Books

Cremin's American *Paideia*

JURGEN HERBST

AMERICAN EDUCATION: THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE, 1607–1783. *By Lawrence Cremin. HarperCollins. Paper, $12.95.*
AMERICAN EDUCATION: THE NATIONAL EXPERIENCE, 1783–1876. *By Lawrence Cremin. HarperCollins. Paper, $12.95.*
AMERICAN EDUCATION: THE METROPOLITAN EXPERIENCE, 1876–1980. *By Lawrence Cremin. HarperCollins. $35. Paper, $17.95.*
POPULAR EDUCATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THE INGLIS AND BURTON LECTURES. *By Lawrence Cremin. HarperCollins. $17.95.*

Three massive volumes aspiring to sum up the American educational experience of 373 years, presented and interpreted by one historian in an effort that stretched over nearly a quarter of a century, now weighing in with 2,076 closely printed pages—this surely is a monumental achievement reminding us of the multi-volume histories produced by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians. Few contemporary scholars, I dare say, would have thought it likely that we should see again such a comprehensive narrative in this age of specialized research scholarship; but Lawrence Cremin, who died this past September, has given us such a narrative in his history of American education.

Those devotees of research scholarship notwithstanding, there will be many grateful readers within and without the university who will find Lawrence Cremin's sprawling canvas inviting and rewarding. They will enjoy dipping into the text and allowing themselves to be educated vicariously, in other places, at other times, and in ways they never experienced for themselves. Some, particularly as they leaf through the most recent volume, will feel the shock of recognition as they encounter themselves, family members, friends, or acquaintances in Cremin's magnum opus.

American Education is a learned history in the traditional, narrative sense; a book that the theoretically inclined research specialist, fixated on the latest methodological innovation and school of thought, can afford to ignore; a book that will be bought, perused, and enjoyed by those lay readers and professionals who know and appreciate the fact that good history has always been, still is, and will continue to be about people and their lives.

How did *American Education* come to be written? In the spring of 1964, W. Stull Holt, Francis Keppel, and John Gardner, at that time, respectively, secretary of the American Historical Association, U.S. Commissioner of Education, and head of the Carnegie Corporation, asked Lawrence Cremin whether he was willing to undertake a comprehensive history of American education. Cremin, whose 1961 *Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education* had established him as the most exciting author in the field of American educational history, tells us that his reply was "enthusiastically affirmative."

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Cremin responded as he did because he was convinced that "the traditional chronicle of American education has been narrowly institutional, full of anachronism, and painfully moralistic." It had concentrated, Cremin wrote, almost entirely on the development of public schooling. Its anachronism became apparent when one realized that its materials had been selected and viewed for their relevance to contemporary problems. Its moralism resulted in a pervasive Whiggism that linked the school's progress to the progress of the United States. None of the traditional approaches did justice to what Cremin held to be the true history of education in America.

It is only fair now to inquire whether Cremin succeeded in doing better and whether he avoided the three blemishes of narrowness, anachronism, and Whiggism. To overcome narrowness he had to discard the simplistic identification of public schooling with education. To rid himself of anachronism, he had to concentrate on the historian's task of trying to re-create for his readers the world of the past, and he had to resist the temptation of selecting and interpreting his materials exclusively from a present-day point of view. To escape the Whig fallacy, he had to free himself from a way of thinking that equated process with progress and that assumed that growth and development inevitably and ultimately improved the human condition.

There can be no doubt that Cremin succeeded magnificently in casting into outer darkness any assumption or definition that identified education with schooling. In his first volume he called education "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit or evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities." As Cremin moved along in his history, this definition of education expanded. In a note to the Merle Curti Lectures of 1977, he pointed out that education included self-study as well as instruction, and he added "acquiring" to the "transmitting" and "evoking." Cremin observed that instruction could be offered by adults to other adults and to children and, as in the case of second-generation immigrants, by children to adults. Not only did schools and colleges educate, Cremin wrote, but so did "parents, peers, siblings, . . . friends, . . . families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, benevolent societies, agricultural fairs, settlement houses, factories, publishers, radio stations, . . . television networks, . . . [and] occupational groups." What is more, educative institutions related to each other in configurations and interacted with society and were themselves illuminated by the study of communities. Biography, prosopography, demographic surveys, generational approaches, and national character studies also became raw material for the educational historian's analysis.

