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Beyond Civics and the 3 R's: Teaching Economics in the Schools

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During the twenty to twenty-five years after World War II, children in the United States were increasingly taught to understand their nation, its history, and its economic greatness—as an “economy”—rather than in social, moral, philosophical, or political terms (i.e., as a society, a community, a republic, etc.). Equally powerful was its message that the U.S. economy was an unprecedented marvel of productivity and a facet of Americanness of which to be proud and to defend. During this time period, not only did an economics education movement emerge, but economics increasingly was taught as part of social studies, history, or other classes, and a huge amount of curricular material was developed and disseminated for classroom use.

The idea that a new chapter of U.S. history and in the history of the nation's economy had dawned was a frequent subject not only of K-12 curricula, but also of news reports, political discourse, and business communication, particularly after the Korean War. Between the mid-1940s, and especially from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, domestic opinion-shapers

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increasingly linked American greatness and “identity” with quantitatively defined prosperity. As economics assumed a newly prominent role in American thinking, the messages conveyed about what were the core qualities of “Americanness” shifted to economic virtues such as the country’s high, rising, and broadly diffused standard of living, and its economic dynamism and growth. This occurred as economic ideas and an economic style of thinking were popularized, competing with older political and moral lenses and languages for viewing society. Economics increasingly became a principal language and lens through which America understood and defined itself.

Americans were convinced to think of their country and their lives in economic terms, and a historically new conception of America as an “abundant society” emerged between the late 1940s and 1960s. Such ideas had antecedents in the late 1920s and early 1940s, began to gain traction in the late 1940s, but only came into their own from the end of the Korean War to the Great Society. They included: first, a belief that U.S. supremacy and “exceptionalism” were founded in the country’s wealth, productive capacities, and economic growth; second, economics, wealth, and consumption were principal measures of social value; third, optimism and thinking about the future were defined in economic terms; fourth, the language of growth, prosperity, free enterprise, and consumption increasingly replaced the language of political liberalism and religion; fifth, individual psychological fulfillment and meaning were to be found in prosperity, growth, and consumption.

Aspects of this change have been touched on by scholars such as Alan Brinkley, Nelson Lichtenstein, Godfrey Hodgson, Robert Collins, Alan Wolfe, Robert Griffith, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Daniel Horowitz, T.J. Jackson Lears, Lizabeth Cohen, Meg Jacobs, and Michael Bernstein. Brinkley, Lichtenstein, and Hodgson argue that more progressive elements of the New

Deal retreated between the late 1930s and late 1940s, resulting in a “liberal consensus” that emphasized economic growth and capital/labor gain-sharing.. Collins and Wolfe assert that a new “politics of productivity” or “economic growth” arose in the postwar era to convince the public that higher productivity and growth would bring an end to poverty, social inequality and class conflict. Griffith focuses on the politics-business nexus in forging a postwar “corporate commonwealth” in which prosperity would enable the nation to overcome contentious party politics and class conflict, and Fones-Wolf examines how business sold itself and free enterprise. Horowitz, Lears, Cohen, and Jacobs explore the emergence of consumer culture, and Bernstein describes the postwar rise of the economics profession. This scholarship has been valuable in explaining postwar U.S. politics and economics, yet how this “liberal consensus” was expressed culturally – in media such as school classrooms and curricula -- largely has not been examined.¹

By the late 1950s and 1960s, a broad consensus had emerged that learning about the economy’s workings, the roles of various economic actors, and U.S. economic achievements was critical for America’s children. Truman’s first Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) Chairman Edwin Nourse referred to economic education as “a high calling.” Solomon Fabricant, research director of National Bureau of Economic Research, called it “capital formation” and AFL-CIO

¹ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Nelson Lichtenstein, “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era,” in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Alan Wolfe, *America’s Impasse: The Rise and Fall of the Politics of Growth*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Robert Griffith, “Forging America’s Postwar Order: Domestic Politics and Political Economy in the Age of Truman,” in Michael J. Lacey, ed. *The Truman Presidency*. (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press, 1989; Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Robert Collins, *The Business Response to Keynes, 1929-1964* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic, 1994; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Michael A. Bernstein, *A Perilous Progress: Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

research director Stanley Ruttenberg said that economic education was “vital if our economic system as we know it is to survive.”² The American Economic Association and business groups created blue-ribbon task forces, and Congress even held hearings.

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In the first half of the twentieth century, as attitudes toward children and child-rearing changed, child-labor laws took effect, public education began to expand, and the first flickering of a children’s consumer market appeared, American elites and opinion-shapers first began to think of children as emerging citizens. The beginnings of public education in the nineteenth century had generated textbooks, popular books, and “readers” for children—many of which instilled patriotic values and told narratives of the “American story.” By the 1920s, a fairly well-developed textbook market for elementary and secondary school students had come into being³

However, it was only after World War II, when universal K-12 education became a reality and the status of children rose—as Spock-pampered, business and Cold War-inspired “American leaders of tomorrow”—that opinion-leaders considerably ratcheted up their efforts to influence America’s children. Certainly, there were many messengers – the educational system, advertisers, popular culture, and child-oriented “movements” such as scouting. Likewise, many messages were conveyed—from ideas about good behavior and opposition to communism to what commodities and experiences were desirable and what was the essential nature and meaning of the United States.

Older children were hardly oblivious to messages presented to their parents by political leaders, business, and the media, but it is the very consistency of these classroom messages with

² Joint Council on Economic Education. “Education for the Economic Challenges of Tomorrow: A Report of a Symposium in Conjunction with the 10th Anniversary of the JCEE, 1949-1959” (New York, 1959), pp. 28-30.

³ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

broader societal discourse about the U.S. as a new type of abundant society that this article addresses. At one level, it is hardly surprising that six to eighteen year olds would hear the same messages about their country that their parents were hearing.

In any modern society, this is generally going to be true, but the 1945-1965 era was unique in several ways. First, these messages reached a much broader swath of America's children and youth than ever before because of the expansion of K-12 public education.⁴ Second, both the content and the tone of these messages were significantly different from what children were taught during the Progressive Era through World War II. And third, there was arguably much greater acceptance of these adult-delivered messages before the counterculture led many educators and their students to “question authority” and later twentieth century trends in popular culture introduced a heavy overlay of cynicism to youth and adult thinking about many subjects.

It is all but impossible to reconstruct what actually occurred in hundreds of thousands of classrooms with millions of teachers and tens of millions of students – although efforts to do so undoubtedly would prove fascinating. Textbooks and other curricular materials, including filmstrips and student-oriented *Scholastic* magazines, provide a proxy, albeit imperfect, for what children were learning about the United States.

Most of this learning occurred in history, social studies, and civics classes, so these textbooks, and how they changed, will be a key focus of this article. However, one of the distinctive features of social studies education in the 1950s and 1960s—one that was especially consonant with the broader set of messages being conveyed by politicians, business, the media, and academics—was the new “economic education” movement. Spearheaded by business, but

⁴ Secondary school enrollment, which was about 45 percent in 1930 and 60 percent in 1945, rose to more than 90 percent by 1965. Similarly, kindergarten enrollment rose from 21 percent in 1950 to 70 percent in 1965. National Center for Education Statistics, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait (NCES Web site)*; and W. Steven Barnett and Clive R. Belfields, “Early Childhood Development and Social Mobility” (unpublished paper, Brookings Institution, 2005).

supported by many educators, government leaders, and the economics profession, its rationale was stated in terms of teaching economic “literacy” for more effective citizenship in an economically complex society.

Learning About America, 1900-1940

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American schoolchildren consistently learned that the United States was exceptional because of its devotion to liberty and democracy, as well as its achievements in forging a great nation out of a supposedly virgin continent. While messages taught in schools always have been contested, a basic, heroic narrative has had a powerful hold on American consciousness. This is a familiar story of hardy, pious, freedom-loving (white) settlers forging a new democracy, taming a continent, becoming a beacon of liberty to the world, and rising to world dominance. As an 1875 school textbook noted, America was “the land designed by God for the home of liberty,” and an 1879 McGuffey Reader insisted that patriotism be based on values of “equality and the principle of representation.”⁵

The idea that school textbooks should promote national cohesion and promote a widely agreed-upon basis for American patriotism began in the aftermath of Reconstruction, when – as is often observed – the United States became a singular, rather than a plural, noun. Charles Morris’ 1900 book titled, *Young Student’s History of the United States*, for example, emphasized the importance of learning history for children to become citizens, and Americans to “be made the noblest and happiest of all the people of the earth.”⁶

⁵ James D. McCabe, *The Centennial History of the United States* (Philadelphia: The National Publishing Co., 1875), p. 4; and McGuffey cited in Knud Krakau, ed., *The American Nation, National Identity, Nationalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), p. 39.

⁶ See, for example, McCabe, *The Centennial History of the United States*; David H. Montgomery, *The Leading Facts of American History* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1900); and Charles Morris, *Young Student’s History of the United States* (1900), pp. 3, 250.

Modern, systematic, elementary- and secondary-school teaching about America began with industrialization, urbanization, the birth of professional scholarly disciplines, and the emergence of a critical mass of public school students at the end of the nineteenth century. Coming on the heels of these developments were intense debates during the Progressive Era about the function of education. As the school establishment took over from academics, the National Education Association's Committee of Ten, chaired by Charles Eliot, called for rigorous teaching of history, to democratize history and use it to Americanize native-born and immigrant children. Progressives such as John Dewey saw education as a vehicle for social reform, emphasizing the relevance of teaching history to inform thoughtful social change.⁷

The most famous textbook of this era – and, perhaps, the most influential history textbook in U.S. history – was Barnard College professor David Saville Muzzey's *American History*. First published in 1911, but updated and reissued into the 1970s, Muzzey's text revered the Founding Fathers, the Enlightenment, and what Louis Hartz later described as an America cast in the image of Lockean liberalism. With a picture of George Washington on his frontispiece, Muzzey rooted American culture in Anglo-Saxon Europe and American politics in Jeffersonian idealism. Economic and social history were largely absent from early editions, and Muzzey hearkened back to an agrarian, white ideal, condemning both the "heartless exploitation" of capitalism and the threat of "hundreds of thousands of aliens (who) come to our shores."⁸

Muzzey's Progressive contemporaries, Albert Bushnell Hart and Willis Mason West, treated the Revolution and Constitution as the sacraments of American civilization, but saw the nation as in need of reform. Although West devoted two-thirds of his 1913 *American History*

⁷ Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), pp. 170-74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 59, 63, 65; and David Saville Muzzey, *An American History* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1920), p. 537.

and Government to America's founding and its principles, he noted that democracy was "only imperfectly tried."⁹ Hart's 1920 *School History of the United States* bucked the era's Anglophilia to acknowledge that America was made up of diverse peoples, including African Americans.¹⁰ West's textbook was remarkable for noting America's "blunders," pitting "the people vs. privilege," and damning a society in which "the modern industrial organization produces wealth with gratifying rapidity, but it fails to distribute wealth properly. America is rich; but too many Americans are horribly poor. Ostentatious affluence, marked by wasteful and vicious expenditure, jostles a cruel and debasing penury."¹¹

