

Chronicling the Interplay of Politics, Economics, and Education: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

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Abstract

This article identifies several key assumptions that underlie currently ascendant theory related to politics, economics, and education—and then contrasts those assumptions with philosophical views that have been relegated to the margins. The civic republican political and economic tradition of the past and the contemporary communitarian critique of liberalism represent two such marginal, yet increasingly popular, views. Recent judicial opinions related to affirmative action in education are used to demonstrate the growing strength of alternative visions. The authors argue that as the strength of community-oriented political and economic theory grows, the educational system will shift its focus in accord with new assumptions about the human condition.

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Probably the most valuable contribution historians make is to shake people out of the natural inclination to believe that circumstances have pretty much always been as they are, that humans at all times have possessed the same motivations they themselves possess. By doing so, by shaking things up, historians illuminate possible pathways that could serve to alter current circumstances and re-order cultural values and assumptions.

In education circles, we have been immersed in a particular educational agenda for so long, for so many generations, that most Americans now lack the wherewithal to imagine that there might be an alternative to the thinking that currently drives educational policy and practice. And thus educational historians have their work cut out for them. They need to shake things up. They need to describe to the public the quite different ends America's public educational enterprise served in the past and might serve again. This paper is intended to be a small contribution to that effort.

Historical Perspectives: Political Theory

Few historians would deny that there have been pivotal moments in human history, points at which fundamental, deep changes occurred. The period called the Enlightenment, say, the 125 years between 1650 and 1775, represents one such moment. It was during this relatively brief period that 1000 years of entrenched feudal traditions were turned on their head. Literally all of the political theorists that contributed to creating a vision of a post-feudal world lived and worked during this period: Locke, Harrington, Hobbes, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hume, Kant, and many others. The list reads like a political philosophy hall of fame.

Some of these individuals favored maintaining a monarchy, though limiting its powers; while others were more daring and pushed for far more democratic arrangements. As fate would have it, it fell to thirteen isolated British colonies on the North American coast to sort through these diverse views and create a society premised on the value of human freedom. One big part of that vision was ascertaining what it meant in terms of educating the new nation's youth. If citizens were to have a voice in the decisions that would affect them, even an indirect voice through the selection of representatives, didn't this require intellectual cultivation? If the vote were wielded by individuals who were not capable of raising the common good above their own self-interest, couldn't the whole experiment very easily devolve into anarchy?

Thomas Jefferson's answer was clear and to the point:

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion.¹

Jefferson tried three times to pass a free school bill in his native Virginia. Each time he was unsuccessful, though he was certainly not alone in this regard. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia lobbied for a similar system in Pennsylvania, to no avail. Robert Coram of Delaware called for a national public school system, also to no avail. Noah Webster pushed for free schools in his native Massachusetts, also with no success. In fact, the creation of free school systems in the United States would require a half century to come to fruition.

To fully understand the delay we must take a closer look at a few of the Enlightenment insights that were central to almost every post-revolution discussion about what the American republic might become. Within limits, it is possible to line the hall of fame philosophers into one of two camps in terms of their political theory: there were those who fit what has come to be called the modern liberal tradition, and those who embraced the somewhat older civic republican tradition. In terms of influence in the North American colonies, John Locke ranks as the leader of the modern liberals, Charles de Secondat Montesquieu represents the leader of the civic republicans.

As each camp sought to legitimize its views and present a well-argued alternative to feudalism, they focused on a concept that came to be called the “state of nature.” The idea behind this concept was that if one could rationally examine man in a natural state, one could then piece together how societies would have developed if the process had not been usurped by the power of kings, lords, and priests. Both modern liberals, like Locke, and civic republicans, like Montesquieu, wrote a great deal about the state of nature, but their views differed profoundly.

Locke argued that man’s first act in the forest would be to search for food, to gather acorns and apples and claim them as his property. Locke used this analysis to reason that man is essentially an economic being (and thus “pre-political”). What man required, therefore, was the freedom to enter into a contract with those who would agree to fairly govern society, leaving him free to engage his private economic pursuits.

Montesquieu saw the state of nature far differently. Rather than an arena where each man was out for himself, where each would inevitably try to acquire and claim all that he could as his own, Montesquieu argued that natural man’s first act would be to search for a friend, meaning man is essentially a social—or political—being.

