AMERICAN EDUCATION IN POPULAR MEDIA

From the Blackboard to the Silver Screen

Edited by Sevan G. Terzian
& Patrick A. Ryan

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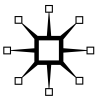

AMERICAN EDUCATION IN POPULAR MEDIA

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For Our Parents

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SEVAN G. TERZIAN
Gainesville, Florida
November 2014

PATRICK A. RYAN
Emmitsburg, Maryland
November 2014

Chapter 1

Popular Media Representations of American Schooling from the Past

Sevan G. Terzian and Patrick A. Ryan

Education happens everywhere. The emergence of mass media over the past century is a prime example of the ubiquity of education—often beyond the confines of schools. Lawrence Cremin had long advocated a broader scope of investigation for educational historians. He characterized the rise of news and entertainment media in the twentieth-century United States as educative as the nation emerged as a global power.[1] For Joel Spring, meanwhile, movies, radio, comic books, and television have been sites of ideological conflict over the shaping of values and tastes among American youth.[2] Some historians have followed these leads by studying the didactic functions of radio, film, and television in American society—and the various struggles over the content and form of their programming.[3] In addition to considering the implicitly educational aspects of these popular media, a host of other historical works has considered popular media's explicit depictions of formal education. Such studies have examined past representations of schooling and higher education in mass magazines,[4] movies,[5] and popular radio.[6]

The robust scholarly literature in cultural and media studies about popular portrayals of schooling is also instructive. As Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder explain, fictional representations of educators are powerful because "[m]ost of us . . . will encounter more teacher

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characters over time in mediated classrooms than actual teachers in our own classrooms."[7] The repetition of key tropes about schooling in television and film, moreover, tend to reinforce such images as normal and discourage critical questioning of their veracity or desirability.[8] Teacher–student relations have comprised one notable object of investigation. Such studies have examined the tendency to portray effective teachers as mavericks who gain the trust of their troubled students through unconventional methods and often without institutional support.[9] Some of this scholarship has considered the recurrence of romantic themes between teachers and students as well as the pejorative implications of depicting white teachers who "save" predominantly racial minority students.[10] Taken together, these works suggest that popular film and television portrayals of schooling have emphasized heroic acts of individual educators without featuring actual classroom teaching or consideration of entrenched inequalities that could warrant the systematic reform of social institutions.[11]

Given the emerging ubiquity of popular media in American society over the past century and the power of such images in informing public perceptions of schooling, more historians of education can benefit from enlisting aural and visual sources as objects of examination. As Sol Cohen has argued, because "all texts contribute to the construction of and provide access to reality," historians must "go beyond the archive and monographs, textbooks, and periodicals to encompass all cultural artifacts, including the symbolic and the imaginary."[12] It is in this spirit that *American Education in Popular Media: From the Blackboard to the Silver Screen* aims to further these lines of scholarly inquiry and to encourage more historical investigations of the educational functions and representations of schooling through popular media.

Portraying Professional Educators

For radio and television programs, films, and popular print media to be successful, writers, directors, and producers must envision what will resonate with audiences according to their perceived values, interests, and needs. For example, television situation comedies, in which teacher images prevail, have affirmed contemporary norms that largely perpetuate middle-class values and gender role prescriptions.[13] Where there is less realism and more often the use of exaggeration for humorous effect, according to Ken Kantor, audiences tend to disregard inaccuracies and to embrace these programs "if the tenor of the show is sincere, and people in schools are treated respectfully."[14] On the rare occasions when popular media depictions invite audiences

to question the professional identity of educators, the quality of classroom instruction, or societal inequities, ultimately the goal remains for audiences to feel satisfied with the resolution of the narrative. Even when teacher-heroes in a film drama overcome obstacles to instruct successfully in their classrooms, they do not enact systemic change in school structures. As a result, the status quo remains without challenging the audience to consider options for educational and social transformation.[15] Moreover, motivated by profit to appeal to a mass audience, producers of popular media would not be likely to offend paying customers and advertising sponsors. As the chapters of this volume reveal, popular media have frequently aligned with dominant social and political views in various ways.

Audiences, however, can derive multiple meanings from media images of educators and schooling. Because of the constructed realities created by students, parents, teachers, and administrators, the "nature of school knowledge, the organization of the school, the ideologies of teachers, indeed any educational issue, all become relative."[16] Diverse audiences will often internalize different perceptions of the same image. In viewing popular film representations, for instance, prospective teachers may evaluate their own professional identity according to images advocating nurturing and self-sacrifice.[17] Although it is generally accepted among scholars that the media reflect and shape public attitudes, it is difficult to determine causal relationships. The popularity of a television program or film might have little to do with the portrayal of the teacher or the school. The genre, the fame, and likability of the actors, the other competing programs and films vying for audience attention, or the noneducational subplots may complicate audience attitudes. As a result, ratings, box office earnings, and circulation may not always be accurate indicators of public satisfaction with educator portrayals. Neither does critical acclaim always coincide with wider audience approval or disapproval. Although the prescriptive implications of these images are difficult to assess historically, this volume acknowledges the role of the audience in these representations.

While popular media depictions of professional educators were largely positive in the first half of the twentieth century, scholars have noted a shift to more negative images beginning in the 1960s and 1970s that coincided with various societal conflicts including the civil rights and feminist movements, the anti–Vietnam War demonstrations, the War on Poverty, the distrust of the government in the wake of the Watergate scandal, anti-intellectualism, and rising inflation and unemployment.[18] Positive images feature teachers as moral and altruistic role models who implement student-centered instructional

methods, advocate high expectations, and have friendly, supportive relationships with their students.[19] Achieving success often entails confronting antagonistic, generally male, administrators,[20] who could range in depictions from being the clueless bureaucrat to a tyrannical taskmaster to a comical buffoon. To highlight the teacher-hero representation, the majority of his or her colleagues are often shown as ineffectual and cynical.[21] The teacher-hero is also successful without much formal preparation or experience—an accomplishment thus diminishing teacher education and professional certification standards.[22] Negative images, by contrast, feature teachers as disaffected amid violent, alienated youth and as sexually deviant or depraved.[23] Overall, these "mixed" depictions of educators reveal historically ambivalent popular attitudes toward teachers, who often are viewed as outsiders not fully integrated into their communities and as belonging to a "semiprofession" with varying standards of expertise, lack of autonomy, low salaries, and inferior social prestige.[24] Chapters in this volume that discuss these images in various historical contexts can inform our understanding of enduring issues surrounding the teaching profession.

While the prevalence of teachers and schools in popular media attests to their significance in popular culture, certain missing elements in the depictions reflect an incomplete understanding of the profession. The behind-the-scenes work of lesson preparation, grading, and parent conferencing is rarely shown. The scarcity of scenes of classroom instruction, particularly in early postwar-era television and film, may also suggest that the audience and the general public did not need to see a teacher in the act of instruction because having pedagogical expertise was taken for granted. Alternatively, such scenes might be regarded as uninteresting, unless depicting deviant conduct by teachers or students. Profiling juvenile delinquent behavior or the nontraditional student could sensationalize the classroom on screen, making the commonplace worthy of our attention.

Historically, schools in the United States have been instrumental in transmitting disciplinary content knowledge, crafting notions of American identity, and developing vocational skills. Schools have also been vehicles for conserving dominant social norms, including gender roles. Indeed, since the nineteenth century, when public school reformers encouraged single women to enter the teaching profession in advance of their future roles as wives and mothers, teaching has been defined—and often devalued—as a feminized sphere.[25] In popular media depictions, elementary teachers are primarily single women, who often leave the profession upon marriage, while administrators

and college professors are more likely to be represented by men. As a result, female teachers in the popular broadcast media and film are valued less for their academic knowledge and instructional ability and more for their physical attractiveness, maternal "ethic of care," and domesticity.[26] In such representations, moreover, female teachers devote nearly all of their attention to their students, while male teachers enjoy an autonomous life outside of school.[27] In the first half of the twentieth century, when administrative progressives implemented bureaucratized hierarchies to oversee teachers, women frequently became subject to male authority in the profession.[28] This tendency is also demonstrated in the popular media. If a male teacher is depicted on a noncollege level, his masculinity might be compromised or overheterosexualized to maintain gender role prescriptions.[29] In the feminized sphere of schooling, depictions of male principals could also imply a lack of assertive masculinity, unless explicitly emphasized. The chapters in this volume further demonstrate how images of schooling could in turn project expectations for obedient girls excelling academically and boisterous boys struggling to make the grade, while representations of higher education could refashion masculinity and the prospects for professional success in a corporate world.

Portraying Students

Amid the structures of schooling, stereotypical images of obedient girls are often marginalized in favor of representing noncompliant boys, more dramatic for depiction across media and genres. Although the rules of conformity are eventually reasserted and maintained in most popular media narratives, the violation of norms by the boys is still showcased for purposes ranging from humor to shock value. Rather than participating in a school pageant or reading a book at his desk, the elementary-age boy in cover art of popular periodicals would prefer the freedom of playing outside and is often represented as being "in trouble" inside. Adolescent boys' frustration and disengagement with middle and high school could be manifested on film through violent classroom disruption and defiance, identified as juvenile delinquency. In media representations, only if a teacher strives to make curriculum content relevant to students' experiences and interests do the boys achieve academically.[30] Without much intervention by teachers and administrators, girls quietly earn high marks as expected. In an assertion of gender role prescriptions, the "passive" girl is rewarded and the "active" boy needs his energy channeled by schools. Once in

college, magazine fiction declares how fraternities and football can shape the young man into a leader.

According to popular media representations, particularly from the Progressive Era through the postwar era, positive images of eager learners are manifested once a favorable teacher–student rapport is achieved. When the teacher demonstrates care and concern for students as individuals, the most recalcitrant learners become more engaged. In the process, however, students must recognize how the curriculum content is pertinent to their success beyond the classroom. Early-twentieth-century magazine fiction describes young men who develop their thinking at liberal arts colleges and can then apply their creativity to the business world. With opportunities to express their opinions, inquiries, and interests, the depicted students regard schooling as vehicles for their personal and professional success. In the 1955 film *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, for instance, former students of this grade-school teacher appreciate her transformative role in helping them discover their vocations. In media depictions some students may value knowledge and insights gained, while others may regard earning a diploma as a necessary credential or an important symbol. School nonetheless has salience for all of them. Even if the comedic genre favors an unconventional adult learner somewhat disrupting educational structures in returning to school, a positive image prevails. In such profiles, audiences see traditional and nontraditional students motivated to do well.

As with popular portrayals of teachers, however, negative images of students proliferated in the latter half of the twentieth century. Again, such representations may have reflected societal anxieties about the adequacy of schools, along with government and other institutions, to address the stresses of movements toward greater economic, racial, and gender equity. Postwar-era images of "bad" students in films such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *High School Confidential!* (1958) might have sensationalized and even glamorized juvenile delinquency. Yet popular media reaffirmed the traditional norms and capability of schools in the 1950s to mitigate antisocial student behavior. Educational films focus upon individual and family responsibility as explanations for student delinquency, rather than highlighting social causes not as easily remedied. In subsequent decades, however, popular media portrayed less confidence in the efficacy of schools. Beginning in the 1980s, with additional federal mandates determining the relative value of knowledge taught and the emphasis on high-stakes testing for accountability, more representations of disaffected and even "bad" teachers emerged, following some earlier postwar-era

images of "bad" students.[31] Decontextualized knowledge and deprofessionalized teachers, in films such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) and *Teachers* (1984), contribute to depictions of schools as places of alienation. Classroom scenes of productive collaboration are dwarfed by teacher–student confrontation. As images of white middle-class teachers continue to dominate, more representations of ethnically and racially diverse, economically disadvantaged students are depicted.[32] Rather than regarding diversity as an enriching opportunity, popular media often associate diversity with delinquency—as a challenge to be overcome. Notably absent from depictions of "problem" youth are the parents, perhaps seen as ineffectual, thus deferring their responsibilities to beleaguered schools. Through the representations of student behavior, popular media reflect and shape perceptions about the roles of both teachers and students in an uncertain future. In this volume, analysis of the media images of students therefore can further historical understanding of the purposes and values of schooling in American society.

Looking Ahead

The chapters in this volume examine diverse media artifacts and genres from different eras in the twentieth century as evidence of popular depictions of students, teachers, and school administrators. They are presented in a roughly chronological sequence with some recurring themes. In the first of these chapters (chapter 2), Daniel A. Clark explores how fiction in mass magazines cast particular images of college life that conveyed both tough masculinity and gentlemanly refinement. Although the vast majority of Americans had not attended college in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the predominantly middle-class readership of these periodicals suggests that such stories resonated far beyond students and alumni. If certain qualities of masculinity appeared congruent with Progressive Era depictions of higher education, the same could not be said about mass magazine art portraying boys in school, as Heather A. Weaver discusses in chapter 4. Rather than celebrating the rise of nearly universal public schooling and compulsory attendance, such images highlighted the apparent incompatibility between boyhood and formal educational institutions.

Popular portrayals of juvenile delinquency also raise questions about who belongs in school. In chapter 6, Amy Martinelli studies the relatively neglected genre of mental hygiene films from the mid-twentieth century as a deliberate response to heightened societal

concerns about juvenile delinquency. Martinelli reveals that questions regarding the causes of teenage male criminal behavior often culminated in prescribed remedies. In this sense, she concludes, such media artifacts should be seen as distinct impulses in moral education. As Daniel Perlstein and Leah Faw demonstrate in chapter 7, the iconic film *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) invited Americans to consider juvenile delinquency as a tool for deciphering an emerging youth culture and adult authority within the confines of high school. Such depictions, Perlstein and Faw explain, highlight the limits of inclusion in a democratic society that prizes individual competition and institutional conformity. What, then, are the benefits of going to school? According to Andrew Grunzke in chapter 8, this is a recurring question in the genre of television sitcoms and film comedies from the latter half of the twentieth century that feature an adult returning to school. On one hand, Grunzke argues, these portraits lampoon the ill-equipped characters who struggle to navigate the academic and social expectations of formal educational institutions. On the other hand, they are praised for making the effort to pursue the credential. Such ambivalent messages highlight the diminishing value of high school diplomas and even bachelor's degrees as educational attainment continually rose over the course of the twentieth century.

Teachers are featured prominently in this volume's chapters as well. In chapter 3, Michelle Morgan enlists both professional educator journals and popular newspapers from the Progressive Era to trace efforts to shed the long-standing image of the female teacher as a crusty old schoolmarm. Whether bolstering the teacher's professional credentials or aiming to make her more fashionable, Morgan argues, such prescriptive and descriptive accounts advocated greater teacher autonomy at a time when more Americans were enjoying more leisure activities. As Patrick A. Ryan discusses in chapter 5, however, long-standing expectations that the teacher remain completely devoted to her occupation persisted. The prevalent image of the teacher as altruistic was especially powerful in the postwar era. Popular radio, television, and film depictions of teachers as self-sacrificing for the benefit of students and all others in the school, Ryan demonstrates, reflected American anxieties about the Cold War, juvenile delinquency, and racial integration. As such, the teacher as martyr allowed the school to fulfill its moral mission.

Such noble aims perhaps reflected and perpetuated unrealistic expectations about an array of societal problems that teachers and public schools could somehow remedy. By the late twentieth century, as Robert L. Dahlgren demonstrates in chapter 9, it had become

fashionable to express disillusionment with schools by challenging the authority of teachers. In Hollywood films from the 1970s and 1980s—both comedic and dramatic genres—social studies teachers in particular are the objects of ridicule and scrutiny. According to Dahlgren, social studies teachers are blamed for an apparent decline in the quality of American public schooling and emerging challenges to the nation's global economic competitiveness. Such unflattering portrayals of professional educators in the late twentieth century were not confined to teachers. As Kate Rousmaniere reveals in chapter 10, the school principal often appeared in radio, television, film, and comics as a bumbling buffoon. By questioning the principal's masculinity, such satirical accounts suggested that school officials could not be trusted to maintain order in the asylum—much less inspire a new generation or usher in an era of societal prosperity.

Collectively, the historical chapters in this volume illustrate the dual educational dimensions of popular media. By their very nature, mass magazines, radio, television, and film shape people's perceptions about the world around them. At the same time, popular media portrayals of schooling are inherently normative. They suggest what students and educators are typically like—and how they ought to be. Rather than incidental curiosities, various media sources and genres depicting education and youth constitute vital artifacts for all scholars examining the societal implications of these powerful—and often controversial—modes of informal education.

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Chapter 2

The College Man in Popular Fiction: American Magazines and the Vision of the Middle-Class Man, 1890–1915

Daniel A. Clark

The *Saturday Evening Post* rose rapidly to become a prominent national magazine in the first decades of the twentieth century. Its editor, George Horace Lorimer, shepherded the magazine's growth with a firm hand and a finger on the pulse of America. One key indicator of Lorimer's extraordinary ability to connect with his readers was "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant" and its successor "Old Gorgon Graham," which ran from 1901 to 1904. These were written anonymously by Lorimer himself and were so popular that they were later published as a book. They took the form of letters written by John "Old Gorgon" Graham to his son. As the title suggests Graham had worked his way up from scratch to own a grand meat-packing firm. With the changes sweeping a swiftly industrializing America, Lorimer could have used this platform to address many pressing social issues, such as the labor problem or the trust question. Significantly, though, the letters centered on another problem that Lorimer must have considered of grave import to his readers—the passing of the torch from the self-made men to a new generation of leaders (often more-privileged sons).

This topic of generational transition and the opportunities for success in a more corporate America deeply troubled Lorimer.

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The *Post* ran numerous editorials berating the idle sons of the rich, followed by articles on success advice, and Lorimer saw to it that numerous short stories dealt with similar subjects. How would the sons of self-made men forge vital elements of Victorian character without having to struggle up from the bottom? How could leadership be formed in the modern corporation?

The very first letter revealed the radical new component of an altered vision of success designed to help solve the problem, as John wrote to his son Pierrepont (aka "Piggy") who was preparing for his final year at Harvard. Graham explains that "like most fellows who haven't any much of it, I've a great deal of respect for education," and for Graham (Lorimer) that meant a traditional liberal arts education, thus satisfying one element honored in the ideals of Victorian manhood—cultured breadth.[1] Yet Graham goes on to illustrate how a college education entails potential abilities beyond the mere acquaintance with culture by recounting the tale of the first college man he ever hired, the son of a friend fallen on hard times. Sticking the boy on the loading gang, expecting him to crack, Graham later learned the man was promoted and continued to progress through a series of higher positions by thinking of ways to make the tasks more efficient—an overhead rail for the loading gang, typewriters for the clerks, and so on. Finally he wrote ad copy—the brave frontier of managing demand.[2]

Lorimer as Graham in this and later letters posited the college man as the perfect answer to the question of business leadership in a new era. Liberal education endowed Piggy and other would-be managers with the proper cultural breadth and polish of a gentleman, while it also bestowed the mental precision to bring modern scientific order and problem-solving to the business world. In the letters series, though, Lorimer also offered numerous caveats to the vision of the college man as a future executive by filling the letters with advice on not spending too much money, not being distracted by women, and not being "chesty" (prideful), all common knocks against the college-bred, and he paraded several college-educated businessmen who failed to work hard and expected exalted positions. The long-running series essentially chronicled how Piggy, and all college men, would have to work up from the bottom in old self-made fashion to earn their place, but it unmistakably reveals how fiction in particular helped to craft a new cultural narrative of manly authority for the modern age.[3]

The *Post* was one of a handful of pathbreaking periodicals that arose around the turn of the century, led by editors and publishers

very similar to Lorimer who pioneered a new vision of the magazine and of their American readers. *Munsey's Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Collier's Weekly*, and the *Post* spearheaded a magazine revolution beginning in the 1890s by sharply lowering prices and generating revenue from advertisers attracted to their massive circulation numbers (700,000 for *Munsey's*, with the *Post* topping one million by 1909, compared to the 150,000 for an old genteel monthly). These magazines became the first truly national media, read by one in four Americans, and scholars have come to recognize these magazines as active forums of cultural formation, where the attitudes, ideals, and values of a new corporate and professional middle class could find sources of identification and guidance in a new corporate and consumer-oriented world.[4]

Their editors' connection with the new middle-class readership formed the bedrock of these magazines' success, and the content of the magazines both reflected and guided this corporate middle class as it formed. Revering the Victorian values of the genteel elite, the magazines still championed the ideals of advancing high culture in their coverage of arts and letters. Yet the readers were also forging modern America. They worked for the corporations and felt comfortable with most of the modern changes sweeping America, and their magazines again reflected this with coverage of scientific discoveries and technical advances, and an engaging ethos far different from the old stuffy genteel monthlies. Fiction made up most of the content in these magazines and even here, while they continued to forward the ideal of providing only the best literature, the editors championed modern realism and contemporary topics involving business.[5]

Given these magazines' necessary devotion to divining the needs and wishes of their readers, Lorimer's choice to address the worries of businessmen over paths to success in a dawning corporate age was no accident. Men constituted the main readership of all these magazines in that time period, in what one scholar has termed a golden age of male readership.[6] And American men around the turn of the century suffered through a profound crisis of masculinity. Reared on the ideal of the self-made man and the vision of the independent farmer and shopkeeper, men faced the reality of a new corporate age that offered few opportunities for individual autonomy. A bureaucratized and routinized working regimen stifled the notion of hard work as the time-honored path to forging character. In addition to the altered work lives of men, women not only championed political participation, they also entered into the business office as secretaries, threatening that

route of traditional business apprenticeship. Waves of new immigrants flooded the United States, all while White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP), middle-class men faced fears of overcivilization in soft lives as managers and professionals. According to the dictates of Social Darwinism, native-born white males were supposed to be dominant both mentally and physically over these immigrant inferiors; yet how to forge tough manhood amid such changes?[7]

Numerous scholars have charted the American middle-class responses to this crisis. On the broadest level the response involved a hyper or passionate masculinity embracing once suspect pursuits as a place to forge requisite toughness and character to compensate for the loss of autonomy and identity in the workplace.[8] Men indulged in rough sports (the cult of the strenuous life) and joined fraternal orders for a sense of all-male camaraderie.[9] There arose a parallel infatuation in literature with manly fantasy heroes such as cowboys, Tarzan, and football heroes, offering vicarious regeneration to American men.[10] Business practices and leadership received an aggressive and competitive makeover—managers marshaling forces for battle and salesmen competing in campaigns.[11]

Keep in mind, though, that American middle-class men hoped to appear not just as virile and robust, but also as civilized, a term encompassing both the traditional gentleman and the modern expert.[12] Educational credentials and college education in particular would become a critical component of this emerging middle-class identity, but such identifications with college did not just happen; they had to be crafted. Nineteenth-century American men, businessmen especially, had long dismissed college as a frivolous waste of time, an experience more likely to hurt one's chances for success not only by delaying one's start in the world but also through the cultivation of poor habits. Success manuals advised against a college excursion, and the enrollments reflected this.[13] Only about four percent of the age cohort attended college in 1900.[14] College had to be constructed as relevant in the realm of culture for American men to perceive it as contributing to their paths to success, and here is where the new mass magazines with their devotion to helping their male readers navigate a transforming America played an essential role.[15]

American higher education was undergoing its own profound transformation in the late nineteenth century with the rise of graduate schools, science and some professional studies in the curriculum, and the elective system, and this contributed to the makeover of the college experience in the mass periodicals, too. But the central reason

that editors, writers, and advertisers reformulated and broadcast a new vision of college hinged on the multifaceted way that the college experience could be depicted to meet the various longings and fears of middle-class American men as they adjusted to the demands of the new age. And make no mistake, an amazing transformation in the representation of college occurred in mass magazines around the turn of the century that envisioned the college experience in ways that proved potently attractive to the white male readership of these periodicals. Articles, editorials, advertising, and fiction simultaneously cultivated visions of college that sustained the value of liberal culture befitting a Victorian gentleman, while also trumpeting the college man as a modern scientifically trained expert. They featured the rough camaraderie of student and fraternity life, and the fierce grid-iron battles, all the while retaining the notion of college as a place of noble striving and uplift. Rugged yet cultured, traditional, and modern, the ways that magazine writers and editors deployed college, then, emanated not from a distinct interest in reforming higher education but rather from the ease with which college could be imagined as a new avenue for forging an authoritative manhood.[16]

While the frenzied infatuation with college as a new and rich experience for American men faded as a fixation in articles and editorials after 1908, the usage of college references in fiction subtly increased in profound ways.[17] Fiction was vital for each of these magazines. It dominated *Cosmopolitan* and *Munsey's*, and the *Post* and *Collier's* ran three to four short stories in each issue. Accounts of pranks, hazing, and football tales became the most popular college narratives and built on the fascination with college life that began in the 1890s. While significant, one must delve beyond the obvious college stories and see how the idea of going to college entered into the background of characters, especially in the contemporary business fiction so common in these magazines, in order to appreciate the depth and breadth of the cultural transformation these periodicals helped forge. Rather than reporting or editorializing in rational discourse, fiction can paint in full emotional color characters and situations that readers could directly identify. To quote Richard Ohmann, magazine fiction gave more depth or "reality" to the norms being articulated, "fiction dreams and plays and does not argue or present evidence."[18] Examining the way authors in these periodicals integrated the vision of the college experience and the college man, one can see vividly how the magazines worked to establish new middle-class norms, new visions of the possibilities for white-collar WASP men that eventually transformed

not only the place of college in American life but also notions of masculine power and authority in America.[19]

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The generic businessman stood as the stereotypical male reader of these mass magazines. Lorimer at the *Post* used the term "businessman" as a totem word (like American) that encompassed a broad range of occupations.[20] Judging from the editorials, articles, fiction, and advertising of all these magazines, however, the white-collar business and professional man was the center of editorial attention, the quintessential American, and the ideal that informed his worldview remained the icon of the self-made man, who rose on his own merits and learned his lessons through hard work and self-culture. With its largely Latin and Greek curriculum, college held a dubious place in this culture, fine for ministers, doctors, or lawyers. Worse than its curricular futility, though, for the businessman, were the assumed bad habits that college seemed to foster—luxurious living, pretentiousness, sloth, and licentious behavior. College corrupted the very attributes necessary for self-made success. Depictions and warnings about college proved ubiquitous in the early pages of these mass periodicals, and magazine fiction offered vivid reinforcement here too.[21] The elite college "sport" loomed as a stock character in fiction, depicted as a boy who drank and gambled, physically flaccid and weak, an effeminate foil to the ideal self-made businessman.[22]

Not surprisingly the first magazine authors to directly couple college and business in a character's background linked a college past to negative attributes. A *Cosmopolitan* story began with the principal character forced to drop out of college and go into business to prove himself to his father, "a year of cut lectures, bed at sunrise, and waking at noon," branding him the typical "sport."[23] College grads usually had to first purge themselves of college habits before realizing any business potential. For instance, a comic piece in the *Post*, "How Miss Wilcox was Fired," involved a beloved younger son recently graduated from college replacing a long-suffering clerk as head of the office. His father (the owner) thought the boy would be fine once he "worked the Latin and Greek out of his system." An older brother (who had not gone to college) and the old clerk observed, however, that the boy conducted business "as he went to his classes at college, as if he could miss a couple of days and make them up later, when he happened to be in the humor."[24]

Yet alongside this common sniping at collegiate training, one may also witness in articles and editorials the growing awareness of a problem that would inspire the effort among editors and writers to investigate novel paths to business leadership: one that would address the rising alarms occasioned by what one might term, "the crisis of the clerk." In the days of nineteenth-century proprietary capitalism, clerking had served as the time-honored route to eventual business ownership—a sort of business apprenticeship beginning as an office boy and rising to learn the business first-hand. This remained a visibly respected ideal in the magazines even as the rise of the corporation destroyed the viability of this model, and after 1900 the magazines too increasingly recognized the dire trend and sounded shrill alarms of its demise.[25]

How would the businessman, the typical middle-class American, forge his character through hard work? The old routes to self-made manhood (and what it taught) seemed perilously threatened. It was during this time that magazines would collectively undertake to fashion new avenues to masculine success, and one of the key elements involved the reformation of the college experience.

The curriculum perhaps posed the most critical aspect of the college experience requiring a makeover. Early on, magazine editors and writers attacked this issue and the question of what value the curriculum held for the American man of affairs. The lively and deep discourse on this topic revolved around what mixture of liberal culture and practical modern utility the evolving college curriculum offered. These were days long before true "majors" evolved. The discussion often involved engineering and science, but in truth the curriculum still centered on the liberal arts core with some allowance for elective specialization in the senior year. An emerging consensus coalesced around a balance of culture and science that seemed necessary to the vision of a genteel, cultured leader, who also possessed the analytical abilities afforded by the injection of science into the course work.[26]

This magazine discourse over the value of the college curriculum usually remained confined to articles and editorials, but it quite tellingly penetrated fiction as well, as already noted with Old Gorgon Graham, and it reinforced the developing consensus surrounding the benefits of college worked out in the other areas of the magazines. When authors specifically explored the issue, they focused on a college-educated character's creativity and efficiency in solving problems in the business world. The hero in "The Matter with Carpenter," for example, performs poorly as a draftsman at first, exemplifying many of the negative stereotypes of the college grad—impatience with menial

tasks, which leads to inattention to detail and poor work habits. Carpenter sits and reminisces about past grid-iron glory. Eventually the boss figures out that Carpenter's problem is a lack of an adequate challenge, and he transfers him to research and development, where he excels.[27]

Advertising offered another brave new frontier in business at the turn of the century and a *Cosmopolitan* story, "Love and Advertising," perfectly captured what the college man could contribute. The story in fact hinged on the traditional antipathy toward the college man in business, as the old German partner in a candy-manufacturing firm steadfastly refuses to hire college men. For a new advertising campaign involving chewing gum, he hires a person who had taken a short course in advertising. The firm's American partner, though, gives in to his daughter and hires her beau, Tom Brainard, a recent college graduate, as an assistant on the campaign. When the initial campaign fizzles and Tom voices his lack of support for it, the daughter prevails upon her father to let Brainard run his own campaign, which quadruples sales of the gum. Young Brainard's explanation of his own campaign becomes a spirited defense of the college curriculum. Freshman rhetoric led him to see that the firm's "practical" ad man was attempting two incongruous things—selling gum and being elite. Rich people did not chew gum. His economics class taught the laws of supply and demand, and his "analytical research," "deductive logic," and "psychology" classes provided the knowledge of how to create the demand, or where the potential markets lay. Brainard then describes how his old college chums supplied the talent for the new campaign. One classmate, now a bohemian opera composer, wrote up a catchy tune, while another, working in a social settlement, supplied the immigrant organ-grinding "dagoes" to disseminate the tune, and a dancer–wife of Brainard's former football trainer performed the song in her act—overall a media blitz. Another classmate, now a professor, provided a scientific testimonial on how the gum aided in digestion for print ads. Brianard's character potently demonstrated the superior vision of a college-educated executive. His was not a professional course of study but rather a mixture of culture and modern subjects, rendering Brainard the ideal ad man and corporate leader with penetrating powers of analysis and the ability to solve problems.[28]

Reimagining the relevance of the college curriculum addressed one critical area of college that demanded attention in order to erase unmanly stereotypes. Perhaps the most fascinating media makeover of the college experience, however, arises from how simultaneously the

extracurricular of college life receives a manly reformation completely in tune with the then current longings and anxieties of a masculinity in transition. Consider for a moment the *Post*'s first College Man's Number published in October 1899. Two short editorials discussed the benefits of the college curriculum, but most of the issue's content highlighted nonacademic endeavors. "Presidents as Fraternity Men" celebrated the achievement and exploits, the brotherly bonds and loyalty to the alma mater of numerous American Presidents, down to William McKinley (an Sigma Alpha Epsilon [SAE] member). "The Great College Circus Fight," a short story, offered up a humorous and raucous vision of college days, featuring a huge brawl and a football captain who saves the day. Another article emphasized football's unique manly benefits—how it built "higher and more manly qualities" than any other game. In a vivid description of such qualities the short story, "The Last Five Yards," captured the toughness of the game, the romantic pageantry of game-day, and the almost spiritual love of the alma mater (Penn) as the hero scores the winning touchdown despite a broken ankle. As the contents of this one issue reveal, the college experience underwent a broad reformulation aligned with visions of restoring a tough, heroic, white manhood through sport, fraternities, and the rough camaraderie of college life, all with a dash of romance and uplifting to satisfy the civilized–primitive ideals of middle-class masculinity.[29]

While each of the magazines extolled the virtues of college sports (*Collier's* even boasted a regular department) in nurturing desirable qualities, football captured America's attention and was tied most closely with college.[30] But a magazine article on a big game could not explore the full range of developing masculine connections or render them so vividly through characters and scenes as could fiction, and all the magazines published college football fiction regularly, with the *Post* lavishing the most attention (five in 1909 alone).

James Hopper was a lead developer of the genre prior to 1920. A former college football player, Hopper was a lifelong friend and inner-circle companion of realist Jack London.[31] Like London, Hopper elevated the primitive, brutal side of football, yet Hopper's tales also contained a parallel theme. All of his characters proved themselves in grid-iron combat, but they also had to demonstrate a capacity for team work and loyalty. One of his earliest stories featured a senior long relegated to the scrub team, who saves the day in the big game. This hero of "The Idealist" stuck through four years of football practices as a scrub due to his love for his alma mater, even when ridiculed by fans as a "girlie." He earned the grudging admiration of his

team and student body for his fortitude. Finally getting his chance, the hero rose "lithely and casting off his sweater . . . stepped out upon the field . . . across the trampled ground, calm, grave-eyed as if to a sacrificial rite." Then with only a few minutes left, "thrilled in an ecstasy of resolution," he hauled in a fumble, broke free, stiff-arming opponents in his scoring run to stand beneath the goalpost "erect and serene." The one-time effeminate collegian had proven his manhood.[32]

In one of his last *Post* stories, Hopper alters the equation. The star senior fullback, Jones, has grown complacent. He contemplates quitting after the coach demotes him to the scrub team. His roommate, Midge, a senior scrub, lectures that Jones's problem is that he never played scrub, where one plays for the love of the game, and learns to take licks and never surrender. Hopper then describes two days of vicious scrimmages. With Midge calling the signals for the scrubs and handing the ball to Jones, they eventually score twice on the varsity. Jones learns his lesson, returns to form, and then leads the varsity to victory in the big game, with Midge proudly telling his teammates that his reward is watching Jones succeed.[33]

Typical of the genre, Hopper's stories stressed traditional manly values, such as toughness and rising through one's own merit. Nevertheless his stories also enshrined a modern corporate theme—the notion of teamwork and efficient cooperation. In "The Redemption of Fullback Jones," Midge defers any individual glory, fully subordinating himself to the team. In tune with the shifting imperatives of the business world, authors in this genre seemed to offer lessons geared toward the emerging corporate ethos.[34] Similarly, in line with more modern dreams of virile passionate masculinity, the football stories were filled with images of physical extremes and combat. Hopper excelled at this, but so did Owen Johnson (author of *Stover at Yale*), who in "The Varmint" depicted a precollege Stover roused by the "phalanx of bone and muscle coming toward him . . . [into] a combative rage, the true joy of battle." Such aggressive, martial language runs throughout this genre.[35]

Articles in the magazines also ran stories that depicted a very masculine side of college life that complemented the rehabilitation of college through sports. Class fights and raucous pranks had long been a staple of college folklore. When they had noticed such behavior, the old highbrow monthlies had condemned such activity as barbaric.[36] But as middle-class Americans and their magazines became enamored of college life, stories of class fights, pranks, and high jinks worked alongside the football tale to reconstruct and

masculinize the image of college, and a variety of magazine fiction added vivid color to this gritty reformation.[37] "The Crime of '73," for instance, comically chronicled a rush (as class fights were called) when a freshman class broke tradition and brazenly took the privilege of walking with a cane.[38] Nothing exemplified the ability of fiction, to simultaneously cast college life as rowdy and yet unique and special, better than George Fitch's long-running series of adventures at Ol' Siwash. Fitch's brand of writing came out of the mold of other Midwestern humorists like George Ade. He modeled Siwash on his alma mater, Knox College in Illinois.[39] But the adventures he situated at Siwash seem more drawn from (and contributed to) the evolving popular impressions of college life the magazines enthusiastically portrayed. Siwash students overzealously pursued athletics. They recruited a huge Norwegian immigrant, Ole, to play football, though Ole regarded a fork as an oddity. The boys faked a funeral in another story to attend a college baseball game. Most stories, though, recounted parties and pranks—sophomores trying to ruin the freshman formal or sneaking a foul-mouthed parrot into the chapel organ pipes. One story detailed a wild fraternity party filled with drinking, singing, and raucous initiation rites.[40]

Despite the narrator or the Siwash tales' criticism of the classical curriculum and that he never made it off the scrub-line in football under a tyrannical and cussing coach, Fitch's tone in the end was sympathetic to college life and his characters are endearing. Most of all Fitch depicted college as full of fun and camaraderie, where men learned lessons and formed friendships that lasted a lifetime. Such tales of pranks and high jinks served the critical function of introducing college life to the middle class, of democratizing college without losing its special appeal. But Fitch's Siwash stories evidenced a more profound evolution. Siwash was not Harvard; her alumni were not wealthy bond salesmen. They were in fact nondescript businessmen. Most stories began with the narrator reminiscing from an office. In one the narrator turns toward his former classmate now in the same firm, and asks, "How can I be the same guy who climbed sixty feet to get the bell-tower clapper?"[41] Though not the Ivy League, Siwash was a sacred place, full of its own traditions. But the stories also solidified a parallel image of college life adapted from the middle-class fascination with the urban underworld—full of aggressive masculinity, rough friendships, and ethically questionable behavior. Siwash and other depictions of rough college life legitimized college as a safe, sanitized place to incorporate such experiences.

American colleges never lost their elite associations in the magazines, however. While many articles and fiction rehabilitated the college man as an aggressive hero, magazines concomitantly enhanced the image of campuses as seats of high culture and sophisticated manhood.[42] At the same time editors began endorsing college athletics, they also ran stories, including illustrations and pictures, that upheld identifications between colleges and universities and the elite. Frequent articles explored college life, academic personalities, and seasonal collegiate events much as the magazines covered high society. Regattas, eating clubs, fraternities, all presented in an idealized and highly attractive form, encouraged middle-class readers to think of college (and themselves) in particular ways, privileged and genteel.[43]

Articles performed such cultural work, but so did fiction. College football stories, though the most popular, were hardly the only ones forging an accessible romantic and sophisticated vision of college life. Charles Macomb Flandrau wrote two serials in the *Post* involving college life, "The Diary of a Harvard Freshman" and "Sophomores Abroad." "Diary" detailed the first year of one Tommy Wood. Worried mothers on move-in day, tight money, flunking exams, pranks, and class fights filled the installments and contributed to forging and popularizing the folklore of college life to an uninformed readership, and Flandrau's serial also offered word-images that idealized college as someplace special.[44] Flandrau captured the breathless excitement of Tommy's first day in the rarefied atmosphere of Harvard, capped by Duggie (the football captain and Tommy's housemate) advising Tommy on the finer points of Harvard—proper vocabulary, clubs, teams, and musical societies. When Duggie notes what he loves best about Harvard, Flandrau paints a romantic word-image of living "on the Yard." "In May and June the morning and evening views from your window are different from and more beautiful than anything in the world," he states, as the glee club sings under the trees.[45] In a later story one character comments that he never tired of "looking up at the stained glass windows and the severe portraits—[it all seemed] so academic . . . [possessing] a calmness and dignity."[46] Most readers of these magazines would never go to college, let alone Harvard, but fictional idealizations of college such as Flandrau's helped to establish the expectations and imagined vistas of college life for a rising group of Americans awakened to the possibilities and longing for a mark of traditional gentility.

The various disparate elements of college life thus far explored in magazine coverage addressed different aspects of an ailing white, middle-class manhood and posited college as a convenient location to

forge toughness and passion through football or the rowdy and raucous side of campus life. And yet the college did not lose its connections to an air of elite sophistication or cultivated culture. Nevertheless, acquiring any of these experiences was not exclusive to college attendance. Middle-class men could forge toughness and acquire culture outside the college gates. This is where the mass magazine reenvisioning of college performed an unappreciated cultural function by crafting and widely disseminating a cohesive vision of college designed to appeal to middle-class men as a new possible route to manhood. Magazine fiction, in particular, excelled at offering engaging college characters that celebrated the discordant elements of masculinity simultaneously—civilized–primitive heroes that mixed culture, scholarship, and athletic prowess.

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Imagining the college graduate rising to succeed in the business world, however, confronts a whole different set of beliefs, the most powerful of which was the ideal of the self-made man. College men had to prove themselves rugged in the old-fashioned realm of hard work, and alongside early depictions of the spoiled college sport, one also began to see the celebration of a new character, the self-supporting student. A plethora of articles popularized the ideal, such as "How Modern College Students Work Their Way Through," but again fictional treatments dramatized the phenomenon.[47] One of the best examples was "The Cost," a David Graham Phillips serial in the *Post*. Set in a Midwestern state, the tale's central character, Hampden Scarborough, hails from hardy farm stock. His own father refuses to pay for college dismissing its relevance and forcing Scarborough to earn his way through.[48] Scarborough proved a good student, a champion debater, and in good democratic fashion led the "barbs" in their overthrow of the "greeks" in the dominance of a literary society in order to turn the organization away from petty politics and back toward serious intellectual discussion.[49] Interestingly, when his sweetheart jilts him in favor of a rich sport, Dumont, Scarborough proceeds through a cycle of collegiate sin and redemption, descending for a time into the life of a college sport himself—drinking and gambling. He swears off the life, though, and redeems himself by selling books in the summer to pay his college expenses. He is offered a management position upon graduation.[50]

Although Scarborough forgoes a career as a sales manager to pursue law and reform politics (eventually confronting the corrupt monopolist,

Dumont), he proves his merit and fitness through hard work and perseverance, the ideal traits of the self-made man. Significantly, even his brief foray into gambling and drinking is depicted less as debauchery and more as a manly rite of passage. Phillips described Scarborough as a "manly" drinker, and an exceptional gambler (he actually paid for his tuition and expenses for a year) due to his "naturally bold spirit."[51] Scarborough's character marked a watershed in how mass magazine authors fashioned college men. Scarborough was a naturally democratic leader of sound character, who desired an education and whose carousing in effect indicated less a corrupt person than a manly indiscretion, a requisite brush with the un-Victorian but authentically manly urban-sporting culture rising in masculine vogue. The story posited that the proper type of college man could excel in business and that he had worked through college served as the foundational example of his masculine worth.

While the self-supporting student then became one new stock character in magazine fiction that helped to insert the college man within the self-made man tradition, the rise of an even more novel character type, the college graduate as self-made corporate climber, proved tellingly significant in the reworking of masculine notions of success. At the turn of the century, the most typical hero of business fiction resembled Horatio Alger heroes with some new corporate twists. One might still begin as a clerk or mechanic and rise to possess one's own company, but more often characters now worked their way up to an executive position within a corporation, reflecting the changing business reality. Roughly after 1905 an increasing number of stories featured college-educated businessmen. The college experience received a different cast as well. Largely gone were the references to immoral activity. More often authors used college as a defining characteristic, denoting intellect, ability, or potential, almost always demonstrated by working one's way up through the ranks. College training of future corporate leaders figured prominently in many stories, normally taking the form of references that established a character's background. Omitting the Old Gorgon Graham series, there were twenty-four stories in the *Post* containing significant mentions of a college man working up through the ranks, mostly occurring after 1905. *Munsey's* and *Collier's* (which did not publish much business fiction then) offered only six specific mentions of such characters together, while *Cosmopolitan* boasted one per year between 1905 and 1909.[52]

One marvelous example of the subtle way significant collegiate references slipped into character formations, thereby establishing such

idealized connections as normative, occurred at the beginning of a 1909 *Post* serial, "The White Mice," a tale of international business adventure. The main character, Rodman Forrester, had been a "celebrated Yale pitcher." He goes abroad for his father's company, graduating to such responsibility only after a brief but seemingly requisite seasoning in the machine shops of one of his father's foundries.[53]

If "The White Mice" represents one set of such stories (that of privileged sons working through the ranks), "The Triumph of Billy" exemplifies the other set, that of middle-class characters displaying a fitness to lead. The hero, Billy, is a "Tech grad of '02" hired by an Illinois electrical company, an industry that led the way in hiring grads as future managers, although in this case he fights the anti-college prejudice of the self-made owner. Billy emerges triumphant, proving his worth by rising through the company. "The Pampered Fledgling" in 1916 featured a similar cast of characters. A girl from an elite family falls in love with Will Store, the son of the town druggist. The girl's drunken older brother disapproves of the romance on social grounds even though Will "had gone to technical college, earning most of his way through and was now working for the telephone company," managing forty men—a fast rise on the management track. College helped to define these new middle-class business heroes in these similar stories as modern professionals, worthy matches for genteel ladies, while also manly heirs in the self-made mold. College ceased to be only the mark of the elite with liabilities in business fiction, and now seemed to justify swift and natural advancement.[54]

To this point, this chapter has largely explored the component elements of a reimagined college experience in the fiction of periodicals. While important for clarity, most aspects of the magazine makeover of college and its insertion into the matrix of manly authority blended the benefits of the college experience, and this certainly was true in fiction. Henry K. Webster's "The Wedge" offers an early example elevating the college man as a new potential leader in business. Home on summer break, young Carpenter consented to help out a family friend determined to break a strike in his foundry and in need of workers. Carpenter believed that he could not back down, largely for the honor of his alma mater, after the friend made it plain that he doubted whether the college boy could stand the labor. Although he found the work difficult, Carpenter mastered it, passing the first test of self-made manhood. From here he rose to the test of managing men. Blocked at the foundry gate by striking laborers, Carpenter rallied the immigrant strike-breakers, coaching them in the finer points of the "flying wedge" (a notoriously deadly mass football formation).

Declaring that he and his college teammates had mowed down tougher mobs than this, Carpenter organized the men into a scrimmage line, and then with "twenty-five molders from Cleveland with Becker Newton Carpenter, Jr., '02, at the head, locked into one body," they easily cleared a path through the striking workers, "a human locomotive." By the end of the strike Carpenter had organized the immigrant workers into a marching club, a baseball team, and two football squads, with plans for a glee club. The strike-breakers even yelled their versions of college cheers on the train back to Cleveland. The story portrayed young Carpenter and, by extension, any college man, as the ideal future manager and natural leader, who could rise up through the ranks and prove more than a match for any group of laborers.[55]

Few stories combined football and executive leadership potential like "The Wedge," but after 1900 and the awakening of interest in college education generally, brief background references to a collegiate football past (and college generally) for a business-related character recurred regularly. These pointed references to a college past for a businessman perhaps betokened little more than an author's recognition of an increasing trend, but again the fact that they now were used most often to highlight the manliness or potential for leadership rather than mark a character's liabilities remains significant. One serialized story of business intrigue in the *Post* further displayed the transformed meaning imbedded in fictional college references. In John Corbin's "The Cave Man," college and the lead character's athletic past played prominent roles as he engaged in business battles. The story centers on the figure of Wister, the young head of a leading car manufacturer. The driving plot of the serial revolves around love and the efforts of a manager of a rival company (and a rival in love) to force a consolidation on Wister, who naturally opposes such "trusts" as dishonest. Wister is introduced as a humble warrior, embarrassed as old classmates chant his name and call for him—the old lineman who led the blocking for a famous runner and Rough Rider—to lead a cheer at a Harvard homecoming.[56] Wister eventually forms his own "good" trust to defend himself and others.[57] A polo match with Wister facing down his rival in a penalty shot showdown symbolizes the business battle. In this Wister summons the will to put aside his pain and weariness just as he had against Yale years before. The athletic past of Wister augments and clarifies his fitness to lead.[58] But the author also describes him as an "academic," devoted to research and development. And he recruits his young cousin from Harvard to help him, putting the grad through a management-track training that emulates

an up through the ranks rise from the shop floor.[59] Wister and the story perfectly capture the essential facets of how the usage of college evolved in magazine fiction to highlight the connection between college and masculine authority.

When college entered into a fictional character's past as the new century progressed, the man most often was engaged in some sort of business activity, denoting a significant evolution. Casting the college-educated businessman as a manly leader, however, involved more than inserting references to grid-iron glory. Businessmen began seeing themselves as expert managers, a rising new professional class, and the magazines promoted this budding self-conception. If the curriculum seldom assumed center stage in magazine fiction, the fact that college increasingly entered into the fictional backgrounds of business characters, nevertheless, owed a great deal to the perception of curricular change and its relevance to the shifting demands of the corporate world. A character with a technical or engineering education did tend to receive increased attention over time, which one might assume given the growing interest in scientific management. But even when stories featured the college graduate's ability to inject scientific efficiency into outdated business operation, the course of study was not specified. In one such story, in fact, the innovative college lad who turned around his grandfather's importing business hailed from Yale, a school with a manly football reputation, but notoriously conservative in its curriculum.[60] Acquiring the refining qualities of liberal culture through college still received specific mention in some business-related fiction as well.[61] A collegiate background, then, could be used to emphasize one trait or refer to many things at once, and magazine authors, in fact, were using collegiate references as a sort of cultural shorthand. Through this new mass medium, collegiate references conveyed an amalgam of ideal qualities that had become associated both with the college man and the ideal emerging business leader.

