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Questioning College

A spate of recent articles on the value of a college education has asked whether higher education is really worth what students are paying for it. *Forbes* went so far as to title its article “The Great College Hoax” (2-2-09). Writer Kathy Kristof accused “the education industrial complex” of deceptively cultivating “the image of college as a sure-fire path to a life of social and economic privilege.”

Kristof interviewed a number of disillusioned students who had gone deeply into debt for higher education, only to find that their earning potential came nowhere close to what they had expected. College graduates earn an average of \$57,500 a year, while high school graduates average \$31,600. Over the course of 40 years, the difference between the two adds up to a little over \$1 million. Kristof charges, however, that this difference in earning power results partly from differences in intelligence and other abilities — the student with a college degree might have earned more than the average student in the high school group, even without a degree. Kristof also points out that the difference between the two average salaries has held steady over the past five years, while the cost of higher education is rising at twice the rate of inflation.

Scholar Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute has long criticized the “inflated status” of the B.A. degree and the pressure on young people to attend college. One major study shows that 90% of high school students say their counselors have told them they should attend college. According to Murray, Americans revere the B.A. as an essential education attainment, even though many people without a B.A. might be better prepared or more competent for the jobs they seek than other applicants who do have the degree.

In an August 2008 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Murray facetiously described the plan behind the current system of post-secondary education:

First, we will set up a single goal to represent educational success, which will take four years to achieve no matter what is being taught. We will attach an economic reward to it that seldom has anything to do with what has been learned. We will urge large numbers of people who do not possess adequate ability to try to achieve the goal, wait until they have spent a lot of time and money, and then deny it to them. We will stigmatize everyone who doesn't meet the goal. We will call the goal a “B.A.”

Murray addresses the same problem in his 2008 book, *Real Education*. He points to the certification tests already used by accounting, and a few other professions, as a model that could replace the

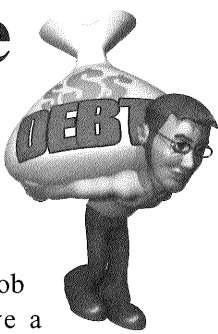
B.A. as a more accurate measure of job applicants' abilities and job preparation. “Young people entering the job market should have a known, trusted measure of their qualifications that they can carry into job interviews,” Murray asserts. “They need a certification, not a degree.”

Murray says the B.A. actually “tells an employer nothing except that the applicant had a certain amount of intellectual ability and perseverance.” This is even true of students with degrees in vocational majors such as business administration, since schools and departments differ so much in what they require of students who receive such a degree.

“Certification tests would disadvantage just one set of people,” says Murray: “Students who have gotten into well-known traditional schools, but who are coasting through their years in college and would score poorly on a certification test. Disadvantaging them is an outcome devoutly to be wished.”

Meanwhile, the federal government appears to be moving toward the opposite end of the spectrum of opinion on the usefulness of postsecondary education. Pres. Obama recently urged Congress to promote the goal of college for every single American (2-24-09). The *Associated Press* chose six experts to ask whether the

(See *Questioning*, page 4)



Texas Science Standards Allow Critical Thinking

The Texas State Board of Education debated numerous possible changes to the state's science standards before making several key decisions. The standards as finally adopted protect critical thinking and free inquiry by requiring that schools teach science in a way that “examin[es] all sides of scientific evidence.”

The editorial page of the *New York Times* accused “religious and social conservatives” of trying “to insert into the state science standards various phrases and code words that may seem innocuous or meaningless at first glance but could open the door to doubts about evolution.” (3-31-09)

The standards formerly called for the teaching of the “strengths and weaknesses” of scientific theories. Some critics strongly objected to that language, believing that any weaknesses in the theory of evolution should not be taught. After much debate, the board decided to replace the “strengths and weaknesses” wording. Some individuals on both sides of the debate claimed this as a victory: apparently both sides could agree that examining all sides of the scientific evidence and encouraging critical thinking were suitable goals for the education standards to adopt.

