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# Looking Backward to Go Forward: Toward a Kliebardian Approach to Curriculum Theory

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## Abstract

*This paper analyzes the work of Herbert M. Kliebard, not only as a curricular historian, but also as a curricular theorist. We focus on his approach to studying the history of education and curriculum as a methodological framework for understanding the purpose of education. Next, we explore two important curricular events in the 1930s: *The Eight-Year Study* and the social studies textbooks of Harold Rugg. While the 1930s were markedly different from today, most notably in terms of the demographic and educational contexts of the United States, our analysis points to ways that educational scholars in the 21st century might mobilize more Kliebardian insights in their work. In both sections, we build from Kliebard's discussion to explore ways in which massive poverty and economic precarity did not lead to the federal centralization of curriculum and school policy, but rather to a range of localized and radical curricular interventions and practices. We then draw from the sense of possibility at the core of Kliebard's work to show that even in the face of seemingly commonsense responses to the growing poverty of school-aged youth, multiple opportunities for resistance remain. We conclude with future directions for curriculum theory and curriculum studies to carve out critical spaces where transgressional and transformational scholarship remain inherently possible.*

*Keywords:* Herbert Kliebard, curriculum theory, curriculum history, anticapitalism

On January 16, 2015, *The Washington Post* ran an article with the headline “Majority of U.S. Public School Students Are in Poverty” (Layton, 2015). The premise of the piece followed from the Southern Education Foundation's (Suitts, 2015) report that 51% of students in the United States in the 2012–2013 school year were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The 2012–2013 school year marked the beginning of a new era for public education: most students in public schools were now federally classified as poor.

With the coming of the 2014–2015 school year, another shift in the population characteristics in the public school system occurred: students of color now made up more than 50% of the total student population (Maxwell, 2014). These recent changes meant<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> We cite newspaper articles to emphasize popular constructions and narratives of the ways that students of color and students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch are “framed,” as articulated by Lakoff (2002, 2004) to mean the contextual and co-textual ways in which particular ideas are animated through lenses that condition and determine aspects of how they are interpreted. See Kumashiro (2008) for more on how frames of neoliberalism animate right-wing educational policies.

that, as of 2016, most students in school were students of color whose family incomes qualified them to receive free meals at school. This new demographic reality of the school-aged population presents a number of important policy, curricular, and pedagogical challenges. Thus far, at the level of federal educational policy, the United States' collective response to these shifts has been characterized by neoliberalism.

In this paper, we conceptualize neoliberalism as market fundamentalism, where the logic and methods of for-profit businesses are applied to any and all social spaces and goods (Apple, 2001; Casey, 2016a; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). One of the major aims of neoliberalism is the privatization of what has traditionally been public (Harvey, 2005). Thus, all public entities are seen as businesses in need of greater efficiency and accountability to guarantee that they maximize returns on investments (see Casey, 2013, 2016a; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). Curriculum scholars have located the origins of neoliberalism in the Reagan- and Thatcher-era policies of the 1980s, and have explored the ways in which neoliberal logic has pervaded federal education policy in the United States (Apple, 2001; Hill, 2009). These neoliberal policies have led to an increasing reliance on high-stakes test scores (Hursh, 2007), national(ized) curriculum standards in the form of the Common Core State Standards (Casey, 2016b), and the rapid rise of charter schools across almost every major metropolitan area in the country (Lipman, 2011).

Thus, we can understand the above as producing the following three theses: (a) students in the United States increasingly live in homes that are below or at the federal poverty line; (b) most of these students are students of color, who have been historically excluded, marginalized, and discriminated against in formal school settings; and (c) our federal education policies have focused on national reforms that rely on high-stakes testing and a centralization of curriculum under the banner of neoliberalism (Casey, 2016b; Hursh, 2007; Lipman, 2011).

Curriculum theorists (see Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2002) and scholars have a wealth of resources at their disposal to reconsider this narrative in a critical light. Given the relative crisis of curriculum theory in recent decades (see Snaza, 2014 for an engaging discussion of the field's relative "mourning"), many have examined curricular history to better contextualize and understand our present moment. It is from this search for context and historical precedent that this project emerged.

