CHAPTER SEVEN

THE AMERICAN CONTEXT, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

> I end … with a call for action. American children … face high odds of experiencing poverty, violence, family disruption, drug addiction, and poor schooling. Proposals for new programs are consistently greeted with statements that there is no money, that the national deficit is already out of hand. Yet money is found for other crises—[bailing out our financial institutions and our endless] Middle Eastern military operations … are two salient examples. The welfare of children is also a crisis, and we ignore it at our peril. "Children are ever the future of a society. Every child who does not function at a level commensurate with his or her possibilities, every child who is destined to make fewer contributions to society than society needs, and every child who does not take his or her place as an adult diminishes the power of that society's future." … Without major changes in public policies for children, our future will be bleak.
>
> —Aletha Huston, writing in *Children in Poverty: Child Development and Public Policy* (1991, p. 313) and quoting from F. Horowitz & M. O'Brien (1989, p. 445)

As previous chapters have made clear, the United States lags seriously behind other advanced nations in its treatment of impoverished youths; and because of the close tie between youth poverty and educational failure, the U.S. pays huge costs for this neglect in wasted lives, high rates of serious social problems, and stunted national development. Why on earth are such costs tolerated in America, and what might be done to cope with them?

This chapter seeks answers for these questions. It begins with a brief discussion of major themes in American culture, seeking to understand how these have lead to the country's present problems with youth poverty and its impact in education. It continues by discussing strategies likely to govern success when seeking to improve outlooks for impoverished American youths and their schools. And it closes with a discussion of promising tactics, based on research reviewed in earlier chapters, that can help achieve these goals.

THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

> It is easy to identify a set of reasons that explain why progress in alleviating child poverty has been so difficult in the United States.

> They include the anti-tax and anti-government strain in our national character that has become an increasing part of our political discourse, based in part on perceptions that the government has not performed well in many areas and that money devoted to government is largely wasted. Our ideology of individualism holds that people ought to stand on their own feet and that government help undermines the habit of independence. Many unattractive behaviors are attributed to parents who are the direct beneficiaries of government benefits for children—an avoidance of work, disorderly family relations, loose sexual behavior, the feckless procreation of children the public must support, and the misspending of the money [those parents] receive for necessities on "luxuries" and "vices."
>
> —Barbara Bergmann (1996, p. 10)

> [Within America] it's hard to think of a more satisfying solution to poverty than education. School reform involves relatively little money and no large-scale initiatives, asks practically nothing of the nonpoor and is accompanied by the enobling sensation that comes from expressing faith in the capacity of the poor to overcome disadvantage by themselves.
>
> —J. Traub writing in "What No School Can Do," an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (2000, p. 54)

Anyone who writes about major themes in American culture faces a daunting challenge. The United States is an enormous country with a unique, short-term political history that tolerates a diverse population, the accumulation of great wealth, and many competing value-and-belief systems. Key groups within America often hold antithetical views about problems facing the country, prominent Americans express discordant beliefs about conclusions to be drawn from scientific evidence or historical experiences, and American political debates are often chaotic and tend to be dominated by the interests of wealth.

Nevertheless, all is not chaos within the United States, and a host of authors, fascinated by The American Experience, have written about shared themes in its culture.[1] It would be nearly impossible to review the full range of insights expressed in these works, and many of those insights are not relevant to problems addressed in this book. But some authors have written insightfully about American themes bearing on youth poverty and education, and what I write now draws from their works.[2] Which of these themes offer insights that help us understand America's reluctance or inability to think clearly, debate sensibly, and adopt policies that confront the country's massive youth poverty and its dreadful educational impact? Herewith nine themes and examples that provide partial answers for these questions.

Individualism

In contrast with other advanced nations, Americans more often assume that social

outcomes are produced by the actions of *individuals* and downgrade the effects of other forces involved in their creation.[3] This stance encourages both personal enterprise and competitiveness and justifies assigning rewards and punishments to individuals who are thought to be responsible for "successes" and "failures." At its best, individualism promotes creativity, optimism, and a sense of efficacy among Americans. At its worse, individualism leads to ugly social philosophies, such as that of Ayn Rand, the dog-eat-dog economics of Milton Friedman, and the far-right political extremism of Tea Party adherents and their allies. And it encourages conclusions that poverty appears because poor persons suffer from negative personal traits and that educational failures result from the personal deficiencies of educators—victim-blaming notions that will not solve problems faced by impoverished youths and their educators.

Individualism is also associated with other value and belief systems in America. One of these is *personal freedom*—freedom to *do* whatever one wants (unless one's conduct interferes "too much" with other persons or violates moral and legal constraints), and freedom *from* "unreasonable" restrictions imposed by institutions or governments. And another is the complex belief-value system of *unfettered capitalism* which allows and encourages individuals to accumulate great wealth though innovation, marketing, quasi-legal and political shenanigans, business-government "partnerships," and the poorly compensated labor of others.

Communitarianism

But as many commentators have also reminded us, individualism has not been the only major theme dominating American culture.[4] Indeed many of the founding fathers were suspicious of unfettered individualism, and their writings often stressed need for a constraining belief-value system based on commitment to *communities*. This latter theme also appears over and again within American history—in the concept of "Christian charity," in New England town meetings, in events leading to America's constitutional convention which created a new federal government, in reciprocal assistance common among prairie families who needed help with barn building and came together for quilting bees, in Jane Addams' Hull House movement, the Social Gospel, the writings of John Dewey, and the professions of social work and community development, in Americans' widespread willingness to join service clubs, support charities, and respond to needs created by environmental disasters, in creation of the country's national park system, the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the Great Society, and other political initiatives that have promoted equity, shared environmental resources, and social justice. Thus, *communitarianism* has also played a prominent role in American culture, one sometimes opposed to the dominant value of individualism, one in which poverty is more often viewed as a disaster to be remedied than as a reflection of personal flaws, one that recognizes the roles played by poverty and other forms of disadvantage in helping to generate educational failures, one that challenges narrow goals for public education.

Adult Orientation

Both individualism and communitarianism are largely focused on America's adults. Individualism assigns inordinate powers to *adults* as actors in public dramas who are thought to be those who create, use, and enjoy or suffer from those actions, and—particularly in the hands of far-right activists—this can lead to proposals for "solving the poverty problem" by punishing impoverished parents until they "reject welfare and decide to work for a living."[5] In contrast, communitarianism stresses the need for *adults* to be engaged in public debates and be willing to participate with others in collective efforts. Neither belief-value system focuses on the activities, treatment, or needs of *youths*, and this focus contrasts sharply with major themes in the cultures of other advanced countries.

France, for example, views youths as the key persons who will honor and promote French culture in the future, thus who need to be protected and appropriately socialized. Norway believes that youths should become informed and active participants in the nation's political life, and it sets up youth clubs and training camps with this goal in mind. Sporting achievements are strongly valued in Australia, and youths there are provided with dedicated athletic facilities and are encouraged to participate regularly in sports and recreation.[6] In sharp contrast, the chief role assigned to youths in America is that of "consumer"—of manufactured toys, fast foods, pop music, child dedicated TV and motion picture offerings, cell phones and other electronic gadgetry, and "the latest" fashionable garments—not because these products are necessarily good for youths, but rather because they generate profits for industry.[7] Although American adults are often deeply concerned about children in their own families, they are provided little ideological or institutional support for thinking about other youths in the nation.

The Importance of Public Education

Individualism and communitarianism are also alike in that each stresses the need for a widely *educated* populace if American democracy is to thrive. To work efficiently, individualism requires the presence of adults who can make thoughtful and informed choices; communitarianism demands the presence of adults who respect others and both understand and honor the traditions of collective decision making. Awareness of these needs grew out of The Enlightenment and were well understood by America's Founding Fathers who assumed that education was a *public* responsibility. (John Adams, for example, helped to write a state-supported guarantee of citizens' rights to obtain an education into the Constitution of Massachusetts, and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were both involved in establishing Virginia's first, publicly supported, university.) So it is hardly surprising that America led other nations in setting up the world's first public primary schools whose curricula stressed both acquiring basic skills and learning the forms and traditions of representative democracy. Nor is it surprising that the U.S. pioneered other features of public education during the 19th and early 20th centuries (such as much-expanded

curricula that responded to evolving needs in the nation), that public education gradually became a Major Institution in the country (with all the strengths and problems of such organizations), and that Americans began to assume that their public education system was, of course, the "best in the world."[8]

At least four forces have now brought this comforting thought under attack, however:

- *For one*, and in contrast with education practices now common in other advanced countries, the U.S. developed a *comprehensive* secondary school system in which all students were subject to enrollment and many curricular options were offered. Such a system presumably keeps the doors of opportunity open for all students, but over time it has led to resentment and discontent among affluent parents who see little reason to pay for "frivolous courses" and the costs needed to educate students who are thought to be "less talented," "less motivated," and often from the "wrong" ethnic or racial backgrounds.
- *For another*, and responding to serious lacks of social services in America, public education has had to take on numerous noneducative tasks. Today, the country's public schools commonly offer free and assisted meals for low-income students; nursing, counseling, and other medical services for students and their families; "special education" programs for students with disabilities; "outreach" programs in which the needs of students' parents are addressed directly; interschool athletic competitions; "adult education" classes for adults and senior citizens in their communities; and the like. In other advanced nations, such tasks are often funded by collateral institutions, but such burdens are paid from the core budgets of public education in the U.S., they have increased sharply in recent years, and policies requiring the funding of such noneducative tasks has generated both misunderstanding and resentment. (In fact, some Americans argue now that public education *alone* can cure poverty or other major social problems in the nation, and far-right advocates like to pretend that increases in the budgets of public schools, actually driven by noneducative costs, indicate that those schools are "failing.")
- *For a third*, for some years the country has been besieged by hysterical press reports, based on comparative studies, which purport to show that American public education does *not* "lead the world" in achievement levels for core skills such as literacy, numeracy, and scientific knowledge. In part, these reports reflect misinterpretations of data from American schools (see Chapter Four), in part they reflect inadvertent acceptance of the industry-serving notion that these core skills are the only ones that "matter" (despite long-standing American commitments to broader goals for education), and, over time, they have generated worries about the vaunted "leadership" of America's schools.
- *And fourth*, since the early 1980s, American education has also come under energetic and dishonest attacks from far-right forces representing the interests of super-rich individuals, ultraconservative foundations, religious

fundamentalists, racial and ethnic bigots, private schools, affluence, big business, those who hate unions, entrepreneurs who want to make money by offering private services to public schools, and ideologues who would abolish *all* public institutions.[9] I will have more to say about this attack in the last theme discussed below.