Fiction on college effectively condensed many aspects of college education—such as the refinements of liberal culture, breadth of learning and character formation, scientific training—regardless of apparent contradictions within the curriculum. It often merged these intellectual traits with an indefinable something, a panache, a quality of leadership that often was signified through athletics or the extracurricular. Such ideal characterizations helped to account for the increased use of college references in fictional business characters and for the popularity of the college football tale. This ideal, civilized–primitive college man possessed all the qualities that American men were being told they should prize.

The interconnected transformation in cultural perceptions of college and the ideal man these fictional characters represent is a remarkable story. But at a time when a relatively small portion of the American middle class even went to college, the creation of college-age characters or college-educated businessmen as heroes, in story after story, worked another more subtle yet profound transformation in American culture. Such fiction writers not only refashioned and interrelated ideal notions of college, manhood, and success; they also helped to make going to college a normative expectation for the middle class, another element in how the magazines worked to weave these new and interrelated characterizations into the fabric of American cultural perceptions. Analyzing the evolving narrative of authority depicted in popular magazine fiction helps one understand the modern embrace of higher education as a middle-class path to success. Businessmen did not just awaken one day and decide a college degree made perfect sense. The American cultural acceptance of college demands explanation, and the integration of college into mass magazine visions of manhood and business success (with fiction as its most potent representation) played a vital part of that cultural transformation, setting the stage for the growing demand for college education in the century ahead.

NOTES

1. "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 3, 1901, 11. By cultured breadth, I mean an intimate knowledge of an idealized Western Civilization—art, literature, music, and history, à la Matthew Arnold.
2. "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 17, 1901, 11.
3. Graham admonished his son to work harder in "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 22, 1902, 11; and "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 22, 1902, 5. He preached against pride in "Letters from Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1901, 5. Old Gorgon Graham recommended the Maine woods as more manly than purchasing "badly fitting clothes" during a European vacation. "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 31, 1901, 7. He urged his son to write and speak with directness like a businessman, rather than with the rhetorical flourishes of a college dandy in "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 21, 1901, 7 and in "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 11, 1902, 5.

The father mentioned socializing when a business associate noted receiving a letter from the firm that began "Dearest," the boy having mixed up his correspondence as a clerk. "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 5, 1901, 6.

4. Statistics taken from Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Appendix 1. In 1893 a price war began. Frank Munsey, the owner/editor of *Munsey's*, set the new standard by lowering his price to ten cents, with *McClure's* and *Cosmopolitan* soon following suit. The lower prices paid off. By April of 1894, *Munsey's* circulation had risen from 40,000 to 500,000. Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 25. The circulation numbers for the genteel monthlies are noted in John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 59. Most genteel monthlies ranged in circulation from 40,000 to 150,000. Helen Damon-Moore and Jan Cohn do a good job of looking at George Horace Lorimer. Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the* Ladies Home Journal *and the* Saturday Evening Post*, 1880–1910* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 109–121; and Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and the* Saturday Evening Post (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 9–18.
5. Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 25, 220–234, 245–246; Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order*, 110–111, 158–160, 175–178; Cohn, *Creating America*, 9–12 and 136.
6. Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985).
7. Major works on the challenges to American men and the resulting shifts in conceptions of American masculinity include Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man!: Males in Modern Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1990); and E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
8. The term "passionate masculinity" is Rotundo's, but most scholars who examine the changes in male gender expectations see the same thing. John Pettegrew's recent work highlights the primitive and violent aspects of this shift due to the influence of Darwinism. John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).
9. Some of the excellent studies examining the embrace of outdoor activity and the "strenuous life" include Rotundo, *American Manhood*, ch. 10; Stearns, *Be a Man!*, 110–118; Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize-Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

1986), chs. 6–7; Roderick Nash, "The American Cult of the Primitive," *American Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1966): 517–537; Steven A. Reiss, "Sport and the Redefinition of American Middle-Class Masculinity," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 8 (May 1991): 5–27. Very good works covering the growth of American fraternal organizations include Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Rituals and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

10. Some of the excellent works touching on the new manly heroes that have influenced this study include Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 227–246; Stearns, *Be a Man!*, 86–94; Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits*, ch. 3; and John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), ch. 3
11. Stearns believes that the initial redefinition of the businessman as warrior and general stemmed from big businessmen's desire "to justify themselves to themselves" and to the wider world which had been taught that excessive wealth was wrong. Stearns, *Be a Man!*, 110–114.
12. I built my understanding on this topic from Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
13. Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 95–96. Wyllie drew from nineteenth-century advice literature such as Edwin T. Freedley, *A Practical Treatise on Business* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Company, 1854). Judy Hilkey found the very same dismissals of the college man into the twentieth century. Judy Hilkey, *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 108–110.
14. US Bureau of the Census (1961), *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 10 and 210–211, quoted in David K. Brown, *Degrees of Control: A Sociology of Educational Expansion and Occupational Credentialism* (New York: Columbia University Teachers College Press, 1995), 76.
15. Most of the excellent histories of colleges and universities or professional groups for this period just assume an increase in demand for college education as a natural outgrowth of a modernizing economy and social ordering process, and their source bases rarely extend beyond academia or a profession. Some of the key relevant histories upon which I build are Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976); Clyde Barrow, *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1894–1928* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915–1940* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

1986); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Culture from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); Brown, *Degrees of Control*; and W. Bruce Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars: College and Community in the "Age of the University," 1865–1917* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

16. This forms the main argument of my book, Daniel A. Clark, *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle Class Manhood, 1890–1915* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010). Of the four central editors (Frank Munsey, John Brisben Walker at *Cosmopolitan*, Norman Hapgood at *Collier's*, and George Horace Lorimer at the *Post*) all but Munsey had either attended or graduated from college. Unquestionably their magazines reflected their visions of America quite openly, and that applies to their opinions about college as well. The two most outspoken about college, however, Walker and Lorimer, were often quite critical. As I argue, their vision of college emanated more from their notion of what the evolving ideal business and professional man needed, rather than any coherent interest in American higher education. I believe for the most part that goes for the writers as well. The vast majority of the fictional writers for whom I could find biographical information either attended or graduated from a college and this did color their vision in a more positive direction. Once again, however, the conception of college remained subordinate to issues surrounding evolving masculinity and class. Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 22.
17. To me the increased usage of college in the backgrounds of male characters and the simultaneous explosion of ad copy explicitly referencing college or the college man and his activities evidences that the concept became more normative for the middle-class readers of the periodicals. Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 21–22.
18. Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 287.
19. My work builds on and contributes to scholars working on middle-class masculinity and culture in several areas, mainly in that while most recognize the increasing notion of going to college or the importance of college football, none have explored how the concept as a whole (the many facets of the college experience) played so prominently into evolving notions of masculinity.
20. For Lorimer "American" was a totem word, and it often was conflated to stand in for the modern businessman, and "businessman" itself was a generic and inclusive term that encompassed entrepreneurs, professionals, drummers, and clerks. Cohn, *Creating America*, 30–32.
21. For example, "Do Mental Gymnastics Make Strong Men?" *Saturday Evening Post*, February 2, 1901, 12.
22. A few of the stories that incorporated characters where college marked them as ne'er-do-well sports and gamblers are A. T. Quiller-Couch, "Parson Jack's Fortune," *Collier's*, April 19, 1900, 14; Anne O'Hagan, "The Caddishness of Tressington," *Munsey's Magazine* 23 (August 1900):

601–607; and Charles Battell Loomis, "Tales of Men of Many Trades: The Story of Hubbard Wilson, a Misfit," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 24, 1900, 865.

23. Melville Chater, "Motorman Cupid," *Cosmopolitan* 28 (January 1900): 290–294.
24. I. K. Friedman, "How Miss Wilcox Was Fired," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 12, 1905, 4–7 and 14.
25. See Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 41–46.
26. Ibid., ch. 2.
27. H. K. Webster, "The Matter with Carpenter," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 26, 1904, 6–7 and 28.
28. Richard Walton Tully, "Love and Advertising," *Cosmopolitan* 40 (April 1906): 670–678.
29. Nathaniel Butler, "Shall I Go to College?" *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1899, 329; Maurice Thompson, "The War Against the Classics," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1899, 329; "Presidents as Fraternity Men," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1899, 323; Jesse Lynch Williams, "The Great College-Circus Fight," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1899, 324–326; Harmon S. Grant, "The College Man's Game," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1899, 337; and Arthur Hobson Quinn, "The Last Five Yards," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1899, 335–336.
30. Examples in the fall covering football include Walter Camp, "Harvard vs. Yale," *Collier's Weekly*, December 2, 1899, 20–22; Walter Camp, "The All-America Football Team," *Collier's Weekly*, December 19, 1908, 10–11; and Walter Camp, "Influence of the Tackle Play," *Collier's Weekly*, October 15, 1910, 24–25.
31. Richard O'Connor, *Jack London: A Biography* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1964), 76 and 152.
32. James Hopper, "The Idealist," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 14, 1905, 6–8 and 22.
33. James Hopper, "The Redemption of Fullback Jones," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1912, 12–14 and 57–58.
34. For example, Norris described the other team as "inferiors as individuals but by months of strenuous training welded together to form a single compact unit" in Frank Norris, "Kirkland at Quarter," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 12, 1901, 4–5. David Lamoreaux provided a detailed analysis of the Dink Stover stories in the context of corporate expansion and progressive angst that helped to inform my understanding of the college football story in middle-class magazines. David Lamoreaux, "Stover at Yale and the Gridiron Metaphor," *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (Fall 1977): 330–344.
35. Owen Johnson, "The Varmint," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 21, 1910, 21–22.
36. One typical article critical of hazing is David Starr Jordan, "College Discipline," *North American Review* 165 (October 1897): 403–408.

37. For example, "College Pranks: Old Grad Tales of Freshman Days," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 7, 1902, 2–3; Max O'Rell, "Early Influences: A Reminiscence of My School Days," *Cosmopolitan* 30 (November 1900): 57.
38. Stanley Waterloo, "The Crime of '73," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 26, 1900, 112 and 114.
39. Marvin Litvin, *"I'm Going to Be Somebody": A Biography of George Fitch (Originator of the Word "Siwash")* (Woodston, KA: Western Books, 1991).
40. George Fitch, "Initiating Ole," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 18, 1909, 5–7 and 34; George Fitch, "Ole Skjarsen's First Touchdown: A Siwash College Story," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 6, 1909, 15–17 and 44–45; George Fitch, "A Funeral that Flashed in the Pan: Sad Days at Old Siwash," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 18, 1909, 5–7 and 24–25; George Fitch, "When Greek Meets Grouch: A Siwash Tale," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 9, 1909, 5–7 and 26–27. The foul-mouthed parrot is mentioned in the funeral story.
41. The quote comes from Fitch, "A Funeral that Flashed in the Pan," 5. Another Fitch story highlighting the main Siwash grads getting their start in the business world is George Fitch, "Sic Transit Gloria All-America," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 15, 1911, 15–17.
42. Both Schneirov and Ohmann explored how these new popular magazines celebrated modernity while still adhering to the cultivation of genteel culture like the quality monthlies of the nineteenth century. Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order*, 76–86; and Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 158–159.
43. Ethelbert D. Warfield, "The Expansion of Our Great Universities," *Munsey's Magazine* 25 (August 1901): 693–706; Mrs. Burton Harrison, "Henley Week," *Cosmopolitan* 29 (July 1900): 241–252; "The Election of a President of Yale," *Collier's Weekly*, April 15, 1899, 21; P. F. Piper, "College Fraternities," *Cosmopolitan* 22 (March 1897): 641–648; and Erman J. Ridgeway, "College Fraternities," *Munsey's Magazine* 24 (February 1901): 729–742.
44. The stories dealing with the problems noted in the text come respectively from Charles Macomb Flandrau, "Diary of a Harvard Freshman," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 27, 1900, 10–11; Flandrau, "Diary," December 8, 1900, 12–13; and Flandrau, "Diary," November 10, 1900, 10–11.
45. Flandrau, "Diary," October 27, 1900, 11.
46. Flandrau, "Diary," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 19, 1901, 11.
47. Forrest Crissey, "How Modern College Students Work Their Way," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 6, 1903, 10; and James Melvin Lee, "How to Be Self-Supporting at College," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 27, 1900, 26–27.
48. The main characters were introduced in the first two episodes. David Graham Phillips, "The Cost: A Tale of a Man and Two Women," *Saturday*

Evening Post, November 14, 1903, 1–3 and 18–19; and Phillips, "The Cost," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 21, 1903, 11–13.

49. Phillips, "The Cost," November 21, 1903, 11–13. In the next installment he reforms a literary society to take the "faction and cast" out of its debates. Phillips, "The Cost," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 28, 1903, 10.
50. Phillips, "The Cost," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 5, 1903, 15–17 and 53; and Phillips, "The Cost," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 12, 1903, 10–11 and 24.
51. Phillips, "The Cost," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 5, 1903, 16.
52. Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 135–138.
53. Richard Harding Davis, "The White Mice," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 13, 1909, 3–5 and 52–54.
54. Herbert Quick, "The Triumph of Billy," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 8, 1906, 5–7; Walter Prichard Eaton, "The Pampered Fledgling," *American Magazine* 82 (September 1916): 7.
55. Henry K. Webster, "The Wedge," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 28, 1901, 7–8.
56. John Corbin, "The Cave Man," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 26, 1907, 3–5 and 31–32.
57. Corbin, "The Cave Man," February 2, 1907, 15–17.
58. Corbin, "The Cave Man," March 2, 1907, 9–11.
59. Corbin, "The Cave Man," February 2, 1907, 15–17.
60. James H. Collins, "Bulwarks of Business Policy," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 13, 1912, 18 and 40–41
61. In Robert Herrick, "Common Honesty," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 19, 1903, 2–5 and 28, the college-educated son goes into the business firm of his father. The reader is treated to a classic businessman's lament, as the father notes his regret of not having a college education's refinement. Both Gouverneur Morris, "The Spread Eagle," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 4, 1909, 18–20 and 42 and Edgar Jepson, "The Shanghaied Son-in-Law," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 10, 1910, 5–7 featured college-educated businessmen, who attended Oxford, soaked in culture, and then settled down to business.

Chapter 3

"A Touch of Risquity": Teachers, Perception, and Popular Culture in the Progressive Era

Michelle Morgan

In a series of articles on teachers' "inferiority complex" in 1926, a Los Angeles teacher confessed that she often hid her job from acquaintances. "Yesterday the teacher was considered snobbish and uninteresting because of her backward, retiring nature," she wrote: "Today the teacher, in order to be up to date and practical, must meet people in their own sphere and on an equal basis." Times were changing, and teachers needed to keep up with them. Bobbed hair, fashionable dress, and lively social interaction were necessary in a modern world. But "at the present time this idea of a teacher's dress and social life is still fast in the minds of some people," the author lamented. A teacher could not "participate in any social activities without being severely criticized for her dress and many of her actions by the people who still cling to their old ideas. The teacher is considered by some people as inferior and by others as superior," she concluded. "As a matter of fact," she argued, "most teachers want to be neither inferior nor superior, but just one of the 'bunch.'"[1]

Teachers' position as role models for children, however, made it difficult to be a member of the "bunch." This chapter explores the debates that emerged as popular images of teachers conflicted with teachers' definitions of professionalism, their middle-class aspirations, and their desire to participate in the growing array of leisure activities

S.G. Terzian et al. (eds.), *American Education in Popular Media*

available in the early twentieth century. It focuses on the urban Far West. Urban spaces offered fewer restrictions on teachers' behavior than did rural communities, and many of the teachers employed in these western districts were drawn to these cities by professional opportunities and the amenities of urban life.[2] Their willingness to articulate their personal and professional goals may have made them more forthcoming about the contradictions they experienced, although research in rural areas and other regions suggest that these teachers were not atypical in their concerns. As Kathleen Weiler's work on rural California suggests, teachers in the interwar years negotiated and resisted administrator and community restrictions on their personal lives.[3] Teachers in the urban spaces of the Far West used print media as a means to challenge public perceptions regarding their appearance and behavior and its relationship to their professional identities. The resulting debates reveal the complex interactions between ideas about professionalization, class, and gender in teachers' lives outside the school.

These discussions reflected community members', teachers', administrators', and reformers' concerns regarding teachers' roles in educational reform and the social transformations of the Progressive Era. Community members voiced expectations that teachers model middle-class behavior appropriate to their gender. As gender roles changed, the Victorian teacher appeared increasingly out of step with modern life, and yet community members and parents expressed discomfort when teachers participated in activities associated with the "new woman." Administrators and reformers focused on crafting a professional identity in which teachers' leisure activities supported their work in the schoolroom. Teachers navigated these changes carefully, asserting their right to participate in a variety of leisure activities and embrace some aspects of popular culture. Female teachers claimed that professionalism required them to shed the image of the dried-up schoolmarm and instead project a modern, stylish, yet conservative persona. Drawing on the emphasis progressive reformers placed on understanding the individual child, teachers also asserted that engagement in leisure activities and consumer culture enabled them to relate to their students more effectively. In doing so, teachers combined emerging ideas about middle-class femininity and masculinity, progressive educational reform, and professionalism to redefine their public image.

Print media both reinforced the stereotypical images that concerned teachers and administrators and offered teachers an opportunity to engage, often anonymously, in efforts to reshape these images. Urban

newspapers and educational journals enjoyed tremendous popularity during the Progressive Era, and despite their different purposes and audiences, they contained similar discussions regarding the image of the teacher. Newspapers played instrumental roles in creating communities in the increasingly complex urban spaces. From the penny press issues aimed at working-class readers to the information-centered press with middle-class audiences, newspapers provided avenues for public discussion of community issues. Letters to the editor, in particular, revealed the dynamic voices of teachers, parents, and community members as they engaged with each other regarding these issues.[4] Educational journals spoke to a narrower audience and flourished in their effort to professionalize schoolwork. This chapter examines journals produced by local classroom teachers' organizations or with strong classroom teacher participation. These publications were both prescriptive and descriptive; teachers related their experiences and advised each other on how best to balance the professional and personal. The more informal style encouraged teachers to discuss professional and social issues and offered perspectives with less administrative oversight than did the larger regional or national educational journals. In addition, advertisements in these publications specifically targeted classroom teachers' purchase of consumer goods, thus reflecting what local businesses believed was appropriate consumer behavior for teachers.[5]

Teachers' images throughout the range of these publications closely reflected social expectations regarding gender roles. As Jackie Blount has eloquently argued, the expansion of common schooling in the nineteenth century placed increasing responsibility on teachers to model and assimilate children to community-approved gender roles.[6] The shifts in gender roles during the Progressive Era presented male and female teachers with diverse challenges. Female teachers struggled to simultaneously meet standards of professionalization and middle-class womanhood, an identity dependent on patterns of consumption. For male teachers, professionalism and middle-class identity were intertwined, but classroom teaching offered few opportunities for the autonomy expected in professional employment.

Nineteenth-century common school reformers defended women's entry into the teaching force by emphasizing teaching as an extension of women's domesticity. But not all women teachers chose to leave the classroom and marry; some women found teaching to be an avenue to economic independence, allowing them to forgo marriage and remain single or maintain partnerships with other women. Although teaching helped spinsterhood become more socially acceptable—they

were, after all, still devoting themselves to the welfare of children—it also contributed to negative stereotypes of the socially awkward schoolmarm.[7] Said one observer in the 1920s, this woman was a "ridiculously dressed, angular faced, homely mortal whose chief stock in trade was the proverbial birch switch, a threatening scowl and the 'dunce block.'" She appeared in popular venues like the comic valentine, cards on which a derisive jingle captioned a caricature designed to offer anonymous criticism of the recipient's behavior. Cards depicting teachers often drew connections between teachers' appearance and intelligence:

> Oh! How we love our teacher!
> She knows much more than the books;
> But if the truth were known
> She's as foolish as she looks.[8]

Such caricatures hardly furthered efforts to portray teaching as a serious profession.

Male teachers faced a different set of stereotypes challenging their claims to masculinity and professional status. Prior to the expansion of common schools, young men eager to enter the "real" professions used teaching as a stepping-stone. Local schoolmasters were often transient and communities viewed them with skepticism. Popular literature confirmed these sentiments. Washington Irving's Ichabod Crane is moderately skilled in the schoolroom, but his general social awkwardness and failure to successfully woo the fair Katrina Van Tassel contribute to his encounter with the headless horseman and subsequent disappearance from the community. Moreover, Crane's social incompetence is reflected in his physical appearance:

> He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weathercock perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the wind blew.[9]

Crane's image persisted in both fiction and public perception. As the proportion of women entering teaching dramatically increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, male school teachers found themselves in a workspace shaped to reflect women's roles. Public school teaching, particularly in cities, became a dependent role as

supervisors wrested autonomy away from classroom teachers. Thus male school teachers found it difficult to claim the independence and autonomy that defined Victorian and Progressive Era manhood.[10]

Underlying both masculine and feminine stereotypes of teachers were portrayals of teachers as socially awkward and mentally flighty. Clearly, neither the spinster schoolmarm nor Ichabod Crane improved the public perception of teachers. Administrators, teachers, and educational reformers all wanted to change this image, but how best to achieve this transformation? And what would the physical and behavioral traits of a "professional" teacher be? By the 1890s, district administrators and educational reformers publicly promoted social images for teachers designed to emphasize their professionalism.[11] Men moved into the expanding administrative apparatus, becoming "managers" and presenting themselves as akin to businessmen and members of the emerging class of white-collar middle management. Female teachers appeared as dignified and genteel. Administrators and community members felt that to maintain this dignity, lady teachers should disdain activities that seemed too modern or faddish.

Discussions regarding teachers' images frequently spilled over into local print media, as newspapers enthusiastically recounted the inner workings of school board meetings. One such example emerged in the debate over "pet names" in San Francisco in 1894, a story followed closely by the *San Francisco Call*. School board president and attorney Frederick Hyde articulated many of the concerns of the new business-oriented school administrators. He battled with teachers on issues ranging from tenure to hiring; he also objected to teachers' use of diminutive names such as Birdie, Nellie, and Minnie as "undignified." His ire was raised by the use of these names on school documents, but the debate also illustrates efforts to create a new public identity for the teacher. Articles routinely referenced the ages of teachers involved; "Bessie," was an "elderly and dignified" principal, reportedly so "ashamed" of her name that she used her initial. Hyde complained of "gray-haired women in the department" who went by names like "Gussie, Jennie, Jessie, and Birdie." The descriptions of teachers as older, stately women without faddish "pet names" contrasted images of motherly young teachers, biding time until marriage, or spinster schoolmarms, dried up and harsh. Instead, the school women were supposed to be "professional"—dignified and experienced. When Hyde's proposal to ban the names on school documents passed after two weeks of debate, the *Call* noted: "Hereafter Miss Birdie will be primly and properly addressed as Miss Ornithologiea."[12]

Efforts to recast the spinster schoolmarm as a mature lady did not address the concerns of younger teachers. As marriage bans lifted in many Far Western cities in the 1910s, female teachers articulated their desire to participate in the emerging practice of dating and leisure pursuits including movies, dancing, and cards. But popular images of the spinster schoolmarm and awkward schoolmaster, teachers believed, inhibited their social interaction. They expressed their concerns, often anonymously, in the pages of educational journals. Many admitted that negative reactions made them hide their occupation when away from the schoolroom. "I often deny that I am a teacher because I am young—just 25," wrote one Los Angeles teacher, "and I want all the attention and fun that the normal girl desires." Revealing her status as a teacher, she felt, scared away men. Once a potential beau discovered how she earned a living, "almost instantly his manner toward me changed from the easy boy and girl manner to the one used to the family clergyman, respectful and nice, but no longer 'interested.'" Female teachers also worried that their economic independence might be threatening to a potential beau. "The man must be the hero," another Los Angeles teacher observed, "He wants to be leaned on. Women with careers don't lean!" But hiding one's profession did little to improve its status. The *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* advised: "When you go out into society, don't pose as a stenographer. All normal men enjoy teachers."[13]

These concerns shed light on community reactions to broader social changes in gender roles. In the late nineteenth century, women teachers' growing economic independence challenged a social structure that identified wife and mother as the most appropriate roles for women. As women's participation in the wage labor force increased, female teachers became a focus of social anxiety over women's new roles. Teaching was a socially sanctioned and highly visible way for women to pursue education, support themselves (admittedly on meager wages), and delay or avoid marriage. In the early twentieth century, the expanding psychological focus on "healthy" and "deviant" sexuality made its way into popular discourse, challenging the nineteenth-century image of teachers as asexual. Although fears regarding same-sex desire among female teachers were slower to develop than concerns about effeminate male teachers, a growing sentiment in favor of promoting "healthy," heterosexual relationships for teachers emerged by the 1920s.[14] In addition, the easing of marriage bans before the Depression offered the potential to combine marriage and a career. These changes enabled teachers to openly (if often anonymously) discuss the effects public perception had on their social lives.

Both male and female teachers observed that others expected them to behave as if they were always in the classroom. One complained that people acted as if "her presence called for stiff, formal conduct; for 'heavy' intellectual conversation."[15] Anonymity offered escape from the cares of the schoolroom, and allowed a teacher to be a "common garden variety of vacationists [*sic*]."[16] As one teacher concluded in a *Los Angeles School Journal* series on the subject:

> What I do vigorously object to is being catalogued and pigeon-holed . . . according to the public's conception of a certain profession. The popular idea of a pedagogue may have changed considerably from the one represented by that happily defunct institution of my childhood, the so-called comic valentine, but enough of it remains to irritate a person who prefers to be taken on his merits as human being, first and foremost, and not exclusively as a dispenser of knowledge supposed to be always on the job as well as a professional example of all the virtues to the youth of the land.[17]

In hiding their identities, teachers attempted to draw a distinction between their role in the classroom and life outside classroom walls, illustrating the dilemmas teachers encountered as they navigated the developing ideology of professionalism and the array of leisure activities, including movies, modern dancing, and travel, available to urban Americans.

The discussions of teachers' images in both the popular press and professional journals connected closely with debates surrounding teachers' use of leisure time. Concerns about teachers' leisure activities built on earlier patterns of coercion over teachers' behavior. They also reflected Progressive Era efforts to eliminate vice through control of nonwork hours, particularly of the working classes. Middle-class anxieties about working-class leisure spilled into the schools' expanding social responsibilities; schools taught children both academics and how to behave outside of school. Supervised playgrounds provided guidance for younger children while high school curricula increasingly addressed the "worthy use of leisure time."[18] Directing teachers' leisure time, therefore, was part of a larger impulse to manage public behavior. The seasonal nature of teachers' work intensified these concerns. Administrators could not claim direct authority over teachers during unpaid summer months, but nonetheless encouraged teachers to demonstrate their professionalism through their use of their vacations. District administrators and reformers constructed an image of teachers' leisure time that clearly placed recreation as subordinate, yet complementary, to school work.[19] Activities that expanded teachers' knowledge or

enabled them to recover physical health and vitality were worthwhile pursuits, ruling out activities that drained teachers' energy or made them morally vulnerable.

First and foremost, administrators urged teachers to use their time outside the classroom to expand their educational credentials, a move designed to further claims that teachers possessed the expertise necessary for professional status. Teachers embraced these opportunities, as single-salary schedules adopted in the 1910s and 1920s meant that educational attainment was the primary way to advance up the salary ladder.[20] In 1916, the Portland Grade Teachers Association noted over 80 percent of their members had participated in university extension work, night school, or summer school during the last year, while many others took lessons in music, art, and languages.[21] The sheer number of articles and advertisements dedicated to extension courses and summer schools in educational journals evidenced their popularity. Teachers regularly reported that they planned a course of study over the summer; such announcements served the social function of letting friends know their plans and also indicated to supervisors that teachers sought professional improvement.[22] Such widespread dedication to advanced education reflected administrative admonitions to keep up-to-date and teachers' willingness to assume additional work in order to advance their careers.

Accounts in educational journals indicate that some teachers maintained reservations regarding the emphasis on continuing education. Focusing solely on scholarly achievement appeared too narrow, particularly given the diversifying curriculum in the schools. Too much intellectualism also challenged the evolving notions of gender. As historian Gail Bederman argues, white, middle-class men in the late nineteenth century moved from a manhood based on "self-mastery and restraint" to one emphasizing physical strength. Concerns that the feminization of teaching undercut the masculinity of boys contributed to an emphasis on the physical body of male teachers. A Los Angeles teacher illustrated these concerns in a sketch about two educators. "One, studious by nature, is interested mainly in continuing his studies," and he "lives with his books." The second "spends some of his time in social life. He plays tennis or golf. He hikes, and keeps himself physically fit. He is interested in boys and gives of his time to scout and other boys' work and thus get an angle on boys' life not obtained in the school room." Although the studious teacher quickly ascends to a position as principal, lack of exercise takes a toll on his body and "his habits of living are beginning to have their effects on his nerves."[23] The contrast between these two teachers highlights the

anxiety surrounding gender roles and reflects the expansion of schools' mission during the Progressive Era. The well-rounded teacher instructs students more effectively because he meets their diverse needs. Victorian manliness, exemplified by the studious teacher, was susceptible to the new disease of neurasthenia, caused by "excessive brain work and nervous strain." Too studious a teacher could not provide the dynamic role model his students needed.[24] Female teachers, too, needed to guard against overextending themselves. "Evening lectures that leave one wearied of body and mind, late afternoon classes that add to the tension of a nerve-breaking day, home study that robs one of precious leisure for relaxation and outdoor recreation are wrong," warned an anonymous Portland educator, and these might result in a "nervous over-wrought, uncertain-tempered teacher."[25]

To avoid collapse and nervous prostration, health advocates directed teachers to use physical activity and rest to counter the debilitating effects of the schoolroom, advice which also reflected the era's concerns regarding racial deterioration and eugenics.[26] The Los Angeles assistant director of physical training singled out women educators as least likely to participate in outdoor activities, relaxing with "cards, theatre, concerts, and lectures." He suggested "hunting, fishing, mountain climbing, picnicking, or community field sports" to help "exhilarate and keep one fit."[27] Play expert Henry S. Curtis contended that while walking was an excellent form of exercise, walking to and from school did not provide the requisite stimulation, because "of the hard pavements and the dodging of automobiles and street cars at the crossings." Country walks were best.[28] Such advice emphasized a calm and relaxing atmosphere: a respite from the supposed chaos of the schoolroom.

The Progressive Era's emphasis on physical activity coincided with teachers' assertions that part of the draw of Far Western cities was their proximity to beautiful scenery and their milder weather. Teachers enthusiastically formed and joined hiking clubs, regularly reporting on their outings in educational journals. Such organizations encouraged both exercise and social networks among teachers, a combination Christine Ogren observed in the physical culture curricula of late nineteenth-century normal schools.[29] It is difficult to assess what percentage of the teachers participated in these outings, but the existence of the clubs and the regular updates in teachers' bulletins suggest their popularity.[30] Administrators' support for these excursions is also clear. Hawai'i's Territorial Summer School was held at Kīlauea on the Big Island of Hawai'i in 1919, and the department offered a

variety of hikes and nature walks as part of the program. Although the sessions took place in Honolulu the following year, the department advertised the program in the *Hawaii Educational Review* through a series of cartoons: one depicted a teacher and summer school professor trekking up a hill. The male professor led, pulling the hand of the female teacher and telling her "you're the best little hiker in the class." Both are visibly perspiring.[31] Such an image both reinforced and reshaped gender roles; the male authority, identified as higher on the academic ladder with the title "professor," led the subordinate female teacher. And yet the sweaty, vigorous exercise contrasted with the dried-up schoolmarm of caricature and the dignified teacher portrayed in the 1890s battle over pet names.

Travel offered teachers a means of combining the physical benefits of outdoor activity with the mental benefits of new educational experiences. It was the solution to the "bookish" teacher; in visiting new places, both academic knowledge and social understanding expanded. Educational journals contained numerous advertisements for railroads, steamship lines, and travel companies. Fall issues provided reflections and reminiscences on the joys of the summer's journey. Alaska, Asia, and Europe were all popular; mainland teachers often enjoyed a summer in Hawai'i, while teachers from Hawai'i traveled to the coast. Jean Lane, a librarian at Seattle's West High School, led a trip to Alaska in the summer of 1921. In an advertisement in the *Seattle Grade Club Magazine*, Lane promised, "an unlimited amount of joy and benefit awaits." The trip offered "interesting, congenial companions" as they sailed through "black, jagged, pine-clad islands and mountain peaks." Lane assured potential participants that "a great deal may be learned of Alaska's resources and this trip will appeal particularly to the person interested in industrial development of our northern country."[32] Such advertisements and the reports from teachers who had taken journeys reinforced the notion that rest, relaxation, and ongoing learning were "worthy" ways for teachers to spend their leisure time.

Teachers embraced many of the leisure activities encouraged by reformers and administrators. But they also emphasized that the choice of which activities to engage in should be the teacher's decision. In an editorial in the *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* one teacher asserted that "the question of how to spend a vacation is not to be treated lightly." She went on to describe two teachers. The first planned to spend the summer, including some Saturdays, in school. She needed to move up the salary ladder, because "her heart is set on a Rolls Royce." A second teacher had no such aspirations, and "says she

must have a vacation from thinking education." She is not tempted by the lures of consumer culture, "she feels Rolls-Roycie rumbling along in her cousin's 1926 Ford. To her an afternoon frock easily becomes a dinner party gown, and a trip along the waterfront is a wondrous voyage to far ports." The author concluded that both teachers were right, because each teacher's plan removes her from "the jog-trot of her daily existence."[33] The author's observations suggested that teachers should have the choice of activities based on their individual needs and connected their decisions regarding vacation with consumption, not professionalization. Teachers who dreamed of Rolls Royces and attended dinner parties aligned themselves with the affluent, even if their salaries presented challenges to their aspirations. Participation in this consumer culture required a more up-to-date public image for teachers.

In order to defend their engagement with consumer culture and leisure pursuits, teachers drew from the rhetoric of progressive educational reform. In 1930, Los Angeles high school teacher William C. Morrison argued a change had come over the ideal teacher. "Perhaps after all," he observed, "the best teacher is the one who is not 'too safe'." Forty years before, the idea that a teacher should have "a slight amount of 'risquity'" would have raised the eyebrows of even the most permissive urban school board member. But the social transformations of the early twentieth century had shifted, albeit slightly, the sense that teachers must be absolutely beyond reproach. "Risquity," according to Morrison, "tends to give balance and permits a greater understanding of the problems of life and adds to one's ability to understand a boy and girl's classroom and extracurricula [sic] problems."[34] Morrison's statement reflects the expansion of the curriculum into a student's social life and the emergence of a new youth culture in the 1920s, one that teachers needed to be attuned to in order to teach well. The rise of youth culture and expansion of women's public role contributed to the idea that the teacher should not be "too safe." Through fashion and participation in popular culture, teachers constructed a professional identity that reflected women's broader participation in the public sphere.[35]

New social pursuits offered Americans alternative ways in which to define themselves. Nan Enstad's study of working women in New York demonstrates how "consumer culture offered working-class women struggling with extremely difficult material and ideological constraints a new range of representations, symbols, activities, and spaces with which to create class, gender and ethnic identities."[36] Teachers, too, appropriated these new cultural artifacts to recreate

their public image. Assumed to be "ladies" and models of middle-class womanhood, teachers used fashion and popular culture to redefine their public identity as professionals, crafting an image of a youthful, intelligent, and stylish woman who also displayed restraint.

Articles in teachers' journals cited the physical appearance of the teacher as a central impediment to their social progress. Caricatures of teachers not only appeared in the classroom, but on the city streets as well. As late as 1930, one Los Angeles teacher chided her colleagues by recounting how she had determined that she had arrived at the wrong place for an institute meeting:

> A number of ladies entered. . . . Many of them were smiling. Their cheeks glowed in the winter sunlight, some with the clear tone of exercise, some with the equally attractive tone of careful make-up. Snow-white hair showed beneath the clever hats of a number of them. Well-groomed, skillfully outfitted, they were women not young, intent upon an hour of mental enjoyment, and wholly charming, in the meantime, to the eye.

The author knew she had made some mistake; upon inquiry, she discovered the "wholly charming" ladies belonged to the Tuesday Morning Club, not the teaching corps. When she did arrive at the correct location, it was immediately obvious.

> Too many of the ladies entering wore spectacles. Their skins were either as the Lord made them, (and no special credit to Him), or else the worse for make-up, pathetic in its lack of art. There were glimpses of hastily arranged hair beneath hats intended purely as coverings for the head. The grooming in evidence was of the type which considers dressing merely the act of putting on clothes. Many of the faces were too set for smiling. They were women not young—intent upon an hour of duty fulfilled, and wholly depressing, in the meantime, to the eye.[37]

The difference between the "wholly charming" society ladies and "wholly depressing" teachers was clear: appearance indicated attitude, and teachers were lacking. Although the author identifies both groups as "ladies," the society ladies reflected the middle class' engagement with the beauty industry, sporting tasteful cosmetics and artful hair arrangements. Progressive reformers linked physical appearance with attitude, indicating that the physical body offered insight into an individual's mental state and intellectual abilities. Moreover, dress and physical appearance served a number of purposes in the workplace. Not only did working-class women use dress to assert their independence, women who aspired to professional status viewed appearance as a means to pursue promotion.[38]

By 1930, when the anonymous author claimed to be able to easily identify the "wholly depressing" teachers, advertisers and the teachers themselves had been encouraging lady teachers to adopt more stylish dress for over a decade. The author's comments indicate that the battle was far from won, and determining the extent to which teachers embraced fashion based on the available evidence remains difficult. Teachers' journals were prescriptive by nature. It is telling, however, that classroom teachers authored many of the articles on these subjects and they were more likely to appear in publications produced by classroom teachers' associations than in the educational journals dominated by administration. Teachers themselves clearly linked their appearance with their standing in the community. Some observers at the time noted a distinct difference between teachers' actual appearance and public stereotypes. A newspaper account of a social hosted by the Portland Grade Teachers' Association described the 200 teachers who attended as "attractively attired" and argued they "presented a very different appearance from that of the supposedly fagged 'school-marm'."[39]

Articles and advertisements challenged teachers to adopt a professional, stylish look. Jonna Perrillo's research on New York City teachers has led her to describe this image as the "smart" look; advertisers in *The Seattle Grade Club Magazine*, *The Los Angeles School Journal*, the *Bulletin of the Portland Grade Teachers' Association*, and *The San Francisco Teachers' Bulletin* all described their fashions as "smart."[40] Seattle's Carmen Shop pointed out that "professional women are quick to appreciate" their "well chosen apparel" that "gives long wear 'year in and year out' and keeps, to the very last, its smart appearance."[41] The "smart" look in the West was also "sporty." Reflecting contemporary concerns about physical health and the body and the enthusiasm of many among the teaching corps for outdoor activities, advertisements featured outfits complete with fashionable hat, shoes, and golf club.[42] Balancing budget and fashion, however, posed a problem. In response, the *Los Angeles Times* fashion editor suggested that "materials good, yet not TOO good, should be selected"; a garment that wore too well might tempt a teacher to continue wearing it, even when style had left her behind.[43] Restrained yet active, conservative yet stylish, fashion advice aimed to remake the modern female teacher through clothing.

Beauty culture in the 1920s demanded that women also consider their complexion. By the 1920s the use of cosmetics transformed from a sign of questionable moral virtue to an assertion of women's freedom.[44] Women educators approached such freedom cautiously. Few advertisements appeared in educational journals for cosmetics.

Administrators acknowledged, however, that banning them was fruitless. A 1924 advertisement in the *Los Angeles School Journal* claimed "Leader Approves of Teacher's Showing Pupils How to Use Beautifiers." The advertisement included a newspaper article quoting the state superintendent of elementary education: "Teachers and their girl pupils will apply attraction potions. . . . Forbidden [*sic*] the use makes sneaks of them."[45] Instead, teachers should model moderate use of cosmetics. Madame Margarita Orlova, "authority on the history and psychology of make-up," invited Los Angeles teachers to a lecture on "facial aesthetics" and reminded women that it was their business to "wear a happy, smiling face, and to have gay and brilliant eyes."[46] Knowing how to apply make-up correctly was as important as knowing how to dress properly.

Modern dress and prudent use of cosmetics were not, of course, simply for the classroom; they promised teachers more lively roles outside the classroom. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a shift in women's public visibility; as women ate in restaurants, lived in boarding houses, rode streetcars, and attended commercial amusements, they redefined their use of public space.[47] Urban positions provided freer access to these social spaces than rural jobs, where restrictions were more comprehensive and persistent. What did limit urban teachers' access to popular culture were grading, meetings, and extension courses during evenings and weekends. "O May she quickly learn," an anonymous Portland teacher pleaded, "To paint red some other thing than theme pads." Rather than grading in the evening, "let her footsteps turn / To a cinema the-ayter [*sic*]."[48]

Teachers' steps did turn to the "the-ayter" and other popular amusements. Portland teacher Nora Green frequently mentioned attending plays in the city. One Saturday, she "got up quite early, cleaned my room thoroughly, cleaned myself up, sent down town shopping, and this afternoon Emma and I went to the matinee at the Bungalow." When her social life slowed, Green quickly felt the lack of stimulation. "#629 is duller than ever," she wrote in May of 1909, "We don't go anywhere. Want to go to the theater next week to see the great Russian actress, Nazimosa, but do not think I can persuade Daddy and Mamma to go."[49] Her frequent trips to these entertainments and casual mention of them in letters indicate that urban teachers' attendance at such events was not unusual.[50] Movies, too, became a favored past time, despite the working-class environments of the nickelodeons. By 1918, one study found that going to the movies ranked as the second

most popular form of relaxation for teachers in towns and cities.[51] It is little surprise that Annie Fadar Haskell, who taught in the Bay Area, recorded in her diary that she and some friends "walked over to Fillmore St. had some lunch and visited a nickelodeon to relieve nervous tension" after taking a teachers' exam in 1911.[52]

Teachers' participation in urban popular culture changed over the course of the Progressive Era, much like the role of women in public spaces did. Although teachers needed to be circumspect in embracing change, views on teachers' dancing in public and the way in which their participation was discussed in print media illustrate the expansion of teachers' access to popular amusements. A teacher frequenting a dance hall likely would have lost her job; but the decision to dance in other spaces also sparked controversy prior to World War I. In the fall of 1913, the tango burst into Portland nightlife, provoking extended debates about the morality of popular forms of dance. The debate itself was not over whether teachers should dance, but what types of dance were acceptable. The tango, with its Latin American roots and overt sexuality, sparked broad concern.[53] Debates over the dance became particularly heated in the editorial columns of Portland's *Evening Telegram*, which reported that some teachers learned the tango during a meeting of the Portland Educational Association. Administrators had formed the association in January 1913. From its inception, it had difficulty attracting classroom teachers, who challenged that the administration was attempting to undermine the popular Portland Grade Teachers' Association.[54] On December 5, 1913, the *Telegram* relayed the shocking news that the most recent meeting had included not only card playing but also instructions in the tango. Dismayed at its inability to supplant the teachers' own organization, the administration's group tried to use popular culture to lure new members.

Parents and community members objected immediately. Many writers to the *Telegram* stressed that dance itself was not inherently evil—folk dances provided wholesome exercise for students. But the popular dances, including the tango, were not appropriate. The new "tough" styles brought dancers' bodies into close contact. The sexual overtones of the "bunny hug," the "grizzly bear," and the "turkey trot" caused alarm in middle- and upper-class circles.[55] Parents accused teachers of becoming obsessed with the new dance steps, undermining their positions as role models. "Just as I had forbidden my children to learn the objectionable dances, the hugging, the high kicking, bunny-bear-tommy type," one mother argued, "I said that their

teachers, in whom they and I believed, would not participate in such dances nor approve the pupils doing so." She lamented:

> Can you imagine my facilities for defense, when my daughter, 10 years old, mind you, promptly presented a local newspaper . . . with the glaring headlines, "The Tango has the Teachers." The very forces on which I most relied to hold my position and the children in check have deserted my cause and I think the children's, and have boldly joined the enemy.[56]

Other community members expressed similar outrage, calling for increased oversight on teachers outside the classroom and echoing the persistent belief that, as role models, teachers could be bulwarks against change.[57]

Teachers' responses to the debate varied, reflecting a measure of ambivalence toward popular culture. Some used the involvement of the Portland Education Association to bolster their case against the organization and further critique the administration. One teacher explained that the community never noted the good work of teachers in the classroom, but instead accused teachers "sharply in public and private places as a worker not giving the best service to our schools."[58] Others argued that dancing was harmless entertainment. One confessed:

> I joined largely [because] I saw an opportunity for that social pleasure which has been generally denied the lady teacher. I saw no cards played, and I was disappointed. I saw dancing, and I tried to learn the tango, and I am not ashamed of it. Why should I be? I would, if I could, tango with my principal, my superintendent or the president of the association.[59]

The author identified herself as a "pupil teacher," and her response demonstrated younger teachers' desire to expand the range of female teacher's activities in public spaces.[60]

The social revolutions of the 1920s muted the debates on teachers' participation in aspects of popular culture such as dance. By the interwar years, teachers' clubs regularly sponsored dances and card parties, advocating them as a means of relaxation and fellowship. A 1922 advertisement in the *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* for a dance school promised, "The Bright Way Is the Easy Way." Dancing was a natural and appropriate recreation for teachers, because "nothing is so sure to relieve mental fatigue as is Modern Dancing when properly executed."[61] Thus modern dance, so potentially scandalous a mere decade before, had been recast as a means of meeting the reformers' ideals of health and relaxation.

Just as seemingly contradictory pedagogical and administrative reforms could be combined in the classroom, so too could teachers create their public identities from a variety of conflicting norms. A modern, professional teacher was stylish and intelligent, combining a dash of daring with the conservative. Through advice on fashion and participation in productions of popular culture such as movies and dancing, teachers recast their identities as professionals. The *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* advised in 1921: "Boost—Youth. Don't begin to decay because you're forty. Use cold cream, go to dancing school, let the kiddies chase you during game period, and laugh. Boost Joy."[62]

Debates over popular media's images of teachers and their behavior outside the classroom were an integral part of the larger battle for control over teachers' identities. While community members wanted to insure that teachers remained safe role models for children, administrators engaged in a power struggle with teachers over definitions of professionalism. Both teachers and administrators wanted to replace the image of "schoolmarms," constructing different, but not always conflicting, images of the professional teacher. School reformers advocated continuing education in the form of extension classes and summer schools and stressed the importance of rest and relaxation for the teacher. At the same time, teachers used aspects of popular culture to define themselves as modern women, as well as professionals. By asserting their right to dress "smartly," dance, and participate in the expanding commercial and public culture, teachers recreated their public roles.

Notes

1. Spelling irregularities corrected. "Just One of the Bunch," *Los Angeles School Journal* 14 (December 6, 1926): 15.
2. Michelle Morgan, "A Field of Great Promise: Teachers' Migration to the Urban Far West," *History of Education Quarterly* 54 (February 2014): 70–97.
3. Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 171–182.
4. Newspaper data for this study were gathered using printed or online indexes when available, and a visual search of microfilmed newspapers between 1890 and 1930. The survey includes the following newspapers: *Honolulu Bulletin*, *Honolulu Star*, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, *Los Angeles Express*, *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Oregon Journal*, *Oregonian*, *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, *Portland Evening Telegram*, *San Francisco Bulletin*, *San Francisco Call*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Seattle Daily Times*, and *Seattle Union Record*.