Surprisingly, Charles and Mary Beard's 1921 *History of the United States* ignored Charles Beard's controversial economic interpretation of the Constitution, opting instead to tell America's teen-agers about Jefferson's "Republican simplicity," invention as "the very warp and woof of American progress," and "the tremendous, irresistible energy of a virile people." Although the Beards' final chapters spoke of "many perplexing problems," they heralded American history as a story of democratic reform.¹²

Rivaling Muzzey, Connecticut schoolteacher Mabel Casner and Yale professor Ralph Gabriel's *Exploring American History* was primarily geared to junior high school students that was first published in 1931 and survived in revised editions into the 1970s. Like texts for younger students, Casner and Gabriel were somewhat more jingoistic, celebrating the United States as a model of virtue among nations. Organized around "nine fundamental ideas" about America, the 1930s editions highlighted "how the U.S. has promoted world peace," the marvels

⁹ Willis Mason West, *American History and Government* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1913), p. iii, chapters 1-11.

¹⁰ Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, pp. 107-08; and Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts Over American History Textbooks From the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 171, 209.

¹¹ West, *American History and Government*, pp. iii, 642, 703.

¹² Charles and Mary R. Beard, *History of the United States: A Study in American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), pp. 186, 297, 401, 620.

of how “the machine changes the American way of living,” and how America “offers an opportunity to start life again” to the “suffering peoples of Europe.”¹³

While the Beards and Casner and Gabriel sang the praises of technology, the song was about American inventiveness – one quality that had made the nation great – not about the economic abundance made possible by technology. If anything, these and other texts of the 1920s and 1930s – both before and during the Depression – reflect a sense of class conflict and moral distaste, if not outrage, about America not living up to its ideals of social equality. Such qualities were to largely disappear from schoolbooks of the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s.

However, no text expressed this critical take on America so completely – and to such controversial end – as Harold Ordway Rugg’s 1930s textbooks such as *A History of American Civilization: Economic and Social*, *Man and His Changing Society*, and *An Introduction to Problems of American Culture*. The Muzzey and Casner and Gabriel editions continued to be churned out, and Muzzey became increasingly critical of business, but Rugg’s books, with five million in print, were the single most popular U.S. history texts of the New Deal era.¹⁴

Although Rugg celebrated the drama of America’s settlement, paid homage to the country’s founding ideals and creation, and urged children to be “tolerant, understanding and cooperating citizens,” his *History of American Government and Culture* was distinctive in focusing on the nation’s economic development. Anticipating postwar textbooks, Rugg described how America had become wealthy and a new consumer ethos was emerging, which “emphasizes above everything else the securing of ‘things.’” Yet, he came to the startling conclusion that most Americans could not attain a “minimum comfortable standard of living,” and that

¹³ Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, p. 114; and Mabel B. Casner and Ralph H. Gabriel, *Exploring American History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1933), pp. 750, 560, 625.

¹⁴ Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman, *Molding the Good Citizen: The Politics of High School History Texts* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), p. 107; and Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*, pp 210ff.

“industrial civilization” had brought seven benefits but sixteen “difficult problems.” He praised the nation, or its economy, for providing better living standards, longer life, shorter working hours, and expanded education and leisure. But, Rugg also wrote of America’s “unequal distribution of the national income,” increasing commercialism and materialism, growing “indifference” to public life, and increasing conformity. Rugg portrayed the 1920s as a time not of prosperity, but of gross inequality, attacked laissez-faire capitalism, and called for a redistributionist welfare state and social and economic planning.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, Rugg became a bete noire to business. The American Legion and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) attacked his “un-American” texts, and the Hearst newspapers and *Forbes* magazine vilified him. He was even brought before the anti-communist Dies Commission, his loyalty questioned, and his textbook publishing career all but ended.¹⁶

Telling America’s Story in the Postwar Era: A Teleology of Abundance

If the possibility of an expanded New Deal and a more social-democratic nation briefly surfaced in U.S. politics between the late 1930s and the late 1940s, this was most closely mirrored in secondary-school pedagogy in the contemporaneous success of Harold Ordway Rugg.¹⁷ But business attacks, inept as many of them were, and the Republican congressional gains between 1938 and 1946 hardly explain the change in school textbooks after World War II.

Instead, the transformation came with the unexpected prosperity brought by the war and the political and cultural adjustment to it. The change in school history and social studies

¹⁵ Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, p. 37; Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*, pp. 230ff; and Harold Ordway Rugg, *A History of American Civilization: Economic and Social* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1930), pp. 596, 606, 615-24. Rugg even offered the heretical observation that women were paid less than men for the same jobs.

¹⁶ Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*, pp. 241, 243, 248; and Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); and Nelson Lichtenstein, “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era,” in Fraser, Steve and Gary Gerstle, eds. *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

textbooks echoed the more sophisticated business public relations led by the Committee for Economic Development and Ad Council, the new business journalism led by Henry Luce's Time Inc. magazines, the rise of a postwar political consensus that economic growth could solve all problems, the newfound influence of the economics profession, and the appealing Cold War depiction of America to the Soviet and nonaligned blocs as a land of plenty. As in these other spheres, the change in school history textbooks did not happen overnight.

The years from Victory in the Pacific Day until the end of the Korean War and McCarthyism were a time of transition. The broad-based patriotism borne of America's ridding the world of fascism, uncertainties about whether the economy would plunge back into depression, and the shrill, fearful newness of the Cold War defined a large, but diminishing share of popular consciousness during the Truman years and the start of Eisenhower's presidency.

