

Reconsidering Bailyn: Author Roundtable

In the Author Roundtable below, Professor Fallace's article reconsidering Bernard Bailyn's formative essay is followed by four invited responses from intellectual historians and Fallace's reply—*The Editors*.

The (Anti-)Ideological Origins of Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*

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Bernard Bailyn's Education in the Forming of American Society represents, perhaps, the most significant text in the history of the field. In this essay, I argue that Bailyn's classic text can, and should, be contextualized in the post-World War II intellectual milieu of consensus liberalism that overtly rejected ideological commitment. Bailyn and other postwar consensus liberals considered academic research, conducted free from political ideology, to be the best antidote to the totalitarian thought of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Bailyn's famous text reflected the values of postwar consensus liberalism by rejecting the ideological commitments of the interwar period and embracing the objective, scientific values of the 1950s as reflected in the new intellectual and cultural history. Bailyn's emphasis on cultural-intellectual history as the best corrective for totalitarian thinking reflected the aspirations, hopes, and fears of his own moment in time, in the same way the progressives' focus on conflict and reform reflected theirs.

The 1960 publication of Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* marked an important turning point in the historiography of the history of education. Bailyn's provocative book directly attacked the past and present work of educational historians by dismissing much of it as "derived directly from their professional interests." Bailyn critiqued the work of Progressive Era scholars such as Thomas Davidson, Ellwood Cubberley, Paul Monroe, and Henry Suzzallo for approaching the past "as simply the present writ small,"

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and he argued that the field take a broader approach to education by defining it “not only as formal pedagogy but as the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations.”¹

Ultimately, Bailyn suggested that historians of education align themselves with the ideologically neutral and intellectually rigorous approach of professional historians and expand their focus to house education in the broader currents of intellectual and cultural history. Most historians of education enthusiastically adopted Bailyn’s ideas. By 1973, one historian concluded that, as a result, “the history of education [had] come of age.”²

Why, one must ask, did mainstream historians suddenly become interested in educational history in the late 1950s? And why did educational historians suddenly consider ideological neutrality to be their presiding value, displacing the previous generation’s commitment to conflict, progress, and reform? Historians Sol Cohen and Milton Gaither addressed the first question—why the late 1950s? Cohen praised Bailyn’s “healthy demythologizing of the history of American education” and depicted Bailyn’s critiques as the culmination of decades of professional infighting over the efficacy of the functional “social foundations” approach to history in teacher education.³ In contrast, Gaither was critical of Bailyn, dismissing his critiques as “simply a commonplace of Sputnik-era educationist bashing” that sought to extinguish “the burden of optimism rendered odious by a postwar intellectual context.”⁴ Both Cohen and Gaither correctly link Bailyn’s text to the anti-progressive mood of the period, but to link their arguments together one has to appreciate the broader anti-ideological context of the postwar years that specifically led Bailyn to offer intellectual-cultural history as an corrective to progressive historiography.

The 1940s and 1950s were the high tide of attacks on progressive education and its accompanying social foundations approach to the history of education, and Bailyn’s critique capitalized on these preexisting trends.⁵ Since the 1930s, critics such as Geoffrey O’Connell,

¹Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 9, 14.

²Sol Cohen, “New Perspectives in the History of American Education 1960–1970,” *History of Education* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1973), 87.

³Sol Cohen, “The History of the History of American Education, 1900–1976: The Uses of the Past,” *Harvard Educational Review* 46, no. 3 (Sept. 1976), 329.

⁴Milton Gaither, *American Educational History Revisited: A Critique of Progress* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), 159.

⁵For the backlash against progressive education, see Lawrence Cremin, *Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876–1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961); Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak,

Russell Kirk, and Robert Hutchins had attacked progressive education for its alleged epistemological relativity, while critics such as Arthur Bestor, Mortimer Smith, and Richard Hofstadter attacked progressive pedagogy for its lack of rigor and marginalization of academic content.⁶ Critics of progressive education looked to the academic disciplines to restore rigor to the faltering American curriculum, so, as Gaither pointed out, the turn toward a more academic approach to the history of education aligned with this anti-progressive mood. However, I argue, it was not just the progressive historians' sense of optimism and professional identity that Bailyn resented. More importantly, Bailyn rejected the progressives' embrace of *ideology* because during the postwar years leading historians and social scientists considered ideology to be extremely dangerous in a world falling prey to *totalitarianism*—a term scholars coined in the mid-1930s in reference to the ideological rigidity of fascism and communism.⁷

Ideology was a malleable and imprecise term, yet scholars used it repeatedly in the postwar years, often without defining it, and they used it with a sense that readers understood exactly what they were talking about. Postwar scholars agreed that ideology, especially the rigid

Education in the United States: An Interpretive History (New York: Free Press, 1976); Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893–1958*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995); Adam Laats, *The Other School Reformers: Conservative Activism and American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform* (New York: Touchstone, 2000); Diane Ravitch *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Joel Spring, *The Sorting Machine: National Educational Policy Since 1945* (New York: David McCay, 1976); Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, *History of the School Curriculum* (New York: Macmillan, 1990); Burton Weltman, “Reconsidering Arthur Bestor and the Cold War in Social Education,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 28, no. 1 (Jan. 2000), 11–39; Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁶ Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in our Public Schools* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953); Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954); Geoffrey O’Connell, *Naturalism in American Education* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1938); and Mortimer Smith, *The Diminished Mind: A Study of Planned Mediocrity in Our Public Schools* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954).

