



Education in the Progressive Period (ca. 1890s–1920s)

Abstract This chapter explores education in the early twentieth century by using pragmatism to present progressivism and its offshoot, social reconstructionism. Not content to examine the father of progressive education (John Dewey) this chapter also looks at the grandfathers of progressive education (G. Stanley Hall and Francis Parker). It separates out progressive education into three areas: child-centered progressivism, administrative progressivism, and social reconstructionism. It concludes with a discussion on the educational legacies of this period and recommendations for further reading.

Keywords Pragmatism • Progressivism • John Locke • Charles Darwin • William James • John Dewey • Jean-Jacques Rousseau • G. Stanley Hall • Francis W. Parker • Child-centered progressives • John Dewey • Jane Addams • Laboratory school • Progressive Education Association • Project method • Critical pedagogy • *Cardinal Principles Report* • William Heard Kilpatrick • Hilda Taba • Eight-Year Study • Ella Flagg Young • Administrative progressives • Theodore Brameld • George Counts • Social reconstructionists • Extracurriculum • Smith-Hughes Act

Unsanitary food production facilities. Overcrowded, crime-ridden slums. Political corruption. Economic instability. Class stratification. Alcoholism. War. Racism. Anti-immigrant bias. Farm outmigration. Industrial abuse of

workers. Corporations dictating society. Business leaders out-earning their actual worth. Technology taking over factories. Jobs being lost or moving overseas.

While this sounds like a laundry list of the challenges that face our society today, these were in fact but some of the challenges taken on chiefly between 1890 and 1930, the period known as the Progressive Era. While representing a relatively brief period of time, due to the laundry list of sociopolitical reforms that came out, this is one of the most revolutionary in the US history and included the following:

- Pure food and drug laws, including the Food and Drug Administration
- Direct election of senators and women’s suffrage
- Prohibition (and its eventual repeal)
- City manager government, civil service reform, social bonds, and the citizen’s initiative
- Sanitation reform and tenement regulation
- Trust busting, child labor laws, and unionization
- The cult of efficiency

Just as there was tremendous social upheaval that caused thinkers such as Horace Mann to take on the purpose of schooling, the political and social challenges facing reformers in this period caused a significant overhaul of the public schools. Reforms came on every level of schooling, from the frazzled teacher in the one-room schoolhouse on the prairie to the equally frazzled teacher of English in the large urban school that was running more and more like a factory. Prior to this period, both teachers feared for their jobs politically; both had to “do more with less”; and by the period’s end, both had to turn their schools into community centers.

Progressive education is one of the better known, and more popular, periods; if you ask most classroom teachers today what they are, they will (often incorrectly) label themselves “progressive.” It is popular and makes one feel good about oneself to be progressive; why, the opposite is regressive, and who wants to be that? To truly be a progressive, though, one must be well schooled in the politics and philosophy behind the movement.

WHAT ARE THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF PROGRESSIVISM?

- **Key terms:** pragmatism, progressivism
- **Key figures:** John Locke, Charles Darwin, William James, John Dewey, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The roots of progressivism actually lie in the philosophy of **pragmatism**, which encourages the quest for things that work well, are useful, and, by proxy, encourages all humans to do our best in everything. Pragmatists believe that knowledge is culturally and socially based and comes from problems which must be solved. Humans are social beings, and the main goal of humanity is to discover each individual's role in society. Pragmatists believe the environment is the most important factor in shaping humanity; many pragmatists take that notion a step further and argue that, by extension, too much civilization is harmful to a person's development. However, pragmatists believe that the primary means of coming to know is through discovery and the scientific method, whether individually or societally. Pragmatists argue that ideas cannot be separated from conduct—to have ideas is to know effects and consequences, a notion that would give rise to the behaviorist movement (explored in more detail in Chap. 5).

One of the more significant figures was **John Locke**, who took the realist notion of *tabula rasa* and came up with a practical application for it. Locke argued that ideas must have proof in the real world—the world of experience. Alongside Locke was **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**, who wrote the novel *Emile* to discuss the role of education. To Rousseau, a “natural education” that is highly individualized is the best way to train good citizens. Another was **Charles Darwin**, most famous for his concept of natural selection—“descent with modification.” Darwin argued that species adapt to their environments; those who don't adapt die off. Similarly, only the strongest within each species win out—“survival of the fittest”—that ensures the perpetuation of a species.

