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# **The Second World War's impact on the progressive educational movement: Assessing its role**

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## **Introduction**

As the smoke rose above the ashes of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the American people with a celebrated speech that began, "December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy." He continued his speech by describing the "unprovoked" and "dastardly" attack by Japan on the United States. The United States Congress immediately declared war. And in that same moment, the political, social, and economic climate in America changed. December 7, 1941 should be remembered not only because of its immediate effect, the U.S. entrance into World War Two (WWII), but also because of its enduring effect on American education. While the Great Depression opened the door for educational reform and critical analyses of American society, both the nation's reaction to the Second World War and the Second Red Scare ultimately silenced these efforts.

We begin our article by providing a brief review of the progressive educational movement at its peak in the 1930s. The goal of our article, however, is to analyze the impact of the Second World War on the progressive educational movement. Relying on articles from the New York Times from 1939 to 1941 and several primary and secondary sources, we demonstrate the integral role WWII played in initiating the decline of the progressive educational movement. We selected the New York Times because it was not only the leading newspaper in wartime America, but also the most widespread source of national news during the war; moreover, its articles reflect the nation's reaction to the war and its impact on education. Secondary sources such as Altenbaugh (2003), Kliebard (1995), Urban (2010), and Urban and Wagoner (2004) provide the historical context of the progressive education movement from the 1930s through the 1950s, while Evans (2004, 2007, 2010) and Halvorsen (2012) depict the status of the social studies curriculum in secondary schools and postsecondary institutions. Moreau (2003) offers a thorough account of the social studies textbooks used before, during, and after the war. While these secondary sources provide a foundation for our analysis, the addition of The New York Times articles and corroborating primary sources demonstrate how the war

itself influenced both educational rhetoric and practice in secondary and postsecondary institutions. We offer unique insight into the role the Second World War played in initiating the decline of the progressive educational movement—specifically in the secondary social studies curriculum. We conclude with an analysis of the aftermath of the war on the secondary progressive educational movement in post-war America.

Before Pearl Harbor, the progressive education movement reached its zenith. The movement itself developed in the early twentieth century out of the broader “culture of protest ... against the prevailing ideology of big business ... cultural uniformity”, and citizenship transmission (Krug, 1972, 178–179). John Dewey is considered the father of the progressive education movement as he advocated teaching for democracy—allowing students to participate in democracy through education. According to Dewey, school was a place to learn content and also a place to learn how to participate in a democratic society (Dewey, 1907, 1916). To foster democratic schools, Dewey challenged traditional methods of teaching because they were static, emphasized rule following and discipline, and failed to incorporate experiential learning. He believed education and learning were interactive processes and students should not only interact with their environment, but also play an active role in their learning. The teacher's role was as a guide or facilitator who built on children's interests and prior experiences through hands-on or experiential education. Throughout the early progressive era, different types of progressive educators emerged. Evans (2004) argues there were at least four kinds of progressives: the mainstream, the reconstructionist, the administrative, and the Rousseauist progressive. The reconstructionists, viewed as the most radical of the progressives, called for schools to create a new social order by using schools to reform society.

Beginning with the stock market crash of 1929, the educational climate, like the broader political climate, shifted in favor of the progressives—who were oriented toward social reconstructionism. As over 15 million people were unemployed, school enrollments reached unprecedented levels. Moreover, the need for social reform was obvious to the majority of Americans impacted by the Depression. Thus, using public disillusionment as leverage, social reconstructionists advocated for social studies courses emphasizing social problems and a critique of the status quo.

The influence of the progressive movement on Depression-era social studies curriculum is apparent in the writings that emerged from the Commission on the Social Studies of the American Historical Association (AHA). According to the Committee's Conclusions and Recommendations (1934), the AHA supported an integration approach to social studies while maintaining separate disciplines. Charles Beard (1932), in an article entitled “A Charter for the Social Studies in the Schools” supported an integrated social studies

curriculum. While history still remained central, regimentation was abandoned in favor of personal, cultural, and individual freedom (Evans, 2004, 55). The Commission recommended several textbooks (including works written by George Counts and Charles Beard) that reflected the reconstructionist tradition of advocating for social change through collectivism. In sum, the Commission on the Social Studies of the AHA (1934) clearly advocated the movement towards innovation in curriculum planning and integration or at the very least, a willingness to compromise.

As the progressive movement gained momentum, Teachers College became the center of the progressive education crusade. Social reconstructionists such as George Counts, William Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg, R. Bruce Ramp, Jesse Newlon, John Childs, Thomas Biggs, and others emerged from Teachers College at Columbia University (Horowitz, 1971). George Counts, a professor at Teachers College and a member of the Commission on the Social Studies of the AHA, became a leading spokesperson for the social reconstructionist movement when he gave a radical speech to the Progressive Education Association (PEA) in 1932 entitled "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" In this speech he not only challenged the status quo, but he also advocated the use of schools to reform society. He challenged educators "to face squarely and courageously every social issue, come to grips with life in all of its stark reality" and with students, "critically examine our [nation's] social institutions and practices ..." (Counts, 1932, 1933, 9, 87).

Also at Teachers College, Harold Rugg married the philosophies of Dewey and Counts by advocating for a child-centered, issues-oriented curriculum. Rugg supported the "cooperative commonwealth" and conjectured that "all units of work shall be ... in problem solving form" focusing on "alternate proposals" about "current affairs" (Rugg, 1921, 252). According to Rugg, social studies courses were to be relevant, interesting, and meaningful. He proposed a new high school course entitled Problems of Democracy and created a series of textbooks to be used in elementary and junior high classrooms. Both the new course and his textbooks identified social problems and asked students to critically examine their own society and social institutions. Problems in Democracy became the fastest growing course in high schools and his texts became the most widely read textbooks in social sciences classrooms (Moreau, 2003).

