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ABSTRACT

A lunch program on the Lower East Side with kosher meals for Jewish children and Italian meals for Italian children and a health program in which visits to students' homes are a regular service are a small part of the efforts made 50 and 100 years ago to meet the needs of New York City's immigrant school children. The implications of such a picture are very relevant to the present. They suggest a far different perspective on community control than we generally assume: a perspective in which current demands for community control, especially on the part of black and Puerto Rican parents, may be seen as an extension of, rather than an exception to, those voiced by urban minorities in the past. The scope and variety of past demands for community-controlled schools in New York City are especially visible in the actions of three groups: Irish Catholics in the 1840's; Jews in the period surrounding the turn of the century; and, Italians in the middle 1930's and early 1940's. In the Irish, Jewish, and Italian communities in which such community and educational leaders as Bishop John Hughes, Julia Richman and Leonard Covello worked, the idea of a community-oriented school struck a vital nerve. When we look at these communities in perspective, we find interest in virtually every community-control issue--from food to curriculum--which we now debate. (Author/JM)

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Community Control in Perspective

by Nicolaus C. Mills

A lunch program on the Lower East Side with kosher meals for Jewish children and Italian meals for Italian children. A health program in which visits to students' homes are a regular service. Vacation schools kept open during the summer for recreational rather than educational purposes. A governor who recommends that pupils be "instructed by teachers speaking the same language...and professing the same faith."[1]

No, it is not a description of the community-control movement in New York City in 1973. It is a description of efforts made 50 and 100 years ago to meet the needs of New York's immigrant school children. The implications of such a picture are, however, very relevant to the present. For they suggest a far different perspective on community control than we generally assume: a perspective in which current demands for community control, especially on the part of black and Puerto Rican parents, may be seen as an extension of, rather than an exception to, those voiced by urban monorities in the past.

The scope and variety of past demands for community-controlled schools in New York are especially visible in the actions of three groups: Irish Catholics in the 1840's; Jews in the period surrounding the turn of the century; Italians in the middle 1930's and early 1940's. Indeed, it is impossible to look at the example of these groups without wondering why more emphasis has not been given to the traditional nature of community control.

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No group provides a better illustration of the way in which community control was a crucial issue in the nineteenth century than New York's Irish Catholics. Their struggle in the early 1840's, which ended with a decentralization plan giving the city's wards control over the schools, bears such striking resemblance to the 1968 controversy that often the difference between the two seems only a matter of style.

The spark that set off the 1840 controversy was recognition by Governor William Seward of the failure of New York City schools to serve immigrant children. In his *Annual Message* of 1840 Seward observed:

> The children of foreigners, found in great numbers in our populous cities and towns, and in the vicinity of our public works, are too often deprived of the advantages of our system of public education, in consequence of prejudices arising from differences of language or religion . . . . I do not hesitate, therefore, to recommend the establishment of schools in which they may be instructed by teachers speaking the same language with themselves and professing the same faith. There would be no inequality in such a measure, since it happens from the force of circumstances, if not from choice, that the responsibilities of education are in most instances confided by us to native citizens, and occasions seldom offer for a trial of our magnanimity by committing that trust to persons differing from ourselves in language or religion.[2]

Seward's *Annual Message* came at a time when New York City's Irish Catholics were particularly dissatisfied with the public schools, and one month after Seward's speech, eight Catholic churches in the city, with free schools instructing nearly 3,000 pupils, petitioned the Common Council of New York for money to support their educational work.[3]

The overriding issue between the city's Irish Catholics and those who controlled the public schools was the common-core approach to religion that the public schools featured. In the eyes of those in control of the public schools, the common-core approach was neutral. As Hiram Ketchum, counsel for the Public School Society of New York, observed during the 1840 controversy, "We undertake in these public schools to furnish this secular education, embracing as it does . . . a knowledge of good morals, and those common sanctions of religion which are acknowldeged by everybody."[4] In practice, however, the common-core approach was neutral only to those who regarded a bland protestantism as neutral. It was impossible for Catholics to accept as neutral the Public School Society's assertion, "The Constitution of the Society and public sentiment wisely forbid the introduction into these schools of any such religious instruction as shall favor the peculiar views of any sect . . . schools are uniformly opened with the reading of the scriptures, and the class books are such as recognize and enforce the great and generally acknowledged principles of Christianity."[5]

The problem for the city's Irish Catholics, who objected to the reading of scripture without comment, who found the King James Bible the schools used unacceptable, and believed, in the words of the Bishop's Pastoral of 1840, "in any

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common effort it was always expected that our distinctive principles of religious belief and practice should be yielded," was convincing the Common Council of New York of the legitimacy of their grievances.[6] As it evolved, the confrontation was a classic one between a majority culture seeing itself as unbiased and undogmatic, and a minority culture finding its deepest values ignored or disparaged.