Darwin's theories have been applied on a social level by many pragmatists. Social Darwinism is when “survival of the fittest” becomes applied to society, for good or for ill. Why are some rich and some poor? Darwinist pragmatists would (albeit incorrectly) argue that it's because they most deserve it—they are the most fit in that society. The American dream is another aspect of Darwinian sociology—work hard, and you will succeed. If you don't succeed, you don't deserve to make it after all. Many misguided people in history have misapplied Darwin's thinking to justify poor treatment of people of marginalized cultures, who spoke English as a second language, and/or who had disabilities.

In the United States, the philosopher **William James** greatly expanded on pragmatic notions. James argued that there is no absolute truth—made in actual, real-life events. Rather, the truth was not found in ideas, but in

the acting out of those ideas. To further muddle the matter, James argued in the difference between Truth (with a capital “T”) and truth (with a lowercase “t”). Truth (Capital “T”) is objective, verifiable, and universal; truth (lowercase “t”) is individual experiences of this Truth. James further defined truth both as the process of experiencing—actually living, undergoing something—and the experience itself.

Pragmatism played out as an educational philosophy by becoming **progressivism**. Progressives ultimately believe that learning how to learn is more important than knowing a set of specific facts. For example, **John Dewey**, a philosopher who applied his thinking to schooling, rejected many of Locke’s notions. Dewey argued that there was a transactional relationship between man and environment—it was not one way. He argued that how humanity experiences the world is subjective; further, we cannot act entirely in conjunction with environment—we tend to do what is best for us as individuals. Progressive thinkers believe experience and nature are completely interrelated and that we must take time to return to a natural state/world.

As it impacted education, progressives believed it was the goal to develop the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic dimensions of students—educating the whole child is common parlance. They believed that educating the cognitive, social, and moral aspects of a student is more important than pure academic preparation—that producing good, active citizens is more important than producing intellectuals. Progressives believe that it is more important for students to learn how to learn than is what they learn. In addition, progressives believe children are born basically good, curious creatures, and must be provided an environment to work on that learning. If a child misbehaves, it is often the teacher’s fault for not properly tapping into the child’s intellect or curiosity.

Progressives use an entirely student-centered pedagogy and curricula. They focus on fostering the scientific method within children, at the very least, relying heavily upon the problem-solving method. They integrate children’s needs with resources to provide that learning. Since humans are social beings, progressives believe in cooperative learning and teamwork. Since the ultimate goal is to teach students their proper role in society, progressive educators use field trips, community leaders, real-world neighborhood projects, and hands-on resources; books are just one material amongst many to provide learning experiences.

On the surface, it appears that progressives don't have rigidly constructed roles; however, it is a false assumption. The roles are more fluid and a bit reversed, but are structured. The teacher is a leader, modeler, and guide; they help arbitrate learning, but do not necessarily dictate learning. The students take the most active role in the classroom on all levels. They determine the curriculum and help decide how they want to learn it. The students come up with classroom rules and the consequences for breaking those rules; they also are the ones charged with enforcing the rules. A truly progressive teacher will begin the year with few, if any, notions of what they will teach and how they will teach it; the first few days will be spent establishing the classroom, forming teams, performing team building activities, and such similar tasks. Most teachers—even those who call themselves progressive—aren't comfortable relinquishing this much control.

Another difference between many teachers who consider themselves progressive and actual progressivism is the ultimate purpose of schooling: to produce active citizens in the democratic republic that is the United States. All progressive teachers have an idea of how to improve this country, if not a clear vision of society as it should be. This vision shapes everything they do in their classroom; progressive teachers recognize that everything in education is political, and they are churning out students to step up and become social activists, regardless of stance or issue. While in the past teachers simply believed that an educated citizen was a good citizen, progressives believed that children needed to practice qualities of being a good citizen before they could actually do them in later life.

It is difficult in today's educational world to be a "true" progressive. The top-down, standards-driven accountability climate doesn't leave much room for teachers who want to turn over matters to their students and remain flexible. Progressivism is a bit naive—students don't learn just because they are given a voice. In addition, it is difficult to assess a progressive program—the aesthetic and moral dimensions are not covered on standardized tests. Due to the financial cuts in many school budgets, most teachers are having to fill too large a variety of roles beyond teacher in their classrooms to really engage in progressive teaching effectively (even though progressive schooling can help with the whole child). Finally, really doing progressivism is difficult and exhausting for the teacher, often leading to rapid burnout or at the very least a rapid regression to more traditional teaching methods.

WHO WERE THE GRANDFATHERS OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION?

- **Key figures:** G. Stanley Hall, Francis W. Parker

Most works of educational history and philosophy refer to John Dewey as the father of progressive education in the United States. This is true, but to extend the metaphor, Dewey was no virgin birth; there were those who preceded, from whom Dewey derived inspiration. There were two men in particular from whom Dewey drew educational inspiration.