⁷ Les K. Alder and Thomas G. Paterson, “Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930’s–1950’s,” *American Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (April 1970), 1046–64; and Benjamin Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

kind of ideology totalitarians employed, was inappropriate, or even dangerous, in a healthy democracy, and they linked progressive historians to this naïve and dangerous approach. The linking of progressive education to totalitarianism was exaggerated, but it reflected the intellectual milieu in which Bailyn crafted his critique of progressive educational history. By focusing specifically on the backlash against ideology in the postwar years, I demonstrate how Bailyn's critique drew upon a broader repudiation of ideology that incorporated both the professional infighting as depicted by Cohen and the overturning of the long-standing belief in American progress as depicted by Gaither. Bailyn and postwar consensus liberals considered the separation of academic research from ideology to be the best antidote to totalitarian thought—a belief he shared with the majority of his postwar liberal peers.⁸

Contrasting liberal democracy with the totalitarianism of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Communist Russia, postwar consensus liberals rejected the progressives' ideological commitment to reform and embraced the values of ideological skepticism and disciplinary rigor.⁹ For example, in *The Vital Center*, Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. explained how the thrust of postwar liberalism was “away from fanaticism ... towards compromise, persuasion, and consent in politics.” In *The End of Ideology*, sociologist Daniel Bell critiqued progressives' tendency “to convert concrete issues into ideological problems” and concluded that democracy in the post-ideological world ought to be characterized by “bargaining between legitimate groups and the search for consensus.”¹⁰ Thus, postwar consensus liberals vaguely defined *ideology* as rigid and fanatical beliefs that were allegedly impervious to compromise, persuasion, and consent. Whereas postwar consensus liberals depicted progressives and totalitarians as excessively ideological, they depicted themselves as anti-ideological; whereas

⁸The fact that Bailyn has been depicted as a “revisionist” instead of a postwar consensus liberal has obscured the more conservative elements in his classic work. To underscore this point, I deliberately avoid the term *revisionist*. The term *consensus liberal* is borrowed from Andrew Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹Robert Booth Fowler, *Believing Skeptics: American Political Intellectuals, 1945–1964* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); David J. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Edward A. Purcell Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973); Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); and Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 53–76.

¹⁰Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 250; and Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: New Press, 1960), 370, 373, 110.

progressives and totalitarians viewed history through conflict and reform, postwar liberals viewed history through consensus and compromise. Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* reflected these broader postwar anti-ideological values of consensus and compromise. His repudiation of progressive history was part of a broader postwar rejection of ideology and totalitarianism in the disciplines of history and the social sciences. Bailyn and postwar consensus liberals argued that, by framing educational history as a battle between high-minded reformers and shortsighted vested interests, progressives had overemphasized political-economic conflict in history and overlooked the consensus of values inherent in a healthy liberal democratic society. As intellectual historian John Higham explained in 1959, "An earlier generation of historians ... had painted America in bold hues of conflict," while the current generation was "carrying out a massive grading operation to smooth over America's social convulsions."¹¹

By reading Bailyn's classic critique of the progressive historiography of education in the context of postwar consensus liberalism, I argue that Bailyn proposed ideological neutrality and intellectual-cultural history not only as correctives to the approach of progressive historians such as Davidson, Cubberley, Monroe, and Suzzallo, but also as contrasts to the ideological rigidity of totalitarian regimes. Bailyn's rejection of ideology specifically drew upon the emerging field of cultural-intellectual history, which embraced disciplinary rigor and qualitative analysis of cultural-intellectual differences as antidotes to this rigidity of totalitarianism. Intellectual historians of the 1950s examined the consensus of liberal values at the heart of American society and how those values evolved holistically over time in response to changing social, economic, and cultural differences. In other words, 1950s intellectual historians sought to view ideology as the *object*, not the *subject* of their inquiry, by thinking *about*, not *through* ideology in an effort to reject ideology altogether. Studying the ideologies of others became a way for consensus liberals to suggest that their own inquiries were non-ideological. Although Bailyn did not explicitly frame his critique of educational history in terms of "the end of ideology," those who inspired him did frame it in these terms. The first section of this essay traces the emergence of the postwar "end of ideology" approach to history and the social sciences. In the second section, I demonstrate how Bailyn and other revisionists adopted the anti-ideology approach from intellectual-cultural history, American studies, and cultural anthropology and then applied it to the writing of educational history. In the third section, I place Bailyn's text in the context of similar

¹¹John Higham, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus': Homogenizing Our History," *Commentary* 27, no. 2 (Feb. 1959), 94.

critiques of educational history, and how and why the counter-attack against Bailyn was unsuccessful.

The End of Ideology

In his 1961 review of Bailyn's "beautifully written" *Education in the Forming of American Society*, award-winning historian Lawrence Cremin summarized Bailyn's argument: "Most who have taught the history of education—and incidentally written the textbooks—have viewed the subject not as an aspect of American history writ large but rather as a device for communicating an appropriate *ideology* to a newly self-conscious teaching profession [emphasis added]."¹² Bailyn never actually used the term *ideology* in his text, but Cremin's application of this term to Bailyn's argument reveals the centrality of "ideology" to the discourse on historiography, social science, and totalitarianism in the years leading up to the text's publication. By *ideology*, Cremin meant a predetermined set of right answers that had been worked out prior to the inquiry. Empowering the newly professionalized teaching force took precedence over the pursuit of accuracy and nuance for its own sake, and emphasis on conflict and reform had trumped objective and balanced understanding of the past. Bailyn's critique reflected the concerns of most postwar liberal scholars.

During and after the Second World War, ideology became anathema to most scholars, because communists, socialists, and fascists had employed ideology to distort the truth and implement unprecedented destruction upon the world. As early as 1944, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr admonished both conservatives and radicals for their naïve views on the perfectibility of human nature. Subtly critiquing the misguided ideals of progressive education, which made social reform a central purpose of the schools, Niebuhr dismissed those who think that "evil is no more than ignorance, and therefore waits for a more perfect educational process to redeem man from his partial and particular loyalties."¹³ Niebuhr argued that ideologues were dangerous because they dismissed dissent as mere ignorance, and they looked to education to impose their particular ideological view upon the masses, a tendency he observed in both totalitarian regimes, such as fascists, Nazis, and communists, and American progressives.

¹²Lawrence Cremin, "Review of Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 4 (March 1961), 678.

¹³Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1944), 17, xxxii.

Furthermore, in the introduction to his 1955 Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Age of Reform*, historian Richard Hofstadter critiqued progressives for their moral absolutism and suggested that—as the Soviets and Nazis had demonstrated—moral absolutism and moral relativity often look the same “because an excessively consistent practice of either leads to the same practical result—ruthlessness in political life.”¹⁴ Most leading social scientists agreed that the Second World War had clearly demonstrated the need to reject all ideology and stay clear of grand narratives, overarching theories, and collectivist movements by rejecting extremism on the right and left.