Taken together, forces such as these have caused Americans to become worried about their public education system, have set agendas for public debates about that system, and have generated misguided and sometimes tragic proposals and programs attempting to "reform" the system. These outcomes reflect the depth of American concerns for public education, but they have also repeatedly diverted attention away from *real* problems faced by public schools—and crucially, those associated with youth poverty and its pernicious effects.

Exceptionalism

Americans also tend to assume that their country is *exceptional*, "a city on a hill," "a beacon of light and hope among nations." Among all countries, the U.S. is presumed to be the most energetic, richest, most moral and compassionate of nations; uniquely endowed with natural resources; the world's leader in intellectual enterprise, science, technology, innovation, the media, and the arts; the world's most successful military power, the only truly "safe" repository for weapons of mass destruction. Most of these beliefs are at least questionable, of course, but collectively they justify a form of chauvinism in which Americans focus largely on events in their own nation and assume that what goes on in other countries will be of little interest or irrelevant to their concerns (unless those events should intrude on American interests, of course).

Such a stance is sharply at odds with those of most other advanced nations whose interdependence with other countries is more self-evident, and this means that citizens of those nations are more likely to be aware of or to have thought more about life in other countries—and in particular, to know more about how other nations handle issues bearing on poverty, youths, and education.

As well, American exceptionalism has a second downside; since the blessed condition of the U.S. is unique, it is also likely to be envied if not resented by other peoples, hence Americans must always be vigilant and guard the country's treasures, its borders, its accomplishments and privileges, and this can lead to knee-jerk reactions of fear and aggressiveness towards "outsiders" presumed to threaten the country and its interests. A lucid portrayal of this issue was provided by Robert Reich in his 1987 book, *Tales of a New America*, and Exhibit 7.1 provides an abridged version of his words.

As can be seen, Reich stresses that the targets of American worries about "The Mob at the Gates" have shifted over the years, and currently they are most often centered on "foreign terrorists" or "radical Islamists." But whatever the presumed source, threats to American interests from "foreign enemies" often take precedence over pressing domestic concerns—including those of impoverished children and public education.

Exhibit 7.1. The Mob at the Gates

[This] mythic story is about tyranny and barbarisms that lurk "out there." It depicts America as a beacon light of virtue in a world of darkness, a small island of freedom and democracy in a perilous sea. We are uniquely blessed, the proper model for other peoples' aspirations, the hope of the world's poor and oppressed. The parable gives voice to a corresponding fear: we must beware, lest the forces of darkness overwhelm us. Our liberties are fragile; our openness renders us vulnerable to exploitation or infection from beyond.

Hence our endless efforts to isolate ourselves from the rest of the globe, to contain evil forces beyond our borders, and to convey our lessons with missionary zeal to benighted outsiders …. The American amalgam of fear and aggressiveness toward "them out there" appears in countless fantasies of space explorers who triumph over alien creatures from beyond. It is found in Whig histories of the United States, and in the anti-immigration harangues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ….

In this century Woodrow Wilson grimly rallied Americans to "defeat once and for all … the sinister forces" that rendered peace impossible; Franklin Roosevelt warned of "rotten apple" nations that spread their rot to others; Dean Acheson adopted the same metaphor to describe the Communist threat to Greece and Turkey immediately after Hitler's war; to Eisenhower, South Vietnam was the first in a series of dominoes that might fall to communism; to John F. Kennedy it was the "the finger in the dike," holding back the Soviet surge. The underlying lesson: We must maintain vigilance, lest dark forces over-run us.

—Robert B. Reich (1987, pp. 8-9)

Hostility to Corrupt Elites

For years, Americans have also been suspicious of and hostile to the "malevolence of powerful elites, be they wealthy aristocrats, rapacious business leaders, or imperious government officials."[10] In prerevolutionary years these concerns were centered on the British crown and other powerful aristocrats living in European countries, and the American colonies insisted that titles of nobility be proscribed when they designed their own governments. But the colonies were also initially governed by authorities sanctioned from London, so those colonies also quickly learned to resent domestic government officials, and over the years this resentment was extended to those who were *elected* to govern whenever their actions were thought to be so nonresponsive, corrupt, or to reflect stances with which voters strongly disagreed. And when it became clear that America's industrial revolution was generating, not only desired innovations, new products, and wealth for a few, but also pollution, grinding poverty, and urban miseries for many workers and their families, suspicion and hostility were also extended to business leaders deemed responsible for such outcomes. Today, antagonism towards governments is more likely to be expressed by The Right, while suspicion and hostility towards business leaders more often comes from The Left,

but both forms of response are widely shared by the American public, and either or both forms tend to appear during political debates over domestic agenda.

Interestingly, this "American parable differs subtly but profoundly from a superficially similar European mythology. The struggle is only occasionally and incidentally a matter of money or class. There are no workers pitted against capitalists at the heart of this American story. It is, rather, a tale of corruption, decadence, and irresponsibility among the powerful, or conspiracy against the broader public."[11] Thus, along with Lord Acton, Americans tend to believe that any form of "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," a good deal of political rhetoric in the U.S. reflects depredations by powerful forces in business and government, and many of the country's severe problems now imposed on impoverished youths and public education can, indeed, be traced to self-serving actions by powerful, well-organized, and self-serving elites. And it suggests that, as in the past, once Americans begin to think clearly about youth poverty and its dreadful effects in education, they can be mobilized to *do something* about such issues.

Race and Ethnicity

Americans are also profoundly *racist*. This is hardly surprising given the country's early history of slavery, its viscous Civil War, and the angry reconstruction period that followed. But legal segregation, overt discrimination, and race-based violence against Blacks were also prevalent until quite recently in America, particularly in the Deep South, and these ugly practices reflected not only prejudices and ideologies, but also differences between the cultures of White and Black Americans, as well as greater affluence among the former and long-entrenched poverty among the latter. Most laws allowing discrimination and racial segregation have now been abolished, but many Americans remain hyperconscious about racial cues, some are outright bigots, and housing and educational segregation still persist in the country. In fact, racially based, discriminatory practices by real estate agents, banks and other lending agencies, as well as federal policies, have been the major forces leading to residential *ghettoization* in the U.S. which leads, in turn, to the clustering of affluent adults into urban neighborhoods or suburbs where they communicate largely with one another and assume that they bear little or no responsibility for what goes on in America's urban (or rural) poverty-racial ghettos.[12]

Americans also tend to be confused about the interrelated effects of poverty and Black identity. Many thoughtful commentators have written about the latter concern, but a particularly trenchant expression of the issues was provided by Steven Shulman in 1990, and Exhibit 7.2 quotes from his text.

Not surprisingly, the myths noted by Shulman provide potent reasons to avoid even thinking about, let alone helping, impoverished American adults, and as other authors have pointed out, such myths are also applied, willy-nilly, to impoverished youths.[13]

Exhibit 7.2. American Myths About Black Poverty

Unlike [poverty], a person's race is visible. The black poor are not simply poor. They visibly represent a set of stereotypes that support the values and sense of worth of the non-poor. In the era when racism was openly expressed, blacks were identified with laziness, promiscuity, and stupidity. Today these stereotypes are expressed in a more roundabout fashion: black poverty is blamed on welfare disincentives (that is, laziness), out-of-wedlock births (that is, promiscuity) and lack of human capital (that is, stupidity). Despite the lack of evidence supporting any of these explanations for black poverty, they persist in the academic literature as well as the popular imagination. They are values not in the instrumental sense of reinforcing positive life processes, but in the ceremonial sense of reinforcing status distinctions. It is far more comfortable to perceive black poverty as resulting from the deficiencies of the black population than to see it as the outcome of a racial hierarchy that skews the distribution of income toward whites. The former has the pleasant corollary of explaining the successes of whites as resulting from their alleged characteristics, such as hard work, self-discipline, and skills. The latter has the unpleasant connotation of discrimination that deserves to be ended but that inevitably entails equalizing the competition for a limited set of rewards. Furthermore, the former reflects and reproduces the individualistic ethos of the marketplace, while the latter calls into question capitalism's self-images of opportunity and democracy. It is no wonder that racial myths have proved so enduring. They are part and parcel of the myth of America itself.

—Steven Shulman (1990, p. 1014)

Some Americans have also responded badly to various immigrant groups—including, in turn, persons of German, Irish, Scandinavian, Italian, Eastern European, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hispanic and other extractions. In fairness, these ugly responses to immigrants have not generally been as severe as those imposed on Black Americans, and they have often been restricted to locales where concentrations of specific types of immigrants were high. But since most immigrant groups have also been impoverished, some Americans are also confused about the interrelated effects of poverty, ethnicity, and immigrancy.

Guns and Violence

Gun ownership is also far more prevalent in America than in other advanced nations, and again this reflects a complex history that is unique to the U.S. Given frontier conditions, early rural homes in America were likely to own rifles used for hunting game and for defense against wild animals and "savage Indians." These weapons were then used when the American colonies formed militias to fight their wars of independence, and an ambiguously worded "right to bear arms" clause was subsequently written into an amendment to the U.S.

Constitution. Violence and the use of personal weapons were also common in the West and in unrest preceding and responding to the country's Civil War. Enthusiasm for gun ownership is now more popular in rural areas and among hunters, gun collectors, survivalists—and now, Republicans—and the use of weapons is promoted by a noisy and politically powerful advocacy group, the *National Rifle Association*, whose deep pockets are filled with contributions from The Gun Industry.