When, in 1980, the second volume appeared, Cremin made explicit that the newly added "acquisition" of knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities entailed that the history of education also would have to consider "any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended." Subsequently this trend stressing direct and indirect, intended and unintended results became even more encompassing. "Ethnoreligious configurations of education wrought fundamental changes," stated Cremin in the third volume. Progressive reformism played a major role "in the unprecedented expansion of the schools and colleges and in the establishment of a host of educationally oriented social service agencies." The media, libraries, museums, agriculture, industry, and the military increased their educative functions. Missionaries, businessmen, philanthropists, and government spread American educational institutions abroad. No doubt whatsoever, Cremin clearly had escaped the confines of a narrow history of schooling.

What about the anachronistic presentism that Cremin had found in the traditional accounts? Did he refrain from selecting and viewing his material with a view to explaining problems of the present? Here, too, the answer is yes. Lawrence Cremin was far too fine a historian and far too decent a human being to fall prey to the arrogance of self-appointed know-it-alls and prophets who appropriate to themselves and their purposes the richness of past historical experience. His respect for the unique lives of individuals and of peoples, their trials and triumphs, joys and pains, was far too high to allow him to consider them only for their present-day relevance.

What, finally, can we say about Cremin's success in escaping the pervading Whiggism he had deplored in the historiography of American education? Here, I am afraid, the answer is negative, for Cremin did not escape the Whiggism he deplored. His pages celebrate the persistence of an American educa-

tional *paideia,* of an American culture that has always affirmed education as the nation's central concern and activity. To be sure, this is not the celebration indulged in by previous historians who glorified as inevitable the "rise and triumph" of the public school, the conquering march of the idea and practice of administrative professionalism, or the ever-accelerating excellence of the classroom teachers' scientific training and expertise. Nor do we encounter the moralizing overtones of so much Whiggish literature. Cremin was too perceptive a scholar to deny that much is wanting and defective in the American *paideia.* But affirmation and celebration lie at the heart of Cremin's narrative canvas.

On balance—a favorite phrase of Cremin's—*American Education* emphasizes the successes and admirable aspects of the American story. Illustrations that support the upbeat theme prevail over those that do not. Cremin celebrates the spirit that gave us local control, that refused to limit education to schools, and that invested education with tasks of social and political reform extending far beyond the realm of academic learning. His generalizing terms for these and other characteristics of American education, as he saw it, are *popularization, multitudinousness,* and *politicization.*

By contrast, Cremin wrote little about countervailing tendencies, such as the increasing strength of state bureaucracies and nationwide lobbying and professional organizations. Eight lines of text are devoted to the index entry "National Education Association, recent period." The forces at work that press for greater uniformity, stifle diversity, or give cause to dampen the celebratory spirit are mentioned, to be sure, but rarely discussed at length. The third volume has no index entries for censorship of textbooks or for academic freedom. Schools and programs that eschew political or social reform and choose greater academic emphasis in their curricula are mentioned only in passing. Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal* of 1982, for example, is not discussed in the text, although it is cited in a footnote as an example of its author's belief that it was but an extension of John Dewey's philosophy. Cremin's interpretive thesis is clear, and its Whiggish overtones unmistakable.

It has often been said that a book bears all the defects of its virtues, and this may also be said of *American Education.* Cremin's definition of education, one intended to help him stay clear of equating the history of education with the history of public schooling, is a case in point. Cremin defines education as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities, and he includes in that definition any learning that results from the effort, whether intended or unintended, direct or indirect. This definition succeeds magnificently in breaking the confines of a history of schooling, perhaps too magnificently, because now one wonders whether there are any boundaries to education at all. The question to which Cremin's efforts inevitably lead is whether anything in American life may *not* be considered educational, and, if this be so, whether and how the history of education differs from a history of American life or culture?

Cremin thought that a clear distinction exists. His definition of education, he wrote in his first volume, is not quite as encompassing as the anthropologist's "enculturation" or the sociologist's "socialization." He wanted a reader to understand that, in his view, not everything that shapes people comes under the heading of education, and that the history of education is not to be seen as a kind of all-inclusive "history in general." Yet, once historians of education concern themselves with indirect and unintended results acquired by Americans in, say, summer camps and agricultural fairs and through radio programs and advertisements, how do they differ from cultural or social historians or from students of "history in general"?