The newly adopted language requires schools:

“In all fields of Science; [to] analyze, evaluate, and critique scientific explanations of science by using empirical evidence, logical reasoning, and experimental and observational testing including examining all sides of scientific evidence of those scientific explanations so as to encourage critical thinking by the student.”

As part of its decision-making process, the Board examined hundreds of articles from mainstream scientific journals, which demonstrated ongoing debate and controversy over some of evolutionary biology's major claims. Dr. John West of the Discovery Institute applauded the new standards and defended the Board against the accusations made by such critics as the *New York Times* editorial page. “Contrary to the claims of the evolution lobby, absolutely nothing the Board did promotes ‘creationism’ or religion in the classroom,” said West. “Groups that assert otherwise are lying, plain and simple. . . . Let's be absolutely clear: Under the new standards, students will be expected to analyze and evaluate the scientific evidence for evolution, not religion. Period.”

(See *Science Standards*, page 4)



More Controversy about Drugs for ADHD

The long-running debate about the effectiveness of drugs prescribed for children with attention-deficit disorder or hyperactivity (ADHD) has been re-ignited by new research on a large federal study. The new research, which appears in the online version of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, claims the drugs do little good beyond 24 months and may stunt children's growth. That is very different from the study's initial report back in 1999.

The report followed 485 children for eight years. All of the children had been diagnosed with ADHD. Children who continuously took stimulant medications and children who did not take stimulants were no different from each other after eight years in the categories of inattention, hyperactivity, or social functioning.

Another report in the same journal

analyzed the same group of 485 children and found that stimulant medications affected the children's growth. Children

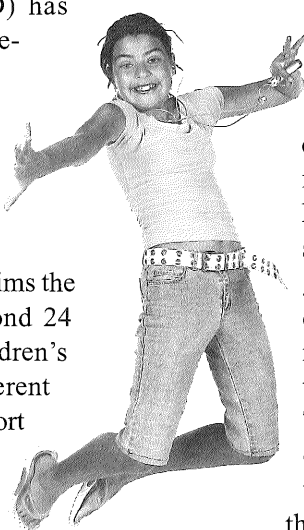
who never took stimulants were three-quarters of an inch taller and weighed six pounds more on average than children who took stimulants for three years. Other reports had already indicated that stimulants stunt children's growth, but defenders of the drugs said that children would make up the difference once they stopped taking the drugs. This latest report shows that children who take the drugs will remain somewhat smaller throughout their lives. In 2007, when researchers first reported that children who took stimulants were smaller, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a press release spinning the data by stating that children who were not on medication “grew somewhat larger.”

One principal scientist in the latest analysis of the study, psychologist William Pelham, says that the medications are

useful in the short term but not over longer periods. Pelham says that his colleagues repeatedly tried to explain away evidence that challenged the long-term usefulness of the medication. “The stance the group took in the first paper was so strong that the people are embarrassed to say they were wrong and we led the whole field astray,” says Pelham. Initially, after 14 months of treatment, the medicated children showed improved behavior. But as time went on and scientists continued to monitor the children, those who took drugs and those who didn't began to look more and more similar in their behavior. Meanwhile, prescriptions for stimulant drugs soared nationwide. In 2004, American physicians wrote 28 million prescriptions for ADHD drugs; last year, they wrote 39 million.

Adderall and Concerta are among the medications most frequently prescribed for children. Dr. Pelham said, “If 5% of families in the country are giving a medication to their children, and they don't realize it does not have long-term benefits

(See *ADHD*, page 4)



EDUCATION BRIEFS

An expert warns that U.K. schools are in danger of embracing the self-esteem agenda, imported from the U.S., to an extreme that promotes narcissism and undermines learning. The expert, Dr. Carol Craig of Scotland's Centre for Confidence and Well-Being, also questions the notion that schools should set themselves up as "surrogate psychologists or mental health professionals" rather than "educational establishments." In 2007, the U.K. adopted legislation requiring schools to improve students' well-being. When schools adopt social and emotional goals, they "run the risk of undermining the family as the principal agent of sociability," cautions Craig. (BBC News, 3-14-09)