We understand curriculum theory as a call for "complicated conversations" that illuminate the ways "in which academic knowledge, subjectivity, and society are inextricably linked. It is this link . . . which curriculum theory elaborates" (Pinar, 2004, p. 11). If we conceptualize curriculum as anything we can learn from, we are able to appreciate the range of meanings and meaning-makings that are possible in both formal instances of curriculum, such as textbooks and standards, and informal or hidden curricula, such as teachers' or peers' ways of speaking to or about us. Thus, curriculum theory motivates us to think pedagogically, to center the experiences, positionality, and potential of teachers and learners in ways that work in opposition to traditionally oppressive educational practices and aims. Curriculum theory calls on us to reconceptualize

curriculum in light of the Freirean (2000) insight that all education is always-already<sup>3</sup> political, and thus always-already in relationship with practices of oppression and resistance (Casey, 2016a; Darder, 2002; Freire, 2005; Kumashiro, 2009). As Pinar (2000) wrote, “Curriculum theory [might] be said to be the essence of educational theory because it is the study of how to have a learning environment” (p. 12). Methodologically, we aim to read both our contemporary experiences as well as curricular history through this explicitly political lens of curriculum theory.

We began this work, following Pinar (2010), by questioning the “newness” of the demographic challenges impacting our contemporary work in public schools. While our current methods of measuring poverty at the federal level in the United States only began in the 1960s, we can use other historical sources and measures of relative poverty to understand that the 2010s are in fact not the first time in U.S. history that most public school students have come from low-income backgrounds. We can look to the 1930s, the era of the Great Depression, for insight into other responses to the demographic reality of our present historical moment. There are, however, significant limitations to any such theoretical and historical engagement. We must state plainly that the 1930s was an era characterized by resistance to capitalist exploitation on the part of workers and organizers, but also by massive injustice. These injustices included restrictive housing covenants as conditions for Federal Housing Authority loans and other policies banning people of color from social services, union membership, and most housing opportunities across the country (Casey, 2016a; Thandeka, 2006). Adding further complexity, the majority of people in the United States did not complete high school in the 1930s, and thus the present practice of compulsory secondary education makes any comparisons exploratory at best. However, such exploration contains possibilities for new ways of engaging educational problems that seem overtly contemporaneous. Upon further historical engagement, these can become more pedagogically framed ways of asking questions about our present conditions and hopes for educational justice. In this work, we argue that there is no better starting place than the collected scholarship of the late Herb Kliebard.

In this paper, we not only discuss Kliebard as curricular historian, but also examine his work as a practice of curriculum theorizing. We focus on how he conceptualized the purposes of studying educational and curricular history as a methodological guide for curricular theorists. Next, we further explore two important 1930s-era curricular events: The Eight-Year Study and the social studies textbooks of Harold Rugg. In discussing both events, we build from Kliebard’s theory to explore ways in which massive poverty and economic precarity did not lead to federal centralization of curriculum and school policy, but rather to a range of localized curricular interventions and practices. We then work to draw from the sense of possibility at the core of Kliebard’s work to show that multiple opportunities for resistance remain—even in the face of seemingly commonsense (Kumashiro, 2009) responses that reinforce the status quo—to the growing poverty of school-aged youth. We conclude with future directions for curriculum theory and studies

<sup>3</sup> By always-already, we mean that there is no moment when education is ever *not* political, as though education were only made political at particular moments, and was capable of being “neutral” unless made political by particular social actors. Because all of education is always-already political, we can ask critical questions of who is being privileged and who is being left out of any particular educational initiatives or curriculum. For more on this see Freire (2000) and Kumashiro (2009).

to carve out critical spaces where transgression and transformation remain possible, even in an era characterized by rising white supremacist nationalism and rampant neoliberal centralization and privatization (Casey, 2016a).

### **Kliebard: From Historian to Theorist, and Back Again**

Kliebard's impact on curriculum studies continues to resonate. His books, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893–1958* (Kliebard, 2004) and *Changing Course: American Curriculum Reform in the 20th Century* (Kliebard, 2002), remain two of the most important contributions to the study of curriculum history in the United States. Yet, in our work to understand the connections and possibilities between our present moment and the 1930s, we were drawn to an article that Kliebard published in 1995, entitled “Why History of Education?” In many ways, this is the central question of our present inquiry, and—for this purpose—we focus on Kliebard's insights drawn primarily from this essay and secondarily from his more widely known texts. We attribute our claim that one might better read Kliebard as a theorist, rather than only historian, to this essay.