Cremin does not tell us. The closest he came to answering this question was to refer us to his statement, given in his Curti Lectures at Wisconsin, that the theoretical strength of his work may be gauged by the presence of "some intelligent conception of education." But the interactionist conception, as he calls it, does not clarify the question. It does nothing—and, to be fair to Cremin, was not intended—to circumscribe the range of phenomena the historian of education is to deal with. I, for one, find it very hard to see how in a history of education as defined by Cremin we can omit anything that touches people's lives. I am not sure just how or where one would draw a line of separation between

Cremin's educational history and "history in general," except insofar as educational history will always have to deal with human beings and "history in general" presumably does not always. Beyond that, a clear demarcation of territory is absent.

This question about the proper scope of the history of education is made even more perplexing when one notes how little appears in Cremin's books of what one might consider the traditional subjects of the history of education, such as schoolbooks, teaching methods, school administration, the curriculum, teacher education, and teachers. While Cremin still wrote about these topics in his first volume, he very nearly omitted them in the second and third. To give but one example: Despite his evident enthusiasm for the multitudinousness of the instruments of educational transmission, Cremin finds little space for what is known as the curriculum. The word does not occur in the index of any of the three volumes. If one chooses "history" as one curricular subject and traces its discussion through the volumes, one does not fare much better. The ten pages referred to in the index of volume 1 amount to no more than simple mentions of "history" as a subject in one educational proposal or another. In the second volume, eight references are made to proposals for the study of history and four to the appearance of history in schools and colleges. Of the latter, only one amounts to more than a one-line mention. The index of volume 3 finally omits "history" altogether, though there is a half-page discussion of the transformation of history, geography, and civics into the social studies. Readers who continue to search will be better served if they rely on the bibliographical essays that, in the sections marked "Institutions," will at least point to other works dealing with such subjects as schools, schoolbooks, teachers, and curricula.

The crux of the matter is that Cremin's history of education is, in fact, a cultural history of the American nation. (We can leave aside now Cremin's own disparaging reference to "history in general"—it is a term without meaning anyway.) Enculturation and socialization are allowed to enter after all, and education is assigned a central place in these processes. Cremin uses education as a device to hold together the various elements of his story—and a well-chosen device it is. Education, after all, *is* central to any nation's or society's history. That which a people choose to offer to their children is what they value most highly in their collective inheritance. That which they transmit daily and unthinkingly to their contemporaries and successors allows us to take the measure of their worth. Thus Cremin is right. Both intentional and unintentional teaching and learning create and preserve a nation's culture. Taken to its most comprehensive extent, a nation's educational history is a nation's cultural history. The question that leaves me baffled is why Cremin demonstrates that proposition in every chapter of his work and yet refrains from affirming it when given the chance.

But let us return to what Cremin called his "interactionist conception" of education on which, as he wrote, the theoretical strength of his work rests. A history of education, Cremin indicated, should not be judged by the subjects covered but by the presence of "some intelligent conception of education itself," which would assure an "intelligent conception of the history of education." The interactionist conception of education views "education as purposeful, the conception of the configuration as a patterning of institutions, the view of personality as a biosocial emergence, and the idea of the educative process as a continuum of contemporaneous and successive transactions." It does not, as already pointed out, help define the field of educational history, but it does ask us to understand the education of individuals as embedded in an institutional matrix and as a process conducted with a purpose that extends across generations.

For the United States, Cremin holds, this educational process constitutes its *paideia,* its culture. Because this American *paideia* is enshrined in the nation's ways of education and faith in it, Cremin challenges American historians to move the study of educational institutions and traditions to center stage. To study America, he appears to say, study its education. By looking at what Americans teach their children and at what their children learn in schools and out of them, one learns what America is all about. Reading Cremin's volumes with these assumptions in mind, one will find throughout that the kaleidoscopic quality of presentation, the constant search for the telling characterization, and the celebra-

tion of American diversity build up gradually and irreversibly a compelling sense of an American educational identity. More precisely, one comes to realize that it is Cremin's contention that Americans have shaped their identity through a receptivity to education in all its forms.