Student Jonathan Lopez has sued the Los Angeles Community College District over the censorship of his conservative views on marriage. In a public speaking class, Lopez spoke in favor of the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Prof. John Matteson called Lopez a "fascist bastard" and refused to let him finish his speech. Matteson refused to grade Lopez's effort, telling him he should "ask God" for his grade, according to the suit. (Los Angeles Times, 2-13-09)

A counselor at Seven Hills Middle School in Nevada City, California ordered a 12-year-old to take a pregnancy test at school. The counselor had heard a rumor from another student that the girl was pregnant. The counselor forced the girl to leave class, go into the bathroom and give a urine sample for the test. The girl's family will sue the school district over the alleged violation of the 12-year-old's privacy. (WorldNet Daily, 2-11-09)

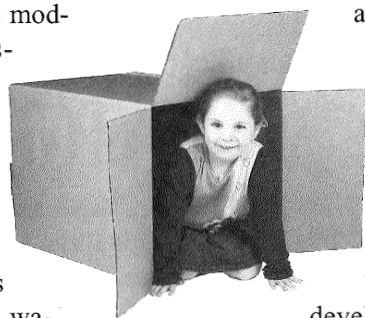
Some schools are giving up on the fight against head lice, with about 60% of public schools now allowing children with lice eggs in their hair to stay in class. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommended in 2002 that, because too many students were missing school because of nits (lice eggs), schools should send children home if they had adult lice in their hair but not if they had nits. Since nits lead inevitably to adult lice (and then to more nits), lice infestations may become more widespread under the new policy. (The Examiner, 2-18-09)

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Schoolchildren Miss Out on Play

The Alliance for Childhood, a group based in College Park, Maryland, just released a report on three new studies examining play time in the modern kindergarten classroom. In 268 full-day kindergarten classrooms studied, children spent less than 30 minutes on average in free play or "choice time" each day. Classic play materials such as blocks, sand and water tables, and make-believe props were noticeably absent from the classrooms, a trend that prompted the Alliance for Childhood to describe the course of early childhood education as "increasingly didactic, test-driven, and joyless."



The report, entitled *Crisis in the Kindergarten*, found that kindergarten classrooms are increasingly regimented and devoted to seatwork activities, such as math worksheets and penmanship practice, which are more developmentally appropriate for older children. *Crisis in the Kindergarten* even addresses the fact that the trend it documents may especially disadvantage young boys. This report does not address the problems boys face in detail, but other research has found that seatwork activities, which require fine motor skills and a high level of early literacy, are especially inappropriate for young boys, who bloom later on average than girls do in those two areas. Today's overly academic kindergarten "stacks the deck" against many boys, who become frustrated and discouraged by school at the very beginning of their school careers.

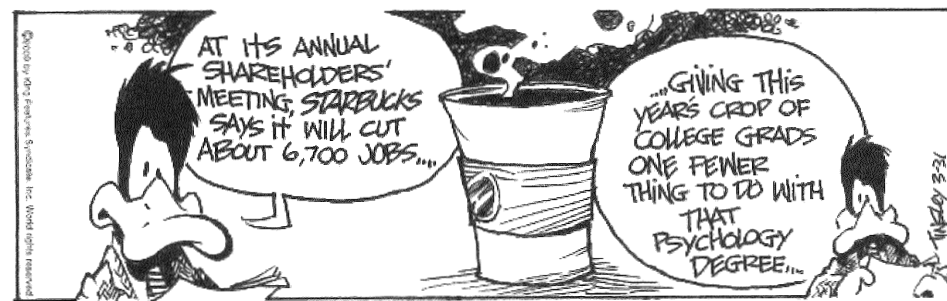
Cutting out play appears to disadvantage all children to varying degrees, putting their health, intellectual development, and future success in school at risk. "These practices, which are not grounded in research, violate long-established principles of child development and good teaching," claims the Alliance report. "Many experts believe that developmentally inappropriate expectations and practices are causing normal child behavior to be wrongly labeled as misbehavior, and normal learning patterns to be mislabeled as learning disabilities."

