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ABSTRACT

While American Legion officials wasted few words condemning the works of John Dewey and his followers, they really focused their attention and efforts on the curriculum materials developed and written by Harold Rugg. In 1941, as the U.S. prepared for war, the American Legion was busy writing and distributing the pamphlet, "The Complete Rugg Philosophy," outlining the Legion officials belief that Rugg's plan was to indoctrinate students to turn away from Americanism to Socialism or Communism. This paper examines "The American Legion Magazine" and their pamphlet series, "The Complete Rugg Philosophy," produced from 1941 until the advent of Sputnik, assessing the nature of the American Legion's attack on Rugg. The paper presents the social reconstructionist ideas of Rugg and his contemporaries, along with an overview of academic freedom at the secondary or public school level. It notes that, while much has been said about academic freedom at the college and university level, there is only fragmented knowledge of how public school teachers in the early decades of the 20th century dealt with this issue, particularly concerning the Rugg materials. The paper finds that what set Rugg apart from other intellectual reconstructionists of the 1920s and 1930s, making him an easy target for patriotic watchdog organizations, was that his writings and materials made their way into the public school system. (Contains 68 references.) (BT)

"A Bootlegged Curriculum": The American Legion versus Harold Rugg.

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"A Bootlegged Curriculum:" The American Legion versus Harold Rugg

The heightened patriotism of pre-World War II, followed into the decade of the infamous McCarthy hearings is the historical context for the American Legion's attack on progressive education. While Legion officials wasted few words condemning the work of John Dewey and his followers, they really focused their attention and efforts on curriculum materials developed and written by Harold Rugg. In 1941, as the United States prepared for war, the Legion was busy writing and distributing pamphlets titled *The Complete Rugg Philosophy*, which outlined, Legion officials believed, Rugg's plan to indoctrinate students away from what it termed Americanism and toward Socialism or even Communism (Legion, *Philosophy*, 1941). To writers whose articles condemned the Rugg materials, the curriculum that Rugg offered American youth was a "bootlegged" one.

This paper examines the American Legion's main press organ, *The American Legion Magazine*, from 1941 until the advent of Sputnik, and its pamphlet series titled *The Complete Rugg Philosophy*, in order to assess the nature of the Legion's attack on Rugg. In order to contextualize these attacks, we present the social reconstructionist ideas of Rugg and his contemporaries, along with a brief overview of academic freedom at the secondary or public school level. While much has been said about academic freedom at the college and university level, we have only fragmented knowledge of how public school teachers in the early decades dealt with this issue, especially as it concerned the Rugg materials.

Far from being the lone voice for social reconstruction, Rugg was one of any number of educators throughout the United States who believed that education should offer more to the American way of life than graduating students with some form of common knowledge, but with little ability to effect necessary change. Despite their numbers, it was Rugg the reconstructionist who bore the brunt of the Legion's assault. Why? His views actually made their way from the academic podium into the sacred halls of our public schools, special places reserved for special interests. What is more, his fame as a textbook writer offered him financial security. Hence, he became a favorite target of patriotic groups like the American Legion.

In the 1958 October edition of the *Legion* magazine, writer Irene Coreally Kuhn, penned an article titled "Battle Over Books," in which she congratulates Col. Augustin C. Rudd for exposing the evils of Rugg's textbook series and the work of other "Frontier Thinkers," such as George Counts. To Kuhn, the entire Teachers College bunch, who functioned as satellites around the American philosopher John Dewey, described by Kuhn as a "materialistic, shaggy-haired scholar," were peddling little more than communism when they advanced their ideas of a new social order (Kuhn, 1958, p.20).

Kuhn's hero, Rudd, saw Rugg's textbook series as blatant propaganda. He used such terms as "clever" and "stealth" in describing the methods employed by Rugg in his writing. According to Rudd, Rugg, "with gentle language and a pedagogic smile," led the child "through the successive stages of indoctrination." By way of example, he pointed to one of Rugg's student workbooks. In one edition, Rugg posed the question, "Is the United States a land of opportunity for all our people?" Why? According to the teacher's guide, the answer the child should give is as follows: "The United States is not a land of opportunity for all our people; for one-fifth of the

people do not earn any money at all. There are great differences in the standards of living of the different classes of people. The majority does not have any real security" (Kuhn, 1958, p.38). While these statements may seem to hold obvious truth for many of us today, we must recall with clarity the 1940s and 1950s context in which Legion reviewers and sympathizers examined Rugg's work.

Academic freedom and public schools

At its most basic, academic freedom is the right of educators and students to pursue "truth" wherever they might find it. This would include, for educators, the freedom to teach, to think, to learn and to select curricular materials without fear of censure or loss of employment. The dearth of literature discussing academic freedom in public K-12 schools, unlike the plethora of articles dealing with issues of academic freedom on university and college campuses, during the first half of the 20th century is limited; therefore, one must extrapolate from what is available. In 1967, the National Council for the Social Studies Committee on Academic Freedom discussed 'Social Studies Materials in the Free Marketplace of Ideas' stating that a "diversity of points of view is essential to education in democracy . . . all positions should be heard so that the best may be chosen." This document then proceeds to recognize that the citizens of a community have a right to analyze and criticize curricular materials and spells out the procedures for so doing.