Cremin does not merely leave us with this rather general and all-encompassing definition of *paideia*; he defines it more precisely as characterized by popularization, multitudinousness, and politicization. By *popularization* Cremin means "the tendency to make education widely available in forms that are increasingly accessible to diverse peoples." *Multitudinousness* refers to "the proliferation and multiplication of institutions to provide that wide availability and that increasing accessibility." And *politicization* describes "the effort to solve certain social problems indirectly through education instead of directly through politics." Cremin envisions these three terms as particularly descriptive of the American *paideia*. None of them, he writes, "has been uniquely American . . . yet the three in tandem have marked American education uniquely."

With that statement Cremin has revived the once heated debate over whether the American experience diverges from that of Europe in any fundamental way. In the context of *American Education*, this may be asking for more than Cremin could deliver; yet his assertion of American uniqueness nonetheless means that his thesis will have to be tested with comparative studies of educational histories outside the United States. The same demand should be raised when one wants seriously to evaluate the excellence or failure of American education. Conversely one should point out that the presence of Cremin's massive historical account should now forestall any repetition of such superficial and ill-informed reports as *The Nation at Risk*, which was written with little regard for America's educational legacy. Cremin's well-grounded appreciation of our own educational past has given us a platform from which we may set out to view ourselves in comparative perspective without falling prey to self-flagellation or hyperbole.

By arguing that he finds in America's commitment to education the essence of American uniqueness, Cremin focuses attention on the mixture of record and anticipation or of accomplishments and myths that makes up the American *paideia*. In Cremin's volumes this mixture of reality and vision becomes the heart of the story. America's educational heritage feeds a sense of purpose that, as a culture's linchpin, turns education into "a vision of life itself as a deliberate cultural and ethical aspiration." Here we begin to hear echoes of Horace Mann's belief that past, present, and future generations constitute one great commonwealth and that their commitment to continuing education created their common heritage. While reading Cremin, one is caught up in a sense of obligation of what we in the present owe to those in the past for both their achievements and their shortcomings, the ones to cherish, the others to rectify. Through education, Cremin testifies, we have become a nation. That is the meaning of his popularization, multitudinousness, and politicization.

At this point, Cremin's celebratory voice allows his vision to blend with reality and very nearly to take its place. Referring to the colonial experience, for example, Cremin writes that "the diurnal life of the community became educative." I don't think one misconstrues Cremin's interpretive approach when one recognizes the educative character of daily life as the vision, while the legislative provisions for schooling are part of the reality. But in the absence of clear distinctions between vision and reality it becomes difficult to distinguish fancy from fact or program from accomplishment. One also wonders again how even an "intelligent conception of education" could possibly keep the text within bounds and save it from becoming an all-inclusive cultural history.

This blending of vision and reality also makes one wonder to what extent the three aspects of Cremin's *paideia*—popularization, multitudinousness, and politicization—were part of vision or reality throughout America's history. There remains little doubt that Cremin's description of schooling in volume 1 calls up images of popularization and multitudinousness and that he intends to describe reality. Schooling, he writes,

> went on anywhere and everywhere, not only in schoolrooms, but in kitchens, manses, churches, meetinghouses, sheds erected in fields, and shops erected in towns; . . . pupils were taught by anyone

and everyone, not only by schoolmasters, but by parents, tutors, clergymen, lay readers, precentors, physicians, lawyers, artisans, and shopkeepers; and . . . most teaching proceeded on an individual basis.

Politicization, too, is presented as an aspect of reality. Cremin makes this clear when he writes of "public concernment" that viewed schooling as a "device for promoting uniformity, . . . put to the purposes of the controlling elements of society."

What is striking throughout Cremin's three volumes is how much more readily and enthusiastically he writes about popularization and multitudinousness and how, as one moves through the volumes, one reads less about politicization, particularly when it enters through legislative and other governmental action. To be sure, as Cremin discusses the Revolution and its meaning for colonial society, he again mentions "public concernment." Given the task of creating a government for the new republic, the revolutionary generation could not but realize the convergence of education and politics in what he calls the "act of creative statesmanship." Quite obviously, Cremin views this creative statesmanship as an aspect of reality. But the educational function of the lawgiver, of necessity a unifying, homogenizing act, then was overshadowed by popularization.

