

The Systematic Destruction of American Education

A Book Review by Dr. John R. Fawcett, Jr.

The Leipzig Connection, by Paolo Lionni and Lance J. Klass. Portland, OR, Heron Books, 104 pp. (P.O. Box 563, Portland, OR 97207)

The answer to the question, what is wrong with education in the United States, has already been provided by a number of educators from Arthur Bester to Russell Kirk. The answer to the question, what caused the rot in American education in the first place, is supplied by Paolo Lionni and Lance J. Klass in an excellent, well-documented, and straight-to-the-point book entitled *The Leipzig Connection*.

Tracing the educational psychology presently in vogue, and serving as the underpinning for most of our present educational practices, to the work of Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt in his laboratory in Leipzig, Germany, from 1875 to 1925, Lionni and Klass describe not only how Wundt corrupted education, but also how he and his disciples impressed the corruptions on the American educational system. The corruption stems from Wundt's teachings that man is devoid of spirit and self-determinism, that he is merely the summation of his experiences. The impression upon American education was accomplished by Wundt's students who returned to the United States to teach.

The first of Wundt's students to return and teach in the United States was G. Stanley Hall who returned in 1883 to teach at Johns Hopkins University, and who established the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1887, and who became president of Clark University in 1892.

Hall and others of Wundt's students had little trouble securing positions in major American universities due to the prestige of having studied in Germany. In these positions, they trained many PhDs in psychology.

John Dewey studied under Hall at Johns Hopkins. He received his PhD in psychology from that university. John Dewey went on to become the leading figure in American education while teaching at Teachers College of Columbia University.

James McKeen Cattell, another of Wundt's students, returned to this country in 1887. By 1891, Cattell had become head of the psychology department of Columbia University. While at Columbia, he supervised 344 successful doctoral candidates in psychology.

James Earl Russell, a student of Wundt's, became Dean of Teachers College of Columbia University in 1897, a position he was to hold for the next 30 years while it, Teachers College, Columbia University, became the largest institution in the world for the training of teachers. There, Russell hired Edward Lee Thorndike who had been trained by several of Wundt's students at Wesleyan University, and who later provided the literature of education with such gems as "Artificial exercises like drills on phonetics, multiplication tables, and formal writing movements are used to a wasteful degree."

Although Wundt's students and students of his students were well positioned by the start of this century to spread their brand of psychology throughout the rapidly growing American system of education, they would not have been nearly so successful had they lacked funding. And it is in recounting the marriage of the Wundtians and Rockefeller money that Lionni

and Klass perform a great service to those of us interested in another question. How did the rot spread so wide and so fast?

It spread wide and fast due largely to the choice of people John D. Rockefeller made to distribute his wealth, and the choices they made regarding to whom to distribute it.

By 1887, Rockefeller had employed Frederick Taylor Gates, a Baptist minister, to handle requests for Rockefeller money, and, at the same time, to do all he could to improve the Rockefeller image. In 1902, Gates, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and others established The General Education Board to promote education mainly in the South. To this board, John D. Rockefeller contributed one million dollars. The General Education Board was soon contributing money for scholarships to Columbia University at the request of Dean James Earl Russell. This was only the start of the outpouring of Rockefeller money which was to enable Teachers College of Columbia University to have such a great effect on American education. In September, 1902, Rockefeller established a \$250,000 endowment for the college, and promised to match dollar for dollar up to \$250,000 all money contributed to the college by others during the next two years.

In 1916, Abraham Flexner, who was then employed by The General Education Board, proposed the establishment of a new school from which Latin and Greek would be barred and in which the teaching of English grammar would be dropped, and classical literature ignored while history and literature would be taught in new ways. In 1920, this school came into being as The Lincoln School, and Teachers College of Columbia University used it as a laboratory school in which Wundtian psychology and Rockefeller money combined to construct a new curriculum and develop new methods. Thousands of educators visited this school. Even though Rockefeller poured five million dollars into it and sent four of his five sons to it, one of whom later complained, that he was not taught how to read at the school, The Lincoln School was closed in 1946. But from 1920-1946 a generation of teachers and educators attending Teachers College had been taught that The Lincoln School was the type school they should run back home. 1920 1946

Meanwhile, the rot was being spread through the efforts of Dewey's disciples at Teachers College of Columbia University through such pronouncements as the following by Harold Rugg: "Through the schools of the world we shall disseminate a new conception of government — one that will embrace all of the collective activities of men; one that will postulate the need for scientific control and operation of economic activities in the interest of all people." Both Rugg and George S. Counts spent much time as faculty members calling for a new social order to be built through the schools.

By 1953, about one-third of all presidents and deans of accredited teacher training schools were graduates of Teachers College, Columbia University. *

It is these men and others trained by them who Lionni and Klass point out are making decisions that influence great numbers of people, men who believe and teach that man is merely a stimulus-response animal.

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