Before the 1930s, social science textbooks often steered clear of controversial issues. In his book *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* Joseph Moreau (2003) demonstrates that concerns of social class were largely ignored in social studies textbooks prior to the rise of the progressive educational movement. When discussing social class at all, texts infused the Horatio Alger rags to riches theme to emphasize that social mobility was possible because in America, there

was equal opportunity for all. For example, textbooks like Taylor's (1897) *The Model History* slighted labor issues in the industrial era by stating there was only a "supposed conflict between capital and labor." Instead, textbooks focused on the benefits of progress and used men like Cyrus McCormick, Andrew Carnegie, and Thomas Edison as role models for students. In his text, *School History of the United States*, John Bach McMaster (1897) wrote that all classes benefited from the Industrial Revolution. Textbook authors avoided depictions of conflict.

Progressive textbook authors of the 1930s dramatically changed the tone of textbooks and provided a more critical analysis of American history (Moreau, 2003). As Rugg (1937) wrote in *The Conquest of America*, "from the very first years in America the mass of people struggle against the control of the wealthy property owners." The most striking difference between Rugg and previous textbook authors is his bold explanation of present events.

As scholars like Dewey, Counts, Rugg, and many others crusaded for progressive curriculum reforms, their philosophies met resistance in a few schools. Some teachers faced community-opposition and little freedom to venture away from the traditional curriculum. Despite the resistance, the Eight Year study conducted by the Progressive Education Association (PEA) also demonstrates that progressive strides were made in the 1930s and gaining momentum (Giles, McCutchen, & Zechiel, 1942). Notwithstanding criticism that the Eight Year study largely included elite schools, the study reported greater teacher experimentation, an increase in innovation in curriculum planning, a movement toward fusion of courses, and an integration of recent history. In the beginning of 1939 Rugg was the most widely read author of social science textbooks in the US. His publisher, Ginn and Company, shipped more than five million textbooks and workbooks to over five thousand school systems in the decade since his first full-volume series, *Man and His Changing Society*, was published. The Rugg series was not the only progressive textbook that gained popularity in the 1930s, *The Building of Our Nation*, *The United States in the Making*, David Muzzey's *American History* also gained momentum (Moreau, 2003).

The criticism of progressive education began well before the United States' entrance into WWII. Social reconstructionists and educational organizations such as NCSS and the NEA were labeled "red menaces" by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the American Legion (Dilling, 1934). The American Legion led a "loyalty" drive advocating for states to require teachers to take loyalty oaths and by 1936, 21 states followed suit (Evans, 2004). The National Association for Manufacturers (NAM) commissioned money to begin a study to investigate textbooks deemed "un-American" (Armstrong, 1940).

Despite the conservative backlash, the progressive movement continued to gain momentum due to the general disillusionment caused by the Depression.

December 7, 1941 set the stage for the beginning of the end of the secondary progressive education movement of the 1930s. As fear and suspicion of inside agitators and aggressors mounted, certain facets of progressive education, which emphasized an issues-centered approach to learning, and a critical analysis of society became too risky to the war effort. The educational climate shifted from questioning American institutions to celebrating them (Altenbaugh, 2003; Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995). A restoration of traditional values followed; a good citizen became an unquestioning, obedient patriot and social studies teachers were expected to promote such citizenship (Altenbaugh, 2003; Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Through evidence in *The New York Times* from 1939 to 1945, we demonstrate the significant role that the Second World War played in the decline of the progressive movement in secondary and postsecondary education.

### **The mobilization of education**

In an effort to mobilize a nation for a Second World War, the federal government began to foster the centralization of education much as it had during WWI (Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). The government increased its control over economic and educational institutions to unprecedented levels. The centralization of education is evident in many wartime articles featured in *The New York Times*. The Education Wartime Commission, headed by Dr. John Studebaker, was created to provide a “unified voice to education” (Fine, 1942a). The Wartime Commission placed the resources of the colleges and universities at the command of the federal government (Fine, 1942a). Commissioner Studebaker declared that the purpose of the commission was to preserve democracy. He noted, “The Wartime Commission will help develop policies and programs of action for American education, adjusted to the needs of the war, whatever they are and however rapidly they change” (Fine, 1942a). While the war was fought abroad, “American schools [played] their part on the home front” (Kliebard, 1995, 203).

Defense training became a crucial goal of the Education Wartime Commission. New government-funded educational projects increased attention to war-related fields of study such as geography, aviation, navigation, and intercultural education (Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban & Wagoner, 2004; Winifred, 1942). In July of 1940, the newly formed National Defense Advisory Commission began its task of training defense workers. Over 150,000 youth and unemployed adult citizens participated in this ten-week training program. These government-led training programs produced over one million

defense workers in less than four months (Evans, 2004; "Courses", 1942; Stark, 1942; "War", 1942). Vocational training also reached unprecedented levels as the need for skilled defense labor skyrocketed ("Educators", 1943; "In the Field", 1943; "Student", 1941). Paul McNutt, Federal Security Administrator, stated that from July 1, 1941 to January 31, 1942 approximately 1,800,000 men and women received defense training as compared with 1,500,000 during the previous year ("War", 1942); in just one year, the federal government successfully increased the production of defense workers by twenty percent.

At the Conference on War Problems and Responsibilities of Illinois Schools and Teacher Colleges, an outline for the role of schools in the war effort was drafted (Kliebard, 1995). In essence, educators in attendance determined that the role of schools was to help "create and maintain a democratic morale" (Smith, 1942, 113). During WWII, vocational training in schools placed a "greater stress upon aeromechanics, aeronautics, auto mechanics, navigation, gunnery, and other aspects of modern warfare" (Smith, 1942, 115). Such occupational training was preparing youth for participation in either the military or the defense industry (Evans, 2004; Kiebard, 1995; Krug, 1972; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Likewise, biology and home economics courses began to emphasize nursing and first aid, while social studies courses accentuated war aims. Scrap metal, paper collection, Red Cross, and first aid drives were prevalent in schools across America as were consumer education courses stressing strategies to deal with wartime shortages.