In 1969, this same committee produced another document: *Academic Freedom and the Social Studies Teacher*. This document defines a teacher's academic freedom as "his/her right and responsibility to study, investigate, present, interpret, and discuss all the relevant facts and ideas in the field of his/her professional competence. Under a section titled 'Threats to

Academic Freedom' this document discusses 'Educational Materials' and 'Curriculum and Content'. The statements made in this latter category include:

> The genius of democracy is willingness to generate wisdom through the consideration of the many different alternatives available. Any pressure which restricts the responsible treatment of issues limits the exercise of academic freedom. Similarly, the mandating of curriculum or content by legislative action or legally established agencies presents a potential threat to academic freedom. When such mandates are based on the prevailing political temper, parochial attitudes, or the passions of a specific point in time, they are especially dangerous. (p. 3)

While these documents enter the historical stage several decades after one of the most successful challenges to academic freedom in public education—the attack on the curriculum materials of Harold Rugg by the American Legion—they can be viewed as a link to past struggles over issues of censorship, suppression, and ideological supremacy of special interest groups.

Violas (1971) examined the issue of academic freedom in *Fear and Constraints on Academic Freedom of Public School Teachers, 1930-1960.* His thesis is that the time period, 1930-1960, encompassed three traumatic events in United States History: the Great Depression, WWII and the Cold War. Violas believed that the trauma of these events was so deep that a particular set of social fears arose that threatened teachers' academic freedom. He goes on to say that due to these events " The production of student attitudes conducive to effecting national unity became a primary objective of the schools" (p. 74). As proof of this he cites the chairman of the N.E.A. Academic Freedom Committee declaring "the time has come when we should rethink and rewrite the statement of principles adopted in 1937 . . . There is, we realize, always a danger that certain persons may hide under the cloak of academic freedom and disseminate propaganda in our public schools . . .The committee must not and will not be a shield for Fifth Columnists in the United States of America" (pp. 74-75).

But, Violas may be ascribing too much to the era and not enough to the beliefs of the citizens about academic freedom in public schools in any time period. For example, in 1968, the American Civil Liberties Union stated that while the general principles of academic freedom and civil liberties apply equally to colleges, universities and secondary schools, there are some major distinctions (For a discussion of academic freedom in colleges and universities see Riley and Stern, 2000). First and foremost is the "primary function of the school as a transmitter of knowledge and a force for the inculcation of the community's culture" (p. 4) as opposed to the emphasis in the college and university on the research and expansion of knowledge. Second, the ACLU addresses the "relative immaturity of the students" as requiring "greater prudence in the extension of freedom to them than seems necessary in higher educational institutions" (p. 4).

Despite these concerns, the document does recommend providing students with as much experience in democratic decision making and choice as possible for their preparation as citizens. In terms of 'Selection of Texts and Supplementary Instructional Resources' (p. 7), the document states "Textbooks should be appraised on the basis of accuracy and adequacy of scholarship, promotion of the curricular objectives, and freedom from unfounded or prejudiced opinions of racial, cultural, religious, or political matters." Furthermore, in terms of controversial materials, the ACLU focus is on exposure to varying viewpoints and in terms of censorship: "Where parents, as individuals, or parent or other community groups, raise the question of suitability of any material out of concern for maturity level, morality, patriotism, literary merit, etc., the decision as to its acceptability should be vested in a representative professional committee" (p. 7).

This statement does not, on the face of it, disagree with the Georgia Department of

Education's (1973) recapitulation of an American Legion's adopted policy (1949) stating "instructors in these schools are placed in a most delicate position. They must develop the critical habit of their students. They must always seek the truth. At the same time, they must contribute a product in the form of legal, constructive, creative, law-abiding citizens" (p. 5). The Georgia Education Department goes on to list the American Legion's "Criteria for Evaluation of the Loyalty Factor as Expressed in Instructional Materials." These criteria include:

> In the study of democracy both its accomplishments and failures are examined; In the treatment of the individual's relationship to government his obligations are stressed as well as his rights; Those interested in helping this country to improve democracy are privileged to review the past for failure but are obligated to use their findings for some constructive purpose; The materials help students to develop their own methods of propaganda analysis; and lastly, In dealing with controversial issues, both sides of the issue are fairly presented. (p. 5-6)

The Georgia Department of Education then reclaims its own words stating "parents, teachers, school board members and citizens are reminded that ideas are not killed by suppression or by banning and burning printed materials."

Thus, when it comes to academic freedom in terms of teachers and curricular materials, the leaders of our public schools seem to be sending out mixed messages. On the one hand, the mission of the schools as the producer of good citizens is agreed upon but on the other hand, there may be some disagreement about the definition of a 'good citizen.' In early drafts of the Committee on Social Studies section of the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (1918) the chair of the committee wrote

> Good citizenship should be the aim of social studies in the high school . . . In line with this emphasis the committee recommends . . . such topics as the following: Community health, housing and homes, public recreation, good roads, community education, poverty and the care of the poor, crime and reform, family income, savings banks and live

> insurance, human rights versus property rights, impulsive action of mobs, the selfish conservatism of tradition, and public utilities. (in Butts, p. 6)

While some of Rugg's critics may have supported some of the above curriculum topics, many of these topics, e.g. the selfish conservatism of tradition, would not appeal to their definition of good citizenship topics. To illustrate, Booth (1997) cited Mrs. Elwood Turner, Corresponding Secretary for the Daughters of Colonial Wars as denouncing Rugg because he was "trying to give a child an unbiased viewpoint instead of teaching him real Americanism. All the old histories taught my country right or wrong. That's the point of view we want our children to adopt. We can't afford to teach them to be unbiased and let them make up their own minds" (p. 4).