We will return to the importance of reading Kliebard in historical context, but we begin this section by discussing the theoretical orientation to curriculum and history that is present across Kliebard's work. Kliebard (1995) argued that

Perhaps, more than anything, what the study of the history of education can provide is not so much specific lessons pertaining to such matters as how to construct a curriculum or how to run a school as it is the development of certain habits of thought. (p. 194)

From this starting point, we are not seeking a backward looking, nostalgic argument for returning to past trends or practices. To be clear, there is no previous period in the United States that granted full and equal access to social goods and opportunities for women, indigenous people, people of color, queer people, immigrants, undocumented people, or people with disabilities. For the vast majority of the United States' history, there were explicit laws denying citizenship, subjectivity, and personhood, and the 1930s were no exception (Thandeka, 2006). Today, struggles for justice continue, marked by both de jure and de facto forms of discrimination and oppression. We cannot go backward, nor start from any historical moment other than the present. What we can take from the above quote, however, is Kliebard's notion that we might take “certain habits of thought” from our historical investigations that can aid us in our present work to demand and actualize more just schooling practices and outcomes.

Kliebard (1995) argued against the utility of three main questions commonly asked within the field of curricular studies. These three questions are: (a) “What should be the goals that define the curriculum of schools?” (p. 195); (b) “What educational experiences should be provided by schools to prepare children for the adult activities that they will one day be required to perform?” (p. 196); and (c) “How can schools meet the common and individual needs of children and youth?” (p. 197). He argued that each of these questions stifled, rather than animated, democratic approaches to teaching and learning with students.

The first question, around goal setting, is perhaps the most apparent example of a question that blocks critical thinking and action in educational policy and practice. Kliebard

(1995) wrote that “the process of goal stating may even become a surrogate for taking action” (p. 195). When we consider the now infamous No Child Left Behind (NCLB) goal that every student in the country be proficient in math and reading by 2014, we can understand Kliebard’s critique as one that calls our attention to the actual practice of goal setting. The act functioned more as a “convenient justification for what we would be doing anyway” (p. 195) than as an invective masked as aspirational objective (see McGuinn, 2006, for more on the uninterrupted educational policies of the past 25 years). Kliebard made this point explicitly: “A goal is something that gives direction to present activity, not something enunciated prior to the activity and imposed from without” (p. 195). Although we caution that there is an absolute need to continue imagining more just and humanizing lived experiences for people (Freire, 2000), Kliebard’s point remains salient. Years before NCLB passed, Kliebard had already explained why such acts function primarily as a way to justify practices that would be carried on regardless of the goals presented. Further, we can think of the subsequent reauthorizations of NCLB as additional examples of this goal-setting-as-action. In many ways, the most recent iteration, now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), has realized the goal-setting-as-action phenomenon in state-level policy—states establish benchmarks and their ways of attaining and measuring progress become an instrumentalized loop. Goal setting is the policy making, conjoined to neoliberalism, to create ever-greater desires for efficiency. Demanding greater efficiency and accountability as ends in themselves is empty work, yet this is precisely the stage we have reached in our present educational policy moment.

Kliebard’s second critique examined the notion of education as preparation for future work. As a Deweyan, Kliebard rejected the notion that the school can ever actually prepare students for an unknowable and not yet realized future (see Dewey, 2007). Yet this insistence—that schools prepare students for their futures—is the expressed aim of our present school system (Casey, 2016a). “Every student college ready” proclaim school district mission statements and legislators in unison. Yet this orientation toward the future runs counter to a student-centered approach to curriculum and pedagogy by rejecting the present concerns and interests of actual students for the imagined concerns and interests of future adults. A neoliberal framing for the purposes of public schooling sees students only as future workers—recent calls to fold the Department of Education into the Department of Labor in the United States are clear examples of this neoliberal project. As Dewey (1897/2010) put it, “Education . . . is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 22). Kliebard (1995) clarified this point as well, writing that “children will begin to see knowledge as important if the knowledge they get in school is of consequence to them in the immediate world in which they live” (p. 197). Insistence on education as preparation functions on the side of neoliberalism by warping the concrete material needs of students into the needs of the capitalist economy (Casey, 2011). Despite an era of rapid technological innovation and increased economic unpredictability, our national aims for education remain wholly future-oriented.

Kliebard's third question revolved around the purpose of schooling. He argued that—emerging from the life-adjustment<sup>4</sup> debates in the 1950s (Kliebard, 2004)—schools had been asked to respond to virtually every social issue facing the nation. Kliebard (1995) wrote that “the obvious implications of an overestimation of the power of schools lie mainly in the common tendency to ascribe to the school functions that it cannot realistically perform” (p. 197). Constructing schools as failing thus becomes more possible once schools are responsible not only for traditional academic subject areas, but also for drug and alcohol abuse, driver's education, reproductive health, and the myriad other examples we might list here. The critiques of public education made possible from such an unrealizable demand—that schools accomplish everything needed in society as well as everything that schools are thought to be most responsible for (i.e., academic content knowledge)—abound. As Kliebard wrote, “many of those critics fail to see the connection between a diffuse and indefinitely expanded curriculum on one hand and the failure to teach academic subjects successfully on the other” (p. 197). For those seeking to privatize public education, constructing an unlimited number of goals for schools and making the aims of education contingent on distant, future outcomes ensure that the thesis remains the same: schools are indeed failing.