As one social scientist affirmed in 1948: “Not only do the chief ideological banners of our age—capitalism and socialism—appear increasingly undifferentiated, but ideology itself seems to be dying.”¹⁵ Echoing this sentiment, Bell argued in *The End of Ideology* that “the impulses of the past century and a half” toward “chiliastic hopes, to millenarianism, to apocalyptic thinking” have been “exhausted” and are now considered by most intellectuals to be a “dead end.” Bell explained how the “calamities of the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet pact, the concentration camps, the suppression of Hungarian workers” led to a decline “in simplistic, rationalistic beliefs.”¹⁶ Leading postwar intellectuals argued that political problems in the post-ideological world ought to be approached incrementally, not subsumed into some grand narrative, universal truth, or ideological system. Such a pluralistic approach to democracy should focus on commonalities, not differences, and allow competing groups to negotiate toward consensus.

This rejection of totalitarianism led scholars away from the reform agendas of the progressives toward an emphasis on incrementalism, scientific thinking, and ideological skepticism because such approaches were considered the best way to prevent totalitarian thought and action. Democracy’s “love of variety discourages dogmatism,” Arthur Schlesinger Jr. explained in *The Vital Center*, “and its love of skepticism discourages hero-worship . . . the advocate of free society defines himself by telling what he is against: what he is for turns out to be certain *means* and he leaves other people to charge the means with content.”¹⁷ Schlesinger—along with a new breed of consensus

¹⁴Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 16.

¹⁵Eugene O. Golub, “Is Ideology Dying?” *Challenge* 8, no. 8 (May 1960), 56. See also George H. Sabine, “Beyond Ideology,” *Philosophical Review* 57, no. 1 (Jan. 1948), 1–26.

¹⁶Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 370, 373, 110.

¹⁷Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, 245.

historians that included Hoftstadter, Louis Hartz, and Daniel Boorstin—demonstrated how history could be written without the kind of economic, ideological, and social conflicts outlined by progressive historians by focusing on shared American ideals, principles, and culture.

According to postwar consensus liberals, the main problem with ideologues was their dangerous failure to face the hard facts of reality when the facts did not affirm their ideological preconceptions and rigid beliefs. Progressives, communists, and fascists, to different degrees, shared an excessively ideological approach that overemphasized conflict, squashed dissent, and failed to come to terms with the reality of changing conditions. In *The Vital Center*, Schlesinger specifically targeted “Doughface progressivism” for its “distortion of facts for desire.”¹⁸ Similarly, as historian Richard Burks explained in 1949: “The vitality of ideological belief has been movingly demonstrated in our own time by the refusal of western intellectuals, when confronted with the realization of the ideological character of such configurations as democracy and communism, to undertake a critical revamping of these patterns or to abandon them altogether.”¹⁹ In contrast, postwar consensus liberals determined and interpreted facts scientifically with an open mind by avoiding rigid ideologies that distorted the truth and prevented compromise. This new post-ideological outlook, education professor Donald Oliver explained, represented a “tough-minded scientific approach” to research, which he contrasted with the progressives’ naïve “ideology of love and harmony.”²⁰ The scientific and objective reckoning with the facts is what differentiated postwar consensus liberals from the alleged naïvety of progressives because consensus liberals deliberately sought out the complexity, nuance, and rigor of reality without preconceived ideological notions.

Drawing upon this anti-ideological outlook, numerous critics attacked progressive educators in the postwar years, not only for their excessively student-centered pedagogy and moral relativity, but, more significantly, for their use and abuse of ideology and desire to use the schools as levers of social reform. For example, in *Educational Wastelands*, historian Arthur Bestor’s widely read critique of progressive education, he asserted that life adjustment education—an

¹⁸Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, 40, 42.

¹⁹Richard Burks, “A Conception of Ideology for Historians,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 2 (April 1949), 196–97.

²⁰Donald Oliver, “The Selection of Content in the Social Studies,” *Harvard Educational Review* 27, no. 4 (Oct. 1957), 300. In his critique, Oliver specifically targeted the National Council for the Social Studies and the educational work of progressive historian Charles Beard.

approach that sought to bring an anti-academic, relevant curriculum to the majority of students—was not merely a reform movement but rather an “ideology” that “was widely held in professional educational circles throughout the country.”²¹ By *ideology*, Bestor meant a self-fulfilling and mutually reinforcing set of rigid ideals that ignored or distorted the facts, demanded strict adherence, and dismissed dissent and compromise.

Beyond the critiques of professional historians and social scientists, many postwar educators also rejected the ideological approach of progressive educators. For example, professor of education Frederic Lilge rejected progressive educators’ tendency to “politicize” educational philosophy by transforming educational approaches into ideologies that “defend or oppose the social order.” Lilge denounced the progressives’ desire to turn “crucial problems of education” into “political problems.”²² Similarly, Everett Kircher, professor of education at Ohio State, argued that, despite their invocation of freedom, progressive educators inappropriately demanded that “philosophy abandon its liberal status for a doctrinal status” by making education “self-consciously the ideological center of reference for the culture.” That is, like totalitarians, progressives collapsed ideas, action, and politics to the degree that their philosophy had become all-encompassing and ideologically intolerant. As Kircher explained: “The Russian error was in the selection of a wrong philosophy ... put into practice without fundamental modification.”²³ Kircher suggested that, like the Russians, the progressive educators’ reform-oriented curriculum inherently conveyed a specific ideological vision for the future and was, therefore, a form of indoctrination.

Education professor Isaac Kandel, a long-standing critic of progressive education, agreed, writing how progressive education had devolved into a “dogmatism which arrogantly refuses to recognize any virtue in the past or any validity in opposing arguments.”²⁴ Change for the sake of change and progress for the sake of progress had become the mantra of progressive educators without any set of apolitical criteria against which they could gauge their successes and failures. Similarly, Mortimer Smith’s *And Madly Teach* accused

²¹ Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wasteland*, 83.

²² Frederic Lilge, “Reason and Ideology in Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1952), 252; and Frederic Lilge, “Politicizing of Educational History,” *Ethics* 66, no. 3 (April 1956), 193.

²³ Everett J. Kircher, “Philosophy of Education—Directive Doctrine or Liberal Discipline?” *Educational Theory* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1955), 229, 221.