For the Irish Catholic community in New York and their most effective leader, Bishop John Hughes, the most galling was the argument by supporters of the public school system that the public schools were neutral. Hughes and the Catholics were perfectly willing to let the schools controlled by the Public School Society continue with their protestantism provided a *quid pro quo* arrangement could be made whereby they received support for schools serving their children. The insistence by the Common Council that the public schools were neutral in religious matters undercut any such arrangement, however. For instead of providing a way in which aid to their schools could be balanced by aid to schools serving the city's Irish population, it put Catholics in the position of seeming to make religious demands of a secular system.

When the controversy began in 1840, New York's Irish Catholics were careful to emphasize their unwillingness to interfere with the religious beliefs of the city s Protestants and to ask only for money that would support their educational efforts. "We do not want or ask for the public money to enable us to teach any religious doctrines," Bishop Hughes told his opponents over and over again.[7] But as the controversy developed and the unwillingness of the Common Council of New York to reconsider its position became clear, Hughes and the Catholic community began devoting much more of their energy to galvanizing their own supporters and building a case against the Common Council that would persuade the state legislators in Albany to take action on their behalf.

Hughes' conviction that "we are citizens when they come to gather taxes, but we are Roman Catholics when we look for a share of the funds thus contributed," became the animating argument of the city's Irish Catholics, and brought into the open the intensity with which they felt the need for schools responsive to their interests.[8] In three areas—books, teachers, and general culture—Hughes and the Catholics he led made their arguments with striking modernity.

In the area of books, they had no problem at all in asserting that the public schools of New York were hostile to them. They could point to *An Irish Heart*, in which the "emigration from Ireland to America, of annually increasing numbers," was seen as creating a situation in which "our country might be appropriately styled the common sewer of Ireland." Or they could point to a text like Samuel Putnam's, *Sequel to the Analytic Reader*, in which John Huss' death was attributed to his trust of "the deceitful Catholics."[9] For the Public School Society, the private, nonprofit organization that received taxes from the Common Council and ran the city schools, to protest that it was willing to remove such books whenever they were called to their attention was beside the point. To Hughes and New York's Irish Catholic community, it was evident that only in a hostile school system would such books be bought in the first place.

Hughes and the Irish Catholics reached similar conclusions about the teachers in the public schools. They worried over Catholic children being taught by those who urged them to disown their past, men who could advise, as a representative of the Public School Society did, "If he [the Irish immigrant] comes with an Irish heart, let it become an American heart."[10] Hughes had a strong sense of the need poor Irish Catholic children had to be educated by teachers with whom they could identify. As he told a meeting of his supporters during the school crisis:

> When in Ireland last summer, among other objects of curiosity, I visited one of the schools conducted by a society of young men, who have associated themselves voluntarily, and devoted their lives, and talents, and acquirements, . . to supply that education of which the tyrannical government of Britain tried to deprive the Irish people . . . My intention is to send to Ireland, and that within three weeks, for as many members of this excellent community as I can find willing to devote themselves to the education of the whole Catholic children of New York.[11]

Hughes applied this same logic to the broader question of the environment in which Catholic children were taught. Hughes wanted a school setting in which Irish Catholic children "need not be ashamed of their creed, and where their companions would not call them 'Papists,' and tell them that ignorance and vice are the accompaniments of their religion." He felt it especially important that Catholic children see the positive role of their culture and their place in American history. "I would give our children lessons for exercise in reading, that should teach them that when the young tree of American liberty was planted, it was watered with Catholic blood, and that therefore we have as much right to everything common in this country as others."[12]

When in early 1841 the Common Council of New York overwhelmingly defeated the petition of the eight Catholic churches for funds to support their schools, Hughes and the city's Irish Catholics moved quickly to take political action. Their first step was to solidify their own support. After forming a Central Executive Committee on Common Schools, they began organizing meetings in each ward of the city to protest the way the schools were run. In the ensuing weeks, 7,000 signatures were obtained, and by March, 1841, the Central Committee was ready to take its case to Albany.[13]

