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# Introduction

Diversity in the United States did not begin in the late twentieth century. As this historical survey will show, American children have always come from a variety of racial ethnic, religious, and other communities and this fact has had an impact, albeit a changing impact, on their school experience. The impact of group identity on children's schooling has been shaped by at least four factors:

1. The degree of difference between the cultures of children's home communities and the cultures of their schools;
2. The meaning and value both communities assign to their differences;
3. The political and social relations between the two communities, including the degree to which one has the power to impose its will on the other;
4. The agency of the home community, that is, the active efforts of community leaders, parents, and sometimes children to resist, change, supplement, or replace what is offered by the school.

## DIVERSITY AND SCHOOLING TO THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN AGE OF CONGRUENCE

Diverse from its beginnings, the land that would become the United States was home to dozens of indigenous cultures and colonized by Spanish, French, Swedish, Dutch, Russian, and English speaking Europeans. At the close of the American Revolution, the new republic was populated not only by the English, but also by Native Americans of many tribes or nations, African Americans both free and enslaved, Welsh, Scots, Irish, Scotch Irish, French, Spanish, Germans, Poles, Italians, Scandinavians, and other ethnic groups as well as by Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, Jews, Quakers, Moravians, and a wide variety of other religious sects and denominations.[1] Despite the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity of the United States in its colonial and early national periods, there was little conflict between the communities from which

children came and the schools to which they went. Indeed, at no time has there been greater congruence between community and school. This was true for two reasons: First, many children did not go to school at all, but were educated at home or apprenticed to a trusted neighbor. Second, children who did go to school attended institutions chosen, perhaps even created, by their parents, as public schools did not exist until well into the nineteenth century.

Before the coming of the public school, wealthy parents hired tutors for their children or, after the mid-eighteenth century, sent them to private academies. Other parents joined with relatives or neighbors to hire a teacher or sent their children to a nearby dame school, to a school sponsored by their church or synagogue, or, if the children were boys, to a New England town or Latin grammar school.[2] Whether children were taught in a neighbor's kitchen, an African American church, or a private academy, the curriculum, language of instruction, teaching methods, discipline, religious training, differential (and usually inferior) treatment of girls—indeed, the entire culture of the school was compatible, if not identical, with the culture of the home. It was also compatible with the social, ethnic, and religious community in which the home was embedded.

The congruence between family, community, and school gave children the advantage of an easy transition from home to school and an education free of cultural conflict. However, there were also significant disadvantages. In an environment in which home, school, and community were so close as to be almost indistinguishable, children had little chance to learn about diverse lifestyles or different values. Moreover, in an era in which all schooling was private and voluntary, girls suffered serious gender discrimination in education and many children, including a disproportionate number of the poor and virtually all of the enslaved African Americans, had no schooling at all.

The congruence between school and community experienced by most children before the coming of the public school was not, however, experienced by all. The relatively small number of native American children who were educated in Christian missions found their schools not only different from but hostile to their traditional community life and, indeed, deliberately destructive of that life. In what would later become the southwestern states, Spanish speaking Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries, assisted by Spanish soldiers, established fortified border settlements that served as church, home, workplace and school for Christianized Indians of all ages. Here, under strict discipline and military guard, children were forced to adopt the dress, work habits and sex roles as well as the religion of Spanish colonial authorities (Weber 1982; Webb 1982). In the English colonies Protestant clergymen undertook similar

educational activities, although on a smaller scale and without overt military support (Axtell 1984, 54–57; Salisbury 1972; Szasz 1988). Congregationalist minister Eleazar Wheelock, better known as the founder of Dartmouth College, established a boarding school in Lebanon, Connecticut in 1754 to train Native American boys to become ministers and missionaries and native American girls to become their wives and assistants. The young people were separated from their homes and communities so that a new lifestyle featuring male agriculture, female domesticity, and Protestant individualism could be substituted for traditional "uncivilized" hunting and gathering communal lifestyles (Wheelock 1767; Szasz 1980).