²⁴ Isaac Kandel, “A Controversy Ended,” *Educational Forum* 22, no. 2 (Jan. 1958), 177.

progressive educators of an “un-American” ideology that pushed students “along the road to totalitarianism.” Smith cast progressive educators as ideologues who represented a “cohesive body of believers with a clearly formulated set of dogmas and doctrines” who only certified teachers “who have been trained in the correct dogma.”²⁵

Bestor, Lilge, Kircher, Kandel, and Smith argued on behalf of recovering the rigorous liberal arts curriculum that had allegedly been replaced by progressive education because a liberal arts curriculum was inherently anti-ideological in its pursuit of transcendent truths independent of politics, ideology, and reform. By focusing on classic texts, universal truths, and, above all else, rigor, the liberal arts curriculum was allegedly apolitical. “The liberal arts are the arts of freedom,” Robert Hutchins reminded readers in his wartime book *Education for Freedom*, “To be free a man must understand the tradition in which he lives.”²⁶ The critics of progressive ideology were quick to remind readers that progressive educators such as John Dewey, George S. Counts, John Childs, Boyd Bode, and Theodore Brameld had praised the collectivist schools of Soviet Russia in the 1930s, demonstrating how they had flirted dangerously with totalitarian ideas such as indoctrination and imposition. Education and scholarship in a democracy, in contrast, ought to steer clear of dogmatism, indoctrination, and/or propaganda, approaches that some progressives had embraced. Scientific findings discovered in an objective, non-ideological and politically independent way, sociologist Robert Merton insisted, cannot be “invalidated by Nuremberg decree.” Merton argued that there was an unspoken “cultural structure of science” that was “legitimized in terms of institutional values.” These values—universalism, communism, disinterestedness, organized skepticism—were able to flourish in a democratic society, but were restrained in totalitarian ones.²⁷ Merton’s position was not simply an attack on totalitarianism but also, in part, a repudiation of progressive social science; Merton defined scientific thinking as the circumvention of ideology instead of as an ideological tool for social and political reform.

The critiques of progressive education overlapped with the critiques of progressive historiography and social science in three ways. First, critics argued, both progressive historians and progressive educational theorists overlooked cultural consensus by exaggerating the

²⁵Mortimer B. Smith, *And Madly Teach: A Layman Looks at Public School Education* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1949), 7.

²⁶Robert Hutchins, *Education for Freedom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), 14.

²⁷Robert Merton, “A Note on Science and Democracy,” *Journal of Legal and Political Sociology* 1 (Oct. 1942), 117–18.

need for conflict, progress, and reform. After the Second World War, the focus on conflict was considered dangerous in a world where totalitarians preyed on class and social divisions. Second, postwar consensus liberals argued that progressives employed a reform ideology that was rigid, shallow, and naïve. In their effort to reform society through education, progressives uncritically rejected all elements of the past as inherently outdated, ineffective, and wrong. However, consensus liberals argued, the rigor and neutrality of the pre-progressive curriculum needed to be restored for democracy to flourish. Third, progressives had conflated politics and knowledge in the pursuit of reform. This was the most dangerous development because the conflation of politics, research, and education was precisely how the Nazis and communists had turned their distorted and relativistic version of the world into reality. Consensus liberals insisted that, to avoid totalitarianism, scientific communities in democracies needed to remain autonomous by pursuing rigorous inquiries free from politics and ideology.²⁸

Intellectual History and the End of Ideology

The “end of ideology” approach that characterized history and the social sciences between 1944 and 1960 not only engendered and supported the writing of consensus history but also affirmed the methodologies of several new sub-disciplines, such as intellectual history, cultural anthropology, and American studies. By the 1950s, the Soviet Union had rapidly industrialized and built up economic, political, and educational institutions that equaled those of the United States. As one political scientist observed in 1953, “It is *prima facie* evident that the antinomy of these two political systems is rather one of ideological content than of institutional arrangements since both of them make use, to a large extent, of identical political institutions and techniques such as constitutions, elections, parliaments, courts, political parties, and administrative procedures.”²⁹ That is, totalitarianism and democratic liberalism could not be assessed hierarchically in terms of developmental stages toward an ideal type because both liberal democracy and communism had proven to provide legitimate paths to modernization and industrialization. Both approaches

²⁸David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University*.

²⁹Karl Loewenstein, “Political Systems, Ideologies, and Institutions: The Problem of Their Circulation,” *Western Political Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Dec. 1953), 689.

employed education, bureaucracy, mechanization, division of labor, and other structural elements that the progressives had once used to assess premodern societies in terms of universal stages toward the modern world. Totalitarianism and liberal democracy provided alternative paths to modernization, so social scientists approached the two in terms of cultural, intellectual, and ideological differences. “If democracy is not an institution or a set of institutions, what is it?” historian Jacques Barzun asked. He answered: “It is an atmosphere and an attitude; in a word—a culture.”³⁰ The new cultural anthropology reinforced the approach to view totalitarian and liberal societies in terms of cultural, intellectual, linguistic, and ideological differences, instead of viewing them in terms of universal stages of culture. During the 1920s and 1930s, anthropologist Franz Boas and his former students Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead dismantled the hierarchical savage-barbarian-civilization stage theory approach to culture and helped usher in a more contingent, qualitative approach to the subject based on in-depth descriptions of how actual cultures operated at the ground level.³¹

The interdisciplinary field of American Studies also emerged out this postwar anti-ideological, contingent, and cultural approach. American Studies focused on the unique cultural aspects of the United States by aiming to explain how and why the US had diverged from both Western Europe and the Soviet Union, both of which had been overtaken by rigid ideologies during the interwar years. As sociologist Edward Shils suggested in 1955, “We [Americans] must rediscover the permanently valid element in our historical ideals ... in our rejection of ideologies, we must study what can be salvaged from them.”³² Historian Daniel Boorstin, pointed out in *The Genius of American Politics* that, while Europeans “look to ideology to help them choose among alternatives,” Americans, in contrast, are “reared

³⁰Jacques Barzun, *Of Human Freedom* (Boston: Little Brown, 1939), 40.