Secondary schools and postsecondary institutions themselves became training grounds for the war. The war required changes in physical education curricula and The New York Times reflected such changes. A student defense plan in New York was drafted to prepare college students for tasks they may be called upon to perform in defense ("Student", 1941). The plan included compulsory military training, which became supplemental to instruction to 50,000 students enrolled in four municipal colleges. The program included mandatory medical examinations for students, the correction of any detected physical defects, as well as required courses in civilian defense ("Student", 1941). The City College Group of New York City further drafted a ten-point physical education program to prepare defense workers ("Would", 1941). President of the Association, Professor Joseph Bressler, argued that the proposed program "will add to the strength and endurance of the students and defense workers so that they will be able to meet 'whatever is required of them' by the government" ("Would", 1941). This plan included a minimum of 1 h of drill every day, hygiene training, physical education courses, callisthenic drills to "harden" student bodies, first-aid training, and an extension of extra-curricular, intramural, and varsity athletics ("Would", 1941).

The United States Office of Education, the Army, and the Navy devised a similar plan to meet the physical needs of men and women who would enter the armed forces (“Teachers”, 1942). Demonstrations by representatives from the Army and Navy were held for teachers from New York, New Jersey, and Delaware at Teachers College, Columbia University. Representatives of the armed forces stressed the need to increase student participation in physical education programs and to improve the rigor of such programs to match the training received in the armed forces. Emphasis was placed on swimming and gymnastics as both focus on stamina, muscular strength, and endurance (“Teachers”, 1942). The drive to prepare youth for physical demands of wartime surpassed P.E. programs on college campuses. The American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation created a physical fitness program for New York youth ages eight to eighteen that included “work camps” similar to German and Russian youth programs (“Work Camps”, 1942). Dr. Jay Nash, President of the Association, claimed that these summer work camps would “build a sense of loyalty to the nation ... keep them [youth] out of direct contact with the war” and at the same time, provide useful defense work (“Work Camps”, 1942).

At the national level, President Roosevelt implemented modifications to the defense industries which greatly impacted schools as well. These educational reforms are further reflected in The New York Times. In the National War Service Bill, President Roosevelt ordered the mobilization of the total manpower of the United States (approximately 60,000,000 labor units) in the war effort (Starks, 1942). The bill included the assignment of individuals to “essential services in factories, on the farms, in the laboratories, and even to the education of young people under military age for scientific pursuits” (Starks, 1942). Another significant impact of the draft and the creation of a massive defense industry was that school enrollment dropped by over a million from 1940 to 1943 (Altenbaugh, 2003; Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995). During the Great Depression high school enrollment increased to unprecedented levels as the youth labor market deteriorated; however, the federal government’s actions during WWII reopened jobs for adolescents, thus causing many young people to once again leave school. Moreover, the federal government lowered the age limit for women in the defense industries from 18 to 16; this deregulation caused many young women—both teachers and students—to leave high schools (Altenbaugh, 2003; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). The Roosevelt Administration noted that the longer the war extended, the more vital it was to ensure that every American was assigned a specific task for the war effort (Starks, 1942).

Mobilization efforts extended beyond secondary education and the defense industries. The New York Times revealed that higher education was also significantly impacted by the war effort. Examples of continued mobilization efforts include the subsidization of

young men to complete college educations so that “their knowledge may be of aid during the war” and afterwards (Starks, 1942). Tuition-free courses in engineering, science, management, and industrial safety sponsored by the United States Office of Education, were offered at universities such as Manhattan College (“Courses”, 1942). The Harvard Business School began offering war production training courses for “mature executives” to help businessmen learn the new problems of the war industries (“In the Field”, 1943). Sarah Lawrence College registered students for volunteer and extra- curricular work in defense industries (“In the Field”, 1943). Duke University opened a course in industrial safety engineering to train leaders for future safety programs in war industries (“In the Field”, 1943). Skidmore University offered their student nurses to serve as volunteers at the Red Cross and neighboring hospitals (“In the Field”, 1943). Ball State's Teachers College created a defense plan which included committees focused on promoting conservation, improving civilian morale, and fundraising for the war (“Ball State”, 1942). Colleges and universities across the nation demonstrated their support for the war effort through a variety of similar programs.

### **Social studies as propaganda**

While the broader field of education was mobilized, the social studies curriculum quickly became a primary vehicle of propaganda. The New York Times and reports from the National Council for Social Studies' (NCSS) Commission on Wartime Policy reflected the adjustments in social studies that the war initiated (“American History”, 1942). The Commission on Wartime Policy of NCSS was created and accountable for overseeing the teaching of social studies during WWII (Evans, 2004); perhaps members of the NCSS Commission also felt the need to prove their support for the war effort. The commission entitled its report, *The Social Studies Mobilize for Victory* (Commission on Wartime Policy of the NCSS, 1943). Just two years prior to the outbreak of war, NCSS ardently defended the attack on progressive education and the social studies movement; yet after Pearl Harbor, NCSS quickly altered its cause in order to demonstrate support for the war effort.

Depicting the turning point in the war on social studies, the tone of the NCSS Presidential Address of 1941 is largely defensive. In the opening paragraph, the NCSS president stated,

We [NCSS] cherish the democratic way of life and we seek to develop in youth an appreciation of the American heritage, an understanding of democratic processes, an abiding love to American institutions, and a will to work and sacrifice that this nation might endure” (Anderson, 1941, 60).

NCSS proved its loyalty to democracy and the war effort. Anderson (1941) further

charged all social studies teachers to accept the challenge of promoting effective, democratic citizens. He outlined what he refers to as “A Program for Democracy” which included the following:

1. Selecting for special study, problems that relate directly to our national welfare.
2. Placing special emphasis on the methods of studying social problems.
3. Developing warm loyalties to the democratic way of life (1941, 67–68).