The report recounts researchers' impressions of the preschools they visited as well as the concrete data they gathered. "Most of the activities that are set up in 'choice time' or 'center time,' and are described as play by some teachers, are in fact teacher-directed and involve little or no free play, imagination, or creativity," says Edward Miller, a program director for the Alliance.

Other experts on childhood echo the findings of these studies. Michael Thompson, psychologist and author of *The Pressured Child* and other books, has reported that 40% of elementary schools now devote less than 20 minutes a day to recess. David Elkind, author of *The Hurried Child*, called the *Crisis in the Kindergarten* findings "heartbreaking." "We have had a politically and commercially

(See *Schoolchildren*, page 4)

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley



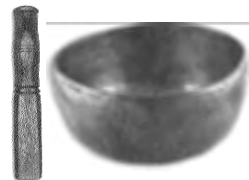
California Students Learn Meditation

Nineteen schools in central California have adopted meditation as part of their curricula for elementary school students as young as kindergarten. 4,600 children have learned meditation techniques through the program in the past two years.

An unapologetically enthusiastic article in the *Sacramento Bee* hailed the teacher-directed meditation training as the welcome alternative to "graduating another generation of workaholic, road-raged adults." The feature described one instructor, Oren Sofer, as he led a class of 3rd-graders in various meditation techniques. The children greeted Sofer upon his entrance to the classroom with a unison chant: "Mindfulness. Mindfulness." The *Sacramento Bee* defined "mindfulness" as "the ability to be aware of what is happening in the

present moment without judgment."

In pursuit of "mindfulness," Sofer rang a Tibetan singing bowl and asked the students to listen quietly to the bell's echoes. The Tibetan singing bowl is a bell used in the context of Buddhism to facilitate prayer, meditation, and trance induction. After playing the bell, Sofer led the class in rhythmic breathing exercises and meditation.



"Not only are kids managing their stress and getting along better with others, they're using mindfulness to enhance their drawing, acting, running and sleeping," raved reporter April Dembosky.

The meditation courses take place in 15-minute increments, three times a week for five weeks. The Oakland-based Community Partnership for Mindfulness in Education developed the program and pays its instructors. (*Sacramento Bee*, 2-9-09)

Book of the Month



One Nation Under God, Dee Wampler, Evergreen Press, 2008, 184 pp., \$24.99

In *One Nation Under God*, Dee Wampler debunks the myths about church and state that



are so often used to marginalize the opinions of religious people. "The First Amendment has been twisted to remove God from public life," said Judge Roy Moore, former Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court. "We're moving from separation of church and state to separation of the people from God. If that trend is not stopped, we'll have no rights given by God, only rights given by the government. And what it has given, it can take away."

Starting with Christopher Columbus, Wampler quotes from one historical figure after another to show that until very recently, everyone agreed that religion was absolutely central to American life. George Washington said, "Do not let anyone claim to be a true American if they ever attempt to remove religion from politics."

One especially interesting chapter examines the life and beliefs of Thomas Jefferson, supposedly the first and leading exponent of the modern view of the separation of church and state. In January of 1802, Jefferson used his now famous "wall of separation" metaphor in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Church. First of all, our nation is built on the Constitution, not on the correspondence of our presidents. But Wampler furthermore proves that Jefferson did not mean what members of the secular elite want him to have meant. Two days before he wrote that letter, Jefferson attended church in the House of Representatives for the first time. He attended that church "constantly" for the next seven years. Wampler lists dozens of other ways that Jefferson flouted the misinterpretation of the First Amendment that is so often credited to him.

With its readable format and full-color pictures on almost every page, *One Nation Under God* is a short textbook on the history of religion in America, a history that fewer and fewer students learn today. One social studies book devotes 30 pages to the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving, without once mentioning religion. Wampler writes of a boy who came home from school and told his mother that "Thanksgiving was when the Pilgrims gave thanks to the Indians."