Taken together, Kliebard (1995) encouraged his readers to consider why it is that when we are confronted with questions over the goals and purposes of education that we immediately seek to answer them, rather than to “hold them up to critical examination” (p. 198). It is through this move—of shifting from working to answer these seemingly immortal curriculum questions to critiquing them—that we believe Kliebard can be read as a theorist. Kliebard's theorizing in “Why History of Education?” can be viewed methodologically as a form of critical engagement with historical texts. He has made clear that such engagement is not an instrumental act (see Horkheimer 1947/2004), in which we look to the history of curriculum for best practices. Rather, Kliebard demonstrated that we might use historical engagement with curriculum to move away from forms of inquiry that are overly limited to begin with. That is, we might engage the history of curriculum in ways that allow us to question much of what feels automatic or commonsense—in the Kumashiroan (2009) sense—about our contemporary educational landscape. We now turn to this Kliebardian historical engagement.

### **Akin's Eight-Year Study: Responding to Poverty, Pedagogically**

The Progressive Education Association (PEA) created a new plan in 1930, spurred on in part by the beginning of the Great Depression (Akins, 1942). Up to this point, the PEA had been focused on elementary education. Child-centered approaches and experimental curricula had gained traction and spread across progressive classrooms in the early grades, yet secondary schools—especially high schools—lagged behind. This was seen largely as a result of the strict demands that colleges and universities placed on high schools. The elementary grades were more open to experimentation because of their relative distance from college classrooms, whereas high schools were forced into greater alignment with the

<sup>4</sup> Life-adjustment education advocates argued that life-skills, practical for those who were not going to attend universities, should replace more traditional academic subjects in secondary education. These debates emerged after World War II and continued into the 1950s. For more see Kliebard (2004).

expectations of higher education. Formed with support from the Carnegie Foundation and the Rockefeller-backed General Education Board, the PEA established a “Commission on the Relation of School and College to explore possibilities of better co-ordination of school and college work and to seek an agreement which would provide freedom for secondary schools to attempt fundamental reconstruction” (Akin, 1942, p. 2). This fundamental reconstruction came with universities’ agreement to admit students from experimental high schools, even if their credits and course requirements were different from the standard procedures for admission. With the demand that they align with preexisting college and university expectations suspended, high schools were able to approach education in ways that contrasted sharply and significantly from much of our contemporary educational policy, characterized by neoliberal initiatives, centralization, and privatization (Lipman, 2011).

The results of the Eight-Year Study were seen as a kind of “anticlimax,” to use Kliebard’s (2002, p. 56) term, because students who attended the experimental schools had almost no difference in college performance and success compared to the control group of students who attended traditional high schools (see Kridel & Bullough, 2007). These results, however, ought to be seen as a significant success for the PEA and the leaders of the study in that they demonstrated that “many roads lead to college success” (Akins, 1942, p. 116). In other words, students who had not attended a high school with explicitly college-oriented curriculum performed no worse than those who had. In our present moment of neoliberal centralization, these lessons appear to have been lost, as schools race toward a dispossession of student potentiality in the name of college readiness (Casey, 2016b).

Akin’s (1942) account of the Eight-Year Study, as well as Kliebard’s treatment of it in both *Changing Course* (2002) and *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* (2004), offer numerous examples of the different kinds of curricular projects and programs that the 30 participating high schools undertook. As this history has been well documented (see Kridel & Bullough, 2007; Pinar, 2010), we work here not to repeat detailed accounts of the particular curricular and pedagogical interventions that these schools made. Instead, we have organized our discussion of the Eight-Year Study into four frames (Lakoff, 2002, 2004) that we developed to help us analyze Akin’s account using a Kliebardian lens. These four frames are: (a) local autonomy for schools, (b) relevance for students, (c) experimentation as aim, and (d) risk-taking for teachers.