These early educational experiments reflected not only the great differences between Native American and European colonial cultures but, more importantly, the negative evaluation of the former by the latter. They also reflect the imbalance in political and military power that enabled Europeans to impose their will on at least some elements of the indigenous population. Despite the imbalance in power, there was resistance. In the Spanish Empire resistance took the form of armed uprisings. In both the Spanish and the English colonies, students protested by running away (despite harsh punishments if they were caught) and by reverting to native beliefs and lifestyles at the earliest opportunity (Wheelock 1767; Szasz 1980; Ronda 1977, 66–84). Despite questionable results, missionaries and, later, the United States government continued to isolate and acculturate Native American children in boarding schools throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries (Prucha 1976, 265–91; Szasz 1977, 60–80).

## The Dominance of the Public School: Conflict Replaces Congruence

Beginning in New England and the Midwest and spreading after the Civil War to the South and the farthest frontiers, state-supported public schools gradually replaced families and private or religious schools as the educators of most children in the United States. By the early twentieth century, ninety percent of all children who were in school were in public schools. Moreover, by the early twentieth century the percentage of school aged children actually attending school had increased enormously, as most states passed and enforced compulsory attendance laws. Often marginal before 1850, schooling now became increasingly important in the lives of American children.[3] The relationship between home and school communities also became increasingly important, as did issues of inclusion, exclusion, and acculturation.

Most public schools were controlled by English-speaking, native-born, middle-class, white Protestant men, men who felt duty bound to inculcate all students with the behavior and values of their own community. Students who looked, spoke, and behaved like the "schoolmen" continued to experience congruence between home and school. However, many students experienced conflict rather than congruence. These students included African Americans in the South and, increasingly, in the North as well; Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans incorporated after the Mexican and Spanish-American Wars; voluntary immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and, in much greater numbers, Europe; and working-class children and girls of all social classes, the last two groups previously underrepresented but now visible in the classroom in unprecedented numbers. Clearly, the ethnic, class, and gender communities from which these children came were different from the schools to which they went.

The relationship between children's home and school communities was affected, as already noted, not only by the degree of difference between the two, but also by the meaning each assigned to that difference. African American children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not differ significantly in language or behavior from white children of similar social class. However, the white community saw darker skin color as such an important and stigmatizing difference that they barred African American children from the new public education altogether or relegated them to separate and grossly inferior schools. White immigrant children were admitted into public schools. However, their native languages and traditions were interpreted as dangerously un-American and were therefore vigorously suppressed.[4]

Even "minority" children whose families wanted them to assimilate into "mainstream" American often found their encounters with the public school painful. Teachers and textbooks ignored or denigrated their heritage and, by implication, their families and themselves. Catholics, Jews, and children of other religious minorities were marginalized by Protestant worship in the schools. Some problems were caused by prejudice on the part of teachers or stereotyping on the part of the school, as when African Americans, immigrants, working-class children, and girls of all social groupings were assigned to vocational and other nonacademic tracks, regardless of their abilities or preferences. Other problems were caused by cultural conflicts: for example, some ethnic and religious communities found coeducation, physical education, and other common school practices culturally unacceptable. Less tangible but equally troubling were conflicts over values; public schools stressed competition and individual achievements, while some ethnic communities stressed cooperation and valued the welfare of the family or the group more than individual achievement.

Communities whose children experienced these and other difficulties reacted in a variety of ways. Recognizing the political component in educational decisions, immigrant communities marshalled what political resources they could to make the changes they saw as desirable. Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Buffalo, and other cities with large German-speaking populations organized successful political campaigns—including rallies, petitions, and parades—to get the German language into the public school curriculum as a "foreign" language, a language of instruction, or both (Kloss 1977; Troen 1975, 55–62). The German community could do so because they controlled a significant number of votes in these cities, because they had a well-developed institutional structure, and because their educational, economic, and social status was, for an immigrant community, relatively high. The low status but large and politically sophisticated working-class community of East European Jews in New York City was also successful in at least one attempt to influence their children's education. Allied with Tammany Hall politicians, thousands of children and adults engaged in school boycotts and street violence as well as more traditional electoral politics to block a school reform program (the Gary Plan) they feared would consign their children to vocational rather than academic education (Cohen and Mohl 1979, 35–66).

No community fought longer or harder to influence their children's education in the public schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than the African American community. Led by ministers, business men, and a cadre of strong women, African Americans fought first for access to public education even if it was segregated, then for the improvement of segregated facilities (including qualified black rather than unqualified white teachers), and finally for integrated education. As early as the 1850s African Americans in Buffalo, New York, conducted a campaign for integrated education that included a "sit-in" by two young teenaged girls in a hostile white school. In the South, where political action could result, literally, in death, African American teachers in segregated schools substituted academic for "industrial" education and introduced African and African American history when they could (Webber 1978; Anderson 1988; White 1969).