Karl Marx wrote that "a people without a heritage are easily persuaded." Wampler urges Americans to reclaim their heritage, and to work to rebuild America's foundations and preserve the nation from further decline.

FOCUS: Howard Zinn's Revisionist History Text

By Bettina Esser

My husband and I first became aware of revisionist history in the early 1990s through an English class. My oldest son came home with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and I was delighted. After all, so many schools wouldn't touch that book with a ten-foot pole. What a great time in one's life to read a wonderful coming-of-age book! I had visions of us discussing the symbolism of the river and the raft, freedom versus responsibility; but that was not how the teacher planned to present this book. This book was to be critically read only in the context of racism in America. This book was not to be discussed with anyone outside of class, and the only outside materials that the students were allowed to read were in a packet consisting of newspaper clippings and articles related to the racism of *Huckleberry Finn*. The most fair and balanced among those articles was one by Clarence Page.

That same year, my 5th-grade son came home with a new history textbook. It was beautiful — lots of color pictures, timelines, and even a CD-ROM. When I perused it, I noticed that there were many oral history entries, even though oral history is one of the least reliable sources of historical information. There was a chapter on the Seneca Falls Convention and the woman's movement, but no mention of Thomas Edison or the Wright Brothers. The new President, Bill Clinton, got his own page as "The Man from Hope," but George H. W. Bush was not mentioned; nor was Tiananmen Square or the fall of the Berlin Wall. Richard Nixon got two pages: one for Watergate and one for losing the Vietnam War. My husband and I realized that our children were being taught with a post-feminist, multicultural curriculum. We wanted them to learn reading, writing, and Western civ.

We first became aware of Howard Zinn when my eldest son was a junior in high school taking American history. Who is Howard Zinn? He is the author of *A People's History of the United States, 1492-Present*. This book is the #2 best-seller on the Social History list of Amazon's American History section. First published in 1980, the book has sold over 1.5 million copies, which ironically has made Zinn, one of American capitalism's most vicious critics, quite wealthy.

It is not a bestseller because it has blazed new trails in historical research. In fact, Zinn gives no primary sources in this book. The book intersperses secondary sources, without individual citation, with Zinn's own stream-of-consciousness commentary. It is not a bestseller because it covers history in breadth and/or depth. In fact, it only covers 25 historical events and movements in finite time-spans. Often, in spite of its 680+ pages, we are left to wonder how the story ended.

It is not a bestseller because it best supports one of the traditional approach-

es to America's story, such as the "Great Man" or "Great Idea" theories. In fact, the book's overarching thesis could best be summarized in this way: "America is not a republic but an empire controlled by white men, but only certain white men, and its heroes are anti-establishment protesters and those in the trenches of class warfare."

This book is a bestseller because it is required reading in most colleges and an increasing number of high schools. Because this is the only book on American history that many students will read, Howard Zinn has become one of the most dangerous men in America. Most insidiously, the power of this man's thinking will only expand, because new versions of his book have come out in comic-book form (which is great for teens who have limited critical reading skills or limited attention spans), as well as a multi-volume set rewritten for upper-elementary and middle-school students.

Howard Zinn was born in 1922 in Brooklyn, the son of Russian immigrants, and much of his attitude to American history was shaped by the time and place in which he grew up. He was one of four sons, one of whom died before Zinn's birth while the family was on a "cheap vacation in the country." The child died of spinal meningitis on the trip, forcing the parents to ride home holding their deceased child. Although he did not know this brother, Zinn retells the story often, and its importance in shaping his attitude toward their poverty cannot be underestimated.

Zinn's parents were poor, but he remarks on how much he was loved. In fact, he reflects that no child who is loved ever feels poor. During the Depression, his father, a factory worker, saved 25 cents to get Howard a complete set of the works of Charles Dickens. He was a voracious reader, but from reading his later work, one would think that the 19th-century British world of rigid class structure and static economic conditions still dominates 21st-century America.