Prior to Pearl Harbor, the social studies curriculum promoted a critical analysis of internal problems within the United States; however, in his “Program for Democracy,” Anderson suggested focusing on external threats to national welfare.

In his Presidential Address, Anderson (1941) clearly established the NCSS's support for the war effort by accepting the responsibility of fostering a commitment to democracy in America's youth. He declared, “Materials, methods, and life in the schools must be oriented to provide pupils with a greater appreciation of the democratic way of life” (Anderson, 1941, 67). A year later at a conference held in Philadelphia, the commission called for a resurgence of American History courses at all levels and greater emphasis on geography. Commission members again stressed the importance of knowledge of American traditions and institutions stating, “the basic faith and vision of democracy, for which this country has once more gone to war, must be clarified and strengthened in all existing social studies courses” (“American History”, 1942). The new mission was clear: to produce citizens who were ready and willing to fight for their country. School leaders could not encourage students to be critical of U.S. intervention in the war, the draft of 10 million American citizens, or the internment of over 110,000 Japanese-Americans.

### **Progressive textbooks under attack**

While the war in Europe and the Pacific waged on, the war against progressive education continued on the home front. Progressive secondary education, in particular social reconstructionism, was deemed a threat to national unity not only due to its tendency to foster independent, critical thinking, but also because of its propensity to challenge the status quo and highlight the flaws in American society (Altenbaugh, 2003; Evans, 2007, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Articles in *The New York Times* suggest that progressive textbooks came under attack first; in order to silence progressive educators the issues-centered teaching materials they utilized were banned. While the initial criticism actually began before the U.S. entered into the war, the United States' entrance into the war legitimized the quest to ban textbooks deemed “red.” Most progressive textbooks were criticized for emphasizing the defects of democracy or casting doubt on American institutions (Altenbaugh, 2003, Armstrong, 1940; “Bronxville”,

1941; Evans, 2007, 2004; "Iowa", 1940; "Jersey", 1940; "Mt. Kisco", 1940; "Schoolbooks", 1939; Urban & Wagoner, 2004; "U.S. History", 1942a).

The Rugg textbooks, which challenged students to identify and solve problems in American democracy, were the first to be nationally criticized. On November 20, 1939 in New Jersey, the Parent–Teacher Association of Cleveland Schools held a hearing on the Rugg textbooks. George West, the lead prosecutor, quoted Dr. Rugg's text, "Is America the land of opportunity for all people" ("Schoolbooks", 1939)? Mr. West then read from Dr. Rugg's answer key, "No, not for all the people." Mr. West argued that this statement was both un-American and untrue ("Schoolbooks", 1939). In his defense, Rugg claimed that his books "had been designed with the single aim of bringing the realities of life into the schoolroom and not of keeping it out, as educators of the McGuffey Reader period had to do" ("Schoolbooks", 1939). A year later, the Cedar Rapids Board of Education in Iowa voted unanimously to remove Harold Rugg's textbooks from the city's junior high school curriculum.

The Board of Education of Mountain Lakes public schools in New Jersey banned four Rugg textbooks which had been used for ten years in social science classes ("Jersey", 1940). The American Legion stated that "they [the Rugg texts] are essentially documents written to serve as propaganda leading toward a change of the American social and economic system" ("Jersey", 1940). More importantly, the American Legion claimed that the books "failed to teach the pupils an appreciation for the ideals and institutions of the United States and failed to inspire a strong spirit of national patriotism" ("Jersey", 1940). Mount Kisco, New York Board of Education discontinued the use of the Rugg textbooks in junior high schools based on the American Legion posts and the demands of parents who contended that the books did not promote "true Americanism" ("Mt. Kisco", 1940). The Bronxville, New York Board of Education followed suit by banning all textbooks written by Harold Rugg after fifteen years of their use in social studies classrooms; the Board claimed the books had an "anti-capitalistic slant that amount[ed] to propaganda" ("Bronxville", 1941).

In the midst of total war, it was imperative that textbooks, like the educators who utilized them, promote loyalties to American democracy; thus, banning textbooks which questioned American ideals was encouraged. In an article entitled *Treason in the Textbooks*, Orlen K. Armstrong (1940) referred to textbooks written by progressives like Rugg as seditious. He documented the books' rebellious goals of "debunking American heroes, casting doubt upon our Constitution and form of government, condemning our system of free enterprise, and questioning traditional religious faiths" (Armstrong, 1940, 51). He argued that integrated social studies courses themselves were "red" because

they evoked “opinions favorable to collectivism” and shaped “opinions favorable to replacing them [American intuitions] with socialistic control” (Armstrong, 1940, 51). According to Armstrong (1940) and his constituents, any textbook or educator that taught students to question the status quo, an American institution or ideal, or an action of the U.S. government was un-American and therefore, communist.

The National Association Manufacturers (NAM) expanded the attack beyond Rugg to include any textbook, which questioned the U.S. form of government, society, or system of free enterprise (Altenbaugh, 2003; Armstrong, 1940; Evans, 2007, 2004). What began as a call for a more balanced approach to history transformed into a vicious attack against progressive educators. Dr. Ralph Robey, a professor of banking at Columbia University, summarized his personal conclusions from a survey of 600 textbooks conducted by the NAM (Fine, 1941). He concluded that a “substantial proportion” of the social science textbooks used in history criticized our form of government and condemned our system of free enterprise (Fine, 1941). He further claimed that the majority of the books played down the accomplishments of this country and ‘stressed the defects of our democracy’ (Fine, 1941). He noted that the purpose of the texts was “to create discontent and unrest by their approach and treatment of government and business questions” (Fine, 1941). While the NAM stated that Dr. Robey's conclusions represented his personal opinions, not those of the NAM, the NAM's war era assault on progressive textbooks continued (Altenbaugh, 2003; Armstrong, 1940; Evans, 2007, 2004).