Frances Fitzgerald has observed that, "after World War II, there were no more dissenting books on the market. The political spectrum of the texts narrowed to a point somewhere in the neighborhood of Dwight D. Eisenhower and remained there for the next 25 years."¹⁸ Fitzgerald is certainly correct to note the consensus that existed—although it did not emerge immediately in 1945—and that "democracy" was no longer a call to action as it had been from the Progressive Era through Rugg, but simply a background assumption about the nation. She is also right to say that foreign affairs gained a more prominent place in textbooks, as children were taught not only to fear communism, but also a Cold War-inspired internationalism that even celebrated the United Nations as a (made-in-America) vehicle for world peace.¹⁹

Yet, the most important change was in the image of America to which millions of schoolchildren were taught to pledge their allegiance. Fitzgerald noted that the textbooks'

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, p. 55; see also Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*, pp. 256-59.

¹⁹ Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, pp. 55-56.

portrayal of U.S. homogeneity was greatest in their “reporting of economics in American life,” virtually never hinting at economic inequality or injustice, or any relationship between economics and power.²⁰ However, this significantly understates the importance of this theme. The universality of the middle class and economic opportunity were not merely key facets of American life, but were part of a larger constellation of qualities—all essentially economic in nature—that defined America and defined its greatness.

During World War II, and also the years the followed it, ideals of democracy clearly predominated, albeit shorn of the hortatory and self-critical qualities present in Rugg, West, the Beards, or even the early Muzzey books. Casner and Gabriel’s *The Story of American Democracy*, published in 1942 and 1946, stated its intent at the outset — “to bring to the boys and girls of the middle of the twentieth century an understanding of the struggle of those who have gone before us to plant democracy in the forest and to carry it across the continent.” With Lincoln’s Second Inaugural quoted on the frontispiece, this book for seventh and eighth graders was organized into ten units, which not so subtly wove into each the theme that “only in terms of democratic ideals and principles” can the nation’s history be understood. For example, unit five told how “Frontier Life Teaches Americans More about Democracy,” unit six explained how “Democracy is Tested by the War Between the States,” unit nine described how “Knowledge and Education Strengthens (sic) Democracy,” and unit ten discussed how “The U.S. Fights for its Life and for a Free, Democratic World.”²¹

Similarly, Ralph Volney Harlow and Ruth Elizabeth Miller’s 1947 *Story of America* presented U.S. history as showing “how our predecessors triumphed over difficulties, solved

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 105, 109.

²¹ Mabel B. Casner and Ralph H. Gabriel, *The Story of American Democracy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1946), pp. v., 301, 342, 577.

major problems, [and have] given us our freedom.” This was a primer in civics education, teaching democratic problem-solving through the examples of political and business leaders. Beginning to reflect postwar changes in attitudes toward business, the authors noted that while it was long “fashionable to condemn” business leaders, “American business has brought great advantages.”²²

One fifth-grade textbook, Frank D. Whalen and Orrel Baldwin’s *Our America* (1953) was organized into seven units in which nearly half the book was devoted to the creation of the republic. The concluding emphasis was on American religious freedom and opportunity, juxtaposed against communist tyranny.”²³

While the change in emphasis is clear later in the 1950s, the shift can be traced by examining different editions of the same textbook. For example, the 1950 edition of a widely used high school textbook written by Fremont Wirth announced on the first page, opposite a drawing of covered wagons, that the book is about “American ideals and institutions.” Like many textbooks that lionized America’s founding and the elaboration of its fundamental principles by its revered Founding Fathers, one-third of the book’s forty chapters merely covered the triumph of Jefferson over the Federalists. The twentieth century received short shrift, with little or nothing said about the emergence of consumer society, rising living standards, or even the New Deal. Forebodingly, the 811 page tome ended with Americans feeling “a sense of grave responsibility.”²⁴

By contrast, a 1957 edition of Wirth’s text—like other textbooks of the late 1950s—wove discussion of U.S. economic progress into almost every section and opened with an almost poetic

²² Ralph Volney Harlow and Ruth Elizabeth Miller. *Story of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1947), pp. v, 391-92, 664. Harlow and Miller largely avoid the New Deal and World War II, but note that other countries “all recovered from the Depression without a New Deal.”

²³ Frank D. Whalen, and Orrel Baldwin, *Our America* (New York: Noble and Noble, 1953), pp. 241, 318.

²⁴ Fremont P. Wirth, *The Development of America* (New York: American Book Company, 1950), pp. 1, 225, 811.

paean to prosperity: “America is a strong and wealthy nation, the greatest of all countries in its industry, its agriculture, its scientific achievement.” A sixteen page opening color spread on American ideals, called “the American way of life,” now included “Freedom of Enterprise” and “Individual Ownership of Property.” Instead of his 1950 image of covered wagons lumbering across the prairie, Wirth began this newer edition with a portrait of modern abundance:

Powerful cars moving smoothly along superhighways; swift ocean liners plowing through great harbors; skyscrapers pushing up into the blue; wide acres of wheat waving across the prairies; fields of cotton ripening in the sun; busy little shops lining Main Street; factories turning out thousands of products; and all across and up and down the land, millions of students like yourselves hurrying back and forth to school. This is America today.²⁵

Even more remarkably, the Jefferson who was lauded for his commitment to “equal and exact justice” in 1950 had become the man who “emphasized the importance of free enterprise.” John D. Rockefeller, a villain in Wirth’s 1943 textbook, was now a hero, as tables on rising corporate profits and consumer spending were prominently featured.

