

Chapter 8

A Declining Educational System

An empire is only as strong as its people and without an educated people an empire is bound to fail. It's a bad thing when we have third world conditions right here in America. Let's consider the problem of our education system because, within neighborhoods children of all colors are increasingly looked upon as warehouse baggage that has accumulated, and now needs to be put out; this is the result of neglect and underutilization, disparate impact, adverse impact, racism, and all the other sicknesses that live in America.

In 1906 Upton Sinclair wrote an astounding novel that shocked the meat packing industry about the conditions that existed that ultimately caused the health department to organize a safety and regulatory agency to oversee and set standards for how things should and should not be done. Jonathan Kozol sparked that same kind of atmosphere in the educational arena with his searing look at educational inequities in suburban and inner city America, discussed in his book *Savage Inequalities*. But in spite of his raw, naked and undiluted exposure of the inequities (read: financial funding) in the American public education system, the outrage is falling on deaf ears.

We have an education system that is on failure and that's a fact. Being an educator and running in those circles, I have worked with and encountered countless educational experts and specialists who were trying to develop a better way to educate America's children. However, there is a continued lack of support from the

top. No matter how educated teachers are, they can only do what the “higher ups” dictate they can do. Education is the only professional field that is not regulated by its professionals; i.e., doctors are regulated by other doctors, lawyers are regulated by other lawyers, etc.; that and a multitude of other factors, such as substandard facilities, politicians refusing to fund certain programs, and legislating unfunded mandates such as No Child Left Behind, keep teachers from accomplishing the task for which they trained.

This is not by accident either, but rather by design. The American educational system is designed to ensure the continuation of the class system in this society. Certain groups of people HAVE to fail to be educated. Think about it, they come out of school uneducated which leads to a failure to be employed. In order for this capitalistic system to continue to flourish, there has to be a permanent underclass of people who are unemployed or underemployed!

We are producing a generation of educated illiterates...our children cannot READ, they cannot WRITE , they cannot THINK CRITICALLY, they cannot apply MATHEMATICAL concepts, hell, they can't even do basic computations without the aid of calculators! All you have to do is look at the statistics nationwide and compare them to when our generation was in school.

The American education system is suffering from intellectual tyranny. Mindlessness, recklessness, betrayal, exploitation are generally terms you associate with the penal system. However, these same terms are descriptive of America's academic institutions (or asylums). It is a broken system and no one from the inside is trying to fix it, not the educators, not the parents, not the students. American children are not being taught to be independent thinkers despite the oft-listed

curriculum goal of “creating critical thinkers”. If students were really being taught to be critical and independent thinkers, I believe the first thing they would question is the relevancy of what they’re being force-fed as education.

Our generation and generations before us were raised to believe that education was the key to a secure (financially) future. We teach our children that they must get a high school diploma so they can go to college so they can get a job in corporate America and live the American dream. It was what we (well, some of us, anyway) did, it was what our parents did; it was right for them, it was right for us and therefore, it is right for our children.

The problem with this scenario is that the times and economic landscape have changed; corporate America doesn’t exist anymore. There’s no such thing as a secure future with a secure company because nothing is secure in America right now.

An educational revolution has to take place and it has to start with those who are charged with carrying it out...the teachers, the parents, the students. But before that can happen, their eyes must first be opened to the reality of the broken system. Education is not about learning to “get ahead”; it is not about making sure you can count 1-2-3 and say a-b-c; it’s about “learning so you can pay me”.

In this capitalist society, education is about gaining the skills necessary to become a “productive member of the middle class” by becoming employed in order to make someone else’s dreams come true! But those dreams are fast becoming a nightmare.

Across this country, state after state has implemented one form or another of high-stakes standardized testing, supposedly to make educators accountable as well as to

raise the standards for graduation so our children can be competitive in the global market. In reality, the opposite occurs. What results is a subclass of people who are undereducated and underemployed because the vast majorities who don't pass the tests don't get a high school diploma and therefore don't go on to college or pursue any type of postsecondary education or training. The majority of this majority is predominately minorities, in particular Black males.

However, even among those who do manage to pass these tests and go on to college, many are unprepared for the demands of college level curriculums, requiring remediation in reading, writing and arithmetic. Of these, the completion rate for a two- or four-year degree is abysmal for an advanced superpower like America, and the numbers are declining each year.

According to the 2008 National Report Card issued by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, America ranks sixth among developed nations with only 34% of young adults ages 18-24 enrolled in college. Korea ranks number one with 53%! The completion rate is even lower; America ranks 15th with only 18% of students completing certificate or degree programs. Australia, Japan and Switzerland are at the top of the heap with a 26% completion rate. When looking at the workforce, only 39% of American adults ages 25-34 have two year degrees or higher, compared to number one Canada, with 55%. Eight other countries have rates higher than America.¹

¹National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
Measuring Up 2008. <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org>

The consequence of these numbers is a steadily declining pool of skilled and educated workers, reducing America's ability to remain competitive in the global market. In order to stay ahead of the game, you have to be a leader, and America is no longer ahead of its international competition with regards to an educated workforce.

The politicians that make and enforce the laws eventually have to be replaced. The engineers, who design new technology to improve our quality of life, eventually have to be replaced. The military men and women who operate the sophisticated weaponry that "keeps our country safe", eventually have to be replaced (especially at the rate they're being killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and at home once they return.) Somebody has to repair the bridges and roads, build and fly the airplanes and continue to teach in the broken system. The thousands of retiring Baby Boomers need workers to contribute to the Social Security pot they are depending upon for a source of income.

Where will they come from? Our children are dropping out mentally before they drop out physically and this is happening earlier and earlier in their school career. An educational revolution is the answer to this problem. An empire is only as strong as its weakest link and an educated populace is a necessity to maintain an economy and global dominance.

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