Communities worked to supplement as well as to change the education offered their children by the public schools. Settlement houses, churches, women's clubs, and other community institutions set up programs to prepare young children for entry into the schools and to support their continuing progress there. African American women's clubs made the establishment of nursery schools and kindergartens a priority. In settlements such as New York's Educational Alliance, Jewish communities taught English to preschoolers and to newly arrived school-age immigrants. Mexican American

communities established "little schools" to give their Spanish-speaking children a basic English vocabulary before entering the public schools (Giddings 1988; Brumberg 1986; Ratterway 1984, 32–33). Communities established supplementary programs not only to prepare children for public school but also to give them knowledge they would not find in the public schools. Scandinavians, Jews, the Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, and East European nationalist societies set up after-school and weekend programs to teach traditional language, religion, and culture. Socialists in both immigrant and native-born communities set up socialist Sunday schools to present their children with an alternative to the capitalistic orientation of the public school (Fishman 1980; Fishman and Nahirny 1966/1978; Teitelbaum and Reese 1983, 429–49).

Some communities organized not only to change or supplement public schooling, but also to provide substitutes or alternatives. Wealthy and socially privileged communities maintained many private, usually single-sex, schools that taught not only academic subjects, but also the speech patterns, sports, and social graces essential to the community's lifestyle. In the African American community, private academies like the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia (active in the latter half of the nineteenth century), trained teachers and served as showcases to convince doubting whites that African Americans could profit from higher education. Roman Catholics established extensive networks of parochial schools that educated thousands throughout the nation, especially in industrial cities with large immigrant populations (Perkins 1983, 18–33; Buetow 1970).

## Schools and Communities after 1950: Increasing Complexity

After 1950 the relationship between children's diverse home communities and the public schools became increasingly complex. This was true because "minority" communities became more varied and more vocal and because educational ideologies became more controversial and more overtly political. It was also true because education became more important. With the decline of well-paid industrial jobs and the rise of the new "information economy," young people needed education through high school and beyond, not only for social mobility, but for economic survival.

The number of children from recognizable "minority" communities rose rapidly after 1950, as did the variety of communities from which they came. Many children still came from the older racial and ethnic communities with which schools were familiar (though by no means comfortable). However,

others now came from newly self-conscious and politically organized communities of feminists, lesbians and gays, and persons with disabilities. A massive wave of Asian and Latino (as opposed to earlier, predominantly European) immigration and a growing militant Christian fundamentalist community added further to the already wide range of group life in the United States and in American public schools.

Further complexities stemmed from the fact that neither the older communities nor the newer ones were static or homogeneous. Class, gender, and political conflicts within communities followed their children into the classroom. So did conflicts among "minority" communities themselves and between these communities and the changing, self-defined "mainstream" of American life. The relationship between racial, ethnic, and religious groupings and the schools was further complicated by the progressive blurring of boundaries. As mixed marriages increased, increasing numbers of children entered the schools with multiple or changing group identities.

By the early 1990s a quarter of all school age children were racial minorities, a proportion experts expected to rise to thirty percent by the year 2000, and over a hundred different languages were spoken in the schools (Bennett 1990, 15). Old certainties were no longer certain: a "black" child might be African American—or he might be a member of a family recently arrived from Haiti, Cuba, Nigeria, Ethiopia, or the Dominican Republic. A teenager might identify herself as a young woman, a lesbian, a Latino, a Catholic, or a member of the middle class, or as any combination of these sometimes conflicting identities at different times and under different circumstances. Clearly, the educator who hoped to understand the students of the late twentieth century, whatever his or her own community affiliations, faced a challenging task.

Parents, students, and community leaders, too, faced a challenging task, since, like their predecessors, they had to cope with schools that were culturally different from and politically more powerful than themselves. Some accepted American schooling as they found it, despite cultural conflicts and unequal treatment, either because they lacked the language skills, time, and other resources to attempt change or, especially if they were voluntary immigrants, because they believed that the schools would, in fact, prepare their children for success in the new environment. As in the past, others sought to change public schools, to supplement them, or, less frequently, to create substitutes for them.