The man the Committee entrusted its case to was Gulian Verplanck, a Whig Senator from New York County and a man sympathetic to the Catholic cause. Verplanck could not have been a better choice, nor could his decision to tie the Catholic protest to the larger question of freedom of religion in the public schools. For on these grounds New York's unique arrangement, whereby the Common Council turned over state funds to the private Public School Society to run the city public schools, was vulnerable. Verplanck enlisted the aid of Secretary of State John Spencer, *ex officio* superintendent of common schools throughout New York, and from Spencer came an attack on the management of New York City schools and an alternative plan. Spencer found the Public School Society derelict in its duties, calling attention to the fact that,

although there were 62,952 children of school age in New York, average attendance was only 13,189. "Thousands of citizens of New York demand the right of controlling through responsible public agents, the education of their children, and the application of common funds to which they have contributed for a common object," he observed in his report on public schools in the city, and then went on to recommend his own solution, a plan under which each ward would control the schools within its bounds and elect the commissioners who would form a city-wide board of education.[14]

Resistance to the Spencer Plan was considerable, not only from within New York City but from nativist sentiment throughout the state. On May 30, 1841, the American Protestant Union was formed to oppose Catholic "encroachments" against the public schools, and a vote on the Spencer Plan was put off by the New York legislature until 1842, when a newly elected Senate and Assembly would meet in Albany. For Bishop Hughes and New York's Catholics, who had remained silent during the Albany debates so as not to arouse anti-Catholic sentiment, it once again became time to act. If the delegates sent to the state legislature by New York City were opposed to the Spencer Plan, it was clear that the Catholic cause would be lost.[15]

But how to organize a school campaign? In the Common Council election of 1841, cursory efforts had been made. "Catholics Arouse! To the Rescue! Irishmen to your posts! The friends of an equal distribution of the School Fund are called upon to rally!"—one notice in the *New York Observer* read.[16] But these elections were a disaster for Catholics, and their one ally on the Common Council was defeated. Moreover, in the elections to the state legislature, neither the Whigs nor the Democrats were willing to take a party position favorable to the Catholics on the school question. Both feared the nativist, backlash vote.

Faced with this dilemma, Hughes and those he led saw only one alternative. Organize their own ticket. Thus, there came into existence the Carroll Hall ticket, a combination of Whigs and Democrats whom Bishop Hughes in a Carroll Hall speech named as favorable to the Catholic school cause. "You have often voted for others, and they did not vote for you, but now you are determined to uphold your own votes, your own rights," Hughes told his supporters.[17] It was a gamble that worked. Every Democratic candidate endorsed by the Carroll Hall Party was elected, and the four Democratic candidates in New York City who were defeated would have won if they had had Catholic support.[18]

When the state legislature met in 1842, a revised version of the Spencer Plan passed. Each ward in New York was for educational purposes treated as a separate town. Its schools were controlled by five elected trustees, and the monies it received from the state were given to it in proportion to the children it served. Pressed to the point of no return, Bishop Hughes and the Irish Catholic community had politicized the question of local school control and won a victory.[19]

It was not, however, a victory that Hughes or his followers could accept with ease or take full advantage of. In a letter to a friend, Bishop Hughes observed, "I know that if I did not go beyond my episcopal sphere, I went at least to the furthest verge of it. But the disease was desperate and required a desperate effort for its removal or mitigation . . . The school question is beaten into the heads of the public men whether they will or not."[20] In practice the 1842 school legislation relieved Catholics of some of the harsher pressure on them, but it never gave them a situation in which they could control the schools their children used to their satisfaction. Bishop Hughes spoke of the 1842 bill as only a "partial redress," and by 1850 he was telling his parishoners in a Pastoral Letter, "I think the time is almost come when it will be necessary to build the school-house first and the church afterwards."[21]

Looked at from the perspective of a century and with the community-control movement in New York in mind, the accomplishments of Bishop Hughes and his followers are not nearly so modest as they imagined, however. For they succeeded not only in making clear how the majority culture of the public schools threatened them and others not in agreement with it, but they also succeeded in getting a measure of community control accepted as a means by which ethnic groups might reassert direction over their children's education.

In many ways the contrast between the Irish Catholic response to New York schools in the 1840's and the Jewish, particularly the Russian Jewish response, at the turn of the century could not be greater. As Marshall Sklare has written, "Jews not only sent their children to school, but they also made the principle of public education an article of faith. In fact loyalty to the cause of public education was so overwhelming that as late as 1917 only five Jewish day (that is, parochial) schools had been established in the entire country. . .[Jewish] fears were not allayed by the example of their Irish Catholic neighbors, who never doubted for a moment that they had the right to establish their own schools."[22]

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the Jewish newcomers who filled New York's Lower East Side in the late nineteenth century found a uniformly warm reception or were never less than a success in school. In the schools themselves, they were often the victims of antisemitism, as the following passage from novelist Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* makes clear:

> . . . it was torture to you, Ku Kluxer before your time, to teach in a Jewish neighborhood.
>
> I knew no English when handed to you. I was a little savage and lover of the street. I used no toothbrush. I slept in my underwear, I was lousy, maybe. To sit on a bench made me restless, my body hated coffins. But Teacher! O Teacher for little slaves, O ruptured American virgin of fifty-five, you should not have called me 'Little Kike.'[23]

The poverty and language problems of the Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side also made schooling difficult. In 1890, when the Baron de Hirsch Fund undertook to discover the needs and status of Jewish immigrants, only 15,000 of the 50,000 adults they interviewed spoke English.[24] That such a situation did affect Jewish children is reflected in the fact, when in 1903 Julia Richman, the superintendent in the most

heavily Jewish districts on the Lower East Side, undertook an investigation of her schools, she found that many of the children who were applying to leave school (legally it could be done at age 14) were not able to read at a fifth grade level, a requirement at age 14 in New York to be eligible for work certification. And she discovered that these reading problems were connected with other disturbing problems—children in and out of school for reasons of misconduct, children whose individual needs were overlooked when promotions were made, children who had been turned into perpetual truants.[25]

By 1890 there were ample grounds for Jewish immigrants on New York's Lower East Side to develop a movement for community-controlled or, at least, community-centered schools. And in fact such a movement did develop, although certainly not in the way it did among Irish Catholics fifty years earlier or Italians in East Harlem fifty years later. What such a movement makes clear, however, is that even among the ethnic group that supposedly benefited most from New York public schools the need for a community-oriented education was felt and acted upon.

At the grass-roots level of community-centered schools on the Lower East Side were those Hebrew schools that conducted their classes after the regular public school hours and were designed to maintain the religious traditions. The Machzikay Talmud Torah School of the Lower East Side provides a perfect case in point. As one of its supporters observed to a *New York Tribune* reporter, "The boys learn to sing patriotic songs in the public schools, and then they come here to learn the sacred music."[26]

Established in 1884 with one class of 25 pupils, by 1899 the Machzikay Talmud Torah School had 22 classes and a total of 1,100 pupils ranging from six to fifteen years in age. The school stood very self-consciously apart from those whom one of its members labelled, "the Reform Jews who live uptown" and "know nothing about the Hebrew in their service." Support for the work of the Machzikay Talmud Torah School came exclusively from Russian Jews in New York, and those whom it served were poor. There was no charge for instruction, and the school made a practice of supplying needy pupils with shoes and clothing. In 1899 the *New York Tribune* characterized Machzikay Talmud Torah as a school "unknown beyond the Russian district," and there is no reason to doubt this judgment. At the same time the size and poverty of the school in no way alter the proof it offers of the deep desire of many Jews on the Lower East Side for a school that would not betray their cultural heritage.[27]

A much different example of community-centered education is offered by the three groups (the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the Hebrew Free School Association, and the Aguilar Free Library) that in 1889 formed the Educational Alliance, a combination settlement house and educational institute. Although at times run in condescending fashion by German Jews seeking to Americanize newly arrived Russian Jews, the Alliance did play an important role in the education of Lower East Side Jews and was especially sensitive to the need new immigrants had for language instruction.[28] The Hebrew Free School Association was accurate when it justified the job it was doing by asserting, "The public schools are inadequate for the accommodation of the crowds of recent arrivals from Europe, children entirely ignorant of English and for whom, if even there were room, there could be no proper instruction in the public schools."[29]

Although the Hebrew Free School Association saw its basic policy as one of introducing schooling "where existing congregations do not provide for the moral and religious education of the children," and deliberately avoided duplicating the work of the public schools, it clearly made possible a transition from Europe to America that would have taken much longer if Jewish immigrants in New York had relied exclusively on public institutions.[30] Kindergartens, special language schools, vocational training, adult education were all pioneered by the Hebrew Free School Association and Educational Alliance. As a result Jewish immigrants were able to utilize institutions like the public schools much faster than they would have if events had been allowed to take their "natural" course, and the public schools, as Superintendent William Maxwell acknowledged in 1909, were moved to change much faster than they would ordinarily have.[31]

For an understanding of the positive response public schools on the Lower East Side made to the Jewish community they served, it is, however, necessary to turn to the work of Julia Richman, for a long time an officer in the Educational Alliance. As the first woman to be made a district superintendent of public schools in New York City, Julia Richman might have chosen any number of areas in which to serve. Her decision to work on the Lower East Side in an area that was ghetto district, to live there in a house she turned into a teachers' settlement, and to play an active role in the community (she personally participated in raids against the procurers who made Seward Park their base of operations) was a milestone.[32] While there had been some attempt by the school system to place teachers in areas where they share the ethnic background of their pupils (for example, in a school system in which only six percent of the teachers were Jewish, one elementary school on the Lower East Side had a Jewish principal and assistant principal and of 68 teachers 25 were Jewish, it was altogether different for someone like Julia Richman, herself Jewish, to be in a position of such high authority and to regard working on the Lower East Side as a desirable assignment.[33]