This statement not only is an attack on academic freedom, but it also points up another problem — an anti-intellectual or anti critical thinking belief likely held by many Americans of the 1930s and 1940s whose sensitivities were strained as a result of war, social and economic instability, and a great fear of the new unknown—communism. Carbone (1997) explains that the Progressives and the Social Reconstructionists were "calling for people to adopt a cluster of intellectual virtues: reasonableness, rationality, 'healthy' skepticism, tolerance, open-mindedness, fairness, impartiality, and also to be disposed to act in accordance with those virtues" (p.6). He goes on to discuss how few of those virtues and dispositions exist in abundance in our society. He continues saying "Further, there is still no visible sign of a forthcoming mandate from the general public to foster them. Thus a vicious circle presents itself. Each generation of students emerges from formal education with little or no appreciation for critical thinking and hence no burning desire to see it cultivated in the next generation" (p. 6).

This problem is borne out by Frances Fitzgerald in her study of American History textbooks in the twentieth century, *America Revised* (1979). In one of her discussions of the Rugg textbooks she explains that Rugg was trying to introduce some realism into the texts. He "discussed unemployment, the problems faced by new immigrants, class structure, consumerism, and the speedup of life in an industrial society" (p. 16). According to Fitzgerald, this approach was revolutionary as these topics had never been delved into in any previous texts. In addition, she comments on the "frankness" of the approach, even by 1979 standards. While Rugg did advocate national economic planning, and did use the word "Socialist" in the book, Fitzgerald clearly states that his textbook series "does not, however, advocate Socialism. The books are full of pieties about the need for American children to become 'tolerant, understanding and cooperating citizens' (p. 17). Later in her study, Fitzgerald credits Rugg with including African American history and leaders although he does mention "the Negro" as a "social problem" (p. 83). Nonetheless, Rugg's books did mention free blacks and the contributions of famous African Americans, something that was unheard of for many years to come. To summarize, "In spite of their detractor's claims, Rugg's series of social studies textbooks did not promote Marxism; if anything, they advocated liberalism (in the sense of racial understanding, democracy, citizenship and social justice) and Keynesianism (in the sense of national economic planning). Rugg's writings, which also addressed problems related to unemployment, immigration and consumerism, represented the expression of progressive education in the field of textbooks" (Schugurensky, http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_schugurensky/).

Thus, the issue of academic freedom and curriculum materials in public schools is confused. On the one hand people state that they want to have children who are good citizens. In

theory that means critical thinkers and problem solvers. But, if students are exposed to textbooks that highlight actual problems, they will question the perfection of their country and therefore, by default, might be less patriotic and/or seek to change or improve the current system which has worked perfectly well for those currently in power. As Fitzgerald puts it:

> The censorship of schoolbooks is simply the negative face of the demand that schoolbooks portray the world as a utopia of the present—a place without conflicts, without malice or stupidity, where Dick (black or white) comes home with a smiling Jane to a nice house in the suburbs. To the extent that young people actually believe them, these bland fictions, propagated for the purpose of creating good citizens, may actually achieve the opposite; they give young people no warning of the real dangers ahead, and later they may well make these young people feel that their own experience of conflict is unique in history and perhaps un-American" (p.218).

Background to Harold Rugg and Social Reconstruction

Despite decades of intermittent study of Rugg and the Social Reconstructionists, we find that a few unanswered questions remain. For example, what was the nature of Rugg's theory and practice? Did Rugg's brand of social reconstruction grow out of a well-defined philosophy or did Rugg formulate his theory as his writings emerged and were re-defined by his own intellectual milieu and the scio-historical context of the 1920s and 1930s? This is an area that requires more investigation. Another question that begs further study is what did Rugg actually mean when he used the term collectivism. We know that the American Legion and other opponents of Rugg and his materials viewed this important term with an eye toward its definition as articulated by Soviet Russia. Yet, this term was combined by Rugg and any number of reconstructionists with the term democracy, thus rendering the term "democratic collectivism."

This second question or area of exploration and further study, the one concerning Rugg's meaning of collectivism, is the one that the writers will generally focus on in this study.

To begin, we pose the question, What were Rugg's ideas on such things as the curriculum, purpose of schooling, or the role of students and teachers? First, Rugg was a proponent of the interdisciplinary approach, although he saw the social studies as a sort of centerpiece with other subject areas in supporting roles. He essentially believed that all curriculum was social studies curriculum and thus, all lessons could be approached through the social studies. He also agreed with the Progressive focus on the scientific method to solve problems that reflected the larger society, rather than the school reflecting a microcosm of society. Rugg also believed that students should immerse themselves in real world problems including working in their communities to find and present solutions that would improve their lives and the lives of their fellow citizens (Rugg, H.O., 1939; Rugg, E. 1939; Bagenstos, 1977; Reitman, 1972), a view today that is consistent with authentic assessment and learning.

The social studies texts prepared by Rugg and his co-authors, contained material on minority groups, including Blacks and women, along with an understanding that we inhabit a larger, more interdependent world. Thus, Rugg and the Social Reconstructionists viewed the role of the teacher as that of a facilitator or one who guides students in the use of the tools of critical thinking and problem solving in order to study real world problems in the hope of building a more equitable democratic society in the United States (Kliebard, 1992, p.183). As Progressives, they never doubted that the tools of scientific method coupled with the American spirit would be able to solve America's pressing social problems (Rugg, H.O. 1939). They were convinced that economic and social gaps between the rich and the poor were stifling our democracy, closing down our avenues of opportunity, and blocking our creativity. Rugg believed that these issues needed to be studied through the school curriculum so that all Americans would "see the light"

and then address and rectify these problems. For Rugg, this was the beauty of democratic—citizens could express their freedom and exercise their liberty by studying, voting and changing the system.