5. Educational periodicals surveyed for this study published by classroom teachers' organizations include the *Seattle Grade Club Magazine*, the *Portland High School Teachers Magazine*, the *Bulletin of the Portland Grade Teachers' Association*, and the *San Francisco Teachers' Bulletin*. The *Los Angeles School Journal* had editorial input from district administrators, building principals, and classroom teachers. The *Hawaii Educational Review* was directed by the administration, but actively solicited teacher participation and routinely published on social and community issues.
6. Jackie Blount, *Fit to Teach: Same-Sex Desire, Gender, and School Work in the Twentieth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 18–24.
7. Geraldine Jonçich Clifford, "Man/Woman/Teacher: Gender, Family and Career in American Educational History," in *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 293–343.
8. E. G. Welch, "The Teachers of Today as Compared with the Teachers of Other Days," *Los Angeles School Journal* 7 (February 11, 1924): 32.
9. Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle and the Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (New York: Macmillan, 1893), 117.
10. Welch, "The Teachers of Today as Compared with the Teachers of Other Days," 32; Blount, *Fit to Teach*, 24–25.
11. Karen Leroux, "Veterans of the Schools: Women's Work in U.S. Public Education, 1865–1902" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2005).
12. "It's Freddie Hyde," *San Francisco Call*, June 16, 1894, 12; "Those Pet Names," *San Francisco Call*, June 15, 1894, 10; "To Cut Salaries," *San Francisco Call*, June 29, 1894, 12.
13. "Exposure is Fatal," *Los Angeles School Journal* 14 (December 6, 1926): 12; "Clinging Vines Wanted," *Los Angeles School Journal* 14 (December 6, 1926): 16; "Boost, Teachers!" *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* 2 (June 1921): 25.
14. Blount, *Fit to Teach*, 59–79.
15. Spelling irregularities corrected. "Clinging Vines Wanted," 16.
16. "Dolce Far Niente," *Los Angeles School Journal* 14 (December 6, 1926): 13.
17. "Being Catalogued," *Los Angeles School Journal* 14 (December 6, 1926): 14.
18. Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); chap. 16; William Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform, Grassroots Movements During the Progressive Era* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), chap. 6; Judith Rosenberg Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885–1941* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 27–32. "Worthy use of leisure time" was one of the seven aims in the National Education Association's report of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (the Cardinal Principles report), which outlined the idea of the comprehensive high school designed to serve a diverse student body through differentiated curricula. Herbert

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28. Henry S. Curtis, *Recreation for Teachers; or, The Teacher's Leisure Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 70, 75; "My Hobbies," *Los Angeles School Journal* 10 (October 1928): 38.
29. Morgan, "A Field of Great Promise," 82–83; Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 168–169.
30. "About the October Walk," *San Francisco Teachers' Bulletin* 12 (November 1928): 26; Agnes Winn, "Club Life for Teachers," *Los Angeles School Journal* 11 (January 9, 1928): 24; Advertisement, *Bulletin of the Portland Grade Teachers' Association* 2 (May 1916): 14.
31. "Excursions," cartoon, *Hawaii Educational Review* 8 (June 1920): 13.
32. Jean Lane, "Seattle Business and Professional Women's Club Announces 1921 Annual Summer Trip," *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* 2 (June 1921): 18–19.
33. Blance Lindesmith, "What for Vacation?" *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* 11 (June 1930): 22.

34. "You Are Just the Kind of a Woman with Whom Any Wife Would Trust Her Husband," *Los Angeles School Journal* 14 (December 1, 1930): 18.
35. Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
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42. Advertisement, *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* 4 (December 1922): 43.
43. Olive Grade, "Teachers' Clothes," *Los Angeles School Journal* 10 (October 10, 1927): 13.
44. Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).
45. "Fairness for Our Teachers," *Los Angeles School Journal* 7 (March 17, 1924): 38.
46. Mrs. Leo Gamble, "Face Value," *Los Angeles School Journal* 3 (February 18, 1930): 20.
47. Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco: 1890–1915* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
48. "The Night Life of the School Marm," *Portland High School Teachers' Magazine* 4 (March 8, 1928): 9.
49. Nora Green to Lois Fear, October 3, 1908, Green to Fear, December 14, 1908, and Green to Fear, May 12, 1909, all in Fear Family Papers, Special Collections, University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene.
50. Howard Beale found that many districts in the Midwest and South forbade teachers to attend plays through World War I. Howard K. Beale,

Are American Teachers Free?: An Analysis of Restraints upon the Freedom of Teaching in American Schools (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 374–375.

51. Curtis, *Recreation for Teachers*, 44–49. For discussion of women's attendance at nickelodeons and theaters, see Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City*, 95–115 and Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 121–172.
52. Annie Fader Haskell Diary, June 12, 1911 in Haskell Family Papers, BANC MS C-B 364, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
53. Linda Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 25.
54. "Grade Teachers Not Interested in Body," *Portland Evening Telegram*, January 6, 1913, 8. The Portland Grade Teachers' Association included "aesthetic" dancing in their monthly gatherings by 1915, and their *Bulletin* advertised dancing classes. Neither sparked controversy, although the descriptor "aesthetic" suggests that the dancing did not include the more scandalous styles. Diary—Social Committee, 1916, October 27, 1915, PGTA papers; "Dancing Class," *The Bulletin of the Portland Grade Teachers' Association* 2 (December 1915): 17–18.
55. Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 83–94, 155; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 100–104; Tomko, *Dancing Class*, 23–25.
56. Letter to the editor, *Portland Evening Telegram*, December 17, 1913, 11.
57. Letter to the editor, *Portland Evening Telegram*, December 11, 1913, 2.
58. Letter to the editor, *Portland Evening Telegram*, December 8, 1913, 11.
59. Letter to the editor, *Portland Evening Telegram*, January 13, 1914, 7.
60. This awareness reflected the culture students built at normal schools, where, according to Christine Ogren, middle-class gender lines were blurred by students' use of working-class gender identities. *The American State Normal School*, chap. 5.
61. Miss Bright, advertisement, *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* 3 (February 1922): 29.
62. "Boost, Teachers!" *Seattle Grade Club Magazine* 2 (June 1921): 25.

Chapter 4

"Spirit of Education": The Gendered Vision of Compulsory Schooling in Mass Magazine Art, 1908–1938

Heather A. Weaver[1]

There is a cover that Norman Rockwell produced for *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1934 that featured a young boy and an adult woman.[2] The woman is presumably the boy's mother or teacher; she has been helping him change into a costume. At this point he is holding a heavy book in one hand and a torch in the other. He is wearing a garland, toga, sandals, and a sash that reads "The Spirit of Education." The scene is a pageant or a play of some sort, and the woman is encouraging the boy to go on stage. But the boy, dressed up, it would seem, as an avatar of America's ongoing project of public schooling, is distinctly unhappy. His frown commands the picture, and it raises questions about what *The Saturday Evening Post*—consistently America's most popular mass magazine during the earlier decades of the twentieth century—meant to say to its millions-wide readership about the promise of young students and about the nature of the education system.

To explore these matters, this chapter looks at cover artwork from popular magazines of the early twentieth century that specifically portrayed the experience of primary schooling.[3] Like many movies of

S.G. Terzian et al. (eds.), *American Education in Popular Media*

the era that were addressing the same subject matter, the magazine covers depicted their share of disorderly conduct on the part of school kids.[4] But unlike in the movies, the misbehaving school kids of the magazines were always boys. Magazine covers highlighted the disengagement of male students and the achievement of female students. Calling attention to the fact that schooling was increasingly compulsory during this period, they portrayed school as an uncomfortable, forced environment for boys.[5] All of this amounted to a gendered vision of schooling that raised questions about whether or not the needs of boys—and ultimately the interests of students in general—were being adequately served by conventional schooling.

A Magazine Nation

When Norman Rockwell died in 1978, his obituary in *Time* magazine noted that Rockwell was an artist "familiar to nearly everyone in the U.S., rich or poor, black or white, museum goer or not, illiterate or Ph.D."[6] This assessment was not limited to posthumous remembrances. In 1931, for example, the newspaper of Rockwell's suburban New York town noted the following: "There probably never has been in the world's history before an artist with a regular audience of at least 6,000,000 people, so may we please introduce to you Mr. Norman Rockwell, whose covers on *The Saturday Evening Post* are known, we venture to say, to every inhabitant of the United States."[7] In "venturing to say" that the inhabitants of the United States amounted to six million people, the newspaper was underestimating by more than a factor of twenty—the national population in 1930 was close to 123 million. This is an example of the way in which publishers selectively conceived of their reading public.[8]

Magazine publishers were no exception. Mass-circulation magazines were not seen by everyone, but rather by a fraction of the population that, if geographically diverse, was nonetheless predominantly middle-class and white.[9] But this did not stop the publishers from describing their products as national in reach. Around the turn of the century, the publishers of both *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's* began styling their magazines as "general interest," shedding their earlier incarnations as men's magazines in favor of targeting women, men, and indeed the entire family.[10] In 1908, the *Post* reached the circulation benchmark of one million homes per week, and by the 1930s, both magazines had subscription rates of over three million per week. Their makers worked to create the impression that they were reaching everyone in the country. The subtitle of *Collier's* went from "An Illustrated

Journal" to "The National Weekly." George Horace Lorimer, the editor of the *Post* from 1899 to 1936, took to describing the work of his magazine in terms of national unity and acculturation.[11] Selling magazines to the general public had become a mission.

Prominent publishing maven Howard Hungerford provided an image for this journalistic mission in his 1931 book *How Publishers Win*. Taken from a 1901 mural by Frederick Dielman in the *Evening Star* building, the image was called "The Diffusion of Intelligence." For Hungerford, it captured the essence of "the spirit of publishing," and he noted the following details about it: "Central figure typifying journalism sends forth a winged genius of enlightenment; at her feet palm branches and laurel. Small kneeling figure on left with tablet bearing the word 'LUX'."[12] Here the process of spreading information, or diffusing intelligence, took on a mythic status, in much the same way that the process of education did in the seal of a school. Indeed, palm and laurel branches had symbolized victory in the ancient world, but in more recent centuries they had both been appropriated as symbols of educational accomplishment.[13]

The idea of publishers as diffusers of knowledge, even educators of the public, had predated the twentieth century. In 1874, Congress had passed an act that allowed publishers to mail out newspapers and magazines at reduced cost: three cents per pound for magazines, and no more than two cents per pound for newspapers. Representative John B. Packer of Pennsylvania had given a speech in favor of this, which was entitled "No Tax on the Diffusion of Intelligence."[14] Five years later, with the creation of second-class mail, Congress made the subsidy of magazines equal to that of newspapers, as both were "published for the dissemination of information of a public character, or devoted to literature, the sciences, arts, or some special industry." The second-class subsidy allowed magazines to be mailed throughout the nation at a nominal rate. Representative Joseph Cannon of Illinois observed that this was justified because they were "a means for information and education of the people."[15]

If the second class of mail was established as a category for printed matter of an informative nature, it was also to set these publications apart from the "illegitimate" material—mail order journals and advertising circulars—in the new and more costly third class.[16] The irony was that not only had magazines previously contained advertising, but they gained more advertisers after the creation of the second-class subsidy. By 1911, one survey of popular magazines concluded that "reading matter" constituted fifty-two percent of the average publication, while advertising took up the other forty-eight percent.[17]

Although new advertisers brought significant revenue to publishers, the most important advertisements to grace the pages of turn-of-the-century magazines were arguably not from outside companies, but rather from the publishers themselves in the form of magazine covers. It had long been convention for magazines to feature much the same cover from issue to issue, yet this began to change around 1890 when, as Carolyn Kitch notes, magazine covers became a "selling tool."[18] Moving beyond simply seeing the cover as a static label, publishers became interested in how changing it from week to week or month to month could serve to entice readers on a regular basis. In seeking out cover illustrators, publishers spared no expense, drawing upon (and in the process helping to create) major talents such as Maxfield Parrish and J. C. Leyendecker.

Illustrated magazine covers arose out of a desire to sell the magazines themselves, and they therefore functioned as meta-advertisements. Not only were they advertisements for publications that themselves featured advertisements, but they were also, more broadly speaking, advertisements for a standardized American way of life. Like the ads contained within the pages, the cover art of many mass magazines offered a vision of "typical" America—a magazine nation, as it were, populated by acceptably typical people, objects, subjects, and themes.[19] This parallels what Roland Marchand calls the "visual vocabulary" in the general advertising of the period.[20] Standards of typicality, largely determined by the editors, delimited the boundaries of the magazine nation. Their function was to both reflect and inform the values of the readership. Editors were highly sensitive to these boundaries. For example, whenever over the course of the 1920s Rockwell would come to Lorimer with an idea for a cover with an African American character, the editor's response was always that "the country wasn't yet ready for such a move"; Alan Pyle, another illustrator, had a similar experience.[21] Like many others in the publishing industry, Lorimer intended for his magazine to show Americans not necessarily who they were, but rather who it was he wanted them to imagine themselves as being.[22]

Though similar to regular advertisements in many ways, cover art nonetheless tended to evoke a world more open-ended than that framed by a single product such as oxtail soup, floor polish, or safety razors. Whereas the ads of the period pointed in the direction of self-improvement and life enhancement, covers could present a less resolved picture. The following sections of this chapter will examine how cover art portraying the experience of school—the increasingly universal phenomenon that involved a degree of participation far in excess of any

publishers' best numbers—shed light on some of the tensions inherent in the American way of life that magazines sought to sell.

Boy-Centered Magazine Covers

Early-twentieth-century America was a new-era society replete with innovation. The sphere of education was no exception. Reform-oriented theorists were prescribing "progressive" and "child-centered" approaches to schooling such as project-based learning, themed curricular units, and group activities, aimed at more effectively and flexibly meeting the needs of each student.[23]

Whether or not the creators of general-interest magazines were very familiar with the latest ideas about education, they understood the educative function of their industry. And whether or not they were reformist in their mindset—*Collier's* editor Norman Hapgood was, for example, and Lorimer of the *Post* was not—their school-themed covers provided a popular basis for understanding the new child-centered perspective of the era. Although cover artists were depicting conventional schooling rather than the less typical "new" type of school (where students variously constructed miniature cities, handled the school's finances, and leapt rhythmically in the fields), their scenes were not of dozens of interchangeable students sitting at attention in rows.[24] Rather, they focused on the affective experiences of students, and in doing so they highlighted the fact that each schoolchild was an individual.

The most common month for school-themed covers was September, when children across the country began the new school year. Public education was increasingly mandatory—by the turn of the century, most states had enacted some sort of compulsory schooling law, and enforcement of those laws was growing more rigorous.[25] Student enrollment was on the rise. But mass magazines during this period did not generally depict this phenomenon as the realization of the fundamental right to a basic education. September was instead usually rendered as a time of academic confusion, disorderly conduct, and student absenteeism. Compulsory attendance was cast as an imposition at best, and coercion at worst. The recalcitrant or hooky-playing schoolchild was a back-to-school trope for the magazines.

Central to the visual vocabulary of this trope was that this type of student was portrayed as a boy. The magazine covers of this era did not show schoolgirls misbehaving, disengaging, or skipping school. Though they did feature girls in school, it was almost never without the accompaniment of schoolboys.[26] Boy pupils were often depicted in and of themselves; girls were depicted in comparison with boys.

Why did the general-interest covers of this era depict boys as the default students? Two simple answers suggest themselves. It could have been the pictorial equivalent of linguistic convention. Mirroring the way in which writers and speakers typically used the pronoun "he" to signify a generic person, editors and artists might have chosen to use the schoolboy as the typical student. It could also have been simply the personal bias of editors and artists, for most of the people creating magazine covers were men. Yet it is not quite that straightforward. Male artists frequently portrayed women, and not only in the presence of men. The "Gibson Girl" images by Charles Dana Gibson are an example of the many covers that highlighted women as subjects in their own right. There were occasionally covers portraying a young girl or girls without the accompaniment of others, but these were usually painted by women, and they focused not on schooling, but rather on domesticity, gardening, and recreation.[27] These were traditionally feminine pursuits associated with the "separate sphere" of women. The message was that these were the activities that truly allowed girls to come into their own.[28]

And yet there is another question. If schoolboys were their default students, why did the covers, as will be shown, so often portray them as disengaged in one way or another from the learning process? Some artists and editors had experienced a measure of difficulty during their student years, and perhaps they drew on that in depicting the subject. Others, however, had enjoyed a good deal of success. Norman Hapgood, *Collier's* editor from 1903 to 1912, for example, was editor-in-chief of the *Harvard Monthly* while an undergraduate at that institution, and he stayed there to get his law degree.[29] Robert J. Collier, editor from 1912 to 1914, graduated from Georgetown University and did further studies at Harvard and Oxford.[30] Lorimer briefly attended both Yale University and Colby College, but later in life he was a firm opponent of a liberal-arts education, seeing his own publishing house's salesboy program as a superior real-world alternative.[31] Maxfield Parrish dropped out of Haverford College in order to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where he was a student of great distinction.[32] J. C. Leyendecker immigrated with his family to Chicago from Germany at the age of six. He was a dedicated young student, apprenticed with an engraving firm as a teenager, and went on to excel in his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Académie Julian.[33] For his part, Rockwell did not finish high school. He began skipping classes during his first year (with sanction from his parents and the high school principal) to study at the Chase School of Art. Rockwell later thrived as a student at the Art Students League.[34] Finley Peter Dunne, editor of *Collier's* from 1917 to 1919, managed

to graduate from high school, but was last in his class, and had no further time as a student.[35] Though their experiences were varied, this was not a group of elementary school dropouts. Each one of them had benefitted from advanced formal education at a high school, college, art school, and/or university.

As such, they were all part of a privileged minority when it came to education in America around the turn of the century. William Hawley Smith, a pedagogist who toured the states giving lectures and speeches, estimated in 1912 that less than 10 percent of elementary students were going on to graduate from high school.[36] The majority of students were not even getting to high school, let alone further schooling. This did not begin to change for a couple of decades.[37] It would therefore seem that editors and artists were doing more than drawing on their own experiences in creating images of schoolboys resisting school. Arguably, they were also recalling those they had gone to school with in their early years—those who may have struggled more than they did, and those who left school sooner than they did.

William Hawley Smith's estimation of student graduation rates was from his book *All the Children of All the People*, which made the case that compulsory education was a mandate not just to educate everyone, but to educate everyone to the fullest. In Smith's view, schools were presently serving only the college-bound, those who would become "book-professional" people. He urged educators to diversify their methods and offerings so as to develop the individual strengths of each student. Smith was familiar with the work of educational statistician Leonard P. Ayres, and particularly his 1909 book *Laggards in Our Schools*, which drew attention to the problems of "retardation" (referring in this case to students who repeated a grade) and "elimination" (referring to those who left school prematurely). Ayres had shown that more boys than girls fell into these categories, and one of his firmest assertions was that "[o]ur schools as they now exist are better fitted to the needs and natures of the girl than of the boy pupils."[38] Smith agreed with this and opined: "The great bulk of our boys drop out of our schools at the end of the grammar grade. . . . This is bad. They and their sisters need to be kept together."[39] This line of thinking began to attract national attention. In 1914, William D. Lewis published a book called *Democracy's High School*, which among other things discussed how the educational system needed to cater to the "great many thousand boys, mostly unambitious and purposeless," and teach not just a few "leaders," but rather "all sorts of boys destined for every occupation." The book was endorsed in the foreword by none other than Theodore Roosevelt. And the basis for its chapter on boys had been

distributed to one and three-quarter million households two years prior in the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post.*[40]

FIGHTING, FAILING, AND FLEEING

The school-themed covers of general-interest magazines did not explicitly reference the work of prominent educationalists. They did not, for example, feature a Norman Rockwell bar chart of the student dropout rate. But the covers nonetheless illustrated some of their basic points: that the conventional schooling system did not suit the nature of so many of the students brought in by the rising tide of compulsion and enrollment; that such students fell behind in their learning; that such students often left school before the system meant for them to; and, finally, that such students were most likely to be boys.

If there were two schoolboys on a magazine cover during the early decades of the twentieth century, the odds were good that they were fighting, soon to fight, or in the aftermath of a fight. In a 1911 *Post* cover by J. C. Leyendecker, two boys cast their books aside in deference to throwing punches and pulling hair (Figure 4.1).[41] In the schoolroom of a 1922 *Collier's* cover, one boy uses a ruler and chalk to nail the one in front of him.[42] *Collier's* in 1928 suggested that the best use a black-eyed boy had for his stack of schoolbooks was as a prop for his copy of *Famous Fighters* magazine. He practices pugilism, homework forgotten (Figure 4.2).[43]

The magazines portrayed boys' belligerence in the school setting as something normal. In this respect, the cover art fell in line with the thinking of G. Stanley Hall, the turn-of-the-century expert on pedagogy and psychology who had promulgated the notion that fighting was a necessary and salutary part of boys' development. Hall was known for appropriating the German biologist Ernst Haeckel's "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" theory to his own ends, drawing the conclusion that children sequentially enacted the different eras of human history in their growth. He believed that for a boy to develop normally—for him to grow up to be a proper man—he had to experience an actual phase of primal physicality:

> The child revels in savagery; and if its tribal, predatory, hunting, fishing, fighting, roving, idle, playing proclivities could be indulged in the country and under conditions that now, alas! seem hopelessly ideal, they could conceivably be so organized and directed as to be far more truly humanistic and liberal than all that the best modern school can provide.[44]

Figure 4.1 Belligerent schoolboys, 1911
Source: Courtesy of the General Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

The "savage" boy would generate enough vitality in his childhood to withstand the enervating influences of modernity during his adulthood. This did not apply, however, to girls. Hall felt that females were more "adult" from the start, and thus did not need to experience this primitive phase of development. Although he spoke of the savage child, he was actually referring only to the boy.[45]

Victor C. Anderson's 1919 *Life* cover, entitled "The New Teacher," would have functioned well as a visual aid for Hall's theory (Figure 4.3).[46] In it, the boys are taking advantage of the fact that the teacher has not yet established order in the schoolroom. They throw their books and rulers into the air and set about attacking each other. One boy appears to be choking the kid next to him. The girls, meanwhile, sit watching. One puts her hand to her mouth, aghast at the

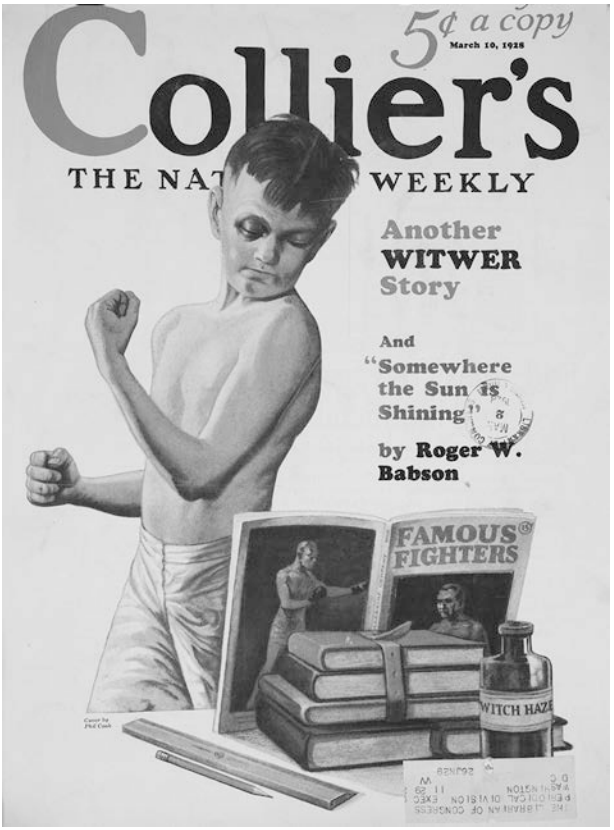

Figure 4.2 Belligerent schoolboy, 1928
Source: Courtesy of the General Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

chaos. Two others look to the teacher, waiting to see what she will do. The one at the very front is a miniature version of the teacher herself. She sits with her book open in the same way as the teacher. Her hair is the same brown as the teacher's, and the blue fabric of her dress so resembles that of the teacher's that they seem cut from the same cloth. She looks at the teacher with a particular urgency, almost ready to step in and take charge herself.[47]

The magazine boys did get to their lessons, but generally not with any degree of success. Maxfield Parrish used his own son, Dillwyn, as a model for illustrating this. In his paintings "Alphabet" and "Arithmetic," published respectively as *Collier's* covers in September 1908 and 1911, Parrish presented pictures of a schoolboy overwhelmed by letters and

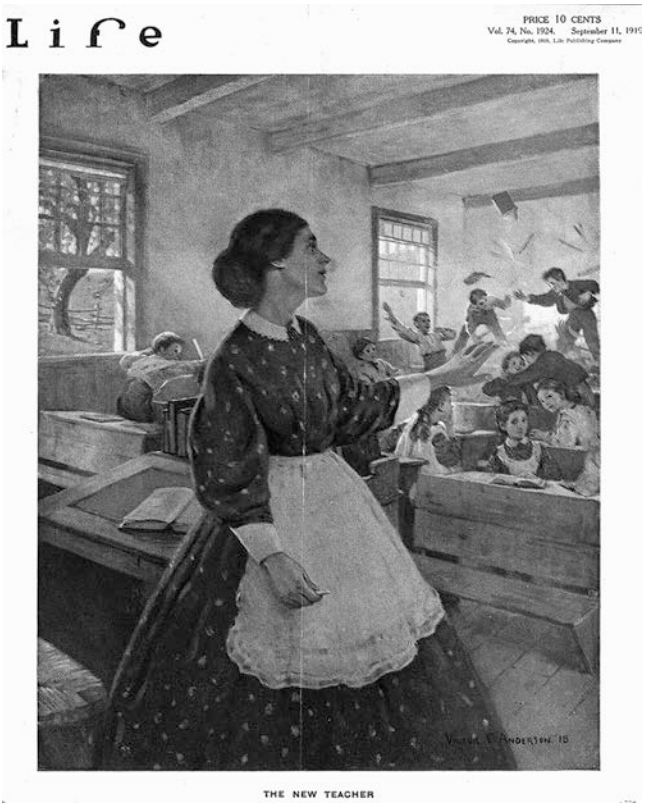

Figure 4.3 Behavior divided along gender lines in a 1919 *Life* cover
Source: Collection of the author.

numbers (Figures 4.4 and 4.5).[48] Subsequent artists offered variations on the theme.[49]

Cover art depicting the schoolboy and schoolgirl in a learning context always showed the girl as ahead. In an image the *Post* ran in 1927, a girl stands alongside the teacher (with their resemblance turning the girl into yet another miniature teacher) and they both observe a boy as he struggles with his spelling word.[50] A *Collier's* cover from 1935 showed a girl and boy comparing report cards only to discover what they may have already expected, that his grades were far inferior to hers (Figure 4.6).[51] The boy appears frustrated and disappointed. The girl seems to be suppressing a smile, as if she has been taught that although it is acceptable to outperform boys,

Figure 4.4 Trouble with letters in *Collier's*, 1908
Source: Courtesy of the General Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

the achievement should nonetheless be handled with humility and discretion.

So thought the prominent man of letters Hamilton Wright Mabie, who, while serving in Japan as a Carnegie exchange professor in 1913, offered the following restrained praise on the subject of the success of female students:

Fifty years ago it was the boy who filled the foreground of hope and ambition; but for a generation the girl has stood beside him. She looks forward to a college course as confidently as her brother; and for her it has become as necessary

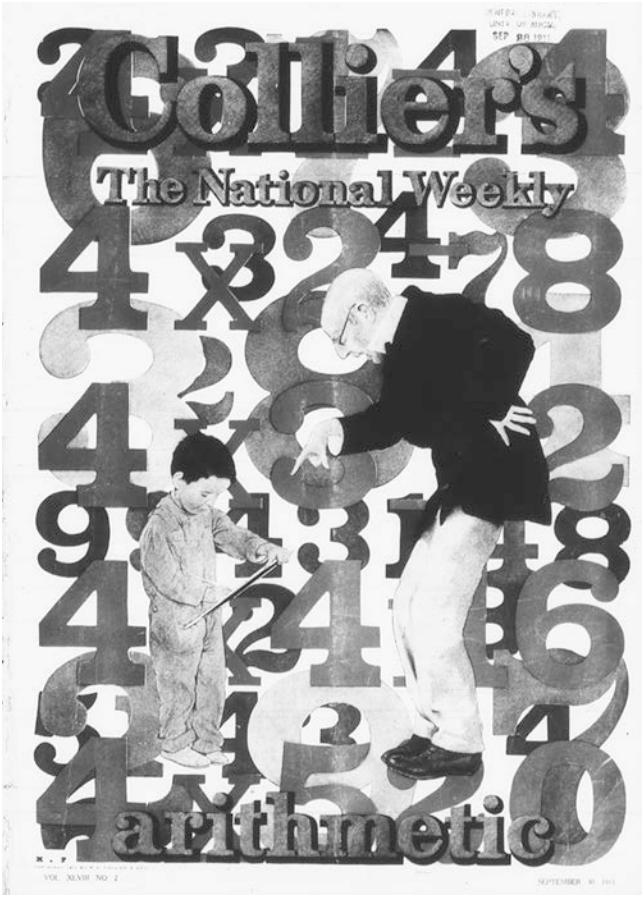

Figure 4.5 Trouble with numbers in *Collier's*, 1911
Source: Courtesy of the General Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

if she is to enter the profession which has long been open to women in America, teaching. But the vast majority of girls who take the college course are not and do not expect to become self-supporting. They come from well-to-do homes; they are the children of professional men, of the leading officers of the government, of men of large means; as well as of teachers on small salaries, of farmers on small farms, and of village shopkeepers. The college woman has long ceased to be a marked person; she is taken for granted in every community.[52]

Mabie was presumably aware that there were now more women than men eligible to attend college in America—around this time, the ratio

Figure 4.6 Comparing report cards, 1935
Source: Collection of the author.

of females to males with high school diplomas was three to two.[53] Whether despite any such knowledge or because of it, Mabie seemed to assure his foreign audience and his American readership that the ascendance of girls would be held in check. Yet in admitting that the success of girls was being taken for granted, he was also implying that that of boys was being called into question.

At times, the magazines took the idea of the schoolboy falling behind his schoolgirl counterpart and rendered it in literal terms. J. C. Leyendecker's "back to school" September cover from 1921 showed a snail outrunning a miserable boy on his way to school (Figure 4.7).[54] In a September 1929 cover from *Country Gentleman*,

Figure 4.7 On the slowness of the schoolboy in September 1921
Source: Courtesy of Larry Sanders.

a group of kids waits for the school bus. The girls stand in front, most of them smiling and eager. The boys hang back, all of them scowling or on the verge of tears, even the littlest boy who holds an apple for his teacher.[55]

Rockwell's September 1935 cover for the *Post* depicted a mother handing her son off to the teacher.[56] Sari Biklen has shown that conflicts between mothers and teachers were common during this period.[57] Yet here, they lean toward each other in a gesture of accord. It is the boy who leans away—already held back—uneasy about his new situation. As mentioned, Rockwell produced this piece in the mid-1930s, but he used turn-of-the-century dress, taking viewers back a generation to his own childhood experience.

The magazine boy's aversion to school eventuated in absenteeism, both mental and actual. Covers portrayed the schoolboy as lost in a reverie about the battlefield, or the baseball field.[58] In Paul Martin's September 1925 illustration for *Collier's*, a boy at his school desk takes refuge in a composition that reads "The boy/fishing in/brook" (Figure 4.8).[59]

Not infrequently, the magazine boys skipped school altogether and went straight to fishing.[60] J. C. Leyendecker's September 1910 piece for the *Post* used the prospect of (fish) hooky to represent "back-to-school" time not as a given, but as a question (Figure 4.9).[61]

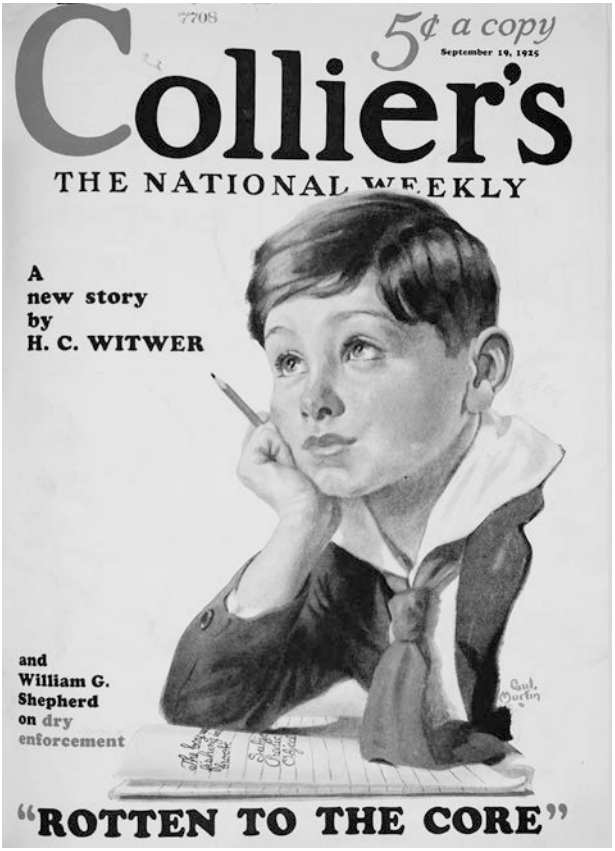

Figure 4.8 Mental absenteeism in a 1925 *Collier's* cover
Source: Courtesy of the General Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

Figure 4.9 The desire to play hooky, 1910
Source: Courtesy of the General Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

Artists depicted the typical schoolboy as only happy on the last day of school, when he could fly out of his desk and abandon his books for good.[62]

Truancy on the part of the schoolboy found justification in Rita Scherman's 1923 Knopf book *A Mother's Letters to a Schoolmaster*. This popular account of child-centered education, in its fourth edition by 1928, began with a section entitled "In which a little boy plays truant, and why." The mother in the book spoke on behalf of such a boy to a tradition-bound schoolmaster, stating: "What to you is truancy, to me is simply freedom."[63] The argument was that the boy was wise to avoid conventional schooling, for it stood in the way of his own personhood. Sociologist A. E. Hamilton was someone who took this view seriously, explaining that "real boys" learned best not

through the school-bound abstractions of books, but through their own exploits in the wider world:

> I have seen the predatory instinct of my old gang at work alike in the after-school activities of Chicago's north side and on the sidewalks of New York east of Avenue A. Spitballs fly just as far and just as accurately in our elite country-day schools as they do in the classic little square buildings at our country cross-roads. Marbles for keeps, craps, cards, matched pennies and preposterous betting are generic and seasonal despite every effort at reform from above. Corn-silk, pipes, cigarettes . . . what boy escapes them entirely? . . . Despite school walls, teachers, truant officers, superintendents, and books, the real education of our youngsters goes on. They discover the world as it is, whatever our efforts to show them a world as it ought to be.

When outside of school, the "real boy" gave himself a "real education," exercising his own freedom in the material world, and in the process freeing education from the academic confines of the classroom.[64]

THE SPIRIT OF EDUCATION

In their 1928 book *The Child-Centered School*, Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker made use of Ayres's two-decade-old concept of "laggards" in education. But instead of applying it to a discussion of student attrition, or the proportionally higher rate of academic failure on the part of boys, Rugg and Shumaker utilized the term "laggard" to describe America's general approach to schooling. In their chapter called "Our Laggard School System," they observed that the vast majority of schools were lagging behind in two different ways: first, the curriculum of the schools was out of step with modern society; second, it was out of step with the interests and needs of students.[65]

It was the second point that came to light in the *Post*'s April 21, 1934 cover. With his image of an unhappy boy wearing a "Spirit of Education" sash, Rockwell was making a complex statement about the overall nature of schooling during this period. That the sash-wearer was a boy rather than a girl suggested the logic, propagated by G. Stanley Hall at the turn of the century and perpetuated on the covers of general-interest magazines for the several decades that followed, that boys were less suited to schooling than girls. But if the boy was signifying his own dissatisfaction with school, he was also, as the spirit of education, communicating the rejection of any curriculum or method that claimed to teach him without appealing to his own interests. The magazine boy's resistance to traditional education

only confirmed a need for authentic change in schooling. Thus was this magazine cover image, like so many others, in a kind of correspondence with opinions emerging in the field of education that aimed at going beyond traditional modes of schooling. Students could only be suited to schooling when schooling was suited to them.

In the 1938 book *The Purposes of Education in American Democracy*, the Educational Policies Commission underscored this perspective. The commission was the policy arm of the National Education Association, and at this time it included such members as George Counts and George Strayer. Asserting that "The Spirit of Education Outweighs the Forms of Schooling," the commission explained that activity-based curricular niceties were no replacement for transforming the school into something that was at once more personal and more democratic, more respectful of the student's needs:

> The spirit and organization of the school are prepotent. We shall not enthrone peace and reason, at home or in the international sphere, merely by conducting model Leagues of Nations or model Senates in our classrooms. . . . There can be no lasting contribution to peace, reason, and order from a school in which the discipline is based on autocracy; from a school in which the mainspring of effort is rivalry; . . . from a school which ignores and overwhelms the living individual personality of each child.
>
> Only from a school . . . with a broad, humane, and flexible curriculum; from a school saturated with the educational philosophy which commands respect for the personality of each child that it touches; only from methods of instruction which not only teach but which actually *are* democracy and cooperation, will the appeal to reason be heard and heeded.[66]

Just as Rockwell's cover had implied, this commission of experts argued that it was not sufficient for a school to enact a pageant about democracy. If schools subverted such an activity with systems and practices of subordination and disregard, one could hardly expect all students to remain within their doors.[67]

Notes

1. I wish to thank Nancy Beadie, Susan A. Glenn, Deborah Kerdeman, Sevan Terzian, and Patrick A. Ryan for their insightful readings of various drafts of this chapter.
2. Norman Rockwell, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 21, 1934.
3. I excluded covers about high school and college from this study in order to focus on primary schooling, the educational experience most common to

Americans during this period. The year 1908 is taken as the starting point because it marked *The Saturday Evening Post*'s achievement of the million-per-week circulation mark, signifying the ascendancy of the general-interest weekly. Increasing revenues gave magazines the means to employ talented artists to illustrate each new cover, thus creating a new visual genre in American culture—the illustrated magazine cover. It was only in the late 1930s that this genre began to be eclipsed by a new emphasis on photographs in magazines (something pioneered by *Life* magazine starting in 1936). The relative importance of magazines would later be diminished by the medium of television. In 1938, the first commercial televisions were sold in the United States. The following year saw the emergence of regular television broadcasts. The advent of television, together with the threat of a second global war, signals for me the onset of a new cultural era. This chapter involved a review of every cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*, two of the most popular general-interest weeklies, from 1908 to 1938, and also incorporated *Life* magazine and *Country Gentleman* covers from this same period. I identified fifty-nine primary school–themed covers, forty-seven of which I discuss in this chapter.

4. For early cinematic portrayals of disorderly students, see Heather A. Weaver, "'The Teacher's Unexpected Bath': Plumbing the Meaning of Mayhem in the Celluloid Schoolroom, 1871–1939," *History of Education Quarterly* 54 (2) (May 2014): 145–171.
5. For other studies of media representations of the gendered dimension of education, see Daniel A. Clark, *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood, 1890–1915* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010); Gary N. McCloskey, "Conformity, Conflict, and Curriculum: Film Images of Boys' Preparatory Schools," in *Schooling in the Light of Popular Culture*, eds. Paul Farber, Eugene F. Provenzo Jr., and Gunilla Holm (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 173–189; Jo Keroes, *Tales Out of School: Gender, Longing, and the Teacher in Fiction and Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Josephine May, *Reel Schools: Schooling and the Nation in Australian Cinema* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), chapters 4 and 5.
6. Robert Hughes, "The Rembrandt of Punkin Crick: Death Comes to a Reticent Monument of America," *Time*, November 20, 1978, 110.
7. Quoted in Laura Claridge, *Norman Rockwell: A Life* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 227.
8. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 64. See also Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 255; R. F. Bogardus, "The Reorientation of Paradise: Modern Mass Media and Narratives of Desire in the Making of American Consumer Culture," *American Literary History* 10 (1998): 518.

9. John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America: 1741–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79–81; Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the* Ladies' Home Journal *and* The Saturday Evening Post (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 6–7.
10. Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions*, 191.
11. Ibid., 10.
12. Herbert Hungerford, *How Publishers Win: A Case Record* . . . (Washington, DC: Randsell Incorporated, 1931), 15–16; emphasis in original. See also "The 'Washington Evening Star' Mural Decorations," *The Collector and the Art Critic* 3 (11) (September 1905): 145.
13. *Laurea*, the Latin word for a laurel wreath, is the root for the Italian word *laureata/o*, meaning a university graduate, from the practice of giving the new graduate a laurel wreath. It is also the source of the English word "laureate," as in poet laureate or Nobel laureate. For their part, palms became a symbol of education in 1808, when Napoleon created the Ordre des Palmes Académiques to honor notable university academics.
14. John Black Packer, "No Tax on the Diffusion of Intelligence: Free Exchange and Transmission of Newspapers and Distribution of Public Documents: Speech of Hon. John B. Packer, of Pennsylvania, in the House of Representatives, February 17, 1874" (Washington, DC: J. H. Cunningham, 1874).
15. Act of March 3, 1879, 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 20 Stat. 359, quoted in Richard B. Kielbowicz, "A History of Mail Classification and Its Underlying Policies and Purposes" (report prepared for the Postal Rate Commission's Reclassification Proceeding, MC95-1, July 17, 1995), 44, http://www.prc.gov/Docs/40/40518/PRC-LR-2.pdf; 45th Cong., 3rd sess., *Congressional Record* 8, pt. 1 (January 23, 1879): 692, quoted in "Postage Rates for Periodicals: A Narrative History" (United States Postal Service: 2010), https://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/periodicals-postage-history.htm
16. Kielbowicz, "A History of Mail Classification," 43.
17. Lewis H. Haney, "Magazine Advertising and the Postal Deficit," *Journal of Political Economy* 19 (4) (April 1911): 338–343.
18. Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 4.
19. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, chapters 6–9; Carolyn Kitch, "Family Pictures: Constructing the 'Typical' American in 1920s Magazines," *American Journalism* 16 (4) (Fall 1999): 57–75.
20. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xx.
21. Claridge, *Norman Rockwell*, 181.
22. For a study of how Lorimer endeavored to shape the zeitgeist with the *Post*, see Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and* The Saturday Evening Post (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

23. For an expression of progressivist child-centered educational theory, see Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker, *The Child-Centered School: An Appraisal of the New Education* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY: World Book Company, 1928). That the cover art about schooling was "child-centered" during this period not only complemented this newer approach to pedagogy, it also paralleled the growing attention that advertisers were paying to children. See Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
24. Compare the two photographs in Harold Rugg and Ann Shumaker, *The Child-Centered School*, frontispiece. See also Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 26.
25. In 1852, Massachusetts was the first state to put compulsory education on the books. The majority of states followed suit later in the century. Mississippi enacted its version of the law in 1918, making it the last state to do so out of those then in existence. For various examples of this legislation, see Edgar W. Knight and Clifton L. Hall, eds., *Readings in American Educational History* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 365–379.
26. Only two out of the fifty-nine covers featured a schoolgirl not in the presence of a schoolboy: Hester Miller, cover illustration, *Collier's*, September 8, 1923; Frances Tipton Hunter, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 30, 1938.
27. Sarah Stilwell Weber was a magazine artist who specialized in images of children, particularly girls. Jessie Wilcox Smith and Ellen Pyle were two other artists who painted pictures of young girls.
28. This was an extension of the ideal of "true womanhood," popularized in nineteenth-century magazines. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (2) (Summer 1966): 151–174.
29. "Norman Hapgood, Editor, Dies at 69," *New York Times* (April 30, 1937), 22.
30. "R. J. Collier Dies at Dinner Table," *New York Times* (November 9, 1918), 13.
31. "George H. Lorimer, Noted Editor, Dies," *New York Times* (October 23, 1937), 1, 17; Cohn, *Creating America*, 26, 35–43.
32. Laurence S. Cutler, Judy Goffman Cutler, and the National Museum of American Illustration, *Maxfield Parrish and the American Imagists* (Edison, NJ: Wellfleet Press, 2004), 43–44.
33. Laurence S. Cutler and others, *J. C. Leyendecker: American Imagist* (New York: Abrams, 2008), 20; Walt Reed, *Great American Illustrators* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1979), 96.
34. Claridge, *Norman Rockwell*, 85, 89, 92–99.
35. *The Literary Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Finley Peter Dunne," by John Lowe, http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=1352

36. William Hawley Smith, *All the Children of All the People: A Study of the Attempt to Educate Everybody* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 129.
37. Thomas D. Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), 34, 38–39, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf; Claudia Goldin, "America's Graduation from High School: The Evolution and Spread of Secondary Schooling in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 58 (2) (June 1998): 345–374.
38. Leonard P. Ayres, *Laggards in Our Schools: A Study of Retardation and Elimination in City School Systems* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1909), 158; Smith, *All the Children of All the People*, 171. For a look at how such writings translated into the industrial education movement, see Sol Cohen, "The Industrial Education Movement, 1906–1917," *American Quarterly* 20 (1) (Spring 1968): 95–110. For more on the "boy problem" in schooling at this time, see David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Schools* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), chapter 7.
39. Smith, *All the Children of All the People*, 171. Two studies of the primacy of girls at the secondary level during the later nineteenth century are Kim Tolley, *The Science Education of American Girls: A Historical Perspective* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003); and John Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870–1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), chapters 1 and 2.
40. William D. Lewis, *Democracy's High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914); William D. Lewis, "The High School and the Boy," *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 6, 1912, 8–9, 77–78.
41. J. C. Leyendecker, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 1, 1911.
42. Loren Holmwood, cover illustration, *Collier's*, October 21, 1922.
43. Phil Cook, cover illustration, *Collier's*, March 10, 1928. For a cover showing a boy at his school desk aiming a slingshot, see Alfred E. Orr, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 16, 1920. For more covers showing one boy against another, see Charles A. MacLellan, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 7, 1912; Howard Butler, cover illustration, *Collier's*, February 15, 1936.
44. G. Stanley Hall, *Youth: Its Education, Regimen, and Hygiene* (New York: D. Appleton, 1906), 2–3.
45. For the best overview of G. Stanley Hall's ideas about boyhood and education, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chapter 3.
46. Victor C. Anderson, cover illustration, *Life*, September 11, 1919. Another cover showing a girl looking in shock at the violence of boys is Leyendecker, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 28, 1935.

47. Hall's view of fighting as a normal and even healthy part of boys' development began to fall out of fashion during the 1920s as psychiatrists and social workers worked to popularize the "mental hygiene" movement, which identified childhood as the crucial period for addressing personality "maladjustments" and preventing delinquency. By the 1930s, the mental hygienists had taken to the national stage at the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. See Sol Cohen, "The Mental Hygiene Movement, the Development of the Personality and the School: The Medicalization of American Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 23 (2) (Summer 1983): 123–149. Characterizations of the "maladjusted" pupil were prevalent in the world of education by the 1930s. A 1936 elementary school principal's bulletin from the National Education Association provided a list of possible maladjustments; these served to stigmatize fighting behavior on the part of students and included "misconduct in school . . . quarreling with other children . . . [and] trying to dominate other children." Department of Elementary School Principals, *Personality Adjustment of the Elementary School Child* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1936), 589. A 1936 *Post* cover showed that these ideas were also gaining traction in the world of popular opinion. The cover featured black-eyed and bandaged schoolboys sheepishly awaiting their consequence at the door of the principal's office: Hunter, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 12, 1936.
48. Maxfield Parrish, cover illustrations, *Collier's*, September 12, 1908 and September 30, 1911. Laurence S. Cutler and Judy Goffman Cutler, *Maxfield Parrish: A Retrospective* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1995), 4. See also Parrish, cover illustration, *Collier's*, September 3, 1910.
49. For more covers depicting academically overwhelmed schoolboys, see Charles A. MacLellan, cover illustration, *Collier's*, June 27, 1914; E. M. Jackson, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 29, 1923; William Meade Prince, cover illustration, *Country Gentleman*, September 1926; Henry Hintermeister, cover illustration, *Country Gentleman*, September 1936. For covers featuring boys disengaged from their schoolwork, see Worth Brehm, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 19, 1910; Robert Robinson, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, December 17, 1910; Frederic Stanley, cover illustration, *Collier's*, January 22, 1921.
50. Lawrence Toney, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 10, 1927.
51. Frances Tipton Hunter, cover illustration, *Collier's*, May 4, 1935. For other covers showing schoolgirls as superior to schoolboys, see MacLellan, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 17, 1914; Rockwell, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 14, 1919; Alan Foster, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 27, 1930. See also Miller, cover illustration, *Collier's*, September 8, 1923; Butler, cover illustration, *Collier's*, February 15, 1936.