During this period there was an emerging field of science known as psychology, and one of the first to link it expressly to education was **G. Stanley Hall**. In his seminal book *The Contents of Children's Minds*, he conducted a detailed study of German schoolchildren in which he measured how they learned. Hall quickly explained what was at the time revolutionary concepts that today are considered standard. He argued that children learn more effectively when new knowledge is linked to prior knowledge, so teachers should measure what their students know and then base lessons from this. Hall also argued that since children have a wider, deeper knowledge base as they get older, students should be taught differently at different ages.

In the year 1875, in Quincy, Massachusetts, Col. **Francis W. Parker** was hired as superintendent of schools. Tapping into his experience and skills gleaned from careers in the military and then running a factory, Parker set out to streamline the school system while still focusing on the individuality of the student; little did he know that he was about to provide the framework for an educational revolution. New concepts he introduced were multitudinous. He allowed student participation in curriculum building, added kindergarten, and had the schools include real-life problem-solving challenges and community-based field trips. Using the skills in efficiency management sweeping factories of the time (such as the assembly line), Parker established a system of teacher specialization and age-based grouping of students. Any teacher who's been up into the wee hours on a Sunday night finishing their lesson plans for the week now have a name to curse for this practice: Parker was the one who insisted teachers design and submit lesson plans in advance.

WHO WAS THE FATHER OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION?

- **Key figures:** John Dewey, Jane Addams
- **Key terms:** Laboratory school

If Hall and Parker are the grandfathers, **John Dewey** is the father of progressive education in the United States. A philosopher by training, Dewey became influenced by G. Stanley Hall's work in adolescence and child psychology. Dewey was deeply influenced by social reformers outside education such as **Jane Addams**, the Chicago settlement activist and reformer seen as the mother of social work and a leading voice in women's suffrage. Just as activists such as Addams were advocating for large-scale reforms in society, so too did Dewey decide to start schooling over and work from ground up. To this end, he founded the University of Chicago **Laboratory School**—the first of its kind and the model for all those that came after. The Lab School discarded traditional curriculum and moved to whole child education; teachers started with concrete/familiar concepts, then worked outward to new, abstract thoughts. They included conversations, constructive work, stories, songs, and games. True to his political roots, Dewey and the teachers he trained created miniature societies within their classrooms, getting students to realize their power as citizens.

Rather than focus on strictly academic concepts, the Lab School as often as possible came up with practical learning situations. For example, students didn't just learn the parts of a plant and photosynthesis, but instead designed, planted, and harvested their own crops. Much of the produce was sold at student-designed and managed grocery stores that catered to the local community. The school was such a success that, in 1904, the University wrested it away from Dewey; rather than continue on in a more minor role, Dewey left and returned to the life of an academic for almost 50 years following.

While at the Lab School, Dewey trained as many teachers and graduate students as he could; many went on to spread their vision of what Dewey intended across the nation. As anyone who remembers playing the telephone game as a child can attest, though, the more ears and mouths a message moves through, the more altered it becomes. Bits and pieces of what Dewey truly intended got altered or outright lost in translation; the most substantive loss was the politically motivated decision making in which Dewey argued all teachers should engage. Again, Dewey was a philosopher at heart; as such, he believed the core of education was in

producing good citizens that would go on to shape a better society. To Dewey, who wrote book with titles such as *Democracy and Education*, schooling *was* democracy—or at least the principal means of perpetuating it.

WHO WERE THE CHILD-CENTERED PROGRESSIVES?

- **Key terms:** Progressive Education Association, project method, critical pedagogy, Cardinal Principles Report
- **Key figures:** William Heard Kilpatrick, Hilda Taba

From Dewey in Chicago, progressive education spread like wildfire. Eventually, there were distinct camps within the progressive education movement. One group, the **child-centered progressives**, focused on overhauling the practices of teaching—the curricula, pedagogy, and management. A group of progressive scholars came together in 1919 to form the **Progressive Education Association (PEA)**, a group whose mission was “reforming the entire school system of America.” Beyond Dewey, progressive thinkers included **William Heard Kilpatrick**, who in 1913 invented the **project method**. Kilpatrick defined the project as a purposeful act that demonstrates a worthy life in a democratic society. He presented four types of projects in which students could engage: they could embody some idea or plan (make something), enjoy some aesthetic experience (appreciate something), solve some problem (fix something), or obtain some degree of skill (learn to do something).