But as Michael Moore taught us in *Bowling for Columbine*, the biggest factors now driving American enthusiasm for guns are violence and fear.[14] *Violence* against individuals has also had a long history in America and was used both to settle grudges in colonial times and extensively by Whites against Blacks in the Deep South and Indians in the West. Today it is greatly promoted by Hollywood films, video games, TV programs for children(!), and nightly news programs throughout the country whose implicit marketing slogan is "If it Bleeds, it Leads." And the rate of weapon-driven urban violence is far greater in the U.S. than in other advanced countries, so the nightly media have a lot of material to work with. The result? *Fears* about violence and weapon use are now endemic in America, sales of weapons tend to spike after episodes of horrendous slaughter are displayed on American TVs, and (fuelled by gang fights over illegal drugs) personal violence and gun use are now widespread in America's poverty ghettos, imposing enormous miseries on impoverished American youths and the public schools they attend. Media portraits of American violence also tend to vilify impoverished teenagers and again distract attention from issues created by youth poverty and its educational impact.

The Far Right, Money, Lies, and Activism

America's ability to confront serious domestic problems has long been bedeviled by political conservatism, the machinations of wealth, racism, and constitutionally based, structural constraints, and these constraints created a "moderately conservative" ideology that was embraced by most Republicans and some Democrats during much of the 20th century.[15] Dominance of this ideology has recently been challenged, however, by at least four forces:

– those created when, in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act (which drove White Southern supremacists into the Republican Party);
– those generated by demands for immediate social change and "immoral" conduct displayed by left-leaning college students in the 1960s (which offended and frightened social conservatives);
– those induced by hyperinflation and the unexpected stagnation of the American economy in the 1970s (which aroused fiscal conservatives and prompted creation of archly conservative think tanks and propaganda mills); and

– those let loose in the 1980s by well-planned attacks on the efficacy and legitimacy of the Federal Congress by Newt Gingrich, then Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives.

These and related forces have now produced a new, *far-right* version of conservatism that subscribes to a radical form of individualism; believes that the quest for community and the federal government are "antithetical to the strivings of free individuals," and is "contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime, scornful of compromise, unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence, and science, and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."[16] As I have stressed, Americans who advocate far-right positions represent various interests, but far-right activities are largely bankrolled by a small, energetic, ideologically and selfishly driven set of very wealthy persons and right-wing foundations which promote their interests through massive investments in ultraconservative "think tanks" and front organizations, political activism on campuses, slanted and dishonest propaganda, talk show hosts, and both direct and hidden support for political candidates.[17]

This movement's vigorous attacks on the poor and public education began in the early 1980s, and its well-financed and dishonest propaganda have created both confusion and destructive policies regarding these issues. But now, and aided by eruption of the (far-right funded) Tea Party in 2010, the movement has seized control of the Republican Party, both in the federal Congress and in a number of state houses where it has wreaked havoc during the past several years, prevented appointments of key persons to administrative and judicial posts, imposed further depredations on needy persons, and stalled legislative actions needed to address major problems now facing the country and its states. Needless to say, the *far-right movement* does not respect the aims and values held by traditional American conservatives (let alone those held by liberal or progressive Americans), but until saner voices recover control of the Republican Party, the American electorate becomes disenchanted with that party, or innovative means are found to sideline its lunacies, political action is unlikely to appear concerning the country's serious, domestic problems—including those associated with youths, poverty, and education.

To give an example of well-financed, far-right, antipublic education activism at work, let us trace the money trail from a major source through to a typical piece of dishonest, far-right propaganda. As it happens, one of the best-funded far-right sources, The Bradley Foundation, centered in Milwaukee, has long held interests in promoting both far-right control of Wisconsin politics and American private schools as the proper alternative to the country's supposedly "crisis-ridden," and "clearly failing" public education system. Regarding the latter, "Bradley has spent over $31 million since 2001 [funding] organizations promoting education privatization, academics providing favorable pro-privatization pseudoscience, media personalities promoting the privatization agenda, and … aggressive, pro-privatization media and lobbying efforts."[18] And over this period the foundation has made major grants to at least 20 nationally based far-right front organizations that promote school vouchers and priva-

tization, including (and crucially, for our purposes) the "Barry Goldwater Institute for Public Policy Research" and the "Alliance for School Choice."[19]

And what does this support generate? One answer for this question is suggested by a recent document, *Report Card on American Education*, sponsored by one of the most prominent, far-right, front organizations, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which "might best be described as a 'corporate bill mill' that helps conservative state legislators become a vessel [sic] for advancing special interest legislation."[20] To aid its antipublic education goals, this organization has also long sponsored a string of book-length reports supposedly evaluating the country's public schooling, and in its latest, 18th edition, the report's authors, Matthew Ladner and Dave Myslinski, not only recapitulate stale claims about the much-touted "failures" and "crisis" state now presumed to threaten the country's public schools, but also claim to provide *research-based* rankings of American states "on a handful of education policies around ALEC's agenda of free-market enterprise, limited government, and federalism that will presumably solve these supposed problems."[21]

But how honest is the authors' discussion of such issues? This question is answered in a recent review of the "Report Card," cowritten by Matthew Lubienski and Jameson Brewer, and Exhibit 7.3 reprints, in full, their summary of this review.

Exhibit 7.3. Review of "Report Card on American Education"

The 18th edition of the American Legislative Exchange Council's (ALEC) *Report Cared on American Education: Ranking State K-12 Performance, Progress, and Reform* draws on ratings from market-oriented advocacy groups to grade states in areas such as support for charter schools, availability of vouchers, and permissiveness for homeschooling. The authors contend that these grades are based on "high quality" research demonstrating that the policies for which they award high grades will improve education for all students. This review finds that, contrary to these claims, ALEC's grades draw selectively from these advocacy groups to make claims that are not supported in the wider, peer-reviewed literature. In fact, the research ALEC highlights is quite shoddy and is unsuitable for supporting its recommendations. The authors' claims of a "growing body of research" lacks citations; their grading system contradicts the testing data they report; and their data on alternative teacher research is simply wrong. Overall, ALEC's Report Card is grounded less in research than in ideological tenets, as reflected in the high grades it assigns to states with unproven and even disproven market-based policies. The report's purpose appears to be more about shifting control of education to private interests than in improving education.

—Christopher Lubienski & T. Jameson Brewer (2013, Summary)

As can be seen in the exhibit, the claims made in the "Report Card" were surprisingly unanchored in discernable evidence but were based, rather, on far-fight ideological tenets. This then was not a work of scholarship but rather one of profoundly dishonest propaganda. Why on earth would those who produced this

work have behaved in such a way? Would you believe that its senior author, Matthew Ladner, has recently spent time as a staff member in various far-right organizations devoted to school privation including—surprise!—the "Barry Goldwater Institute for Public Policy Research" and the "Alliance for School Choice"? (My, how the dots form a pattern.)

But do the claims of such pseudoscientific propaganda pieces have an effect in the real world of American public opinion and policy-making? Unfortunately, the answer to this question must be "yes." Since the same claims appear from multiple sources, all too often they are picked up by uninformed press outlets, are repeated by ignorant or right-wing news commentators, and eventually creep their way into public opinion and the rhetorics and demands of far-right politicians. Meanwhile, the less well-funded, less repeated voices of honest evidence about excessive American youth poverty and its corrosive impact in education are often lost amidst the welter of dishonest but well-financed, far-right propaganda blasts that blame The Poor and attack America's public schools. And this funding imbalance is yet another reason for American ignorance (or confusion) about the huge youth poverty education Elephant in its living room.

GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

> Americans are accustomed to think that the primary beneficiaries of child care, income supplementation, and medical care programs are parents, and in particular, mothers, rather than children. One reason for that attitude is that most of the American programs focus on families at the bottom of the income scale. Unlike the French programs "for children," which benefit families up and down the income scale, American programs go to the least respected members of the population, those whose behavior is regarded as the least prudent and who appear to be making the least effort to extricate themselves from poverty. (That many African-American families who receive the benefits have had the cards stacked against them by racial discrimination does not usually enter into the discussion.) In contrast to the French, who generally regard income supplements as deserved and sensible help to struggling families, Americans tend to view these programs as necessary but regrettable assistance to "people who sit in the wagon instead of helping to pull it." … The spotlight often plays on the deficiencies of these adults rather than on the needs of their children when American programs for child well-being are discussed.
>
> —Barbara R. Bergmann (1996, pp. 19-20)

But let us assume that radical, far-right, political voices can be neutralized, and Americans are once again able to engage in sensible, evidence-based legislative debates about serious problems now facing the nation, which strategies are more likely to help build programs that will relieve massive youth poverty and its awful effects in American education? Answers for this question are suggested,

not only by longstanding, cultural themes and recent events in the U.S., but also by the related experiences of other advanced nations, and I phrase some of these answers as eight strategies designed to help with the task of building programs to confront The Unacknowledged Disaster.

Focus on Youths

As Barbara Bergmann suggested in the above quote, many Americans hold negative attitudes and opinions about impoverished adults. These are often fuelled by associated beliefs that the bulk of poor persons are Black or Hispanic and share negative traits with other adults in these minority groups. But American *youths* are less likely to be tarred by such negative stereotypes, so whenever possible, programs designed to address poverty and its educational effects should be focused on youths rather than adults. And this means, for example, that American programs providing poverty-relieving services for youths should be easier to establish than those that provide such services for their parents, their families, or other adults.

Entitlements

Means-tested benefit programs are often portrayed as being more focused and less expensive, but they require assessment of eligibility (which can generate additional costs) and often lead to victim-blaming and resentment among those receiving and those paying for such benefits. So whenever possible, *entitlement*-based programs are preferable in the American context. (To illustrate, *social security* is an entitlement program and is wildly popular among Americans; whereas *Medicaid*, in contrast, is a means-tested program and is more often attacked.) Thus, for instance, if new day care and preschool facilities are to be planned for Americans, those facilities should be designed so that *all* appropriately aged youths are entitled to use them.