52. Hamilton Wright Mabie, *American Ideals, Character and Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 236–237.
53. Robert Max Jackson, *Destined for Equality: The Inevitable Rise of Women's Status* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 133.
54. Leyendecker, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 3, 1921; see also George Brehm, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 5, 1925. For a cover showing a miserable boy returning to school after the Christmas break, see Rockwell, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 8, 1927. For covers showing the reluctance of schoolboys in terms of their tardiness, see Leyendecker, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 19, 1914; Anderson, cover illustration, *Life*, September 30, 1920; Foster, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 27, 1930.
55. Prince, cover illustration, *Country Gentleman*, September 1929.
56. Rockwell, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 14, 1935.
57. Sari Biklen, *School Work: Gender and the Cultural Construction of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995), chapter 6.
58. Robinson, cover illustrations, *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 12, 1918 and May 9, 1925. For covers in which a dog or dogs waited outside the school door, embodying the desire for release from the classroom, see Foster, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 14, 1929; Robert C. Kauffmann, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 10, 1938.
59. Paul Martin, cover illustration, *Collier's*, September 19, 1925.
60. Brehm, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 5, 1909; Worth Brehm, cover illustration, *Collier's*, September 9, 1911; Leyendecker, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 13, 1914. The word "hooky" dates back to mid-nineteenth-century American usage. Its etymology is a matter of guesswork, with one hypothesis being that it derives from the dishonesty denoted in the term "hooky-crooky." See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "hookey." It is arguable that associations of truancy with fishing and specifically the fish hook helped to give rise to or perpetuate this particular usage of the word.
61. Leyendecker, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 10, 1910.
62. Rockwell, cover illustration, *Saturday Evening Post*, June 28, 1919; June 23, 1923; June 30, 1934; Eugene Iverd, cover illustration, *Saturday Evening Post*, June 25, 1927.
63. Rita Scherman, *A Mother's Letter to a Schoolmaster*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), 3.
64. A. E. Hamilton, *The Real Boy and the New School* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), 46–47. See also Julia Grant, "'A Real Boy' and not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood, and Masculinity," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Summer 2004): 829–851.

65. Rugg and Shumaker, *The Child-Centered School*, chapter 2.
66. Educational Policies Commission, *The Purposes of Education in American Democracy* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1938), 31–32; emphasis in original.
67. Images of schoolchildren continued to appear occasionally in cover art beyond this period, but the attendant messages about education shifted away from those that had prevailed since the turn of the century. A 1938 *Post* cover by Frances Tipton Hunter notably featured a schoolgirl struggling with her recitation; all previous iterations of this theme had featured a schoolboy. Covers began portraying children as generally eager to return to school, as in Stevan Dohanos's back-to-school cover for the *Post* in 1944, which showed children peering out from the back of a school bus, all of them—the boys as well as the girls—smiling with enthusiasm. Meanwhile, the stereotype of the brawling schoolboy faded. Rockwell did reference it in a 1953 cover, which featured a child sitting outside the principal's office with a fresh black eye as two adults conferred concernedly inside the room. But in a move that would have been unheard of in earlier decades, Rockwell made the child a girl, and gave her a big grin that telegraphed her triumph. By the mid-1960s, Rockwell had long neglected portraying the unwilling schoolboy. He had in fact made a move away from many of his old themes by ending his relationship with the *Post* in favor of one with *Look* magazine, a publication that let him more freely address subjects of racial prejudice and social inequality. In January 1964, *Look* ran an article surveying the American way of life. Accompanying it was a Rockwell painting entitled "The Problem We All Live With." It depicted six-year-old Ruby Bridges walking with US marshals past a hate-strewn wall to her new school in 1960. The earlier-twentieth-century conceit that compulsory schooling was an imposition upon a child's personal freedom had well and truly been supplanted by the message that legislated schooling was a basic American right. Hunter, cover illustration, *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 30, 1938; Stevan Dohanos, cover illustration, *Saturday Evening Post*, September 2, 1944; Rockwell, cover illustration, *Saturday Evening Post*, May 23, 1953; Norman Rockwell, center illustration, *Look*, January 14, 1964.

Chapter 5

Chalk It Up To Experience: The Sacrificial Image of the Teacher in Popular Media, 1945–1959

Patrick A. Ryan

Introduction

Sitting alone at his classroom desk after school, Beaver quietly reads from a book. He is catching up on a day's work he has missed, when he skipped school because he was afraid of the contents of a note his second-grade teacher sent home with him. After erasing the blackboard, his teacher Miss Canfield turns, says he can stop studying, and sits at a student's desk to face Beaver. He subsequently learns that her note asked permission of his parents for Beaver to play Smokey the Bear. Beaver looks downcast, and Miss Canfield gently raises his chin with her hand to talk with him.

> "Why did you assume that what I wrote in the note was something bad?"
> "I don't know," he shrugs.
> "Well, you must have had a reason."
> "Well," he hesitates.
> "Well, what?"
> "I guess it's because you're a teacher."
> "Theodore, teachers aren't the natural enemies of little boys. You know it's very hard to be a good teacher. Well, someone once said that a good teacher is like a candle—consumes itself to light the way for others."[1]

S.G. Terzian et al. (eds.), *American Education in Popular Media*

In this latter phrase, Miss Canfield articulates the sacrificial role of the teacher projected by popular media in the postwar era.

After World War Two, new higher education opportunities for veterans through the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, increased consumerism with more readily available goods, and the rise in home ownership with the expansion of suburbia contrasted with popular media portrayals of educators from 1945 to 1959, where teachers were expected to make sacrifices as part of their professional identities. Teachers are represented as privileging the needs of others before themselves, to the point of inhibiting professional advancement, forfeiting time and relationships for a personal life outside of school, risking financial insecurity, and endangering physical health. These depictions of sacrifice avail as metaphors for advancing in moral virtue, as the teachers are ennobled by sacrifice to be not only moral role models but also worthy purveyors of ethical standards to address the underlying problems of American society in the 1950s. In their living rooms and movie theaters, audiences received important lessons from media teachers worthy of our attention as educational historians, because the artifacts of film and programs on radio and television point to tensions in how America embraced prosperity and global leadership, but struggled amid Cold War conflicts, fears of a rise in juvenile delinquency, and opposition to school integration. Because of the perceived influential role of the teacher, the social benefits resulting from the teacher's personal sacrifice demonstrate faith in the power of the individual to stabilize structures amid transformations that appear more threatening if regarded as uncontrollable. Thus, through the sacrificial teacher image as a model, the popular media sought to perpetuate the perception of economic and political prosperity and preservation of social norms in the Cold War era.

The Teacher Image: Radio, Television, and Film

Employing the often underutilized resources of radio, television, and film, this chapter builds upon scholars' historical perspectives on postwar schooling[2] and understanding of gender roles for women and men teachers[3] to further contextualize the media sources within the society and culture of the Cold War era. Scholars in media and cultural studies, sociology, literature, gender studies, and teacher education have analyzed literary, television, and film images, but historians have not thoroughly addressed popular media depictions of schooling as sources for contributing to the understanding of American education. For answers to their inquiries, historians have been less inclined to

analyze twentieth-century mass media of film, radio, and television compared to studying written documents.[4] In 1973, Michael Isenberg discussed how commercial film was not initially regarded as art worthy of aesthetic criticism, much less as a medium and form of history because of factual inaccuracy, but urged historians to join social scientists in analyzing film. A decade later, R. C. Raack advocated that Hollywood films are appropriate for study because they "may convey a great deal of historically useful information, and the emotional power of reinforcement in its message may be as great as that of the actuality film document."[5] Even if films were historically "inaccurate," Vivian Sobchack, in 1997, contended that historians are nonetheless "often moved by movies" and that motion pictures deserve critical attention precisely because of the competing discourses generated about "legitimate" and "illegitimate" history. Historical myths perpetuated by the popular media and the development of collective memory through iconographic images make the visual a "historiographic form" with diverse narratives. Hollywood films inform a "historical consciousness," having validity with "academic histories," and examination of popular culture representations of the role of history helps to shape our understanding of historical thinking.[6] Popular media of the postwar era not only incorporate history, but they are history in and of themselves, and understanding the context of the era in which a radio/television program or film was produced facilitates analysis of those media. Television images have been examined through media studies, but generally without historical contexts, and radio representations of teachers and schooling have largely been ignored. Because the popular media reflect and project standards for the teaching profession that apparently resonated with audiences, based upon ratings and box office earnings, the images potentially impacted how students, parents, administrators, and teachers themselves defined the role of an educator in the postwar United States.

To examine the roles of teachers in American media, this chapter incorporates different genres from 1945 to 1959 that show male and female teachers in a variety of educational contexts from the elementary through the college levels in both public and private institutions. The television program *Leave It To Beaver* (1957–1963) and the films *Navajo* (1952), *Bright Road* (1953), and *Good Morning, Miss Dove* (1955) depict elementary school teachers, while the television program *Mister Peepers* (1952–1955) profiles a middle school general science teacher. The radio and television program *Our Miss Brooks* (1948–1957) and the films *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *High School Confidential!* (1958) offer high school contexts. In the film *The Corn*

Is Green (1945) young children and adults are educated by Miss Moffat and two other teachers in her own home. Colleges and universities are represented through the radio program *The Halls of Ivy* (1950–1952) and the film *Monster on the Campus* (1958). The film *The King and I* (1956) depicts the role of a private tutor for the King of Siam's young children. These programs and films include the genres of comedy, drama, and science fiction horror.[7]

With prestigious awards and high box office earnings and viewer ratings, these teacher representations received popular and critical acclaim by American audiences. Accordingly, many of the films were selected for study based upon top box office earnings and nominations and awards for the film and/or the leading and supporting actors, as indicated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences website (awardsdatabase.oscars.org) and Cobbet S. Steinberg's *Film Facts* (1980). For *Our Miss Brooks, Variety* reported the radio program reaching the eleventh and seventh ranks in the Nielsen ratings and Hooper ratings, respectively, in 1949.[8] With the *Mister Peepers* television program winning a Peabody award in 1952, Eve Arden receiving a 1953 Emmy Award for her portrayal of Miss Brooks, and the film *Blackboard Jungle* earning 5.2 million dollars in 1955 ($200,000 more than either *East of Eden* or *The Seven-Year Itch*), the media moguls seemed to know what their audiences wanted to see regarding teacher representations.[9] On being made a member of the National Education Association (NEA), Arden remarked: "It seemed that teachers had taken Connie Brooks to their bosoms, and the public was not far behind."[10] Thus, the prevalence of the sacrificial image of the teacher across the genres and media modes demonstrates how analysis of popular radio, television, and film can further our understanding of public expectations for educators and schools in a postwar era of American prosperity.

Personal and Professional Sacrifices

In teaching, the sacrifice could be imposed from positions of authority, but the popular media image also has teachers choosing to make sacrifices professionally and then personally. In the *Our Miss Brooks* radio program, which began airing in 1948 on the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), Principal Osgood Conklin demands that high school English teacher Miss Brooks help him write a speech for the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), type his teacher convention notes, and review other reports during her personal time.[11] As the

teacher considers others' needs first as part of his/her professional identity, this can in turn inhibit advancement in the profession and any concomitant benefits. Miss Brooks never wavers in her advocacy for others, and her students often ask her to represent their interests to the school administration, jeopardizing collegiality with her principal. When the building has insufficient heat during the winter, the basketball team needs more uniforms, and the domestic science class has a broken sewing machine, she willingly takes these grievances to the principal. Harriet Conklin, the principal's daughter, pleads: "Miss Brooks, it's up to you to make conditions in this school livable."[12] When students nominate Miss Brooks as their spokesperson to object to Principal Conklin's "carelessness codes," the petty fines he has instituted for minor, if not nonexistent, infractions of the rules, student Walter Denton defines her role as an heroic adversary: "You are the knight we have chosen to slay the dragon."[13] Although this advocacy for others places this teacher in a somewhat privileged role, it is a personal sacrifice to maintain the stability of the status quo, and because the sacrifice does not advance change, it is also at the expense of furthering her career.[14]

In thinking of others, Miss Brooks voluntarily risks professional advancement. When she thinks her colleague, biology teacher Mr. Philip Boynton, is ill at home, Miss Brooks is willing to forgo attending a teachers' convention to nurse him.[15] Supporting her relationship with Mr. Boynton is more important than career development. When Clay City High School offers her a better teaching position, Miss Brooks declines it because no comparable opening exists for Mr. Boynton.[16] While "being a friend necessarily includes aiming at the good of the other for their own sake, and in certain situations this will lead one to give their good priority over one's own,"[17] Miss Brooks may not be making a sacrifice, as a friend or colleague, if greater happiness for her emanates from being with Mr. Boynton at Madison High School rather than from being without him at Clay City High School. Instead, her professional sphere is sacrificed for the domestic sphere in wanting to marry Mr. Boynton, as she has internalized the postwar message of a woman's happiness being achieved as a wife and mother. Although more women were entering the workforce in the 1950s and the National Manpower Council supported this development, the Council also advocated that women withdraw from the professional sphere when raising a family.[18] Through the teacher image, the *Our Miss Brooks* program reaffirmed a conservative message of returning women to the domestic sphere, a foundation for social stability.

The popular media image of the sacrificial teacher in the postwar era consistently reinforced the fundamental relationship of teacher and student as mother and child, which secures personal and social interactions. As in a parent–child relationship, the caring connection teachers have with students is reciprocal but "[t]he contributions of teachers and students are necessarily unequal."[19] The teacher not only shares more knowledge and experience, but ultimately sacrifices a bit more to maintain the caring relation. The film *The Corn Is Green* (1945) further connects teaching and sacrificial motherhood. For an especially promising young student Morgan Evans, Miss Lilly Moffat devotes most of her time over two years teaching him English composition, history, Latin, and Greek, and she effectively prepares him for winning a scholarship to Oxford University. An orphan, Morgan, has lost much of his family in a mining accident, and Miss Moffat becomes a surrogate mother intellectually by building upon the rudimentary English education Morgan had acquired from his father. When Bessie, the daughter of Miss Moffat's housekeeper, Mrs. Watty, seduces Morgan and becomes pregnant by him, Bessie threatens to derail his chances for Oxford largely because she resents Miss Moffat's discipline and education. Miss Moffat then pays her "hush money," but once the child is born Bessie wants to leave the baby with Morgan and marry someone else. Mrs. Watty proposes that Miss Moffat adopt the baby, and she agrees to do so without telling Morgan, to preserve his educational future. When Morgan accidentally learns from the village squire that he is the father, he wants to marry Bessie and/or provide for his baby, but Miss Moffat tells him his responsibility lies "to the world," to accept the scholarship to Oxford, and to go on to accomplish great things, including to help improve the lives of other Welsh miners. Miss Moffat has intellectually nurtured Morgan, and now she will physically raise and teach his child. Her mothering and teaching will continue at an even greater sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice willingly embraced on behalf of her favored student and for goals beyond herself. Miss Moffat's professional role as a teacher is subsumed in securing a safe, stable home, sequestered from the outside world, so men, as represented by Morgan, can engage socially and professionally. A traditional patriarchy is maintained through the image of the domesticated teacher.

Teaching is a form of mothering, but of someone else's child, and so it is mothering in the absence of the teacher having her own family. To some extent, Miss Moffat is able to recover this loss with a surrogate family, but in the 1955 film *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, this future elementary geography teacher feels obligated to deny herself the

opportunity of having a family upon entering the profession. When her banker father suddenly dies of a heart attack, Miss Dove learns from his business partner that her father had embezzled over 11,000 dollars. Although not obligated to pay her father's debt, she does so to preserve his reputation. Her life of privilege ends. Miss Dove does not return to college and tearfully declines a marriage proposal from her Princeton boyfriend, so she can take the position of a teacher to pay back her father's debt without any scandal. This sacrifice is further intensified by her not telling her boyfriend the reason why she declines his proposal. According to a Liberty Hill police sergeant commenting on the purpose of her life, Miss Dove's teaching career is a sacrificial denial of the happiness she could have had as the mother of her own family. One of her former students, Bill Holloway, however, defends the meaning and happiness of her life: "Not much of a life, huh? No family. No kids. No kids! Boy, you're really off your rocker. Kids—she has a 1,000 of them." It is still, however, a surrogate family and a sacrificial motherhood of substitution. Miss Dove's classroom has become a home. Rather than teaching being an expansion and elevation of the domestic sphere leading to greater independence for women as Catharine Beecher had envisioned in the nineteenth century, the media image of the teacher in the mid-twentieth century had women returning to the home amid more circumscribed actions.

When teaching was not only defined as service to others in the public and private spheres, with a lower salary schedule compared to other professions with similar levels of educational preparation and experience, professional sacrifice inevitably led to personal sacrifice financially.[20] On the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television network, middle school general science teacher Mr. Robinson Peepers can only afford to live in a rented room next to railroad tracks, and Miss Brooks regularly struggles to pay overdue bills. For example, a collection agency for Sherry's department store wants to deduct 25 dollars from Miss Brooks's salary and inform her employer regarding an unpaid six-year-old Easter purchase.[21] When she only has 76 cents saved for a vacation, Miss Brooks joins her students Harriet, Walter, and Stretch in the taxidermy business to earn extra money.[22] Financial sacrifice becomes an accepted component of teaching to the point of instructing at one's own personal expense. In *The Corn Is Green*, when Miss Moffat arrives in a Welsh village to educate young, illiterate miners, she is refused the use of a building for a school, so she conducts classes in her own home and even offers stipends to students' families to defray mining wages lost during schooling

hours. In promoting the public good of education, while minimizing the public expense, the expected financial sacrifice of teachers profited society. Coinciding with financial limitations that constrain personal growth and opportunities, the image of the profession of teaching had teachers not only accept but embrace other personal sacrifices in their roles as educators.

These sacrifices often involved endangering the teacher's physical health in service to others. To help his students succeed on an astronomy exam retest, Mr. Peepers stays up all night, despite a worsening cold, to revise his notes for a class review.[23] When Miss Dove becomes seriously ill at school, she initially refuses to be sent to the hospital because the state proficiency exams are next week and the fifth grade is "weak" on the winds and the tides. Ultimately she acquiesces to her doctor's recommendations, but evidently Miss Dove regularly thinks of her pupils at Cedar Grove Elementary School before herself. In the 1958 film *High School Confidential!*, when a challenging new student, Tony Baker, telephones his English teacher, Miss Arlene Williams, in the middle of the night asking for personal help, she goes to his house and is subsequently roughed up by some drug dealers and is held against her will as she intervenes to save another student from deepening drug addiction. A teacher's "ethic of care"[24] extended beyond the realm of classroom walls to secure intellectual learning, physical safety, and social well-being.

Instead of the status of the teacher being degraded by sacrifice, through these popular media depictions the teacher was ennobled by the sacrifice and was elevated in stature as a purveyor of a moral code. In *Leave It To Beaver*, when his second grade teacher Miss Canfield explains to Theodore why she had to take him to the principal for bringing a dog to school, she regards herself as a protector leading him toward virtue: "Well, if a teacher can keep you out of little troubles now, there's a good chance you'll keep out of bigger troubles later on."[25] When other students tease Theodore about his friendship with a girl, the problem escalates into a fight, and the next day Miss Landers, his third grade teacher, articulates a moral code for their interactions by explaining that everyone in her class is a member of one family, that there is nothing wrong with a boy and a girl liking each other, and that as family members students need to demonstrate kindness and respect. If they do so, she adds, "you'll be taking a big step toward becoming . . . the kind of men and women we want you to be."[26] The television-viewing audience rarely witnessed Miss Landers's academic instruction, but this was a morality lesson not to be missed. The teacher could also introduce to young students the

consideration of societal ethics. In the 1956 film *The King and I*, the teacher Mrs. Anna wants the children of the King of Siam to understand the injustice of slavery: "Sometimes things can't be just a question of what we want . . . but of what is right." Through moral inquiry, the teacher had the power to influence the way students saw themselves and their world. Asserting a moral order through the postwar teacher image helped to ensure ethical standards.

This model of sacrifice and service as a purveyor of morals and virtues particularly became established in teaching, when women increasingly entered the profession during the common school era. In articulating how Catharine Beecher's morality empowered nineteenth-century women as teachers, Catherine Gardner outlines the positive personal and social compensation an individual receives for making sacrifices. There was no "self-negation or self-denial" when the sacrifices conferred "happiness to the individual" and had "social value."[27] According to Beecher, God had ordained a hierarchical world of superior and subordinate relationships to promote the greater good, and the principles of Christianity and democracy were "identical."[28] With the continued feminization of teaching in the 1950s and the postwar allocation of the profession largely to the domestic sphere, the extent of the social impact of teaching toward change was necessarily limited, while the sacrifice remained.

In a 1949 conference report on the preparation of liberal arts teachers, Harry J. Carman, Dean of Columbia College (Columbia University), connected the moral function of teachers with the preparation of upright citizens participating in democracy, who "subordinate their own success to their public usefulness." These citizens needed "to realize that the democratic way of life not only cherishes freedom but also entails obligation and even sacrifice for its preservation."[29] Carman called for teachers to model privileging the interests of the public good over their own private welfare: "We need teachers who have moral strength, a sense of beauty of spirit, the seeing eye, the watchful soul, the inquiring mind,"[30] but for "preservation" of current norms. Because the personal and professional identities of the teacher were measured according to accepted moral expectations of the general public, the teacher may thus lose "autonomy" under the judgmental purview of others.[31] In a survey of 3,109 Indiana high school students about teacher behaviors, Beeman N. Phillips of the Indiana Department of Public Instruction determined in 1955 "that the majority did feel that the teacher should set an example for others and should exemplify the highest moral standards of the community."[32] Moreover, the extent of the

teacher's moral influence was confined to supporting existing middle-class mores, rather than for social transformation, and in defense of America as the democratic ideal. In reaffirming the status quo, the popular media of the teacher negotiated the political stresses of the 1950s.

COLD WAR TENSIONS

In the Cold War era responsibilities rested in service to the nation and interests abroad, and the postwar image of the teacher aligned with many of the nation's political imperatives. Historian Herbert Kliebard asserts that upon the United States' entrance into World War Two "criticism of American society slipped out of vogue in favor of a wave of patriotism occasioned by an external threat of aggression."[33] In the postwar era with the new external threat of Soviet-style communism, this patriotism continued and incorporated the "idealized" teacher as a noble figure: to portray publicly a negative image of the teacher would be un-American. In 1952, Boston University's Chancellor declared that the teacher "must be not only thoroughly intelligent and intensely devoted to his work, but he must also be long-suffering and patient in his spirit and method of service."[34] The audience for the teacher's media image, however, was not merely in US theatres and homes, but also resonated with an international viewership.

With Hollywood productions dominating worldwide popular media, television and film depictions of American culture would be perceived as representative of the degree to which the United States embodied its democratic ideals. Despite the largely favorable portrayal of high school English teacher Richard Dadier, who ultimately succeeds in addressing problems related to juvenile delinquency in the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle*, Darryl F. Zanuck, Vice President of Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, was concerned that the negative depiction of American public schools in it "would be welcomed with open arms by the Communists."[35] Meanwhile, US Ambassador to Italy, Clare Boothe Luce, similarly worried about America's image abroad, and asked for *Blackboard Jungle* to be removed from the 1955 Venice Film Festival.[36] According to Joel Spring, anticommunism in the 1950s also "made advertisers wary of sponsoring anything that might suggest an attack on the American Way of Life."[37] In the 1954 Senate hearings on television and juvenile delinquency, Joseph Heffernan, Vice President of NBC, declared that children's programming would aim "to convey the commonly

accepted moral, social, and ethical ideals characteristic of American life."[38] The popular media image of the teacher supported this conservation of patriotic and democratic norms.

While Hollywood projected a confident, positive role model image of the teacher that would resonate at home and abroad, the tensions of the escalating arms race and the anxieties about potential nuclear warfare were also embodied by popular media representations of the teacher. As an authority figure, the teacher warned of dangers and offered a moral path through them. In *The Halls of Ivy* radio program, college president Dr. William T. Hall alludes to the atomic and nuclear threat when articulating the significant value of friendship. The resulting "good will" may "go far toward averting the dissolution of my world and yours in a blast of hate . . . living as we are today in the shadow of a man-made cloud, shaped like a poisonous toadstool."[39] To more poignantly demonstrate the extent of these atomic dangers, another teacher in a film sacrifices his own life to bear witness to the destruction we all potentially face. In the 1958 film *Monster on the Campus*, paleontology professor Dr. Donald Blake lectures his undergraduates that "[m]an can use his knowledge to destroy all spiritual values and reduce the race to bestiality or he can use his knowledge to increase his understanding to a point far beyond anything now imaginable." When Dr. Blake later discovers that man's introduction of gamma rays into the natural environment brings out bestiality, the film *Monster on the Campus* expresses Cold War concerns about radiation and annihilation. Dr. Blake then chooses self-sacrifice to change direction. When he learns that he is the serial killer on campus because of being accidentally contaminated with radioactive plasma from a coelacanth, Dr. Blake asks to be shot by the police, as he states among his last words: "It's the savage in modern man that science must meet and defeat if humanity is to survive." In sacrifice, he teaches an international lesson beyond the classroom and joins the voices of other real scientists, such as Albert Einstein, James Conant, and J. Robert Oppenheimer, who opposed the development of the hydrogen bomb on moral grounds.[40] Dr. Blake's sacrifice, however, does not seem necessary: his death may mark the end of violence that he committed, but there is no sense of a shift in people's attitudes or actions in response to the nuclear threat, which perhaps seemed remote. Through the media image, it was still suggested that the teacher had the moral power to help preserve social and even natural order. More immediately threatening and causing anxiety, however, could be challenges to the family unit and the school community.

COMBATTING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

In the 1950s the emergence of a distinctive teenage culture of postwar "baby boomers" often surprised parents and other adults, and when behavior became violent and/or unlawful, the popular media was initially cited as an instigating cause. But as historian James Gilbert argues, sensationalistic reports about juvenile delinquency overly accentuated it as a problem and statistics did not reflect a dramatic rise in juvenile crime. The rise of the comprehensive high school provided a generational setting for nurturing youth culture across different social backgrounds, but often as a culture of "resistance," as ever-larger high schools entailed less control by adults and greater difficulties for students to identify the school "as a coherent community of interests."[41] Rock 'n' roll music, access to cars, and the new consumer power were among cultural changes associated with teenagers. Concerns about juvenile delinquency were not simply a response to generational changes, but further represented a "projection of uneasiness" by adults about social transformations since World War Two, including atomic warfare, communist threats, and reified distinct gender roles for women.[42] Adult management of teenage culture, whether it was through Dress Right codes, Hi-Teen clubs, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), or officially sanctioned dances, could reduce anxieties about changing generational norms.[43] Juvenile delinquency was a problem to be contained, and 1950s images of the teacher successfully addressing the problem offered a reassuring model, even while the causes of juvenile delinquency were not as easily confronted.

Recognizing popular media's informative power, producers of the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle* offered before the opening credits a statement of purpose: to demonstrate concern about the causes and effects of juvenile delinquency with the belief that "public awareness is a first step toward a remedy of any problem." This was the same agenda for the 1958 film *High School Confidential!*, which stated in voice-over narration near the end about this "authentic disclosure of conditions which unfortunately exist in some of our high schools today" and about the enduring battle against illegal drug use until "this insidious menace to the schools of our country is exposed and destroyed." From the violence and crime by boys at the inner city, ethnically and racially diverse North Manual High School in *Blackboard Jungle*, where Mr. Richard Dadier begins his English teaching career, to the illicit drug dealing and use by students at the affluent, white suburban Santo Bello High School in *High School Confidential!*, where experienced English teacher Miss Arlene Williams works, both films

reveal the extent of the dangers to authority and physical well-being. The popular media further identify rock 'n' roll music, smoking, beatnik slang, and drag races as indicators of juvenile delinquency.

Turning points toward solutions occurred once dedicated teachers, countering cynical colleagues and oblivious or absent parents, entered the culture of their students, trying to understand their perspectives to help them succeed. For both Mr. Dadier and Miss Williams, this involved risk and sacrifice. When Mr. Dadier accepts his teaching position at North Manual High School, described by a veteran teacher as the "garbage can" of the educational system, he sacrifices status by joining a low-performing school within a disrespected profession that Mr. Dadier later acknowledges as having babysitter wages. From then on, the teacher is psychologically and physically under attack at work and at home. Disrespectful, disobedient students undermine the teacher's authority in the classroom. Miss Williams gets whistled at, addressed as "doll," and propositioned by a new student, Tony Baker. On Mr. Dadier's first day, a student throws a baseball at him as he writes his name on the blackboard, and he fights off another boy, who is attacking a colleague, Miss Hammond. In retribution for getting this boy in trouble, Mr. Dadier is assaulted by the boy's friends while walking home at night. His reputation is threatened when a student goes to the principal making false accusations that he was racially prejudiced in the classroom. In the mail and on the telephone at home, his pregnant wife receives disturbing messages accusing him of infidelity with Miss Hammond.

Despite ill treatment, the teacher persevered in caring. Miss Williams initially invites Tony to her home to counsel him, but then visits his home to talk with his aunt and to understand him better. Once Mr. Dadier begins to connect his lessons to students' interests and allows them opportunities for their own inquiry, they appreciate how he demonstrates his care for them by getting to know them as individuals. Mr. Dadier's perseverance acts as a model for his students on how to face challenges in their own lives, and when Miss Williams responds to Tony's late night telephone call asking for her help, she models the need for action even at personal risk. Miss Williams is physically assaulted by drug dealers, as she assists in saving a girl from deepening addiction. Influential teachers become catalysts for change, and it is an adult–student collaboration that leads to solutions. When student gang leader Artie West cuts Mr. Dadier with a knife and threatens the classroom community, the other boys in the class side with their teacher, one student charging with a US flag at a threatening boy and another student breaking the knife. Mr. Dadier then hauls off West and his

compatriot to the principal's office, where reform school is to be the likely decision for their futures. Similarly, there's a culminating fight scene where the "good" students at Santo Bello battle against their drug-dealing peers and drug leader Mr. A, with the help of undercover police. Mr. A and his partner are imprisoned, and the drug-dealing students are also sent to reform school. Santo Bello High School has "cleansed itself of its ugly problem" and through dedicated, risk-taking teachers, the perpetrators of delinquent behavior have been isolated, the problems contained, and the normal social order restored. According to these films, public fears about delinquency could be assuaged by teachers, who proved to be reliable and competent in addressing challenges. In popular media representations, the policing function of teachers was to maintain existing boundaries in support of white, middle-class mores.

The Sacrificial Teacher Patrolling Segregated Worlds

Whereas US schools in the postwar era were having more racially and ethnically diverse populations, historian James T. Patterson asserts that the "barriers against 'non-white' Americans" largely remained. Similarly, fictional representations of teachers in radio, television, and film from 1945 to 1959 privileged white middle-class perspectives, rarely depicting the educational experiences of minorities.[44] When the "outsider" is represented, boundaries are maintained through the power of the dominant, mainstream culture. In the 1952 film *Navajo*, a Native American student is forced to attend an elementary reservation school, which teaches English and does not validate the home cultures of students. The boy's white male teacher, wearing a cowboy hat and bomber jacket, emblematically embodies how Western expansion led to the vanishing and assimilation of Indian tribal ways of life. Beginning with the founding of Captain Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879 in Pennsylvania, it became the federal government's policy to "kill the Indian and save the man" through education.[45] In the 1956 film *The King and I*, first premiering on the Broadway stage in 1951 based on Margaret Landon's 1944 novel *Anna and the King of Siam*, Miss Anna's instruction of Western knowledge, culture, and customs supersedes those of Siam, so that an intellectual colonization occurs in the wake of nineteenth-century British imperialism. The King's internal conflict regarding continuing cherished Siamese customs for his people and his children, yet not being labeled as "barbaric" according to European standards, contributes to his own demise.

In the 1955 *Blackboard Jungle* film, white middle-class teachers, mostly male, are enforcing the standards without trying to connect to the experiences of their diverse, working-class students. An antagonistic relationship develops when students perceive an imposition on their culture. Resenting the math teacher's use of music in a more advanced class, students contemptuously destroy the teacher's record collection of classic blues and assert the importance of their own bop music. When Mr. Dadier attempts to teach the rules of Standard English, the students purposely make grammatical mistakes and rebel against the drills that have no personal relevance. Although he vehemently espouses that his students respect each other's racial and ethnic backgrounds, under stress Mr. Dadier's suppressed prejudice briefly surfaces when he almost racially insults the student Gregory Miller, portrayed by a young Sidney Poitier, and falsely accuses him of intentionally misinforming the principal about his teaching. Only when Mr. Dadier allows students' own inquiry to guide their learning in a class discussion, rather than imposing his own agenda, does he have success as a teacher. There is, however, still a hierarchy of the dominant white culture in place, because it is often a white, middle-class teacher "saving" disadvantaged students of color.[46]

Although racial and ethnic respect is advocated, *The Halls of Ivy* radio program similarly ranks cultures. College president and professor, Dr. Hall, refuses to accept the conditions of a much-needed gift to the college of 500,000 dollars for a donated scholarship that excludes students of "certain races and creeds," and he addresses the student body about their bigotry against a Chinese student, who is forced to leave because of peer "prejudice" and "snobbery."[47] Rather than advocating "tolerance . . . [which] seems to indicate a condescension," Dr. Hall argues that Ivy College's mission to support democracy rests upon the students' recognition that "the human race is not an exclusive club with a selective membership." In stating, however, that "it has both active and associate members, and it is up to each of us to provide our own classification," Dr. Hall implies a justifiable hierarchy. The Chinese student does not return to campus, and historically although emigration from China to the United States increased in the 1950s, strict quota restrictions remained under the McCarran–Walter Act.[48] Through this 1950 episode, *The Halls of Ivy* program could be obliquely addressing the segregation of blacks, thus in an unusual moment referencing a controversial contemporary issue. The teacher's advocacy for change, however, is circumscribed, and further sacrifices are not warranted to end the segregated status quo. There is awareness of racism and prejudice, admonishment, but no resolution.

Even the 1953 film *Bright Road*, starring Harry Belafonte and Dorothy Dandridge, which represents teaching and learning in black segregated elementary and catechetical schools in the South, only momentarily questions the racial divide. A student, C. T., proposes to his teacher, Miss Jane Richards, a dilemma about humans being made in the image and likeness of God:

> *C. T.*: Can't see how everybody looks like God, when some's black and some's white.
> *Miss Richards*: [in voice-over narration to indicate her thoughts] Oh, oh, I walked right into that one, didn't I? Well, there's only one answer. I'll hope he'll understand it. [to C. T.] Yes, C. T., God created everybody in His image, black and white.
> *C. T.*: How come? What color is God anyway?
> *Miss Richards:* Well, it isn't a matter of color at all. When God made us in His image, He put a bit of Himself in each one of us. He loves us just like your mother and father love you. We're all brothers together.
> *C. T.*: If white people and black people are brothers, how come they don't act like brothers?
> *Miss Richards*: [in voice-over narration] Oh, Lord, let me say the right word just this once. [to C. T.] C. T., it isn't God's fault when people don't act like brothers. It isn't an easy thing to do, but we can learn because God is always willing to help us when we ask Him.

According to Miss Richards, God does not support the status quo in race relations, but she does not offer C. T. a solution. Upon her response, C. T. silently leaves the Sunday school classroom with apparent dissatisfaction and with society's structural inequities intact. Even in the 1950s subsequent to the US Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, media depictions of the teacher largely would not address the promotion of integration, and no sacrifices were made on screen to achieve this goal. Meanwhile in 1957, news broadcasts informed the nation of the need of the National Guard to help ensure the safe attendance of nine black students at Little Rock Arkansas' Central High School. Much of the American public, North and South, resisted racial desegregation through the 1960s and early 1970s.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the high ratings of these radio and television programs and the significant box office earnings of the films, these images of teachers set standards for professional and personal behavior that

resonated with postwar American audiences. The popular media image of the self-sacrificing, morally upright teacher served to model ethics that further contained the underlying problems and challenges of the Cold War era. The teacher image advocated educational equity for those victimized by racism and prejudice, but because the model of sacrifice circumscribed the professional sphere, the image of the teacher largely served a socially conservative function of preserving middle-class norms and the status quo without transforming the economic and racial structures in the United States. Media representations of the teacher projected a positive image amid Cold War tensions, contained juvenile delinquency, acknowledged injustice, but did not challenge existing societal frameworks. Radio, television, and film, therefore, are important artifacts contributing to our historical understanding of how the American public conceived the role of education in schools and how the media also became a means of instruction. Teachers were asked to make personal sacrifices as part of their professional identity, without the sacrifice having a socially redemptive function of embracing opportunities toward greater equity.

Notes

1. *Leave It To Beaver*, "Beaver Gets 'Spelled,'" October 4, 1957.
2. See Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890–1990*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993); Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945–1965* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Gerald L. Gutek, *American Education, 1945–2000: A History and Commentary* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000); Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–1958," *The Journal of American History* 79 (4) (1993): 1455–1482; Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); John L. Rury, "Who Became Teachers?: The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History," in *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 9–48; Joel Spring, *Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
3. Sandra Acker, "Gender and Teachers' Work," *Review of Research in Education* 21(1995–1996): 99–162; Michael W. Apple, *Teachers and*

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4. Michael T. Isenberg, "A Relationship of Constrained Anxiety: Historians and Film," *The History Teacher* 6 (4) (1973): 553–568; R. C. Raack, "Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (3) (1983): 411–438.
5. Raack, "Historiography as Cinematography," 414.
6. Vivian Sobchack, "The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness," *History and Theory* 36 (4) (1997): 4–20, esp. 6, 8, 12, and 19. See also Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 217.
7. Although efforts have been made to use a representative sample of popular media images in the United States from different genres depicting a variety of teachers, academic levels, academic subjects, and settings, not every genre or learning context is represented. The genres of Westerns and mysteries are worth further consideration, especially because situation comedies dominated the radio and television formats. No doubt in the postwar United States there were teacher representations in select episodes of such highly rated television programs as *Fireside Theatre* (NBC), *Philco Television Playhouse* (NBC), *Kraft Television Theatre* (NBC), *Ford Theatre* (CBS, NBC, ABC), *General Electric Theatre* (CBS), and *Goodyear Television Playhouse* (NBC). With many of these anthology formats performed live, their availability as source material for study may be more limited than the

situation comedies, but future research might lead to new insights about the teacher image in television dramas, which are not addressed in this chapter. Neither is the sample exhaustive in incorporating all the radio and television programs and films produced with teacher images from 1945 to 1959.

8. "Nielsen's Newest Top 20," 1949, 22; "Hooper's Top 15 and the Opposition," 1949, 27.
9. David Sheward, *The Big Book of Show Business Awards: An Indispensable Reference Source for Anyone Interested in the Major Award Winners in Movies, Music, Television, and Theater* (New York: Billboard Books, Watson-Guptill Publications, 1997), 306. Cobbett Steinberg, *Film Facts* (New York: Facts On File, 1980), 22.
10. Eve Arden, *Three Phases of Eve* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 79.
11. *Our Miss Brooks* (radio), April 10, 1955; November 12, 1950; January 10, 1954.
12. Ibid., January 9, 1949.
13. Ibid., February 12, 1956.
14. Patrick A. Ryan and Sevan G. Terzian, "*Our Miss Brooks*: Broadcasting Domestic Ideals for the Female Teacher in the Postwar United States," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 21 (1) (2009): 76–100.
15. *Our Miss Brooks* (radio), November 12, 1950.
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17. Joe Mintoff, "Could an Egoist Be a Friend?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (2) (2006): 109.
18. Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 60.
19. Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 108.
20. Michael Sedlak and Steven Schlossman, "Who Will Teach? Historical Perspectives on the Changing Appeal of Teaching as a Profession," *Review of Research in Education* 14 (1987): 93–131.
21. *Our Miss Brooks* (radio), April 22, 1951.
22. Ibid., June 19, 1949.
23. *Mister Peepers*, February 1, 1953.
24. Nel Noddings, "Caring: A Feminist Perspective," in *Ethics for Professionals in Education: Perspectives for Preparation and Practice*, eds. Kenneth A. Strike and P. Lance Ternasky (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 43–53.
25. "Beaver and Poncho," March 21, 1958.
26. "Her Idol," November 6, 1958.
27. Catherine V. Gardner, "Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catharine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women," *Hypatia* 19 (2) (2004): 8.
28. Ibid. Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (New York: Source Book Press, 1841/1970), 2.

29. Harry J. Carman, "The Preparation of Liberal Arts Teachers," in *The Preparation of College Teachers: Report of a Conference Held at Chicago, Illinois, December 8–10, 1949, Sponsored by the American Council on Education and the U.S. Office of Education*, eds. T. C. Blegen and R. M. Cooper (Washington, DC: American Council on Education Studies, 1950), 14.
30. Ibid., 18.
31. Historian Karen Graves asserts that "the expectation that educators act as exemplars for students has led to intense public scrutiny of teachers' personal lives and restricted professional autonomy." Teachers were held to moral standards not required of other professions. See Karen Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 120.
32. Beeman N. Phillips, "Community Control of Teacher Behavior," *The Journal of Teacher Education* 6 (4) (1955): 299.
33. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum,* 207–208.
34. Daniel L. Marsh, "Maintaining the Dignity of the Teaching Profession," *The American Teacher* 36 (8) (1952): 10.
35. Perlstein, "Imagined Authority," 420.
36. Ibid., 417.
37. Spring, *Images of American Life*, 165.
38. Ibid., 191.
39. "The Ivy Chamber Music and Knockwurst Society," March 31, 1950.
40. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 173.
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42. James B. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 41.
43. William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
44. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 375.
45. Christine Lesiak (Producer/Director) and Matthew L. Jones (Co-Producer), *In the White Man's Image* (Boston, MA: WGBH Educational Foundation, 1992/2007). Also see David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995).
46. Amy Stuart Wells and Todd W. Serman, "Education Against All Odds: What Films Teach Us About Schools," in *Imaging Education: The Media and Schools in America*, ed. Gene. I. Maeroff (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 181–194; Robert Lowe, "Teachers as Saviors, Teachers Who Care," in *Images of Schoolteachers in America*, 2nd ed., eds.

Pamela B. Joseph and Gail E. Burnaford (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 211–225; Xaé A. Reyes and Diana I. Rios, "Imaging Teachers: In Fact and in the Mass Media," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 2 (1) (2003): 3–11.

47. "The Leslie Hoff Painting," September 27, 1950; "The Chinese Student," February 17, 1950.
48. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 378.

Chapter 6

Fears on Film: Representations of Juvenile Delinquency in Educational Media in Mid-Twentieth-Century America

Amy Martinelli

In the opening scene to the 1956 educational film *Boy with a Knife*, the Phillips family sat around the dinner table. Jerry, a teenage boy, listened to his stepmother as she berated him in front of his father and half-brother. She recited an unending list of chastisement for Jerry's wrongdoings at school. She refused to continue to take care of Jerry because he was unmanageable. When Jerry asked to speak alone with his father, she interrupted and reprimanded him once again. He was in enough trouble already. As she began to clear the table of plates and silverware, she lovingly stroked the hair of Jerry's half-brother and said: "*Our* son turned out alright. How do you explain that?" At this, Jerry got up from the table in a hurry and ran out the door. Once outside, he paused in front of the front door of the home, looked out into the distance, and reached into his back pocket. Jerry had a knife. The camera angled up at Jerry, dressed in jeans and a checked button-down shirt, and he looked powerful—his hurt feelings swiftly transformed into fury and resentment. He touched the knife with his fingers before, menacingly, plunging it into the front door of their house. The camera closed in on the knife, a symbol of Jerry's ire, as

S.G. Terzian et al. (eds.), *American Education in Popular Media*

intense music played in the background and the title appeared on the screen: *Boy with a Knife*.

This is one of the ways that educational films in mid-twentieth-century America introduced the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency—by addressing the roots of teenage angst and hostility. *Boy with a Knife* also featured some of the same characterizations of Hollywood films that scrutinized youth culture. It featured a boy who felt isolated from his family and society who used a knife and the protection of a gang of outsiders to soothe his discontent. In that sense, this film belonged to a genre of film dedicated to examining young people: teen-pics.[1] Thomas Patrick Doherty explained that a central theme in juvenile delinquency teen-pics from the 1940s and the 1950s emphasized society's detrimental effects on the young. Juvenile delinquency films projected images of the relationships between the young and the old that "had never been so frightening, ambivalent, or antagonistic."[2] They conveyed a real sense that the tenets of the social contract between generations had changed. On screen, filmmakers simultaneously exalted teenage irreverence and youth culture while at the same time reprimanding it. More often than not, films portrayed the teens with enormous sympathy and cast them as victims, "more sinned against than sinners."[3] The silver screen, indeed, contributed to public perceptions of juvenile delinquents and teenage life.

This chapter addresses an overlooked genre of film that gained less public attention than Hollywood teen-pics: educational films. These short films contribute to a better understanding of reactions to juvenile delinquency after World War II. Historians have paid attention to the role that Hollywood films have played in understanding perceptions about teenagers.[4] But educational films also capitalized on this apparent preoccupation over youth, though they were not considered part of the problem. Concerns over teenage behaviors intensified after the war, especially in the 1950s, because of the rapidity with which cultural changes occurred. James Gilbert studied reactions to juvenile delinquency in the 1950s and found that the fear of juvenile delinquency invigorated a push toward supervised activities for teenagers and censorship of mass media.[5] He argued that films, rock and roll, and comic books all became a plausible source for blame on the new behaviors of an emerging youthful society because they were a salient part of that culture.[6] Ronald Cohen investigated the focus on censorship of media and argued that Americans welcomed expert and professional advice in the face of a new cultural landscape.[7] Educational

films were a form of social guidance that used media to combat delinquency.

In mid-twentieth-century America, the idea of media in schools was nothing new. Progressive school reformers had long promoted films in the classroom, and argued that visual education would combat the mechanical teaching methods of previous decades. Despite the hopeful promises of education reformers, film use in the classroom remained elusive. Larry Cuban contended that although teachers scarcely used films in their classrooms, it was "still the dream of pedagogical and administrative progressives who wanted to make the classroom both an interesting and productive place for learning."[8] Educational films outside of the classroom, however, enjoyed more prominence during World War II, because the US military used short films to educate thousands of soldiers efficiently. In addition, newsreels and docudramas were played in cinemas prior to feature films to educate the public about the war.[9] Previously, producers had aimed to distinguish educational films from Hollywood blockbusters; rather than entertain, these films needed to educate masses of people. But after the war, educational filmmakers understood the value of creating an educative film that also entertained, and reasoned that engaging films enhanced learning.[10]

I examined eight educational films produced between the years 1940 and 1956. Though the films were not all alike, they presented similar behaviors (e.g. vandalism, stealing, and skipping school) and emotional issues (e.g. feelings of isolation, sullenness, and anger) associated with juvenile delinquency. Importantly, the films came from two distinct educational media sources: social organizations and the classroom film industry.[11] Social organizations outsourced the production of short educational films to external studios. Their films, called sponsored films, aimed to promote institutions as a remedy for wayward youths, and presented juvenile delinquents as the victims of a neglectful society. Sponsored films included *Boy in Court* (1940), *That Boy Joe* (1944), *Angry Boy* (1950), and *Boy with a Knife* (1956).[12] Classroom films—written, directed, filmed, and produced by companies that exclusively dealt with films for schools—made low-budget, short films that promoted discussion and provided social guidance in American high schools.[13] They included four films produced by Centron, Coronet Instructional Films, and Encyclopedia Britannica Films (EBF): *Other People's Property* (1951), *Right or Wrong: Making Moral Decisions* (1951), *Why Vandalism?* (1955), and *What about Juvenile Delinquency?* (1955).[14]

Given the controversies over censorship and the fears surrounding many forms of media in mid-twentieth-century America, educational films embody a somewhat ironic reaction to juvenile delinquency. Whereas Hollywood films faced censorship for salacious material, educational films offered moral education that focused on containing and eliminating teenage subversion. Although moral education in schools generally declined beginning in the 1940s and 1950s because schools began to prioritize cognitive ability rather than socialization, that shift came unevenly and did not fully arrive until the 1960s and 1970s. The moral education utilized in sponsored and classroom films in the postwar era represented the vestiges of two competing impulses from previous decades. The character education movement and the progressive movement, as described by B. Edward McClellan, stratified educators between two distinct approaches to moral education, and the two genres of educational films in this study embodied those differences.[15] The character education movement highlighted reliance upon social institutions to provide supervised activities that promoted codes of conduct for moral behavior.[16] Because social organizations requested the production of sponsored educational films, it is not surprising that their messages aligned with that notion. The progressive movement, by contrast, presumed that moral education ought to provide the tools to navigate a changing cultural landscape with flexibility. Classroom films provided situations and tools to negotiate through the changing social landscape rather than edicts on how best to live. To be sure, classroom films promoted particular behaviors. Indeed, critical media scholars have acknowledged that all educational films contain overt ideological messages, and some have argued that they utilized mechanisms akin to propaganda.[17] But classroom films advanced reasoning and discussion as a combative response to juvenile delinquency among teens and communities.