The question of whether man was essentially political or economic aside, Montesquieu and Locke agreed that a republican form of government was best. But in the case of Locke and others of the modern liberal tradition, economic man’s role in government could be fairly limited to the periodic selection of representatives. In the case of Montesquieu and others of the civic republican tradition, man required a political role to play in order to lead a fulfilled life. Since modern society had grown beyond the possibility of re-creating the Athenian assembly, civic republicans determined that citizens could play a political role

through all manner of local associations that animate community life.

It should be obvious that civic republicans placed far more emphasis on the provision of education to improve citizens—since all citizens should rightfully strive to exercise a political voice. Among modern liberals, this was not nearly such an imperative, as Immanuel Kant’s often-quoted quip implies: “the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils. . . for such a task does not involve the moral improvement of man.”² Further, modern liberals placed an extraordinary high value on freedom, and for many this meant the freedom to choose whether or not to send one’s children to a school, for others it meant the freedom not to be burdened by taxes used to support the education of another man’s children. On the other hand, Montesquieu was so convinced that the results of a republican experiment would hinge on whether or not there was a system in place that could deliver “the full power of education” that he actually preferred a limited monarchy to a republic without adequate education.³

These contrasting views regarding education are probably best understood by looking at the educational views of America’s leading modern liberal, Alexander Hamilton, versus those of America’s leading civic republican, Thomas Jefferson. In the huge corpus of Hamilton’s work, there is very little reference to the nation’s youth. And what little there is focuses on the use that could be made of them, “at a tender age,” in the nation’s growing factories. By contrast, Jefferson was a staunch advocate of education:

And say, finally, whether peace is best preserved by giving energy to the government or information to the people. The last is most certain, and the most legitimate engine of government. Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order and they will preserve them.⁴

Hamilton and other modern liberals carried the day in Philadelphia when our Constitution was created. The document limited the political role of citizens to coming out to vote once every two years—and even this was initially reserved only for those who possessed sufficient property. Clearly the ascendancy of modern liberal views when our Constitution was adopted inhibited the development of an educational system. The Constitution made no reference to education.

Interestingly, however, modern liberal views did not remain ascendant. In fact between

1787 and 1850, they were steadily eroded by popular clamor for democratic reforms of the sort described by Montesquieu, Jefferson, and other civic republicans. Universal manhood suffrage was one, but there were many others: prison reform, religious disestablishment, park development, insane asylum reform, and the establishment of free schools.

Between 1836 and the end of the Civil War, virtually every northern state created a free common school system—and southern states created theirs shortly thereafter. This was the hey-day of the civic republican tradition in the United States. This was the era of “log-cabin presidents.” Writing in the mid-1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that democracy in America hinged on the vast array of local associations that were everywhere fast about the business of lobbying for appropriate and just policies. Said Tocqueville, “In every case, at the head of any new undertaking, where in France you would find the government, or in England some territorial magnate, in the United States you are sure to find an Association.”⁵

It is important to recognize the thinking that went into the creation of common schools across the country. To begin with the common school idea arose in the midst of dramatic change for the United States. The first Industrial Revolution was well on its way by the time Horace Mann began his crusade to promote free publicly funded common schools. During such an exciting and unpredictable time, Mann keenly tailored his promotion of common schools to include two messages. The first was that with the influx of large numbers of immigrants looking for work in American factories, common schools were necessary to provide a curriculum that would encourage all of America’s citizens to become contributing political participants. As such, the common schools were intended to deliver sophisticated literacy and numeracy skills that could in turn be wielded by citizens who wished to play a political role with their lives, whether that role was secretary of the County Wool Growers Association or secretary of state in Washington DC. The second message communicated by Mann was that the common schools would provide citizens of all socio-economic backgrounds a means for moving up the “socio-economic ladder.” This dual message captured the basic tension between Locke and Montesquieu regarding man’s economic or political nature, but it ultimately placed it within a rich civic republican tradition that recognizes that freedom in a democracy, without the ability to engage meaningfully in the democratic political process, is a severely limited freedom.