Another example was **Hilda Taba**, a student of John Dewey, who focused on development of curriculum. Taba encouraged teachers to become mediators rather than lecturers, to lead the discussion rather than predetermine the curriculum. Today, Taba’s focus on collaboration is alive and well within the classroom, reflected through educators who employ **critical pedagogy** to account for dynamics of power and privilege that have traditionally placed instructors in positions of power over students.

In a successful attempt at proving that their ideas were solid, the PEA launched the **Eight-Year Study**, in which students in 30 high schools across the United States were taught using completely progressive techniques. There was no set curriculum, no set courses, no set texts, and so on. The study mapped university progress of students from this system compared with their peers from more traditional schools. The results were that students from the progressive school were advanced socially and on par academically. When grades were compared between progressive

schools and traditional schools, the students performed equally on every measure. When looking at non-academic measures (such as community engagement and civic responsibility) progressive students did far better than their peers. The more progressive the curriculum, the better the overall record of its graduates.

The child-centered progressives also tried their hands at curriculum reform, producing in 1917 what would be called the *Cardinal Principles* Report. Led by committees including college professors, state superintendents of education, curriculum theorists, and teachers, the report reorganized the curriculum of the secondary schools to accommodate changing school population, make schools more effective in preparing students for life outside college. Education was now seen as preparation for life, not just preparation for more schooling. Authors of the report saw it as just the first step in evolutionary process; they intended it to be revisited periodically. The authors of the report listed seven objectives of education:

- Health—health instruction, healthy living, physical education classes, developing programs of home/community health awareness
- Command of fundamental processes—reading, writing, math, “elements of oral and written expression”
- Worthy home membership—music and art, wholesome relations between boys and girls, homemaking skills for girls
- Livelihood (Vocational)—social development with coworkers, right attitude about work, vocational preparation, and vocational guidance
- Civic education—understanding of international problems (something we should return to, considering the dearth of US schoolchildren who know where anything else is in the world), responsibilities as a citizen (particularly while women were supplementing men on the homefront due to World War I)
- Worthy use of leisure—avocational interests—music, art, literature, drama, social interactions—to “enrich and enlarge the body, mind, spirit, and personality”
- Ethical character—morals and values, personal responsibility and initiative, spirit of service

Overall, the child-centered progressives attempted to use scientific research to improve teaching. Tapping into new studies on child psychology and adolescence, pedagogy and management improved greatly. Another field

was used to improve the schools: the science of increasing industrial efficiency.

One critical area the child-centered progressives left untouched was that of the endemic racism that was increasing throughout the nation. Indeed, it is paradoxical that the country was making such significant gains in reform—thanks to Theodore Roosevelt’s uber-masculinity, progressivism was even seen to be “manly”—while at the same time becoming so regressive in its approach to race. *De facto* (by fact; societal) and *de jure* (by law; legal) racism became the norm as Jim Crow laws displaced Black Codes throughout the states.

While many believe racism was mainly rooted in Southern Whites, it was not just a Southern thing: the Supreme Court led the way in two major decisions. First (many would say obviously) was the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision in which the court ruled that “separate but equal is constitutional.” Of more particular concern was the case of *Gong Lum v. Rice* (1927), in which the court ruled in favor of a Mississippi school district excluding a student of Chinese ancestry from its white schools. The dichotomous precedent was now set: if you weren’t white, you were “colored” and were kept from the public schools.

However, all was not a lost cause in terms of court cases going for segregation. On January 5, 1931, a principal in the town of Lemon Grove, California, began enforcing segregation against the children of Mexican families in town. Seventy-five students who had previously attended the school were greeted one morning with the news that they had to attend the “new” school: a hastily built wooden structure that came to be called “La Caballeriza,” which translates into “the barn.” The school believed this new facility could provide the “Americanized” education the children needed; however, the children disagreed, refused to go, and the parents sued. In February 1932, Judge Claude Chambers heard the case and ruled in favor of the families. Fortunately, *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove* was the first case to desegregate the schools on behalf of a historically marginalized population. Unfortunately, his verdict was worded to apply only to the Mexican families in the community—allowing California’s, and thus the nation’s, policies of segregation of African-American, Asian-American, American Indian, and other groups intact. While it was one step forward (as are the issues of equality explored in Chap. 5), it is sad that students need to remember public schooling in the United States today remains as segregated, if not more so, than during this time.

WHO WERE THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRESSIVES?