For Julia Richman, the public school was not just an educational institution but the key social instrument in America, particularly with regard to the poor. "Social workers connected with settlements or other private organizations reach a very large number of cases," she observed. "It is the great public school, however, which reaches every home, at least every home in which there is a child of school age."[34] The potential for good that Julia Richman saw resulting from the school was enormous, and she believed that recent developments confirmed her view. "There has been, too, a gradual recognition of the fact that the school is the legitimate social centre of a community, and that from the school or through the school, there should radiate all those influences that make for child betterment, if not for complete social betterment," she wrote in 1910 in an essay on "The Social Need for the Public School."[35]

What this meant to Julia Richman was that the school had a special obligation to understand the child in terms of his

background and to make sure it met him on grounds that reflected his needs. "When the time comes that every teacher shall be able to detect the social needs of each child, and the special school and home visitor shall follow up each case until social disabilities shall have been removed from the life of each child, then, and not until then, can we feel that rescue is possible for *all* school children."[36] In Julia Richman's eyes an Americanization process that did not take into account the history and environment of a child was wrong. She found such a process misleading to begin with. "It is so much easier and so much prettier to teach the oath of allegiance to the flag, than to teach a community to keep the fire escapes free from encumbrances, and yet which is more important?"[37] Equally important she found it false to advocate an uncritical Americanization in a period where there was "general corruption of municipal government" and a "general unethical basis of the commercial world." "We are expected, in communities largely made up of foreigners, to give correct American standards of living to the children of the alien. Are the standards of living in American communities wholly creditable?" she asked.[38]

The programs Julia Richman instituted on the Lower East Side make clear where her opinions lay. As a teacher who worked in what she called "a section of the congested East Side of New York, where over twenty-five thousand school children of both sexes are housed within an area of less than half a square mile," she did not hesitate to point out the failures of the public schools. "For many years school accommodations in this section of the great metropolis have been inadequate. Even now after eight years of constant effort on the part of recent boards of education, the number of schools is not equal to the needs of the district."[39] What she sought to do was to compensate for this neglect and to focus on the child in relationship to the community.

The programs she developed all reflect this dual concern. Her home visitors program, her lunch program, her language program all went beyond the conventional role of the school. Where they stopped short was in changing political control of the school, shifting it from school officials to the neighborhood itself. Yet, even with this limitation, it is clear that the schools of the Lower East Side became, as a result of Julia Richman's influence, far more accountable to their neighborhoods and far more humane. In a period in which East Side mothers once had to start a minor riot to keep city health officials from operating on their children without their consent (the health officials had decided on mass operations to remove adenoids, which they regarded as causing drowsiness), this was no easy step.[40]

It is not just the distant past that contains surprising examples of community control, however. There is no fuller or more generally ignored example of a community-controlled school than Benjamin Franklin High, which Leonard Covello began in 1934. As Preston Wilcox, one of the prime movers to achieve community control at I.S. 201 observed just before that school's opening:

> There are a number of historical precedents for this scheme. One of them is very close to home, in Harlem. Leonard Covello, for whom it is said, Fiorello LaGuardia build Benjamin Franklin High School on 116th Street and Roosevelt Drive, was one of the earliest advocates of the community-centered school. Before World War II, East Harlem was predominantly Italian, and Covello was concerned lest a ruthless drive to 'Americanize' the children of immigrants destroy 'a great wealth of cultural resources' and, by an implicit process of invidious comparison, perpetuate in the minority population long-lasting feelings of inferiority. . . 'In the concept of the community-centered school,' he wrote in 1939, 'we have, it seems to me, the ultimate objective of all education because it deals with the child in connection with his social background and in relation to all forces, disruptive as well as constructive, that contribute to his education.'[41]

The particular situation Leonard Covello was concerned with has been described in the following terms by Caroline Ware in her analysis of *Greenwich Village, 1920-1930*: "The net effect of public school education in this community was often to produce a dichotomy in the individual child between those experiences which were tied up with school and those which he lived outside. If an Italian public school child tried to make a coherent whole out of his home, his community, and his school experiences, he could only find himself trying to make order out of a set of contradictions."[42] Covello, who came to America as an immigrant and at one point quit high school, knew these problems directly, and his effort to deal with them, as a teacher at DeWitt Clinton High and as the first principal of Benjamin Franklin, bear the imprint of his personal experience. Although Covello's observations on Italian school children are often similar to those made by William White in *Street Corner Society* or Herbert Gans in *The Urban Villagers*, we are never allowed to forget the degree to which they apply to him. When we examine his writing, it is his autobiography, *The Heart is the Teacher*, as much as his massive sociological study, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child*, that provides insight into the struggle he led for community-centered schools in the 1930's and 1940's.