The relationship between "minority" communities and schools was more complex than in the past not only because diversity was greater, but also because community activism was more intense. In the 1960s and 1970s African Americans, followed by Mexican Americans, Native Americans, women, gays

and lesbians, and the disabled formed national movements to promote pride in their group identities, to critique their treatment in "mainstream" society, and to win social, political, economic, and educational equality. These groups made educational demands—including the study of their history and present status in the school curricula, equal access to all educational programs, and respectful and effective instruction for their children—and these demands became integral parts of broad national movements for social and political rights. These demands also became part of national as well as local debates about allocation of resources, educational priorities, group as opposed to individual rights (affirmative action), and changing definitions of national identity.[5]

In the twentieth century, as in the nineteenth, self-conscious and organized communities used numbers, votes, demonstrations, and other political resources to change the education offered their children in the public schools. Community pressure, combined with a relatively liberal political atmosphere, resulted in significant improvements in the 1960s and 1970s. In the decades that followed, improvements were also facilitated by changing educational personnel and ideologies. Although still badly underrepresented, especially in leadership positions, women and members of minority racial and ethnic communities were becoming visible as scholars and as teachers and administrators in public schools, where some became agents of change. Perhaps more important, the long dominant ideology of the public school as enforcer of the melting pot was challenged. Many educators ("mainstream" and "minority") now advocated one of the many variants of cultural pluralism instead, suggesting that schools should recognize, even support, multiple lifestyles and belief systems.

The relationship between communities and schools in the late twentieth century became more complex also because the federal government, for the first time, became heavily involved. The problems of children from educationally disadvantaged communities were addressed in the 1960s and 1970s by a series of federal court decisions, laws, and policies, beginning with the school desegregation decision of 1954 and continuing with *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), which required schools to provide equal educational opportunity for children who spoke languages other than English; Title I (1972), which provided additional resources for poor children; Title IX (1972), which guaranteed women equal access to most educational programs; and PL 94-142 (1975), which specified educational rights for children with disabilities. The politically conservative 1980s saw funding and enforcement for many of these and other federal educational initiatives cut. However, the role of the federal government in mediating many aspects of the relationship between diverse communities and the schools seemed likely to continue.

Some communities continued their efforts not only to change public education, but also to create substitutes for it. Angry and frustrated at the public school's continuing failure to educate many of their children, African American parents and educators created independent, often African-centered, "alternative schools" (Lomotey and Brooks 1988, 163–78). The fastest growing alternative schools, however, were the Christian schools founded by Protestant fundamentalists who opposed the secularism and what they considered the loose discipline and morals of the public schools. Ironically, as new culturally specific alternatives to the public schools opened, older alternative schools found their existence threatened by changing neighborhoods and rising costs. As their original immigrant clientele moved away, Catholic schools in inner-city parishes closed their doors, or opened them to children of different ethnic, even different religious backgrounds. Elite single-sex private schools responded to economic and social pressures by becoming coeducational and by admitting racial, religious, and ethnic minorities formerly excluded (Wagner 1990; Kraushaar 1972). In the 1990s, however, as in the 1890s, most American children were in public schools. Therefore it was—and is—mainly in the public schools that the complex relationships between communities, schools, and children must be addressed. By calling attention to the variety of old and new communities represented in American schools and to the emerging educational research about those communities, this book contributes to the ongoing conversation about diversity and schooling in the United States.

We are committed to a thriving public sphere in which the voices of many can be heard. Our goal here is to let these voices move through debates about/with public education. This text contributes to this centering. We ask teachers, scholars, and students to join us in infusing diverse voices into a thriving democratic public sphere. With this we invite you into our text.

## Notes

1. For figures on immigrant and racial minority populations over time, see Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).

2. For a summary view of colonial education, see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607–1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

3. On the origins and growth of public schooling, see Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society 1789–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); and H. Warren Button and Eugene F.

Provenzo, Jr., *History of Education and Culture in America,* 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989).

4. Educational deprivation of African Americans and other racial minorities is documented in Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: A History of Race and Education in the United States*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977). For the impact of schooling on various European immigrant communities, see Bernard J. Weiss, ed., *American Schooling and the European Immigrant, 1840–1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) and Robert Carlson, *The Quest for Conformity: Americanization through Education* (New York: Wiley, 1975).

5. A useful history of some of the social movements of the late twentieth century and the issues they raised is Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Press, 1990).

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