- **Key figures:** Ella Flagg Young

While the child-centered progressives were focusing on reforming American classrooms, another group of progressive educators set their sights on the district offices. Based on improving business models, principles of scientific management, and a membership in the “cult of efficiency,” the **administrative progressives** believed that the same principles that were correcting and improving productivity in the factories could be applied to school districts. A big part of this was in a true spirit of reform: the efforts were trying to take politics out of schooling by doing such things as abolishing ward boards and redrawing district lines across ethnic barriers.

Just as new levels of management were created in factories, so too did school administration. The principal used to be the “principal member of the faculty”—the teacher with the longest tenure and/or most respect (many other countries still maintain this practice; the lead administrator in a school is known as the “headteacher”). Now, thanks to the expanding college of education, there was a formal training required in educational administration—separating the principal from the teachers.

Some child-centered progressives were able to make their way into positions of authority. One example was **Ella Flagg Young**, another student of Dewey (though many would argue she taught Dewey as much as he taught her) who was superintendent of Chicago Public Schools from 1909 through 1915, and served on the Illinois State Board of Education from 1888 to 1913. While women such as Young in Chicago and Annie Webb Blanton (State Superintendent of Instruction) in Texas began to make inroads for women in administrative positions, in spite of their dominant numbers among the teaching force women remain significant minorities in school leadership roles, a trend that continues today.

In a sweeping reform, school boards were presented with a system of checks and balances by the addition of school superintendents, who in turn expanded district offices in their efforts to bureaucratize and centralize. Ultimately, governance of school districts came to adopt a familiar pattern: a system with multiple levels and inherent checks and balances. Representing the executive branch were the superintendents; representing the legislative were school boards; representing the judicial were the prin-

cipals, department heads, and other administrators who designed and implemented policy both in-house and throughout the district.

A top-down management style emerged in the districts. Financially, they urged financial soundness—expanding district boundaries and consolidating schools. Schools began to manage things in-house rather than tapping the community. It wasn't exclusively at the district level that administrative progressive reforms swept through; most states got in on the action as well. States began formalizing teacher certification standards and ran standardized teacher training institutes. There was a movement toward accountability and control at the state level and regional levels: school accreditation programs sprung up state by state, consolidating into regional systems that are still in effect today.

WHO WERE THE SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTIONISTS?

- **Key figures:** Theodore Brameld, George Counts

As time went by, a third group of progressive educators emerged. Growing impatient with the growing focus on fixing practice or governance, the **social reconstructionists** lamented the fact that educators lost their long-term vision in favor of short-term goals. Reconstructionist philosopher **Theodore Brameld**, for example, wrote that educators forgot that time had three dimensions—while they did a good job teaching the past and paid close attention to the present, they abandoned the future. While many contemporary readers think about social reconstructionism as a method of schooling and social reform, there are strong philosophical roots and implications as a mode of thought.

Social reconstructionists understood that everyone involved in education must presuppose a vision of the future and actively work to make their students form that new world. **George Counts**, a student of Dewey who openly fought for a return to Dewey's political motivations, stood before a meeting of the Progressive Education Association and delivered a speech titled "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" which was later published under the title *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* Counts argued that if a movement was to call itself progressive "it must have orientation; it must possess direction." Dancing on the razor's edge between criticism and insult, Counts argued "[l]ike a baby shaking a rattle, we seem to be utterly content with action, provided it is sufficiently vigorous and noisy"¹ even if it wasn't actually accomplishing anything. As Counts

paraphrased Shakespeare, “a very large part of American educational thought, enquiry, and experimentation is much ado about nothing.”²

The reconstructionists had the means and motivation to truly revolutionize schooling in America until the Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare. In the 1950s, US Senator Joseph McCarthy led a series of hearings to find communists among American citizens. These generated a national paranoia about the topic that impacted all vocations; if you were accused of being communist, you were blacklisted from all work. Education was not exempt; many educational leaders had to defend their positions in front of governmental panels. This is ironic as the progressive educators wanted nothing more than to make America as great as it could be.

WHAT WERE THE SOURCES AND PURPOSES OF EDUCATION?

- **Key terms:** Extracurriculum, Smith-Hughes Act

Thanks in part to the efforts of the common school propagandists, by the progressive era the public schools had become widespread institutions. One of the changes was in the role schools played in their communities with the addition of the **extracurriculum**—activities set forth outside the normal school day whose purpose was to reinforce or supplement classroom instruction. From the outset, the extracurriculars that generated the most attention were the academic competitions. Literary and clariosophic societies met to hold formal debates, host poetry readings, and perform dramatic productions; soon, these competitions were supplemented by choral and orchestral performances.