³¹George Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968); Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003). Postwar social sciences likewise rejected ideology but, in contrast to historians, moved deliberately away from qualitative analysis of cultural differences by embracing quantification. See Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate Over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); David Paul Haney, *The Americanization of Social Science: Intellectuals and Public Responsibility in the Postwar United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); and Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University*.

³²Edward A. Shils, “Letter from Milan: End of Ideology?” *Encounter* 5, no. 5 (Nov. 1955), 57.

with a feeling for the unity of history and an unprecedented belief in the normality of our kind of life to our place on earth.”³³ It was precisely the lack of ideology that made American culture and politics unique. The focus on culture appealed to postwar consensus liberals because it reflected the lived, shared experience of reality, instead of a set of prescribed aspirations that made up an ideology. While ideology was considered to be rigid, abstract, and imagined, culture was understood to be fluid, dynamic, and grounded in real life.

Hartz’s *The Liberal Tradition in America* was the most celebrated and recognized text taking this American Studies approach. His 1954 text began with the assumption that “the Bolshevik Revolution represents the most serious threat in modern history to the future of free institutions,” and he sought to discover why the US never developed the tactics of “European socialists,” who were “dominated by ideology.”³⁴ He argued that it was due to the US’s lack of a feudal past, making the nation exceptional in the modern world. The consensus historians defined American exceptionalism in terms of shared inherent cultural traits, instead of in terms of political, economic, and racial structures.³⁵

It was no coincidence that intellectual history as a self-consciously defined field of study emerged between 1935 and 1950, as the contingent approach to culture and history emerged. A major turning point in intellectual history occurred in 1936 with the publication of Arthur Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. As Lovejoy explained, the history of ideas involved uncovering “the unconscious mental habits, operating in the thought of an individual or generation,” instead of describing ideas in terms of philosophical “isms.”³⁶ While Lovejoy traced ideas as they passed from one thinker to another, historian Perry Miller was the most influential in terms of linking ideas to their changing sociocultural contexts.³⁷ Miller’s

³³Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 32–33.

³⁴Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 302, 10.

³⁵On consensus history, see Higham, “The Cult of the ‘American Consensus,’”; Higham, “Changing Paradigms: The Collapse of Consensus History,” *Journal of American History* 76, no. 2 (Sept. 1989), 460–66; and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 320–60.

³⁶Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 7. Lovejoy also helped found the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1940.

³⁷On the significance of Miller, see David A. Hollinger, “Perry Miller and Philosophical History,” *History and Theory* 7, no. 2 (1968), 189–202; David A. Hollinger, “American Intellectual History, 1907–2007,” *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 2 (April 2007), 14–17; and Nicholas Guyatt, “An Instrument of National

innovative work on the Puritan mind, first employed his 1939 *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, meticulously reconstructed the contingencies of the Puritans' mental universe. As John Higham explained, Miller's classic work represented "a shift away from a directly pragmatic point of view" of progressive historians toward "estimating the force of ideas themselves."³⁸ In other words, while progressives had introduced ideas pragmatically in terms of how they had impacted the world, Miller portrayed ideas as ends in themselves, as reflective of an internally consistent mental universe. Both Lovejoy and Miller pointed the field of intellectual history toward the contingent, contextual, and cultural elements of ideas. More significantly, Miller pushed the subfield to approach the history of ideas as *thinking*, rather than as *thought*.

Miller framed his approach to intellectual history in anti-ideological terms. Despite being an atheist, Miller praised Niebuhr's work because he thought Niebuhr's critiques of ideology were penetrating, appropriate, and convincing. As Miller commented in 1949, Niebuhr's "theology proves acceptable, even gratifying, to many who make no claims to possessing anything resembling 'faith,'" and he related how he had encountered "scores" who "comprehend [Niebuhr] on wholly naturalistic grounds."³⁹ Miller critiqued the work of progressive historians and enthusiastically endorsed the work of philosopher Morris Cohen, who also promoted the writing of non-ideological, multi-dimensional history. "Sincere souls embrace communism as a protest against inequality but end up justifying the necessities of the Soviet Union," Miller complained in a review of Cohen's *The Meaning of Human History*. "It is to be hoped—probably in vain—that some of the many on all sides selling their historical inheritance for a mess of ideological pottage may stumble upon [Cohen's] book and turn back before the cheat has undone them."⁴⁰ Thus, Miller framed the writing of contextualized cultural and intellectual history as a foil to, and a solution for, excessively ideological approaches to history and politics. Writing in 1951, Higham predicted that the future of the writing of intellectual history would follow Miller's lead and come to be

Policy': Perry Miller and the Cold War," *Journal of American Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 2002), 107–49.

³⁸John Higham, "The Rise of American Intellectual History," *American Historical Review* 56, no. 3 (April 1951), 470.

³⁹Perry Miller, "The Great Method: Review of Faith and History," *The Nation* 169 (Aug. 6, 1949), 138.

⁴⁰Perry Miller, "Morris Cohen's *Philosophy of History*," review, *The Nation* 166 (May 15, 1948), 554.

characterized by the employment of “anthropological-psychological constructs.”⁴¹

Bailyn started his career as a historian in the burgeoning fields of intellectual history, cultural anthropology, and American Studies that valued the unique cultural and intellectual aspects of American traditions. Like Miller, Bailyn was particularly interested in how European ideas took root in specific and contingent ways in the New World. Accordingly, during the 1950s, Bailyn praised Miller’s work and critiqued other historians for failing to contextualize ideas fully in their social and cultural contexts. For example, in a critical review of Fernand Braudel’s early modern history of the Mediterranean world, Bailyn pointed to the author’s failure to connect the economic, geographic, political, and intellectual elements to one another. “The parts of the ‘world’ are all there,” Bailyn complained, “but they lie inert, unrelated, discrete” instead of being set in a “meaningful relationship with other aspects of society.” Bailyn also chided Braudel for identifying too much with his subject, resulting in a narrative that was unjustly “charged with drama and slicked with affection.”⁴² Bailyn critiqued Braudel both for his failure to link the multiple facets of social change to one another and for letting his affections for his subject get in the way of asking more critical and significant historical questions. Eight years later, he would accuse progressive historians of education of the same thing.