For Covello, the crucial problem for the Italian American child was that the school in which he found himself was not designed with him in mind. In Covello's view, "the traditional American school was planned for an 'hypothetical' American child whose contact with American civilization was assumed to be extensive, whose intelligence was supposed to be higher, and whose knowledge and use of the English language was assumed to be more perfect than that of the Italo-American child."[43] In an article written in 1936 on "A High School and its Immigrant Community," Covello posed a series of questions he felt needed answering: "What role has the public school played in immigrant or foreign communities in which it has been located? What role is it playing today? Has the school really felt the life of the community pulsating beyond its four walls? Has it made an attempt to realize the problems and the difficulties with which the immigrant community is faced?" His conclusion was that the "answer to all these questions, unfortunately, is very discouraging."[44]

Covello's own experience, as he recalled it in *The Heart is the Teacher,* was one in which he and his friends were made to feel inferior and forced "to make a good impression on our teachers. . .at the expense of our family and what was Italian in us."[45] And he found that during the period in which he was a teacher, Italian students felt the same way. From Italian college students came the following responses to questions about their earlier schooling: "Our school. . .'solved' the problem of the Italian group which characterized our neighborhood by ignoring the subject. To be Italian was virtually a *faux pas* and the genteel American ladies who were our teachers were tactful enough to overlook our error. The school . . . never suggested respect for my parents and for the cultural tradition which they unconsciously would use to guide themselves in bringing me up. In fact it did just the opposite."[46]

The only way the school could begin to remedy this kind of situation, Covello believed, was by becoming involved in the day-to-day life of the student:

> To function successfully, it [the school] must know not only the social and educational background of its boys and girls, but it must go one step further; it must strive to understand the individual child in his social relationships outside of school. More important still, it must play an active and aggressive part in the affairs of the community...it must be the leader and the coordinating agency in all educational enterprises affecting the life of the community and, to a certain extent, the pivot upon which much even of the social and civic life of the neighborhood shall turn... The surging life of the community as a whole...will either promote or destroy the work of the school.[47]

As principal of Benjamin Franklin High, Covello was able to put into practice these beliefs.

Benjamin Franklin High came into existence only after Covello and others in East Harlem began putting pressure on the Board of Education for a high school to serve their area. Even then, the key was not, as Covello has acknowledged, the sympathy of the Board of Education, but the election of Fiorello LaGuardia, formerly the Congressman of East Harlem, to Mayor of New York. "Mayor LaGuardia's approval was the deciding factor in the establishment of Benjamin Franklin High," Covello notes in his autobiography.[48] With the establishment of Benjamin Franklin, Covello and his staff were able to begin organizing a community-centered school without worrying about interference. In the summer of 1935 they brought together a Community Advisory Council of Benjamin Franklin High, whose membership consisted of representatives from various community agencies and whose task was to help link the school to the community. By the fall of 1935, an active community program was underway.

Almost immediately, the Council, in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration, set up an afternoon community playground, where from 3:30 to 6:00 the children of the neighborhood could come and be looked after. Next, an evening community center for adults and an evening center for teenagers was established, in addition to the regular evening program that taught basic reading skills.[49] The accessibility of the school to the general community was not, however, at the expense of the parents of Benjamin Franklin students. In order to be sure that they could see him at hours convenient for them, Covello held open house in his office every Wednesday evening. The operation of the school during this period has been described by Covello in the following terms:

> The Wednesday night 'open house' sessions in my office at the old building at Franklin came closest to fulfilling my dream of the school as an integral part of the community. Throughout the building, classes were in progress. I could sit in my office and listen happily to the hum of knowledge. Young men and adults who for one reason or another had been unable to graduate from day school were now completing their high-school education at night. In other rooms immigrants of varying ages and nationalities struggled with the complexities of the English language, sometimes taught by their own sons, while still others prepared for citizenship tests. In the gymnasium a basketball game was in progress . . . In the library, the Parent Teacher Association was holding a meeting, while from the auditorium might come the shrill sounds of an argument that meant that the Community Advisory Council was in session.[50]