Athletic competitions soon became entertainment as well. It started with rowing and rugby competitions; however, around the turn of the century, some schools began hosting competitions that were perceived by many as comedic displays of barbarianism: football games. However, these events soon turned deadly, with players getting killed on the football fields. As a result, Theodore Roosevelt convened conferences to reform the sport and establish rules for all interscholastic competition; as a result, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States formed in 1906, but changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1910.

As extracurriculars grew in importance, the schools became more and more deeply ingrained in the very fabric of their communities. By the end of the progressive era, many educators saw the schools as community centers. In addition to the entertainment of academic, artistic, and athletic exhibitions, schools offered adult education classes for adults, health education centers for new families, and job training centers for local businesses.

Wartime meant added purposes to the schools as well. Heading into World War I, many Americans were against our intervention in what was perceived to be someone else's problem. At the time, the United States didn't have a large standing military force so, when President Wilson broke his re-election campaign promise to keep us out of the war, there was a critical shortage of soldiers. The schools were called upon to provide assistance: recruiters had free rein in the secondary schools of the United States, and schools agreed to administrate intelligence quotient testing to all male students as a means of helping the military with their recruitment and post-induction sorting. With the outbreak of World War II at the end of this period, schools led war relief efforts such as newspaper and scrap metal drives, planting victory gardens, and distributing ration coupons. Schools became sources of information in the communities, hosting seminars in making the most of rationing, successful planting of victory gardens, and the like.

With the addition of the practical purposes of schooling came a formalization of the economic purpose. Particularly with economic depression of 1893–1897, schools were tapped to help the nation's economy by keeping students out of the workplace (to encourage adult employment) and develop commercial and industrial training courses. These would evolve into vocational education or, as it is known today, Career-Technical Education (CTE). As in the common school era, there was a rise of compulsory education laws coupled with tremendous growth in vocational education. The federal government provided a "stimulus package" of sorts to the schools to help—the 1917 **Smith-Hughes Act**. This act provided federal funds for the development of vocational education in American secondary schools, including funds to American colleges to help train teachers and oversee the programs. This was a double-edged sword; while it increased tremendously the amount of vocational education that occurred, because this funding came separate from other sources of school funding, there emerged a separation between the vocational teachers and their academic counterparts that still exists in many schools today.

As progressive reforms swept the nation, some states began passing laws protecting students with disabilities during this time. New Jersey (1911), New York (1917), and Massachusetts (1920) led the way. However, even as more states began passing similar laws, enforcement was spotty at best; most states continued to build separate institutions or asylums. Due to the efforts of reformers such place transitioned from asylums to true schools; in many cases, they were day schools rather than residential. However, many groups were excluded from these schools including those with severe physical disabilities such as students in wheelchairs and those deemed unteachable. These students were far too often placed in facilities that offered no education whatsoever. The rise of intelligence testing (thanks to the Army intelligence tests) reinforced the need for special schools for many students, often mistakenly. For example, students who did not speak English as their primary language were not tested in their native tongue and, as such, failed their tests; as a result they were wholly incorrectly branded as disabled and uneducable.

Of course, the religious, political, and social purposes persisted during the Progressive Era. Particularly with the ever-increasing immigration and newly freed former slaves, there was a huge need to “Americanize” a wide variety of students; the burden of this was, of course, placed heavily on the schools. Unfortunately, the schools were still heavily segregated, in particular in rural areas. Entrenched privileged members of society wanting to maintain status quo, and used schools to that end. Schools that served students of color were particularly hard hit; in North Carolina, finances were so unequally distributed that many African-Americans volunteered a second school tax to be specifically used for their children in addition to that collected for the white schools. However, in addition to the racial segregation, there was an economic segregation as well; children of means either lived in exclusive neighborhoods with exclusive “public” schools, or pulled themselves out to attend elite private institutions. In the South, it continued to be a symbol of success to send one’s children back to Europe for their secondary education.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL LEGACIES OF THE PERIOD?

- **Key terms:** noncurricular

There are a tremendous amount of legacies of the era on all levels of schooling. From the early childhood years, kindergarten was brought to the United States; enrollments in kindergartens and high schools grew

sharply. Schools took to expanding their curricula to meet all students' needs; the schools were perceived as the primary means of educating children in all facets of their lives. Schools engaged in "new" techniques in education such as curriculum tracking, ability grouping, vocational schools, and providing assistance to students with special needs.