Poverty Focus

If a means-tested benefit program is required in America, if possible it should be based on poverty rather than on race, ethnicity, or other indicators of need (however pressing). The U.S. has long been concerned about issues associated with race, ethnicity, and other indicators of need, and prejudice, discrimination, and legal battles have swirled around these indicators, so they represent "hot button issues" for many Americans. In contrast, little public attention has been given to *poverty*—the major creator of misery for American youngsters and public schools in the country—so programs designed to alleviate poverty itself are not only more likely to be effective but are also less likely to provoke needless, irrelevant opposition. To illustrate, if programs designed to alleviate high levels of student scholastic concentration are planned, those programs

should be based on poverty rather than on race, ethnicity, or other indicators of student need.

Federal and State Support

Given extensive economic ghettoization and large differences in state-level ability and/or willingness to fund social services in America, support for programs designed to deal with youth poverty and its educational effects normally should not be based on *local* support; better that support should come from *state* sources; best it should be funded at the *federal* level. To illustrate, various programs providing partial, compensatory support for underfunded schools are now provided from federal and some state sources—and at least one state, Hawaii (as well as the District of Columbia), now provide equal educational funding for all students in their jurisdictions. Programs such as these could be strengthened through various strategies—such as setting national or statewide standards for minimal support of education combined with compensatory funding for impoverished school districts.

Multiple Rationales

Given extensive, competing demands for funding and America's traditionally weak support for impoverished youths and their education, advocates should always plan to provide *multiple rationales* for programs designed to ameliorate youth poverty and its educational effects. For example, advocates for strong day care/preschool facilities should be prepared to explain how such programs not only relieve youth poverty, but also improve educational outcomes for young children, respond to the needs of those children's parents, help the economies of their local neighborhoods and the development of a corps of child development experts, and generate advantages that will accrue for the society down the road such as increased economic, scientific, and artistic productivity as well as reduced rates of crime and incarceration, drug addiction, and mental health problems.

The Marketing of Evidence

In the typical, small, advanced nation, social distances between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers tend to be minimal, and this means that when well-written reports of policy-relevant research appear, those reports often attract attention from media sources, may stimulate quick changes in local practices, and may even provide bases for political debates and innovations in national policies. But the United States is *not* a small nation, its researchers, practitioners, and policymakers tend to live in different worlds, researchers in it generate huge amounts of policy-relevant research (often expressed in technical jargon) whose findings are unlikely to appear in the public media or practitioner-oriented sources, and where political decisions are more often dominated by the interests

of wealth and power. Thus, even though concerned researchers have an enormous advantage in American policy debates—they have the *evidence*—that evidence must be *marketed* if it is to have an impact. (To provide an example of poor marketing, many studies have appeared reporting unfortunate outcomes when graphic violence is portrayed on TV or video screens, but the bulk of this evidence has not generated media reports, and changes in violence-oriented media presentations or policy debates concerning the issue have been strikingly absent in the U.S.) Researchers normally know little about marketing, so in America this suggests long-term need for agencies whose task is to market policy-relevant research evidence bearing on youth poverty and its educational impact. Funding for such agencies should be sought from foundations and other sources committed to the welfare of young Americans and their education.

An Advocacy Organization

Given the forms of American democracy, the nation's conservative traditions, and its current backlog of serious, unsolved problems, it will require a lot of time, good planning, and organized effort to focus political activities on programs designed to reduce the country's levels of youth poverty and its unwanted educational effects. And this suggests, in turn, the need for a well-financed *advocacy organization*, presumably based in the nation's capital, that can help develop and provide leadership and lobbying services for such programs. (To illustrate, in 1972 the National Organization of Manufacturers announced that it was moving its headquarters from New York City to Washington, DC, and this organization has since provided highly successful advocacy services for the interests of Big Business.) Americans seriously concerned with poverty, youths, and public education need such a "presence" in the country's Seat of Power, and professional groups representing their interests should be tapped to provide collective support for such an organization.

Political Leadership

Significant changes in American public policy are also unlikely to appear without savvy political leadership, especially when those changes concern severe domestic problems in the country. This suggests need for improved, direct contacts between those generating research on youths, poverty, and education and politicians who serve both in Washington, DC and the country's state capitals. Such contacts might take several forms, but an attractive alternative might be to sponsor regular seminars concerned with specific youth poverty education topics that bring researchers, practitioners, and policymakers into direct contact. Participants in such seminars should be chosen carefully and should involve researchers who can articulate findings clearly, practitioners concerned with the issues, and policymakers with appropriate interests who have known (or potential) interests in leadership. Funding for such efforts could be provided by

teacher associations, foundations, and other advocacy groups committed to improving the lives of young Americans and their education.

Commentary

A common theme underlies the last three of these strategies—that simple links between youth poverty education research and political action are hard to come by in today's America. In fairness, this thought has also occurred to other scholar-activists, and some have already begun to explore ways to improve this link. To illustrate, in 2008 the Economic Policy Institute, a major think tank concerned with income inequality, poverty, and education, sponsored a new advocacy organization, the *Broader, Bolder Approach to Education* (BBA), whose mission is to involve "scholars, practitioners, and policymakers" in joint activities promoting more sensible, poverty-sensitive reforms for public education in America. This organization has already produced a powerful review of some of the failures of far-right reforms associated with No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, and I return to this review shortly.[22]

TACTICS FOR REDUCING YOUTH POVERTY

> A great nation faces up to its shortcomings and acts to remedy them. American history is full of examples of our doing that. We ended the evil of slavery, outlawed child labor, created Social Security and Medicare to give older Americans a measure of security, guaranteed voting rights for women and African Americans and ended legal racial segregation.
>
> Now our task and opportunity is to save our children, families, communities, and nation by ending child poverty. Let us keep our eyes on what children need to grow up healthy and productive, and not allow ourselves to be sidetracked by ever-shifting political winds or be deterred by the endless stream of excuses attempting to justify national indifference and neglect to children who are our growing edge. It will cost money to end child poverty, but … individually and collectively we will be richer for having done so. The great undertaking of saving America's children will save America's soul and our future.
>
> —Marion Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, writing in an Introduction to *Wasting America's Future* (Arloc Sherman, 1994, p. xxix)

I turn now to specific, tactical suggestions. As thoughtful readers will have noted, findings unearthed in Chapters Two through Six have implied various ways through which youth poverty could be reduced and education could be improved in America, and most of what I write below draws from these materials. I begin with tactics focused on *reducing America's massive youth poverty*.

Before beginning, however, a disclaimer is in order. As we know from Chapter Three, poverty in the U.S. reflects at least three forces: poor wages paid to low-income workers, a regressive tax structure, and lack of benefits for impoverished youths and their families. Although tempted, I will not discuss tactics here that focus on *salary* and *tax* issues. Such tactics are frequently discussed in other sources and would also help reduce poverty rates for American youths, of course, but adults would surely be seen as the primary beneficiaries of salary and tax proposals, and this would create needless burdens for those seeking to help youths in the U.S. Fortunately, this is less true for *benefit-based* tactics, and to the latter I now turn.

Cash Benefits

Installing cash-benefit programs in the U.S. would have two obvious advantages: They would provide flexibility in that additional dollars are available to recipients which could be used, if necessary, to meet unexpected needs; and they would provide immediate relief for poverty. Advocacy tactics designed to promote four of the benefits reviewed in Chapter Three could be structured so they focus on the needs of *youths*. In addition, I also review a fifth type of cash award, first pioneered in the U.S. and discussed in Chapter Four, that would provide benefits for *families*.

Housing awards. As noted, half of the 22 advanced countries for which data were reviewed in Chapter Three provide cash assistance, funded through national budgets, to help with rental costs for *all* eligible, low-income families in their borders, and most other advanced countries provide such assistance in regions or states where housing costs are notoriously high. Most housing benefits are *means tested*, so larger awards are paid to families with less income and/or more children, and in some countries those allowances can be as high as 20% of average wages paid to production workers in that country. No such benefits are available at the national level in the U.S. (although in a few locales, housing benefits are provided through state or local taxes), but families that are "homeless" or cannot afford even modest housing are now attracting concern in America, and interest in this problem could be tapped to organize a "national program to eradicate homelessness" through provision of appropriate housing awards. As noted in Chapter Four, evidence indicates that such a program would generate immediate benefits for impoverished youths, and advocacy efforts could be focused on such outcomes.

Family awards. Chapter Three also reveals that the U.S. stands alone among the advanced nations reviewed in that it *fails* to provide universal, per-child cash assistance to families with dependent children. Most such programs involve only modest awards, but they reduce youth poverty, and most other advanced nations treat them as *entitlements*. Such a program would cost little in the U.S. and would provide significant help for youths and their families who suffer from severe

poverty, but rhetorics that would support such a program are hard to find in today's America. Some European countries justify family awards because they are thought help raise birthrates among native-born citizens, but widespread concern for a nativist birthrate that is "too low" has not (yet?) surfaced in the U.S. and would surely be viewed as anti-immigrant. A better tactic would be to point out that such a program would be a less expensive and *directly* focused way to reduce America's massive youth poverty rate, and such rhetoric would surely fly in today's America.

Child care awards. Three of the 22 advanced nations examined in Chapter Three—Australia, Denmark, and France—also provide universal, *means-tested* cash awards for low-income families with young children to supplement or replace missing day care and preschool facilities. Such awards can also be substantial; in France, for example, the maximum child care award can be as high as 28% of average wages paid to production workers. Most other countries, including the U.S., currently offer merely lower income tax rates for families headed by single parents, and this provides little or no help for single parents with low incomes. A true child care award program would also provide relief for impoverished American infants and toddlers, and it could easily be built into a wider effort that provided nationally funded, strong day care and preschool services (see below).

Single-parent awards. It is widely understood that youths in families headed by single parents (and particularly, single mothers) are likely to experience poverty, and of the 22 advanced nations tracked in Chapter Three, 10 provide cash awards for such families. The bulk of these awards are *means tested*, and larger awards are given to families with more children and less access to other income sources. In some countries these awards are also substantial and can equal more than 25% of average wages paid to production workers. Most other advanced countries, including the U.S., offer merely lower income tax rates for single parents with children, and this provides little or no help for impoverished youths. It can be argued that single-parent, cash-benefit awards might already have appeared in America were it not for far-right propaganda which feeds on American confusions between race and poverty. Be that as it may, large numbers of impoverished, single-parent families have now appeared in the U.S., and once Americans understand that such families can be of *any* color or ethnicity, strong pressure could be organized to provide cash-benefit relief for them.