### **Local Autonomy for Schools**

Local autonomy means a school’s ability to make its own curricular and pedagogical decisions in ways that are rooted in the local community’s and school’s unique needs and contexts. Akin (1942) made clear that one of the most significant findings of the Eight-Year Study was “that secondary schools can be trusted with a greater measure of freedom than college requirements now permit” (p. 124). This greater measure of freedom can be seen as shifting the relative power over who sets the expectations of curriculum. While the schools in the study were free to organize their work however they saw fit, most eventually adopted a process wherein every teacher in the building would be involved in the redesign of their curriculum, courses, and programming. The organizers of the study worked intentionally to not be prescriptive in terms of what these experimental schools should be doing. Instead, the teachers and principals were treated as consummate pedagogues: They



were able to create materials and programs for themselves and their students and even to involve students and others from the community in their planning and preparation. While the range of curricular and pedagogical interventions across the schools defied any neat or orderly classifications, we can summarize the accounts of their work to signal the unique importance of local autonomy for schools and for the teachers and principals within those schools.

### **Relevance for Students**

Another possible synthesis is concerned with the positionality of students in this process. From the outset, the PEA and those working on the study saw a significant misalignment between what students were experiencing in their homes and communities and the curriculum of their high schools (Akins, 1942). When the PEA began to examine high schools that were not satisfying the organizations' needs and aims, one of their early findings revolved around student interest. As Akin (1942) put it, "The conventional high school curriculum was far removed from the real concerns of youth . . . [and] the Commission found little evidence of unity in the work of the typical high school" (pp. 7–8). In response to these findings, the experimental schools worked to connect more of students' lived experiences to course content. Examples included greater engagement with community settings outside of the school, more robust studies of culture and democracy, and greater independence for students to take on more active—rather than traditionally passive—roles in classrooms. Again, the breadth of approaches and examples is beyond the scope of our present argument, but the results of the Eight-Year Study suggest that teachers in these high schools began thinking about their courses and assignments in ways that were more immediately grounded in students' lived experiences.

### **Experimentation as Aim**

In order to accomplish the need for greater connections between students' lives inside and outside of classrooms, the 30 schools operated under an understanding that their work was experimental (Akin, 1942). That is, the school staff knew that they were trying new methods and approaches and were doing so in ways that were rooted in the growing body of knowledge and literature on learning and cognition. Although many teachers were not comfortable with being called progressive, at the school-wide level such work remained experimental and in keeping with the aims of the PEA for the Eight-Year Study (Kridel & Bullough, 2007). Akin (1942) framed this approach by saying that those participating "were quite sure that the spirit and practice of experimentation and exploration should characterize secondary schools in a democracy" (p. 19). Although he did not use the language of best practices anywhere in his account, Akin was clearly against the notion of tried-and-true research-based practices deemed to be useful or impactful in any pedagogical setting. The experimentation called for was rooted in the always-ongoing project of understanding more about the conditions of educators' work and responding to shifting contexts in measured and responsible ways. As Akin put it, "No aspect of any school's work should be so firmly fixed in practice or tradition as to be immune from honest inquiry and possible improvement" (p. 19). Thus, the schools were tasked not only with reimagining the secondary curriculum and pursuing more locally contextual and relevant approaches to work in classrooms, but further committed to experimenting with and

refining their work. Experimentation was at the heart of the study and required staff at all participating schools to engage not only as part of the larger study of 30 “unshackled” high schools, but to experiment within their own buildings and classrooms.

### **Risk-taking for Teachers**

Finally, and in relation to experimental aims, we see many examples of how teachers were required to take more and greater risks throughout the process. One principal who attended the first conference shared, “My teachers and I do not know what to do with this freedom. It challenges and frightens us. I fear that we have come to love our chains” (Akin, 1942, p. 16). Breaking from norms, moving away from what has always been done, is daunting and difficult. Yet this was precisely what was required of the teachers who were tasked with reimagining their work. In the face of grand experimentation at the whole-school level, it was actually individual teachers in individual classrooms who realized the full force of what the PEA and the Eight-Year Study sought. Recognizing that teachers had more knowledge of their students than any policy- or curriculum-making body from outside of the community, teachers in these schools sought to ground their work in ways that were immediately relevant to their local communities and their students’ needs and interests, and to experiment with multiple approaches and strategies for engagement. It was teachers who ultimately had to evaluate the efficacy of their practices and work to refine and strengthen their pedagogies.