Zinn was an avid basketball player in high school and it was on the public courts that he met a group of young communists who helped form his worldview. This worldview crystallized when Zinn participated in an anti-Hitler march and was hit on the head by a policeman. He writes, "I woke up, perhaps half-an-hour later, with a painful lump on my head. From that moment on, I was no longer a liberal — a believer in the self-correcting character of democracy. I was a radical, believing something was fundamentally wrong with this country."

Zinn's attitude toward class struggle is also traceable to a New Year's Eve when he helped his father as a waiter in the restaurant where his father worked. About the job, he writes, "I hated it. All his life [my father] worked hard for very little. I've always resented statements of politicians, media commentators, [and]



corporate executives who talked of how, in America, if you worked hard you would become rich. The meaning of that was, if you were poor, it was because you hadn't worked hard enough. I knew it was a lie, about my father and millions of others, men and women who worked harder than anyone, harder than financiers and politicians, harder than anybody if you accept that when you work at an unpleasant job, that makes it very hard work indeed."

Fans of Howard Zinn believe that his military service during World War II gives his anti-war sentiments credibility. Zinn enlisted and became a bombardier, riding in the nose cone of the B-17 Flying Fortress and operating the Norden Bombsight. At this time, Zinn met a tail gunner who convinced him that World War II was a war for empire, not a war against totalitarianism. When he asked the tail gunner why he was there if he felt that way, the tail gunner replied that he was there to "talk to guys like you." Two weeks later, the tail gunner was killed in action. Zinn's war experience contributed to his opinions that "U.S. policy is rarely, if ever, driven by anything other than corporate interests," and that politicians use war as a way to distract citizens from domestic problems.

After the war, using the G.I. Bill, Zinn received his B.A. from New York University, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia. He was a post-doctoral fellow in East Asian Studies at Harvard. Spellman

University dismissed him from his first professorship when he became involved in creating student dissent. From Spellman, Zinn moved to Boston University, with which he has been affiliated since 1964. He was involved in the civil rights movement while at Spellman and the anti-war movement during Vietnam. He counted among his friends Noam Chomsky, as well as the Berrigan brothers and Daniel Ellsberg, with whom he went to Hanoi to escort three returning POWs. The North Vietnamese wanted liberal sympathizers to be the escorts, and Zinn received official approval from the U.S. enemy.

Zinn is bipartisan in his criticism, but his essays stop abruptly, never telling the reader how the rest of the story turned out. In the world of Zinn, things never evolve, economies don't recover, victims never overcome adversity, and white men are always to blame. Once a person is labeled as "evil," there is no personal redemption. "Robber barons" are not recognized for their own personal achievements or the risks and losses they endured, but only for their manipulation of people and money. In Zinn's economic view, where everybody is out for the most he can get, there is no room for voluntarism, charity, or philanthropy.

Zinn could never explain sacrifice for a greater cause if it involved a traditional definition of "patriotism." He could never justify a volunteer military, nor acknowl-

(See *History Text*, page 4)

Questioning (Continued from page 1)

president's goal was realistic. Not surprisingly, given the AP's strong pro-Obama bias, five of the six experts selected agreed that Obama's proposal was realistic. Their responses ranged from "Absolutely!" to "Not only is the president's goal realistic, achieving it is also vital to the future economic well-being of our society." Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, called for the expansion of early childhood education, early college saving plans for all students, and several other big-government measures.

The token dissident selected by the *Associated Press*, Ohio University's Ri-

chard Vedder, called universal college attendance both unrealistic and undesirable. "Not everyone can or should go to college," he said. "Fulfillment of President Obama's goal would lead to many students failing, resources being squandered and the quality of postsecondary education being diluted." Furthermore, Vedder charged, "the president's approach is the equivalent of dropping dollars out of airplanes over student homes and college campuses. That will not change colleges' behavior to make them less arrogant and elite, and more affordable, efficient and accountable." (*Associated Press*, 2-28-09)

Science Standards (Continued from page 1)

The board received tens of thousands of emails, calls, faxes and letters from interested citizens. In January, a national telephone poll by Zogby found that 78% of likely voters favor the teaching of evidence both for and against Darwin's theory in public schools. This number is up from 69% in 2006.