A negative income tax. Yet another form of cash award was actually pioneered in the U.S., the negative income tax, and it also deserves discussion. As we know from Chapter Four, early in the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson declared a "War on Poverty," and as part of that "War" his administration set up several field experiments designed to see what would happen if families with inadequate incomes were provided monthly cash awards or "negative income taxes." This benefit strategy was thought of as an attractive alternative to the costly and

"corrupting" influences of means-tested welfare payments for specific family needs, experiments concerning it continued into the early years of the Nixon presidency, and results from those experiments indicated benefits for both adults and youths in experimental families. But they were terminated abruptly when rumors began to circulate that women who received such awards more often sought divorces(!) If instituted today, negative income tax awards would require only that recipients file their normal, annual tax returns, so would be viewed as *entitlements* and would make a good deal of sense in the American context. But to make such awards palatable, Americans would have to become convinced that *family* poverty remains a serious and continuing issue for the country, and that single-parent, impoverished families can be of any color or ethnicity.

Noncash Benefits

Noncash benefits put no dollars in the pockets of recipients, but some can certainly be focused on the needs of *youths*, and I review one such program below. In addition, I also discuss a second noncash benefit program now missing in the U.S., which, although focused on the needs of *all* Americans, would nevertheless generate far-ranging benefits for impoverished youths.

Strong day care and preschool facilities. As Chapter Three also revealed, tax-supported day care and preschool facilities vary a good deal among advanced nations, but well-funded, well-staffed facilities for preschool youngsters are already present in Scandinavia and some countries in Central and Western Europe. Such programs are not only focused on the needs of youths but also provide significant relief from poverty for low-income families. At present, the U.S. provides only one preschool program that is federally supported, Head Start, but its funding and provisions are weak, its coverage and staffing are shaky, and it remains politically controversial. Moreover, as we know from Chapter Six, high-quality preschool programs also generate greater educational success, not only for all students, but particularly for impoverished youths and others who are disadvantaged in American education. This knowledge has already led Oklahoma and a few other states to begin exploring such programs with support from state taxes. As well, federal interest in a nationwide preschool program has also begun to appear from the Obama administration, and poll data indicate widespread public support for such a program. Thus, an appropriately strong day care and preschool program would now appear to be within reach in the American context. Such a program could be structured as an *entitlement* and would offer many benefits for Americans.

A tax-supported, universal health care system. Although universal health care systems are not focused specifically on the needs of youths, the lack of such a system in the United States is so striking and vicious in its effects on impoverished youths that action concerning it should also be recommended. As we know from Chapter Three, *all* other advanced nations have installed such

systems, but for years the United States has limped along with an expensive, jury-rigged system that provides tax-supported coverage for a few groups but leaves the bulk of the population either to depend on the tender mercies of insurance companies and HMOs or to have no health coverage at all. The current American system provides very little help for impoverished families (and their youths), and the Patient Affordable Care Act recently enacted by Congress provides only skimpy relief for these needy people. Nor will effective relief appear until the U.S. at last adopts a tax-supported, *entitlement*-based, universal health care system. Powerful forces—representing the interests of insurance companies, HMOs, and major drug manufacturers—now stand in the way of such an action, but the media seem now to be willing to report on the outrageous woes of the country's present health care system, and one can hope that the next wave of American health care "reform" will actually set up some type of health system in which basic health coverage is provided for *all* through federal taxes.

TACTICS FOR REDUCING POVERTY EFFECTS IN EDUCATION

> We are aware—and over 30 years of research has consistently demonstrated—that academic achievement in U.S. schools is closely correlated with student [poverty]. To really improve ghetto children's chances, then, in school and out, we must (in addition to pursuing school-based reform) increase their social and economic well-being and status before and while they are students. We must ultimately, therefore, eliminate poverty; we must eliminate the ghetto school by eliminating the underlying causes of ghettoization.
>
> —Jean Anyon, writing in *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform* (1997, p. 164)

We turn, finally, to tactics that can reduce the harsh effects of poverty in American public education, again basing most of the suggestions put forth on evidence reviewed in earlier chapters,

But again, a disclaimer is in order. As was noted in Chapter Six, an immense amount of good research has appeared concerned with how to reduce problems plaguing American education, and although they cover a lot of territory, the recommendations made here focus on poverty-related issues and do not fully cover the wide range of such contributions.

How Not to Proceed

I begin, however, with a topic, *not* dealt with in Chapter Six—the effects of America's blame-based, market-oriented "reform" programs, No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. Given the prominence and controversial nature of these programs, it is not surprising that a good deal of research has appeared on them during the past two decades. As we know, these programs—begun during the administration of President George W. Bush but continued during that of

President Barack Obama—have *not* responded to the country's youth poverty and its appalling effects in education, so they simply cannot have succeeded in accomplishing their announced goals of "improving education and eliminating the achievement gap" in America. But these programs have also generated serious problems, and these problems have been revealed by good studies of their effects. Although tempted, I've so far avoided discussing these studies—because they have dealt with a wide variety of effects, many not directly related to problems associated with poverty.

Recently, however, an excellent review has appeared from scholars supported by *Broader, Bolder Approach to Education* that covers crucial, youth poverty-related effects of the "reforms," and we can learn from this work. For various reasons, prominent and harsh attempts to implement the Bush/Obama "reforms" have appeared in three of the country's major cities—Chicago, New York City, and Washington, DC—and high-profile leaders responsible for these three initiatives—Arne Duncan and Mayor Rahm Emanuel (in Chicago), Joel Klein and Mayor Michael Bloomberg (in New York City), and Michelle Rhee (in Washington, DC)—have since been touting the supposed "successes" of those programs and arguing that equivalent "reforms" should be adopted widely in the country.[23] Such advocacies have, in turn, prompted research concerning the *real* effects of reforms in these three cities. Building on these studies as well as their own evaluation efforts, Elaine Weiss and Dan Long have prepared a detailed survey of the claims and actual outcomes of these three "reform" efforts, and their work has appeared as a major BBA report entitled *Market-Oriented Education Reforms' Rhetoric Trumps Reality*.[24]

As a rule, these "reform" efforts focused on three tactics: "test-based teacher evaluations, increased school 'choice' through expanded access to charter schools, and the closure of 'failing' and underenrolled schools," and proponents for these actions have argued that they have and will "boost student and narrow longstanding race- and income-based achievement gaps" among students. However, the Weiss and Long report found "that the reforms delivered few [such] benefits and in some cases harmed the students they purport[ed] to help."[25] In particular, the report found that:

- Test scores increased less, and achievement gaps grew more, in "reform" cities than in other urban districts.
- Reported successes for targeted students evaporated upon closer examination.
- Test-based accountability prompted churn that thinned the ranks of experienced teachers, but not necessarily bad teachers.
- School closures did not send students to better schools or save school districts money.
- Charter schools further disrupted the districts while providing mixed benefits, particularly for the highest-need students.
- Emphasis on the widely touted market-oriented reforms drew attention and resources from initiatives with greater promise.

- The reforms missed a critical factor driving achievement gaps: the influence of poverty on academic performance.
- Real, sustained change requires strategies that are more realistic, patient, and multipronged.

—Weiss & Long (2013, Executive Summary, p. 3)

Thus, not only were these "reforms" ineffective, they actually caused *harm* in these major cities. Despite what their proponents have claimed, these "reforms"—central to efforts in these three cities and to No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top—have *failed* to accomplish their announced goals. Indeed, they have provided a veritable roadmap showing *how not to proceed* if Americans sincerely want to improve their public schools and provide a more equitable education for the country's huge number of students who suffer from poverty and other disadvantages.[26]

Home-Based Tactics

So much for what doesn't work; we turn now to evidence-based tactics that should actually *reduce* the evil effects of poverty in American education, focusing again on *youth* centered programs, and begin with those reflecting home-generated burdens that impoverished students bring with them when they enter the schoolhouse door.

Improving housing. As we know from Chapter Four, impoverished American youths are far more likely to live in houses that are "substandard"; that are seriously crowded, have lead-based paint on their walls, lack adequate plumbing or electrical facilities, are infested with vermin, lack adequate heating and air conditioning, or cost more than 30% of their families' monthly incomes. Such problems place severe burdens on the backs of impoverished youths that reduce their ability to cope with education, but they can be remedied.

One way to address "substandard" housing problems would be to provide cash-based, targeted housing allowances to low-income families and, as we know from earlier in this chapter, this strategy has been pioneered in other advanced countries and might also be adopted in America. Other strategies could be targeted for specific housing problems, and one of these was also foreshadowed in Chapter Four. A school-based program could be set up that evaluates all youngsters for level of lead in their bodies together with follow-up visits to the homes of affected youngsters and tax-based assistance that defrays the costs of removing or covering lead-based paint in affected homes. (Although *means tested*, such a program could be defended on medical grounds.) Other, possibly companionate, youth centered programs could combat such problems as inadequate plumbing, poor electrical facilities, inadequate heating, and missing air conditioning, as well as vermin infestations. All such programs would make good sense in the American context but would have to be designed carefully to

accommodate significant regional, rural/urban, and ethnic differences in housing needs and standards across the nation.

Upgrading nutrition and food sufficiency. Chapter Four also revealed that poor nutrition and lack of food within America's low-income families generates several types of problems for impoverished youths. Among others, those youths may suffer lifelong disabilities because their mothers experienced inadequate nutrition during their pregnancies, because those youths have correctable disabilities reflecting their current poor nutrition, and because their families cannot afford to feed them. The latter two problems are already partially addressed by America's national program that provides free- and reduced-price lunches for eligible students and by supplemental food programs that fund other meals in some urban school districts, but these programs normally do not cover nutrition during the summer months, remain controversial, and are now under attack.[27] One way to proceed would be to make youth nutrition a national priority and to expand national support for it within schools so that, if needed, *all* meals are supported for eligible youths on a year-round basis, but this would require an expanded, *means-tested* program that does not solve the problem of poor maternal nutrition. Another tactic would be to emulate earlier programs in which doctors wrote *prescriptions* for tax-supported food to supplement nutrition for impoverished families. If such a program were set up today, eligibility for food help would continue to be established for students (and their families) within schools, but prescriptions could then be written for appropriate food supplementation that feeds *all* within those families.)