As Bailyn recognized, Miller was the most effective at accomplishing the kind of objective cultural and contextualized intellectual history he envisioned. Accordingly, in his review of Miller’s classic *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, Bailyn insisted that Miller’s latest work had “extemporized a social history subtler than any yet written” because it had weaved “themes into intricate patterns, producing a fabric of original and vivid design, while laying out a new interpretation of intellectual history” that “managed to analyze in detail the complete literary output of New England during an entire century.”⁴³ Miller had successfully outlined how historical events and contexts had exerted influence upon the ideas of historical actors, and vice versa, in an ongoing organic process. By 1957, Bailyn praised the “general tendency of current research to concentrate on those most primitive elements of history, people and families” because through the close-up cultural study of these groups, historians were more likely

⁴¹ Higham, “The Rise of American Intellectual History,” 471.

⁴² Bernard Bailyn, “Braudel’s Geohistory: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Economic History* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1951), 279–80.

⁴³ Bernard Bailyn, “*The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* by Perry Miller,” review, *New England Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 1954), 115, 116.

“to see the unsuspected connections and relationships which lead to new and truer views.”⁴⁴

In summary, Bailyn’s 1960 call to define education more broadly as the transmission of culture aligned with several existing trends that were directly or indirectly underscored by “the end of ideology.” First, Bailyn’s focus on ideological neutrality and professional detachment aligned with postwar consensus liberals’ rejection of rigid political theories that allegedly distorted the interpretation of reality and were impervious to adjustment and dissent. Second, Bailyn’s focus on broadening the definition of education to enculturation aligned with the emerging fields of American studies, cultural anthropology, and intellectual history in that each sought to describe, in qualitative terms, the exceptional ways that the US had avoided the ideological approaches of Europe and the Soviet Union. Finally, Bailyn’s praise of Miller and his contextualized history underscored his belief in the inherent value of understanding the past on its own terms and for its own sake, instead of for the purpose of pursuing an ideological or political agenda. These ideas came together in *Education in the Forming of American Society*.

Bailyn Prevails

In October 1959, at a conference on Early American Education in Williamsburg, Virginia, Bailyn presented the paper “Education in the Forming of American Society” to an audience of twenty invited scholars. Three notable attendees happened to be the chief architects of the new anti-ideological approach to history and social science: Hofstadter, Schlesinger, and Merton. They likely applauded Bailyn’s attack on the progressives’ ideological approach to history because it followed the basic contours of their own recent work. According to Bailyn, progressive historians had erroneously asserted that “modern education was a cosmic force leading mankind to a full realization of itself.” This ideological approach to history not only seemed quaint by the 1950s but was actually considered dangerous in the anti-ideological age because it reflected the thinking of totalitarians. Bailyn considered the historical literature on the colonial period—the area of his own expertise—as “the best measure of the limitations of the history these professional educators wrote,” and suggested a half dozen areas of study ripe for the kind of research he suggested.⁴⁵ Bailyn revised the paper and published it as a book the next year.

⁴⁴Bernard Bailyn, “The Beekmans of New York: Trade, Politics, and Families,” review article, *William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Oct. 1957), 608.

⁴⁵Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, 7, 13.

Bailyn was not alone in his attack on the previous generation's writing of educational history, nor was he the only one to embrace the new intellectual-cultural history that focused on families, cultures, and ideas in context. In fact, several educational historians independent of Bailyn had also praised the new cultural history and endorsed its potential for improving the field. In 1955, Cremin praised the recent work of what he dubbed the "new" educational history. Referring to texts by H. G. Good, John S. Brubacher, and R. Freeman Butts, Cremin marked 1947 as a "banner year in the production of textbooks designed for use in the 'new history of education,'" because these accounts housed their narratives in cultural history.⁴⁶ Writing in 1957, historian Bernard Mehl similarly identified two new trends in writing education history: a focus on educational history in a specifically American context, and an effort to "link historical analysis with insights coming out of research in psychology, anthropology, and sociology."⁴⁷ The first trend aligned with the subfield of American Studies, and the second trend aligned with the new cultural-intellectual history. Furthermore, in a 1961 essay, Mehl also implored educational historians to take "a cue from academic historians" and study "non-school educational agencies and their influence on the behavior of modern man both here and abroad." Like Bailyn, Mehl encouraged his colleagues to "become anthropologists of the past themselves," like the consensus historians had done, "simply because the school serves as the container of the projected national character."⁴⁸ Seemingly unaware of Bailyn's call to arms, Mehl likewise proposed a reconciliation with professional historians and a broader focus on how education interacted with culture beyond schools.

However, several historians opposed Bailyn's dismissal of progressive historians of education and his desire to align with professional historians. William W. Brickman, professor of comparative education, considered Bailyn's accusation as arrogant and overwrought. Brickman attempted to revive the reputation of the educationalist scholars by skillfully demonstrating the ways in which "general historians" often cited and drew uncritically upon the work of the "bona fide educationist" historians in their work. "In other words, the general, social, and intellectual historian draws upon the educationists for his own knowledge," Brickman quipped, "Why did

⁴⁶Lawrence Cremin, "The Recent Development of the History of Education as a Field of Study in the United States," *History of Education Journal*, 7, no. 1 (Fall 1955), 32.

⁴⁷Bernard Mehl, "New Writings and the Status of the History of Education," *History of Education Journal* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1957), 110.