Educational historians, the late Lawrence Cremin in particular, have consistently pointed out that the idea that schools might be a catalyst to the development of economic well-being within citizens, or that they might be a kind of general contribution to the health of the economy, was a minor theme at best among the founders of state common school systems. The nation's schools were designed to support the political life of the nation, and any benefit to its economy was secondary. But things change.

Historical Perspectives: Economic Theory

Throughout the feudal era all decisions related to the economy were made on the basis of deeply-rooted traditions or coercive authority. Individuals understood the parameters within which their lives would be led. There was practically no moving above or beyond one's inherited role in life. The Enlightenment introduction of human freedom was hugely disruptive in many respects. It certainly worked catalytically on the infusion of risk into individual lives. What kind of life will I be able to create if I set out on my own? Will I be able to feed my family? If I make a product, will people buy it? Will I find work if I move to the city? The ascendancy of political systems premised on freedom enabled huge opportunities in the economic arena, though it also enabled the possibility of widespread poverty and starvation—and not just in periods of famine or war.

Almost overnight, as the Enlightenment took hold politically, something that never existed before was born. When Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, the world was first introduced to economic theory. Absent the power of tradition or entrenched authority, individuals looked for something—some explanation or observation—that might ameliorate the level of risk that came with a free economic market. At that moment, the “science” of economics was born.

The great and lasting impact of Adam Smith, the thing anyone remotely interested in economics should remember if nothing else, is the degree to which he convinced the world that natural “laws” governed economic activity, irrespective of any legislative or entrepreneurial role humans might play. For Smith, the laws of the market trumped all else. However, what Smith failed to account for is the idea of natural limits on the earth itself, or the fact that the earth's resources might be finite. Without this understanding, Smith assumed that economic activity would proceed in a self-correcting fashion in an ever upward mode. This assumption set in motion the idea that still animates virtually all mainstream

economic thought in the United States: a healthy economy is a growing economy. The cultural depth and force that this approach to economics acquired, partially because it was shared by virtually everyone in the west—capitalists, socialists, fascists, communists—for almost two centuries, must not be underestimated.

However, from the vantage point of the twenty-first century these Smithian notions—market laws trump everything, and an economy must grow to be healthy—increasingly are seen as questionable, at least by a growing minority of scholars in the academy. In fact, it is probably possible now for an economist to obtain promotion and tenure at an institution of higher education through the publication of work which suggests that market laws are not laws at all, but merely general principles that change according to circumstance (the 1970s and 80s stagflation experience is certainly a prime example) and that it is possible, even desirable, to orchestrate an economy on the principle of non-growth. Not too long ago these were radical ideas, although not “radical” in a Marxist sense, and this is an important point to clarify. Marx might challenge Smith and particularly his successors, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus, but not on the sanctity of market laws or on the growth principle. Marx was well persuaded that Smith was right as far as these ideas were concerned.

For all of the sophistication the discipline of economics has acquired over time, it is increasingly plagued by unpredictable dynamics. Most recently we witnessed unprecedented economic growth during the 1990s, but along with it came growth in the ranks of the poor in the United States and elsewhere, a phenomenon so obvious that even the staunchest advocates of growth economics have had to acknowledge this reality.⁶

Of course, one of the great advantages of participating in the discipline of economics is that the focus is so squarely on the future. It makes it easier to deal with unpleasant present realities: perhaps the growth in the number of poor citizens increased in the 1990s, but the growth benefits of that period will eventually be felt by all. When such economic prognostications prove to be wrong, it scarcely matters, for the prognosticators are already off predicting a new future. Besides, and here is another enduring legacy of Adam Smith, the poor in the United States are much better off than the poor in other places. Smith cast aside the mercantilist assumption that the wealth of nations lay in the accumulation of gold and silver. He almost single-handedly taught the world that the true wealth of nations lies in the production of goods and services. And in these terms, Smith was quick to point out,

England (and Scotland, his home) was very wealthy indeed.