Schools expanded their missions greatly. The period marked the beginnings of extracurricular activities (sports, social clubs) to another level of effort to develop the "whole child." In addition, schools got into **noncurricular** activities such as vaccinations, supporting the war effort, school breakfasts, hygiene and medical screenings. Schools increased in complexity—there emerged separate elementary, middle, secondary schools at the public school level, while postsecondary education formed junior/community colleges in addition to the established university system. Overall, there was a changing notion of common schools. There was less sameness in the treatment of students; schools offered a broader curriculum, including vocational education. However, this was still often limited to students who were white, middle to upper class, abled, and often male.

The economic purpose to education codified the school as sorting machine—rather than in or out, now students were in an academic track or vocational track. Almost as soon as this process emerged, the social reconstructionists began their vocal opposition, citing the unnaturally high percentage of students tracked not by ability (as the Jeffersonian idealists desired) but by their social role and/or the occupations of their parents. School curricula were not the only thing becoming stratified: under the guise of efficiency, states implemented teacher certification and state accreditation programs.

The Common School Movement cemented the messianic purpose to schooling. This legacy would increase exponentially with the passage of time. Apparently, any time there is a sociopolitical crisis of any sort in the United States, rather than address the crisis via legislation or social measures, we place the burden on our schools to fix things (Table 4.1).

The most profound example of this messianic notion came in our approach to race in this country. In 1954, in an effort to "fix" the race problem in the United States, the nation's schools were desegregated—once again demanding our educational institutions accomplish something neither requested, nor expected, in any other facet of our society. A decade later, a shift from the medical model to the social model of disability would also legislate that schools address treatment of those with disabilities. In these instances, the US Supreme Court and even the President would get involved.

Table 4.1 Messianic schooling in the United States

<i>Social ill</i>	<i>School-based solution</i>
Economic downturn	Compulsory attendance laws Vocational education
Rise in teenage driving	Driver's education
More free, unchaperoned time	Character education/sex education After-school activities
High poverty/hunger	School lunch and breakfast; home economics (including gardening, canning, and cooking)
Nation at war	Army intelligence testing; JROTC units Relief drives (metal, paper, rubber, blood, etc.)
Communist threat	Patriotic assemblies
Perceived rise in juvenile delinquency	Drug and alcohol prevention programs
Space race	New science, new math curricula

“GOING OLD SCHOOL”: FOR FURTHER READING

There are a great number of works that helped shape the information shared in this chapter that came together over years of teaching and reading. Many of these works are worth reading in their own right. What follows is a list of recommended works that both shaped the content of this chapter and extend it.

“The” work in the field, considered a seminal piece in the history of education, any discussion of African-American education in the United States must reference James Anderson’s *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*.³ Exhaustively researched yet very readable, Anderson’s work begins with the premise that the public schools of the nation have always been two tiered: education for democratic citizenship and schooling for second class citizenship. The touches on a multiplicity of topics—community control, both K-12 and higher education, public support and taxation among others—and should be considered mandatory reading in the field.

As the full title suggests, Harold Benjamin’s *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum, Including Other Lectures in the History of Paleolithic Education, by J. Abner Peddiwell, PH.D. and Several Tequila Daisies, as told to Raymond Wayne*⁴ is a work of satire. However, the fictional conversation that took place in the fictional longest bar in the world still represents the most scathing indictment of public schooling written. The narrative, set in Paleolithic times, explores the development of education

among early humanity, but many teachers will notice elements of their current schools. While meant to be an attack on perennialist models and the value of learning for learning's sake, it is equally valuable today.

A summary of his work in the schools in Floodwood, Minnesota, *Design for America: An Educational Exploration of the Future of Democracy for Senior High Schools and Junior Colleges*,⁵ a little-known and long out of print work by Theodore Brameld, is a clear reminder of two major premises. The first premise is social reconstruction can work in the public schools; the second is contrary to much McCarthy-era rhetoric, social reconstruction can help improve the United States, not destroy it. Interestingly, included are the voices of teachers and students that participated in the project.

One of the least-recalled legacies of the progressive period was the reforms in place by the administrative progressives. Raymond Callahan takes on this legacy head-on in *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools*,⁶ explaining how the expanded bureaucratization horribly led to mass production mentality in education. This linkage between the corporate, business model and the schools is coming to fruition in many of today's arguments arguing for the expansion of charter schools and vouchers—programs that the arguments in Callahan's book effectively disproved half a century ago.

The one that started it all in terms of social reconstruction in the United States, that anyone who purports to call themselves a social reconstructionist must read, is George Counts' *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order? A Challenge to Teachers and the New Social Order*.⁷ The book is call to arms not just for liberal educators but people who purport to be liberal in all aspects. Throughout the text, the majority of which was an address delivered before the Progressive Education Association, Counts alternates between blistering attacks and hope for the potential of the nation.