Fears Assuaged: The Custodial Messages of Sponsored Educational Films

William Graebner described the landscape of the 1940s as confusing for Americans and custodial guidance as increasingly appealing.[18] Into the 1950s, the notion that social institutions could provide a kind of moral compass for American family life was part of the American fabric. Additionally, in the twentieth century, social institutions began to take the place of schools for moral education. McClellan explained that the presumption of morality lessons in schools changed in the beginning of the twentieth century and that schools prioritized

academic achievement to a greater degree than character building. New conditions in society and schools alike required educators and administrators to alter their approach to education to fulfill the new needs of a society that depended less on character and more on skill, efficiency, and social competence.[19] At the same time, social engineers in the 1950s promoted social institutions, especially those that provided supervised activities, as a way to keep juvenile delinquency in check.[20] The selection of sponsored films reflected the mid-twentieth-century belief that social institutions were necessary to bring harmony into public and personal life.[21] They also seemed to mirror remnants of moral education that prescribed specific codes of conduct to preserve character.[22] In particular, sponsored films advanced the idea that juvenile delinquency started in the home, and social organizations and supervised activities could provide a simple resolution.

Geoff Alexander and Rick Prelinger described academic filmmakers as the "short story writers of cinema," because they needed to "delight, challenge and intrigue . . . in one sitting."[23] Additionally, Elizabeth Ellsworth noted that educational films used theatrical conventions that conveyed one distinct point.[24] This was often done through the use of a linear format that emphasized a problem/solution pattern. The sponsored films in this study followed the narrative format, presented a problem, and offered simple and attainable solutions. For example, in the 1950 film *Angry Boy*, sponsored by the Mental Health Board of the State of Michigan, an elementary-aged boy Tommy was caught stealing from his teacher; as the film's narrator explained, he expressed "pre-delinquent behavior."[25] The film focused on the problem of how to cure Tommy of his tendency toward delinquency to prevent him from turning into a teenaged hoodlum. The solution? Tommy and his mother both talked to a psychologist to determine the underlying reasons behind the boy's anger. Through therapeutic sessions, Tommy became better equipped to handle his emotions in ways that would not get him into trouble, and his mother learned how to provide an environment that would assist him in doing so. Many of the sponsored films followed this pattern, and by utilizing linear narratives, the films simplified social problems in order to promote social institutions, such as a community mental health center, to fix them.

In a scene from the 1944 film *That Boy Joe*, the main character, Joe Hastings, was a teenager who faced criminal charges for stealing cigarettes after drinking too many beers. He found himself in the book-lined chambers of the friendly, yet firm, juvenile court judge.

An imposing portrait of Abraham Lincoln peered down on the two as they conversed at a large wooden table. The camera's angles in the scene suggested that the judge wanted Joe to feel comfortable; the two sat at the same level, and the camera alternated between close-ups of Joe and close-ups of the judge. The judge questioned Joe about various aspects of his life including his activities inside and outside of school and paid close attention to Joe's description of his home life. When asked about his family life, Joe responded: "My parents are swell. They let Betty and I do just about whatever we please."[26] At this, the judge scrunched his face in skepticism and challenged Joe about whether or not his parents would really condone his behaviors. Smirking, the judge asked: "You mean, you could go *any*where you want to? Any*time* you wanted to? To *any* kind of a place?" The judge smiled and changed his tone to emphasize the point: "Even down to Macheson's Warehouse for cigarettes?" The judge's questions revealed the truth; Joe could not really do anything he pleased, but his parents' leniency allowed him to think that he could.

When Joe's parents arrived to discuss Joe's fate at the courthouse, they became the ones on trial. Clearly ashamed of her son's behavior, Joe's mother entered tearfully. But the judge assured her that the juvenile court was there to help in cases like this:

> "Now about this son of yours. He's a good boy. Now why do you think he's been playing hooky from school?"
> "What? He has? Joe?"
> "Now wait a minute. You act as if Joe's playing hooky from school were on trial here, but it's not. That's one thing. Joe's here on a charge of burglary and that's a different thing. You didn't know that he played hooky from school and you didn't know that he robbed a warehouse. Did you know where he was going?"[27]

This interaction between the juvenile court judge and Joe's uninformed parents established that parents needed to keep a watchful eye on their children, and that there were some who did not. Joe's family wasn't a bad one, the judge determined, but they lacked the skills, or perhaps had lost touch with ideas about family and character that they had once known. The judge extolled the virtues of social institutions and asked when Joe had last gone to Sunday school or church, and Mrs. Hastings wistfully recalled the lessons she learned there as a girl: "Why Judge, I never realized the importance of religious training. 'Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not . . .' I haven't said those for a long time." This film elucidated a critique of parenting

and home life that could be remedied through following the custodial programs developed by the juvenile court system and demonstrated enormous sympathy toward the boy in question. Joe Hastings's family was too indulgent and that made him susceptible to delinquent tendencies. Films such as *That Boy Joe* offered suggestions for ways that families could beat delinquency by providing a proper home environment and by engaging in supervised, character-building activities.

The example of *That Boy Joe* revealed concerns over slipshod parenting. But the films in this sample highlighted various other ways that family life could corrupt teenagers. *Boy with a Knife* (1956) featured a gang of boys, all of whom came from disrupted family situations, who felt isolated from society and their peers. The boys turned to intimidation and bullying to combat their dissidence.[28] As the camera panned over the gang hanging out at its usual spot, the local hotdog stand, the camera showed the boys in a long shot. As they loitered, the narrator succinctly examined the reasons they felt ostracized by their families, and by society: "It's hard to grow up. If a teenager has extra problems, emotional or social, it's even harder. Kids like this, not wanted by any other group, or anyone else much, tend to hang out together."[29] These boys did not fit in among their families or their peers. The narrator highlighted each boy, the camera moving from boy to boy, and explained his situation in more detail. Joe Martin, smoking and playing dice, had "hardly ever seen his mother sober." Fred Hammer came onto the screen next; his father was in prison. The camera jumped then to Mike Kelly, fully engaged in push-ups, and the narrator explained: "He has to show off all the time—trying to get attention." Mike's parents were dead so he lived with his sister who didn't have time for him: "To her, he's just another hungry mouth to feed in her large family." Harry Jackson then stepped onto Mike's back and pushed him down onto the ground as he made his way to the stand. Harry flaunted a wad of bills and bought himself a hotdog. He got money from his family, but "never any of their time." Finally, the camera panned over to a close-up shot of Jerry Phillips, apathetically carving his name onto the side of the building. Jerry, the narrator lamented, was "the loneliest of the lot." A product of divorce, Jerry, like all the other boys, turned to the gang to combat the rejection from his family, and carried a knife as a much needed source of confidence.[30] These boys appeared to be genuinely more menacing and difficult than Joe Hastings; they intimidated customers at the hotdog stand and frequently fought amongst themselves. But the film treated them all with sympathy, and the common thread that linked them was their unsuitable home life.

The audience then met Budd Williams, "a group specialist with extensive training," who attempted to win them over by demonstrating that he liked them without condoning their bad behavior. Budd continued to impose himself on the boys who eventually listened when he offered productive ways of spending their time together. Budd explained to Jerry that he would not demand that he give up his knife, but he would accept it when Jerry willingly felt that he no longer needed it. After considerable patience and time, the gang transformed from a wild, unorganized bunch into a club with structure and organization that met at a local community center. The boys elected Jerry to a leadership position and through the reorganization of their social time, Jerry found that he possessed the self-assurance to stand up to his verbally abusive stepmother. The film ended when Jerry ran out to Budd's car to deliver the knife. He no longer needed it. Spending productive time with other boys in a supervised and organized fashion eliminated his anger. The happy ending proposed that there was a definite cure for juvenile delinquency: group activities hosted by social institutions.

Boy in Court (1940) featured Johnny Marvin, a sullen boy whose father died and whose mother had no time to nurture him or maintain their home.[31] At school, Johnny was popular among the other students, but academically unsuccessful. He spent his free time with a bunch of boys who, out of boredom, stole a car leaving Johnny to take the fall. Indeed, while the film employed familiar ideas about the seeds of juvenile delinquency, the major thrust of the film focused on the transformative role of the juvenile court, and in particular the interactions between Johnny and his parole officer. A narrator's dictation emphasized the necessity for juvenile courts in every American town. Here, the narrator positions the audience to identify the criminal court system as no place for youngsters:

> What road lies ahead for this sullen, misguided 15-year-old? Will he be placed in a cell for the night? Herded with drunks and criminals? Then, in the morning paraded in the police lineup? Will he be fingerprinted? Photographed? Given a permanent criminal record at 15? Will he be sentenced by a judge who knows nothing of the background of Johnny and his family, or the reasons behind his behavior? Will he grow up in reformatories and prisons to become a bitter and seasoned criminal? Can't something be done to help these twisted young lives and set them straight?[32]

This litany of questions about Johnny's future articulated the harms that could come upon Johnny or any other youthful offender. It suggested that the criminal court system may not only be too harsh, but

could harm Johnny's future, irrevocably. Again, the narration and characterization reinforced Johnny, and all would-be delinquents, as victims who only needed a structured, caring environment to change their ways. Immediately following this line of questioning, the narrator reassured the audience by advertising for the juvenile court system:

> Something can be done. Something *is* being done. Many communities believe that good juvenile courts with well-organized probation services can make good citizens out of wayward youth. Fortunately, Johnny lives in a community which has such a court. After his arrest, he does not go to a jail to mingle with adult offenders. Instead, he is taken to a detention home, which the community maintains especially for children.[33]

This juxtaposition indicated clearly the benefits and necessity for the juvenile court to care for juvenile delinquents. Under the custody of his parole officer, Mr. Benton, Johnny became involved in school; Benton patiently guided him away from his gang and into community-led activities. He went to church, attended school regularly, and became involved in his academics because of his interest in aviation. Benton even introduced Johnny to an engineer who gave him exposure to the field. Through his interactions with the juvenile court, Johnny's life changed completely. At the start of the film, Johnny was unsmiling and uncomfortable around adults but by the conclusion he was engaged, happy, and helpful at home and in school. The role that the juvenile court took in this transformation also underscored the importance of a great many social organizations. Juvenile delinquency, according to the film, had many causes and therefore required a variety of social organizations to assist in the prevention, deterrence, and elimination of the problem. The probation officer helped Johnny personally, but also introduced his mother to social organizations to assist her in maintaining a more stable home environment for her son.

These films suggested that young people, even delinquents, could become productive members of society, but that the constraints of the modern world demanded outside support. By adhering to guidelines set forth by a variety of social institutions, teenagers could be socially responsible. Sponsored films such as these were most likely not often shown in high schools. An article in the January 1946 edition of *Educational Screen* provided some insight into this dilemma and addressed concerns from those who used educational film in the classroom. The benefits of sponsorship were purely financial. The agencies

and corporations involved in producing the films provided the films without charge, in contrast to the higher-priced films produced specifically for schools. However, because the films' sponsors had an interest not only in instruction and guidance but also in promoting their product or agency, their use in schools provoked some skepticism. The editors of *Educational Screen* also questioned the educational quality of sponsored films because educators feared that free films would permeate the market but provide little educational value.[34]

CLASSROOM FILMS: THE SO-CALLED PROGRESSIVE APPROACH TO JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

The classroom films in this study represent the three most industrious academic film production studios of the mid twentieth century: Centron, Coronet, and EBF.[35] Alexander and Prelinger argued that after the war, the need for educational films in the military diminished significantly and academic filmmakers took advantage of this changing landscape. Opportunistic media moguls created a new industry that produced short films for school audiences, and their motivations to do so typically reflected capitalistic concerns.[36] EBF was the most industrious educational film producer because of the efforts of William Benton, the cofounder of the Benton & Bowles advertising agency turned vice-president of the University of Chicago. Its location at the University of Chicago influenced the company's educational prestige, and the board of directors included Robert Hutchins, Adlai Stevenson, Robert Tyler, and Mortimer Adler. EBF created films that adhered to school curricula in order to induce mass production and profits.[37] Russell Mosser and Arthur Wolf headed Centron, housed in Lawrence, Kansas, and the pair produced films for Young America Films, one of the top educational film distributors of the time. Lifelong friends, both worked for Boeing in educational positions during World War II and both had experience in film production. Wolf was the director of Calvin Films in Kansas City, while Mosser held the position of Assistant Director of Visual Instruction at Boeing in Wichita. In 1947, they founded Centron Productions, a film business that devoted their entire library to the production of educational films and created a catalog that described where each fit into the school curriculum.[38] Finally, Coronet, headed by David Smart, a publishing mogul who owned *Apparel Arts* (later *Gentleman's Quarterly*) and *Esquire* magazines, used educational films as a way to break into the film industry after World War II. Coronet's philosophy was to strictly correlate films

to existing textbook curricula.[39] Smart aimed to produce Hollywood-style films for the classroom that would teach through dramatization.

The sponsored films had reflected attitudes and desires of their various sponsors who adhered to the messages of guidance and character education, but they did not promote discussion outside of the film. In fact, a review of *Boy with a Knife* (1956) indicated that the simple resolution for Jerry's anger "seemed to provide a conclusion to the story which in actuality was only begun."[40] In contrast to sponsored films, classroom films presented juvenile delinquency as a topic of discussion and purported to use more progressive methods of educating.[41] The classroom films focused more on the delinquent in question to characterize juvenile delinquency but did not offer solutions to their problems. Instead, their messages aligned with the progressive notion that schools ought to provide tools for navigating moral dilemmas, rather than prescribe solutions. By explicitly promoting classroom discussion, these films treated juvenile delinquency with moral flexibility; they offered the opportunity for students to make judgments about what they saw on screen.

Other People's Property (1951) described the fate of three junior high school–age boys who planned a prank on their teacher. The boys used materials from their science classes to create a chemical reaction that would set the classroom garbage can ablaze. But their plot went awry when the boys got carried away; they used too many chemicals and the entire school had to be evacuated. As the three boys awaited their fates, sitting on a bench outside the principal's office, they lamented their decision:

> *Jimmy*: Golly. What do you suppose is going to happen to us now?
> *Frank*: Aww, they'll probably kick us out of school activities for a month, but I don't care if they do.
> *Dale*: This is sure gonna hurt my mother and dad.
> *Frank*: Awww. What are you always worrying about your mother and dad for? They aren't going to hear about this.
> *Jimmy*: Gee, but they might even kick us out of school. I'd hate to face my folks if they did that!
> *Dale*: Golly! If I had it to do over I'd sure do it different.[42]

Jimmy and Dale displayed remorse over their actions, while Frank did not appear to believe that the consequences would matter at all. The scene portrayed a variety of perspectives to consider. The narrator admonished each of the boys as the camera focused on each of their guilty faces: "Another chance? Do you really think that you deserve

another chance?"[43] The narrator imposed a particular point of view, but the film ultimately asked the audience to make a decision about the actions of the young delinquents on the screen. *Other People's Property* used questioning, reasoning, and presumed punishment to lead its audience to a conclusion about the boys' behaviors. It focused on the consequences rather than on the solutions to delinquency.

What about Juvenile Delinquency? (1951) also illustrated the agency of teenagers and stressed the importance of peer monitoring as a preventative measure. It presented the story of a blonde, good-looking high school student named Jaime who abandoned his gang of hoodlums after being personally affected by their shenanigans. The film began with a shot of three teens, all wearing jackets with lightning bolt patches sewn onto the breast, huddled under a lamppost on a dimly lit street corner. The boys hopped into their car, hollering loudly. They then came upon another car—a big Buick. When the car didn't accelerate fast enough the boys aggressively drove into its bumper. The driver, a balding man, got out of his car as the gang approached him menacingly. The gang closed in on him and the camera made a close up on the man's face. Next, the man was, presumably, knocked out cold.

In the next scene, Jaime, wearing the same lightning bolt–adorned jacket, laid around on the couch, waiting for his friends to pick him up. Jaime was rude and dismissive to his mother; she wanted to know where her son was going, to which he responded in a fashion that has become cliché: "Out!" Jaime and the other fellows hung out at a diner. The jukebox played rock and roll, and the lightning bolt gang clustered together around a table bragging to Jaime about the guy they just attacked. When the boys revealed that they stole a pen off their victim, who drove a Buick, Jaime became suspicious. His dad had that same pen, after all, and he drove a big Buick. When Jaime realized that his father had become the victim of his friends' juvenile delinquency, he dramatically stood up from the table and ripped the badge off his jacket. Upon his arrival at home, Jaime found his father, bruised and beaten on the couch. Ashamed and guilty, Jaime ascended the stairs without admitting that his friends were to blame. Without saying anything, his father looked up at Jaime, focusing on the left breast of his jacket where the remnants of his lightning bolt patch still remained.

The next day, Jaime was caught between two different types of peers. In the school hallway, the gang approached him to convince him to rejoin them. At the same time, another group of students emerged onto the scene. These teens were dressed differently, with no jackets and no jeans. They were the "good" kids who were involved in

school activities. The group of "do-gooders" pleaded with Jaime to join them at the city commission meeting to oppose a proposed curfew for teenagers that would eliminate the possibility of having a school dance. Jaime responded ambivalently: "Look. All of ya' leave me out of all you're planning. All I want to do is mind my own business." The students who wanted to go to the city council meeting convinced Jaime to attend by appealing to his personal responsibility in the matter. Jaime, the group argued, had a responsibility to demonstrate that not all teenagers were delinquents. One of the "do-gooders" stood up to the gang: "Go ahead and laugh. Right now you guys are more afraid than we are. But you're not fooling us. You think you can laugh at anybody who stands up to you. And pretty soon everybody's laughing. Well, I don't care if you're laughing or not. It won't be funny if the city council does what they're talking about."[44] Jaime reluctantly agreed to go to the meeting.

When Jaime left to go to the meeting, the gang followed close behind, driving like crazy to reach city hall. Once inside, Jaime and the "do-gooders" pleaded with the city commission to listen to them. Not all teenagers were delinquents, they argued, and they shouldn't be punished as though they were. The film ended with an invitation from the city commissioner who asked Jaime what he had to say. Visibly still unsure of whether he would take part in the meeting, Jaime took a deep breath, and began to speak up when a narrator's voice-over took over the scene and asked the audience: "What would you do?"

What about Juvenile Delinquency? reflected popular perceptions about teenagers and teen culture: the car as a symbol of freedom, clothing as an indicator of social status and division between the young and the old, and the menacing and tenuous relationships between adults and the young.[45] The story line followed a similar pattern to many of the other films because it focused on one juvenile delinquent in particular but deviated in significant ways. Jaime was not a sullen or lost boy; he was good-looking and seemingly popular. Jaime did not struggle to fit in—in fact, he was torn between two groups of teenagers: the ones who did right and the ones who did not. *What About Juvenile Delinquency?* clearly favored one group of kids over the other. The "do-gooders" were on the side of the law, and they demonstrated their commitment to their community by participating in a town hall meeting. But the film did not prescribe direct solutions for juvenile delinquency. Instead, it asked the audience to consider what they would do, an evident prompt for discussion in the classroom and a way for the students in the classroom to negotiate their feelings about the best behaviors.

Right or Wrong: Making Moral Decisions (1954), a Coronet film, presented a story line similar to many of the sponsored films: a teenage boy and his gang of friends got caught breaking the window of a warehouse late at night, and the audience witnessed the fallout. What distinguished classroom films from sponsored films was the expectation that the audience must come to some conclusion about the things taking place on screen. For example, before the action began, a message came across the screen that read: "Most of us think we know what is right. But do we? Here are some situations that involve moral decisions. Test yourself. Decide what you think is right—and why."[46] *Making Moral Decisions* explicitly prompted the audience to consider its interpretation of the narrative, thus initiating discussion, rather than providing a solution. In addition, the film did not explain in detail the inner workings of the social institutions that would deal with Harry, but presented them as a matter of course. Instead, the film utilized voice-overs to enter the minds of the various people involved. This included the owner of the warehouse, the boy, a family friend, the night guard who caught the boy, the boy's mother, and a police chief. Throughout the film the narrator asked the audience to consider the decisions made in the film based on their "own moral standards."[47] The audience heard the spoken words as well as the inner thoughts of each character who considers his options.

These voice-overs exacted moral negotiations from the perspective of the person on screen. When a police officer arrived at Harry's home late at night, his mother answered the door. Harry's mother, who obviously cared for her son, hesitated to give him up. The camera closed in on her face as she stood between the officer and her home. In her mind, she considered lying to the police officer and telling him that Harry was not at home: "Cover up. Say he isn't here. But if the police want him—if he's done something—I can't help him by hiding him." The use of voice-over in this film allowed the audience to hear the reasoning that each person used to make decisions about how to act. The voice-overs served as a follow-through to the initial prompt asking viewers to think about what they would do in any of these situations.

In a scene that featured a conversation between Harry and an adult friend from his church, Mr. Barker, Harry considered whether or not he should rat on his friends in the following dialogue:

"I didn't break any windows."

"But someone did. Sit down, Harry. Want something to eat? You sure? Oh, I left a note for your father. When he gets home this morning

from work he'll probably stop by. Uh. Harry. I think I know you pretty well. I think you really didn't break any windows. But we'll have a hard time proving that in court unless some of the others who were there speak up for you."

"Can't you see? I can't tell you who was there! It isn't right to squeal on your friends. You haven't got any right to ask me."

"You can sleep here tonight, Harry. I'll get a pillow and blanket."

"Aren't you going to ask me any more questions?"

"Just one: is it right to hide a lawbreaker from justice?"[48]

This encounter illustrated that Harry's behavior had implications for those around him, but did not prescribe a path to choose. For Mr. Barker, the issue of delinquency had moral implications for both Harry and himself. The impetus for curbing juvenile delinquency in sponsored films came from social organizations, while the classroom film presented juvenile delinquency as a moral dilemma that required reasoning to manage.

Why Vandalism? (1955) was one of very few social guidance films created by EBF and possessed a similar dramatized style to Coronet Instructional Films. This picture depicted three teenage vandals described by the narrator as outcasts. Jeff Turner, Don Cardive, and Ed Berger all experienced negligent home lives similar to those boys in the sponsored films. These problems of the home, according to the film, lead to boredom, and an uncontrollable desire to seek revenge against a society that consistently rejected them. The narrator of this film asserted the premise: "Wherever the natural warmth of human feeling has been turned to resentment by constant lack of affection and understanding there is danger of vandalism." This film reiterated the theme that familial and societal neglect would lead to delinquent behavior and in this case violence. It paid particular attention to Jeff Turner and revealed that in spite of his outside appearance as unloving and unkind, he had a soft side and was merely misunderstood. In the classroom, Jeff took interest in caring for the class rabbit. When asked who would help to put the animal back in its cage, Jeff volunteered excitedly. When he brought the bunny to its cage, Jeff took his time, affectionately stroked its fur, and whispered inaudibly into its ears. Jeff became so engrossed in his encounter with the class pet, that he did not notice that the class was waiting for him to rejoin them, and that the teacher had asked him a question. When Jeff finally realized his mistake, the class laughed at him, and Jeff became despondent yet again. This scene certainly invoked sympathy for him, but also revealed that Jeff yearned for affection and attention, and he was willing to take it where he could find it—even from an animal.

Back with the gang, Jeff and the boys scoffed at suggestions of group activities in which they could participate. Because they did not feel that they fit in with the group activities, they instead broke into their school late at night. They trashed the science teacher's classroom, and the situation escalated when the boys accidentally set the room ablaze. The class rabbit that Jeff had such fondness for died in the smoke and flames. In the end the boys stood before a judge who considered their case. He acknowledged that bad parenting had likely led to their vandalism, but enforced punishment for their crimes: "Before the law, you and you alone are responsible for the shocking, appalling waste you've caused." This film treated the teenagers with no less sympathy than the other films. The judge considered the other factors that might have led to these behaviors but determined that "the basic fact remains that you three boys are yourselves responsible for your acts."[49] Even in this one film that explained delinquent behavior as a result of environmental factors, the outlook placed responsibility for rehabilitation squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

In the films designed by sponsors and aired for community audiences, the message about juvenile delinquency was clear. Juvenile delinquency came about as a result of unhappy home lives and the degradation of the family. In the classroom-based films, however, this was not necessarily the case. Classroom films tended to focus more time on the negative behaviors of the teenagers on screen and less time on the motivations behind those behaviors. The films challenged the audience to use questions and discussion to determine its own stance on delinquent behaviors and activities. The provocation of discussion seemed to define this progressive form of educational film.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on a relatively overlooked aspect of mid-twentieth-century moral education. It confirms and elaborates on moral education practices described by McClellan who argued that moral education became less prevalent in the public school curriculum in the 1940s and 1950s than it had been in previous decades. However, concerns over the decline in general morality mounted during this time, and although explicit practices waned in schools, educational films still provided moral education. The films in this study exhibited qualities that reflected the two major approaches to moral education from the previous decades: character education and progressive education. Sponsored films seemed to utilize similar tactics of the character education movement. First, sponsored films exemplified the great

variety of social institutions that responded to juvenile delinquency in various ways. The sponsored films in this sample featured messages from the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National Parole and Probation Administration, The Community Chest (United Way), and the Mental Health Board of Michigan. While the contexts of these films often presented schools as one of the many places where young people could interact with others and learn good behavior, they promoted the services of their organizations explicitly. This underscores the place of social institutions outside of schools, and their role in shaping the moral education of youths. Second, the sponsors of these films used fixed notions of right and wrong to introduce codes of conduct that would guide communities and keep them safe from frightening influences of modern society. Sponsored films emphasized specific prescriptions to social problems and suggested that simple changes to the home environment, coupled with interventions from outside the home, would eradicate juvenile delinquency entirely.

The classroom films as a part of this study also adhered to notions about moral education explained by McClellan. Film in the classroom, cited as a "progressive" teaching method by its promoters, seemed to more closely align with the progressive messages about moral education than character building. Classroom films presented story lines about juvenile delinquents and drew from common ideas about youth and culture, but left the ultimate understanding of morality up to the audience. By placing the onus of discussion onto the audience, these films treated juvenile delinquency as something that could not necessarily be solved with simple codes, but through reasoning. These films provide a lens through which to understand how filmmakers interpreted the notion of progressive education. Essentially, the films suggest that progressive education was closely linked to classroom discussion, or at least that discussion in the classroom was an important component of progressive teaching methods.

Although these films seemed to utilize the approaches to moral education from previous decades, their content also suggests that there were some issues of moral education that schools gladly did not address. McClellan proposed that "cultural upheaval" shifted the focus in schools away from moral education: "Faced with other knotty problems, most notably racial division, teachers and administrators were only too happy to flee from the task of moral education."[50] These filmmakers also sidestepped social and cultural issues, and very prominently, race. All of the sixteen delinquents in the films were male, white, and most came from middle-class homes. The films possessed qualities of moral and social guidance, but avoided divisive issues. Historians have noted the ways

that popular films, such as *Blackboard Jungle*, addressed juvenile delinquency and race as intertwined, but this is something that educational filmmakers left out altogether. To be sure, this is a serious omission; however, it is not surprising given the prevalent fears of juvenile delinquency. Indeed, concerns over the youth of the nation have only ever become the concern of the public when white, suburban, middle-class families perceived intrusion and harm in their communities.[51] Ronald D. Cohen described the transference of juvenile delinquency to the suburbs as a product of the rise of consumerism: "The middle-class lifestyle, part of the rise of corporate America, also had its pitfalls. Suburban delinquency seemed increasingly menacing."[52] The films in this study exemplified that the concern over teenagers became important in a mainstream way when they threatened the white middle class.

While it is difficult to determine the extent to which teachers and communities alike used these films, it is evident that educational films hold vast potential as a valuable resource for future research. In the 1940s and 1950s the educational film industry offered portrayals of adolescents that in some ways coincided with popular portrayals of juvenile delinquency. Sponsored films addressed the inadequacy of family life, psychological factors that led to delinquency, and a multitude of ways that social and moral agencies could diminish or prevent the delinquency trend. James Gilbert described the ambivalent image of the teenager projected by American authorities and reflected in Hollywood films: "Hollywood understood that America both deplored youthful misbehavior and celebrated it."[53] Both sponsored or classroom films portrayed this ambivalence. They condemned the behaviors of delinquents through the "ever present voice of morality," yet depicted the teenagers themselves with a sympathetic tone. Educational films also followed this pattern; narration condemned youthful misbehavior while the youths portrayed on film were rarely menacing. Instead, delinquents were lonely, distraught, out of place, and in need of help. Rather than a source of "outrage," juvenile delinquency was an opportunity for reform.

NOTES

1. Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Teenagers and Teen-pics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in Popular Culture* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 58; Laurence Miller, "Juvenile Delinquency in Films During the Era of Film Noir," in *Images of Youth: Popular Culture as Educational Ideology*, eds. Michael A. Oliker and Walter Krolikowski (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 56; David M. Considine, *The Cinema of Adolescence* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1985), 155–157.

2. Doherty, *Teenagers and Teen-pics*, 58.
3. Ibid., 101.
4. Robert Brent Toplin, "Cinematic History: Where Do We Go from Here?" *The Public Historian* 25 (Summer 2003): 79–91; Adam Golub, "They Turned the School into a Jungle! How *The Blackboard Jungle* Redefined the Education Crisis in Postwar America," *Film and History* 39 (January 2009): 21–30; Jason Barnosky, "The Violent Years: Responses to Juvenile Delinquency in the 1950s," *Polity* 38 (July 2006): 314–334; Considine, *The Cinema of Adolescence*, 156; Peter Biskind, "Rebel without a Cause: Nicholas Ray in the Fifties," *Film Quarterly* 28 (Autumn 1974): 32–38; Beth McCoy, "Manager, Buddy, Delinquent: 'Blackboard Jungle's' Desegregating Triangle," *Cinema Journal* 38 (Autumn 1998): 25–39; Barbara Jane Brickman, "Riots in Girls Town: Remaking, Revising, and Redressing the Teenpic," *Journal of Film and Video* 59 (Winter 2007): 20–36.
5. James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13; William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 88; Doherty, *Teenagers and Teen-pics*, 45; Ronald D. Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History," *History of Education Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 1997): 251–270.
6. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 13.
7. Cohen, "The Delinquents," 254.
8. Larry Cuban, *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom use of Technology since 1920* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), 18.
9. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Strieble, "A History of Learning with the Lights Off," in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, eds. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Strieble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24.
10. Ibid., 20.
11. Elizabeth Ellsworth, "I Pledge Allegiance: The Politics of Reading and Using Educational Films," *Curriculum Inquiry* 21 (Spring 1991): 41–64; Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Educational Films against Critical Pedagogy," *Journal of Education* 169 (Winter 1987): 32–47; Brian J. Low, "'The New Generation': Mental Hygiene and the Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board of Canada, 1946–1967," *History of Education Quarterly* 43 (December 2003): 540–570; Richard Meran Barsam, "'This is America': Documentaries for Theaters, 1942–1951," *Cinema Journal* 12 (Spring 1973): 22–38.
12. National Probation and Parole Association, *Boy in Court* (Willard Pictures, 1940), from the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/BoyinCou1940; National Women's Christian Temperance Union, *That Boy Joe* (Chicago Film Library, 1944), from the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/ThatBoyJ1944; Irving Jacoby and Alexander Hammid, *Angry Boy* (Affiliated Film Production, 1950),

from the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/Angry_Boy; Laslo Benedek, Los Angeles Community Chest, *Boy with a Knife* (Dudley Pictures Corp., 1956), from the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/Boywitha1956

13. Geoff Alexander and Rick Prelinger, *Academic Films for the Classroom: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 101.
14. Young America Films, *Other People's Property* (Centron Corporation, 1951), from the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/0119_Other_Peoples_Property_E00939_09_45_34_10-0018; David A. Smart, *Right or Wrong: Making Moral Decisions* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1951), from the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/0122_Right_or_Wrong_Making_Moral_Decisions_E01196_12_18_34_00; Hal Kopel, *Why Vandalism?* (Encyclopedia Britannica Films, 1955), From the Prelinger Archive, MPEG video, https://archive.org/details/WhyVanda1955; Young America Films, *What about Juvenile Delinquency?* (Centron Corporation, 1955), from the Prelinger Archive, https://archive.org/details/WhatAbou1955
15. B. Edward McClellan, *Moral Education in America: Schools and the Shaping of Character from Colonial Times to Present* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 46, 72–73.
16. This viewpoint was commonly held in the fight against juvenile delinquency. See Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 47.
17. Ellsworth, "I Pledge Allegiance," 41–42; Ellsworth, "Educational Films against Critical Pedagogy," 35.
18. William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 146.
19. McClellan, *Moral Education in America*, 46, 73.
20. William Graebner described various aspects of social engineering intended to modify teenage behaviors. The YMCA offered supervised activities, for example. Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 89, 100–103.
21. James Gilbert's study of the reactions to juvenile delinquency in postwar America included the work of the branch of the federal government, the Children's Bureau (CB). The CB was a branch of the US Department of Labor created in 1920 to deal strictly with issues that affected children. In the 1940s and 1950s, the CB dealt with juvenile delinquency by recommending that supervised activities would combat the problems associated with juvenile delinquency, Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 172. For a history of the CB see Dorothy E. Bradbury, *Five Decades of Action for Children: A History of the Children's' Bureau* (Washington, DC: Children's Bureau, 1962).
22. McClellan, *Moral Education in America*, 48–49.
23. Alexander and Prelinger, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, xvii.
24. Ellsworth, "I Pledge Allegiance," 41–64; Ellsworth, "Educational Films against Critical Pedagogy," 32–47.
25. Jacoby and Hammid, *Angry Boy.*
26. National Women's Christian Temperance Union, *That Boy Joe.*

27. Ibid.
28. In 1955, the Community Chest of San Fernando Valley premiered the film *Boy with a Knife* at its 1955 annual campaign. The organization made the film available to clubs and organizations from the entire Los Angeles area through screenings in local theaters. Roscoe C. Brown, Jr. and Dan W. Dodson, "The Effectiveness of a Boys' Club in Reducing Delinquency," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 322 (March 1959): 47–52.
29. Benedek, *Boy with a Knife*.
30. Jerold Simmons, "Violent Youth: The Censoring and Public Reception of *The Wild One* and *Blackboard Jungle*," *Film History: An International Journal* 20 (2008): 381–391.
31. Willard Productions, based in Hollywood, made shorts for a variety of agencies including the 1944 film *Castaway*, produced for the US Bureau of Aeronautics.
32. National Probation and Parole Association, *Boy in Court*.
33. Ibid.
34. Paul C. Reed, "The Curriculum Clinic: Notes about Sponsored Films," *Educational Screen* 25 (January 1946): 26–27.
35. Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945–1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999), 89–98, 99–100, 107–112.
36. Alexander and Prelinger, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 4–5.
37. "Encyclopedia Britannica Films to Award Scholarships," *Educational Screen* 19 (September 1946): 370.
38. Alexander and Prelinger, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 45.
39. Ibid., 18.
40. L. C. Larson, Carolyn Guss, and John Fritz, "Evaluation of New Films," *Educational Screen and Audio-Visual Guide* 36 (5) (1957): 246.
41. McClellan, *Moral Education in America*, 48, 56. The progressive approach to moral education emphasized the importance of flexibility in meeting the new demands of society: "Progressives believed that modern society required a radically new approach to morality, and they sought to create a moral education that would meet the evolving needs of an ever-changing order."
42. Centron Corporation, *Other People's Property*.
43. Ibid.
44. Young America Films, *What about Juvenile Delinquency?*
45. Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 43–49.
46. Smart, *Right or Wrong*.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. McClellan, *Moral Education in America*, 75.
51. Paula Fass's study of youth in the 1920s demonstrated that fears over youth became less manageable and more pronounced in the 1920s when urban, middle-class youths were considered "at risk." Paula Fass, *The*

Damned and the Beautiful: Youth in the 1920s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128–129. In addition in the 1950s, in particular, the public outcry over juvenile delinquency only occurred when elements of African American culture began to seep into the white suburban neighborhoods and youth culture became distinctly different. Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 88.

52. Cohen, "The Delinquents," 255.
53. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 172.

Chapter 7

Students without a Cause: *Blackboard Jungle*, High School Movies, and High School Life

Daniel Perlstein and Leah Faw

On March 19, 1955, a new teacher, Richard Dadier, entered North Manual High School. With Dadier as the protagonist but the hoodlums he confronts making a far more vivid impression, the premiere of the movie *Blackboard Jungle* debuted now-familiar templates for American portrayals of teenagers and their schools. On the one hand, *Blackboard Jungle*'s portrayal of a new teacher restoring order to a chaotic urban school articulated adult concerns about social divisions and the control of youth. On the other, the movie celebrated the emergence of a distinct youth culture and the centrality of the high school to it. In the second narrative, the youthful pursuit of happiness trumps adult concerns.[1]

Because adolescence is a time when youth are expected to adopt the roles and values of acceptable adult behavior, adult fears and anxieties are often projected onto teens. In the years following World War II, efforts to reestablish returning GIs in the civilian economy and family life threatened, and were threatened by, women's wartime entrance into nontraditional jobs and roles. Meanwhile, declining numbers of blue-collar jobs and McCarthyite repression undermined the ability of working-class Americans to assert their interests, and growing white-collar employment in large bureaucracies threatened American notions of manhood and self-direction for more

S.G. Terzian et al. (eds.), *American Education in Popular Media*

privileged men. Finally, the mechanization of Southern agriculture, black activism, and African Americans' migration to northern cities transformed race relations. *Blackboard Jungle*'s portrayal of youth, delinquency, masculinity, and schooling was uniquely suited to capture the anxieties that arose out of American familial, economic, and political conflicts.

At the same time that *Blackboard Jungle* reflected adult concerns, it also epitomized the emergence of the teenager as a social phenomenon and identity in its own right.[2] Although much of teen culture focused on consumerism and leisure, high school played a central role in teens' lives. American high school student culture had been developing for much of the twentieth century, and by the 1930s a majority of American youth attended high school. It was only in the years after World War II, however, that the combination of economic prosperity, suburbanization, increasing exclusion of youth from adult jobs, and nearly universal high school attendance fostered the full emergence of teen culture and made the high school one of its central institutions.[3]

Although most American high schools were relatively orderly institutions, *Blackboard Jungle*'s image of chaos and violence articulated dominant Cold War anxieties. And although most American teenagers were not delinquents, images of delinquency helped even well-behaved teens make sense of high school and their place in it. By combining an examination of *Blackboard Jungle*'s ambivalent narrative with an analysis of its reception, this chapter explores the terms under which youths and adults shaped the social space and culture of the high school.

Just as *Blackboard Jungle* contains two distinct narratives, two distinct frameworks shaped accounts of high school youth. One framework focused on politics and policy: conservatives condemned schools as soft and indulgent; liberal social scientists, black lawyers, and white justices hatched the idea of school integration; and the one best system enjoyed its last hurrah. Education is the work of adults, and youth rarely enter history's center stage. In the second narrative, youth's growing affluence fuels exuberant acts of racial transgression and the emergence of a distinct youth market and culture. Here, youth make their own world, but one would barely guess that they spent a large part of their days with teachers in schools or evenings with parents at home. This way of thinking casts adults as also-rans, goofy at best and painfully out of touch at worst, in a universe presided over by teens.

Each of these views captures central aspects of American life, but taken alone is inadequate for understanding either the movie *Blackboard Jungle* or the American high school. This chapter seeks to

bring them together and, in so doing, to offer a fuller understanding of youth culture and school.

* * *

Take One: The Social Problem Film

Blackboard Jungle opens with the filmmakers' explicitly stated hope that the movie would contribute to public awareness about juvenile delinquency, "a first step toward a remedy for any problem." MGM included the disclaimer both to appease censors and out of a genuine commitment to serious social commentary.[4] As the audience reads about *Blackboard Jungle*'s policy concerns, the movie's blaring musical score—Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock"—makes manifest the threat in need of containment.

The film opens with a nicely dressed white man walking uncertainly toward North Manual High School in hopes of being hired as a teacher. A boy wolf-whistles at him; others look on suspiciously. The boys then ogle and whistle at a passing woman, their polymorphic desires barely contained by the bars of the schoolyard fence. Although the principal worries about whether the soft-spoken World War II veteran who had attended a women's college has the manliness to maintain classroom order, Dadier gets the job. His new workplace, North Manual High, a jaded veteran teacher explains to him, is a "big, fat, overflowing garbage can" full of dangerous youth. Teachers' job is to "sit on [it] and keep them in school so women for a few hours a day can walk around without getting attacked."[5] The plot of *Blackboard Jungle* tests Dadier's ability to single-handedly take on recalcitrant students, cynical fellow teachers, and school administrators.

The disaffected students in need of control are embodied in two youths. Escorting his students to their classroom on the first day of school, Dadier is confronted by a black student, Gregory Miller, and a white hoodlum leader, Artie West. Although Dadier initially encounters Miller smoking a cigarette in a student lavatory from which a pretty, blond boy has just emerged disheveled and in tears,[6] Miller's school record, Dadier speculates, reveals him to be a "natural born leader." Artie West's leadership skills, on the other hand, are manifest only in his criminal and anti-school activities and his ability to attract other youth to them. Initially representing two examples of delinquency, the youths thus come to epitomize what anthropologist Penelope Eckert has persuasively argued are the two polar identities—one middle class and deferential, the other working class and hostile

to school authorities—whose opposition structures student culture and legitimizes the sorting function of the American high school.[7]

Although set in a working-class school, *Blackboard Jungle* does not, however, trace delinquency to the social structure. After Dadier is assaulted by a group of young toughs, a police officer explains that problem kids come "from both sides of the tracks. . . . They were five or six years old in the last war, father in the army, mother in a defense plant. . . . Gang leaders have taken the place of parents." Mirroring contemporary educational films[8] and other sensationalist portrayals of youth,[9] *Blackboard Jungle* attributes delinquency to a combination of personal character and familial failings.

As he worked on *Blackboard Jungle*, writer-director Richard Brooks collected newspaper and magazine articles on juvenile delinquency. "No matter how well the principal knows that these maladjusted boys should not be in school," Brooks underlined in one article, "he has no authority to send them away."[10] Brooks' preoccupation with the control of unruly youth pervades *Blackboard Jungle*. Its most powerful images of teachers' work portray issues of "classroom management" and not questions of what and how students should learn.[11]

Dadier's campaigns to win Miller's allegiance and vanquish West are two sides of the same educational and ideological coin. In the course of *Blackboard Jungle*, Dadier overcomes his own prejudice and exemplifies liberal notions of color-blind equal treatment. When Miller despairs of making it in white America, the teacher earnestly responds: "That's not a good excuse, not any more . . . Dr. Ralph Bunche proved that." Black Americans praised filmmakers' celebration of individual effort and virtue triumphing over personal racism and social adversity. When *Blackboard Jungle* was banned in Memphis, *The Chicago Defender* mockingly explained that the city's "Dixie Censor" deemed the movie "'the vilest picture I have seen' . . . because [black actor Sidney] Poitier was a member of the cast." His character demonstrated that if given a fair chance, African Americans possessed the same ability to succeed as whites.[12]

Just as it articulates the meritocratic promise that opportunity was open to all Americans willing to pursue it, *Blackboard Jungle* depicts delinquency as a defect of character rather than a consequence of class. In the movie's climax, Dadier exposes Artie West as a self-destructive racist who is unwilling to respect legitimate authority. When West attacks Dadier with a knife, the teacher outfights the young thug. Won over to their teacher's side, the good students use the pole holding the American flag to impale West's sidekick.

In the 1950s, *Blackboard Jungle* was not unique in its preoccupation with juvenile delinquency. Congressional investigations, FBI reports, and countless newspaper and magazine articles all urged Americans to confront an imagined epidemic of out-of-control youth. *Blackboard Jungle*'s portrayal of delinquency, film critic Peter Biskind argues, reflected Cold War liberalism's sophisticated strategy of social control. Just as Dadier won the loyalty of the majority of his students while banning a few incorrigibles, McCarthy-era America banned radical labor organizers while granting domesticated unions a place in state-sanctioned labor-management relations.[13] "A youngster" seeing *Blackboard Jungle*, Screen Actor Guild President Ronald Reagan assured a US Senate committee investigating delinquency, "would have to have a feeling of disgust for the boys who were on the wrong side of the fence."[14]

If, however, *Blackboard Jungle* espoused the ideology of the Cold War, it did little to articulate a vision of a vital liberal, democratic center in which state institutions mitigated the problems created by a capitalist economy while enabling marginalized individuals to integrate into America's cultural, political, and economic mainstream.[15] Educators were particularly critical of the movie. Samuel Gompers Vocational and Technical High School principal Edward Wallen charged that in forty years' work in the New York City schools he had never seen students "remotely resembling" those in *Blackboard Jungle*.[16] The portrayal of teachers as vulgar, racist, and poorly educated disturbed humorist and former New York City high school teacher Sam Levenson "even more than the gross distortions and vicious portraits of the student body."[17] Reviewing the movie in the official journal of the New York City secondary schools, Ruth Goldstein also took issue with the portrayal of Dadier's colleagues as "(without exception) dupes, cynics, boors, or fools."[18]

Few groups were more committed to the liberal celebration of schooling than New York's teachers. Teaching not only offered a career path to the middle class, it epitomized the beneficent role of government in promoting individual opportunity, reason, and social harmony. In reducing teachers and students, with the exceptions of Dadier and Miller, to brutes, *Blackboard Jungle* left the impression that public institutions were incapable of fostering a more rational and inclusive society. In response, school officials invited groups of students and suburban superintendents to tour Bronx Vocational High School, where *Blackboard Jungle* author Evan Hunter had spent seventeen days as a substitute teacher and which was the supposed model for North Manual High. They confirmed that the institution was a well-ordered and effective school, free of chaos, vandalism, or racial

tension. Indeed, rebutting one of the movie's most sensational scenes in which frenzied boys smash a teacher's jazz records for the sheer thrill of destruction, the visitors reported that after a teacher played his Tchaikovsky records in class, the students politely "asked for another chance in the future" to listen to them.[19]

Like educators' claim that marginalized students' capacity to appreciate European classical music constituted proof that schools could educate them, *Blackboard Jungle*, as historian Leerom Medovoi observes, contrasted an all-white exemplary high school with the multiracial gang of delinquents. In the movie as in life, integration was equated with the accommodation of whiteness.[20]

In the 1950s, the failure of the schools to live up to educators' professed ideology began to provoke widespread protest among civil rights activists.[21] Teachers and school officials responded to charges of racism by seeking to deflect attention to the misbehavior and cognitive deficits of black students. Like *Blackboard Jungle*'s creators, educators echoed segregationist equations of integration and disorder, generating a white supremacist subcurrent even within integrationist discourse. Ironically, then, *Blackboard Jungle* shared with the teachers it caricatured a vision of formal equality too limited to make that promise real.[22]

Blackboard Jungle's treatment of gender was also shaped by ambivalence. Like wider concerns about delinquency, the movie centered on young men. Anxieties about masculinity were not a mere metaphor for the Cold War. From its intentionally homoerotic opening to the attempted rape of a teacher in the school library and Artie West's harassment of Dadier's wife, attacks on patriarchal authority suffused the movie. The sexually charged scenes were carefully planned. As the Evan Hunter novel on which the film was based makes clear, the suggestion that teacher Lois Hammond would take "care of the senior boys" was a deliberate sexual innuendo.[23]

Filmmaker Richard Brooks highlighted homoerotic elements from the original text and added others, such as the boys dancing together at the beginning of the movie. "In order to avoid a suggestion of a pansy gag," head Hollywood censor Joseph Breen urged unsuccessfully that the boys "not whistle at Dadier as one does to a girl."[24] Such scenes, Brooks responded, were "really necessary."[25]

The gender anxieties portrayed in *Blackboard Jungle* pervaded Cold War America. Despite expanding female labor force participation, the years following World War II saw the marriage rate rise, the marriage age decline, and the Baby Boom boom—developments that were widely celebrated by opinion-makers. By "fulfill[ing] their

domestic roles," one Ford Foundation study of "successful families" argued, women could "rear children who would avoid juvenile delinquency, stay in school, and become future scientists and experts to defeat the Russians."[26]

No less than film- and policy-makers, social scientists associated delinquency with boys' familial conflict and emasculating schools, rather than with social inequality. Sociologist Talcott Parsons traced young men's difficulties to a "defense against feminine identification," required by work and family structures that removed adult males from boys' lives and left them at the mercy of lower-class or "suburban matriarchy."[27] For girls, Edgar Friedenberg presumed, school "was not a source of difficulty."[28] "Our youth troubles are boy troubles," Paul Goodman wrote in *Growing Up Absurd*. It was they who were "disaffected from the dominant society"[29] and their bureaucratically regulated lives within schools. Caught between the remnants of New Deal liberal activism, McCarthy-era attacks on social melioration through government action, and the contradictions of postwar masculinity, *Blackboard Jungle*'s cinematic portrayal of schools inevitably manifest the ambiguities of both the era and its subjects.