Far from being anti-democratic, Rugg's textbook and other curriculum materials demonstrate that he placed an emphasis on a shared decision making process, a process that he believed had to be taught in order for pressing issues at hand to be solved. Conversely, the language and tone of Legion articles are far more filled with propaganda than anything written by Rugg and examined for this paper. Legion articles with such titles as "Your Child is their Target," "Let's look at our Foundations," and "Smearing the Minds of Kids," speak volumes about the magazine's content and tenor. The Legion's abiding belief was that America's schools were first and foremost laboratories of National Defense and that it was the special role of the school, through its curriculum, to instill the patriotic spirit within each and every red-blooded American boy and girl.

To that end, the Legion aggressively sought to stamp out what its members believed were pockets of un-American activity hidden behind the schoolroom door. In their zeal, they contributed to Rugg's fall from grace and were successful in removing his textbooks from many classroom shelves. The great contest Legion members envisioned between their rank and file and the education demi-gods of Columbia University, especially Harold Rugg, only succeeded in delaying the exposure of the unvarnished truth that Rugg sought to solve through collective participation in problem solving endeavors--democracy and opportunity for all Americans was more myth than reality. Rugg would have understood the following Orwellian-like phrase "all Americans are equal, some are more equal than others," to mean that we are all equal but must

work together to fight inequality. Legion patriots, however, would have viewed the notion of working together to solve real world problems as little more than a smoke screen for a communist plot to subvert the minds of American children.

Caught up in the vortex of the clash were well meaning classroom teachers and administrators. Excited about the latest educational theories, school districts across the United States adopted the Rugg curriculum materials. As Evans, Avery, and Pederson (2000) point out, the traditional approach to social studies—textbook centered and fact-myth-legend—has prevailed over time (p.295). Hence, even in the first half of the 20th century, the Rugg materials sharply challenged the long-prevailing social studies umbrella treatment of separate subjects through their integrated approach and focus on social issues. Moreover, Rugg sought to shape a new type of citizen, one who could interpret the needs of society and who possessed the necessary skills to solve social problems, and above all, one who would act. As Pahl (2001) suggests, Rugg hoped to educate a nation of leaders rather than followers. For Rugg, the only reasonable method to employ in solving problems was the scientific method. Perhaps a contemporary (Price, 1929) of Rugg's said it best:

> Science seems to alternate between specialization and synthesis. Problems are means of unifying the sciences. A real live problem, crime for instance, cuts across the formal boundaries. 'The problem of poverty, for example, is related to biology because of a possible hereditary factor. It also falls into the domain of psychology, for many cases of destitution are neurotic. Economics contributes to the solution, for the distribution of wealth is a factor in poverty. Sociology is related to the problem through population, migration, birth control, city housing, pensions, and public health' (p.368).

Writing from the perspective of a sociologist, Price (1929) further elaborated on the need for an integrated approach when he stated that "[t]he concept of culture is yet to be worked out adequately in world history textbooks. The usual book on world history gives a chronicle of

separate national states but does not indicate the interdependence, contact and contamination of cultures (p.373).

Owing to the fact that nearly every segment of society saw itself as part of the Progressive movement, we should not be surprised at the enthusiasm some educators demonstrated in their selection of methods and texts all of which would allow them to fully participate in the progress at hand.

In their zeal to learn and inquire into up-to-date-educational-theories, many teachers were likely unprepared for the assault on their freedom to choose curricular materials and their methods of teaching. As Levitan (1951) stated,

> The violators of academic freedom do not limit themselves to inquiries about the books used in colleges. In many cases, self-styled defenders of the American system have challenged the traditional democratic right of teachers to pursue the teaching of their subjects as they see fit. An elementary textbook in economics has recently been banned on the sole charge that it defended inheritance taxes, a principle embodied for years in the laws of this land...It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of such campaigns. But a similar drive against Harold Rugg's social science books for high schools has resulted in their exclusion from a great many schools that previously used them (pp. 124-25).

As Boesenberg and Poland (2001) pointed out in their recent study of curriculum controversy and the Rugg textbook series, its direct approach to problems in America represented a threat that led to its eventual banishment from classroom shelves. The problems that Rugg portrayed in his textbook series provoked large organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Hearst papers, along with advertising giants, to group together in opposition. Together with patriotic and ultra-patriotic groups, this amalgam sought to put an end to what their respective leaders considered to be an assault on Americanism. Boesenberg and Poland (2001) said it succinctly, "[t]he organizations that rallied against Rugg were seeking to protect the American way of life and perceived the textbooks as a threat to morality and the political

economic system" (p.653).

Part of American life that was often overlooked or deliberately not considered in discussions on education by anti-Rugg, anti-Progressive education proponents, was the education of African American children (Glotzer, 1996). Perhaps no where were the ideals of the Frontier thinkers more revered than in Negro education circles. In one 1932 article from the *Journal of Negro Education*, the author anticipated a core grievance of 1950s and 60s Civil Rights advocates when he complained about schooling inadequacies and inequalities for minority children, especially in the area of the curriculum. In answering how adequate or inadequate curriculum provisions in 1932 were for the Negro child, he thought it necessary to first establish principles of curriculum construction which were national in scope and conceived of by authoritative sources (Daniel, 1932, p.280). Daniel (1932) found *The Twenty-Sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* to be one such authoritative source. He offered the following:

> The Twenty-Sixth Yearbook, entitled "'The Foundations and Technique of Curriculum-making,'" contains a written statement of the agreement on the curriculum reached by outstanding leaders of thought on the nature of the curriculum. The mere mention of the names of Bagley, Bobbit, Bonser, Charters, Counts, Courtis, Horn, Judd, Kelly, Kilpatrick, Rugg and Works suggests the authority that is attached to this volume" (p. 280).