Both of these programs could be strengthened if they were associated with tax-supported medical examinations for all students, early each school year. Such exams would provide information about *all* disabilities students experience, not only those generated by poor nutrition and hunger, but also those that are normally detected by pediatricians, dentists, and optometrists in other advanced countries—and when correctable conditions were detected for youths, *means-tested* support could be provided for youths with those needs. (Needless to say, focused health care programs for students would not be needed if America were to adopt a tax-supported, universal health care system.)

Providing home-based educational resources. As Chapter Four also stressed, the absence of appropriate resources in the home constitutes a major barrier for the educational success of young children. Some of these resources are tangible, and it would be relatively easy to remedy their lack through appropriate tactics. To illustrate, middle- and upper-income American families normally buy appropriate school supplies for their children, and a bustling industry serves their needs at the beginning of each school year. In contrast, students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunches come from families that cannot afford adequate nutrition, let alone school supplies, and tax-supported programs could be initiated to provide such supplies (and pay student fees, when necessary). Another resource need concerns clothing, for impoverished families are often unable to

provide their children with clothes that provide basic weather protection, let alone garments that are "stylish." Other advanced countries "solve" the latter problem by mandating that all students wear uniforms that are standard for each school, in some countries this requirement is supplemented by grants for needy families so their children too can attend school properly attired, and the U.S. could emulate such practices.

In addition, impoverished homes may lack other, less tangible resources needed to support education—adequate study space for their children, parental time to attend meetings at schools or support their children's homework efforts, freedom from parental stress created by the grinding burdens of poverty, and the like—and it would be harder to meet these needs without national or state programs that provided significant relief from the burdens of family poverty.

Helping with higher education accessibility. Although all American youths are encouraged to acquire an undergraduate degree, this action is now very expensive in the U.S. But very little financial help is provided to help defray those expenses, and this disjuncture is now foreclosing postsecondary educational opportunities for the bulk of low-income youths in the country. As Chapter Four also noted, this problem is less severe in other advanced countries where need-based aid is more widely available and higher education costs are more modest for youths who are citizens or legal residents. Shortly after World War Two, the United States Congress passed a "G.I. Bill" that provided various benefits including *entitlement-based* aid to help defray undergraduate (and postgraduate) costs for all men who had served in the armed forces. This program allowed many, many veterans from low-income homes to obtain higher degrees, and it could serve as a model for legislation that would extend such aid to all youths who were citizens or legal residents of America.

Neighborhood-Based Tactics

Chapter Five indicates that impoverished American youths bear additional, neighborhood-generated burdens when they enter the schoolhouse door, and these findings also suggest tactics that could improve their education.

Phasing out poverty ghettos. As we know, the U.S. tolerates urban ghettos with high concentrations of families that are impoverished, and where violence, crime, and despair are endemic. Most of these ghettos have populations that are overwhelmingly Black, Hispanic, or have recently immigrated from non-English-speaking countries, and this pattern of isolating impoverished, "minority" persons in urban ghettos has deep roots in American history, prejudice, and discrimination. Such ghettos generate serious problems for youths, their educational chances, and the schools they attend.

This does not mean that such ghettos must be tolerated; indeed, we have already encountered a good example of how one American county has taken action which, over time, has reduced its poverty ghettoization. Chapter Six

recounts an ex post facto experiment, designed by Heather Schwartz, that was based on a longstanding, ghetto-discouraging policy in Montgomery County, Maryland.[28] This policy requires that all real estate developments in the county be designed so that a portion of their newly built homes can be rented or sold at below-market prices. As well, the county itself purchases one third of the latter homes and operates them as federally subsidized, low-rent facilities for impoverished families, and this two-pronged approach has generated an outcome in which impoverished families are scattered throughout the county. In fairness, the policy has *not* served the needs of all interested families, but it has already begun to attract attention from other suburban jurisdictions seeking ways to discourage poverty ghettoization and can serve as a model for such local efforts. It would be less useful for addressing ghettoization in America's inner cities, since the latter would not involve new housing construction but rather revamping existing housing, as well as changing ghetto-promoting laws and practices that vary substantially across the country. But to address the latter would require serious national debates about the role that is to be played by America's urban centers, the needs that must be met if those roles are played, and how to fund those needs. Since America's major cities are plagued by *many* problems, such debates are long overdue, and activists concerned with reducing poverty ghettoization could be leaders in those debates.

Reducing violence. Chapter Five also reveals that impoverished American youths have better educational records when at least some advantaged families live in their urban-ghetto neighborhoods, and, as William Julius Wilson has reminded us, a major force driving advantaged families out of those neighborhoods is the violence generated by gangs fighting turf wars over illegal drugs.[29] That violence generates astounding rates of early death and incarceration among impoverished minority youths and generates endless problems for public schools in those neighborhoods. Such problems create a clear need for tactics that will reduce the rate of violence in such neighborhoods.

Since much of America's urban violence is drug related, the country could reduce drug-related violence by programs that combine legalization of such drugs with professional, drug-related counseling for youths and medical help for those persons who become addicted to drugs. A few American states are beginning to drift in this direction by passing laws that legalize the possession of marijuana, and a number of media outlets have begun to ask whether America's current, expensive, and violent "War on Drugs" is not an obvious failure. Such initiatives could be built on to spark a national debate over illegal drug policies. Such a debate is also long overdue, for it would inevitably consider policies that should improve educational chances for impoverished youths as well as save the many lives and huge costs now wasted on America's ineffective "Drug War."

School-Based Tactics I—Coping With Poverty Concentration

Poverty imposes many problems on schools, and we turn now to the first of three

sets of tactics focused on education that should improve prospects for impoverished youths and lead to enhanced, more equitable public schooling. We begin with tactics focused on student poverty concentration.

Phasing out poverty ghettos (again). Chapter Six tells us that student poverty concentration is largely urban based and is strongly associated with academic failure in public schools. Given that most American schools serve their immediate neighborhoods, the basic condition creating scholastic poverty concentration is the persistence of urban poverty ghettos in the country, and the key tactic for lowering that concentration would have to be phasing out those ghettos. Tactics for this purpose were discussed a few paragraphs earlier, and it is clear that eliminating such ghettos will take both time and careful effort.

Good *teaching in ghetto schools*. What might be done to address school-based problems created by *current*, ghetto-associated, student poverty concentration? One answer to this question is suggested by the experiences of inspired teachers who have found ways to provide meaningful experiences for students in high-poverty classrooms. Testimonies from such teachers have stressed the need for several, concurrent tactics: close, personal relationships with *all* students in the classroom combined with personal contacts with students' parents or guardians (often involving home visits); setting and expressing high standards for achievement for all students; expressing and enforcing standards for classroom conduct that prohibit weapons, fist fights, bullying, or other forms of violence; and creative approaches to subject matter presentation that involve clear and intriguing lecturing, one-on-one teacher-student interactions, and classroom groupings in which students with greater subject matter insights mentor and encourage their classmates. Needless to say, pursuing such tactics simultaneously places high demands on teachers, and the few schools where such tactics are promoted tend have programs in place that recruit and reward talented teachers who are devoted to "rescuing" needy students as well as summer workshops that provide focused training for new recruits who are to teach in high-demand classroom environments. Nevertheless, this approach remains challenging, and those teachers willing to attempt it should be given both support and rewards.

Breaking the ghetto-poverty concentration bond. Another way to reduce problems associated with student poverty concentration is to break the bond which ties that concentration to urban poverty ghettos, and tactics for doing this are now being pioneered in a few school districts around the nation. The innovative program underway in Wake County, North Carolina, is the best known of these efforts, and Gerald Grant has provided details of its history, tactics, and effects in his inspiring book, *Hope and Despair in the American City*.[30]

Wake County has one major city, Raleigh, the state capital, and for historical reasons it entered the 20th century with only two school districts, one

serving that city, the other serving the rest of the county. After the Second World War, concerns about the county's schools and the county's future were voiced, and fears were raised that if the county continued to segregate its Black-urban-poverty core from its White-affluent suburbs, it would depress chances for youths who lived in the core and forfeit opportunities for economic growth. So in response to such worries, the county's two school districts voted to amalgamate, and Wake County opened its first integrated schools in 1976. From the beginning, this step required that students be *bused* from their homes to schools which, although nearby, were not strictly in their neighborhoods, and at first this busing program was designed to reduce student *racial* concentrations in specific schools. Over time, however, court decisions in the U.S. whittled away at the legitimacy of busing for racial reasons, and the Wake County school district became the first in the nation to bus students for *economic* reasons, mandating that no school in the county should enroll more than 40% of students who were eligible for federally assisted lunches.

Busing of Black or impoverished students was not the only tactic employed, however. Recognizing that the program also required that White students from affluent families be relocated, the school board set up attractive *magnet school programs* in many urban schools and pumped money into those schools so that White and affluent students would be attracted and could be bused to them. Concerned with student achievement levels, it also created *achievement-level quotas* for individual schools, eventually mandated that *95% of all county students should achieve at or above grade level* (!), and set up a *Wake Leadership Academy* to train educators for key posts in the new program. Results of these tactics have been astounding. Ninety-one percent of all county students now pass tough, state-administered achievement tests in mathematics and reading; a huge 76% of all county students take SAT tests for college entrance—earning basic scores that are 40 points greater, on average, than those from students elsewhere in the country; the district's Black/White and poverty-related achievement gaps are now lower than those in *any* other of the nation's school districts; and the program is widely popular among both urban and suburban parents living in Wake County.