Like the *New York Times*, the Texas Freedom Network (TFN), a liberal group, objects to the new standards. TFN reports on its blog that another portion of the new standards could affect the way global warming will be taught in Texas schools. In December, a writing team drafted environmental systems curriculum standards that required schools to "discuss the positive and negative influence of commonly held ethical beliefs on scientific practices

such as methods used to increase food production or the existence of global warming." This ambiguous language seems to invite schools to accuse those who question manmade global warming of being motivated by their "ethical beliefs" rather than by the evidence.

The board chose instead to adopt a standard calling for analysis of "how ethical beliefs can be used to influence scientific practices such as methods of increasing food production." In a separate item, the board called for students to "analyze and evaluate different views on the existence of global warming." TFN and other critics claim that there are no legitimate dissenting views on global warming — a claim that is patently false. (tfnblog.wordpress.com; *Houston Chronicle* 3-27-9)

ADHD (Continued from page 1)

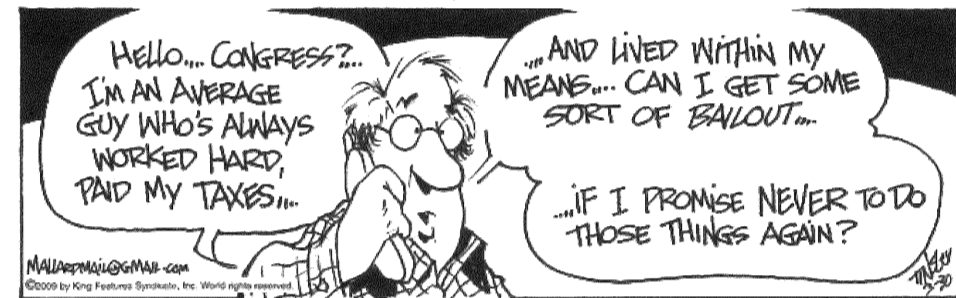
but might have long-term risks, why should they not be told?"

Dr. Peter Jensen, a fellow researcher, criticized Pelham as biased against the use of drugs. "We were struck by the remarkable improvement in symptoms and functioning across all treatment groups," said Jensen, also pointing out that some children who took drugs did show more improvement than average over the long term. But this does not explain why children who didn't take drugs showed the same degree of improvement on average as those who did. Many of the non-medicated children, as well, showed greater-than-average improvement.

Another co-author, Dr. Brooke Molina, agreed with Dr. Pelham that the data "do not support that children who stay on medication longer than two years have better outcomes than children who don't." Molina also noted that academic reviewers of reports on the study "thought we were bending over backward (inappropriately) to dismiss the failure to find medi-

cation effects at eight years."

Dr. Pelham believes that behavioral interventions are the better choice for ADHD treatment. "Behavioral parent training is widely available — it is not rocket science, and it's proven to help," says Pelham. The prevalence of drug treatment, however, means that fewer parents try behavioral interventions than otherwise would. Pelham mentioned another study, soon to be published, that examines the treatments that parents pursue when their children are diagnosed with ADHD. When physicians tell parents to try behavioral interventions first, 95% of parents do so. But when physicians both prescribe a drug and recommend behavioral intervention programs, only 25% of parents try out the behavioral approaches. (*Washington Post*, 3-27-09)

**MALLARD FILLMORE** / by Jeff Tinsley**Schoolchildren** (Continued from page 2)

driven effort to make kindergarten a one-size-smaller first grade," Thompson charged. "Why in the world are we trying to teach the elementary curriculum at the early childhood level?"