Daniel (2001) outlined the major assumptions of the State to education by asserting that ..."it is the duty of the state to provide for the education of all of its citizens. Such an assumption is necessary and consistent with the American democratic principles..." (p.278). While Rugg would likely have concurred with these statements, and would have supported the idea that underrepresented children perhaps more than others should be empowered through education to identify, define, and correct problems of society, the anti-Rugg camp would have perceived talk

of "America and its problems" as strictly un-American.

One after another, Rugg's contemporaries spoke out in favor of the need for educating American youth with eye on fact finding and problem solving. And why not? Wasn't the 1930s the heyday of muck-raking journalism? Weren't Americans entitled to know of the abuses of such things as the meat-packing industry or what "big oil" was up to? Education, like other spheres in American life, wanted to demonstrate a certain Progressive spirit. Knode (1935), in his article entitled "Professors and Propaganda: Unprejudiced Factual Material on Social Problems needed by Teachers," while praising Rugg as forward looking, essentially viewed him as not going far enough in presenting students with opportunities to deal with the then contemporary problems of society. He insisted that they only way to achieve rigor was through the "establishment of commissions within the profession itself" (Knode, 1935, p. 349), although his words carried one caveat—those engaged in critical analysis must possess integrity. In other words, teachers should not use their positions of classroom power for subversive purposes. Rather, they should engage students in problems solving activities of an authentic nature that would naturally lead to social re-alignment and an improved living standard for all.

In the heightened atmosphere of impending war, Porter Sargent (1941) writing in the *Journal of Higher Education*, presented readers with an irony. Within the same article he quoted from Rugg's address at the centenary of Colonel Francis Parker. He prefaced Rugg's remarks with "Harold Rugg boldly stated what the universities should do," which was

> Face the problems! Confront them squarely, bravely, intelligently-not dodging an issue on a problem, a trend or a factor! ...Teachers must become students of the world scene! Of its trends and factors. But below these trends are two great problems. The whole world-struggle of today is over these: First, Who shall control and own property? Second, Who shall control government? For...10,000 years—the struggle...has been over these ...Today we tend to confuse them by saying, Fascism vs. Communism (p.

323).

Sargent (1941) concluded his article by quoting President Conant at the Harvard Tercentenary:

> We must examine the immediate origins of our political, economic, and cultural life and then work backwards. ...The origin of the constitution, the functioning of the three branches of the federal government, the forces of modern capitalism, must be dissected as fearlessly as the geologist examines the origin of rocks
> On this point there can be no compromise; we are either afraid of heresy or we are not...Those of us who have faith in human reason believe that in the next hundred years we can build an educational basis for a unified, coherent culture suited to a democratic country in a scientific age (p324).

What stands in bold relief is how shrill the anti-Rugg voices were when at the same time other prominent educationists publicly proclaimed the same sentiments as Rugg and other so-called Frontier thinkers. From Sargent's (1941) article, one might rightly ask the question, "How different in meaning was Conant's "unified, coherent culture," from Rugg's brand of collective activity?

While Rugg's textbooks eventually disappeared from classroom shelves, his ideas about education continued to influence the next generation of educationists. Far from being a conservative political incubator where young minds are inoculated against any number of ideological viruses, educators such as Slavin (1950) paid respect to Rugg's notion of the school as a partner or the "society centered foundations of education" (p. 135), for the improvement of society. To be sure, Rugg was misunderstood during the years in which his textbooks fell from popularity. The conservative forces so staunchly against him turned much of what he had to say into a communist proposal for America. However, if one carefully reads Rugg and his educational plan, it becomes clear that he did not lose sight of democracy as our form of government, nor did he advocate communism. His early background as an engineer made it easy

for him to resonate to the "efficiency" movement afoot, with its emphasis on planning.

At its February 1934 meeting in Cleveland, the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association "instructed a committee of educators to present....a statement of the social and economic trends and their implications for a new education," (Committee Report, 1934, p.533) with Harold Rugg as Chair. The two sections of the committee's report centered on trends and implications. The report was then sent to several hundred educators throughout the country "...with instructions to use the report as the basis of local conferences of educators and laymen. The conclusions reached in these local conferences were to be brought to Cleveland and fused into a final report for submission to the program committee of the Department of Superintendence" (p. 535). What emerged as the final product can be considered as a document greatly influenced by Rugg; however, with the input of several hundred educators in the production of the final product, it was hardly a case of rubber stamping. Perhaps it can be instructive at this point to look at the Rugg-inspired document, especially letter E. which was titled *Education and Social Reconstruction.* (Italics not added).

> Anticipating Lyndon Johnson's plan for a Great Society, the conclusion to Part I read:
>
> Indeed the study of man and his changing society produced the conviction that we stand today on the verge of a great culture. The epoch which we are now entering is the first on the time-line of history in which man can bring forth a civilization of abundance, of tolerance, and of beauty.
>
> It is a potentially great culture, because having invented efficient prime movers, man need no longer be a cringing slave of nature. It can be great, not because the twelve-hour day can and will become the four-hour day, but because work of any prolongation can become a happy, creative experience; great because of the possibility of the successful union of democracy and technology; great because the scientific method can at last be applied to the man-man relationships as well as to the man-thing relationships; in a word, great because man can now live creatively both as artist and as technologist.
>
> We stand indeed at the crossroads to a new epoch; in various directions lie diverse

> pathways to tomorrow. Some lead to social chaos and the possible destruction of interdependent ways of living. One leads, however, to the era of the great society. There is no way to short-circuit the solution to the problem of building this new epoch. There is only the way of education, and it is slow, not sudden (Committee Report of the NEA, 1934).