Partly because of the program's successes but also reflecting the attractions of North Carolina's famed "Research Triangle," families have been flooding into Wake County, and those new immigrants have included both impoverished Hispanics and affluent Whites from the nation's northern suburbs. The former have created serious, additional challenges for the Wake County district (which now enrolls more than 143,000 students), and the latter have arrived with parental memories of previous, more-segregated school districts in which their children did not have to be bused to obtain a "good" education nor attend schools where up to 40% of students are impoverished or—worse—are from minority groups they dislike or fear. Over time, discontent with the program spread in the suburbs, and in October, 2009, when candidates ran on party slates for the first time but only 8% of the electorate turned out to vote in an off-year, off-month election, well-organized, Republican voters managed to elect a bare majority of members

on the county's amalgamated school board. This far-right majority soon announced plans to *scrap* the Wake diversity program in favor of a new plan designed to stress neighborhood schools by dividing the county into "community school zones or districts," and a huge brouhaha broke out. After protests, marches, resignation of the district's superintendent and various stalling actions, a new political action committee—"Wake Up Wake"—was formed to represent the 94% of parents who were satisfied with treatment of their children under the existing program, and a new, pro-program board was chosen at the next election. Bitter feelings remained, however, and the program had clearly been damaged.

What are we to make of this history? On the one hand, this highly successful program required amalgamation of only *two* local school boards, its presence was a thorn in the side of well-organized, affluent voters, and creating programs similar to it would require, not only good will and sustained leadership, but also consolidating the multiple district boundaries that presently girdle most of America's larger cities. But on the other, it tells us that, with enough good will and sustained leadership, it is possible to *break* the bond linking American ghettoed housing and student poverty concentration, and that well-planned programs for doing so can have spectacular effects. And this optimistic, inspiring message is long overdue in today's America.

School-Based Tactics II—Improving Funding and Resources for Impoverished Schools

Next, we turn to tactics designed to increase support for schools that are now miserably funded and cannot afford basic resources needed if impoverished students are to be treated equitably.

But before considering such tactics, it is good to remind ourselves about the horrific school-funding problem in America. As we know now, the U.S. stands alone among advanced nations in that it provides *less* funding for schools serving students who suffer from impoverishment. As Chapter Six notes, so bad is this problem that, across the nation, affluent, suburban school districts will spend $12,000 or more per year for every enrolled student, while miserably funded schools, often found in city centers, must make do with as little as $3,000 per student. As a result, the latter schools may lack even minimal resources needed to provide basic human decency for students, let alone those required for educational success.

And lest you think I'm exaggerating this problem, please look carefully at Exhibit 7.4 which describes conditions in a badly underfunded, middle school in the San Francisco Bay area. (The description appeared originally in a class-action lawsuit, *Williams v. California*, that was filed in 2000 on behalf of California's low-income students of color, but it was excerpted and reprinted by Linda Darling-Hammond, 2013, and Exhibit 7.4 reprints the latter version.) Although this school does not represent the "typical," urban school in the U.S., it certainly displays conditions in some of the country's worst-funded schools and exhibits the heart of the country's school-funding problem. Why on earth would anyone

expect students to achieve academic success when incarcerated in such an educational hovel?

Abolishing inadequate funding. As we know from Chapter Six, substantial differences in per-student funding for school districts appear both between and within individual states in America. Alleviating the former would require federal action, of course, and to the best of my knowledge, no initiative has yet surfaced that advocates such an action. In contrast, and under pressure from court decisions, a few American states have now begun tactics that provide more-equal, within-state funding for their schools.

Exhibit 7.4. Conditions at Luther Burbank, a Miserably-Funded School

At Luther Burbank, students cannot take textbooks home for homework in any core subject because teachers have enough textbooks for use in class only …. For homework, students must take home photocopied pages, with no accompanying text for guidance or reference, when and if their teachers have enough paper to use to make homework copies …. Luther Burbank is infested with vermin and roaches, and students routinely see mice in their classrooms. One dead rodent has remained, decomposing, in a corner of the gymnasium since the beginning of the school year. The school library is rarely open, has no librarian, and has not recently been updated. The latest version of the encyclopedia in the library was published in approximately 1988. Luther Burbank classrooms do not have computers. Computer instruction and research skills are not, therefore, part of Luther Burbank students' regular instruction. The school no longer offers any art classes for budgetary reasons …. Two of the three bathrooms at Luther Burbank are locked all day, everyday …. Students have urinated or defecated on themselves at school because they could not get into an unlocked bathroom …. When the bathrooms are not locked, they often lack toilet paper, soap, and paper towels, and the toilets frequently are clogged and overflowing …. Ceiling tiles are missing and cracked in the school gym, and school children are afraid to play games in the gym because they worry that more ceiling tiles will fall on them during their games …. The school has no air conditioning. On hot days class-room temperatures climb into the 90s. The school heating system does not work well. In winter, children often wear coats, hats, and gloves during class to keep warm …. Eleven of the 35 teachers at Luther Burbank have not yet obtained regular, non-emergency teaching credentials, and 17 of the 35 teachers only began teaching at Luther Burbank this school year.

—Linda Darling-Hammond (2013, p. 78, quoting from Williams et al. v. State of California, 2000)

To illustrate, consider the case of New Jersey.[31] After a mere 30 years of stalling, litigation, and *nine* court decisions declaring that the state's inequitable funding practices violated New Jersey's Constitution, in 1998 the state finally began to provide additional funding for impoverished school districts. But these additional funds were not to be used for "any old purpose," rather, they were to

be spent implementing "a new state curriculum linked to the state standards; support whole school reform; ensure early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds as well as full-day kindergarten; educate preschool teachers; reduce class sizes; invest in technology; ensure adequate facilities; and support health social services, alternative, and summer school programs to help students catch up." In addition, an early literacy program was begun that provided reading coaches and professional development for teachers in kindergarten through third grade.[32]

The result? "By 2007, New Jersey had substantially increased its standing on national reading and math assessments, ranking among the top five states in all subject areas and grade levels on the NAEP and first in writing. It was also one of four states that made the most progress nationally in closing performance gaps between White, Black, and Hispanic students in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math. By 2007, although parity had not yet been achieved, Hispanic and Black students scored between 5 and 10 points above their peers nationwide, depending on the test. The state also reduced the achievement gap for students with disabilities and for socioeconomically disadvantaged students."[33] Thus, a New Jersey program that had provided thoughtfully planned, additional funding for impoverished school districts had created enviable outcomes, and it and similar programs from a few other states provide evidence about likely, equally impressive results if such help were available across the nation. Program details and results from these states should be widely disseminated, and federal action to help other states set up such programs is now needed.

Improving teacher qualifications. I turn now to tactics for improving specific, funding-related *resources* in American schools. Chapter Six reviewed evidence showing that teachers with better qualifications are more likely to generate high levels of achievement but that such teachers are less often found in underfunded schools. (Indeed, as Exhibit 7.4 suggests, underfunded schools are often staffed with young teachers with minimal qualifications and little, if any, prior classroom experience—persons who will either shortly leave teaching or move to better-supported schools.) Chapter Six also implied that several tactics might be employed for addressing this issue.

- *For one*, better student outcomes appear when teachers have had more appropriate academic preparation, and this suggests a strong need for teacher-training programs that provide information and supervised experiences focused on coping skills appropriate for impoverished students and disadvantaged schools. Most American teacher training does not have this focus today, but it is badly needed if poverty continues to debilitate the lives and education of many, many American youths.
- For another, better outcomes also appear when teachers have had more years of experience, and this implies need for programs that reduce teacher turnover or recruit experienced teachers into disadvantaged schools. Such programs might employ various tactics ranging from salary loadings and salary ladders for teaching in such settings to collective engagement in

experimental programs designed for disadvantaged students and schools and led by dedicated principals and curriculum specialists. Research suggests that both types of tactics can work, but that the latter are more effective.[34]

– For a third, better student results appear when teachers earn higher scores on tests of teaching skills, and this indicates need for programs that regularly assess such skills and provide rewards for teachers who do well on them and training for those who don't. Programs that assess and reward *teaching* skills are not often found in today's impoverished American schools (which must struggle, instead, with federal demands for programs that assess student *output* and unfairly punish educators and schools when poverty ruins their chances for success on the latter). Programs that assess and help to develop teaching skills are fairer and more effective, and although they normally involve examining teacher classroom behavior, their development and wider adoption should be encouraged.
– And fourth, better results also appear when teachers are paid higher salaries. Not only do such salaries generate a more-talented pool of teacher-trainees, they also help well-funded schools retain and attract more-qualified teachers. But in today's world, underfunded American schools normally do not have the wherewithal to pay high salaries to teachers. The need for programs that provide impoverished schools with compensatory funds for this purpose would be widely understood in America, and such programs should be developed and promoted.

These four suggestions certainly do not exhaust the topic of tactics useful for improving teacher qualifications in America. Chapter Seven of Linda Darling-Hammond's *The Flat World and Education* reviews tactics used in other nations for this purpose and offers the author's own suggestions for workable tactics in the U.S. Readers are encouraged to learn from this source.[35]

Reducing early grade class size. Chapter Six concluded that well-conducted programs which reduce the size of classes in the early grades generate greater educational success, not only for all students, but particularly for those who are impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged in American schools. Given widespread awareness of this effect, several American states have already begun programs to reduce class size in the early grades, and such programs have been most successful when they have mandated class sizes of 20 students or fewer, when they have made provision to increase the flow and funding of teachers for the early grades, when they have provided additional funds to allow schools to add or reconfigure their buildings for extra classroom spaces, and when those programs have included workshops to help retrain older teachers for the transition to smaller classes. Although it would require a federal initiative, a national program that mandates and helps to fund small classes in the early grades is now in order. Such a program would be viewed as an *entitlement* that benefits all early grade students, and it would likely garner widespread support in today's America.

S*trong day care and preschool facilities (again)*. And although this tactic was also recommended earlier because it helps to reduce the level of family poverty, Chapter Six revealed that high-quality preschool programs generate educational success, not only for all students, but particularly for those who are impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged. Many Americans have also become aware of this effect, and as we know, several states have begun programs to provide such services, and the White House has begun an initiative that would provide national support for such programs. This initiative has a good chance for success and should be supported strongly.

School-Based Tactics III—Reducing Discriminatory Procedures

Finally, a third set of problems are also faced by impoverished students in today's American schools—common discriminatory procedures that are known to reduce their educational successes. Two such procedures were reviewed in Chapter Six, and distinct tactics are in order to confront these two issues.