Observe the accommodation of the most common artificer or day-labourer. . . all the different parts of his dress and household furniture, the coarse linen shirt he wears next to his skin, the shoes which cover his feet, the bed which he lies on. . . the kitchen-grate at which he prepares his victuals. . . all the other utensils of his kitchen, all the furniture of his stable, the knives and forks, the earthen or pewter plates. . . the glass window which lets in heat and the light, and keeps out the wind and the rain. Compared, indeed, with the most extravagant luxury of the great, his accommodation must no doubt appear extremely simple and easy; and yet it may be true, perhaps, that the accommodation of a European prince does not always so much exceed that of an industrious and frugal peasant, as the accommodation of the latter exceeds that of many an African King.⁷

Smith's enduring contribution with this passage was to augment an already growing tendency, since Locke in the seventeenth century, to view life as purely an economic endeavor. If England's poor have possessions that the poor of Africa do not, then they are better off than the poor of Africa. The same comparison continues to be made about the poor in the United States today: "They may be poor, but at least they have a car to drive, a refrigerator, and a TV. The poor in other parts of the world have none of these things." The extent to which an individual readily acknowledges these claims as obvious and true is also the extent to which that individual has bought into the Lockean-derived cultural assumption about life being primarily an economic endeavor. An individual looking at the world through a civic republican lens, on the other hand, might ask whether the poor in Africa enjoy a more coherent community life, whether they are able to develop skills and competencies in acquiring a subsistence living that garner the admiration and emulation of the young, as well as the respect of friends and neighbors. Or, an individual wielding civic republican perspectives might ask whether the poor in Africa are able to exercise a voice in the decisions that affect the way life unfolds around them.⁸

Such questions are not intended to condone or legitimize poverty. They need to be asked, however, because there is a distinction to be made between the poor and the "competently poor," to use an expression taken from Wendell Berry;⁹ and between the poor who have some political recourse versus those who have none. The point here is that

the business of legitimating huge discrepancies between the wealthy and the poor on the grounds that those in poverty are not as poor as poor elsewhere is imminently simplistic and obviously self-serving. There is a necessary economic dimension to life, to be sure, but it is not the only dimension that can render a life poor — or rich.

Just as Enlightenment political theorists projected a central role for education in the post-feudal world, the economic theorists who followed them did the same, though with somewhat less vigor. Smith believed that a common educational project could yield greater moral wherewithal and thus reduce the potential for conflict or abuse in a free economic market. Smith's successors, in particular, James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, believed that public schools needed to create a more competitive spirit among youth to create a vibrant economy. As it turned out, however, the real catalyst for shifting America's educational agenda from one designed to work in the service of democracy to one squarely in the service of the economy, came in the wake of new theory almost totally unrelated to politics or economics. It is to that development that we must now turn.

Darwin and the Re-Ascendancy of Modern Liberal Views

The hey-day of civic republicanism in America, the era of log-cabin presidents, the mass participation in local associations identified by Tocqueville, all faded quickly after the nation's Civil War. The day of the robber-barons arrived and, with it, an intellectual milieu fundamentally at odds with democratic sentiments and squarely in line with the modern liberal sentiments of Hamilton, Madison, and other constitutional architects. Much of the rationale for this re-ascendancy of liberal views came from unexpected quarters. As things unfolded, the economic emphasis of Locke's world view received significant legitimation from ideas related to Charles Darwin's great work of modern biology, *The Origin of Species*. Darwin never saw his efforts in anything other than biological terms, though that wasn't the case for many of his subsequent followers. Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner are two of the most prominent examples of men who ceaselessly translated evolutionary concepts into contemporary sociology. The end result was what we casually refer to as social Darwinism (it would have had more explanatory power if we had simply called it racism) and a severe blow to lingering ideas about the way schools might serve democratic ends.

Most social Darwinists came to see society as a kind of organism, with the individuals in society analogous to cells. Since all cells play an identifiable role in the health of the organ-

ism, all individuals have an identifiable role to play in the interest of a healthy society. This insight became the wellspring for all manner of attempts to “socially engineer” the school, the workplace, even the church.

Recall that it was at the height of Montesquieu’s influence in America—the 1830s—described and documented by Tocqueville, that we finally began to adopt a system of free common schools for all (with some lamentable exceptions). By the first decades of the twentieth century we were so convinced by Darwinian logic, so sure that each individual had an “evident and probable destiny,” to quote long-time Harvard president Charles Eliot, that we believed education had to be differentiated, not common, where individual strengths were accurately matched to societal needs.