Finally, the twentieth century, which had received two chapters’ of attention in Wirth 1950 book, warranted twelve of forty chapters in his 1957 textbook. He noted that instead of facing “grave responsibilities,” contemporary Americans now had TV, atomic energy, and prosperity for all. Highlighting the country’s “tremendous economic growth,” Wirth described the change in American capitalism from the exploitative robber barons to a “popular capitalism” that had given “the American Consumer a high standard of living, which in turns makes possible mass production and mass consumption.”²⁶

A similar change can be seen in the continuing series of Muzzey textbooks. His 1945 *A History of Our Country* echoed the strongly moralistic tone of his earlier books, insisting that the

²⁵ Fremont P. Wirth, *United States History Revised Edition* (New York: American Book Company, 1957), introductory section.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

United States was not about the false gods of money, but its enduring ideals of liberty, democracy, union, and the achievements of the pioneers. Critical of “worshipping the golden calf,” not giving all Americans their “fair share,” and the “preoccupation with material success,” Muzzey hailed “the threefold motto of the American republic as ‘Liberty, Democracy, Union,’” and concluded by urging children to be “more faithful” to the Founders’ ideals of liberty.²⁷

By 1955, Muzzey had not only changed his frontispiece from a somber-looking George Washington to a collage of progress from a tepee and explorers to giant office buildings and factories, but he also had apparently changed his mind about the beneficence of business. The Constitution was still a “wonderful achievement” and Jefferson was still admired—albeit more for the Louisiana Purchase than the Declaration of Independence, but the robber barons were now “our great captains of industry” who “could hardly help growing rich” and brought “our modern industrial prosperity.”²⁸

An even more dramatic transformation can be seen in the succeeding postwar editions of Howard Wilder, Robert Ludlum, and Harriett McCune Brown’s *This is America’s Story*. The 1954 edition opened by cataloguing of America’s leadership in refrigerators, cars, radios, and washing machines, but the authors wrote, “we are even prouder of our freedoms” than our wealth and power.”²⁹ By 1963 the authors felt confident enough to declare that business, labor, and government had “solved the problems” of modern America. Moreover, the hierarchy of pride had been inverted, as the 1963 edition featured a fourteen-page introduction highlighting seven defining qualities of modern America. The first four emphasized its demographic and economic

²⁷ David Saville Muzzey, *A History of Our Country: A Textbook for High School Students* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1945), pp. 109, 313, 806, 897.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 164, 320-21. While a hint of change can already be seen in 1950, when Muzzey proudly notes America’s pre-eminent position in car and telephone ownership, it is only in the 1955 edition that he devotes a full four chapters to “How Our Reunited Country Increased in National Wealth and Power.”

²⁹ Howard B. Wilder, Robert P. Ludlum, and Harriet McCune Brown, *This is America’s Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954), pp. 2, 7, 664.

size and power, while republican government and the global defense of liberty were relegated to the last spots. The very scale of American abundance was such that if anyone had predicted it, they “would have been thought completely mad,” the authors wrote. Unit eight, which focused on the first half of the twentieth century in both editions, metamorphosed from its 1954 disquisition on the arrival and contributions of immigrants to a story of “growth and change [of] modern conveniences and labor-saving machinery, . . . greater leisure and increased opportunities, [and] reduced working hours.”³⁰

Indeed, by the mid 1950s and early 1960s, school textbooks seemingly could not get enough of the story of America’s transformation into an abundant land of popular capitalism. But, transformation from what? Was this a change from high-minded ideals of liberty and equality—to which lip-service was still paid—to a nation whose dominant characteristic was its abundance? No one would say it quite so bluntly, but the role and meaning of those ideals was no longer what it had been in the texts of the first half of the century. “Freedom” less and less connoted the Bill of Rights than free enterprise as the backbone of the American system. Rarely did a textbook of the 1950s or early 1960s chastise the nation for not living up to its ideals of liberty, justice, and equality for all. Instead, the ideals were now like wallpaper—a pretty background that was taken for granted, not pondered too deeply, and not the big story.

Henry W. Bragdon and Samuel P. McCutchen’s 1954 *History of a Free People* opened, characteristically, with the statement, “In terms of wealth and strength the U.S. is one of the great nations of the world—probably the greatest. . . Amazing productive capacity has given it the world’s highest standard of living.” Number one on the authors’ list of ten qualities of “Americanism” was “Economic Opportunity,” and chapter one began with a quote from the Rev.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 507, 509, 467; 2, 7, 664; and Howard B. Wilder, Robert P. Ludlum, and Harriet McCune Brown, *This is America’s Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), pp. 481, xi, 442, 535.

John Higginson, “Lord thou hast been a gracious God, and exceedingly good unto thy servants. . . . We live in a more comfortable and plentiful manner than ever did we expect.” Although the authors extolled the virtues of freedom, the first of three freedoms described was “freedom of enterprise,” which “encourages the production of goods which Americans enjoy in abundance.”³¹

“Freedom” still figured prominently in textbook titles, but this have been an artifact of the Cold War—an effort to reinforce America’s superiority to Soviet communism. Like Bragdon and McCutcheon’s *History of a Free People*, however, Gertrude Hartman’s *Land of Freedom* (1959) presented American history as a two-act play—the first, about the “adventure” of the nation’s early history, and the second, about “A Century of Industrial Progress.” The teleology is clear—from “Land of Promise” in chapter four to “Land of Plenty” in chapter twenty-seven.

After graphically illustrating this with the one-hundred-fold growth in ice cream production between 1900 and 1957, Hartman told her students

Today, the standard of living of the people of this country is the highest in the world. They have better food, better clothes, better houses than any other people. The majority of American homes are equipped with a host of modern household appliances and labor-saving devices. There are more electric lights, more telephones, automobiles, radios, television sets, and other conveniences than in other countries. The people have more leisure, with all that this means in the way of recreation, education, and opportunity for cultural improvement.³²

Children were then told to work hard to create ever more abundance for all: “This is the challenge which our democratic society must meet.” Historian Allan Nevins contributed his two

³¹ Henry W. Bragdon and Samuel P. McCutchen, *History of A Free People* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp. ix, 3, 672, 644. Interestingly for a high-school text, Bragdon and McCutcheon commend the CED for helping to prevent a postwar depression.