⁴⁸Bernard Mehl, "History of Education," *Review of Educational Research* 31, no. 1 (Feb. 1961), 16–17.

he not go to the original sources? Apparently, he was satisfied to rely upon the scholarship of educationist historians.” Brickman ridiculed Bailyn’s argument that “there has not been any real history of education until the general historian got around to it.” By presenting numerous examples of high-quality educational histories prior to 1960, Brickman concluded that Bailyn’s critique was “a masterpiece of oversimplification.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, Harry Hutton and Philip Kalisch praised Bailyn’s “shock treatment,” predicting that his book would “have net influence for the good,” but they debunked Bailyn’s assertion that Davidson’s *A History of Education*, published in 1901, was a seminal book in the development of the field that pointed educational history in the wrong direction.⁵⁰ Hutton, a professor of education, and Kalisch, a historian, demonstrated that the initial reaction to Davidson’s study was mixed, and its impact was not as great as Bailyn had asserted. Finally, education professor Bruce Hood found Bailyn’s definition of education too broad to be of any use. “If we are going to approach the history of education from the perspective of socialization or enculturation,” Hood asked, “how, then, is the role of a historian of education different from that of a historian in general?” Hood also pointed out that most teacher candidates had already taken general history courses in high school and college, and so a history of education focused solely on schooling was warranted. He worried that Bailyn’s approach would make historians of education “interpret themselves out of a job.”⁵¹

However, any sense that Brickman, Hutton, Kalisch, and Hood had delivered an effective counterpunch to Bailyn’s critique was squashed by the 1965 publication of Cremin’s historiographical book, *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley*. In the book, Cremin agreed with Bailyn “that the anachronism and parochialism of [Cubberley’s] work require correction.” Nevertheless, Cremin diverged from Bailyn on two issues. First, he attributed the split between educational and mainstream historians in the beginning of the century to be, in reality, a “conflict among historians themselves” and cited as evidence several mainstream progressive historians who employed a similar ideological approach to educational history. Second, Cremin praised several recent examples of educational history that employed new methodological approaches borrowed from

⁴⁹William W. Brickman, “Revisionism and the Study of the History of Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Dec. 1964), 216, 218, 219, 221.

⁵⁰Harry Hutton and Phillip Kalisch, “Davidson’s Influence on Educational Historiography,” *History of Education Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1966), 85.

⁵¹Bruce L. Hood, “The Historian of Education: Some Notes on His Role,” *History of Education Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1969), 373.

the social sciences, which had largely corrected for the shortcomings Cubberley demonstrated. At its most revealing point, Cremin even admitted that his own writing in the 1950s “represented essentially a refinement of Cubberley rather than a fundamental revision.”⁵² Taking a moderate tone, Cremin approached the new developments in historiography as less of a radical rupture than Bailyn suggested. Yet, he nevertheless carefully aligned himself with Bailyn. In fact, Cremin’s publication of *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* in 1961 was reviewed alongside Bailyn’s *Education in the Forming of American Society* and lauded as an example of the new approach to the field.⁵³

Most historians of education praised Bailyn in unequivocal terms. Timothy L. Smith praised the “new historian of American education” for his “use of broader historical references and his wider, more humanistic, professional commitment.”⁵⁴ Paul Nash identified new studies that addressed single topics or problems as “the most fruitful path of development in the field of educational history.”⁵⁵ John E. Talbott likewise praised the new approach’s “increasing concern for the interrelatedness of past experience, the emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to the past, and the collapse of the internal boundaries that once delineated ‘areas’ of historical study.”⁵⁶ Sol Cohen declared that the “past decade has witnessed a surge in the writing of the history of American education; broadly conceived, closely allied with the fields of special and intellectual history, imaginative and mature in its use of tools and apparatus of historical scholarship.”⁵⁷ Thus, professors of history were unanimous in their praise of Bailyn’s book, while historians of education housed in colleges and/or schools of education were divided over whether or not to embrace the new objective approach.

⁵² Lawrence Cremin, *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley: An Essay on the Historiography of American Education* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965), 43, 73.

⁵³ For the reviews, see C. P. Hill, “American Education,” *Bulletin: British Association for American Studies* 3 (Dec. 1961), 70–73.

⁵⁴ Timothy L. Smith, “The New Historian of American Education,” *Harvard Educational Review* 31 (Spring 1961), 136.

⁵⁵ Paul Nash, “History of Education,” *Review of Educational Research* 34, no. 1 (Feb. 1964), 7.

⁵⁶ John Talbott, “The History of Education,” *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971), 134.

⁵⁷ Sol Cohen, “New Perspectives,” 82, 87. Gaither listed additional, but later (post-1980), praise for Bailyn in the introduction to *American Educational History Revisited*.

Ultimately, Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* met a mostly positive reception in the early 1960s because he targeted the ideological naïvety of educationists, courted the participation of academic professors, and housed his argument in a "coming of age" narrative about implementing what was depicted as the latest commonsense developments in the fields of cultural anthropology, American studies, and intellectual-cultural history. As a result, his argument met a postwar audience hungry for an anti-ideological approach to educational research that embraced the values of scientific rigor and ideological neutrality. Historian Laurence Veysey summarized this consensus view in 1969, writing, "Bailyn would thus make us all into cultural anthropologists. ... And this advice is profoundly right."⁵⁸

Bailyn's argument won the day because it aligned perfectly with the anti-ideological context of postwar consensus liberalism. Like the critics of progressive education, Bailyn looked to academic disciplines to save the schools from what they considered to be the naïve, ideologically driven, and closed-minded approach of progressives and totalitarians. Bailyn's attack was underscored by an ongoing and well-funded effort by academic professors to strengthen the rigor of the American curriculum in the disciplines of math, science, and eventually social studies.⁵⁹ Bailyn targeted the "Whiggism" of progressive educational history in the same way that leading critics such as Niebuhr, Bestor, and Hofstadter had targeted the alleged sentimentalism, optimism, and ideological naïvety espoused by progressive educators.⁶⁰ Like the critics of progressive education, Bailyn assumed that the best course for educational reform involved realigning educational leadership with academic professors by circumventing, or at least reducing, the influence of professors of education.

Second, Bailyn considered socialization into an academic discipline to be the best preventive for ideology. Bailyn did not provide a particularly articulate reason for why socialization into an academic discipline was the best way to avoid ideology; others had done this for him. Instead, he simply assumed that, since academic disciplines were

⁵⁸Laurence R. Veysey, "Toward a New Direction in Educational History: Prospect and Retrospect," *History of Education Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1969), 345.

⁵⁹Peter Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Ronald Evans, *The Hope for American School Reform: The Cold War Pursuit of Inquiry Learning in Social Studies* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Christopher J. Phillips, *The New Math: A Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and John Rudolph, *Scientists in the Classroom: The Cold War Reconstruction of American Science Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁶⁰Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, 59.

in the business of producing knowledge and reflected certain scientific and apolitical values, educators ought to emulate them because such an approach was conducive to democratic life. The fact that Bailyn's discipline-centered approach met very little resistance in 1960 underscored the belief that a "tough-minded scientific approach" was the best answer to the alleged "Dough-faced," "love and harmony" approach of progressives and totalitarians, and the most effective way to bring rigor to the field of education.

