

Lawrence A. Cremin. *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988. Pp.xiii + 781. Indexed. Hardcover.

The publication of *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* marked the completion of Lawrence A. Cremin's mammoth trilogy on the history of American education. Altogether, the noted author devoted twenty-three years to the trilogy, the first two books of which are *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) and *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

This latest book deals with the broad array of American institutions and individuals who have educated others since about 1876. It includes discussions of such important educational institutions as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its counterpart, the YWCA, Salvation Army schools, settlement schools, company schools, nursery schools, and public and parochial grade schools and colleges. Other educational influences discussed range from post-Civil War Reconstruction to federal anti-poverty programs begun during the 1960s; from Darwinism to foreign religious missions; from President Harry S. Truman's Commission on Higher Education to federal and scientific efforts to improve agriculture; from the Industrial Revolution to the Chautauqua movements; from Sigmund Freud and Benjamin Spock to museums, libraries, playgrounds, and summer camps; from international expositions to print and electronic media; from the rise of natural science to the recent notion of the "importance of investment in human beings as a major factor in economic growth and development" (p. 424).

In other words, Cremin's book deals with nearly every imaginable form of education, both formal and informal. The book provides an episodic, almost kaleidoscopic account of American education in the broadest sense, tied together brilliantly by summaries and insightful commentary.

One example of an influential institution is the church, which the author believes has played an extremely important educational role through Sunday schools, summer camps, revival meetings, and other activities. He calls the fundamentalist Bible Institute "one of the most innovative

educational institutions of the era, pioneering in the use of new technologies such as gospel wagons, correspondence courses, radio broadcasting, and missionary aviation" (p. 36). He also discusses the turn-of-the-century shift by many American churches away from fundamentalism toward more liberal, secular views, and the subsequent "broadening of fundamentalism into a social movement" (p. 41). This shift was personified by William Jennings Bryan and his fight against the teaching of evolution in schools. These are only two of a large number of issues included in Cremin's account of the educational functions of churches in American society.

Repeatedly, the author describes the ability of individuals and groups, both public and private, to effect change in educational processes. Personal and professional fatalism, the malaise that so permeates our modern society and, in particular, the formal education establishment, does not manifest itself in Cremin's writing. Instead, while he gives some credence to chance events and relationships, he appears to believe that purposeful actions resulting from individual and group volition have profoundly influenced the ways in which people become educated:

I have tried steadfastly to avoid the related sins of Whiggishness and anachronism: what happened in the past century of American educational history was neither inexorable nor foreordained; it was the outcome of the particular combinations of people, politics, and chance that mark all of human history. (pp. x, xi)

Cremin provides a wide-ranging account of the motivations and methods of the people and institutions who have intentionally and unintentionally educated the public, but he is considerably more cautious in his assessments of the results of these educational processes. He demonstrates justifiable concern about the results of education, but he is keenly aware of the difficulties inherent in identifying causative relationships:

The sources of behavior are almost always multiple, though education is frequently one of them; and the sources of education are multiple too, so that it is rare that one can determine on any one-to-one basis the precise outcome of any particular educational effort or the precise educational source of any particular behavior. (p. 294)

One of the premises of the book, as reflected by its title, is that as the United States became increasingly urban, city life had more to do with the shaping of education than any other single factor. The author notes that between 1890 and 1980 the percentage of Americans living in cities rose from thirty to seventy-five, resulting in "the ubiquitous and incessant education implicit in the very nature of metropolitan life" (p. 9). Cremin relates many American educational phenomena to the urbanization of the nation, but he fails to make his case completely for metropolitanism as the primary determinant of the salient characteristics of education. He does argue persuasively, however, that urbanization significantly affected the character of many, though not all, of our most important educational forces, both formal and informal. In the end, the author manages to convince the reader that urbanization may have been the single most influential factor on educational change in America over the past century or so, if not on education itself.

Cremin appears to place but small importance on the influence of educational research on the practice of education. He mentions G. Stanley Hall's role in calling attention to adolescence as a developmental stage, he discusses briefly Herbert Spencer's advocacy of scientific research, and he appears to attribute some significance to educational testing. He says little else about research, however, and in the final analysis, his cursory treatment of educational research probably says more about the modest influence of research on educational practice during the period covered than about any possible biases on the part of the author.

To the contrary, the book captures the essence of the progressive educational movement perhaps better than any book of its type. Significantly, Cremin argues that the main principles of progressivism still live in American education, a point all too often overlooked or misunderstood by teachers and educational scholars. It is gratifying also to read the author's highly sensitive and insightful account of the educational plight of women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and immigrants. As in other areas, a great deal of his commentary about the education of these people centers on informal modes of education. Cremin says little about teacher training in American education, the importance of which he appears to undervalue.

Likewise, this book says little about music as an educative force. The author does discuss in a general way the founding of nineteenth-century cultural institutions, which he claims were oriented more toward "so-called world-class standards in art, music, and literature than toward indigenous standards, with the result that these centers failed to encourage the vernaculars of American cultural life" (p. 444). Professional orchestras and opera companies are not mentioned specifically in this context, but presumably they are implicit in the discussion. Neither the important education efforts of orchestral conductor Theodore Thomas nor are the more popular musical organizations like professional and town bands mentioned.

Cremin also notes the federal Work Progress Administration's preference for European art music in the twentieth century. He discusses the "cultural explosion" following World War II, when music critic Harold C. Shonberg and other lamented the effects of that movement on artistic standards. He also discusses how jazz, along with certain other types of art such as the paintings of Grandma Moses, eventually moved from the popular realm into the world of the artistic elite. His discussion of the growing support for the National Endowment for the Arts during the 1970s reminds readers of the rapidity of change and the potentially fickle nature of political support for the arts in this country.

Cremin says little about music education in the schools. He does mention singing instruction as a late-nineteenth-century curricular subject, an increase in elementary school music in the early twentieth century, and a "plethora of athletic teams, orchestral, choral, and dramatic groups" in the 1950s. Nowhere does he mention general music classes, music appreciation classes, or even school bands, the most popular type of school performing group throughout most of the twentieth century. There is no mention, either, of foreign influences on music education, such as those of Suzuki, Dalcroze, Orff, or Kodály.

Cremin's failure to treat adequately music and other discipline-specific types of education results from his tendency to discuss nationwide movements and governmental efforts rather than local happenings. Music education programs, especially those found in schools, are typically grounded in localities rather than in federal programs.

Readers of this book should expect neither a concise nor a thorough history of American education during the years covered; the author's scope is far too broad for either. Rather, Cremin continually reminds readers of the highly complex and individualistic nature of education:

what was taught was not always what was learned, and vice versa. And when what was taught was actually learned, it was always learned in context and hence learned individually. (p. 523)

The approach (and even the titles) used in all three books in this trilogy are reminiscent of Daniel Boorstin's seminal trilogy on American history, which is similarly characterized by its breadth of scope.¹ This approach enabled Cremin to present a picture of education not found in other books on the history of American education. For that reason, his trilogy should be read by serious practitioners and scholars of education and music education. He has succeeded in portraying the American schools as an absolutely necessary but far from sole agency for education in this country. Moreover, his holistic approach to the history of education should broaden the horizons of music education historians, whose literature to date tends to focus almost exclusively on American public school music education. There is much to be learned from Cremin's efforts.

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¹Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958); *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).