The Rugg books were further chastised and Harold Rugg himself labeled a socialist, a communist, and an anarchist. Elizabeth Dilling, a prominent anti-communist, added Rugg to the Red Network, “a field guide to alleged subversives” (Moreau, 2003, 240). Since their peak in the 1939, Rugg's texts had dropped 90 percent by 1944 (Moreau, 2003). While Rugg made numerous attempts to defend his books, as well as progressive education, his pleas were muted by the calls for courses promoting social unity and encouraging nationalism. NCSS called for academic freedom but the nation ignored the pleas as citizens were preoccupied with finding ways to support the war effort through education. It became un-American to question American institutions. Rugg's textbooks continued to be abandoned; by 1945 they were virtually non-existent in schools.

### **The war on social studies**

Evidence in *The New York Times* suggests that after the challenge to progressive textbooks arose, the questioning of secondary social studies curriculum commenced. Just as the conservative criticism against the Rugg series began before the war, so did the reproach of the history curriculum in schools. For example, in 1935, a national study in

which researchers tested 7000 junior and senior high school students in 24 schools across the country demonstrated that high school students did not know much about their history or government (Emery, 1936). A few scholars responded to the survey with articles that blamed the progressives' fused curriculum (Halvorsen, 2012); however, the study did not gain national attention, nor did the criticisms impact the momentum of the progressive educational movement. Though the backlash against "progressive" social studies courses and methods by traditional historians had begun long before the war, the wartime hysteria brought the debate out of the academic arena into the public (Halvorsen, 2012); In fact, evidence in the New York Times suggests it gave the conservatives the upper-hand in the battle.

The wartime assault began when Allan Nevins (1942a), an American History professor at Columbia University and a staunch supporter of traditional history, published an article in The New York Times entitled "American History for Americans." In the article, he claimed American students did not know their history, which put the nation at risk. Admitting that WWII was a leading factor causing his alarm, he stated that, "no nation can be patriotic in the best sense, so people can feel a proud comradeship without a knowledge of the past." Asserting that "national identity and ideals" are rooted in American History, he set out to prove that history had been abandoned in schools and that social studies was to blame (Nevins, 1942a). In large part, he assessed that the presence of fused social studies courses, which overshadowed and ineffectively portrayed the nation's history, and the absence of state laws requiring the teaching of U.S. History at all educational levels were to blame for students lack of historical knowledge. He argued that the progressive movement challenged traditional values thus threatening a common national identity. Nevins blamed students' lack of knowledge on the absence of standardization in history courses. Nevins argued that twenty-six states required some sort of U.S. History, while twenty-two states required none. Without conducting any research on what was actually offered in the high schools themselves, he assumed that U.S. History was not being offered because it was not mandated. He further claimed that very few colleges required U.S. History or Government. He called for state laws mandating the teaching of thorough, intensive U.S. History courses in all high schools. Moreover, he advocated for a model which taught traditional U.S. History "divorced from social studies" (Nevins, 1942a).

A month later, The New York Times published a survey of enrollment patterns in history courses at liberal arts colleges across the U.S. Results of the survey indicated that out of 1225 colleges and universities sampled, 82 percent did not require U.S. History and 72 percent did not require it for admissions ("U.S. History", 1942a). Without researching high school curricula itself, the Times author, like Nevins (1942a), made the assumption that high schools were not teaching U.S. History. Survey respondents claimed that the

teaching of U.S. History was important in promoting civic responsibility and fostering an appreciation for American heritage especially for the youth entering the military (Halvorsen, 2012; "U.S. History", 1942a). In response to the Times' survey findings, historian Matthew Page Andrews (1942) wrote a letter to the editor of the Times blaming social studies for students' poor performance in college history classes. He called social studies a "racket" full of "crackpot ideas." Frederick A. Van Fleet, elected general of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, declared that it was a moral imperative for colleges to require U.S. History and teach it well ("U.S. History", 1942b). He vowed,

Any single word, which directs the thoughts of our people toward an understanding of how our liberty was born and ... developed over the years helps to arm them for its defense ... We, can greatly help the American people understand what the nation is fighting for. That understanding is vital to victory" ("U.S. History", 1942b).

Further evidence in The New York Times suggests that progressive educators led a counterattack to prove that social studies was not the enemy. Erling. M. Hunt, professor at Teachers College and progressive educator, responded to Nevins' survey in an article entitled "History Charges Called Untrue: Professor E. M. Hunt Says Subject Is Being Taught in All Schools" (1942a). In the article, Hunt responded to the claim that social studies had thwarted history in American schools as "hysterical", "uniformed and irresponsible." Hunt further argued that virtually all secondary schools were in fact teaching U.S. History as part of the social studies curriculum. He charged that laws were not required to force educators to teach history; they were already doing it. According to Hunt (1942a), the problem was not a lack of history courses, but the quality of the instruction. Hunt stressed the need for better education of history teachers. Moreover, he claimed that schools required too much "memory work" and as a result, American History was distorted and students' contempt and disdain for the subject grew.

In an editorial published in the NCSS Journal, Social Education, Hunt further chastised Nevins' calls for more U.S. History as "nationalistic and ill-informed" as every high school in the country offers U.S. History (Hunt, 1942b). He added that, "History is no longer, as Nevins and the New York Times imply, the only source of understanding and appreciation of American traditions, and institutions, or the only source of patriotism and unity." NCSS echoed Hunt's sentiments by claiming the survey was "misleading" and disavowed the need for further state legislation regarding the social studies curriculum, as history remained an integral part of the social studies curriculum. Hunt explained that it was history pedagogy that was problematic (Hunt, 1942b). Nevins (1942) responded in Social

Education stating that fusion courses were “social slush” which teachers may use to “slight, evade, or mangle the study of American History”. The debate continued as Hunt responded again stating that according to the AHA Report on the Commission of Social Studies (1934), the classroom time allotted towards U.S. History had doubled in the 1930s, since the adoption of social studies (Hunt, 1942c). According to critics, progressive social studies educators failed to adequately teach youth U.S. History; subsequently, social studies educators placed the nation at risk (Fraser, 1943).