Popularization, writes Cremin, "with respect to access, substance, and control became early and decisively the single most characteristic commitment of American education." In the popularized and popularizing aspects of education Cremin sees both the boon and the bane of American education. They led him to stress its visionary aspects and to acknowledge its unfinished character and unpredictable outcome.

At its best, [the American commitment to popular education] moved men to dream impossible dreams and then set out to realize them; but, at its worst, it filled them with unfulfillable hopes that could only be answered in some other, more perfect world. In short, for all its nobility, it led men inexorably to the brink of hubris, and then tempted them beyond with visions of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Vision reigns on the side of popularization; reality characterizes politicization.

In the second volume of *American Education*, the theme of the interplay between multitudinousness and politicization continues. Cremin writes that improvisation, imitation, and trial and error characterized the development of schools and colleges during the first half of the nineteenth century. Because they had been fueled by popular initiatives, the results were, predictably, marked by variety. Swept up by the political process, they were then fused into state and even nationwide systems. "What was fresh in the republican style," Cremin writes, "was the emphasis on system, on a functional organization of individual schools and colleges that put them into regular relationship with one another and with the polity." Horace Mann's public-school revival in Massachusetts, repeated in state after state, and the Morrill Act of 1862 laid down the base lines of the system.

But Cremin cannot bring himself to admit governmental action as a means of politicization to equal standing. Toward the end of the volume, one reads: "Popularization and multitudinousness, in tandem, were the distinguishing features of American education during the nineteenth century." Politicization, viewed earlier as a unifying factor, is not mentioned. The fruits of popular education—literacy, skills, attitudes, sensibilities—were "on balance," Cremin writes, "in the direction of increasing diversity and choice." Cremin concedes that was not necessarily all to the good. Education could be used for demeaning and coercive purposes; it did not "augment liberty for slaves or for Indians . . . but these omissions [and others Cremin cites but I leave out here] must not obscure the extension of opportunity for others." "On balance"—that phrase again—education augmented personal liberty and advanced equality "at least in the sense in which that term was used during the nineteenth century." That sense, visionary as it was, did not always square with reality.

When Cremin discusses the era of the Civil War, his view of politicization as a unifying force, substituting education for politics, encounters temporary difficulties. It is weakened for a time as the American *paideia* "was variously perceived and applied by different segments of the population in different regions of the country." Cremin asserts that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "had contributed to the consciousness of separatism that ultimately led to war." The interplay of education and politics, he argues, now

increased the consciousness of differences and "did so at the expense of what remained of a common American *paideia*." Still, Cremin continues, a common *paideia* never entirely disappeared. In fact, it was helped to new prominence by another revival of public schooling spearheaded by such schoolmen as William T. Harris. "These men were as aware as any previous generation that families, churches, libraries, and indeed the entire apparatus of civic institutions, educate; but, unlike previous generations, they were willing to stake the nation's future primarily on its schools and colleges." In the third volume Cremin thus notes "the increasing significance of schools and colleges and of the media of popular communication."

Yet in Cremin's American *paideia*, the forces of popularization and multitudinousness ultimately persist and triumph. He notes that just as the metaphor of the "melting pot" began to give way to that of the "mosaic," alternative *paideias* of various ethno-religious groups began to compete with the common American *paideia*. If commentators had been afraid that "big government," an all-powerful media establishment, and homogenized schools would create a mass mind, Cremin tells them not to worry. "What was taught was not always what was learned," and "what was learned frequently had nothing to do with anything that was taught but rather with what a particular individual set out to study for his or her own purposes." Add to this that an increasing politicization of education meant an increasing number of didactic voices seeking to propagate their messages throughout the schools, and Cremin convinces himself that the specter of a homogenized, uniform educational experience for all Americans is simply unreal. He appears to say that in the twentieth century politicization's unifying force fades away. "The more education became a form of politics and even a substitute for politics, the more the clash of orthodoxies was likely to remain a recurrent phenomenon on the American educational scene." Politicization spoke with many voices and ranged itself together with popularization and multitudinousness on the side of the divergent tendencies, all advancing liberty and choice. Once more, an encouraging vision triumphed over a darker reality.