Alternatives to tracking. Extensive research confirms that American tracking procedures steer students who are disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, or social class into low-demand courses where they are confronted with lower-quality curricula, academic expectations, teachers, and support from others—and where (surprise!) their academic prospects deteriorate from year to year—and it would be astounding if such findings did not also apply to students who are impoverished. Pressures for tracking are likely to persist in the U.S. as long as the country remains committed to comprehensive public high schools and affluent parents control most of its school boards, but these pressures can be countered by evidence showing, not only that disadvantaged youths suffer badly from tracking, but also that advantaged youths are not hurt when tracking is abolished. In response to this information, "lighthouse" schools in various corners of the nation have now set up instructional programs where all classes are de-tracked, and results from these programs are impressive.[36] Such programs provide models for what good de-tracking programs might look like, but pressure to retain tracking is strong in America, and wide distribution of research-based knowledge about the effects of tracking and de-tracking is now needed.

Coping with the long hot summer. Substantial evidence also indicates that the long summer "break" in the American academic year is associated with reduction in academic achievement among primary students, that this effect is worse for students from impoverished homes (whose parents are less able to provide supplemental support for summer learning), and that the effect is weaker in other advanced nations with shorter summer holidays. Knowledge about this effect has also spread widely among American educators, and a number of school districts have begun trial programs to deal with it. Those programs feature various tactics ranging from summer school sessions for impoverished youths, to book-loaning plans, and summer "enrichment" opportunities for youths (and sometimes their

families) focused on music, theater, and the arts. Initial results from such programs have been positive indeed, and these and related tactics should be pursued vigorously. Many school districts cannot afford such programs, however, so to solve the problem fully would require supplemental funding from state or federal sources.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Yet one more recommendation is needed that is associated with a major American cultural theme. As we know, commitment to broad educational goals has long been present in the U.S. From their beginnings, public schools in America were asked not only to provide instruction in "The Three Rs," but also to prepare students for thoughtful participation in a democracy (and this latter goal has *not* been assessed in comparative studies).[37] Over the years, American schools have also expanded their core curricula to include *many* different subjects—literature and history, civics, hygiene and psychology, foreign languages, music, theater, and the arts, for example—and American high schools now offer instruction in a host of career-related subjects ranging from typing and auto mechanics to computer programming, ballet dancing, and flower arranging. In other advanced countries, subjects such as these latter are often taught in nonacademic secondary schools whose students have failed to pass gateway, academic exams, but Americans are committed to "comprehensive" high schools in which many subjects are offered and students can sample various interests and career lines. And because institutions that provide collateral support for youths are largely missing in the U.S., American schools typically provide additional nonacademic services for students—such as athletic programs that provide entry into professional sports, driving instruction, free meals for students from low-income homes, nursing services, and community outreach programs. Thus, curricula in American schools are far broader than those typically undertaken in other advanced countries (and this difference has also *not* been assessed in comparative studies).

Why then is the U.S. so often pilloried when comparative research fails to show that it leads the world in such core subjects as native language acquisition, mathematics, and science when other "competitor nations" often feature narrower curricula that focus only on these subjects? One answer to this question is suggested by incessant corporate pressure in America which stresses the need to upgrade standards in these core subjects, hence to begin appropriate training for more American scientists and engineers who are thought to be needed if the country is to maintain its "leadership"—pressure that is oblivious to the needs of impoverished students, of course. But if Americans are truly committed to broad goals for their educational system, they should recognize this pressure and respond to it by stressing companionate needs for a more inclusive education system that provides not only core instruction but also equity for all students and access to a broad range of academic subjects, career paths, civic responsibility, democratic leadership, health information, social awareness, opportunities to

explore the arts, humanities, hobbies, and sports—and, if needed, supportive services. And this suggests, in turn, that the country should now begin serious *national* debates concerning the goals Americans want for youths of the nation and how best to structure their educational system and collateral institutions to meet those goals.

Which brings me back to major concerns stressed throughout this book. America is currently afflicted by a *huge* Elephant in its living room—a massive, unacknowledged disaster that ruins lives and debilitates education for millions of the nation's youths. Research concerning the nature and extent of that catastrophe has been reviewed throughout earlier chapters, and that research reveals that, in America, millions of impoverished youths and those charged with educating them are presently being given monstrously unfair, raw deals. But such conditions need not be tolerated. The U.S. is still a country with vast stores of good will and high aspirations, where debates concerning sensitive issues are tolerated and free speech is encouraged, and where democratic political processes needed to solve pressing problems may yet be restored. And—as this chapter has suggested—research points ways for understanding and coping with this massive calamity. The strategies and tactics reviewed in this chapter will require hard, dedicated, and sustained effort, but they *are* doable, and this should give hope to all concerned Americans. The goal of a society where no youth is impoverished and no school must struggle with underfunding, punishment, and inequity may be distant goals, but a few, evidence-based, efforts leading towards these goals have already begun with spectacular success. It is now time to build on these efforts with a national commitment to dispel the Elephant and confront *The Un-acknowledged Disaster*.

NOTES

[1] Good insights about themes in American culture can be found in writings authored by some of the country's Founding Fathers, among them John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. However, most scholars credit Alexis de Tocqueville with producing the first, broad-gage description of American culture in his two-volume work, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840).

[2] See, for example, Bellah, Madsen, and Sullivan (2008), various chapters in Biddle (2001), Books (2004), Chomsky (2000), Dewey (1900), Dionne (2013), Edelman (1994), Frank (2004), Grant (2009), Hacker and Pierson (2010), Huston (1991), Kantor and Lowe (2013), Katz (1986/1996, 1989, 1995), Mann and Ornstein (2012), Pizzigati (2012), Reich (1987), Spring (1985, 1986), Tyack (1974), and Wilson (1987, 1993, 1996).

[3] For works that discuss individualism in America, consult Albelda and Tilly (1997), Bellah, Madsen, and Sullivan (2008), Dionne (2013), Glass & Rud (2012), Kluegel and Smith (1986), and Reich (1987). Feather (1974) provides comparative evidence showing that individual explanations for success and failure are more prominent in America than in another advanced nation—Australia.

[4] For general works discussing communitarianism, consult Dionne (2013), Etzioni (1993), Glass and Rud (2012), Nisbet (2009), and Selznick (2002).

[5] See, for example, Bergmann (1996, pp. 19-20, 117).

[6] Biddle, Bank, Anderson, Keats, and Keats (1981).

[7] See, for example, Finkelstein, Reem, and Doner (1998).

[8] See Spring (1985, 1986) and especially Tyack (1974).

[9] See Berliner and Biddle (1995).
[10] See Reich (1987, p. 12).
[11] This quote again comes from Reich (1987, p. 12).
[12] For good discussions of American ghettoization and its effects, consult Anyon (1997) and Bishop and Cushing (2009).
[13] This point is made by Bergmann (1996, pp. 10-11), for example.
[14] Moore (2002).
[15] For discussions of American conservatism, consult Nash (1976) and Sombart (1906/1976). Hacker and Pierson (2010) provide a good discussion of the machinations of wealth. Dionne (2013) cogently describes structural problems in American politics.
[16] The quotes are from Mann and Ornstein (2012, Introduction). Also consult Dionne (2013) and Hacker and Pierson (2010).
[17] In fairness, my account here stresses the recent efflorescence of far-right activism in America, but far-right voices of extremism and unreason have also long been present in the country (see McGirr, 2002 and especially Lipset & Raab, 1978). As well, a narrower view of the far right may be found in Berliner and Biddle (1995, pp. 133-135), but far-right activism is now better financed, is better organized, and has a far wider scope than was the case two decades ago.
[18] One Wisconsin Now (2013, p. 2).
[19] One Wisconsin Now (2013, p. 4).
[20] The quote describing ALEC is from Fischer (2013, p. 26). To read the latest ALEC "Report Card," consult Ladner and Myslinski (2013).
[21] Lubienski and Brewer (2013, p. 1).
[22] To access the BBA's full mission statement, consult Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (2008). The review to which I refer appears in Weiss and Long (2013).
[23] The Chicago program was begun when Arne Duncan was Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools but has been continued under the leadership of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. (Emanuel was formerly Chief of Staff in the Obama White House, and Duncan is now Secretary of Education in the Obama administration.) The New York City program was begun by Joel Klein, then Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, but it has since been continued by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The Washington, DC program was begun under the leadership of Michelle Rhee, then Chancellor of Washington, DC Public Schools.
[24] Weiss and Long (2013).
[25] Both quotes are from Weiss and Long (2013, Executive Summary, p. 3).
[26] Note that an excellent book has just appeared from Diane Ravitch entitled *Reign of Error* (2013) that lists and discusses the roles played by major persons and organizations advancing far-right agenda designed to weaken public education and promote private schools, reviews errant claims that are issued by these sources, explores the actual effects of their efforts, and advances alternative options for supporting and improving public education for *all* students. Since this work covers some of the same issues as those addressed in this book and provides additional corroborative details, concerned readers are urged to read and learn from it.
[27] As I write, the U.S. Senate has passed a "compromise" version of this year's farm-support bill that provides support for large agri-businesses but slashes funds for school lunches, but even its reduced benefit provisions seem to be too much for House Republicans, who have proposed an alternative bill that eliminates food stamps for impoverished families!
[28] See again Schwartz (2010).
[29] Wilson (1987, 1996).
[30] Grant (2009). Details I cite about the program and its history come from this source.
[31] Detailed descriptions of the history, features, and effects of the New Jersey program are given in Darling-Hammond (2010, pp. 122-130; and 2013, pp. 96-97), and I have based my presentation on these sources.
[32] Darling-Hammond (2013, p. 96).
[33] Darling-Hammond (2013, p. 97).
[34] Darling-Hammond (2010, pp. 220-222).
[35] Darling-Hammond (2010). Details of such efforts in other advanced nations may also be found in an excellently researched recent book edited by Marc Tucker (2011), but readers should also be warned that the latter work overreaches when stating its conclusions (see Biddle, 2012).

[36] See Tyson (2013), among others.
[37] See Levin (2013) for an insightful discussion of this issue.