Now on the offensive, Nevins, Hugh Russell Fraser (journalist and employee of the U.S. Office of Education), historian Matthew Page Andrews, and journalist Benjamin Fine of The New York Times collaborated to develop a survey which would demonstrate the destructive effects of neglecting U.S. History in high schools. The team created and administered a 30 min timed test containing a mixture of multiple choice, matching, and open-ended response questions focused on “historic events, inventors, industry developments, and political, industrial, and financial leaders” (Halvorsen, 2012). The test was then administered to 7000 college freshmen at thirty-six different colleges and universities. In April of 1943, the New York Times published the results in an article entitled “Ignorance of U.S. History Shown in College Freshmen” (Fine, 1943a). As the title suggests, the test results supported the claim that ‘students do not know their history.’ According to Fine, there appeared to be a serious lack of knowledge or understanding of U.S. History. More alarming, Fine reported, was the amount of misinformation that the survey disclosed. Fine concluded that either students were poorly prepared in high school, not forced to take U.S. History, or had forgotten the information.

Nevins (1943) followed up days later with an article in the Times entitled “Why we should know our History” in which he claimed that the main cause of the problem was the confusion about the place of U.S. History in the high school curriculum. One of Nevins' main arguments was that interdisciplinary social studies courses focusing on contemporary problems and current events should not replace traditional U.S. History courses. The accusation against schools changed from a lack of U.S. History courses offered to the quality of the courses themselves. Inevitably, the blame fell on the progressives and their “menacing conspiracy” against America (Evans, 2004, 91). NCSS and Teachers College were singled out as contributors to the lack of quality history courses offered in American schools. Social studies courses were viewed as not rigorous enough.

Hunt (1943) immediately responded claiming that Fine's article was nothing more than “sensationalist journalism” using a survey which was “ridiculous, amateurish, and unreliable.” He criticized the survey for its obscurity, its overreliance on 18th and 19th

century history, its ignorance of contemporary history, and its tendency to ask questions about events and people of minor significance. For example, one question asked students “Which was the first United States census in which railway mileage could have been reported? Another question asked, “Before the passage of the Homestead Act, what was the minimum price-per-acre of federal public lands sold at auction”? In general, the survey relied on fact-based questions based on the memorization of people, places, and events. Hunt further argued that students at Ivy League intuitions were not included in the sample and the test time was too short. In short, it appeared the researchers wanted students to do poorly in order to launch an attack on progressive social studies educators (Halvorsen, 2012). Hunt (1943) went on to charge that students' lack of history knowledge was due to the way it was taught—often by poorly trained teachers using traditional teaching methods. Students disdain for history and their lack of knowledge could be blamed on its the mundane repetition in schools, the overreliance of history teachers on dry textbooks, and the “drill and kill” techniques of history and social studies educators. Once again, he called for an improvement in the training of social studies teachers and better instructional materials.

Spurred by the alarming results from the history surveys printed in *The New York Times*, an American history teachers' conference was held at Stanford University (Davies, 1943). After a poll was conducted, it was reported that one-third of California schools represented at the conference diluted their U.S. History courses by including subject matter having “no relation to history.” Surveyors concluded that American history courses were diluted with extraneous material that detracted attention from American leaders and ideals. Alarmed at the results of this informal poll, Professor Maxwell Savelle of the Stanford History Department emphasized the importance of high school history courses in the indoctrination of American youth. “High school teachers are giving the last preparation for full-fledged citizenship as citizens in a democracy” (Davies, 1943).

Despite Hunt's pleas, other educators soon joined the attack against progressive social studies courses emphasizing critical analysis of democratic institutions. Fraser, collaborator of the survey, argued that the blame for students' ignorance shown in the survey was “social studies extremists” who had emerged in the 1930s and “succeeded in substituting courses in social problems and contemporary issues for history courses” (Halvereon, 2012, 14). Echoing Fraser and Nevins, Colgate University's history department chair Charles R. Wilson blamed the social studies program for “elbowing history out of the curriculum” (“Survey”, 1943). The department chair of Temple University, Arthur Cook, agreed stating that “history has been pretty much shoved out of favor of social studies which, in my opinion, are apt to be superficial—pretty sloppy stuff” (“Pupils”, 1943). Professor Robert Caldwell, Dean of Humanities at Massachusetts

Institute of Technology (MIT), further declared that ignorance of our nation's institutions and ideals was "dangerous ... to the development of democracy ("Educators", 1943). Many other university history professors made similar accusations against the social studies curriculum ("Educators", 1943). According to these university history educators, secondary social studies courses, with their tendency to embed critical analysis as well as fused content from history, economics, geography, sociology, and government diminished the memorization of historical facts and deemphasized American ideals. The lack of social studies knowledge portrayed in the Times survey became more than just an educational dilemma; in the midst of total war, the results made the social studies curriculum a national concern.