Instead of going with the third volume of Lawrence Cremin's trilogy in the history of education, instead readers should consider the somewhat celebratory *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876–1957*.⁸ The book shines a light upon the Progressive Period arguing that it impacted American education through two World Wars. Broken into two sections, Cremin argues that the concept of progressivism actually predates Dewey and the like, while it was thoroughly implemented after 1917.

It is not John Dewey's best-known work, but the closest we have to him summarizing his entire philosophical position is *Democracy and Education*.⁹ Dewey was a writer thick with theory, a style that turns many contemporary readers off; however, the incredible insights shared must be read in his original words, as many have misinterpreted him over the years. Reflecting the broad reach of progressive thought on education, Dewey approaches education from theoretical frames (looking at education as a social function and requirement for direction and growth) and somewhat more practical frames (subject studies, vocational education).

Future and current secondary teachers take note: this book is for you and about you. Edward Krug's *The Shaping of the American High School 1880–1920*¹⁰ presents a detailed overview of the origins of American high schools; it is remarkable how little has actually changed since then. This work is considered “the” starting point for conversations regarding secondary education in the United States. Krug explores the shift in the high schools of the nation from scholarly enterprises to social efficiency machines, often at the expense of academic rigor.

George I. Sanchez is arguably the father of Chicana/o in the United States. *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans*¹¹ is Sanchez' powerful study of the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico. This book lays the foundation for a number of works to come. Based on a tremendous amount of field work conducted primarily in New Mexico and Texas, the book analyzes how social and economic conditions impact schooling and learning, analyzing the cultural defeatism that would shape future generations.

Many forget that the Progressive Era also marked the rise of US imperialism around the world; very few consider the role that schools play in imperialism. Luckily, Clif Stratton takes on this topic directly in *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship*.¹² The book examines the link between imperialist schooling and building good citizens in California, Hawaii, Georgia, New York, and Puerto Rico. Stratton argues that the path to citizenship was as much about exclusion and subordination of some groups as including and reshaping others. Schools in and of themselves are “domestic colonial institutions” (p. 3) that promoted American exceptionalism at home and abroad.

Vivian Thayer et al.'s *Reorganizing Secondary Education*¹³ best encapsulates the work of the Progressive Education Association's Eight-Year Study and the implication for high school teachers. Thayer and her colleagues argue for the reformation and reevaluation of secondary education

in the United States. The first part of the book deals with the issue of adolescence and the role of the school in working with adolescents. The second part looks at the problems of adolescents in a democracy around four main areas: close social relationships, wide social relationships, economic relationships, and personal living. The third part looks at how the program laid out in the Eight-Year study met these needs/addressed these areas.

David Tyack's *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*¹⁴ created the term "administrative progressives" while presenting this encyclopedic look at aspects of progressive education often overlooked. While detailing education in urban settings, the reader is reminded how often those principles were workshopped in the cities before migrating out to more rural areas. Tyack argues that no one system can serve the pluralistic nature of the United States; that bureaucracy in schooling leads to a lack of reform; that schools have failed the poor; that politics still greatly impacts schooling; and that the United States has a long history of victim blaming when it comes to social justice issues in education.

Still regarded as one of "the" essential readings in curriculum construction, Ralph Tyler crafted what would become known as the "Tyler Rationale" in *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*.¹⁵ Essentially the publication of his Education 360 syllabus, Tyler's work is the primer on continuity, sequence, and integration in curriculum development. Even though backward design is the current most popular model, those engaged in curriculum development and reform (teachers and administrators) can learn much from Tyler's model and discussion.

NOTES

1. George Counts, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 4.
2. *Ibid.*
3. James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
4. Harold Benjamin, *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum, Including Other Lectures in the History of Paleolithic Education, by J. Abner Peddwell, PH.D. and Several Tequila Daisies, as told to Raymond Wayne* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).
5. Theodore Brameld, *Design for America: An Educational Exploration of the Future of Democracy for Senior High Schools and Junior Colleges* (New York: Hinds, Hayden & Eldredge, Inc., 1945).

6. Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
7. George Counts, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order? A Challenge to Teachers and the New Social Order* (New York: The John Day Company, 1932).
8. Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).
9. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916).
10. Edward Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School 1880–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).
11. George Sanchez, *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans* (Albuquerque: C. Horn Publishing, 1940).
12. Clif Stratton, *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).
13. Vivian T. Thayer, et al. *Reorganizing Secondary Education* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, Co., 1939).
14. David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).
15. Ralph Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).