Blackboard Jungle continues to offer the model for a seemingly unending stream of films in which a novice teacher enters a school and wins over recalcitrant ghetto youth. This well-worn plot echoes in subsequent movies like *Conrack*; *To Sir, with Love*; *Lean on Me*; *Stand and Deliver*; *Dangerous Minds*; and *Freedom Writers*. They, too, portray the struggles of an unsullied outsider, armed only with idealism and force of character, to rescue poor black and Latino students from incompetent and uncaring teachers and mind-numbingly oppressive institutions.[30] Typically, convincing the youth to "do school" figures far more prominently than questions of what and how such youth might most profitably learn.[31] The remakes thus continue to pair ambiguous aspirations for marginalized youth with a suggestion that schools are too bureaucratic, broken, and inured to the status quo to be repaired from the inside. Their remedy remains a rebel teacher like Dadier, willing to bend a few rules and reassert command over the chaotic space of the classroom.

* * *

Take Two: The Teenpic

While the creators of *Blackboard Jungle* went out of their way to convince the censors and adult audiences that they were creating a social problem film, the exuberant energy of Artie West and the other

delinquents stole the show. Dadier's triumph was "a bitter and superficial solution to the problem at hand," *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther lamented: the "terrifying notion of the un-discipline and rebelliousness of slum-area youth and the almost complete inability on the part of teachers to handle them." The result was a "blood-curdling, nightmarish picture of monstrous disorder."[32]

Others denouncing the movie included the Girl Scouts, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the American Association of University Women, and the Communist Labor Youth League. *Blackboard Jungle* was banned in Atlanta, Memphis, other large US markets, and deemed unfit for youth in Britain and Japan. Lest the world get the wrong ideas of America's youth, the US State Department blocked the film from being screened at the 1955 Venice Film Festival.[33]

Critics were more apt to view the movie as nihilistic rather than as red. Following *Blackboard Jungle*'s statement of concern about delinquency, the movie showed boys in the schoolyard jitterbugging in pairs to the opening musical score. If the scene suggested delinquency as a social problem, it highlighted the irrepressible exuberance of youth.

The very qualities that critics lamented, marketers loved. Radio ads featured "Rock Around the Clock." One newspaper ad promised: "A teacher . . . indiscreet enough to wear a tight skirt . . . in this big-city school where tough teen-agers ran wild!" Another blared: "They brought their jungle code into the school!" TV ads featured the rape scene and Artie West lunging at his teacher with a knife. Movie trailers promised a "brass-knuckle punch" from "teen-age savages who turn big city schools into a clawing jungle."[34] According to *Variety*, the US government's campaign against *Blackboard Jungle* helped make the movie "one of the mostly highly publicized films in the worldwide market."[35]

The marketers were right. Even as it troubled critics, *Blackboard Jungle* electrified teen audiences, and paved the way for scores of films to come. At test screenings, teenagers responded to the movie's opening scene by dancing in the aisles. In Rochester, "young hoodlums cheered the beatings and methods of terror inflicted upon a teacher." Teens exploded out of theaters in Hartford and Birmingham. In Buffalo, a radio DJ incited what police labeled "a demonstration" by playing "Rock Around the Clock" and asking listeners to honk outside his station's studios. Newspapers reported that in Minneapolis, teenagers "danced through the downtown and smashed windows after seeing the film."[36] MGM worried that the film, released only ten

months after the US Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, would fare poorly in the South, but it was as popular there as in the rest of the country. Efforts to ban the film, as Jerold Simmons notes, "only seemed to enhance its appeal," helping make it the top-grossing movie in America at that time.[37]

On the surface, it might seem that there was little in *Blackboard Jungle* for most teens to identify with, especially white, middle-class teens with no working knowledge of a switchblade. But moralizing critics were not entirely wrong to assume middle-class white youth would be seduced by the film's lower-class hoods.[38] The very effort to represent authority in *Blackboard Jungle* helped create a language with which it could be critiqued, and adult projections of juvenile delinquency took on a life of their own. "We wanted to be tough like those kids in that picture," a fourteen-year-old Memphis girl explained after she and five friends set fire to a fairgrounds cattle barn.[39] "I was 16 years old and went to see it three times just to make sure I had my 'bad' attitude right!" journalist Nancy Hardin recalled. By appropriating portrayals of delinquency for their own stylized attempts at transgression, teens, in Hardin's words, made *Blackboard Jungle* "our movie."[40]

Still, it was a special kind of delinquent that appealed to mainstream youth. In explaining why he hijacked a truck, Artie West scoffs that if he lived by the rules, "the army comes by and they say, 'OK, Artie West, you get in a uniform and you be a soldier and you save the world and get your lousy head blowed right off.'" Even for the juvenile robber, the universal threat of nuclear annihilation and not poverty or conditions in American cities causes delinquency. Artie, it turns out, is more Holden Caulfield than Murder, Inc.

Blackboard Jungle contrasts the delinquents with model scholars at an affluent school. Whatever its utility in the social problem film, the comparison fails in the teenpic. With "The Star Spangled Banner" being sung in the background, we see insipid, well-scrubbed students compliantly learning Latin by rote, the boys in jackets and ties. The scene was inserted to appease censors and preclude Communist agitators from citing the movie as an indictment of America's public schools, but these students are lifeless and unconvincing mannequins.[41] Their phoniness only reinforced youthful viewers' identification with the delinquents' vitality. The movie even undermines Dadier's subjugation of West by accompanying it with the reprise of its joyous, subversive theme song.

Cultural theorists have argued that subcultures deemed deviant elicit a twin reaction of repression and appropriation from the

dominant society.[42] Even as it portrayed repression, *Blackboard Jungle*'s youthful rebelliousness served "to sanitize delinquency and praise youth culture as good clean fun."[43] Such a portrayal appealed to affluent youth. According to *The New York Times*, in response to the movie, a thousand Princeton University undergraduates "poured from the dormitories," staging a "mild uprising." Princeton's rioting *Blackboard Jungle* fans, *The Times* assured readers, "milled around the street in a good-natured mood. . . . There were no injuries or property damage."[44] Similarly, as Dick Hebdige notes, when the movie opened in London, "Britain witnessed its first rock riot. . . . Teddy boys and girls jived in the aisles. Those expelled from the cinema vented their rage on a tea-stall situated on the pavement outside. Cups and saucers were thrown about. It was a very English riot. It represented a new convergence: trouble-as-fun, fun-as-trouble."[45] As social theorist Adam Yauch has suggested, youth's fight for their right to party constituted as much a distraction from political engagement as an expansion of the political struggle to the cultural sphere.[46]

Whereas social problem analysis distinguished mainstream from marginalized students, in a teenpic, youth-culture framework, lower-class hoodlums expressed the wider desires of teens. Social changes in the 1950s facilitated this identification. As blue-collar jobs disappeared from American cities, working-class young men stayed in school. By the end of the 1950s, more than four-fifths of youths aged fourteen to seventeen years attended high school.[47] But high school, in the words of Eric Schneider, offered working-class young men "few legitimate means for establishing a masculine identity" such as those older generations found in factory work or World War II soldiering.[48] "Lower class youngsters," Edgar Friedenberg observed in his classic 1959 study of adolescence, "are continually subject to intense disparagement in school and society that demand of them skills they have had no opportunity to acquire and that punish them for the kind of behavior that formerly brought them prestige."[49]

For the vast majority of delinquents, however, peer relationships were not the source of their troubles. Schools, researchers Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck found, had treated youth who became delinquent differently from those who did not. Rather than "arous[ing] socially acceptable ambitions," they enhanced "the development of antisocial attitudes and defiance of all authority."[50] Finding that delinquency declined significantly during the summer months, researcher William Kvaraceus echoed that "children are often less frustrated when out of the range of the school's influence."[51]

The problem of alienation was not unique to lower-class youth. Class- and gender-based complaints highlighted wider grievances. Monotonous school routines serving competition for grades, as Ralph Banay argued in *Youth in Despair*, seemed designed to produce "the frustrations inherent in trying, but failing, to meet standardized requirements."[52] With its hall passes, cigarette bans, dress codes, and phalanxes of disciplinarians monitoring student behavior, the high school, Edgar Friedenberg observed, "devoted itself to the interests of uniformity more than to individuality. . . . School today is less a stew pot than a blender." This prolonged sentence left youth battered, bleak, and drained of brilliance.[53]

Still, high school also afforded teens something like autonomy. Relatively unsupervised spaces—hallways, bathrooms, lunchrooms—provided alienated students with opportunities to recover identities lost in the classroom.[54] As historian John Rury notes, the campaign of 1950s educational reformers such as James Conant to develop "larger high schools, with greater numbers of students and psychological distance between adolescents and adults, may have abetted the development of [a] school-based youth culture."[55]

The attributes celebrated in high school culture, sociologist James Coleman observed in a 1957–1958 study, included athletic ability, knowing how to dance, owning a car, and having a "good reputation." (Academic success was relatively unimportant.)[56] High school cliques seemed to offer students freedom to find their own niche, but the attributes required for membership in the leading high school crowd inevitably left countless students, even those who were not delinquent, with feelings of exclusion,[57] feelings reflected in students' identification with *Blackboard Jungle*'s delinquent outsiders.

Both the juvenile gang and the middle-class youth subculture, remarks historian Joseph Kett, stood "poised between conventionality and unconventionality."[58] "One of the peculiar characteristics of the 1950s," sociologist Wini Breines has observed, "was that fun-loving conformist teens existed side-by-side with disaffected teens—the delinquents, hoods, and beatniks who loomed much larger in the cultural and psychic life of America than their numbers might suggest."[59] For the vast majority of students who obeyed the rules and generally "did school,"[60] imitations of rebellion became a way of signaling a mild form of autonomy, like wearing heterodox socks to protest one's school uniform. If obedience is the fundamental curriculum of high school, increasingly delinquency was the play of youth, the small rebellions that embellished an ethos of conformity.

Like the institution of the high school, youth culture drew on changes in the wider American economy. The prosperity of the post-World War II years granted teenagers unprecedented discretionary income. The average teen had four times more spending money in 1958 than in 1944,[61] and increasingly entertainment, clothing, and other industries targeted young consumers. Meanwhile, Hollywood was threatened by television viewing and a 1948 Supreme Court decision that broke up the studio film distribution monopoly. While Federal Communications Commission (FCC) guidelines restricted television producers to wholesome, "family friendly" shows, films had more leeway. The studios responded by targeting specific audiences with specific genres such as the teenpic.[62]

Before its use in the movie, "Rock Around the Clock" had generated little notice. Because of *Blackboard Jungle*, the song became the anthem of youth culture and the biggest hit in the history of rock 'n' roll. The movie was not the first to portray a teen rebel, but, as music critic Greil Marcus notes, it was only with *Blackboard Jungle* that the "connections between rock and roll, teenage rebellion, juvenile delinquency, and other assorted horrors were made explicit."[63] As Elayne Rapping notes, with adult life increasingly privatized in the suburbs, "the life of young people [was displaced] from the larger community of adult concerns and responsibilities."[64] As they "identified themselves as a self-conscious and rebellious social group," writes George Lipsitz, young rock 'n' roll fans began "an unprecedented crossing of racial and class lines."[65] "Bill Haley was playing the teenage national anthem," Frank Zappa would recall of the movie's opening scene, "and he was LOUD. I was jumping up and down. *Blackboard Jungle*, not even considering that it had the old people winning in the end, represented a strange 'endorsement' of the teenage cause."[66]

Despite being bested by Dadier's paternal hand in *Blackboard Jungle*'s denouement, West lost little of his allure, built up through a long series of tough actions and diffident remarks. Though Miller is the ostensible role model of the film, his assimilation feels compelled. While both Miller and West follow formulaic paths, West is more in control of his failure than Miller is of his success, making him far more appealing to teens in search of agency within the confines of the high school and the market.

As with social problem films, *Blackboard Jungle*'s teenpic sired a line of movies in which teachers and other adults may be kind, comic, or cruel but in any case are marginal to teens' high school life. In hijinks-filled romps like *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, or *10 Things I Hate About You*, adults are laughable

buffoons, caricatures of grown-ups who act as foils to the teen-driven main action. Disconnected from the demands of adult life, teen culture, in these movies, is the stuff of play and comedy rather than drama. And even in teenpics with a heavier tone like *Pump Up the Volume, The Breakfast Club*, or *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, rebellion and angst take place in a universe populated and propelled almost entirely by youth. Although some sort of misbehavior is necessary in this genre, the teen protagonists tend toward white and affluent, and "youthful indiscretions" serve as steps in development. They too are largely free of the consequences one would face in adult life.

Easily derided as sales-driven, pop-scored, wish-fulfilling fluff where the guy gets the girl or the girl gets the guy, college acceptance is attained, and parents slink helpfully into the background, the teenpic captures something essential about the pains and possibilities of youth.

* * *

Take Three: Remaking the Blackboard Jungle

In the end, *Blackboard Jungle* is not two distinct movies, but an effort to reconcile the two. The film concludes, as Beth McCoy suggests, neither with Dadier's domestic and professional triumph nor with the reprise of the theme song, "Rock Around the Clock," but rather with both mixed together in an "unsettling ambivalence."[67]

The movie was ambivalent because the conflicts it portrayed between adults and youth also exist within each group. Tensions—at the heart of America's liberal democratic order[68] itself—between the individual and the group, between the call to get along and the call to get ahead, were built into the very structure of the large, comprehensive high school. As James Conant argued, by creating a setting in which "youth of very different backgrounds and outlooks share a common experience," this particularly American approach to schooling "provide[d] a basis for growth of mutual understanding between different cultural, religious, and occupational groups" and thus "nourish[ed] the spirit of democratic unity." However, the comprehensive high school could still track youth into vastly different futures. Even as it minimized "class distinctions," Conant claimed, "within this one school there can and must be differentiation of courses of study."[69]

Even as Dadier attempts to domesticate his charges, *Blackboard Jungle* suggests that he is composed of Miller and West in equal measure. As much as he urges Miller to find his opportunity through

school, he rides into North Manual more like Shane than Mr. Chips. In an era that witnessed the invention of the Marlboro Man and the golden age of the Hollywood Western, Dadier, like Artie West, seeks his masculinity in opposition to the public as it is represented by the school.[70] The Hollywood gunfighter hero, as historian Richard Slotkin suggests, "devalues 'democracy' as an instrument of progress and declares that the only effective instrument for constructive historical action is a gun [or, one might add, a stick of chalk] in the hands of the right man."[71] Epitomizing the gunfighter, Dadier urges Miller to avail himself of the opportunity afforded by schooling, but by suggesting that educational success is only possible by bucking the system and going it alone, Dadier undermines the very institution through which Miller is expected to advance.

Just as *The Blackboard Jungle* reflected the contradictions of Cold War liberalism, the movie and its reception represented the contradictions of American youth culture. Like all subcultures, youth culture reflects as well as challenges the dominant one. While mass marketing broadcast formerly submerged voices, rebelliousness rarely threatened the marketing mechanisms that spread rock, and celebrations of universal youth culture did not preclude the racial and class sorting of youth.[72]

Capitalist relations and political ambiguities pervade the rebelliousness of *Blackboard Jungle* and the youth culture that embraced it. Sometimes, youth culture appropriations of such hallmarks of delinquency as rock 'n' roll and working-class clothing were accompanied by real acts of political contestation, but it was just as likely that Marlon Brando would morph into the Fonz. At the very moment when the assimilationist racial liberalism epitomized by the 1954 *Brown* decision was becoming America's official language of race relations, migration of blacks and, in New York, Puerto Ricans, to American cities, together with the movement of urban whites to segregated suburbs, intensified racial stratification in metropolitan schools. Hollywood and teen culture invocations of the jungle's allure suggested a racist ethos that buying records by Pat Boone, Elvis, or Frankie Lymon could not transcend.[73]

In combining differentiated courses of study with a common core curriculum and institutional structure, historian John Rury suggests, the comprehensive high school of the 1950s mirrored the tensions between commonality and stratification within the wider society.[74] High schools encouraged youth to participate actively in the reconciliation of these contradictory claims. If school was a Panopticon, it was an oddly constructed one. It combined surveillance, judgment, and

the degrading regulation of student behavior with the appearance of autonomy and free choice.

The hidden curriculum in race, class, and gender relations extended well beyond academic tracking. High school sports, as sociologist William Bielby argues, attempted to win youth

> to a value system that emphasizes not just teamwork but also unequal status and rewards, hierarchy, and competition. . . . This value system is then incorporated, in modified form, into the teens' own informal peer groups and status hierarchies. . . . The peer group value system that emerges is one that is formed and sustained largely in accord with, rather than in opposition to, the dominant value system.[75]

And yet, this value system was not unilaterally imposed on youth. Teenagers, to paraphrase E. P. Thompson, were present at their own creation.[76] While rock 'n' roll may have played at transgression, a 1957 survey found that Illinois high school students preferred Pat Boone to Elvis Presley by a two to one margin, a rate that held true for both boys and girls.[77] For high school students, as for adults, the challenge was not to choose between Miller and West, but to figure out how to combine the two.

Moreover, the bad boy energies of Artie West and his friends confirmed some hierarchies even as he challenged others. High school culture reproduced conventional gender roles and relations, especially among young women. A 1955–1956 survey of girls in grades 6–12 found that plans for further education and work remained vague in deference to the "feminine goals of marriage and motherhood."[78] A few years later, girls delivered the same message to anthropologist Jules Henry. Said one sixteen-year-old: "One of my biggest problems is to keep my mind on my homework. I go steady and have for two years. My boyfriend and I plan on marriage after I graduate." Said another: "It's very hard to turn aside social activities to get my homework done. It seems as though we go to school until we reach around 21 or 22 and then . . . get married and raise a family. . . . All this [school] work doesn't really get us anywhere, it seems."[79] One could, it turns out, rebel against school while accommodating its gender roles and heterosexual regime.[80]

Preoccupation with being popular did not divorce students from the values of the wider society. High school youth, sociologist James Coleman argued, "look very much to their peers for approval" but "are still oriented toward fulfilling their parents' desires."[81] If *Blackboard Jungle* was the archetypal cinematic expression of high

school, *Catcher in the Rye* was its quintessential literary expression. Salinger's novel, as David Castronovo argues, displayed "an idiom and an attitude of its own, something that made young people newly aware of themselves." Ironically, however, *Catcher* became one of the stalwarts of the high school curriculum. As much as youth rebelled against adult culture, that very rebellion resonated with adults.[82]

* * *

CONCLUSION: HIGH SCHOOL IN FILM AND LIFE

There is an old joke. A grandfather is pushing a stroller down the street. A woman stops him:

> "What a beautiful baby!"
> "You think the baby's beautiful?" he responds. "You should see the pictures."

Same thing with high school. Even for those who have been through it, media images have a power that can transcend and transform mere reality. "America created the teenager in its own image," as Thomas Hine argues, "brash, unfinished, ebullient, idealistic, crude, energetic, innocent, greedy, changing in all sorts of unsettling ways."[83] Classmates like Miller or West and teachers like Dadier do much to shape Americans' experience and memories of high school.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, as leading schoolman Ellwood Cubberley noted, American life was defined by the growing "concentration of capital and business enterprises" and with it a growing division of labor and declining possibility of social mobility. Economic changes not only hardened class divisions but also drove children and youth out of the workplace, a trend manifest in post-World War II high school attendance. Once they gave "up the exceedingly democratic idea that all are equal, and that our society is devoid of classes," schools could efficiently prepare youth for their inevitable futures while "instilling into all a social and political consciousness . . . as opposed to class consciousness . . . that will lead to unity amid diversity."[84] Americans widely resisted the Cubberleyan suggestion that the United States was a plutocracy or caste society, even as they lived in a Cubberleyan economic order. As an institution which simultaneously brought together youth of different backgrounds and sorted them into different futures, high school had the impossible job of harmonizing the contradictions of liberal democracy in capitalist America.

Lacking the economic basis for real autonomy, nostalgic Americans searched to recreate it. They turned in the postwar years to a kind of self-actualization offered by renowned child-care expert Dr. Benjamin Spock. Give children "the feeling that they are free to set their own aims and occupations in life according to their own inclination," he urged.[85] Youth found much the same feeling in teen culture and high school. As they "danced to the music of Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and the Comets, Jerry Lee Lewis, and many others whose music permeated the airwaves," historian Paula Fass argues, "American adolescents were expressing their irritation at parental [and, one might add, high school] restrictions on their freedom." Rock and roll, Fass concludes, "was a substitute for real autonomy, a realm of free expression that grew up to siphon off the desire for other kinds of independence. Music was a symptom of the tightening and lengthening of parent [and, one might add, high school] controls over children's lives."[86] Dreams of recovering lost freedom, as historian Grace Elizabeth Hale suggests, led to a widespread belief "that people somehow marginal to society possess cultural resources and values missing among other Americans."[87] Stylized celebrations of delinquency epitomized high school students' urge to be free.

Still, youth culture, like the wider American culture, could pull in contradictory directions. Denim overalls became the uniform of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activists battling Jim Crow in its most entrenched locales. Youth culture fostered the rebirth of pacifism, feminism, and new freedom in sexual mores. By the late 1960s, high school students across America took up Artie West's cause en masse. In the fall of 1968 a group of disaffected students launched *New York High School Free Press* with press runs of ten thousand copies. "The main thing that's taught us in school," wrote editor Howie Swerdloff, "is how to be good niggers, obey the rules, dress in our uniforms, play the game." Adult authority, the paper's Reggie Lucas argued, "is not just undesirable, but repugnant to us. The real hero today is the person who can mess up the society and pervert the youth."[88]

And yet anti-institutionalism could cut many ways. "Everybody was my boss," gang leader Carl Joyeaux, Jr. recollected of his school days, "or acted as if they were. Somebody took it upon himself to give me orders from the moment I woke up in the morning until I fell asleep at night." In response, Joyeaux and his friends "stomp[ed]" classmates before lunch not "so much for the money, as for the bang out of seeing kids fade away when we appeared."[89] Even as they constituted an oppressed youth's agentic cry, Joyeaux's aggressions, like

those of the boys portrayed in *Blackboard Jungle*, reinforced the punitive apparatus of the schools and promoted the sorting of students by social class. "Bad boys," rebelling against schools' confinement and oppressive regime, were easily labeled and punished as troublemakers, creating a self-fulfilling identity that reinforced both the status quo social hierarchy and the schools' use of force.

Finally, if *Blackboard Jungle*'s portrayal of teen rebellion heralded the young activist educators' participation in movements to transform ghetto schools into liberatory institutions and to reshape American life, it also prefigured Teach-For-America reliance of heroic individuals and noblesse oblige. And in contrasting Dadier's heroism with the corruptness of the public school in which he worked, *Blackboard Jungle* foreshadowed the privatization and outsourcing of recreational programs, nutrition services, and even core academic functions decades before these "neoliberal" reforms became common.[90] Dadier the outsider, the lone gunslinger, is a potent herald of the neoliberal argument that career teachers and overburdened central bureaucracies have neither the will nor the capacity to reform schools and create change.

Academic, economic, social, and psychological pressures on high school youth have not dissipated since the 1950s.[91] *Blackboard Jungle* captured central tensions of the high school and teen life: of universal teen culture and social differentiation, of reproduction and rebellion, of authenticity and marketing, of demands for childish deference and adult responsibility. The film continues to set the dominant pattern for American school movies because the tensions it reflects pervade the lives of Americans young and old, shapes conflicts between them, and remains central to American high schools and social life.

NOTES

1. Portions of this chapter appeared in Daniel Perlstein, "Imagined Authority: *Blackboard Jungle* and the Project of Educational Liberalism," *Paedagogica Historica* 36 (2000): 409–425.
2. Ernest Smith, *American Youth Culture; Group Life in Teenage Society* (New York: Free Press, 1962).
3. Already in the 1920s, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd observed that high school "with its athletics, clubs, sororities and fraternities, dances and parties, and other 'extra curricular activities' is a fairly complete social cosmos in itself." Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1929), 211.
4. James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 182.

5. Censors insisted that "attacked" replace the more charged "raped" in the script. Joseph Breen to Dore Schary, September 20, 1954, Motion Picture of America Association (MPAA) Production Code Administration Case File, "Blackboard Jungle," Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood, CA.
6. Censors noted the scene's "unsavoriness." Breen to Schary, September 20, 1954.
7. Penelope Eckert, *Jock & Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989).
8. See Amy Martinelli's chapter, "Fears on Film: Representations of Juvenile Delinquency in Educational Media in Mid-Twentieth-Century America," in this volume.
9. Benjamin Fine, *1,000,000 Delinquents* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957).
10. Agnes Meyer, "Schoolboy Racketeers," 1954, 37, Juvenile Delinquency File, Richard Brooks Papers, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood, CA.
11. In response to the growing presence of black students in New York schools, principals would soon receive almost unfettered power to exclude children they deemed disruptive. Rachel Lissy, "'Young Man, You Get Out of Here': Producing the Discipline Gap in New York City, 1955–1970," Ph.D. Diss., University of California Berkeley, 2014.
12. "'Blackboard Jungle' Banned," *New York Times* (March 29, 1955), 33.
13. Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 205. Scholars debate whether delinquency rates actually changed or reporting rates increased. Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic, 1996), 161; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 66–71; William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 87.
14. United States Senate, *Juvenile Delinquency (Motion Pictures): Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee of the Judiciary, June 15–18, 1955* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955), 94.
15. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).
16. Edward Wallen to Editor, *New York Times* (April 3, 1955), II, 5.
17. Sam Levenson, "Teachers and *The Blackboard Jungle*," *High Points* 36 (June 1955): 32.
18. Ruth Goldstein, "The Blackboard Jungle," *High Points* 37 (May 1955): 58.
19. Leonard Buder, "2 Reports Clear School in Bronx: Educators and Pupils, After Visits," *New York Times* (July 17, 1955), 39.
20. Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
21. Daniel Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 3.

22. Lissy, "Young Man, You Get Out of Here"; Christina Collins, *"Ethnically Qualified": Race, Merit, and the Selection of Urban Teachers, 1920–1980* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011). Although a black character was *Blackboard Jungle*'s best-behaved student, Southern lawmakers invoked the movie to justify new juvenile delinquency laws used to combat civil rights activism. In Birmingham over one thousand black high school activists were suspended or expelled as delinquents. Anders Walker, "'Blackboard Jungle': Delinquency, Desegregation, and the Cultural Politics of 'Brown'," *Columbia Law Review* 110 (2010): 1945; Robin D. G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 90–91.
23. Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 35.
24. *Blackboard Jungle*, script, version of August 19, 1954, 1, Brooks Papers; Breen to Schary, September 20, 1954.
25. Richard Brooks, *Blackboard Jungle* script, version of September 2, 1954, file 16, Brooks Papers.
26. Elaine Tyler May, "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 163.
27. Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960), 49–52.
28. Edgar Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent* (Boston: Beacon, 1964 [1959]), 92.
29. Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 11, 13.
30. See Amy Stuart Wells and Todd Serman, "Education Against All Odds: What Films Teach Us About Schools," in *Imaging Education: The Media and Schools in America*, ed. Gene Maeroff (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 181–194; and William Ayers, "A Teacher Ain't Nothin' but a Hero: Teachers and Teaching in Film," in *Images of Schoolteachers in Twentieth-Century America*, 2nd ed., eds. Pamela Joseph and Gail Burnaford (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001), 201–210.
31. Denise Pope, *Doing School* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).
32. Bosley Crowther, "The Screen: 'Blackboard Jungle'," *New York Times* (March 21, 1955), 21; Bosley Crowther, "The Exception or the Rule?" *New York Times* (March 27, 1955), II, 1.
33. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 185; Arthur Hornblow, "'Jungle' Furor," *New York Times* (September 11, 1955), X7.
34. Dan Leopard, "'Blackboard Jungle': The Ethnographic Narratives of Education on Film," *Cinema Journal* 46 (2007): 25, 38.
35. Jerold Simmons, "Violent Youth: The Censuring and Public Reception of 'The Wild One' and 'The Blackboard Jungle'," *Film History* 20 (2008): 390.

36. Amanda Klein, *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 116.
37. Simmons, "Violent Youth," 388; Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 5–6.
38. Concern about black or working-class teens being corrupted was noticeably absent.
39. Leerom Medovoi, "Reading the Blackboard Jungle: Youth, Masculinity, and Racial Cross-Identification," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, eds. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 139.
40. Nancy Hardin, "*Blackboard Jungle* Was Our Movie," http://nancyhardin.hubpages.com/hub/blackboard-jungle-was-our-movie (accessed October 27, 2014).
41. Pandro Berman to Dore Schary, January 13, 1955, Post-Production file, Brooks Papers.
42. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), xv.
43. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 195.
44. "Rioters at Princeton," *New York Times* (May 19, 1955), 31; "Princeton Suspends 4," *New York Times* (May 21, 1955), 37.
45. Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 30.
46. Terry Gross, Interview with Adam Yauch, *Fresh Air* (March 29, 2006), http://www.npr.org/2011/05/06/136019762/the-fresh-air-interview-the-beastie-boys (accessed June 12, 2014).
47. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice*, 20; David Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890–1995* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 203.
48. Eric Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 24–25.
49. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 75.
50. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Delinquents in the Making: Paths to Prevention* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 70, 76.
51. W. C. Kvaraceus, "Delinquency—A By-Product of the School?" *School and Society* 59 (1944): 351.
52. Ralph Banay, *Youth in Despair* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1948), 53–54.
53. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, xii, 45; Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1956). *Howl* was the subject of an obscenity trial prosecuted by San Francisco juvenile delinquency authorities. Joel Black, "Ferlinghetti on Trial: The *Howl* Court Case and Juvenile Delinquency," *Boom* 2 (Winter 2012): 30.
54. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 60–70, 110.

55. John Rury, "Educating Urban Youth: James Conant and the Changing Context of Metropolitan America, 1945–1995," *American Educational Research Association*, 1999, 1, 10–11, 14.
56. James Coleman, *Adolescents and the Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 19.
57. Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 132.
58. Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic, 1977), 263.
59. Breines, *Young, White and Miserable*, 129–131.
60. Pope, *Doing School.*
61. Robert Hampel, *The Last Little Citadel, American High Schools Since 1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 82.
62. Palladino, *Teenagers*, 110; Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers & Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988).
63. Greil Marcus, "Rock Films," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*, ed. Jim Miller (New York: Random House, 1980), 390.
64. Elayne Rapping, "Hollywood's Youth Cult Films," *Cinéaste* 16 (1987–1988): 14–15.
65. George Lipsitz, "Land of a Thousand Dances: Youth, Minorities, and the Rise of Rock and Roll," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 267–268.
66. Medovoi, *Rebels*, 135.
67. Beth McCoy, "Manager, Buddy, Delinquent: 'Blackboard Jungle's' Desegregating Triangle," *Cinema Journal* 38 (1998): 36.
68. Envisioning both individual autonomy and collective self-determination, the liberal democracy rests on the claim that there exists no contradiction between capitalism and democracy.
69. James Bryant Conant, *Education and Liberty: The Role of the Schools in a Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 56, 59–60, 62.
70. In 1954, advertising executive Leo Burnett invented the Marlboro Man to rebrand a little-known cigarette previously marketed to women. "Do you know anything more masculine than a cowboy?" he asked. Sales jumped 3,241% within a year. Linda Kulman, "Madison Ave's Marlboro Man," *U.S. News & World Reports*, 127 (25) (December 27, 1999): 62.
71. Richard Slotkin, *The Gunfighter Nation: Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1998), 396.
72. Doherty, *Teenagers & Teenpics*, 47; Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, 7–8; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
73. Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

74. Rury, "Educating Urban Youth," 1, 10–11, 14.
75. William Bielby, "Rock in a Hard Place: Grassroots Cultural Production in the Post-Elvis Era," *American Sociological Review* 69 (2004): 8.
76. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963).
77. Bielby, "Rock in a Hard Place," 6–8.
78. Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson, *The Adolescent Experience* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 233.
79. Jules Henry, *Culture against Man* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 177, 179.
80. C. J. Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 156–174.
81. James Coleman, *The Adolescent Society* (New York: Free Press, 1961), 9.
82. David Castronovo, "Holden Caulfield's Legacy," *New England Review* 22 (2001): 180–181.
83. Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Avon, 1999), 10.
84. Ellwood Cubberley, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1909), 50, 55, 66.
85. Paula Fass, "The Child-Centered Family? New Rules in Postwar America," in *Reinventing Childhood After World War II*, eds. Paula Fass and Michael Grossberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 1.
86. Fass, "The Child-Centered Family?" 10.
87. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle-Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.
88. Diane Divoky, "The Way It's Going to Be: Revolt in the High Schools," *Saturday Review* (February 15, 1969): 101; "Free the New York City 275,000," *New York Herald Tribune* (March 1970), 1.
89. Ira Henry Freeman, *Out of the Burning: The Story of a Boy Gang Leader* (New York: Crown, 1960), 70, 72.
90. Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Patricia Burch, *Hidden Markets: The New Education Privatization* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
91. Peter Demerath, *Producing Success: The Culture of Personal Advancement in an American High School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Chapter 8

The Importance of Teaching Ernest: The Fool Goes Back to School in Television and Film Comedies in the Late Twentieth Century

Andrew L. Grunzke

In the wake of the development of the comprehensive high school and the advent of child labor laws, graduation rates in the United States increased sharply over the course of the twentieth century. Between 1890 and 1930, the amount of fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds enrolled in high school rose from less than six percent to more than fifty percent, reaching more than ninety percent by 1970.[1] Prior to 1910, the high school graduation rate was less than ten percent. It had increased to more than fifty percent by 1940. By 1970, almost three-quarters of American youth were successful in obtaining their high school diplomas.[2] Along with larger numbers of students attending and earning diplomas in the nation's high schools came an increased stigmatization of those young women and, especially, men who failed to complete their high school education. Despite long-standing American cultural strains of anti-intellectualism,[3] educational attainment was experiencing a substantial rise in the second half of the twentieth century. In the postwar-era United States, as high school graduation became the rule, rather than the exception, the negative image of the high school dropout began to crystallize.

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As graduation rates grew, education reformers began decrying the "softness" of the high school curricula. Throughout the Progressive Era, educational reformers championed public schools for their ability to socialize individuals, create a sense of community, and assimilate waves of immigrants. Calls for replacing Progressive Era life adjustment education with more academically challenging curricula have dominated the discourse of educational reform since the 1950s, taking the form, as only a few examples, of the National Defense Education Act (1958), the *A Nation at Risk* report (1983), and the debates leading up to the passage of No Child Left Behind (2001). So, even as more students were attending high schools, increased emphasis was being placed on the institutions to provide rigorous academic experience.

If schools were ostensibly aiming high, mass media were not necessarily following the same trajectory. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a variety of new "low" art forms developed and grew dramatically in popularity: vaudevillian theatre, series books, pulp fiction, comic books, and cinematic serials. The advent of radio and television did little to stem the rising tide of low cultural artifacts. Borrowing heavily from the preceding theatrical and cinematic traditions, television recycled a variety of old styles, themes, and characters. One character archetype commonly used and reused in early twentieth-century low art was the buffoon whose clumsiness and/or unintelligence lands him in comedic situations. Charlie Chaplin's "Tramp," Lou Costello (of Abbott and Costello fame), and Stan Laurel (of the Laurel and Hardy comedy duo) in many ways served as standard examples of this character type that would be adopted by television programs and films in the latter half of the twentieth century.

As the high school became a more important institution in the lives of many Americans, it would become more prominently featured in both film and television programs—including those intended for mass consumption. This chapter examines the intersection of these two phenomena: the near universalizing of the academic high school experience and the proliferation of "low" art mass media. Before the meteoric rise of high school attendance and graduation rates, there would have been little sense in having the stereotypically foolish character attend an educational institution. Increasing high school enrollments, in conjunction with the generic nature of television and (to a lesser extent) film, led to the development of a new trope in television situational comedies and slapstick films: the sophomoric character who is compelled (for one reason or another) to return to school to complete

his or (to a far lesser extent) her education.[4] This chapter considers thirteen such texts produced from the 1960s through the mid- to late 1990s: the films *Back to School* (1986), *Ernest Goes to School* (1994), and *Billy Madison* (1995), as well as episodes of sitcoms *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960–1968), *The Flintstones* (1959–1966), *M*A*S*H* (1972–1983), *Cheers* (1982–1993), *Married . . . with Children* (1987–1997), *Full House* (1987–1995), *Golden Girls* (1985–1992), *3rd Rock from the Sun* (1996–2001), *The Simpsons* (1989–present), and *Futurama* (1999–2003). In examining these filmic texts, this chapter argues that while educational reformers sought to reshape the American high school to make the United States more economically and militarily competitive, television and film comedies held onto an older, Progressive Era image of the high school as a locus of social refinement, Americanization, and marriageability.

The Universalizing of the High School Experience

In 1892, the National Education Association formed a special committee to create uniform requirements for admission to the nation's colleges. The Committee of Ten's resulting recommendation of a universal educational experience for American high school students, and its concomitant dismissal of the idea of a two-tiered educational system for college- and noncollege-bound students, solidified the idea that high school would become a unifying experience for American youth.[5] Even if many educational Progressives balked at the idea of a single academic track for all youth, regardless of likely future occupations, the notion of school as a unifying social experience was appealing. In the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, the aim of America's secondary schools was made even more explicit. While cementing the progression toward multiple academic tracks, the *Cardinal Principles* also established that one of the defining features of the high school as an institution would be to provide "a basic core offering to provide a body of common, integrating experiences."[6] Numbered among these offerings would be curricula to promote personal health, civic responsibility, proper use of leisure time, and the development of ethical character.[7] Developed, at least in part, around a perceived need to assimilate waves of immigrants, the comprehensive high school was created for its unifying effect on the population. In moving toward a more complex, modern society, the rise in high school enrollment was a means for providing students with a common experience and a shared set of social values. Throughout the era,

Progressives emphasized a shared high school experience, in terms of Americanization, the understanding of social and political procedures, and the acquisition of other social values.[8]

At the time that television was rising in popularity, though, the unifying effect of the high school was becoming less of a focus. Escalating tensions with the Soviet Union in the 1950s changed the character of politicians' attitudes toward public schools, resulting in increased curricular emphasis on science and mathematics and greater federal involvement in the public schools. As the purpose of college education began to shift from the liberal to the vocational,[9] the high school began, at least in some sense, to lose its unifying mission. In seeking to identify and challenge talented individuals and prepare them for higher education, the idea of high school's most important function to create a shared experience and set of values began to wane, at least among administrators and educational reformers.

Television sitcoms and slapstick comedies failed to represent this shift in mission of the comprehensive high school. Rather, these filmic texts maintained Progressive Era attitudes about secondary education, despite any reforms that may have been occurring. Television is a medium that, itself, serves as a universal experience and seeks an ideological middle ground to garner the largest possible audience. These texts present high school education not as an economic or educational dividing line but as an experience that brings people together. Moreover, because of the mechanisms for measuring viewership in place (especially in the case of television), these texts may serve as a sort of indication of what middle-class Americans hoped their educational institutions might be, even as reformers sought to reshape the institutions in other directions.

TELEVISION, COMEDY, AND THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

Because the main function of comedy as a genre is to make people laugh, it also has the tendency not to be taken seriously. Comedies discourage audiences, critics, and academics from "looking beyond the laughter" at the broader messages of the texts.[10] As a result, the literature on television (and film) comedies tends to be a little sparser than other genres. The relative dearth of scholarship about comedies is unfortunate, as comedy also serves an important social function. This is especially true of the modern image of the fool in slapstick. Folklorists and anthropologists have documented the importance of ritualized clowning in maintaining and critiquing cultural mores, and

slapstick film is akin to modern ritualized clowning. By subverting social norms and conventions, the fools in the set of visual texts examined in this chapter reinforce commonly held educational ideas. Specifically, "ritual clowns provide an institutionalized means for a . . . society to express collective laughter at taboos."[11] In the case of the set of comedies discussed here, the taboo of dropping out of high school holds up those fools who left school as objects of ridicule and reinforces traditional beliefs about the importance of high school graduation and the meaning of the degree itself.[12]

Television is a medium ripe for scholarly studies of history. Television sitcoms have a "repetitive logic, relaxed domestic spaces, comfortable social relations, and an ideological middle ground, without philosophical or political extremes."[13] Tending to eschew controversial political stances and seeking to garner the largest possible audiences with one of the most established mechanisms for measuring numbers of viewers of any of the major mass media, television is, perhaps, a more accurate barometer of public attitudes than other media. Recycled character concepts, stock scenarios, and heavily repetitive tropes make television sitcoms highly predictable, but they also make excellent fodder for historians seeking to identify patterns. Analyses of television shows within the history of education serve to "open up the discourse of media and education into a broader cross-disciplinary understanding along both historical and literary analytic lines."[14]

Television is also a medium that helps to explore the cultural attitudes of those groups of people often overlooked by historians. Television studies (particularly, but in no way limited to, studies of daytime television) focus on a medium frequently consumed by children, housewives, the elderly, the poor, and the unemployed.[15] Television programming is openly popular and usually contains a distinctly anti-elitist ethos.[16] It is decidedly a working-class medium.

Ironically, there are historically few depictions of the working class on television sitcoms, and virtually no depictions of working-class people laboring. One study of 262 domestic sitcoms from 1946 to 1990 found that "only 11 percent of the shows had blue-collar, clerical, or service workers as head of household."[17] This statistic is staggering enough in itself, but it is an even starker number when compared to the twenty-two percent of television families who have servants. In the 1960s, there were especially few representations of the working class, who made a much larger appearance in the 1970s, attributable in part to white middle-class discontent with the pervasive liberalism of the 1960s social policy—including and especially the antiwar and civil rights movements. *All in the Family*, despite its

left-leaning posturing, became the icon for the new working-class depiction in the 1970s. Even so, working-class families made up a minority of television families who were more like *The Brady Bunch*—white-collar professionals with live-in servants.[18]

While completing school and moving toward professional or white-collar work is a stereotypically upper-middle-class trajectory, the narrative of *returning* to school to complete one's education for career advancement is a familiar one to members of the working class. However, the idea of promoting a back-to-school agenda is one that is, in fact, an ideological middle ground. Using school as a means of social advancement is not an idea dependent upon a political extreme. In truth, the idea became less politically divisive over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, as the political left argued that education was a crucial weapon in the war on poverty and the right argued that education would help maintain the economic and military supremacy of the United States. The buffoon-returning-to-school narrative resonated with viewers sufficiently enough for the story to reappear across several decades and a variety of different television shows. While early television tended to borrow tropes and themes from Hollywood feature films, in the case of the fool-goes-back-to-school narrative, the television trope seems to have been reappropriated by makers of feature films after extensive use on television.

Sophomoric Credentialism

Given the rhetoric from both the political left and right on the economic advantages associated with increasing education attainments, one might expect that when clownish characters return to school, they do so for primarily economic reasons. However, this was not frequently the case. Take, for example, sitcom television's first instance of the fool-goes-back-to school motif: Ernest T. Bass from *The Andy Griffith Show*. While *Andy Griffith*'s Mayberry sets itself up as the epitome of sleepy, small-town life, Ernest T. Bass was a lovable hillbilly who periodically appeared in episodes of the show—seemingly to remind the audience they identify with the Mayberry residents more than the culture outside of Mayberry.[19] The fifth season episode, "The Education of Ernest T. Bass," begins with Bass throwing a rock through the window of Mayberry's police station. He is in town because he was courting a young woman named Ramona who turned him down because of his lack of education. (He never knew that a man who could "chunk a cow across his shoulders" needed one.) He has given himself a week to get an education, so he can go back to the

woods to continue his wooing of the young lady. When Sheriff Taylor tells him that he cannot possibly get an education in a week, his response is simple: "If'n I don't get that education, I'm gonna bust every window in town."

Andy Taylor and Deputy Barney Fife hatch a plan to educate Ernest T. Bass. They decide to enroll Bass in a fifth-grade classroom to prove to him that he is "not no account . . . [He's] just ignorant." Bass has tremendous difficulty with the fifth-grade course materials. Convinced Bass will never legitimately earn his diploma, Barney and Andy come up with the solution of "fix[ing] him up with a diploma and everything." They give him a fake test in order to graduate him and get rid of him. He takes the certification seriously. "I'm proud. I am so proud," he asserts after completing their farcical exam. In the context of this episode, whether Ernest T. Bass becomes an educated man is irrelevant, since the "proof" of the learning (and its resulting ability to convince his lady friend of his marriageability) was his only real goal for going back to school.

Bass's reason for seeking to continue his education was more concrete than most of his later counterparts. The most commonly cited reason for the character of below-average mental agility to return to school was to achieve a level of respect impossible to garner otherwise. Take, for example, Peggy Bundy from the 1990s sitcom *Married . . . with Children* in the fourth season episode "Peggy Made a Little Lamb." In this episode, while showing her daughter her senior picture, Peggy finds her last report card folded up and stuffed between two pages of the yearbook. She opens it to discover that she failed one half credit of home economics that she was supposed to retake in summer school.

After discovering she has not graduated from high school, Peggy's family begins mocking her mercilessly. Her husband returns home from a hard day of work, complaining, "I truly, truly want to die . . . but, hey, at least I have a high school diploma." Peg's response, obviously full of chagrin, is, "It's just a stupid piece of paper. It means nothing, nothing at all." Ultimately, the "stupid piece of paper" does mean something to both her and her family, and she returns to school to finish her last half credit of home economics. She, inexplicably and like most of the other members of the sample, ends up in a class with a bunch of high school students, which in her case includes her own daughter. The irony of a homemaker returning to school to take home economics is subsequently mined for its comic potential. In the end, Peggy's shortcomings as a homemaker mirror her inability to successfully complete the life-adjustment home economics class; the

important aspect of the high school education is not academic learning, but the acquisition of important life and social skills.

If the message of *Married . . . with Children*'s fool-goes-to-school episode was that the high school dropout (even an unwitting one) was rightly the object of mockery, late 1980s, early 1990s sitcom *Full House* used its back-to-school episode (as was usual for the program) for some heavy-handed didacticism. In the sixth season episode "Educating Jesse," D. J., the oldest of the three girls in the family, is working on a stay-in-school campaign for her high school and is charged with coming up with slogans encouraging students to stay in school. She asks her Uncle Jesse to help with the project. He uncharacteristically refuses. In a scene highly reminiscent of an intervention, the entire family blocks him in the kitchen to find out why he is acting so suspiciously rudely. They discover he feels guilty helping D. J. with her stay-in-school campaign when he is a high school dropout.[20] Jesse ultimately decides that what is really important is his family's esteem. He decides he is going to drop back into school, which is visually punctuated when he puts on his glasses, an obvious signifier of intelligence,[21] and leads to the (moralizing) conclusion drawn by D. J. and her stay-in-school committee: "People who are smart finish what they start" or "Don't drop out, even if you have to glue your butt to a chair." D. J.'s banners, interestingly enough, do not emphasize the benefits of the education received. Rather, they emphasize solely the importance of finishing school for the sake of completing the process. The banner states that if you are already smart, you will finish your schooling; it does not emphasize the role schooling may play in making a person smart.

*M*A*S*H*, on the other hand, used its back-to-school episode ("Dear Dad, Again") to explicitly comment on the rising tide of credentialism. This episode is narrated by army surgeon Hawkeye in the words of a letter home to his father about the grisly realities of war. The letter tells of Colonel Blake's man-child assistant Corporal Radar O'Reilly's attempts to complete his final week with the High School Diploma Company of Delavan, IN. Radar has serious test anxiety, and it is also clear that he has cheated by opening the test and memorizing the answers.[22] When given the test, he mixes up the answers to questions about the isosceles triangle and Gettysburg Address. After three questions, Blake gives up, congratulating Radar for graduating, to which Radar responds: "This is the proudest moment of my life." In short, Radar is given three questions, none of which he gets right and two of those answers were obtained dishonestly, and Blake is willing to sign off on the diploma. This scene, despite

differences in comic timbre, bears a striking resemblance to Ernest T. Bass's final exam in which Andy and Barney set up a farcical exam to give Ernest T. Bass a meaningfully meaningless credential.

The idea that a diploma can bring "respect" becomes a running joke in the Rodney Dangerfield vehicle, *Back to School*. The film opens with a scene in which Meloni, an Italian immigrant tailor, is chastising his son for a poor report card: "I don't care how rich or successful a man is, if he doesn't have an education, he's got nothing." A montage during the opening credits shows how the young boy grows up to build an empire of "Tall and Fat" clothing stores. Melon (who has Americanized his family name) becomes rich and successful, but does not have an education.

At an elaborate dinner party hosted by his socialite soon-to-be-ex-wife, he exhibits completely unrefined behavior, telling a larger female guest in a green dress that "if that dress had pockets, you'd look like a pool table" and that she should "try [his] Tall and Fat stores. No offense." He has built a commercial empire, possesses an acute business sense, spouts off keen witticisms, builds meaningful relationships (especially with members of the working class), and is extraordinarily streetwise. He is, though, lacking in social grace and has difficulty making those same connections with his bourgeois peers. Melon is, as his detractors accuse, nouveau riche; he goes to college as a means for obtaining the social class his money cannot bring him.