³² Gertrude Hartman, *America: Land of Freedom* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1959), pp. 577-578, 583. The only discordant notes in this tale of “continuing industrial progress” are the unspoken, but implicit fear that nuclear war, depression or other “natural disaster” (sic) could call a halt to this march of progress, and the surprising exhortation “to increase production and spread its benefits so that every family will share in the abundance which by our united efforts we are now able to produce.”

cents in a foreword to Hartman's book: U.S. history "is a story of the conquest of material wealth...to create a standard of life such as the world had never before known."³³

The duality, if not interdependence, of freedom and abundance was also the theme of Glenn Moon, Don Cline, and John MacGowan's *Story of Our Land and People* (1957). Figures such as Andrew Carnegie and Thomas Edison were featured as making life better for all Americans. While the New Deal brought an unfortunate increase in regulation and labor power, all Americans now enjoyed freedom from want (as well as FDR's other Four Freedoms), and the book concluded: "We are today the strongest, richest, and most advanced nation."³⁴ This contrasts with Moon's much more tentative 1949 edition that emphasized America's melting-pot liberalism and fear of a new war.³⁵

Certainly, Cold War themes jostled with abundance for prominence in 1950s textbooks. Edna McGuire and Thomas B. Portwood's *Our Free Nation* (1954), for example, told students "how fortunate you are to be living in a free land," and that "there exists today a mighty struggle between the free nations and those whose freedom is not allowed."³⁶ A few textbooks, highlighting American freedoms, even touched on the still unsecured rights of African Americans, and offered a puritanical critique of the material "selfishness" and "wastefulness" of a people who should be devoted to higher ideals.³⁷ Somewhat contrary to Fitzgerald's claim about unanimity among textbook writers, Howard Wilson and Wallace Lamb's 1955 *American History*, while telling of the nation's unparalleled living standards, injected the surprisingly

³³ Gertrude Hartman, *America: Land of Freedom*, pp. vi-vii.

³⁴ Glenn W. Moon, Don C. Cline and John H. MacGowan, *Story of Our Land and People* (New York: Henry Holt, 1957), pp. x, 399, 441, 472, 474, 599, 611.

³⁵ Glenn W. Moon, *Story of Our Land and People* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949), pp. xiii, 582.

³⁶ Edna McGuire and Thomas B. Portwood, *Our Free Nation* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), v.

³⁷ Howard B. Wilder, Robert P. Ludlum, and Harriet McCune Brown, *This is America's Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954), p. 507; Philip Dorf, *American History in Review* (New York: Keystone Education Press, 1954), p. 231; and Howard Eugene Wilson and Wallace E. Lamb, *American History* (New York: American Book Company, 1955), pp 589, 577-580.

progressive messages that some Americans have a higher standard of living than others and that the “economic well-being of any nation is the concern of all.”³⁸

The liberal winds that began blowing in mid 1960s America were evident in a new crop of textbooks that began to note such problems as racism and environmental degradation alongside their cheerleading about the nation’s gross domestic product growth. Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti’s *The Rise of the American Nation* (1966), mentioned the contemporary “age of anxiety” and the challenges of civil rights and poverty, and introduced women as worthy of a sidebar in an 800-page text. However, much of Todd and Curti’s post-Civil War story was about the development of “American Ways of Life,” a phrase equated with economic progress, not political or idealistic qualities. American prosperity’s inevitability was clear, because, “although [Americans] had no way of knowing it, the road along which they were beginning to move would bring them by mid-century to the highest standard of living the world had ever seen.” Citing Frederick Lewis Allen, they described the mid twentieth century’s “democratization of our economic system,” “Americans building an economy of abundance,” and ushering in “a new epoch in human history.” Explaining “Where Karl Marx Was Wrong,” the authors pointed out how “the great majority of Americans share material comforts and recreational and cultural advantages undreamed of by even the wealthiest people a half century ago.”³⁹

Another mid 1960’s textbook, Johns Hicks, George Mowry, and Robert Burke’s *A History of American Democracy* (1966), concluded by telling students that a new era had dawned in their lifetimes. “The abundance produced by business, and its widespread distribution among all classes” characterized the nation. “The new business system was described as a

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 543, 514.

³⁹ Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti, *The Rise of the American Nation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), pp. 810, 556, 545, 815, 797.

people's capitalism and a democratic capitalism.”⁴⁰ Historian Arthur Link's 1968 *The Growth of American Democracy: An Interpretive History* ended with “storm clouds,” but was still a basically optimistic story of the advent of “breathtaking” prosperity that had nearly solved the age-old problem of poverty, suggesting the nation was headed “Toward a Classless Society?”⁴¹

Within a few years, this optimism came crashing down as more critical textbooks were attacked for their depiction of American society, moral relativism, and less than coherent narratives. Edwin Fenton, who pioneered the “inquiry method” of the “new social studies” in *The Americans* (1970), encouraged students to write about their “obligations” in a chapter on the American Revolution and describe “how you would go about protesting” an injustice.⁴² Henry Graff's *The Free and the Brave: The Story of the American People* (1972) provided an even odder juxtaposition of seven parts devoted to pre-1900 history, venerating the Founders and early Americans, with its eighth and final part a jeremiad about Americans having “scarred and besmirched their natural environment,” a postwar “plague of problems” including a prosperity that was not widely enough shared, and a “nasty war in Vietnam.”⁴³

Nonetheless, a generation of American teenagers, sitting in their junior high and high school history classes and reading history texts between the early 1950s and mid 1960s, learned that the United States was the wealthiest, most productive, most classless society known to man, and that this was what made America distinctive and great. Other themes co-existed—traditional

⁴⁰ John D. Hicks, George E. Mowry, and Robert E. Burke, *A History of American Democracy*, 3d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966), pp. 788-89.