Taken together, we are left with an approach to responding to shifting public school demographics in wildly different ways than we see in the present U.S. context. The schools in the Eight-Year Study took up the work of practicing democracy and organizing the educational experiences of youth in ways that were rooted in a shared conception of educational purpose. Today, we find little evidence of such linkages to practicing democracy in the current movement to privatize and centralize teaching and learning in the United States (Casey, 2016b). Akin (1942) writes,

Teachers and students are driving at something more important to them than learning the content. . . . The immediate purpose [of secondary education] is satisfaction of the pupils’ desire to know and understand: but the larger purpose may be to develop habits of critical thinking and intellectual honesty. (p. 50)

While much of our contemporary discourse around the purposes of education includes notions of critical thinking, when we examine the rest of Akin’s account we see that, rather than relying on greater mastery of content, we find a commitment to making content a means of greater engagement with ourselves and our world.

### **Harold Rugg and the Anti-Capitalist Foundation of American Curriculum**

The work of Harold Rugg, a progressive scholar and textbook author, represents a curricular and theoretical response to the demographic realities of the 1920s and 1930s. Rugg became one of the central figures in the progressive movement and a scholar in conversation with the notable works of John Dewey (1897/2010, 2007). While at Columbia’s Teachers College, Rugg engaged the socio-political realities of U.S. students through textbooks that notably sought not to ingrain specific skills or content, but rather to

inculcate a set of critical dispositions toward the most pressing issues of history and conflict.

Before Rugg, American curriculum consisted primarily of disparate books published on narrowly defined topics. Comprehensive textbooks with a unified curriculum (i.e., those seen today) were brought about as a result of Rugg's work in textbook structure and content (Kliebard, 2002). The purpose of analyzing Rugg as an extension of a Kliebardian theoretical approach is to connect his work to Kliebard's (1995) imperative to make knowledge of "consequence to [students] in the immediate world in which they live" (p. 197). We can understand this as a demand for relevance—for students' lived realities to be present and active components of the curriculum. By actively engaging the historical and political processes forming student's lives, Rugg (1930a) both developed the anti-capitalist/anti-colonialist critique for which he is known, and, perhaps more importantly, illustrated an underlying approach that reinserts students into ideologically subversive points in history in order to develop a global citizenship of questioning and critique.

Reflexively, within each of Rugg's works is an imperative to introduce "young people to the chief conditions and problems that will confront them as citizens of the world" (Rugg, 1930a, p. v). Although the chief conditions that Rugg references aligned with his larger critique of capitalism, the themes of anti-colonialism and antiwar bridge this larger critique with more intentional spaces for engaging students as critics of their own realities. By reading the anti-capitalism within these points, we can begin to reimagine curriculum—as currently constructed—and better understand Rugg's historical methodology for engaging systems of conflict and domination as a means of making meaningful knowledge and content within schools.

In *A History of American Civilization: Economic and Social*, Rugg (1930a) traced the history of American colonization, expansion, and industrialization. Discussing the colonization of the Americas, Rugg presented a central theme: gold and its role in driving "discovery." Although he referenced the greed and cruelty (p. 41) of this pursuit, he does not analyze the larger system of colonization until the time of westward expansion. In his curricular unit titled "The Struggle for the Red Man's Continent" (p. 199), Rugg presented a history of the American colonies and the processes by which settlers came to "buy" native land. In reference to European attitudes toward land, Rugg wrote,

They had risked the dangers of the Atlantic and the wilderness to get a better, a more comfortable living. Practically all of them were ambitious for a fortune, and no matter how much land they got they wanted more land and better land. (p. 210)

Rugg makes evident the ways in which markets were positioned as tools for naturalizing the themes of domination, consumption, and conquest. In instances such as these, we can read into the foundation of Rugg's work. Primarily, we can better understand his assertion that markets function as points of conflict that necessitate analysis in order to fully understand the "chief conditions and problems that will confront [students] as citizens of the world" (p. v).

The curricular methodology that is evident in this approach is formed in spaces where Rugg (1930a) utilized strategic parables to allow access to critical points in history. At no point in the sections on colonialism did he actively side with the native or the settler. What he did, however, is lay the history bare and demonstrate the human cost of global systems

of economic exploitation. Rugg wrote, “‘you and the French,’ said an Indian warrior to an English colonist, ‘are like the two edges of a pair of shears, and we are the cloth which is cut to pieces between them’” (p. 219). Lessons such as these demonstrate a curricular approach designed to generate problems (Freire, 2000). Both in regards to colonialism and the forms of economic interdependence to be presented later, Rugg was intent on complicating the histories of American citizenship and asking students to find the path forward.