The American Legion Magazine and Other Rugg Materials

In Cremin's (1961) seminal work on Progressive education, the author said of Rugg, "Certainly if any single career symbolizes the constantly changing image of progressive education during the decades after World War I, it was Harold Rugg's" (p. 181). One writer characterized Rugg's passion for progressivism in this way: "There were many who saw new and unprecedented opportunities in the rise of new governments which would reach such composite power as had not hitherto been recorded. Thus, 'there lies within our grasp the most humane, the most beautiful, the most majestic civilization ever fashioned by any people'" (Odum, 1934, p.604). That Rugg's work came to be associated by the Legion with the rise of one of the new governments of which Odum (1934) spoke is all too obvious. Yet, Rugg consistently included democracy in nearly all of his discussions on the plan for a New Education. Rugg may have entertained a certain intellectual curiosity when it came to the fundamentals of Communism, but his writings indicate a dedication to a democratic way of life with citizens freed from the burden presented to them by the whims and fancies of unbridled capitalism. Only when the federal government assumed control of the forces of production and engineered a planned economy could citizens release their creative energies in order to engage in problem solving on a large scale, so thought Rugg.

At the time that Rugg wrote a number of his social science textbooks, in the early 1930s, the world had yet to view with complete clarity the abuses of the Communist state. It was too

early to count the millions lost to starvation or brutalized by a draconian secret service. Communism in its infancy likely looked as though it might be the great social equalizer. What's more, the American public at this time had not "digested" the Orwellian version of the communist state in *Animal Farm*. Yet the mere thought of a new social order caused many to dream of social upheaval and displacement. That was enough to convince any stout-hearted loyal American to resist in any form any talk of change. Hence, when Rugg's textbook series first appeared and his star began to rise, the opposition to his work took on a fierce and strident tone. The American Legion, only one organization out of a pantheon of many, took up its figurative sword and prepared to do battle. We turn our attention now to a series of articles on the Rugg curriculum materials published over two decades in the *American Legion Magazine*.

"No 'New Order' for our Schools" (Shumaker, 1941), opens with equal amounts of scare tactics and platitudes. Shumaker paints a picture for the reader of Hitler and Mussolini meeting in 1940 in the Austrian Alps for the purpose of forging an alliance to "blackout" democracy throughout the world (p.5). The author sought to contrast their actions and motives to the United States by picturing America as a land where all can come to the figurative floor to be heard and where everyone's voice counts. While Legion members and leaders may have believed these two views themselves—bad guys versus good guys—countless educators, intellectuals, and social workers, including the first lady cabinet member who received one of Columbia's earliest graduate degrees in social work, Frances Perkins, knew better. They knew that the voices of

immigrants went largely ignored in conservative political circles. This was one of the aspects of American life progressive reformers had hoped to change.

Shumaker's (1941) article heaped praise upon America's educators, pointing out that "[i]n general, the builders of curricula, the writers of textbooks, and the classroom teachers, have performed their tasks most creditably" (p.5). The author went on to call the National Education Association (NEA) an organization that was part of a collaboration responsible for ..."building a great educational system which is the pride of the nation" (p.5). Interestingly, the NEA some seven years before sponsored the Rugg committee report that stood as a blueprint for progressive educational reform, calling for such things as A New Education, one that would vividly present pressing social and economic issues. Rugg's committee insisted that through every avenue of information and education, the issues must be presented, including such concerns as a..." *poverty economy* (italics not added) resulting from an out-moded laissez-faire economic system on the one hand and on the other a *plenty economy* (italics not added) which could result from a designed social system..."(Committee Report of the NEA, 1934, p. 540). Apparently, Shumaker was unaware that the praiseworthy NEA had actually sponsored the detestable document authored, in large part, by the Legion's arch enemy, Harold Rugg.

In attempting to convey the Legion's message in a certain homespun fashion, Shumaker capitalized on the use of clichés throughout. In one such attempt, the author likened the United States to an old ship: "'The old ship of State may have sprung a few leaks but there has been no scuttling of any part of our great heritage—the leaks have always been closed up and the ship continues seaworthy" (p. 6). In other words, yes, the United States has problems, but we have always been able to fix them without getting rid of our form of government. Shumaker's purpose was clear: to convey the idea that what Rugg and other Frontier thinkers were calling for was an overthrow of our existing system as a way to fix any number of social and political problems. He

went on to cast disdain upon the field of social studies by revealing its integrated nature as though an integrated treatment of social, political, historical, economic, and geographic issues and content were something undesirable. The Legion favored the traditional treatment of social science subjects as isolated subject areas merely grouped together under an umbrella term called social studies.

Shumaker leaves the reader with little doubt that he and other Legion officials believe that Rugg and other Frontier thinkers were behind a plan to transplant the Soviet Russia model of collectivism to the United States through the agency of the school. Rugg was also attacked for his call to abolish intercollegiate sports as it held no educational value. One might recall that many university presidents and faculty, long before Rugg uttered his "sporting" challenge, sought to abolish intercollegiate sports as well and for the same reason. Other charges brought about by Shumaker against Rugg included Rugg's "lack of emphasis on true American life and too great emphasis on the unfavorable aspects, failure to give due acknowledgement to the deeds of our great American heroes, questioning private ownership, too favorable emphasis on what has been done in the Soviet Union, the creation of doubt in the minds of pupils and teachers as to the ability of our democracy to function successfully, the dissemination of alien propaganda, statements that the United States Supreme Court favors vested interests" (Shumaker, 1941, p. 7). To bolster the Legion's position on Rugg, Shumaker quoted extensively from Rugg's work, most notably his *Great Technology,* yet offered little in terms of Rugg's textbook content for secondary students.