⁴¹ Arthur Link, *The Growth of American Democracy: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Ginn, 1968), pp. 725, 676, 669-73, 573.

⁴² Edwin Fenton/Carnegie-Mellon University Social Studies Curriculum Center, *The Americans: A History of the United States* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 80-81, 461.

⁴³ Henry F. Graff, *The Free and the Brave: The Story of the American People* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967, 1972), pp. 580-1, 674, 682, 686. Graff wrote cynically of American abundance, under the caption “Atrocities Against Man and Nature:” “The industrial might of the United States has produced oceans of food and goods. This might has enticed Americans into the accumulation of material things a high goal of life.”

narratives of pioneers and democrats and America as the land of the free—and much depended on what textbook was assigned and how a teacher chose to teach. But the textbooks provide striking evidence of what education leaders believed was worthy to teach and emphasize.

Scholastic Reports on “The Sweep and Power of the American Economy”

Scholastic magazine, another venerable source of social studies in U.S. schools, reinforced many messages with its distillations of popular journalism. If history textbooks of the mid 1950s to mid 1960s surmised that abundance was the culmination of the U.S. experience, *Senior Scholastic*, *Junior Scholastic*, and the company’s stable of magazines for younger children provided journalistic immediacy to this Panglossian message. A host of *Scholastic* articles from the era seem to have been cribbed from *Fortune* and *Life*, the Council of Economic Advisers’ (CEA) *Economic Reports to the President*, and the Committee for Economic Development’s (CED) or Twentieth Century Fund’s sophisticated economic cheerleading.

It is no surprise that *Scholastic* did neither path-breaking journalism nor economic scholarship, but it is noteworthy that the upbeat reportage on American abundance was so thoroughly replayed for the nation’s teenagers and children. In addition, *Scholastic Teacher*—the section at the back of each week’s issue geared toward teachers—featured ads for largely business-produced educational films such as Cluett, Peabody Company’s *Enterprise*, General Motors’ *American Miracle*, and U.S. Rubber’s *Finding People for Products*, as well as booklets such as the Ad Council’s *The Better We Produce, the Better We Live*, the CED’s *Toward More Production, More Jobs, and More Freedom*, and the Pure Oil Company’s *Fifty Fabulous Years*. Schoolchildren and their teachers also were treated to periodic, glossy sixteen to eighteen page General Electric (GE) supplements such as a 1950 comic book showing a progression from Colonial Williamsburg to the present, when, “Yes Jane, inventive industry is working harder

than ever to bring us wonderful new things tomorrow,” and a 1956 ode to technology “contributing to the overall progress of the American people.”⁴⁴

Even if *Scholastic* was not exactly original, it was a sophisticated forty eight page publication that offered schoolchildren a fairly complex understanding of the world. Foreign and U.S political news, science, and world religions, not to mention economics, received prominent play, together with regular features on sports and a “Boy Dates Girl” advice column.

Recognizing its audience’s rapidly growing buying power, *Scholastic* increasingly featured ads—from Coke, Chrysler, and the U.S. Air Force to Breck, Cover Girl, and engagement rings. A 1953 Chrysler ad touted its role in “helping to bring about the miracles of tomorrow.”⁴⁵

The special features devoted to the economy, as well as the weekly coverage, were notable for the messages about the U.S. that they presented. The first major feature, in 1950, included seven articles and twenty-one pages devoted to “America’s Economic System.” Drawing on the Twentieth Century Fund, the CED, and *Fortune*, the magazine opened with the familiar trope of American socio-economic exceptionalism. “In this half century,” *Scholastic* noted, “the United States became the richest and most productive nation in the history of man. With only 7 percent of the world’s people and 6 percent of its land area, we produce about 50 percent of the world’s industrial products and about 40 percent of the world’s goods and services.” Praising “America’s miracle workers” for their productivity, the magazine went on to quote GE president Charles E. Wilson that “there are undoubtedly fewer real economic distinctions between rich people and poor people in the U.S. than in any other country in the world...Truly we are a nation of wealthy people. We are wealthy in the things that make our lives safe, free from drudgery, and full of enjoyment.” Two articles summarized the Twentieth

⁴⁴ *Senior Scholastic*, February 1950 and Feb. 9, 1956.

⁴⁵ National Museum of American History, Ayer Collection, Series 3, Box 36.

Century Fund's *Productivity—Key to Plenty* film and *U.S.A.: Measure of a Nation* book, telling youth that poverty and other social problems would soon be washed away in a tide of prosperity. One article pondered "How We Can Make America Better?" – ridding the country of slums, poor health, racial problems, and rapid depletion of resources – but ended optimistically that "the marvelous progress America has made in the past 50 years demonstrates that these things are not only possible – they are within our grasp." "A Look Into the Future, 1950-2000" included articles by Paul Hoffman, David Sarnoff, and others predicting "ever increasing abundance" and a "Golden Age," suggesting that such wealth would make existential questions of life's meaning central, and even predicting a "radio mail system" with many of the attributes of the Internet.⁴⁶

In 1951, *Scholastic* reviewed the Brookings Institution's play for children, *The Dynamic Economy: A Dialogue in Play Form*, reprinted a Twentieth Century Fund-NBC radio play on business and citizens working together (*Partners in Velvet*), and told of America's "Production Miracle." An article by AFL president William Green noted the many areas where "management and labor are in complete agreement: Both agree, for example, that ours is a dynamic, expanding industrial system based on free competition...It has produced the greatest output of consumer's goods and the highest level of general welfare for the common man of any nation in the world."⁴⁷