A second period of importance in Rugg’s work is the point where he connected the legacy of colonial exploitation to the systems of economic interdependence that led to World War I. Rugg (1930b, 1933) explored these linkages in separate books—*Changing Governments and Changing Cultures: The World’s March Toward Democracy* (1933) and *Changing Civilizations in the Modern World: A Textbook in World Geography with Historical Backgrounds* (1930b)—by dedicating one chapter in each to empire building and another to interdependence. Each allowed Rugg to develop his anti-capitalist position within a framework that sought to both engage and explain the defining conflict of students’ lives.

Rugg (1933) understood the Great War as the product of “Europeanizing the Earth” (p. 363). He signaled the colonial system as the means by which European power and thought were disseminated, and extended that critique further into the European socio-political identity. Naming three factors responsible for militarization and the preceding interdependence of nations, he wrote:

First, the economic factors—the desire for profitable markets, for raw materials, and for a place to invest surplus wealth; second, the missionary factor—the desire of Christians to convert non-Christian peoples to their religion, even though these peoples may have had well-developed religions of their own; third, the patriotic factor—the desire to extend the scope of one’s empire, to spread one’s own culture around the world, and to lift “backward” peoples up to the level of one’s own civilization. (p. 380)

Building off his work on early American history (1930a), Rugg continued to interrogate the ways in which systems antagonize people. By positioning Christian proselytization and nationalism as a means of co-opting popular sentiment, space was generated to challenge the ideological subordination of “everyday people” (Rugg, 1933, p. 378). At a time when the world was more democratized than it had ever been before (Rugg, 1930b), the course of empire was shown to divert radically from the interests of people concerned with “steady jobs, in good wages, in vacations, and in good homes” (p. 362). The imperative to invest “surplus wealth,” to “convert non-Christians,” and to “lift backwards peoples” is demonstrated to be absurdly alien to the lived realities and scope of the average citizen (Rugg, 1933, p. 380). In this way, Rugg both challenged the ideological subversion of capitalist imperialism, while also asking students to make sense of their own relationship to democracy. In a historical moment where democratic ideals so clearly failed, how can students engage and critique this moment to bolster the voices and interests of “everyday people” (p. 378)?

Rugg’s (1930b) point on interdependence was directed at Europe’s shared infrastructure and resource markets. In *Changing Civilizations in the Modern World*, Rugg

explained how shared resources, particularly in relation to fuel and transportation, created an interdependent continent prone to economic instability. That instability was largely the product of economies that were made dependent upon colonial products like food, fuel, and valuable minerals. Although modern textbooks tend to focus on the political interdependence of Europe, Rugg argued that these iconic treaties were part of a larger economic system of interdependence. He wrote,

Each region depended upon every other region, each industry upon other industries. . . . Villages, towns, cities, countries—all depended on one another. No one country could live to itself any more than one person could live to himself. All were interdependent. (pp. 348–350)

The core of Rugg’s critical interpretations of capitalism align here. People were forced out of possibilities for subsistence and into obligatory market relations in order to meet their basic human needs (Rugg, 1930b). This process was also enacted on the European countries, as they too became dependent upon the wealth reaped from foreign lands. Any disruption in the European economic system, then, was primed for war because “no one country could live to itself” (Rugg, 1930b, p. 350). What Rugg did exceptionally well was to penetrate narratives that displaced economic causality (Willis, 1981)—violating political alliances did not produce the war; it was rather the product of a complex system of trade and economic exploitation. The curricular importance of Rugg’s attention to political economy was in the focus it placed on economics as a perpetually contested space. His books oriented the student to understand economic systems as points of conflict, and signaled the ways in which working-class subjectivities were pitted against each other in the name of advancing national interests.

Rugg’s unified curriculum was a radical departure from the narrow curricula of the 19th century. Both in scope and purpose, the Rugg textbooks presented an ideological vision of the world that challenged and continues to challenge standard forms of curriculum (Casey, 2016b). By centering economics within his approach to civilization and society, Rugg created a curricular space that took distinctly anti-capitalist forms. Whether in the exploitation of native populations through settler colonialism and the reservation system, the manipulation of common people to favor war and empire, or the system of dominos erected out of European interdependence, Rugg consistently opened spaces for the teacher and student to critically explore the economic institutions of our society. His work to challenge the virtually uncontested space of economics allowed for a civic education that more accurately and critically engaged with the world and allowed for the generation of new possibilities for teachers who were otherwise locked in a system of dis-imagination and collective restraint.