An examination of Rugg's textbook, *Problems of American Culture*, reveals that far from being a vehicle of propaganda, it takes a sort of straightforward approach in dealing with

pressing social, political, and economic issues. For example, Rugg posed this question: "Is there a place for better planning in the development of the press?" (Rugg, 1931, *Problems*, p. 604). He added that since the advent of universal elementary education more and more individuals were reading newspapers, magazines, and books. To Rugg, the greater the ability to reach people through the written word, the greater the responsibility for accuracy in reporting. Far from being the lone voice in the wilderness when it came to exposing the problems of the press, he nevertheless was a prime target of the Hearst papers and others. But what had he actually told students or young people about the press and its problems in his textbook? In *Problems of American Culture*, Rugg simply posed the question of whether or not there was room for better planning in the development of the press. He challenged youngsters to consider that

> [w]e have noted the important role of advertising and business in determining the content of newspapers and magazines. We have seen the widespread tendency for tabloid picture newspapers and other sensational periodicals to print 'news' without too great regard for accuracy. Hence, although reputable publishers are already doing much to improve the character of the press, insistent problems present themselves. Underlying them are difficult questions of propaganda and censorship. Similarly, there emerge the equally important problems of the more fundamental education of our people, of the cultivation of a taste for better literature and of a demand for a more scientific attitude in the press" (p. 604).

Rugg was certainly not the first to speak of things like sensationalism in the press. Recall the allegations leveled at press organs that sensationalized the "Sinking of the Maine," in the Havana harbor some 30 years earlier. The first quarter of the 20th century, it seemed, had been devoted to exposing this or that falsehood and flashy deal making. Why were Rugg's propopsals treated as something new, one might ask.

Make no mistake, Rugg certainly advocated change. The type of change he and others, many others, sought to effect might even be considered radical or drastic. However, these radical

changes could be viewed as proportional to the problems that progressive reformers perceived and sought to ameliorate.

A second article on Rugg appeared in the next issue of the American Legion *Magazine*, May 1941. Hicks (1941) in "Ours to Reason Why," opened with a more scholarly, but no less damning, account of Rugg and his proposal for a New Education than Shumaker had in the April issue. However, when one reads past the first several pages, the article begins to break down into a confusion of surreal images of youngsters tricking their parents by leading them into the chaos of a totalitarian state after years of subtle Rugg propaganda in their schools. Hicks actually went further in condemning Rugg than did Shumaker when he likened the Frontier thinker to Adolf Hitler. In fact, Hicks boldly said, "*The Great Technology* is Rugg's *Mein Kampf*" (Hicks, 1941, p.52). As proof of Rugg's malevolent methods and motives, Hicks pointed out that a Legion post held an essay contest for high schoolers. Students were given a plan to stabilize business based upon both a Soviet and Nazi government model. Students were asked to write an essay without benefit of consulting any texts, dictionaries, or other printed materials. The results of the essay startled Legion members. The students, all of whom had attended a school which utilized the Rugg materials, responded as follows: three recognized the plan as either communist or nazi inspired; three others pointed out the pros and cons; and three thought the plan to be excellent. These outcomes likely confirmed what Legion rank and file believed all along, as long as Rugg and his sort were allowed to influence American youth, our country was doomed.

Following the Hicks article, *The Legion Magazine* (Cunningham, 1941) published a piece entitled "Smearing the Minds of Kids." Its author referred to Rugg as both Comrade Rugg and

Herr Rugg within the same paragraph. Interestingly, Cunningham painted the two systems of governments with the same brush. What it clear is that he believed that communism, a system of government that relied on a central planning committee and a designed economy, was the same thing as a dictatorship, and one we might add, that did not embrace planning on a Soviet scale, or embrace the remotest theory of power sharing. In theory, the two are not the same and we might recall that Rugg more than a practitioner was a theorist. Alternating between Camrade Rugg and Herr Rugg, Cunningham called Rugg's assertions that collegiate sports added nothing to the intellectual rigor of the university nonsense. In fact, he viewed Rugg's position on such sports as anti or un American. It has traditionally been in the domain of team sports, claimed Cunningham, where young people practice democratic principles. As mentioned, Rugg was but one of hundreds of higher education faculty who found collegiate sports to be distractions to the real work of the university.

Like the Legion articles published in the early 1940s, those produced in the 1950s linked Rugg to the most perverse type of subversive activity—teaching the youth of America to find fault with their government. Also like the articles of the early 40s, the authors likened Rugg to Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, albeit Hitler remained the favorite. Unlike the 1941 Shumaker article, in which the author heaped praise upon the NEA, Kuhn's (1952) article entitled "Your Child is their Target," alerted the reading public to a different NEA. She was quick to point out that

> [o]ne of the strongest forces today in propagandizing for a socialistic America is the hierarchy of the National Education Association. ?They have had things pretty much their own way for a long time, too, but the public opposition and nation-wide parents' rebellion which have sprung up in the past two years may force the N.E.A. into a re-examination of itself. It is too soon, though, to say how the organization will eventually react. Some of its performances have been more typical of the tactics of a captured labor

> union complete with goon squads, than of a respectable national organization of more than a half million teachers. The N.E.A. has no reason to be proud of those goon squads which have turned up to do a discrediting job on citizens whenever there has been an uprising in a community against 'progressive' education (p. 57).