As Halvorsen (2012) states, "for a country where the wartime slogan was 'Remember Pearl Harbor,' learning that students of draft age remembered little of their nation's history was demoralizing." Perhaps that is why politicians joined the crusade to usurp the social studies curriculum and restore history's supremacy in secondary schools. Senator Homer Bone (D-WA) claimed the Times survey results were "an indictment of our system of teaching. We are fighting a terrible war to preserve a system which rests on magnificent traditions" ("School Test", 1943). Thus, Governor Dwight H. Green of Illinois signed two bills that required public schools to teach United States History and the principles of representative government ("Illinois", 1943). Senator Joseph Guffey (D-PA) urged that the Senate Education Commission to examine the plight of U.S. History in schools ("Senators", 1943). At the national level, Congress began discussing federal aid for history instruction ("Survey Speeds Reform", 1944). The War Department soon announced its support for the primacy of history by advocating for "Victory" courses in high schools across the nation ("Survey Speeds Reform", 1944).

Evidence in The New York Times demonstrates that progressives continued to defend the social studies curriculum by claiming it was history pedagogy—not the introduction of social studies courses—which was problematic. William Kilpatrick, Professor at Teacher's College and a leading Progressive educator, declared that the survey results merely confirmed what progressive already knew, that the teaching and testing of mundane historical facts was futile. He explained that "People forget what they don't need or what seems unimportant to them. That's why we [progressives] wish to teach everything in a living connection" (Wiener, 1943). Skeptical of the Times survey results, the AHA, Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and the NCSS founded the Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges to conduct their own study (Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges, 1944). Led by Edgar B. Wesley, professor of Teaching of History at the University of Minnesota, the Committee conducted its own test on American History. The Committee undertook three main tasks: survey the status

of American History in schools, examine the historical knowledge of both everyday citizens as well as students, and make recommendations for the teaching of history. While test results were higher than those reported in the Times survey (Fine, 1943b), a lack of historical knowledge was once again demonstrated. The Committee defended the results arguing that people's inability to recognize specific names, dates, places, and events just further demonstrated the failure of "drill and kill" instructional approach to teaching history. In fact, a thorough analysis of the results demonstrated that scores were significantly higher on questions asking respondents to draw comparisons, make interpretations, analyze cause and effect relationships, understand trends and movements, read maps and pictorial materials, and identify time relationships (Halvorsen, 2012). Moreover, survey results indicated that American students may not have been able to recall specific dates, names, or events in U.S. History, but that they understood the subject and appreciated it ("History survey", 1943).

Predictably, the Committee indicated that roughly 100 percent of secondary and post-secondary schools offered and required U.S. History. Wesley (1943) reported that "social studies including history appear to be receiving adequate attention in the schools" The number of required college courses in history, however, did appear deficient (Committee, 1944). While offered as electives, few undergraduates opted to take history courses. The Committee asserted, "The unwarranted assumption that anyone who can read can teach history explains its unpopularity in some schools" (Fine, 1943b). The Committee made several recommendations to improve the teaching of history: improve history teacher preparation, continue to teach history at all educational levels, and decrease repetition of courses (Fine, 1943b).

In short, the Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges (1944) stated, "the crying need in American history is not for more requirements but for better teaching." Through their study, the Committee disproved the assumption that secondary social studies had abandoned history courses; it further refuted the belief that states must mandate it for high schools to teach history. Most importantly, the Committee demonstrated that it was history pedagogy, not the high school curriculum, which needed reform. The Committee argued for the improved quality of social studies instruction by deemphasizing the memorization of mundane facts. Despite progressive educators' defense of the social studies curriculum and their attempt to demonstrate the need to reform history pedagogy, the damage was done.

## **The aftermath**

### *Wartime education*

On the surface, evidence suggests that the social studies curriculum changed very little during the wartime years. The studies that Hunt (1943) and the Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges (1944) conducted and subsequent responses published in *The New York Times*, demonstrate a stability in course offerings during the war (Fine, 1943a). U.S. History continued to be the most commonly taught social studies course in secondary schools and postsecondary institutions. Likewise, U.S. History and Civics/Government were typically required courses for graduation while World History was often offered as an elective. Problems of Democracy, a social studies elective, continued to be the most frequently taught social studies course in the twelfth grade followed distantly by economics, sociology, or government. The most frequent new course that emerged during the war was Geography (Committee, 1944; Evans, 2004; Fine, 1942b, 1943a, 1943b, Hunt, 1943; McConnell, 1941; Urban & Wagoner, 2004).

What did change, however, was the perceived aim of the social studies curriculum as a restoration of traditional values emerged. As evidenced by the increase in the number of states requiring teacher loyalty oaths, and the tone of the NCSS in *The Social Studies Mobilize for Victory* (1943), teachers faced the clear expectation of encouraging patriotism. Progressive educators and secondary social studies teachers, in particular, were responsible for students' lack of historical knowledge, which was necessary to promote social unity in support of the war effort. As evidenced by the growing national concern over whether or not students "know their history" reflected in the history surveys printed in *The New York Times*, the importance of the memorization of facts about American historical events, institutions, and heroes reappeared. In fact, a resurgence of history courses at all educational levels ensued. Thus, the nation returned to a secondary social studies curriculum guided by conservative textbooks emphasizing American History and traditional values. Likewise, state laws requiring the teaching of U.S. History increased at all educational levels.

Perhaps progressives' emphasis on current social issues endangered the perceived solidarity needed to win the war. Not all progressive reforms were deemed a threat, but those advocating critical analyses of American ideals and institutions were openly attacked. Consequently, progressive textbooks like the Rugg series were abandoned for traditional texts such as Magruder's *American Government* series and McGraw Hill's *Our American Heritage* which positively portrayed American institutions and policies (Armstrong, 1940; "Bronxville", 1941; Evans, 2007, 2004; "Iowa", 1940; "Jersey", 1940; "Mt. Kisco", 1940). According to Moreau (2003), U.S. History textbooks "shifted right" as publishers released far more glowing histories of the U.S. in the 1940s and 1950s emphasizing opportunity for social mobility. "For conservatives ... of the 1940s ... faith in opportunity cemented the national union; without it, the specter of division, chaos, or