Melon also decides to go back to school immediately after his divorce to spend some time with his son. His return to school is a product of complex social forces: family expectations (especially related to becoming Americanized), developing the cultural capital he lacks (despite his financial capital), and providing an educational role model to his son (who is considering dropping out). Developing a skill set to give him an economic advantage plays no part in his decision to return, which is far more closely related to the credential itself than to the learning the credential signifies.

If, in the 1970s, *M*A*S*H* was making a complex statement about the declining value of a high school credential, at the close of the twentieth century, Matt Groening's *Futurama* was making a more biting, if less nuanced, critique of the same phenomenon. The premise of the animated show, a scatter-brained pizza delivery boy named Fry accidentally freezes himself in a cryonic chamber in 1999 only to be thawed in 2999, gave the writers numerous opportunities to make social criticisms of the twentieth-century United States, including critiques of the quality of twentieth-century high schools (and colleges). In the first season episode "Mars University," Fry's coworkers

make fun of him because he dropped out of college in the twentieth century. Leela tells Fry that "twentieth-century colleges were basically expensive day care centers." She proceeds to explain to him that, by 2999 educational standards, Fry's only a high school dropout. Passing through Coney Island Community College, with its signs informing potential students they "must be this tall to enroll," Fry realizes that he cannot be satisfied with being a twentieth-century college dropout; he must become a thirtieth-century college dropout. As a result, he matriculates at Mars University, enrolling in a twentieth-century history course with the expressed purpose of dropping out to continue with his dead-end delivery job.

Overall, the majority of filmic and televisual texts in this sample feature characters returning to school to obtain a credential unlikely to dramatically impact their lives—including and especially their economic lives. Instead, obtaining a high school (and far less frequently college)[23] diploma is simply a source of pride for those students returning to school. It is a way for them to avoid the good-natured ribbing, if not outright scorn, of their friends and families.

THE ABSENT ECONOMIC INCENTIVE

Despite the predominance of the fool-goes-back-to-school-to-get-respect narrative, the sample was not devoid of economically motivated decisions to return to school, although characters making this decision usually did so under compulsion. The Hanna-Barbera animated series *The Flintstones* established the prototype for this type of narrative.[24] In the episode "High School Fred," the manager of the stone quarry at which Fred works brings in an efficiency expert, Mr. Rockhard, to analyze the quarry's business practices. Fred, who was sick the last couple of weeks of high school, never graduated.[25] The expert recommends a new policy of terminating employees who do not have a high school diploma. Instead of firing Fred, his boss decides he is too valuable to the company bowling team, and gives him the opportunity to finish the last two weeks of high school—with pay.

Fred ends up having a good time in high school. He proves to be a geology whiz (because of his years working in the quarry) and becomes something of a high school hero after breaking the school malt-drinking record (with a gut-busting forty-nine malts). In another trope fairly common in these texts, the episode ends with Fred becoming the school football hero at the Rock Bowl and giving the commencement speech.[26] Although Fred may have enjoyed reliving his last two weeks of high school, his decision to go back to school was

not made voluntarily; he was motivated to complete his education under threat of losing his job. Even though the decision was (technically) economically motivated, Fred was not going to school out of ambition to obtain skills necessary to advance his career; he, too, was seeking a credential that had little impact on his ability to actually do his job.

When "Jim Varney's cracker character [Ernest P. Worrell] takes a crack at education"[27] in *Ernest Goes to School*, he does so in a scenario borrowed wholesale from *The Flintstones*. After a scene heavily steeped in the requisite slapstick visual humor in which school janitor Ernest has just fixed a leaky spigot in the boys' locker room with a cork and mallet, he is called into the principal's office to discuss a new school board policy: all school board employees must have a high school diploma. Ernest, as a school maintenance staff, is in danger of losing what he describes as "my life, my career, my spiritual fulfillment." So, Ernest is enrolled in the high school in which he works to complete his diploma in order to keep his job. Like Fred Flintstone, Ernest P. Worrell returns to school only under duress. He would not have chosen this for himself and is only going to school to keep a job he already performs, albeit incompetently.

The same scenario reappears in an episode of *The Simpsons* ("Homer Goes to College") in which patriarch Homer must return to school. The episode begins with Homer barefoot and asleep at the console of the nuclear plant at which he works. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) arrives for a surprise inspection, and Homer is hurried to the basement to keep the inspectors from seeing the power plant's most unqualified personnel. The NRC tells Montgomery Burns, the owner of the power plant, that Homer's job requires college training in nuclear physics and he must go to college to complete the requisite classes.

Mr. Burns has a chair at Springfield University and is able to get the obviously unqualified Homer enrolled. Homer has a difficult time adjusting to the academic environment, as his "entire perspective of what college is is based on bad *Animal House*-style movies."[28] After failing his final exam and lamenting "I'm going to lose my job, just because I'm dangerously unqualified," Homer has the computer-savvy friends he met in college change his grade electronically to complete his physics requirement. Again, *The Simpsons* emphasizes the credential itself far more than the skill set it represents. Homer keeps his job because of his ill-gotten college physics credits to the serious detriment of public safety. In *The Simpsons*, the idiotic character being compelled to return to school became a way of lampooning

declining academic standards and misplaced emphasis on the credential over real knowledge.

Neither does Adam Sandler's *Billy Madison* provide a monolithically economic reason for the renewed interest in education. Billy Madison is the son of an aging hotel tycoon looking to retire. His son is a high school graduate in name only—since he bribed the teachers to make sure his son completed his diploma. He decides that, while his son might inherit his fortune, he will not inherit his position in the family business. "How could I hand over my company," he explains, "to someone who couldn't even get through high school on his own?" Billy has become someone whose life is nothing more than "daiquiris, Nintendos, and jerk-off magazines." His father decides to give him one more chance, issuing a challenge. If Billy can go through twelve grades of school, two weeks per grade, to "prove to [his father he's] not an idiot," his father will let him take over the operation of the hotel chain. The option for money is available to Billy without an education, but the option for respect is open to him only as a result of his status as a true high school graduate.

In the end, Billy's father assumes that Billy will learn some skills in school that will benefit him as he makes large business decisions. Interestingly, the skills his father hopes he will learn are not those associated with the rigorous academic reforms advocated in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in education bemoaned the "rising tide of mediocrity" of America's school and worried that "soft" curricula placed the nation at risk both economically and in terms of national defense.[29] While the *A Nation at Risk* report might have had us believe that the United States would not be able to adequately compete without increased emphasis on mathematics, science, foreign languages, and language arts, *Billy Madison* calls this premise into question. Graduation from high school, in *Billy Madison*, is mostly a rite of passage. Billy, the man-child, is not able to take his place in the adult world because he has not earned the respect that comes from the ceremony. In fact, when we see the grown man sitting in the small desks of an elementary school classroom, we are presented with a visual metaphor for the school as a social rite of passage. One cannot truly become an adult without completing the school experience. School prepares you for the "grown-up" world. The educational credential is not about intellectual development, knowledge, or skills; it is about developing the responsibility to see a long-term project to its completion. In the slapstick comedy world, the important curriculum

is the "soft" one in which you develop social skills, maturity, and civic responsibility.

The lone example of a fool going back to obtain better employment comes in the 1990s sitcom, *3rd Rock from the Sun*. Television history is peppered with programs in which aliens come to Earth, the writers using the resulting cognitive estrangement to make veiled social commentary. A little scholarly work has been done on how this mode functions in the 1970s sitcom *Mork and Mindy*.[30] Shows like *My Favorite Martian* (in the 1960s), *Mork and Mindy* (in the 1970s), *ALF* (in the 1980s), and *3rd Rock from the Sun* (in the 1990s) provided vehicles for making rather radical comments about the political and social milieus in which they were created, without violating television's unwritten rules against taking positions deviating more than slightly from the political mainstream. Much more scholarly work needs to be done to examine the intersection of science fiction and television sitcom as it relates to social, political, and philosophical criticism.

In *3rd Rock from the Sun*, a team of alien researchers, masquerading as human beings, is placed on Earth to study humankind. One of the members of the team, Harry Solomon, has a transmitter in his head, so that the group can maintain contact with their home planet. As a result, Harry has a diminished mental capacity. High Commander Dick decides Harry should get a job in order to contribute to the family income. Harry decides that if he wants the human experience of being employed he will have to go to night school to get his high school equivalency degree.

In some ways, *3rd Rock* contains perhaps the most accurate depiction of adult education in any of these texts. The classroom is peopled with parolees, recent immigrants, and high school dropouts. The show does not shy away from depictions of lower-class Americans seeking the perceived benefits of a high school education. In one particularly telling scene, one of the members of Harry's study group who is in danger of failing out comments: "I didn't sit through three months of night school not to get my diploma." To which another fellow student responds: "No, you did it as part of your plea bargain."[31] While most of these texts infantilize the fool by placing him in a classroom filled with children, *3rd Rock from the Sun* uses the back-to-school motif as a means for taking a critical view, not of the student returning to school but of adult education as an institution. Thus, the writers of the program were able to use the fool-goes-to-school trope as a means of discussing adult education in a slightly subversive way in what is usually a sanitized mass medium. In other

words, unlike most of the other examples, Harry's graduation is not a gimmick. Though he is ostensibly going to school for economic reasons, this rationale is simply a mask for the more veiled purposes of the television producers: making incisive social commentary using the tools of science fiction, such as cognitive estrangement.

AN IRRELEVANT CURRICULUM

One can easily see why education, as featured in these sitcoms and slapstick comedies, would avoid depictions of an academically rigorous curriculum in the educational institutions to which these sophomoric characters return. Most of these texts work very hard to establish these characters as being markedly less intelligent than the rest of the program's characters. In practical terms, these characters tend to serve as the "other" against which the rest of the characters are defined. Showing these characters learning vital skills to help them socially promote themselves serves to undermine their narrative functions.

As a result, these schools are replete with curricula that frequently seem weirdly out of step with the needs of the students. In fact, the irrelevance of the curriculum is frequently another source of the humor for the episode or film. These irrelevant curricula seem to take two varieties. First, there are subjects important for someone in the student's situation to know but are presented in an unnecessarily esoteric way. The second variety contains subjects so outside of the character's social sphere as to make the learning of them seem foolish. Examples of necessary and relevant instruction are, for all intents and purposes, nonexistent.

Full House's Uncle Jesse must endure a senior English class in which he must write a fifteen-page, single-spaced paper on his favorite American author, "should he know one." In *3rd Rock*, Harry must write a 500-word book report on Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*—as does his study partner, Filipino immigrant Mrs. DeGuzman—whose interpretations of the book are resoundingly rejected by the rest of the study group ("Like you know anything about New England in the nineteenth century"). Sam Malone and Coach (from the television series *Cheers*) must learn world geography, including the main exports of Albania. This was akin to Ernest P. Worrell's experience in school, in which he needed to learn the chief exports of Guam and how to answer word problems involving the volume of oranges that could be loaded into a truck with given dimensions. It was *Andy Griffith*'s Ernest T. Bass who set the standard, though, having to

memorize the world's oceans in geography (having difficulty remembering, among other things, that Old Man Kelsey's pond was not, in fact, "Old Man Kelsey's Ocean").

If the aforementioned curricula were largely irrelevant, there is another set of these fool-goes-back-to-school texts in which the material would have been highly useful for the student's needs. Certainly, this was the running joke in the *Married . . . with Children* episode in which Peggy goes back to school. One of the major comedic premises of the entire series involves Al's dissatisfaction with Peggy's lack of skill as a housewife. Having to retake home economics became a way for the show's running gag to be perpetuated. Likewise, Homer Simpson's job performance could have been improved by a college course in nuclear physics, had he taken the course seriously—but the repeated joke of the unqualified man serving as a nuclear safety technician found a new punch line when he goes back to school to learn physics.

Rodney Dangerfield's *Back to School* takes a middle position between these two curricular types. On the one hand, he makes the best of his college English literature class's high-art reading list, including Joyce ("she's" his favorite writer) and Fitzgerald ("How would I characterize *The Great Gatsby*? He's . . . great!"), finding particular solace in Dylan Thomas's "Rage, Rage, Against the Dying of the Light." He is slightly clueless and hardly adept at critical readings of the texts, but he does engage with them and tries his best to make meaning of them. His business class, however, is another story. Armed with years of practical entrepreneurial experience, the theoretical nature of his business course leaves him questioning the expertise of his professor. When setting up their imaginary business in class, Melon points out that the professor left off some start-up costs, including greasing the palms of local politicians for favorable zoning and making mafia payoffs to guarantee waste removal. When the professor is aghast that his student would consider making decisions that were not part of the "legitimate" business world, Melon suggests to the professor that he may want to build his factory in "fantasyland." Ironically, being a highly successful businessman, Melon probably could have learned from and contributed a great deal to the course. However, by portraying the college professor as sequestered from everyday, real-life concerns, *Back to School* seems to argue for a view that prizes real-life learning over academic education. This creates a tension within the text, as it simultaneously argues that "without an [academic] education a man is nothing," while portraying the educated man as being wildly out of touch.

The mockery of the fool, in conjunction with the irrelevance of the education he or she is supposedly getting in school, further pushes the idea that the credential is something to be obtained for its own sake. The credential ultimately represents not what the person has learned in school, but only that he or she had the social experience of attending and completing the (often seemingly silly) requirements of school. Educational reformers during the Cold War may have been pressing for schools to focus on sharpening the intellect of students, but the depiction of this type of curriculum in fool-goes-back-to-school narratives was uniformly maligned. None of the films in the sample depicted schooling itself as a useless endeavor, but (as Richard Hofstadter could have told us) the value was not in its ability to endow students with theoretical knowledge. The lessons learned by returning to school were worthwhile, frequently focusing on the acquisition of values, whether they be moral values (like perseverance or self-sufficiency) or cultural values (like Harry's discovery of the American way of life). But the depicted merit of school in all of these films and television programs was never the purpose envisioned by those actually involved in shaping the real-life institutions.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter focuses on two media that rarely receive scholarly consideration: television sitcoms and slapstick comedy films. The lack of previous interest is not really surprising. Critical attention to the films is nearly unanimously negative.[32] This scholarly tendency away from this genre has left an important set of cultural texts largely unexamined.

The coincidental development of television as a medium and rise of high school graduation rates in the latter half of the twentieth century created new kinds of narratives about education. Although it borrowed certain traits from earlier artistic forms (such as vaudeville and silent film), the television sitcom developed its own filmic language and set of frequently used tropes. One of these, pioneered in the early 1960s by *The Flintstones* and *The Andy Griffith Show*, was to take the stereotypically dimwitted character and find a reason for him or her to go back to school.

Despite the rhetoric among reform-minded educators, television sitcoms and films rarely sent their sophomoric characters back to school for economic reasons. Instead, the texts concentrated on rising social pressures to finish one's high school diploma. All the while, the academic learning represented by the diploma received less emphasis than the social experience of going through the educational process

and the rite-of-passage function of the high school graduation. While the stereotypical fools may not have been made appreciably smarter by their experiences in the academic world, they were (at least from the perspective of their teachers, friends, and family) made holistically better by the experience.

In the wakes of the Sputnik launch and the *A Nation at Risk* report, educational reformers sought to reshape the curriculum to meet the perceived needs of a changing world.[33] Television sitcoms and lowbrow comedies did not share the emphasis on reshaping educational institutions to make students more economically and technologically competitive. Instead of watching fools and simpletons trying to meet new, rigid academic standards, audiences saw them subverting that very system. The large- and small-screen dunces who returned to school in the later years of the Cold War did so for reasons steeped in Progressive Era educational ambitions: marriageability, socialization, refinement, and Americanization.[34] As such, even as late twentieth-century education reforms highlighted the power of the school to create an internationally competitive workforce, film and television comedies maintained older aspirations about the power of education to reform individual tastes and habits.

Filmography

"A Friend in Dick." 1997 episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun*, directed by Terry Hughes. NBC, 1996–2001, Mill Creek Entertainment, 2012 DVD.

Back to School, directed by Alan Metter. Orion Pictures, 1986. MGM, 2003. DVD.

Billy Madison, directed by Tamra Davis. 1995. Universal Pictures, 2005. DVD.

"Dear Dad, Again." 1973 episode of *M*A*S*H*, directed by Jackie Cooper. CBS, 1972–1983, Twentieth Century Fox, 2008.

"Educating Jesse." 1992 episode of *Full House*, directed by Joel Zwick. ABC, 1987–1995, Warner Home Video, 2007 DVD.

Ernest Goes to School, directed by Coke Sams. Emshell, 1994. Monarch Home Video, 1994. VHS.

"Happy New Dick." 1998 episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun*, directed Terry Hughes. NBC, 1996–2001, Mill Creek Entertainment, 2012 DVD.

"High School Fred." 1962 episode of *The Flintstones*. ABC, 1960–1966, Turner Home Entertainment, 2005.

"Homer Goes to College." 1993 episode of *The Simpsons*, directed by Jim Reardon. Fox, 1989–Present, Twentieth Century Fox, 2012 DVD.

"Jailhouse Dick." 1997 episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun*, directed by Terry Hughes. NBC, 1996–2001, Mill Creek Entertainment, 2012 DVD.

"Mars University." 1999 episode of *Futurama*, directed by Bret Healand. Fox, 1999–Present, Fox Film Corporation, 2003.

"Peggy Made a Little Lamb." 1990 episode of *Married . . . with Children*, directed by Gary Cohen. Fox, 1987–1997, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005 DVD.
"Sally and Don's First Kiss." 1998 episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun*, directed by Terry Hughes. NBC, 1996–2001, Mill Creek Entertainment, 2012 DVD.
"Teacher's Pet." 1985 episode of *Cheers*, directed by James Burrows. NBC, 1982–1993, Paramount, 2004 DVD.
"The Education of Ernest T. Bass." 1964 episode of *The Andy Griffith Show*, directed by Alan Rifkin. CBS, 1960–1968, Paramount, 2006 DVD.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Mirel, "The Traditional High School: Historical Debates over Its Nature and Its Function," *Education Next* 6 (1) (2006): 14–19.
2. Claudia Goldin, "America's Graduation from High School: The Evolution and Spread of Secondary Schooling in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 58 (2) (1998): 345–374.
3. Despite its age, the standard text on the phenomenon is Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963).
4. Eighty-five percent of the foolish characters returning to school in television and film are male; only fifteen percent are female (Rose from *Golden Girls* and Peg from *Married . . . with Children*). In several television programs, women return to school, but they are rarely cinematic fools. In *Home Improvement*, for instance, Jill goes back to school to learn psychology, in *Boy Meets World* Amy returns to school to study creative writing, and in *Mama's Family* Mama returns to school to complete her high school diploma. Television comedies tend to take women going back to school more seriously, usually making self-edification or the improvement of the family's economic station the motivating factor.
5. Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642–2004* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 246.
6. William Wraga, "The Comprehensive High School and Educational Reform in the United States: Retrospect and Prospect," *The High School Journal* 81 (3) (1998): 121.
7. Herbert Kliebard, "Why History of Education?" *Journal of Educational Research* 88 (March–April 1995): 194–199.
8. Wraga, "The Comprehensive High School and Educational Reform in the United States," 121–134.
9. David Labaree, "Mutual Subversion: A Short History of the Liberal and Professional in American Higher Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 46 (1) (2006): 1–15.
10. Beth E. Bonnstetter, "Mel Brooks Meets Kenneth Burke (and Mikhail Bakhtin): Comedy and Burlesque in Satiric Film," *Journal of Film and Video* 63 (1) (2011): 18–31.

11. James E. Caron, "Silent Slapstick Films as Ritualized Clowning: The Example of Charlie Chaplin," *Studies in American Humor* 3 (14) (2006): 5–22.
12. Lea Jacobs, "Before Screwball," *Film History* 13 (4) (2001): 335–336.
13. Lauren Rabinovitz, "Television Criticism and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 43 (1991): 362. See also David Marc, *Demographic Vistas: Television and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).
14. Dan Leopard, "'Blackboard Jungle': The Ethnographic Narrative of Education on Film," *Cinema Journal* 46 (2007): 24–44.
15. Paul Attalah, "Television Discourse and Situation Comedy," *Canadian Review of Film Studies* 40 (1) (2010): 1–24.
16. Robert Hurd, "Taking 'Seinfeld' Seriously: Modernism in Popular Culture," *New Literary History* 37 (4) (2006): 761–776.
17. Julie Bettie, "Class Dismissed: *Roseanne* and the Changing Face of Working Class Iconography," *Social Text* 45 (4) (1995): 127.
18. Ibid., 125–127. The working class in television sitcoms is marked specifically as white and male. None of the fool-goes-back-to-school films or television shows features an African American (or any other ethnic minority) returning to school to complete his or her education. In the world of television sitcoms, whites are working class; minorities are poor.
19. Don Rodney Vaughn, "Why the Andy Griffith Show is Important to Popular Culture Studies," *Journal of Popular Culture* 38 (2) (2004): 397–424.
20. *Full House* was rather careless in making Uncle Jesse a high school dropout. By the time the show aired, the producers had already shown an episode in which Jesse had attended his high school reunion, another of sitcom television's clichéd, educationally themed tropes.
21. Eyeglasses as visual signifiers of increased intelligence were also used in *Ernest Goes to School* each time he underwent his Subatomic Brain Accelerator treatment.
22. Sixty-two percent of all the texts in this sample depict the fool as cheating in an attempt to fraudulently obtain their credentials (not including Billy Madison, who was accused of cheating, but had not).
23. Foolish characters went back to college only infrequently (twenty-three percent of the texts in the sample). If you exclude animation, Matt Groening programs, or texts from the 1990s, *Back to School* would be the lone example of a buffoon returning to college for a diploma. The fool returning to college was slightly more common than elementary school (which only happened in *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Billy Madison*). The bulk of the idiotic characters returning to school (sixty-nine percent of the sample) went to complete high school. (These numbers do not add up to 100 percent, since *Billy Madison* is included in both the high school and elementary school categories, as Billy must go through both elementary and high school classes.)

24. While I credited *The Andy Griffith Show* with providing the first example of the fool-returning-to-school motif, Ernest T. Bass was actually the first prime-time sitcom buffoon to return to school. The episode in which Fred Flintstone goes back to school actually predates *The Andy Griffith Show* episode by about two years.
25. This excuse for not graduating would reappear in the episode of *The Golden Girls* in which it is discovered that Rose never graduated from high school—because she contracted mononucleosis as a result of working at the kissing booth during the spring carnival. In general, the foolish characters' reasons for leaving school tended to be quite varied. Twenty-three percent of these characters initially dropped out to obtain other employment, thirty-eight percent felt they lacked the mental faculties to continue, and fifteen percent quit due to illness. The remaining film and television characters dropped out for disparate reasons. In *M*A*S*H*, Radar goes to war instead of completing school. In *Billy Madison*, Billy's father, who bought Billy's way through school, compels him to return to complete honestly. In *3rd Rock from the Sun* Harry, an alien, was not on Earth to initially attend school.
26. This is one of the few examples of a student who returns to school on film who genuinely likes the school experience. Fred opines: "I wish I didn't have to graduate. I'm beginning to like school."
27. "It's Time to Laugh at the Video Store," *The Washington Times* (November 17, 1994), M23.
28. See writer Conan O'Brien's commentary track on the Season 5 DVD release.
29. National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).
30. See Robert Goldman, "Hegemony and Managed Critique in Prime-Time Television: A Critical Reading of Mork and Mindy," *Theory and Society* 11 (3) (1982): 363–388.
31. "Sally and Don's First Kiss." 1998 episode of *3rd Rock from the Sun* (NBC, 1996–2001, Mill Creek Entertainment, 2012).
32. See, for some representative examples, Corrie Rickey, "There's Dumb, Dumber—Then 'Billy Madison,'" *Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 13, 1995), F02; Steve Persall, "Dumb, Dumber, and Dumbest," *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL) (February 12, 1995), 14C; "Ain't It Ironic How Tough It Is to Be Stupid," *The Toronto Star* (February 24, 1995), C3. Perhaps the most amusing example is the *Daily Records* television guide for November 5, 2003 ("Pick of the Box"). It contained a two-sentence review of *Ernest Goes to School*: "Hapless bus driver Ernest goes back to school, where he suddenly becomes a genius thanks to a scientific potion made by his teachers. Utterly inane comedy starring Jim Varney." It seems likely the film reviewer never actually watched the film—as Ernest neither was a bus driver nor did he drink a "magic potion."

33. Many historians have written exhaustively on curricular reforms in the twentieth century–too many to list here. For an excellent comprehensive history of the subject, see David L. Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890–1995* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).
34. For discussions of these different dimensions of Progressive educational goals, see David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 180–181, 234–268; David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1–3, 40–51; John Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870–1930* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), 26.

Chapter 9

Prosaic, Perfunctory Pedagogy: Representations of Social Studies Teachers and Teaching in 1970s and 1980s Movies

Robert L. Dahlgren

In an early scene in Peter Bogdanovic's 1970 film *The Last Picture Show*, a classroom scenario provides foreshadowing for the depressing tableau of rural, small-town Texas ennui that follows.[1] As the scene opens, a high school English teacher is perched upon his desk, engrossed in a volume of Romantic poetry, while all around him juvenile chaos reigns in his classroom: two male students play fight with one another, while another male student launches a wad of paper across the room, and a young female student checks her makeup in a compact. As the last attendance bell rings, the teacher (played by Hollywood veteran John Hillerman) continues to ignore his students as late arrivals wander aimlessly into the classroom. Finally roused from his book by the increasing volume of noise, the teacher addresses the class with an opening remark dripping in irony: "Well, I wonder what my chances are this morning of interesting you kids in the work of John Keats." Without missing a beat, a student named Duane (played by a young Jeff Bridges) shoots back: "None at all." The teacher chuckles at Duane's retort as the rest of the class explodes in appreciative laughter.

In this brief but memorable scene, one finds the general paradigm for viewing education and teaching in the early 1970s: out-of-control

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classrooms filled with ignorant students bored to tears with the outdated and irrelevant curriculum presented by teachers jaded by their own tenured status, merely riding out the last few years of their careers until a cozy retirement. The common perception in the 1970s of American public schools in crisis was tied to a general sense of malaise in American society, largely due to a catalog of blows to the sense of American democracy and empire, including the 1973 OPEC oil crisis, the Watergate scandal, economic stagflation during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, and the Iranian hostage crisis at the end of the decade. In his work on the postwar history of Buffalo, New York, Mark Goldman has described this period as "A Decade of Loss."[2] The popular culture, and especially Hollywood films, of the period echoed and reinforced in the minds of millions of Americans the fear that American society and its schools had seen better days.[3]

This vision of education in crisis is commonplace in the punditry of the early twenty-first century, in which the notion of failing schools is the principal rationale for a range of rigid and Draconian standards reforms undertaken in the name of educational accountability. In a speech to The National Urban League in 2010, President Barack Obama defended his *Race to the Top* program of incentives for implementing neoliberal reforms, including an increase in charter schools and an introduction of merit pay tied to student test scores: "The whole premise of *Race to the Top* is that teachers are the single most important factor in a child's education from the moment they step into the classroom."[4] Indeed, it is precisely this argument that often appeals to young, idealistic teachers who would, of course, like to picture themselves as contributing a vital piece to children's success in school. However, placing undue burden on the educational system can all too easily lead to blaming teachers for failing to solve American society's most trenchant problems. Social studies educators are at the center of this critique of American schooling and teaching, as knowledge of history, geography, and American government is often portrayed as a set of canonical, cultural benchmarks for American citizenship.

Yet this tendency to scapegoat teachers for the presumed failures of American schools, something that confronts K-12 teachers as they open the local newspaper or turn on news radio each morning, was relatively rare in the early 1970s. Until this period, teachers had traditionally been portrayed in the popular media as almost saintly figures who sacrificed worldly pleasures and family life in order to devote themselves to serving their students. Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, anthropologist Margaret Mead remarked that the contemporary images of the American teacher were a distillation of

both stereotype and actual lived experience. Mead described the typical schoolteacher of popular cultural imagination as a woman of "indeterminate age, of the middle class, and committed to the ethics and manners of a middle-class world."[5] In their work on the radio and television serial *Our Miss Brooks*, Patrick Ryan and Sevan Terzian have explored the ways in which the professionalism of teachers in the immediate postwar period was presumed to conflict with their personal lives.[6] While this sacrifice was often at odds with the prevailing notions of femininity, the competence or dedication of teachers was rarely questioned.[7] Thus, despite the increasing requirements for certification and entrance-level employment for teachers over the years, the clear message from the popular cultural images of postwar films is that the standard of teaching has been in steady decline over the same period.

In this chapter, I address the gap in the literature regarding the portrayal of secondary social studies teachers in popular movies of the 1970s and 1980s.[8] In the course of a textual analysis of thirty-seven feature films from the period, the following research questions are explored: How are American public schools depicted in Hollywood films of the 1970s and 1980s? What instructional and classroom management strategies are shown in these films? In what ways do social studies teachers in these movies interact with their students? How do social studies teachers view their roles inside and outside of the classroom?[9]

In the course of analyzing these issues and others, I contend that the popular films of the 1970s and 1980s reflect a dramatic shift in the image of public schools and of teachers, particularly secondary social studies teachers. Indeed, these films reinforced the conservative mood among the educational leadership that would culminate in the publication of the Commission for Excellence in Education's 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, which reestablished the social efficiency agenda first developed by administrative progressives in the late nineteenth century. This analysis develops upon and adds to the critical perspectives of educational historians and social studies educators who have probed this turning point in American schooling.[10] Finally, the findings of this study call for a reinvestigation of the cultural fault lines of the 1970s and 1980s that created the intellectual rationale for the neoliberal reform movements that have dominated educational policy in the past quarter century.

Education and Popular Culture Narratives

Sociologists and cultural historians have long understood the power that popular narratives exert over the processes with which people make meaning of their everyday experiences, often threatening to

supersede that actual lived experience. Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings note: "The stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture. Stories and narratives, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives."[11] In the twentieth century, few forms of popular culture narratives captured the imagination of the American public in as powerful a manner as Hollywood films. Carl Plantinga has written about the ability of a movie to make an emotional impact on audiences that allow its images to resonate in the mind long after the initial viewing. Plantinga comments: "Strong emotions have a tendency to make a mark, leaving lasting impressions that transform our psyches and imprint our memories."[12] This insight is crucial, as it is clear that popular culture narratives often trump actual lived experiences: filmed and other visual images, and especially those marketed to a mass audience, are so vivid in the minds of Americans that it almost seems as if we have had identical experiences even if we have not.

In their work on the use of historical film in social studies classrooms, Alan Marcus, Scott A. Metzger, Richard J. Paxton, and Jeremy D. Stoddard have testified to the influence of film in the ways in which history is interpreted within the broad society, which often views historical events through the lens of popular films such as Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. They state: "There seems little doubt that movies are among the most powerful art forms developed in the twentieth century, with considerable influence over many forms of thought, including historical."[13] History teachers, thus, often note with chagrin that their students will derive much of their source knowledge of historical events from Hollywood blockbusters such as Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* (2001), which can present either overly dramatic or deliberately fictionalized narratives within the framework of the events. Marcus et al. stress that Hollywood films are created with a distinct purpose and point of view.[14] For example, many of the most critically celebrated films of the 1970s were specifically created in order to comment on the decline of the American century and disappearance of the American dream with the end of the postwar economic boom.

Similarly, Hollywood films have become an increasingly important prism for the viewing and framing of a variety of cultural issues related to American schooling and education practices. Timothy Shary has highlighted the following notion: "The school film is perhaps the most easily definable subgenre of youth films, since its main plot actions focus on the setting of high school or junior high school

campuses."[15] In the late twentieth century, Hollywood became increasingly fascinated with exploring the lives of American teenagers, and particularly their experiences in school. This concentration on school life is largely due to the creation of a specific teenage film genre to capitalize on the disposable incomes of suburban American teenagers eager to enjoy a Saturday night date. While these films are often categorized as part of "youth culture," Simon Frith notes that the majority of popular culture products are in reality created by adults who are decades older than their target audiences.[16] Thus, in the case of school-based films, the perspectives of the writers and directors reflect a lived experience that is a generation removed from the lives depicted on screen.

In the first wave of these films in the 1950s and 1960s, directors such as Frank Capra, Elia Kazan, and Nicholas Ray depicted a highly romanticized image of the ideal teacher: an unmarried female with naturally nurturing instincts, absolutely devoted to her students. Indeed, the critic Robert Edelman has charged that Hollywood films were "sentimental valentines to the careers of single-mindedly devoted teachers, anonymous human beings who over the years touch the lives of thousands."[17] Even in postwar films that portrayed the American public school classroom in less than flattering terms, such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), teachers still appear as dedicated professionals, albeit beleaguered by stifling bureaucracy and disruptive students. In the seminal school-based drama of the era, director Richard Brooks tipped the balance of sympathy very distinctly in favor of Glenn Ford's character, Richard Dadier, a novice English teacher in a New York City high school, and away from the "juvenile delinquents" in his classroom.[18]

However, in the past thirty years, teachers in Hollywood films have undergone an image makeover. As Bill Ayers noticed, teachers in popular movies of the 1970s and 1980s were typically shown in a negative light. While there is the occasional anointed saint, "the problem is that most teachers in these movies are simply not up to the challenge. They are slugs: cynical, inept, backward, naïve or hopeless."[19] This dramatic shift is evident for the first time in the 1967 film *Up the Down Staircase*, featuring Sandy Dennis as Sylvia Barrett, a young English teacher whose initial idealism from her graduate school teacher training experience is beaten out of her by the realities of teaching in a tough New York City high school similar to the one portrayed some twelve years earlier in *Blackboard Jungle*.[20] This film began a twenty-year period in which teachers, and particularly those in the social studies, were portrayed as cynical, boring, and uncaring

toward their students. This Hollywood paradigm for social studies teaching in the 1970s and 1980s corresponded neatly with an era in which conservative policy-makers attacked progressive policies in public education under the presidential administration of Ronald Reagan.

In the following sections, I will explore the ways in which Hollywood films of the 1970s and 1980s depicted social studies teachers and instruction in American public schools by looking at four broad categories: the conditions of schools and social studies classrooms, classroom management practices employed by social studies teachers, instructional practices employed by social studies teachers, and the interactions between social studies teachers and their students. Embedded within these four broad categories is an overall critique of American schooling and, in particular, social studies instructional practice.

"Fast Times": The Paradigm of Crisis and American Schools

The most common view of education in the 1970s and 1980s is one of malaise. One of the central pillars in making the case for sweeping educational standards reforms in the 1980s was the argument that America's schools faced systemic problems.[21] Crucial to this case was that these problems could not be isolated to certain areas (inner-city schools, for example) or attributed to specific issues such as de facto segregation or inequitable funding through property taxes. Rather, all students regardless of the background or capital were failing to make the grade and thus the entire nation was at risk of falling behind its more dynamic economic and military competitors in Europe and Asia, particularly Germany and Japan—ironically two vanquished World War II rivals whose economies had largely been rebuilt with the aid of the 1947 Marshall Plan.

This view was reinforced by the image of decrepit, chaotic, and dangerous schools in Hollywood films of the period. In *Fame* (1980), for example, a music student in a New York City arts academy points out the merits of attending the school to a fellow student who is unsure that he has chosen the right place to study: "Listen, it's better than regular school. It's free and you don't get raped in the hallways." Indeed, several films from the period are centered on the theme of one or a group of heroic students valiantly trying to survive even a single school day without being beaten by vicious gangs of bullies. One of the most common opening sequences for school-based films

in the 1970s and 1980s was the long, slow, establishing pan shot over a crumbling school building surrounded by a chain-link fence with barbed wire and festooned with toilet paper and graffiti. In a typical scene from the 1986 Goldie Hawn vehicle *Wildcats*, the protagonist—a newly hired football coach played by Hawn—drives through a Southside Chicago neighborhood past obligatory scenes of African American drug dealers loitering on street corners to her new job at Central High School. When she enters the dark and empty hallways of the school, she is immediately set upon by a security guard's two Dobermans and chased from the school.

The message of these scenes to American parents is unmistakable—that public schools are dangerous places to send their children to be educated. This is often reinforced by harrowing newsreel-style narrations and crawls over the opening credits of films, often featuring frightening statistics about school violence. For example, in the 1982 school-based horror film *The Class of 1984*, an opening card reads: "Last year there were 280,000 incidents of violence by students against their teachers and classmates in our high schools. Unfortunately, this film is partially based on true events. Fortunately, very few schools are like Lincoln High . . . yet." The use of statistics in these opening scenes would suggest that these filmmakers were attempting with their films to enter a more serious dialogue about the state of schooling during the period.

Other 1970s filmmakers deliberately chose to transcend reality in order to utilize hyperbole for the sake of humor. In the 1979 vehicle for the punk band The Ramones, *Rock and Roll High School*, Vince Lombardi High is depicted as a school that is careening out of control, largely due to having been run by a principal, Professor Webb, who is shown in an opening scene in a near catatonic state, seated in a wheelchair, being fed oatmeal by a buxom nurse. At the climax of the film, the school's students react to the dictatorial leadership introduced by their new principal, Miss Evelyn Togar, by roaming the hallways alongside the Ramones singing the titular song. The film then culminates in a throng of riotous students setting fire to and finally blowing up the school altogether.

Teachers and administrators in films of the 1970s and 1980s are routinely portrayed as clueless about the culture of their charges and oblivious to the pandemonium surrounding them. The 1984 film *Teachers* begins with what the audience is told to believe is an ordinary day in the life of a typical high school in Columbus, Ohio. A security officer marches a student, who is visibly bleeding, through the school's main administrative office. When an administrator, Mr. Rubell (played

by Judd Hirsch), asks what has happened to the student, the officer nonchalantly states: "Stab wound." Rubell then asks a secretary to call for an ambulance at which point the student rouses himself to say that he doesn't require one. "It's not for you; it's for the insurance company," Rubell responds sardonically. In the mind of the low-level school administrator in 1980s films, the needs of individual students, even those in physical danger, fall far behind the school's bureaucratic and legal liabilities.

In the most cartoonish representation of the out-of-control American public school, *The Class of Nuke 'Em High* (1986) focuses on Tromaville High School, a New Jersey school located only a mile from a nuclear power plant that has gone into meltdown mode. As a result of the contamination of the school by nuclear waste, shown as a thick green slime insinuating itself through the walls of the school's feeble structure, the school's "honor students" have metamorphosed into a knife-wielding "vicious gang of cretins" hell-bent on destruction. In the opening scene, a nerdy student named Dewey makes the fatal error of drinking from a water fountain, the device representing the disintegration of school infrastructure. At first, he appears unharmed by ingesting the radioactive water; however, moments later, he begins having convulsions and starts foaming at the mouth. As he becomes increasingly uncontrollable, Dewey throws himself out of a third-story window. As students outside the building run to see what has happened, Dewey's face begins to disintegrate into a gaseous pool of green slime.

The main plotline of *Class of Nuke 'Em High* concerns the criminal activities of a violent school gang named "The Cretins," who are described as "one minute, a group of clean-cut preppies, and the next day . . . a bunch of violent, perverted creeps." The gang, including one student, named Gonzo, with face tattoos and an enormous nose ring, is shown early in the film selling drugs in the school hallways in plain sight of school officials without any apparent fear of consequences. In a similar fashion to that of *Rock 'n' Roll High School* (1979), the chaos hinted at in earlier scenes culminates with a mass evacuation and panic at the school with the Cretins careening through the hallways on their motorcycles, while nuclear waste bubbles into the building's foundation. The nuclear fallout monster that has been hiding in a large drum in the school's basement throughout the story eventually emerges from the green goo and kills all of the Cretins. In the film's climactic scene, Tromaville High is shown as a pile of rubble. While *The Class of Nuke 'Em High* undoubtedly reflected public fears about the nuclear power industry in the aftermath of the 1979 Three Mile

Island meltdown in Pennsylvania, its satire was mainly aimed at the institution of public schooling.

In all of these scenes, the atmosphere of crisis is unmistakable. The audience is left to wonder what on earth is happening in the schools in which they had previously enrolled their children with a sense of contentment and satisfaction. It is easy to imagine the sense of panic as parents watch a scene from *The Class of Nuke 'Em High* as a bloody-faced member of the youth gang "The Cretins" declares into the camera: "We're the youth of today." The images of crumbling schools in these movies thus undermined public confidence in American public education, advancing the need in the public's mind for wholesale reform.

"No Eating!": Classroom Management in 1970s and 1980s Films

One of the most consistent tropes in school-based Hollywood films of the 1970s and 1980s is the unprepared social studies teacher relying upon dusty and outdated textbooks and yellowed notes as he[22] drones on about an esoteric topic to a group of visibly bored students. In film after film, teachers arrive at the school either alongside the students, casually joking with them as they make their way through the overcrowded hallways to their classrooms, or after the students, often screeching into the school's parking lot in worn-out jalopies after the last attendance bell has sounded, to the chagrin of administrators watching and shaking their heads from their offices above. In *The Class of 1984*, a first-year teacher wanders aimlessly into his classroom on what is the first day of his teaching career as the last attendance bell rings and is horrified to find a group of unruly students throwing wads of paper, punching one another, and playing with a variety of weapons. No teacher, and especially not a first-year teacher working on a probationary basis, would be able to be tardy and regularly absent without soon losing his or her job.

Similarly, the kinds of classroom management techniques that are a central part of any teacher preparation program are entirely absent from the Hollywood imagination of the social studies classes of the 1970s and 1980s. Classrooms are uniformly arranged in spirit-crushing rows of crippling wooden desks bolted to the floor. Thus, one of the most common scenes in these films features the camera panning over rows of bored students gazing off into the distance. As any pedagogue would note, this kind of traditional classroom arrangement makes effective disciplining of a group of students especially

difficult, as those students who are not intrinsically motivated to learn will simply gravitate toward the most remote corners of the room in order to escape their teachers' attention.

As a result, social studies teachers in films of the 1970s and 1980s are uniformly stern in responding to student misbehavior. In the 1982 film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, US history teacher Mr. Hand, played with zest by veteran character actor Ray Walston, is shown reviewing a particularly pedantic list of rules on the first day of his class. Meanwhile, a tardy student, Jeff Spicoli (played by a young Sean Penn), is shown meandering down a long hallway looking for Mr. Hand's class. In the eventual confrontation that transpires once Jeff has found his designated classroom, Mr. Hand responds at first with sarcasm and then with hostility before finally ripping up the student's registration card altogether and directing him toward the administrative office.

This kind of hostility displayed by social studies teachers toward their students is assumed by the filmmakers to be a rather mundane, everyday occurrence. Even implicit threats of violence go unchallenged within the main narratives of these films. In the 1975 movie *Cooley High*—referred to by critics as "a Black *American Graffiti*"—Mr. Mason, a high school history teacher played by *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Garrett Morris, stops a student who is entering his classroom and demands that he remove his sunglasses. When the student resists, Mason yells at him: "Man, you can pull that bad act out on the street, but you don't move me. You take off those shades before I bounce you off those hall lockers."

What is new and provocative in these films is the extent to which students, who in many of the earlier postwar films are pictured as either cheerfully innocent or at least passive, resist their teachers and talk back to them in the most insolent manner. In George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), for example, a social studies teacher chaperoning a school dance confronts the lead character Steve Bolander (played by Ron Howard) who is clutch dancing with his girlfriend in a manner in which the teacher (and presumably the school's discipline code) disapproves. When the teacher presses the couple, Bolander tells him to "go kiss a duck." When asked to repeat the insult, Bolander obliges, adding, "Go kiss a duck, Marblehead!" In *Fame*, a teacher in a New York City arts academy, played by the veteran comedienne Anne Meara, engages a student named Leroy in an epic confrontation on the first day of class, first asking him to turn off his "ghetto blaster" and then to "speak English (properly)." Rather than bending to her will, Leroy at first mutters the epithet "bitch" under his breath before

entirely losing his temper and storming out of the classroom amid a flurry of expletives after destroying a set of classroom cabinets.

In other words, students in 1970s and 1980s movies first had to dodge a gauntlet of physical threats inside and outside their schools before finally arriving at the doors of classrooms. Once there, they found social studies classrooms presided over by content-driven tyrants who had long since lost any capacity for empathy toward their students or indeed any true desire to engage them in the content and skills of the field. By employing exclusively male figures as social studies teachers, filmmakers intimate that the field is dominated by uncaring men who are less nurturing and humane than are female teachers in other disciplines. Whether they had experienced similar teachers in their own schools, audience members were encouraged by these movies to believe that social studies teachers had lost all desire to motivate their students to learn.

"Anyone? . . . Anyone? . . .": Instructional Practices in Social Studies Classrooms

These depressing themes regarding American schooling and social studies teaching in 1970s and 1980s movies are reinforced by scenes of unrelentingly tedious lectures on remote and irrelevant content material delivered by social studies teachers. In the thirty-seven feature films reviewed for this project, direct instruction is by far the most common instructional method presented. Boring lectures interrupted by either dramatic or comic moments are often used as a device by filmmakers. For example, in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, Mr. Hand is portrayed in one scene delivering a lecture on the US occupation of Cuba during the Spanish-American War, when a pizza deliveryman arrives at the door with a sausage and extra cheese pie for the antihero Jeff Spicoli. In the 1985 Michael J. Fox comedy *Teen Wolf*, there is a fascinating montage of three classes (one English/language arts class, one social studies class, and one science class). In all three classrooms, rows of desks point the captive students' vision forward toward a teacher stationed at the front of the classroom behind a heavy industrial teacher's desk, lecturing to students.

Several scenes from these feature films show social studies teachers deliberately wasting students' time with irrelevant content material that is well outside the scope of a social studies curriculum. In *Teachers*, social studies teacher Mr. Jurel opens the first day of class by taking attendance and then announcing: "Alright, boys and girls, today we are going to delve into the fascinating world of radiator repair." When

a student complains quite reasonably that "we're supposed to be learning about social studies, not radiators," Jurel quips sarcastically: "Learning is limitless." In the 1980 drama *My Bodyguard*, a five-minute scene details the beginning-of-the-year procedures in one class, displaying the teacher's inability to master a task as simple as student seating arrangement without losing complete control of the class. It is notable that this scene is then juxtaposed with one set in a science classroom, in which the same group of students is shown busily conducting a lab experiment, indicating in the filmmakers' minds the vast difference in practicality between social studies and science instruction. These scenes underscored the neoliberal obsession in the 1980s with curriculum standards replete with detailed frameworks that would mandate a "teacher-proof" list of topics and subtopics to be covered by even the most recalcitrant social studies teacher. While science teachers are portrayed as presenting students with hands-on opportunities to investigate practical questions at hand, social studies teachers are shown wasting students' time with esoterica and worse.

The content of the endless lectures unleashed by social studies teachers in Hollywood films is typically shown to be uniformly dull and pedantic. In an iconic scene from the 1986 film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, a social studies teacher played by Ben Stein drones on about the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, while the camera pans over a group of progressively bored students, including one whose bubble-gum bubble explodes on her face and another who is fast asleep with a trickle of spittle emanating down the top of his desk. It is notable that the most effective social studies teacher depicted in these films is the Herbert Gower character in *Teachers*, who not coincidentally is exposed at the end of the film as a recently released mental patient who has, in an early scene in the film, fraudulently taken a substitute position at the school. Played with comic genius by veteran character actor Richard Mulligan, Gower is shown throughout the film engaging his students in a variety of increasingly elaborate simulations employing an impressive array of costumes. Gower makes such an impression on the school that, as he is led away by the police, toward the film's conclusion, the protagonist, maverick social studies teacher Mr. Jurel, rushes forward to shake his hand and salute his efforts.

While the plurality of social studies teachers in movies from this period are shown to be jaded and unprofessional, lacking in any creative spark, the one innovative teacher in the sample turns out to be delusional. Not only have the lunatics taken over the asylum, the filmmakers seem to suggest to audiences, the mentally unstable are the only few doing a decent job by their students.

"You're Flunking Out!": Social Studies Teachers' Interactions with Students

The dictatorial classroom discipline methods and outmoded instructional techniques on display in 1970s and 1980s Hollywood movies about public schools' social studies teachers featured in these films exhibit a toxic combination of sarcastic derision, outright hostility, and a general lack of professionalism toward their students. A key element in this theme is the wide cultural gulf portrayed between social studies teachers and their students. Teachers such as Mr. Rice in *Three O'Clock High* (1987) are middle-aged, tweed-jacketed snobs who spend their days in richly appointed faculty lounges that resemble the anterooms of The Oxford Roundtable. These unrealistic caricatures of public schooling allow these filmmakers to wink at their audiences that these teachers not only don't care about their charges, but they also have nothing culturally in common with them or, for that matter, with the middle-class and working-class communities in which they serve.