While that persistence of vision over reality remained Cremin's sustaining affirmation and gives his three books their Whiggish overtones, his historical scholarship permitted him to escape the pervasive moralism that vitiates so much of Whiggish writing. It allowed him readily to admit "the persistent inequalities in access to schooling" and to concede "that the same school could convey messages of encouragement to some children and messages of discouragement to others." He was also fully aware that, for better or worse, most Americans today receive their common education through public schooling and television. Though "increasingly standardized . . . schooling" provides "one important foundation of common language, common knowledge, and common values," it does not overcome the difference that exists between what is taught and what is lived, between vision and reality. That difference, Cremin reminds us, is the American problem. It is real, and it persists. Television furnishes Americans "with a common set of secular symbols, secular discourse, and indeed secular sacraments." Cremin calls it superficial and evanescent. "It taught the substance and values of a consumer culture Tocqueville had feared individualism might bring into being in the United States; and it conveyed that culture in a new language for which the public had not yet learned or been taught a critical literacy."

Thus, while Cremin wondered whether the processes and opportunities of public education "would prove sufficient to the need," he nonetheless maintained that "American education in the large contributed in multifarious and frequently contradictory ways to the delicate balance of liberty, equality, and comity that continued to mark the American ethic during the twentieth century." Cremin's belief is "that schooling tended to broaden the vistas of students beyond those of households and neighborhoods." In his closing paragraph he turns to Margaret Mead for confirmation of his optimism and finds it in her statement that the American *paideia* would have to be made trans-national to include "diverse people at every stage in the development of every significant activity." Again, his mind turns from reality to vision.

What, then, are we to make of Cremin's American *paideia*? At heart, I believe, it is an "urban democrat's" testament of faith. Lest

there be any doubt about it, New York was Cremin's metropolis, and in the final volume it comes to stand for America. We all have seen the Steinberg drawing purporting to be a New Yorker's view of the United States. I am reminded of it when I read Cremin's history of the post–Civil War period. True, America turned urban in those decades, but besides never discarding a rural heritage, America also breathed in St. Louis, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco, cities that never were carbon copies of New York. True, New York and other large cities developed a culture of their own with museums, newspapers, theaters, and municipal colleges; but rural America also knew an educational culture of its own with its consolidated high schools, normal schools, and teachers colleges, 4-H clubs, and agricultural extension agents. For all the lives touched by New York as portrayed by Cremin, there were those others who crowd the pages of Willa Cather, Ole Edvart Rölvaag, and Hamlin Garland. Cremin does mention the other America outside New York, but it does not come to life in his pages as do the people, streets, and institutions of his beloved metropolis.

It strikes me as ironic, too, that, with all of Cremin's emphasis on vision and aspiration and his apparent distrust of the homogenizing politicization he had found in his first two volumes, he ignored altogether the most evident contemporary manifestations of that vision and of that rejection of homogenization. I have in mind the protests and rebellions that erupted in schools and colleges during the sixties and have recently resurfaced in the erstwhile socialist societies in central and eastern Europe. One need not have agreed with every demand and every action that marked those upheavals, nor can one ignore the crucial differences between the systematic and systemic use of terror and violence by communist regimes in Prague and Warsaw and the reaction of police forces on the streets of Berkeley and Chicago. But how can one fail to notice the significant extent to which the students' actions in 1968 and 1989 were inspired by vision and aspiration, idealism and hope? Even from a strictly "realistic" point of view, how can a historian of education afford to ignore events that have so materially affected schools and universities and that continue to affect the course of history at home and abroad?

This, let me add, is not a matter of a "liberal" or "democratic" versus a "radical" interpretation. Even before Cremin began writing his three volumes, historians of no particular radical bent had already described the growth of an administrative professionalism as a threat to spontaneity, idealism, and vision in education. Others commented on the new "science of education" and its disciples' love affair with a "one-best system," and traced the results in the rise of testing, school surveys, performance contracting, behavioral conditioning, or planning, programming, and budgeting systems. But Cremin has little to say about that in his book. There are no index entries for testing, SAT's, or the Educational Testing Service—household words for literally thousands of Americans. Just when in the United States the homogenizing and stultifying effects of politicization achieved new heights in the administrative bureaucracies of public school and higher education systems, Cremin thought their very vastness allowed students to escape their influence. He also avoided any extended discussion of the various strands of rebellion that eventually coalesced to shake educational institutions from Berkeley to New York and from Berlin to Tokyo. Cremin—the New York democrat—found no room for these matters in his book.