Robert C. Pianta, the University of Virginia's dean of education, has studied the average child's school day and where the minutes go. According to Pianta, it isn't a rigorous academic day that is squeezing out time for play: students actually spend a full 30% of their school day on classroom management and routines, such as lining up, transitioning between activities, and waiting for teachers to correct other students' behavior. "It becomes clear that time is not well used, whether it's instruction or play," says Pianta. (*Education Week*, 12-3-08)

The Alliance for Childhood offers six recommendations for policymakers, administrators, teachers, and parents, based on the findings presented in *Crisis in the Kindergarten*. Interestingly, the recom-

mendations give shrift to the obvious fact that children can enjoy age-appropriate, imaginative, free play in their own homes, as well as or instead of in center- or school-based "early childhood education" classrooms. State after state



continues to consider initiatives such as lowering the age of mandatory education, mandating full-day kindergarten, promoting universal preschool, or promoting center-based daycare through Early Head Start or possibly other "Zero to Five" Obama-endorsed programs. Given the importance of play and the futility of pushing too much "school" too soon on children, lawmakers should respect the home as a wonderful, and in many ways ideal, setting for early childhood education. (www.allianceforchildhood.org)

History Text (Continued from page 3)

edge that many copies of his book probably are on the shelves of libraries that bear the name "Carnegie." His writing style is not necessarily chronological, which can be problematic for the reader. Worst of all, he interjects unrelated phrases or ideas, forcing the reader to assume connections that might not be there. For example, when discussing the Pullman strike, he takes time to explain that the workers lived in houses and shopped at stores owned by the company. At the end of the unit, he writes, "A century later this would be called the Race To The Bottom and it would also become the business model for Wal-Mart." Neither of these comments is exactly true, and Zinn gives no further explanation. These "buzz phrases" could become distractions in any discussion with an ill-informed, Zinn-educated student.

Zinn's new books for an even younger and more vulnerable audience are frightening. The comic-book format is used specifically to create the same primal reaction created by cave drawings as they "lend themselves best to storytelling," particularly when paired with shocking photographs and other drawings of the period. Furthermore, Zinn makes no apologies about his intention in presenting history exactly as he does. Of the new junior reader, he writes,

Is it right to take down the traditional heroes of the nation, like Christopher Columbus, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt? Is it unpatriotic to emphasize slavery and racism, the massacres of Indians, the exploitation of the working people? . . . It seems to me it is wrong to treat young readers as if they are not mature enough to look at their nation's policies honestly. . . . Why should we think it heroic to do as Columbus did, arrive in this hemisphere and carry on a rampage of violence, in order to find gold? Why should we think it heroic for Andrew Jackson to drive Indians out of their

land? Why should we think of Theodore Roosevelt as a hero because he fought in the Spanish-American war, driving Spain out of Cuba, but also paving the way for the United States to take control of Cuba?

In the world of Zinn, these were the only things that Columbus, Jackson, or Roosevelt ever did, and no other actions in their lives could compensate for their sins. In his chronology, the reader goes from one unpleasant climactic event to the next, and nothing good happens in the interim.

Perhaps the most lasting "achievement" of Zinn's writing is to deprive young readers the opportunity to feel that they are part of the greater continuing story of American exceptionalism. His book inspires guilt, and forces the reader to feel that success must come only through exploitation. Zinn denies historical process and negates hope for the future. He belittles patriotism and never allows pride of person or place.

I have no problem with students reading Zinn, as long as they have the time and equal support to read other material. One doesn't have to read the entire book to get the picture, and one should not be required to buy it and dissect it like a homiletic text. There are other books on the market that offer alternative points of view and create balance.

Zinn told one interviewer that he had set "quiet revolution" as his goal for writing *A People's History*. "Not a revolution in the classical sense of a seizure of power, but rather from people beginning to take power from within the institutions. In the workplace, the workers would take power to control the conditions of their lives." Perhaps it is we who should begin a quiet revolution of our own, and take back the power that Howard Zinn has to tell America's story.

Bettina Esser is the mother of four children, ages 19 to 28. Her children attended both public and private schools in St. Louis County, Missouri.