The involvement of Benjamin Franklin High in the life of the community it served was so successful that soon the school became pressed to find more space than its two buildings offered. The result was another innovation—store front schools—and the discovery by Covello and his staff that their improvised facilities carried special advantages. "We soon discovered that people who would never dream of going near the school, feeling self-conscious, would make use of the facilities of the store fronts—making us further realize the need for small social and educational centers scattered around a neighborhood to supplement the work of the main building in community education."[51]

For Covello and the staff of Benjamin Franklin High, involvement in the community did not just mean service, however. It also meant advocacy. As public housing started being built in New York during the New Deal, Covello and those at Benjamin Franklin joined others in East Harlem in putting pressure on the government for new housing in East Harlem. They circulated petitions, helped organize residents of the neighborhood, and fought to make sure choice land along the East River Drive in their area was not, in Covello's words, turned into a "Gold Coast." It was a struggle that paid off in 1939, when East Harlem got the housing project it wanted.[52]

The victory was important for Benjamin Franklin High in more ways than one. For the same forces that had been so effectively organized to bring public housing to East Harlem were those that helped get a new high school to replace the old buildings of Benjamin Franklin. At the dedication ceremony in 1942 Covello was able to speak of much more than an education triumph. "Believing that a school building should be available to all the members of the community, all the time, the Board of Education has conferred a signal honor on Benjamin Franklin High School. By a special vote it has decreed that our building is to be open every hour of every day of the year. This means that we who live and work in East Harlem are free to use its magnificent resources at all times."[53]

In making the school part of the community, Covello had reached new heights. But his innovations are also to be measured in terms of how programs he developed worked within the school. These programs served a broad range of students at Benjamin Franklin (not just Italian). They were developed initially, however, for Covello's Italian students at DeWitt Clinton, and it is with the needs of these Italian students in mind that they are best understood. The "within school" results of Covello's work are particularly visible in three areas: language learning, curriculum, and teacher performance.

For Covello, who as a child remembered the "Italian language was completely ignored" so that we got the idea that "Italian meant something inferior," it became crucial to organize a program in which Italian children should feel pride in their own language. When he began teaching, it was possible for a student to get credit for Italian by passing a Regents Examination, but no high school had an Italian department. Covello's first step was to begin teaching Italian to Italian students who wanted to learn it under the informal auspices of an Italian club, *Il Circolo Italian*. But in short order his teaching had progressed from a club to a formal class, and an Italian department was begun at DeWitt Clinton to accomodate the fact that in five years time the number of students taking Italian rose from 30 to 528.[54]

With the development of an Italian department, it was not just the Italian language Covello had made part of the school curriculum, however. He had also helped to rekindle a general sense of cultural pride in his students, and their interest in Italian began to go far beyond a concern with language. They began "to speak or write on Italian subjects in the English, social studies, art classes of the school." [55] Like Covello's other educational innovations, this one too had its final measure in the student seeing that his adjustment to America need not come at the expense of his heritage.

As a result of his involvement in the Italian program within the school, Covello saw his relationship to his students and their parents strengthened. "The Italian teacher became the representative of the school to Italian-speaking parents, as an interpreter and as a sympathetic listener, and the instrument of adjustment of behavior problems and scholastic difficulties in the school and the adjustment of child-parent conflicts in the home."[56] For Covello this larger bond only strengthened his belief in the value of having a teacher and authority figure in the school with the same ethnic background as his pupils. Such a figure, he wrote in *The Social Background of the Italo-American Child*, was a "stimulus to the student toward broader education and continuation of schooling" plus an additional factor in mitigating "the sense of inferiority on the part of the Italo-American student."[57] For Covello, who as a child remembered "our teachers impressed us mainly because they did not live in the neighborhood," only one further step remained for the community-oriented teacher who wanted to be in touch with the most important forces in his students' lives, and that was to do as he did after he became principal of Benjamin Franklin High—move to within walking distance of the school were he taught.[58]

The parallels between the kind of community-centered school Leonard Covello wanted and the kinds of schools parents in a number of areas in New York are seeking today are certainly apparent. But no less apparent are the similarities between Covello's ideas and those of Bishop John Hughes or the much more cautious Julia Richman. In the Irish, Jewish, and Italian communities in which each worked the idea of a community-oriented school struck a vital nerve, and when we look at these communities in perspective, we find interest in virtually every community-control issue—from food to curriculum—we now debate.[59] Indeed, it is a history with not only much to teach us about the educational and political accountability of schools but a history that encourages a community-control movement suited to the present.

FOOTNOTES

[1] William Seward, *Works*, Vol. II, ed. George E. Baker (New York, 1853), p. 215.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.215.

[3] Vincent Peter Lannie, *Archbishop John Hughes and Common School Controversy, 1840-1842* (Unpublished dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963), p. 95.