This omission is stranger still when one considers Cremin's final reference to the idea of the trans-national *paideia*, a concept he borrowed from John Dewey and Margaret Mead. Mead had spoken of the need to include "diverse people at every stage in the development of every significant activity." Why, one wonders, did Cremin ignore the reality of his vision? Was it because his vision derived its inspiration so single-mindedly from New York?

For a final word and evaluation of Cremin's *paideia*, let me return to his text where he comments on Alexis de Tocqueville, a writer who, like Cremin himself, wrote with insight, grace, and persistence on the American *paideia*. Both men found that their topic caught them in the double pull of vision and reality. *Paideia*, after all, is both, and both will have to be recorded. If that is an impossible task, both men refused to be daunted by it. As a result neither could escape both praise and blame. They nonetheless persisted in their task, and

each left us a monumental and memorable bequest.

Cremin wrote of the Frenchman:

> Tocqueville had his blindspots, about education as about much else. He generalized about the family from the more genteel segments of the middle class.... He generalized about political participation from a traditional New England township model.... And he drew his generalizations about Americans as individuals from white males, whatever the disclaimers—and the conflicting evidence—in his chapters on women, blacks, and Indians. Finally, ... [he] continually confused a democratic ideal that he saw coming into being with an American reality that he insisted he was observing.

Mutatis mutandis we can say that of Cremin himself. If those words sound too negative, note that they are followed by these:

> Yet, all such qualifications notwithstanding, the young Frenchman did capture the central tendencies of American education. Others may have presented the details more fully and more accurately; Tocqueville, more than any contemporary, grasped the whole.

I should like to rephrase that last sentence so that it may now apply to the author of *American Education*: Others may have presented the reality more fully and more accurately; Cremin, more than any contemporary, grasped the vision.

Soul Train

THE GODWINS AND THE SHELLEYS: THE BIOGRAPHY OF A FAMILY. *By William St. Clair. Norton. $32.50.*

Reviewed by JOHN P. SISK

As father-in-law of the poet Shelley, father of the author of *Frankenstein*, husband of the author of *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and author himself of *An Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, William Godwin is a tantalizing but too easily forgettable presence: a prose propagandist in an age remembered for its poetry. One learns that *Political Justice* influenced the thinking of such memorable people as Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, Lamb, Southey, Hazlitt, and Byron, but few students of the period do anything more than sample the book, if they do that. We learn now from William St. Clair's handsome biography that Godwin was one of the most published and best read men of his time, but that information is not likely to call forth a new edition of his masterwork. Indeed, few books are less able now to convey the excitement with which they were written.

The important thing, however, is that for biographical purposes Godwin lived his eighty years at the right time, was involved with the right people, and got into the right kinds of trouble. "A late survivor from the puritan period," St. Clair writes, "he had passed through his own accelerated age of enlightenment, taking it to new heights. He had been in at the start of romanticism, and had outlived its end. Now he was on the threshold of the Victorian era." His life had been a cultural history of his times, and they had been, as his friend Tom Paine had put it in another context, times that try men's souls.

Godwin began life as the son of a minister in a strict Calvinist environment and was himself educated for the ministry. However, his early determination "to follow truth wherever she leads" soon led to his encounter with the irreligious French *philosophes* and to the soul-trying that led him through agnosticism to a positive atheism (in later years, under Coleridge's influence, moderated to theism). So de-Christianized, he migrated to London and Grub Street where he survived by means of an immense amount of mainly anonymous writing, much of it reflecting his sympathy with the Jacobin spirit in France. In the fall of 1791, when the news from France was most unsettling to the English, he began *Political Justice* and finished it after two years of intense work. Its combination of secular necessitarianism, utilitarianism, and enlightenment perfectibilism made it a natural target for the anti-Jacobinism with which England responded to the growing violence of the French Revolution (visitors to the British Museum in the summer of 1989 were able to relive this reaction in the splendid exhibition "Shadow of the Guillotine"). Subsequent edi-

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