Third, Bailyn emphasized the importance of depth over breadth. As Bailyn implied, the kind of centuries-long accounts progressive historians of education authored would no longer be possible under the new educational history because the new history required much more attention to context, nuance, and complexity, as demonstrated by the new sub-disciplines of intellectual-cultural history, American studies, and cultural anthropology. This focus on in-depth explorations of narrower topics aligned with a historical field entering its golden age of enrollment growth, creation of specialized new journals, and abundant job opportunities.⁶¹ Bailyn defeated the progressive-minded historians, in part, because there was simply more of them entering the field during the postwar years. Ultimately, several factors aligned to make Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* a pivotal and influential call to arms, but these same factors made the book the product of a particular moment when leading scholars directly or indirectly sought to use academic research as a cure to the ideology of totalitarianism.

Conclusion

In *Education in the Forming of American Society*, Bailyn asserted that the real task of the historian "is to describe the dawning of ideas and the creation of forms—surprising, strange, and awkward then, however familiar they may have become since—in response to the changing demands of circumstance."⁶² Bailyn would win a Pulitzer Prize in 1968 for explaining the "surprising, strange, and awkward" aspects of the ideology that gave rise to the American Revolution.⁶³ Ironically, Bailyn's emphasis on the ideas and ideology of the Revolutionary elites—as opposed to the social, behavioral, and economic causes—led him to be dubbed a "neo-Whig" by historians of the early

⁶¹ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 362–63; and Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: Norton, 2010), 64–65.

⁶² Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, 10.

⁶³ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1967).

republic.⁶⁴ The fact that the most famous critic of Whiggism in the historiography of education could himself be labeled a neo-Whig reveals the ambiguity of such terms but also demonstrates how quickly the outlook of historians changed during the 1970s as New Left historians challenged the view of postwar consensus liberalism.⁶⁵

As the Cold War thawed and more pressing domestic concerns, such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, changed the political landscape, scholars no longer aligned ideology with progressivism and totalitarianism. One New Left scholar explicitly implored his peers to “come out of their end-of-ideology corner fighting for lower-class, as well as Negro, rights”⁶⁶ As a result, New Left historians reintroduced critical economic, social, and structural explanations of the past and present that had been shunned during the postwar years. New Left scholars such as Michael Katz, Joel Spring, Clarence Karier, Paul Violas, Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Michael Apple used sociological constructs, such as bureaucracy and class, and ideological orientations, such as Marxism and libertarianism, to bring further attention to oppressed groups, while mostly dismissing the rhetoric of elite reformers as insincere and irrelevant.⁶⁷ Like

⁶⁴For examples of Bailyn being cast as a “neo-Whig,” see Joyce Appleby, “Social Origins of the American Revolutionary Ideology,” *Journal of American History* 64, no. 4 (March 1978), 935–58; and Colin Gordon, “Crafting a Usable Past: Consensus, Ideology, and Historians of the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (Oct. 1989), 671–95.

⁶⁵For the New Left challenge to the historiography of education, see “New Perspectives in the History of American Education 1960–1970”; Geraldine Joncich Clifford, “Saints, Sinners, and People: A Position Paper on the Historiography of American Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 257–72; Geraldine Joncich Clifford, “Education: Its History and Historiography,” *Review of Research Education* 4 (Jan. 1976), 210–67; Joseph Kett, “On Revisionism,” *History of Education Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1979), 229–35; Diane Ravitch, *The Revisionist Revised: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Douglas Sloan, “Historiography and the History of Education,” *Review of Research in Education* 1 (Jan. 1973), 239–69; and Wayne Urban, “Some Historiographical Problems in Revisionist History: Review of *Roots of Crisis*,” *American Educational Research Journal* 12, no. 3 (July 1975), 337–50.

⁶⁶Hyman Rodman, “The Lower Classes and the Negroes: Implications for Intellectuals,” in *New Perspectives on Poverty*, ed. Arthur B. Shostak and William Gomberg (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 172.

⁶⁷Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 1979); Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Clarence J. Karier, Paul Violas, and Joel H. Spring, *Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rand McNally, 1972); Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1971);

Bailyn, New Left historians made ideology—specifically liberal, middle-class, managerial, capitalist ideology—a central concern of their inquiries but, unlike Bailyn, their version of ideology was largely static, not fluid. That is, the New Left historians viewed ideology in long-term structural terms, not as something that contingently and culturally evolved in response to changing conditions on the ground, as envisioned by Bailyn, because they argued that the ideological outlook of the school leaders had more or less remained the same since the nineteenth century. Ideology remained a central concern for New Left historians and theorists of education, but they approached ideology as something that was unavoidable and hegemonic, and they considered attempts like Bailyn's to avoid ideology to be naïve at best and, at worse, complicit in reinforcing the social inequalities that plagued American life and schooling. Defenders of consensus liberal historiography, such as Diane Ravitch, countered that the New Left historians were excessively ideological in their unwarranted attacks on the schools.⁶⁸

Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* sparked a discussion of ideology in the history of education and revealed it to be a double-edged sword that could be directed at historical actors as well as the historians who wrote about them. Bailyn's text was certainly less ideological than the progressive historians he sought to correct, but it nevertheless reflected the ideology of postwar consensus liberalism. His emphasis on cultural-intellectual history as a contrast to the rigidity of totalitarian thinking reflected the aspirations, hopes, and fears of his own moment in time, in the same way the progressives' focus on conflict and reform reflected theirs. His text unquestionably improved the writing of the history of education by introducing the orientations, methodologies, and techniques of professional historians, but there were also "surprising, strange, and awkward" aspects of his argument that link his classic work to the intellectual-cultural milieu of postwar liberal society in ways that have largely been overlooked and forgotten.

Joel H. Spring, "Education and Progressivism," *History of Education Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1970), 53–71; and Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

⁶⁸Ravitch subtitled the concluding chapter of *The Revisionists Revised*, "Limitations of the Ideological Approach," 164.