It is interesting to note that the Darwinian strand of educational differentiation borrows only one of the two aspects of Plato’s view of educational differentiation. When describing his “noble lie” regarding the three classes of human beings, Socrates suggests that when a person does what he is born to do, it is both good for society and good for the individual.¹⁰ The Darwinian strand of educational differentiation seems to ignore the question of what is good for the individual. Instead, the individual is destined for a particular role, whether it is good for him or not. This perspective opens the door to a guilt-free adherence to a coldly meritocratic educational process focused on improving the economy.

In keeping with the earlier embrace of Locke’s views, America’s schools were increasingly designed to prepare students for economic roles. The idea that there might be a curriculum common to all citizens of a democracy was scarcely acknowledged in the heavily Darwinian milieu of the early twentieth century. And of course some individuals were more fit than others—those would receive a college-bound curriculum en route to the important jobs in society and government. Later in the century another Harvard president, James Conant, added more resolve to the development of meritocratic principles through his tireless promotion of gifted education.

The Communitarian Critique

The point here is that we have moved in a certain direction in this society, a direction first set by our founders in their selection of Lockean views to create a social praxis. The cultural development set in motion by those decisions has in effect promoted the idea that

we are a nation of individuals. The heavy emphasis on individualism—which Madison and Hamilton argued was sewn into our make-up from the outset—received an ideological boost from the ascendancy of social Darwinism. In fact, some scholars are convinced that American society has come to be dominated by a kind of hyper-individualism (the late Christopher Lasch referred to it as a “culture of narcissism”) and that the drawbacks from this have begun to seriously outnumber the benefits. Communitarian scholar Michael Walzer described our current circumstances this way:

We are perhaps the most individualist society that ever existed in human history. Compared certainly to earlier, and Old World societies, we are radically liberated, all of us. Free to plot our own course. To plan our own lives. To choose a career. To choose a partner or a succession of partners. To choose a religion or no religion. To choose a politics or an anti-politics. To choose a lifestyle—any style. Free to do our own thing, and this freedom, energizing and exciting as it is, is also profoundly disintegrative, making it difficult for individuals to find any stable communal support, very difficult for any community to count on the responsible participation of its individual members. It opens solitary men and women to the impact of a lowest common denominator, commercial culture. It works against commitment to the larger democratic union and also against the solidarity of all cultural groups that constitute our multiculturalism (Walzer, 1992, pp.11-12).¹¹

Walzer and others have collectively created a kind of critique of our modern circumstances which is generally described as communitarianism. At the heart of this critique is an argument that goes something like this: America’s preoccupation with acquisitive, or possessive, individualism is directly implicated in the demise of community in America. It has led to a fracturing of communal solidarity which in turn has resulted in the diminishment of a sense of political efficacy among citizens. Worse still, it has elevated the most privileged in American society while condemning historically oppressed groups to ever-more rigid socioeconomic circumstances. Because communitarian arguments call for a reconsideration of the value of community across the full spectrum of the human condition, because it calls for a repudiation of the racism that has infected the post-Darwinian development of American institutions, it has become a kind of catalyst for re-generating the strength of civic republicanism in the United States today, and a source of the rationale for those who would

like to see schools create a better balance in terms of serving both political and economic ends.

Communitarianism and Affirmative Action in Education

Among the educational policies that have worked to temper racist elements of the post-Darwinian American climate, affirmative action has probably been the most visible. While the issue has culminated in two recent Supreme Court decisions regarding the admissions policies at the University of Michigan,¹² the story of affirmative action in education begins with the efforts of committed, highly intelligent and courageous individuals such as Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall. Based on their tireless work, the issue of racism in education took center stage in the American conscience during the middle of the 20th century.¹³ People like Houston and Marshall refused to accept the callous, social Darwinist fiction that propped up the popular, yet questionable idea that members of the American elite held their positions of wealth and power simply and only because they earned them through hard work and applied intelligence, while others who were poor and oppressed somehow deserved to be so. Houston and Marshall, among others, set out to show that despite the claim that segregated schools were equal, one segment of American society received one form of educational treatment by the state (i.e. well funded schools and a vast array of educational experiences and opportunities), while another segment received a very different treatment (poverty stricken schools and severely constrained educational experiences and opportunities). And, they pushed the country to come to grips with the fact that a democratic and just society, if it were to continue to be so, must no longer ignore the problem of educational segregation and inequality. Ultimately, their work and sacrifices came to fruition when Marshall successfully argued before the Supreme Court that segregated schools were patently unfair and unconstitutional.¹⁴