collectivism loomed” (Moreau, 2003, 246). Subsequently, in texts of the 1940s and 1950s, class conflict was once again muted and poverty returned to its status as a phenomenon of the past. Students again saw present day America portrayed as solidly middle class. Books challenging the status quo faded away as textbook authors and publishers attempted to restore the public's faith in economic opportunity (Moreau, 2003). Reflecting the trend in U.S. History textbooks, the Problems of Democracy course began celebrating the benefits of American ideals rather than critically examining them; moreover, it shifted focus from internal issues to external problems, and international affairs and relations (Committee, 1944; Evans, 2004). During the Great Depression social reconstructionists openly challenged the American social structure and greatly influenced education rhetoric, but the war was one factor which may have helped restore the public's faith in the American system; thus, secondary social studies courses, and problem-oriented curriculum were depicted as communistic for they neglected, or worse delegitimized, American ideals. The attack on progressive textbooks, such as the Rugg series, and the more subtle attack on the social studies through the widespread accusations that students “do not know their history”, depict the decline of problems-oriented social studies education of the 1930s. Inevitably, aspects of the progressive educational movement endured, as did individual progressive educators, but its popularity in schools and its national acceptance were significantly damaged by the nation's reactions to the Second World War.

### *Post-war education*

In post-war America, the decline of the progressive education movement continued. In general, educational curricula began to emphasize “life adjustment” with its goal to “prepare young people to take their place in adult society” (Graham, 2005; Kliebard, 1995, 208). Mobilization of public resources continued as did the centralization of education throughout the Cold War (Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). In fact, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 set a new precedent for federal funding and intervention in education (Urban, 2010; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). As the hunt for communists within schools intensified, teachers began to self-censor and schools began to remove courses stressing social problems. Likewise, textbook authors and publishers shifted (Moreau, 2003). While the New Social Studies movement and the Newer Social Studies movement, supporting a return to a social science and issues-centered curriculum, briefly revived progressive social studies, the Cold War quickly stifled its resurgence (Evans, 2010).

In the 1950s, the fear of communism consumed American institutions and any sign of disloyalty to the state was labeled “red” (Evans, 2010, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban &

Wagoner, 2004). Public education itself was attacked by anticommunist organizations such as the National Council for American Education (NCAE). The NCAE published booklets and pamphlets entitled “Progressive Education Increases Juvenile Delinquency”, “Progressive Education increases Socialism”, and “The Commies are After Your Kids” (Altenbaugh, 2003, 285). According to the NCAE, “Progressive educational philosophy and practices” were “undermining national interests, and insisted on replacing them with traditional means of instruction and narrow academic content” (Altenbaugh, 2003, 285).

Courses which questioned American ideals were censored and educators of such courses prosecuted (Altenbaugh, 2003; Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 1995; Urban & Wagoner, 2004). In Progressive Education is REDuction, Jones called progressive educators “little red hens poisoning young minds with communist ideology” (Altenbaugh, 2003, 286). Continuing the trend of the war era, teachers were pressured to return to teacher-driven instruction and many were forced to take loyalty oaths. Teachers also grew weary of questioning the country's economic system, criticizing the government's policies, or encouraging students to think critically for themselves as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) targeted colleges and high schools. In both New York City and Los Angeles, teachers refusing to testify about the political affiliations or name communists were automatically fired as the hunt intensified (Moreau, 2003).

As progressive educators continued to be attacked so, too, did social studies textbooks. In 1953, Alabama passed Act 888 which required publishers to certify that none of their textbooks were written by authors (or had cited authors) who were known advocates of communism. Between 1952 and 1958, one-third of the states launched similar attacks on progressive texts (Moreau, 2003). In lieu of such hostile attacks on textbooks, many publishing companies began adopting more traditional texts. Consequently, social studies textbooks of the 1950s emphasized the common values and ideals. Thus, textbook publishers released books in the 1950s which downplayed class conflict and emphasized social unity like Gertrude Hartman's *America: Land of Freedom* (1952), Everett Augspurger and Richard McLemore's *Our Nation's Story* (1954), and Edward Krug's *Living in Our America* (1951). Such textbooks often omitted recent labor struggles, minimized the significance of social conflict in general, and implied that radical changes to the status quo were unnecessary. The benefits of American society returned to center stage. While problems occurred in the 1950s they were omitted from U.S. History textbooks, as readers were encouraged to see themselves a middle-class citizens in a seemingly classless society (Moreau, 2003). In many ways, U.S. History textbooks in post-war America shared a striking similarity to those prior to the progressive education movement—instead of questioning the status quo, they celebrated it.

## Final thoughts

In the 1930s, fueled by the Great Depression, the progressive educational movement reached its peak; but as the United States entered a Second World War, trepidation influenced policymakers and the American public. Few protested against the centralization of education or the use of social studies as propaganda for the war. Moreover, schools became a major platform to ensure that youth remained loyal to their country; perhaps by promoting patriotism through education, American democracy was safer and victory abroad appeared closer. While educational rhetoric and social studies courses and textbooks of the 1930s moved toward a critical analysis of American society and institutions, the war solidified people's commitment to American ideals. Textbook authors and educators who questioned American institutions were tested. Battles over the social studies curriculum ensued as policymakers sought to ensure the teaching and promotion of American ideals. By 1951, Rugg's progressive textbooks, once the most widespread series in social studies classrooms in the U.S., gathered dust in school libraries and storage rooms. Symbolizing the end of the formal secondary progressive education movement, The Progressive Education Association (PEA) itself disbanded in 1955 and its journal, *Progressive Education* suspended its publication in 1957 (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). While other factors such as the Back-to-Basics movement and the Cold War certainly contributed to the progressive educational movement's waning, the Second World War set the decline in motion. To ensure victory abroad by maintaining loyalty and social unity, a return to a traditional social studies curriculum ensued. In the name of democracy, secondary progressive education in the social studies curriculum faded from the forefront of reform efforts.

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