The mistrust of ordinary citizens such as the Legionnaires and other patriotic groups of their schools, teachers, administrators, along with professional teaching organizations, is palpable in this 1952 article. Nearly 20 years after the 1934 Cleveland meeting of the NEA, when Rugg was charged with drafting a committee report on trends and issues, along with implications, the Legion continued to beat the same drum in its organization's press organ. Kuhn like Shumaker some 20 year before trotted out all of the data on that decades-old meeting as if it were a current red flag.

While the *American Legion Magazine* published a few more articles excoriating Rugg and his contemporaries, the few presented here suffice as examples of the type of message and method of delivery employed by one of our largest ex-servicemen's and patriotic organizations. Perhaps far more than a handful of magazine articles, the Legion's three volume series on the philosophy of Harold Rugg was the most damaging of its written publications. In *The Complete Rugg Philosophy*, the Legion laid at the doorstep of one educator the entire blame for what its members collectively believed was a communist plot to subvert the minds of American children. This step by step analysis of the "Rugg program" relied on excerpts from Rugg's work juxtaposed to original interpretations by Legion employed experts of his work. In volume two, writers assert that

> [t]he Legion recognizes the right of freedom of speech. This is a precious heritage which must be preserved. The Legion is firm in its position, however, that this right ceases to be a privilege when controversial issues are presented to children through textbooks which serve as an instrument of propaganda to promote the personal ideas and program of the author (p.2).

While Rugg clearly held ideas that America could and should be a better place to live for all of her citizens, he never advocated the kind of collectivism defined by Stalin. Perhaps he used the wrong language to introduce his ideas, or perhaps his terminology was correct and the terms simply perverted by totalitarian-minded Soviet leaders. Whatever the case, Rugg was only one of hundreds if not thousands of educators who eagerly sought the promise of progressivism and the hope of a New Education.

For its part, the Legion played the role organization s like that normally play—watchdog. Its ordinary citizen body is ever on the alert to threats against the American way of life. No matter that its members as individuals or as a group attack the work of our thinkers and scholars without adequately possessing the skills to understand the difference between theory and practice. Ideas great or small must be broken down into recognizable forms for most. What is valid is tradition, custom, and ritual. Slogans are truth. Oaths, the highest form of wisdom. Clichés the ultimate method of explanation. The gulf between ordinary citizens and the intelligentsia is wide, and on issues involving the education and indoctrination of youth into its mother culture, one will find many oars in the water.

Conclusion

What set Rugg apart from other intellectual reconstructionists of the 1920s and 1930s and thus made him an easy target for patriotic watchdog organizations such as the American Legion was that his writings and materials actually made their way into the public school system, the stronghold and incubator of American traditionalists. Rugg's talk of collectivism sounded eerily to Legion ears like the brutal system and economic policies of Stalin's Soviet Union. Never mind that Rugg throughout his writings and textbooks for children referred to democracy in a

positive light. No matter that what he and other reconstructionists envisioned was what they called democratic collectivism, his opponents remain unconvinced. Rugg's reconstruction of society embraced a dual strategy: 1) a planned economy in which the federal government would control the production of goods as well as the financial and transportation infrastructure which in turn would free the people from the whims of capitalism and 2)allow Americans to release their collective spirit and work together to solve America's problems, especially in the area of social justice.

Rugg's background, his training as an engineer and one who came of age in the intense atmosphere of efficiency and progress, and all that they promised, made him a good candidate to draw from both the Progressive spirit of caring and reform and to make the necessary changes in society in the most efficient and expedient way. Unlike his fellow reconstructionist George Counts, eventually rehabilitated for renouncing his support and admiration of communism, Rugg's reputation and persona continues to be linked to the great contest between him and his accusers, the "merchants of conflict," as he referred to them in his written defense, *That Men May Understand.* Rugg, under the glare of the un-American spotlight, fell from grace as quickly as his high school textbooks fell from the shelves of school libraries and classrooms. If Rugg would have been a character in a Greek tragedy, his tragic flaw might have been his belief that one could actually synthesize the diametrically opposing notions of efficiency and planning and social justice. The one calls for objectivity and streamlined strategies, the second, for complex answers to complex problems. In the end, Rugg never reconciled the two to the satisfaction of his opponents, especially the watchdogs of Americanism—the American Legion.

Although a lengthy explanation of Rugg's brand of Reconstructionism, a contemporary

of his advanced this reconstructionist proposition:

> Our critics seem to think that if only we would let our pupils alone and not indoctrinate them they would grow up fresh and open-minded and show us the way to a better society. If we refrain from doing anything whatever about a child's provincialism, will he grow up free from provincialism, with equal love for all the social groups and nations of the world? If only we as teachers do not indoctrinate him with conservatism, will he come out open-minded, loving prophets, always ready to change the conventions of society? Not that I ever noticed. The most provincial and conservative people we can find are those most let alone by teachers, those who did their learning from the members of their clan and from their own instinctive promptings. Compare with these those persons whom a wise teacher managed—staging for them opportunities for diversified social contracts, having them hear about all sorts of people and all sorts of points of view, bringing to their attention the fact that every question is likely to have two sides, inspiring them by example and by story-telling with admiration for open-mindedness and progressivism and hatred for bigotry and fear, helping them to grow into techniques of self-criticism and of constructive leadership, never imposing convictions upon them by an *ipse dixit* but always matching ideas with them in a frank and honest search or truth—always with an eye to having realized in them the spirit and the habits of growth (indoctrinating them, that is, with these attitudes and techniques of open-mindedness and creativeness). What odds will you give me if I stand ready to bet that these indoctrinated pupils will be more likely to create for us a better social order than will those who are let alone? (Peters, 1931, p. 270-71).

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