Educational segregation and the hyper-individualist post-Darwinian thinking that helps to perpetuate it, stand in stark contrast to the communitarian call for a deeper understanding and recognition of a specific and robust form of social trust, one that helps to foster the desire or impulse to help one another. This communitarian impulse, this form of robust social trust—or what Robert Putnam refers to as “social capital”¹⁵ — fits neatly with the moral framework of educational desegregation described above, and it helps to ground the reasoning offered by the Supreme Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, its most recent case on

affirmative action in higher education. In fact, when discussing the merits of educational diversity, the Grutter Court carefully considers whether the character or make up of the university community impacts the educational process, and if it does, how, in turn, does it impact our civic life.¹⁶ Ultimately, the Court held that the racial make up of our nation's university student bodies does indeed shape, in fundamental ways, the quality of education received by students as well as the quality of our civic life. In explaining the responsibility that universities have in educating a diverse collection of students, Justice O'Connor writes, "[e]ffective participation by members of all racial and ethnic groups in the civic life of our Nation is essential if the dream of one Nation, indivisible, is to be realized."¹⁷

It is the communitarian impulse, we argue, that grounds the concern for the racial and ethnic make-up of university student bodies. It is the recognition that the cold adherence to social Darwinist models in university admissions policies fails to foster the kind of university communities that matter most; namely, university communities that richly represent all aspects of American society and that are, therefore, democratic and just. In effect, the Supreme Court's affirmation of diversity in education can be understood as the communitarian impulse applied to education. The Court's decision, in one respect, was no more than the formal recognition that the depth and breadth of our educational relationships matters, and that fostering these relationships through the educational process can lead to a renewal of the social trust that is the foundation of all democratic institutions. Justice O'Connor put it this way, "We have repeatedly acknowledged the overriding importance of preparing students for work and citizenship, describing education as pivotal to 'sustaining our political and cultural heritage' with a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of society."¹⁸

In some circles, affirmative action has been described as an unearned and undeserved benefit for those who are either not able or not diligent enough to make it on their own. In other circles it has been touted as a form of reparation for horrible past injustices. For our part, we hold that affirmative action in education is a social balance wheel. It is, at its foundation, a community-oriented educational effort. And, it arises in an age when the need for meaningful community renewal is greater than it has ever been, when the meteoric expansion of communication technologies seems paradoxical against the backdrop of our dissolving civic life, when internet companies have made it possible to do our shopping and dating from the isolated comfort of our bedrooms. Affirmative action in education represents an effort to offset this trend toward isolation. And, it contains a response to the

growing concern that we live in an age when our children are increasingly walled off from one another in gated communities and segregated school districts. In this age, affirmative action in education may be our last and best hope for reviving the communal soul of our nation and, thus, for providing our children with a society that cultivates their sense of belonging and resists the urge to isolate and segregate them.

Conclusion

One glaring difference between an educational system geared to augment the nation's economy and one designed to support the nation's political arrangements is that in the case of the former, it isn't necessary to deliver Montesquieu's "full power of education" across the entire spectrum of students. After all, there is a huge range of jobs in the economy that require little in the way of intellectual ability. How many times have you heard opponents of open and equal educational access justify educational inequality by saying, "well, someone has to sweep the streets," or, "someone has to flip burgers at McDonald's?" Ultimately, such expressions give voice to the idea that schools need not adequately teach all children.

In an educational system designed to enhance the political life of the nation, there is much more pressure to educate everyone well and fully. What this suggests is that schools may need to go beyond a focus on educational diversity and make a much tighter curricular connection between the community that supports the school and the subject matter that students engage. How might traditional school subjects be used to illuminate the forces affecting one's community and how might they point toward solutions to a community's most vexing problems? While they are definitely the exception to the rule at this point, there have been dramatic examples of community-based or place-based units and lessons that have been deeply impactful from a community standpoint, as well as being effective springboards to the construction of deep-level student understanding.¹⁹