### **Discussion: Toward a Kliebardian Future for Curriculum Theorizing**

In light of the demographic shifts in American public schooling, wherein the majority of students are people of color living at or near the poverty line, research must turn toward the possibilities for producing curricular alternatives to neoliberalism. We need ways of reimagining what a robust educational policy looks like, and reclaiming curricular space from the neoliberal imperative to professionalize, standardize, and infantilize. Through the

work of Kliebard (1995, 2002, 2004), Akin (1942), and Rugg (1930a, 1930b, 1933), we can chip away at the discourses that tell us that neoliberal centralization is the only potential response to the real, material inequities that are embedded within schooling.

The work of Kliebard (1995, 2002, 2004) offers an avenue for educators, policymakers, and researchers to re-theorize possibilities within classrooms. It is in this way that Kliebard functions as a cultural and educational theorist—leading teachers to critique limitations through the critical possibilities of (historically-conscious) engagement. He identified the process of goal-setting as a stand-in for action, and argued that the hollow language of reform should be penetrated (Pinar, 2010). Kliebard's (1995) argument was not limited to a prescriptive analysis of policy, however, as he turned toward a conceptual framework for the development of critical "strains of thought" (p. 194). This orientation toward the study of history and curriculum allows for an extension to the formulation of critical strains of thought. Engaging in Kliebardian critiques allows for an unveiling of critical points in history, and an extraction of curricular critiques that embrace the theoretically rich task of holding curricula to "critical examination" (p. 198).

The PEA's Eight-Year Study provided a national platform for experimentation and local control. The four frames identified in this theorization (i.e., local autonomy for schools, relevance for students, experimentation as aim, and risk taking for teachers) connect students to the conditions and realities of their world. Although we do not engage the curricular choices in Akin's assessment of the Eight-Year Study (see Kridel & Bullough, 2007) in detail, his work is useful in understanding the potential for local autonomy within schools. In light of neoliberal trends toward privatization, centralization, and standardization, Akin made evident the value in policies that empowered local teachers and communities. Further, his work unveiled the false logic at the heart of our present educational policy, that calls for greater standardization and centralization of curriculum—schools in the Eight-Year Study that centered teacher autonomy and communal relevance functioned to prepare students in accordance with local values while also performing to the standards of college entrance. Approaching curricular reform with this in mind allows for a penetration of the logic surrounding education, and serves as a point through which we can build upon calls for local autonomy and empowerment of teachers through student-centered curricula.

Rugg's unified curriculum (Kliebard, 2002) remains important both for the impact it had on curriculum and curricular theory, and for the anti-capitalist critique at the center of his work. In light of global economic crises, critical interpretations of material realities have a distinct role to play in the curricular response within schools. Just as Rugg attempted to engage the material crises of industrial capitalism, so too could educators imagine a space where the logic of neoliberal capitalism is challenged within curricular approaches to civics and American history. For example, how can we open space to critique the financial crisis that made millions of children lose their homes at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in what is now known as the Great Recession? How can we apply Rugg's work to understand modern conflict? The core of Rugg's work allows us to imagine a curriculum that engages politics instead of avoiding it.

Returning to the narrative that we sketched to open this work, we would do well to return to the demographic realities that are starkly new in the context of P-12 education in the United States. Although we have aimed to demonstrate that centralization and

neoliberalism are not automatic responses to widespread poverty in student populations, comparisons to moments in history must not lose sight of our present socio-historical reality. This is an additional element of a Kliebardian approach to such work, in fact, because the ways we approach contemporary educational imperatives to reform too often feel devoid of historical engagement. Kliebard would have us attend not only to precedent for educational policy responses to poverty, but also to the ways that such reforms are often applied to achieve already known and desired results that further entrench us in the status quo and protect the material interests of those presently in power. Contradictions should be expected between desires for educational justice and robust participation in capitalism, not approached as novel or as the latest crisis in need of response and reform.

The application of a Kliebardian critique allows us to expand our curricular imaginations. It further helps us read Akin (1942) and Rugg (1933)—both of whom resisted close identification with socialism or communism—as thinkers whose work can be read anew in more critical and anti-capitalist ways than has previously been done. As researchers committed to critical pedagogies, we must engage in processes of rediscovery that unveil the points in history where critical curricula were/are made possible. Moving forward, curricular theorists can turn toward Rugg and Akin as examples of the potential of curricular work in and with schools and communities, when read through the prism of Kliebard as theorist. But, perhaps more importantly, teachers and researchers can learn not to replicate history, but to bring the practices of critical inquiry and reflection into the consciousness of teaching. An education that embraces the experimental and ultimately anti-capitalist tenets of Rugg and Akin begins to redefine our conception of possibility and move toward a practice that recognizes and affirms the sense of hope that is at the heart of teaching and learning.

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