[4] Quoted in William O. Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of New York* (New York, 1870), p. 243.

[5] *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Trustees of the Public School Society of New York* (New York, 1838), p. 7.

[6] *The National Pastorals of the American Hierachy, 1792-1919*, ed. Peter K. Guildhay (Westminster, Maryland, 1954), p. 134.

[7] The Most Reverend John Hughes, *The Complete Works*, Vol. I, ed. Lawrence Kehoe (New York,1865), p. 90.

[8] *Ibid.*, p.87.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp.52, 72.

[10] Quoted in Bourne, *History of the Public School Society*, p.29.

[11] Hughes, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 256.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 157.

[13] Lannie, *Archbishop John Hughes*, p. 361.

[14] *Report of the Secretary of State Upon Memorials from the City of New York*, Documents of the Senate of the State of New York (No. 86, April 26, 1841), pp. 6-15.

[15] Lannie, *Archbishop John Hughes*, p.436.

[16] *New York Observer*, May 1, 1841.

[17] Hughes, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 283.

[18] Lannie, *Archbishop John Hughes*, p.474.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 544.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.496.

[21] Hughes, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 715.

[22] Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews* (New York, 1971), p. 20.

[23] Michael Gold, *Jews Without Money* (New York, 1972), pp. 22-23.

[24] Morris I. Berger, *The Settlement, the Immigrant, and the Public School* (Unpublished dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956), p. 46.

[25] Francesco Cordasco, "The Children of Immigrants in the Schools," *Education and the Many Faces of the Disadvantaged*, ed. William H. Brickman and Stanley Lehrer (New York, 1972), p. 201.

[26] *Portal to America: The Lower East Side*, 1870-1925, ed. Allon Schoener (New York, 1967), p. 109.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[28] Moses Rischin, *Promised City* (New York, 1964), p. 101.

[29] Hebrew Free School, Association, *Annual Report for 1890* (New York, 1891), p. 14.

[30] Hebrew Free School Association, *Annual Report for 1891* (New York, 1892), p. 18.

[31] Berger, *The Settlement*, p.63.

[32] Selma C. Berrol, "The Schools of New York in Transition, 1898-1914," *The Urban Review*, I (December, 1966), pp. 18-19.

[33] Selma C. Berrol, *Immigrants at School: New York City, 1898-1914* (Unpublished dissertation, CUNY, 1967), p. 120.

[34] Julia Richman, "The Social Need for the Public School," *The Forum*, 18 (February, 1910), p. 168.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[37] Quoted in Addie R. Altman and Bertha P. Proskauer, *Two Biographical Appreciations of the Great Educator* (New York, 1916), p. 11.

[38] Julia Richman, "The Incorrigible Child," *Education Review*, 31 (May, 1906), p. 499.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 484.

[40] Berrol, *Immigrants at School*, pp. 126-27.

[41] Preston Wilcox, "One View and a Proposal," *The Urban Review*, I (July, 1966), pp. 14-15.

[42] Caroline Ware, *Greenwich Village, 1920-1930* (New York, 1965), p. 341.

[43] Leonard Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child* (Leiden, Netherlands, 1967), p. 417.

[44] Leonard Covello, "A High School and its Immigrants Community—A Challenge and an Opportunity," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 9 (February, 1936), p. 336.

[45] Leonard Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher* (New York, 1958), p. 47.

[46] Covello, *The Social Background*, p. 338.

[47] Covello, A High School," pp.336-37.

[48] Covello, *The Heart*, p. 182.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 195-96.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 215-220.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 149.

[55] Covello, *The Social Background*, p. 429.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 429.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 429-30.

[58] Covello, *The Heart*, pp. 47, 229.

[59] For recent negative articles on community control and decentralization see "Clark Asks a Curb in Decentralizing," *New York Times* (November 30, 1972). David K. Cohen, "The Price of Community Control," *Commentary*, 48 (July 1969), pp. 23-32. Diane Ravitch, "Community Control Revisited," *Commentary*, 53 (February, 1972), pp. 69-74. Bayard Rustin, "Community Control: Separatism Repackaged," *New York Times* (June 11, 1972). For an alternative view, see Charles V. Hamilton, "Race and Education: A Search for Legitimacy," *Harvard Educational Review*, 38 (Fall, 1968), pp. 669-684. Gertrude S. Goldberg, "I.S. 201: And Educational Landmark," *IRCD Bulletin*, II (Winter 1966-67). Christopher Jencks, "Private Schools for Black Children," *New York Times Magazine* (November 3, 1968), pp. 30-1, +.

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