But shifting the aim of America's educational system is a large undertaking. To get a glimpse of the magnitude of the task, one need only look at recent developments in the European Union, where economists are asking school systems and universities to adopt a policy of "convergence," so that all will teach to similar standards. Those standards have been derived according to an assessment of their contribution to creating what the EU economy needs from its citizens. One doesn't need to step back far to see that this relation-

ship is probably just the reverse of what it should be—but in a culture that sets economic “laws” above all else, in a culture that allows the needs of the economy to trump all other needs, citizens in the service of the economy doesn’t seem quite so out of step. And, if anything, the growing fears about returning to a “flat” world where anyone with energy and ingenuity can steal market share will likely strengthen the resolve of those with power to wed the educational system to the economy by more heartily embracing the modern liberal idea that man is essentially an economic being.

Still, the growing disparity between the rich and poor within and between nations, a disparity that has long since surpassed feudal proportions, suggests that civic republican-inspired adjustments to the educational enterprise may not be as far off as one might think.

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Notes

- 1 Thomas Jefferson to William Jarvis, September 20, 1820, in Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, v. 10, 161.
- 2 This is from an essay Kant wrote in 1760 entitled “Perpetual Peace.” See Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 112-113.
- 3 Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 154.
- 4 Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, December 20, 1787, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, v 12, 478.
- 5 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, Mentor Books, 1956), 198.
- 6 Here the British finance journalist, Martin Wolf, serves as a good example. One would be hard-pressed to find a more adamant defender of market laws and growth economics. See his *Why Globalization Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Wolf, when

speaking about the poor in high-income nations, shifts to the use of the term “unskilled,” without the slightest indication that there may be a connection between a societal embrace of pro-growth policy and the extent to which citizens become skilled or unskilled (pp.168-169). Further, he cites numerous World Bank studies to conclude that people are better off as a result of globalization, with the possible exception of sub-Saharan Africa, “partially because of disease and partly because of the continent’s failure to grow” (p. 171). Wolf proves nothing quite so well as the fact that it is possible to blame the victim at a societal, indeed, even a continental, level. Doing business as it does and in the manner it employs, of course, renders the studies commissioned and published by the World Bank susceptible to charges of conflict of interest, a fact that renders most of Wolf’s arguments seriously weakened.

- 7 Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 9-10.
- 8 James Scott argues that the grand schemes intended to improve the human condition in the Third World consistently have failed largely because they operate from the same simplistic assumption—that material acquisition is what motivates all people. See his *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Jane Jacobs observed that third world development strategies between 1950 and 1980 were merely efforts to replicate the success of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe after World War II. These efforts were undertaken without recognizing that “fixing” an economy and changing the assumptions upon which one is built are two totally different tasks. See her *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984), 7-8.
- 9 Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989) 116. Berry wrote about blacks in the South who lived very poorly, but nevertheless developed great competence in the complex tasks associated with nineteenth and early twentieth century agriculture. The same can be said for the peasants of eighteenth and nineteenth century England who, dispossessed by enclosure and technological innovations, migrated to cities to take up jobs so defined by Smith’s “division of labour” as to be totally devoid of any skilled dimensions. One significant arena for taking pride in one’s life and exhibiting the dignity that goes with a sense of accomplishment was removed from peasant lives just

as it was removed from the lives of blacks who made the northward migration to the Midwest industrial cities.

- 10 Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 94.
- 11 Robert Dahl provides further evidence of this in his little book *How Democratic is the U. S. Constitution?* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. He documents the fact that the U. S. has slipped to the bottom of the top 25 “first world” nations in virtually every measure that defines a democracy.
- 12 *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003 and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003
- 13 Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975)
- 14 *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954
- 15 Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone” *Journal of Democracy* (1995) 6:1, 65-78
- 16 In writing the *Grutter* majority opinion, Justice O’Connor builds on Justice Powell’s analysis in his lone and deciding opinion in the landmark *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* case. In this case Powell raises the importance of the connection between educational diversity and national civic life when he writes, “[the] nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure’ to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples.”
- 17 *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003
- 18 *Grutter*, 2003
- 19 See, as a few examples, Lauri Johnson, Mary E. Finn, and Rebecca Lewis, *Urban Education With an Attitude* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); Paul Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); or Greg Smith, “Place-Based Education: Learning To Be Where We Are” *Phi Delta Kappan*, (2002) 83, 584-594.