These out-of-touch social studies teachers of Hollywood's imagination employ a deep reservoir of sarcastic quips as a means of putting their students in their proper places and indicating overall disapproval of their behavior and performance in the classes. In an early scene from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989), Mr. Ryan, a history teacher at the suburban San Dimas High School, questions the film's two protagonists in front of the rest of the class on, what he considers, basic information about historical figures such as Napoleon and Joan of Arc before a year-end assessment. When he receives unsatisfactory responses to his questions from the students, he pulls them aside to inform them that they are failing the course, stating with zeal: "It seems to me that the only thing that you have learned in this class is that Caesar is a *salad dressing dude*." Even the most sympathetic social studies teachers are seen to give up on their most troublesome students. In *Cooley High*, Mr. Mason, portrayed throughout the film as the one hip teacher who can best relate to his students, throws up his hands when one of his students is arrested, stating, "Yeah, man, I'm through. And next time you're in trouble, don't count on me for anything, jail or anything else."

In these scenes, there is little or no attempt to keep student information or grades confidential, and teachers frequently shame their charges by flaunting their failing marks in front of a class for public ridicule. In *War Games*, Mr. Liggett is shown passing back exam papers at the beginning of his class. When the protagonist,

David (played by Matthew Broderick), enters the class late, Mr. Liggett momentarily stops his exam review to announce in a sarcastic tone: "Oh, David, I have a present for you." He then holds up the student's exam paper on which a large letter "F" is prominently displayed in red ink. In a similar scene from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, Mr. Hand distributes test papers, commenting as he places them on students' desks: "C . . . D . . . F . . . F . . . F . . . Three weeks we've been talking about the Platt Amendment. What are you people: on dope?" Often this tone of hostility is conveyed without a mere word from the teacher. In *Better off Dead* (1985), a message on the blackboard in block letters reads: "Sit down, Be Quiet and/or Shut up!" Whether verbally or nonverbally, students in the 1970s and 1980s (and the moviegoers watching these scenes) get a clear message that their teachers dislike them and also their jobs as teachers.

Furthermore, social studies teachers act in a blatantly unprofessional manner, often crossing the line and intervening in their personal lives. In *Teachers*, for example, the filmmakers portray the character of Mr. Jurel as a caring teacher by showing him going beyond the boundaries of his position to "help" his students. This includes one scene in which he escorts a female student (played by Laura Dern) who has been impregnated by one of the school's gym teachers to receive an abortion at a local clinic. In another, Jurel assists a wayward student (played by Ralph Macchio) who has stolen one of the school's driver's education vehicles in returning it to the motor pool.

Maverick characters such as Mr. Jurel represent an updated version of earlier depictions of teachers, such as Miss Brooks, in that they pay particular attention to troubled students and often intervene in their chaotic lives in an (often failed) attempt to save them. However, by focusing on the obviously undisciplined elements of these efforts, moviemakers in the 1970s and 1980s paint a far darker picture of these characters than did their earlier counterparts.

Myth and Reality in 1970s and 1980s School-Based Films

The overwhelmingly depressing tone of the films surveyed in this chapter would suggest that 1970s and 1980s American public schools were miserable places. In even the sunniest comedies featured, the tacit assumption of the main narratives is that there was precious little instruction or actual learning going on in schools. Rather, American schools had entered a period of deep crisis, in which students of all backgrounds were subjected to random acts of

violence from their peers, verbal abuse and threats from uncaring administrators, and tedious, irrelevant lectures from their social studies teachers, who grudgingly warehoused them for a few hours during the day while their parents were busy in more productive concerns elsewhere.

However, there is an open question as to whether these images correspond with the scholarly record of the period. Hollywood films of this period are a valuable resource for educational historians, as they reflect the prevailing winds of neoliberal, corporate educational policy. However, historians tell a different story. For one, educational historians have described the 1970s and early 1980s as the peak of alternative pedagogy in the United States. Journalist Charles E. Silbermann's 1970 best-seller *Crisis in the Classroom* popularized the "open education" movement as a means of transcending traditional teacher-centered pedagogy that had made public schools in the postwar period "grim, joyless places."[23] The next year, romantic theorist Ivan Ilich went further than Silbermann, advocating the abolition of the entire formal schooling institution in his book *Deschooling Society*.[24] As a result of these scholarly interventions, educators across the country implemented radical pedagogical reforms that influenced everything from school and classroom architecture to school curricula to classroom discipline techniques and instruction. Gerald Gutek, for example, claimed:

> The small, self-contained classroom with a teacher isolated from her or his colleagues and pupils pursuing constraining standardized lessons from textbooks was . . . replaced by large open spaces without restricting interior walls, in which pupils would be free to move from learning center to learning center.[25]

It is important to note, then, that when neoliberal and neoconservative pundits critiqued the school movements of the 1970s, they were specifically pointing out what they felt to be the failures of these far-reaching campaigns.

Despite their stodgy image in the films of the 1970s and 1980s, secondary social studies teachers were not immune to these developments. Building from the New Social Studies movement of the early 1960s that employed National Defense Education Act funding to develop innovative curricular projects, social studies teachers began to introduce inquiry-based methods into their regular classroom instruction. For example, Elizabeth Washington and Robert Dahlgren have detailed the influence of Texas-based history educator Allan

Kownslar's efforts in reviving a social reconstructionist, issues-based curriculum to secondary history curriculum in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[26] Others such as Donald Oliver and his students James Shaver and Fred Newmann at Harvard began to employ an imaginative discovery method to social studies, recalling the nineteenth-century innovations of Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi. Ronald Evans noted: "Their purpose was to explore a controversial area, to encourage the student to find where he or she stood, and to defend a position. Thus, areas of controversy were explored, using what the authors termed a 'jurisprudential approach.'"[27]

As a result of these innovations, nationwide assessments of public education during the period consistently show steady progress in student achievement. This is particularly the case when it comes to closing the gap in achievement between students of different racial and social class backgrounds. David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle remarked that "[the] evidence from the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) also does not confirm the myth of a recent decline in American student achievement. Instead, it indicates a general pattern of stable achievement combined with modest growth in achievement."[28] This steady progress within America's schools is moreover indicated in the contemporaneous surveys of parents, a majority of whom gave the schools that their children attended high marks. For instance, the fifteenth annual Gallup poll of public attitudes toward public schools, conducted in 1983, indicated that 63% gave their local schools an A or B grade, while only 7% gave their schools a failing grade.[29] The positive views of American schooling in the 1970s and 1980s are rarely, if ever, presented in the films of the era.

It thus seems apparent that the schooling institutions that are repeatedly castigated in the films of the 1970s and 1980s were far from those experienced by contemporary students of the period who were watching them. Rather, the filmmakers and actors, many of them members of the Baby Boom generation who were schooled under a more traditional regime featuring a top-down curriculum, direct instruction methods, and behaviorist classroom management in the 1950s and 1960s, were actually encouraging educators to innovate in precisely the ways that many schools did during the time that their films eventually appeared. Indeed, one of the most unintentionally amusing elements of this dynamic is the frequent use of actors who are far beyond high school age to portray fresh-faced teenagers. Free-market advocates who seized upon the dark images of school life that these films portrayed to propose reactionary measures that would

propel American schools backward toward the 1950s and 1960s models that these films so vividly lampooned, however, overlooked this irony. This dated perspective, exemplified best by the vogue in the 1970s for movies that cast a nostalgic eye over the 1950s and early 1960s (e.g., George Lucas's *American Graffiti* and Randal Kleiser's *Grease*), meant that the films that American audiences viewed during this period reflected schooling practices that had long since been banished in favor of more progressive methods.

Conclusion

Rather than the selfless martyrs of earlier cinema portraits, secondary social studies teachers and their practices are portrayed in the films of the 1970s and 1980s as uniformly dull and pedantic, creating a stultifying and authoritarian classroom atmosphere for their students. In films such as *The Last Picture Show*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, social studies teachers engage in a cynical charade of the educational process, warehousing a captive audience of increasingly bored and resistant high school students in dangerous schools filled with a menacing cocktail of underage sex, drugs, and violence. The social studies curricula presented to students in an exclusively traditional form of one-way transference through lecture and rote memorization are understood by all members of the school community to be dull and irrelevant to their everyday lives. The interactions between teachers and students in both the urban and suburban high schools of Hollywood's imagination often surround explosive conflicts in which rebellious teenagers react to the draconian constraints of their schooling experiences.

This depressing and unrealistic portrait of dictatorial teachers, mundane curricula, jaded students, and out-of-control classrooms would ultimately serve the interests of those who would lead a "Back to Basics" school reform agenda under the Reagan administration in the 1980s. Moreover, some thirty years after the heyday of school-based teenage films, the images of secondary social studies teachers from these films continue to be used by neoliberal and conservative advocates of market-based reform movements in the twenty-first century. For example, a 2006 special edition of the ABC TV magazine program *20/20*, "Stupid in America," employed a number of short clips from 1970s and 1980s films to press home its claim that schools a quarter century after *A Nation at Risk* were still in crisis. Thus, it is likely that these unflattering images of secondary social studies teachers and classrooms, crafted by artists projecting backward to their own

dyspeptic memories of schooling in the immediate postwar period, will be used long into the twenty-first century in order to support a traditional approach to social studies curricular development and instruction satirized in the original films.

FILMOGRAPHY

1. *American Graffiti* (1973)
2. *Better Off Dead* (1985)
3. *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989)
4. *The Breakfast Club* (1985)
5. *Can't Buy Me Love* (1987)
6. *Class* (1983)
7. *The Class of 1984* (1982)
8. *The Class of Nuke 'Em High* (1986)
9. *Cooley High* (1975)
10. *Fame* (1980)
11. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982)
12. *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986)
13. *Grease* (1978)
14. *Grease 2* (1982)
15. *Heathers* (1988)
16. *The Last Picture Show* (1971)
17. *Lean on Me* (1989)
18. *Lucas* (1986)
19. *My Bodyguard* (1980)
20. *One Crazy Summer* (1986)
21. *Pretty in Pink* (1986)
22. *The Principal* (1987)
23. *Rock 'n' Roll High School* (1979)
24. *Sixteen Candles* (1984)
25. *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987)
26. *Stand and Deliver* (1988)
27. *The Sure Thing* (1985)
28. *Teachers* (1984)
29. *The Teacher* (1974)
30. *Teen Witch* (1989)
31. *Teen Wolf* (1985)
32. *Teen Wolf Too* (1987)
33. *Three O'Clock High* (1987)
34. *Valley Girl* (1983)
35. *WarGames* (1983)
36. *Weird Science* (1985)
37. *Wildcats* (1986)

NOTES

1. Bogdanovic's film is based on Larry McMurtry's 1966 best-selling novel: Larry McMurtry, *The Last Picture Show* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966).
2. Mark Goldman, *City on the Edge: Buffalo, New York* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 255.
3. Public schools were scarcely the only institution to receive this treatment in films, however. Films such as *Network* (1976) and *Absence of Malice* (1981) critique the trivial tabloid culture of the mainstream media, while an avalanche of disaster movies such as *The Towering Inferno* (1974), *Earthquake* (1974), and *Flood!* (1976) pictured a nation at the edge of complete annihilation.
4. Alyson Klein, "Obama Defends Race to the Top," *Education Week* (July 30, 2010), http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/07/29/37obama.h29.html?tkn=YPSFTuIwSMnvc2wxv6mpspx0ROUv0Qah0KlB&cmp=clp-edweek

5. Margaret Mead, *The School in American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 5.
6. Patrick Ryan and Sevan Terzian, "*Our Miss Brooks*: Broadcasting Domestic Ideals for the Female Teacher in the Postwar United States," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 21 (Winter 2009): 76–100.
7. Ryan and Terzian comment: "Miss Brooks thus largely conformed to the prevailing expectations in the postwar United States that female teachers would be overworked, underpaid, and subject to male administrative power." Ibid., 95.
8. A full list of the films analyzed in this project is provided at the end of this chapter.
9. The textual analysis process used in this project emerges from the sociological school of film studies as exemplified in Robert Bulman's work. Robert C. Bulman, *Hollywood Goes to High School: Cinema, Schools and American Culture* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1985).
10. See Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000); Gerald W. Bracey, *The War Against America's Public Schools: Privatizing Schools, Commercializing Education* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002); Ronald W. Evans, *The Social Studies Wars: What Should We Teach the Children?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004); Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); David B. Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
11. Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings, "Prologue: An Invitation to Our Readers," in *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, eds. Witherell and Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 1.
12. Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 2. See also Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).
13. Alan S. Marcus, Scott A. Metzger, Richard J. Paxton, and Jeremy D. Stoddard, *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 7.
14. Marcus et al. comment: "In other words, just like print novels or stories, movies have *purposes* (intentions) and *themes* (messages)" (emphases in original). Ibid., 7.
15. Timothy Shary, *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 26.
16. Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
17. Robert Edelman, "Teachers in the Movies," *American Educator* 7 (Fall 1983): 26–31.

18. *Blackboard Jungle* is based on Evan Hunter's (nee Salvatore Lombino) 1954 memoir of the same name: Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).
19. William Ayers, "A Teacher Ain't Nothin' but a Hero," in *Images of Schoolteachers in Twentieth-Century America: Paragons, Polarities, Complexities*, eds. Pamela Bolotin Joseph and Gail E. Burnaford (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 147.
20. The film is based on Bel Kaufman's 1965 novel: Bel Kaufman, *Up the Down Staircase* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965).
21. The 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report argued: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983), 1.
22. In the thirty-seven feature films reviewed for this project, there is not a single example of a female secondary social studies teacher.
23. Charles E. Silbermann, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education* (New York: Vintage, 1970), 6.
24. Ivan Ilich, *Deschooling Society* (London: Marion Boyars, 1971).
25. Gerald L. Gutek, *American Education, 1945–2000* (New York: Waveland Press, 2000), 206–207.
26. Washington and Dahlgren comment: "In the same way that Counts (1934) and others (e.g., Harold Rugg) emphasized the analysis of the Communist Party and the concerns over poverty prevalent during the 1930s, Kownslar's (1967) text *Discovering American History* . . . undeniably promoted the concerns of the 1960s social movements around civil rights and the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam." Elizabeth Y. Washington and Robert L. Dahlgren, "The Quest for Relevancy: Allan Kownslar and Historical Inquiry in the New Social Studies Movement," in *The New Social Studies: People, Projects & Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Stern (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), 99.
27. Evans, *The Social Studies Wars*, p. 134.
28. The 15th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools, *The Phi Delta Kappan* 65 (1) (September 1983): 35.
29. Cited in ibid., p. 39.

Chapter 10

Looking at the Man in the Principal's Office

Kate Rousmaniere

While the feminization of teaching has been a topic of interest to educational historians for some time, the parallel historical process by which school administration became "masculinized" has been of less interest, in part because masculine assumptions are so deeply embedded within popular understandings of school leadership.[1] Notable, too, is that cultural studies of the representation of education focus overwhelmingly on the school teacher, with no more than a handful of such studies on images of school administration.[2] Yet in fact, popular culture representations of the school principal offer a provocative insight into pervasive understandings of both school leadership and the status of schooling in America. And central to these conceptions is the gendered identity of the principal.

Although school principals are generally assumed to be male, they have not always been so, and school principals' masculine identity has been regularly questioned. Indeed, since its establishment as a core position in American schools in the early twentieth century, the principal's legitimacy, status, and gender identity have been under constant scrutiny. As late as the Second World War, over two-thirds of elementary principals were still women, defying half a century of professional efforts to recruit men to that position. Furthermore, even in secondary schools, where men have traditionally held most principalships, representations of the school head have been unstable to this day, wavering between the stock image of a bumbling middle

S.G. Terzian et al. (eds.), *American Education in Popular Media*

manager emasculated by school bureaucracy and a hypermasculinized bully. The ambiguity of popular understandings of the school principal has long frustrated principals' advocates who have struggled to raise the professional status of the position to that of doctors and lawyers, in part by promoting male candidates and masculine attributes into the principal's office. But in spite of such efforts, the questionable masculinity of school principals remained a lively topic in late twentieth-century popular culture, particularly with the rise of an independent youth culture in postwar America and increasing public scrutiny of school quality.

This chapter explores the portrayal of the school principal in radio, comic strips, television serials, and films in the late twentieth century, focusing on the way in which cultural anxieties about principals' masculinity have been represented in popular culture. Particularly notable is that as the job of the principal became increasingly complex in the years after the Second World War, popular media increasingly satirized school principals with exaggerated and derogatory gender representations.

The Making of the Man in the Principal's Office

The principalship that dominates contemporary cultural imagination—a well-trained male public official with a high salary and equally high cultural authority—is a relatively recent creation. Well through the mid-twentieth century, the school principal's job was an eclectic and inconsistent position. In some districts, principals were little more than teachers with extra administrative responsibilities; in others, the school principal was not even identified as an administrator. The absence of qualifying entrance credentials or degrees in most districts meant that virtually anybody could become a principal: teachers moved in and out of the position, appointed by school boards to manage a range of basic managerial responsibilities. Further undermining its professional stature, the principalship suffered from low salaries equivalent to those of humble ministers and building trade workers, thus distancing school leaders even farther from their aspirational peers of physicians, lawyers, and engineers. The elementary principalship was particularly low in status and salaries, due to the large number of women who held the position.[3]

Educational reformers in the early twentieth century saw the professional enhancement of the newly conceived principal as a necessary task for the development of a modern school system. Driven by a vision that the nation's economy and culture would be improved

by the systematic education of all its citizens, these reformers set out to develop the institutional capacities of a standardized public school organization. Their goal was a centralized administrative structure whereby all decisions about schooling would be addressed by well-trained and authoritative professional school administrators who would manage a shining new cost-efficient educational bureaucracy.[4]

A strengthened principal's role was seen as the lynchpin to this reform, because the principal would be the local professional agent who would implement central office policies into the local school. This conception of the principal as a middle manager perfectly suited the visions of educational administration reformers who conceived of the modern school system as a corporate enterprise, led by descending hierarchies of trained leadership originating in state and district offices and cascading down to building leaders. As one prominent reformer envisioned in 1923, the ideal relationship of the principal to the district office was

> analogous to that of the manager of a town branch of a public utility to the general superintendent of the business, to that of the manager of a single department to the general manager of a department store, to that of the superintendent of a division of a railroad to the president of the company, or that of the colonel of a regiment to the commanding general of an army.[5]

Early twentieth-century educational administration reformers developed a number of strategies for enhancing the principal's role, each of which inherently promoted a new masculine attribute to the position.

The first strategy for professionalization of the principalship was the physical separation of principals from teachers. Stationed in a separate office, the modern principal would be able to supervise the school in modern ways—by paperwork, reports, dutiful female secretaries, and modern devices such as the dictaphone, mimeograph, and adding machine, all of which promised to distinguish school administration from school teaching. Now physically separated from teachers, the newly professionalized principal was then directed to assert authority over teachers as a regulatory supervisor.[6]

Gender distinctions played a critical role in this separation of the male principal from the largely female teaching staff, addressing the problem that many male school administrators saw as the excessive femininity of American public education. Descriptions of the principal's supervisory leadership often relied on popular imagery of modern industrial society, with specific masculine references and

implications. The newly professional principal must be "a directing educational engineer," a "foreman who through close supervision helped to compensate for ignorance and lack of skill of his subordinates," and one whose work involved the scientific chronicling of the school's needs in much the way financiers completed a banker's ledger.[7] Some school leaders were more explicit in their insistence on the principal's bullish authority as a tough and masculine supervisor. In Chicago in the early 1920s, Superintendent William McAndrew informed newly appointed principals thus: "You have the hand of iron. Use it. If teachers or a wild bunch of citizens . . . try to run the schools, put a stop to it with the power that you have."[8]

A second strategy for professionalizing the principal's office was the development of more specialized and competitive credentialing practices. Reformers argued that one reason for the low status of the principal was that virtually anybody could become one. While the high school principalship tended to have a college degree as a minimum requirement, well through the Second World War, there were few entrance requirements for the elementary principalship. As late as 1937, twelve states still did not require a bachelor's degree for that position. Few principals at any level had professional training or coursework in educational theory or psychology, testing, administration, or supervision. In-service professional development was also inconsistent: some principals might have attended some kind of summer training or professional meeting at some point in their career, but such activities were rarely a prerequisite for the position.[9]

School reformers surmised that the development of sequenced graduate coursework and endorsement by the state would narrow opportunities to enter the principal's office to those who were mentored into such preparatory programs. The principalship would thus cease to be an accidental occupation tagged on to the end of a teaching career, and instead be the successful reward after a competitive preparation and review process. This would raise the principal's status and compensation, and allow for the more intentional shaping of the people, specifically men, who took on the position. Newly extended and formalized preparation programs discouraged women from applying, given the dominant cultural norm for women to avoid competition and positions of public authority. Women were further dissuaded from applying to graduate programs by new male-dominated university departments in educational administration which targeted their new degrees for ambitious male high school teachers and administrators. In the years after the Second World War, male educators were further supported in their professional advancement by the

GI Bill, which covered the costs of the advanced academic study of male veterans.[10]

A third strategy for the professionalization of the principalship was the explicit reshaping of the position to become a masculine occupation, the most popular approach of which was the tapping of newly trained male athletic coaches for the position. The work of coaching—communication, authority, disciplinary training of students and public relations—aligned with the emerging professional identity of the new principal and, in a happy coincidence, provided the masculine image that appealed both to the public and to school reformers. A background in athletic coaching linked the very identity of the principal with a physicality that excluded women, people with disabilities, and men whose masculinity could be questioned by their sexuality. To further support the recruitment of athletic coaches, principals' advocates took pains to describe the great variety and physical mobility of the job, asserting that the principalship involved not only administrative and supervisory work, but also physical responsibilities around the school plant.[11] Because of the dominance of boys' sports—a situation that only began to be redressed by the passage of Title IX in 1972—coaching institutionalized a career ladder that was virtually blocked for women. A national survey of school principals between 1987 and 2000 found that one-fifth of elementary principals and half of secondary school principals had been an athletic coach before taking on the principalship. As late as 2005, 25% of all school principals were former athletic coaches.[12]

Other organizational and cultural changes effectively reorganized women out of the elementary principalship, including the school consolidation movement that replaced small elementary schools where women had been principals with larger schools that required principals with advanced degrees.[13] In many cities, elementary principals were excluded from applying to high school principalship positions, based on the theory that the experience of managing an elementary school was simply not enough for leading a large high school.[14] The work of elementary teaching and administration, done primarily by women, was flatly counted as less significant for school leadership than similar work in the secondary school.

Not surprisingly the number and proportion of women in school and district administration offices plummeted in the years after the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1962, the number of women superintendents declined by 70%. In 1950, women were 56% of all elementary principals; by the early 1970s, they constituted only 20%

of elementary principals, 3% of junior high school principals, and 1% of senior high school principals.[15]

The Problems of the Postwar Principal

The organized efforts to professionalize the principal's office were accompanied by the intensification of the principal's job. Postwar school administration became both more embedded in national legal and policy agendas and more responsive to the demands of interest groups. The principal, positioned in the middle of an increasingly complex educational system, faced both the impact of modern cultural changes in the student and school community and the intensification of modern educational policy developments.

The first challenge to postwar schools was the student enrollment explosion of the postwar "baby boom": total American school enrollment increased by two-thirds between 1945 and 1965. Secondary schools grew particularly rapidly: whereas in 1920, less than a third of teenagers attended high school, by 1940 three-quarters were enrolled, and in 1960, almost 90%.[16] Enrollment growth impacted everything about schools, from the shape and size of school buildings to the behavior and beliefs of students. A particularly new and challenging youth culture arose in the 1950s and 1960s, emerging from the large cohort of baby boomers, postwar affluence, changed family structure, and a newly mediated popular culture. Teenagers from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds met in schools, which served as a rich Petri dish of social interaction, nurturing a popular youth culture that challenged the traditional authority structure of schools.

The increased accessibility of schools to a more diverse group of students led to proposals to diversify the curricular emphases of public education, including movements to address young people's interests by relaxing traditional academic requirements; expanding electives, interdisciplinary courses, and extracurricular activities; and ending dress codes and other social regulations.[17] The vibrant popular culture of the new baby boomer generation led to a national panic about juvenile delinquency and a popular perception that the American education system was failing in its mission. In response, educators implemented more aggressive discipline policies. Los Angeles developed the first district-wide discipline policy in the nation in 1959; by 1975, discipline policies were implemented in 75% of American schools.[18] These policies were supported by teachers and parents, in large part because the new disciplinary authority was now legally assigned to administrators. When Gallup polls of the 1970s and

1980s continued to rank "lack of discipline" as the worst problem in education, school administrators took the blame.[19]

Postwar global politics also impacted schools. A national preoccupation with competition with the Soviet Union led to the first significant federal intervention in schools with the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which provided federal funding for science and technology education, foreign language education, school testing, guidance counseling, and vocational education. These programs set a precedent for federal funding of and intervention in public education in subsequent years, including the monumental Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that instituted federal funding for social enrichment programs for poor children.[20] Later federal legislation and Supreme Court decisions mandated the racial desegregation of schools and the provision of special support for children with limited English proficiency and with disabilities. These policies acknowledged the arrival of whole new populations of students into schools and required new personnel and programs in schools, while formally yoking local schools to the federal government, and imposing additional responsibilities for legal compliance to the principal's desk.

Postwar school principals also faced a newly animated public that clamored for changes in local schools, often in litigious and aggressive ways. In the expanding suburbs of the postwar era, organized parent groups lobbied school boards on budgets, curriculum, racial integration, and social programming in schools. Legal challenges to traditional practices of prayer in schools, disciplinary regulations, and student dress codes ignited local controversies; students fought for their own civil rights for free speech, and gender, racial, and ethnic representation inside schools; and teachers and other school employees organized themselves into newly authorized unions to bargain collectively over issues of wages, hours, and working conditions.[21] Such conflicts were initially played out in the principal's office as they wound their way toward resolution in school board meetings, judicial court rooms, and the ballot box.

In this cauldron of political, administrative, and social changes, postwar principals were handed an unwieldy and contradictory job description: to maintain order and to promote progress; both to listen to the community and to abide by federal regulations; both to uphold the tradition of elders and to attend to the interest of youth. The increased public attention and expectations of schools was expressed in popular youth and adult media, contributing to a culture of suspicion against educators both in the classroom and in administrative

offices, a popular tone which undermined the legitimacy of public schools and further eroded public support.

THE UNMAKING OF THE MAN IN THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Many of the postwar anxieties about the changing role and purpose of the modern schools were played out in popular media representations of the school principal. Now identified as the authoritative father figure in schools, the principal seemed to be the appropriate person to blame for the perceived collapse of authority and order in schools. Finding fault with male leaders echoed a broader national anxiety about masculinity among all white-collar men workers in this period. Between 1920 and 1970, the number of American blue-collar workers declined while the number of white-collar salaried managers and administrators doubled. Although representing the best of postwar prosperity, this increase in middle management raised a number of questions about masculinity. Modern corporate capitalism seemed to have transformed the independent masculine entrepreneur into a passive cog in the bureaucratic machine, a company man who conformed to organizational hierarchy in a windowless office. The modern corporate manager, as portrayed in postwar film, fiction, and popular commentary, was a strangely emasculated, disempowered, and soulless being, neither a skilled worker nor a professional, but merely an "organization man."[22] The popular writer Norman Mailer warned that such a manager "faced a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled."[23]

Furthering national anxiety about American postwar schooling was the perception that "feminized" schools were not capable of enforcing traditional rigor and discipline. Critics charged that school administrators were abdicating their responsibility to uphold standards when they bowed to student interests, parent wishes, and the federal government. Such passive femininity risked nothing less than the future of American society.[24] A 1969 book, *The Feminized Male*, exemplified this concern, arguing that an "overexposure to feminine norms" at home and school was turning boys into sissies, noting that the most intellectual boys also scored the lowest on masculinity scales.[25]

Popular anxieties about the absence of a masculine presence in schools began to appear in a variety of venues in the 1950s. The May 23, 1953, cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* was a painting by the American artist Norman Rockwell, "The Girl with the Black Eye." In the image, a young white male principal is interrupted from his

desk work by his officious woman secretary who stands above him, describing the problem outside his office: a young girl who has clearly been in a fight. The girl—defiant, rumpled, and proudly sporting a black eye—has more confidence and has clearly been involved in more physical activity than the startled young principal at his desk. Surrounded by females and papers, this young man hardly betrays the assured masculinity of the ideal principal—thus showing the ironic poignancy and humor of the scene.[26]

Similarly, in the first modern popular medium about education, *Our Miss Brooks*, broadcast on radio from 1948 to 1957 and on television from 1952 to 1956, Principal Osgood Conklin is a blustering, crotchety, and dishonest man, who constantly annoys his faculty and students and serves as the antithesis of the self-confident English teacher, Connie Brooks.[27] The trope of the officious and monarchical male principal as a foil to the savvy woman teacher was also played out in *Archie* comics, first appearing in 1942, where the rotund and bumbling principal, Mr. Weatherbee, is consistently outsmarted by teenagers and bossed around by the elderly spinster teacher Miss Grundy.

Principals' passive acceptance of bureaucracy was highlighted in *Up the Down Staircase*, a novel published in 1965 with a Hollywood film following two years later, in which a young idealistic female English teacher just starting her career by teaching in an inner-city high school is quickly disillusioned by the combination of administrative restraints, her troubled students' apathy and misbehavior, and her colleagues' incompetence. Central to the dark comedy of the story is the predominance of inane bureaucracy—the title refers to a memo from the never-seen male principal whose presence exists only in the sending of such communications about ridiculous rules. Male administrators, it was clear, were fumbling, flabby creatures who were overwhelmed by bureaucracy.

Principals' passivity was also identified as a risk to national security, as articulated in a lurid front-page article, "Crisis in Education," in the March 1958 issue of *Life Magazine*. Sloan Wilson, the author of the 1955 book *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, which criticized the conformity of modern bureaucracy, wrote a scathing article on American education called "It's Time to Close our Carnival." "To revitalize America's educational dream, we must stop kowtowing to the mediocre," asserted Wilson, the author of the most popular book about mediocrity of the day. Wilson cited a principal of a junior high school in New York City who admitted that when he signed diplomas, he suffered "great pangs of pedagogical conscience" because although many of his students could barely read, he had "with the connivance of the duly constituted authorities helped

to perpetuate the fiction" that they had become literate. Such misgivings were contrasted with the work of a woman principal of a Soviet school, who, in a companion article, was described as a "stern disciplinarian" who held multiple national honors and who was photographed in the midst of delivering a history lecture.[28]

Cold War critiques of educators' masculinity segued with popular anxiety about homosexuality. Indeed, in the 1950s, the persecution of gays and lesbians proved to be the backbone of the anticommunist paranoia: the number of government employees fired on the basis of sexuality far outnumbered the number of alleged communists who were dismissed. In schools, too, paranoia about the infiltration of deviant sexuality mirrored the persecution of political radicals with charges that gays and lesbians had "formed cells in the public schools and were corrupting the unwitting into Communism and lesbianism."[29]

In such a climate, educators struggled to defend and promote the masculinity and heterosexuality of school administrators. In a 1946 description of a professional search for a school principal, the superintendent was "very cautious and discriminate in his male appointment. The man selected could not be labeled as an effeminate being. He was a former collegiate athletic hero. His physique was comparable to any of the mythical Greek gods. He was truly the ultimate in manliness." Last, but not least, he was married.[30] When a board of education employs a school administrator, noted a writer in the same journal in 1963, "it is also bringing the man's wife and family into the community."[31] In a national postwar campaign to recruit men into teaching, educators cautioned male teachers from becoming so consumed by their work that they would lose their masculinity and urged them to participate in "the virile activities that make up the life of any other man," such as sports, community affairs, and men's clubs. Education needed an injection of masculinity, argued an author in this campaign, who concluded enthusiastically: "Move aside, sissies, we are on our way!"[32]

The exception to this pattern also proves the rule. Of all the popular media portrayals of the school leadership after the Second World War, only one principal stands out as a successful advocate for humane, caring, student-centered, and enlightened education, and he appears in a most unlikely source: the 1956 book and subsequent film *Peyton Place*. Heralded as a classic story of scandal and provincial repression against modern youth culture, the main story line revolves around teenage sex, anxiety, and challenges of cultural norms in a small town in the years before the Second World War. The 1957 film centers on the new high school principal, Michael Rossi, an exemplar of masculinity, competence, and rational thought in a town that is

riddled with the emotional drama of women and teenagers.[33] From his first introduction, Rossi represents cool modern advancement and self-confidence. The school board chooses him as the principal over a long-tenured woman teacher, who is beloved by the students, even though Rossi demands a significantly higher salary than the school board originally offers. Well-educated, handsome, single, and speaking with a crisp and assertive voice, Rossi refuses to coach sports, and emphasizes the teaching of forward-thinking ideas. Teachers should teach the truth and "teach a minimum of facts and a maximum of ideas," he asserts. Particularly with the looming specter of war, Rossi believes that "our main job is to teach children how to think." He also proposes a sex education class to bring students into modern social ways of thinking and advises students to follow their dreams by going to college. Such intellectual ideas are hardly a challenge to the principal's masculinity, as he proceeds to woo a widowed school mother, whose emotional life has been frozen by her scandalous past. Fearless about conflict and controversy, charming, sensitive, trustworthy, and athletic, Principal Rossi is the epitome of the healthy new heterosexual man who is both confident and caring, and he earns the respect of his community and students, and the love of a good woman. It is significant that this one positive image of a male school principal occurs in a film centered on the domestic lives of a community. Principal Rossi is the voice of cool reason and masculine stability that rises above the community's social chaos. Such a solid principal figure is virtually never replicated elsewhere in popular culture.

Crisis, Chaos, Incompetency, Insanity, and the Principal

By the 1970s, principals stood at the bull's eye of attention from district, state, and federal offices, and local community, parent, and student demands. With so many interests at play, few parties were ever fully satisfied, and accordingly, by the 1970s, schools were commonly portrayed in popular culture as tragic comedies where educators braced themselves against the double onslaught of rebellious youth culture and dysfunctional bureaucracy. The principal was implicated in this chaos, an iconic representative of the school out of control, and responsible for every failure in schools from boring classrooms to trivial administrative requirements. In television and movie images in the 1970s and afterwards, the principal represented the oppressive school organization against which students successfully rebelled, often driving their irrational and tyrannical principal insane in the process.

The sinister and sometimes mentally unstable attributes of these modern, bully principals offered a different take on gender roles in schools.

As highlighted in the federal report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, many late-twentieth-century Americans had come to believe a narrative that their entire school system was in crisis. There were many identified causes, but certainly the school principal was one of them, although the source of the principals' problem was never clear. Critics attacked principal preparation programs as either too technical or too theoretical; others identified the increased stress, loss of authority, low compensation, and extended work hours for a decline in the number of educators interested in the principalship and the high turnover rate of those who chose the career.[34] But in popular culture portrayals of schools through the 1970s and 1980s, principals themselves were inevitably blamed for their problems, accused of being alternately corrupt, insane, or incompetent.

In a number of media portrayals in the 1970s and 1980s, principals were portrayed as amoral agents in a corrupt and malfunctioning educational system. The school system in the popular television cartoon *The Simpsons*, for example, is consistently mocked for its idiotic administration and the principal's compliance in it. Springfield Elementary is at one time voted "The Most Dilapidated School in Missouri," and fiscal cuts result in a variety of troubling scenarios including replacing the school's tetherball with a cinder block, the construction of a disabled ramp by the local mafia, and a cafeteria menu made from circus animals, shredded newspaper, and old gym mats. Largely oblivious to such problems, Principal Skinner barrels ahead, earning the award of "the best principal that Springfield Elementary could afford," and making public address announcements such as "Attention. This is an emergency broadcast, all is well in the school, my authority as principal is total." Principal Skinner is a bureaucrat who employs neither ethics nor leadership skills in his daily attempts to quell the chaos that is his school, and thus epitomizes popular satiric views of modern American schooling as a poorly functioning machine led by a soulless boss.

While Principal Skinner is a largely benign and powerless presence over his school, some of his media peers are more malevolent in their corruption, unconcerned with moral or legal guidelines, and sometimes mentally unstable. The few women principals in popular media tend to fall in this category, as if the very existence of female authority is the result of illegal, immoral, and insane practices. Angela Li, one of the few women principals in modern popular media, is the tyrannical principal at Lawndale High in the animated 1990s TV show *Daria*.

Principal Li is a self-righteous, iron-fisted tyrant who has little respect for her students and who is constantly using school funds on elaborate security equipment for the school. To deal with her inability to handle the budget for her school, Principal Li forces students to participate in fund-raising schemes of questionable moral quality, calling for mandatory attendance of all school events that charge admission prices. In the 1979 film *Rock and Roll High School*, the core story is the battle between the principal and modern student youth culture, as encapsulated in a particularly vivacious student's passion for the punk rock band, the Ramones. Vince Lombardi High School already has a bad record when the new principal, Miss Togar, takes over, ending her first visit to the board of education with a military salute to the former principal, who sits in a comatose state in a straight jacket at the end of the table, presumably driven mad by the students. Ultimately, Principal Togar is herself driven crazy by her obsessive hatred for rock and roll, and ends the movie in her own straight jacket.

But men principals, too, are mocked for their inability to remain sane. Principal McVicker, the principal of Highland High, in the 1990s TV show *Beavis and Butthead* suffers from such extreme nervous tension that he constantly shakes, and he keeps a bottle of Old Crow whiskey and pills in his desk. Perhaps the most famous example of the mentally unstable male school administrator is Vice-Principal Ed Rooney in the 1986 popular film "*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*," in which Rooney obsessively stalks the clever and popular truant student Ferris Bueller. In such portrayals, principals are slightly deranged people whose eccentricities are exacerbated by teenagers' justifiable resistance. Even good principals can go bad in the popular culture of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Principal Belding, the generally affable, if largely absent, principal of Bayside High School in the popular TV comedy series *Saved by the Bell* that aired between 1989 and 1993, is sent to prison near the end of the fourth season after it is revealed he had installed video cameras in the girls' locker room.

As terrible as principals' insanity and corruptibility is their anti-intellectual and repressive incompetence, often portrayed as the result of their slavish obsession with bureaucracy, which suffocates the inspirational work of gifted teachers. In the 1984 comedy drama *Teachers*, the beleaguered school is led by a haggard principal, who is seen only escaping into his office as he wrestles with a lawsuit by a recent graduate who earned a diploma despite his illiteracy. In the 1995 film *Dangerous Minds*, an inspired ex-Marine female teacher struggles to make a difference in her urban school *in spite* of her principal who is obsessed with protocol and lawsuits at the expense of student

learning, and in the award winning 1989 film *Dead Poets Society*, the traditional headmaster is the repressive enemy against whom the students' beloved and creative teacher famously struggles.

Central to all of these portrayals of the modern principal is the absence of masculine traits: men principals are poorly dressed, unkempt, out of shape, and out of control. Few have wives or successful relationships with women. Principal Skinner from *The Simpsons*, for example, is incapable of committing to a romantic relationship with the assertive teacher Edna Krabappel; he lives with his domineering elderly mother and desperately claims his own autonomy only through his ham radio hobby.[35] Similarly, Mr. Weatherbee from *Archie Comics* is constantly undermined by his own rotund, bespeckled body, his unstable love life with bossy teacher Miss Grundy, and his motorcycle-riding mother who calls him "Willy." Flailing and feminine, they have succumbed to the bureaucracy. Women principals like Principals Li and Togar, in contrast, aspire to be commanding men, and fail. For both men and women, the comedy of their personal failings is intensified by both the administrative machine in which they work and the individual spirit of their students.

I'm the Principal, Man: Fighting a Nation at Risk

In contrast, a distinctly more masculine and combative principal emerged in the 1980s, representing the entrepreneurial ethos that animated the invigoration of free-market ideology of public school reform of the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush presidencies. The crisis of public education, it was asserted, could only be solved by competition that would replace oppressive public school bureaucracy with entrepreneurial ingenuity. Such agendas needed independent, hard driving, and distinctly commanding school leaders. President Reagan's secretary of education, William Bennett, who assertively promoted this agenda, compared the two extremes of educational leadership, stating that "sometimes you need Mr. Chips and sometimes you need Dirty Harry," referring to the intellectually inspiring and effete Mr. Chips from the British novel and film, and the tough policeman, Dirty Harry, played by Clint Eastwood in the 1971 Hollywood movie.[36]

The icon of this image was portrayed in the 1989 dramatized biographical film, *Lean on Me*, which was loosely based on the story of Joe Clark, an inner-city African American high school principal in Patterson, New Jersey, whose school was at risk of being taken over by the state government unless students improved their test scores.

The message of the film was that it was time for education to get "tough" with the school principal as the director of the new disciplinarian regime.[37] The Hollywood story line centers on the now familiar chaotic urban school, with a special plague of drug dealers. A new principal is hired to bring strict order to the school, and he does so notoriously by breaking the fire code and locking all the building doors shut to keep drug dealers out. The principal fires teachers and expels students, and is ultimately under threat of being fired himself until enough students pass the basic skills exam. Although standardized testing is the motivation for the principal's leadership, *Lean on Me* is less a statement of rigid standardized testing and more a critique of bureaucracy as the root cause of school failure. The film applauds independent, entrepreneurial, and male school leaders, who efficiently solve social problems by bucking central bureaucracy. Indeed, after Principal Clark learns that the school will not fall into receivership, he yells, "You can tell the state to go to Hell!"[38]

Similarly, in the 1987 film *The Principal*, the new principal Rick Latimer arrives at a school noted for student disruption and criminality. According to the film, the only way to "tame the roughest, meanest and wildest high school in the district" was to hire an administrator "who was rougher, meaner and wilder." Latimer comes to his new job with force, holding a school assembly to declare his intentions for the school—"No more." No more drug dealing, gang violence, trying to rape women teachers, running in the hallways, or being late to class. Latimore gains control and rides off on his motorcycle, declaring to a student who derisively asks "Who does he think he is, man?" "I'm the principal, man!" He is also, significantly, the *white* man, who whips a school of black teenagers into shape.

Other hypermasculine principals are even more extreme in their belligerence. In the popular late 1990s television show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Principal Snyder is the principal of Sunnydale High School, which is populated by an unusual number of teenage vampires. A strict disciplinarian with a dictator-like personality, Principal Snyder is both domineering and corrupt, coercing students into certain tasks to ease his job or raise money for the school, bullying students, and passing unqualified athletes. Snyder holds a consistently imperious attitude toward students. When he expels Buffy from school, he tells her mother that he has both the right to do so and a "nearly physical sensation of pleasure at the thought of keeping her out of school. I'd describe it myself as tingly."[39] He lectures students: "A lot of educators tell students, 'Think of your principal as your pal.' I say 'Think of me as your judge, jury and executioner.'" Snyder is often compared to

an earlier principal at the school, Principal Flutie, who was known for his concern for students' self-esteem and socialization. But such progressive student-centered concern is both useless and dangerous in the tough world of modern high schools, as evidenced by the fact that Principal Flutie was eventually eaten alive by possessed students. His successor, the harsh disciplinarian Principal Snyder, later quips: "I know Principal Flutie would have said 'Kids need understanding. Kids are human beings.' That's that kind of woolly-headed liberal thinking that leads to being eaten."[40]

The folly of liberalism was also modeled by one of the few African Americans in the celluloid principal's office, Stephen Harper in *Boston Public*, the TV ensemble series from the early 2000s that explores the personal and professional lives of a group of teachers at an urban high school. Principal Harper is a large black man with a heart of gold who believes in the school's obligation to make students smarter and better. But his humanistic vision translates into incompetence: he is portrayed as an indecisive leader who struggles with problems of his employees and students and unsure of his own responsibilities. Often seen with a worried look on his face or holding his head in his hands in despair, Principal Harper is an ineffective leader who cannot maintain control, thus epitomizing what modern policy makers identified as a major problem in modern education—the absence of masculine power and authority. Contrasting sharply with the tough African American principal Joe Clark, the African American principal Harper is a weak, ineffective, and ultimately failed black man.[41]

In these images, the problem in American schooling is weak people, including single mothers, intellectual teachers, and school leaders who promote progressive ideas of creative interdisciplinary and student-centered curriculum. Rather than improving schools through a focus on academic integrity and community engagement, these tough principals boldly assert their own masculine authority.[42] "Forget about the way it used to be," the Hollywood principal Clark insists. "This is not a damn democracy. We are in a state of emergency."[43] The militaristic "can do" school leader appealed to a public that had long been convinced that the crisis in school was due to too many women, too much government bureaucracy, and too little masculine authority.

Leaving the Principal Behind

Contemporary school reform initiatives, such as the 2002 No Child Left Behind federal education policy, demanded that school principals take on additional responsibilities around student, teacher, and

school evaluation, and competitive measures for school support. Reform initiatives such as tuition vouchers, charter schools, school-based management, and alternative and small schools were driven by the theory that the large bureaucracy of public school systems strangled individual educational initiatives in a maze of regulations, and that by freeing the principal from bureaucratic managerial tasks they could focus on "instructional leadership" that would transform the very spirit of their school.[44] Yet the leadership skills and dispositions that were needed for such innovations—cooperation, community engagement, high ethical standards, budgeting skills, and shared values with parents, students, and staff—have not infiltrated, or changed, common understandings of the modern principal. Popular images of twenty-first-century principals resemble their peers half a century earlier: a weak-willed, suspiciously unethical, and notably unmasculine male figure who leads schools that remain mired in old-fashioned power battles.

For example, in the popular musical comedy-drama television series *Glee*, which first aired in 2009 and centers on a high school glee club, Principal Figgins exhibits many of the familiar, and negative, attributes of school leaders seen in popular culture over the previous fifty years. Although the principal of William McKinley High for 27 years, Figgins still has marginal professional status and limited interactions in educational activities; defying all licensure requirements across the country, this principal has a community college degree, and his only prior work experience was filming in-flight safety videos for an airline company. Generally portrayed as having the students' best interest at heart, Principal Figgins is still largely a victim of the system, overly concerned with the school budget, eager to avoid conflict and maintain order, and out of touch with student and teacher needs. He also exhibits an unethical side, once using the popular glee club to support his cost-cutting measures.[45] And typical of his male predecessors in popular culture, Principal Figgins is passive to the pressures of an assertive female teacher, the conniving and ruthlessly ambitious cheerleading coach, who eventually has Principal Figgins fired after she plants pornography and gambling receipts in his office. As a final humiliation, Figgins is demoted to school janitor in the very school that he once led, working underneath the domineering and unethical woman cheerleading coach who had him fired and who is appointed principal. William McKinley High School thus represents all the social chaos and procedural illogic of modern education: men are weak, women are bossy, and teenagers rule the school.

CONCLUSION

For all the increase in numbers, the careful recruitment of certain types of masculine men into the professional office, and the intentional construction of the principalship as a job that involved masculine attributes, popular culture representations of the principal in both adolescent and adult media in the last quarter of the twentieth century continued to characterize the American school principal as an unprofessional, incompetent, unstable, and unmasculine figure. The pervasive image of American school principals in the last seventy years has fallen into two general categories: First, and most persistently, the principal is an incompetent, unethical, and unmasculine man, weak and humiliated by women and children. Second, and less often, both male and female principals are portrayed as bullies and tyrants, personally unstable, possibly insane, and usually driven to such behavior by the crisis state of American education. These, of course, are the views that the popular media expects its consuming audience—all former students—to identify with and enjoy. Deriding school leaders for their personal and professional faults is a game that Americans love to play.

Yet it is a dangerous game. By relying on old and dismissive stereotypes, Americans continue to be blind to the real organizational challenges, failures, and successes of today's schools. For example, although the majority of popular media principals are men, today's school administration is not as male-dominated as it has been; in 2012, 64% of all elementary principals and 30% of all secondary school principals were women—a proportion that has steadily increased over past decades. (In 2000, 52% of elementary principals and 22% of all secondary principals were women.)[46] School leadership is also far more complex than what is portrayed: under school reform initiatives of the past thirty years, the role of the school principal has become more interactive and more public. Rather than stiff functionaries working at the top of a tightly autocratic system, principals are one of the many players in a complex and contested organization, where cultures are negotiated between administrators, teachers, students, and staff. School leadership involves high levels of communication, community engagement and community building, and personal and professional skills of addressing multiple challenges at multiple levels.[47]

But most of us do not know this about principalship. While we all remember our own classroom experiences with teachers, both positive and negative, we rarely remember our school principal, except for some unhappy, and surely unjust, disciplinary encounter. Nor are we taught about school organization or leadership in teacher education classes or citizenship education, and popular media present us only a

narrow and warped view of the position. So we remain ignorant of how schools work even though as taxpayers we contribute significant funds, as parents we commit our children, and as employers we hire the graduates of a universal public school system. Given the derisive portrayals of school leadership that we see in popular media, it is a miracle that Americans support public education at all. How much better could schools be, how much more support could citizens offer to schools, if we had more complete portrayal of the work that goes on in schools, and more respect for the qualities and skills required of school leaders.

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