Like many mass-circulation news magazines, *Scholastic* published an annual economic issue, highlighting U.S. economic achievements. Eisenhower's and Kennedy's *Economic Reports* were given prominent play, with Eisenhower quoted saying that "high levels of production, employment, and income will be broadly sustained [and that] we have broken through to new and higher ground." Kennedy, in full Cold War dudgeon, was reported to have

⁴⁶ "America's Economic System," *Senior Scholastic*, March 15, 1950. Sarnoff's forecast of e-mail by 2000 is uncanny. See also Paul Hoffman Papers, Box 118, Harry S. Truman Library Institute, Independence, Mo.

⁴⁷ "Business, Labor, and the Good Citizen," *Senior Scholastic*, April 11, 1951.

said that “the economy which Mr. Khrushchev called a stumbling horse was racing to new records in consumer spending, labor income, and industrial production.”⁴⁸

The idea of America representing a “middle way” between collectivism and robber baron capitalism, or achieving a new form of “democratic capitalism” also was featured. One article printed an abridged version of a speech by Smith College history professor Massimo Salvadori. Praised by Eisenhower, it noted that the disparity in earnings between the average executive and farmer was much less in the United States than in the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ A 1959 special series on “Americans at Work—Case Studies in Economics” celebrated worker productivity as the font of American prosperity, and a “Special Issue: The American Economy 1962—From Main Street to Wall Street” featured ten densely written articles that provided both sweeping characterizations of American abundance and strikingly detailed topical coverage of the economy. The issue examined government’s broad powers to stimulate the economy, misconceptions about excessive corporate profits, and the benefits of “slashing the tariff,” yet worried about the “hard-driving and effective [Soviet] economic system” and whether the prospect of doubling our living standards in twenty-five years would leave Americans “soft, jaded, and corrupt.” But the chief message was “The Sweep and Power of the American Economy,” which reported that “the U.S. economy in 1962 is something of a miracle....[It] is an awesome wealth-creating machine of

⁴⁸ *Senior Scholastic*, “Our Economic Picture Today: Changing Face of America” (March 17, 1954); “Economic Records Broken” (October 27, 1955); “1956: Another Boom Year?” (Feb. 9, 1956); “U.S. Boom Keeps Rolling” (Feb. 8, 1957); “Are We Having Too Much Prosperity?” (March 8, 1957); and “U.S. Charts its Course for ‘62” (Feb. 7, 1962).

⁴⁹ *Senior Scholastic*, “America: The Middle Way” (Dec. 8, 1955); “Democratic Capitalism” (April 19, 1956); and “Watchdogs on Wall Street” (Nov. 7, 1958), which concluded that “the owners of the world’s richest nation are the people of the world’s richest nation.”

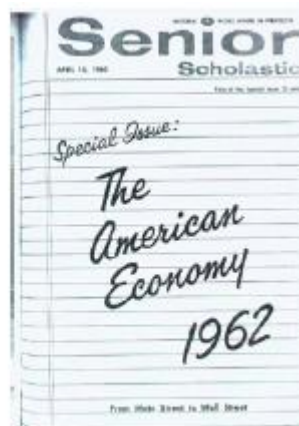
incomparable magnitude. It is difficult for an American to describe it without sounding like a pompous braggart.”⁵⁰

The Economic Education Movement

History textbooks and *Scholastic* magazines were not the only sources that taught American children to think about their nation as a marvel of abundance and to think more generally about their society as an economy. Messages about economics—ranging from scholarly discussions and extensive news reports to political rhetoric, business public relations, and Cold War propaganda—permeated American culture from the late 1940s well into the 1960s. But the perceived importance of economics and of viewing the world through an economic prism led a coalition of business leaders, educators, economists, and politicians to advance the idea that schoolchildren needed special training in “economic education.”



Senior Scholastic in 1950.



Senior Scholastic in 1962.

Postwar economic education was not restricted to youth. Business’ campaign to burnish its image, after being widely blamed for the Depression, evolved into a broader effort to improve Americans’ “economic literacy.” Many employers provided workplace education on “the American free enterprise system.” Efforts were made to use the new medium of television to

⁵⁰ *Senior Scholastic*, “Special Issue: The American Economy 1962—From Main Street to Wall Street,” April 18, 1962. NEED PAGE NUMBER WHERE QUOTE CAME FROM.

teach economics to the general public.⁵¹ And college economics curricula expanded with the newfound prestige of the economics profession. However, the most elaborate aspect of the economic education movement focused on reaching secondary and elementary school students.

The earliest efforts to explicitly teach economics were part of the National Association of Manufacturers' (NAM) and U.S. Chamber of Commerce's late 1930s and World War II—vintage efforts to link “The American Way” with “The Free Enterprise System.” Despite the culturally inhospitable climes of the Depression and the New Deal, the NAM launched a “You and Industry” series of primers and filmstrips for schools in 1936. One film, *America Marching On*, narrated by Lowell Thomas, described the United States as “marching” upward to higher living standards and more leisure under the greatest politico-economic system ever known. During the 1940s, a revived “You and Industry” series emphasized industry’s role in U.S. material and social progress. The NAM sought to influence educators with a free monthly newsletter, “Trends in Education-Industry Cooperation,” that was sent to nearly 50,000 principals, teachers, and school administrators.⁵² The Chamber’s materials for schools in the late 1930s and 1940s smacked more of anti-FDR propaganda than economic pedagogy. The American Economic Foundation and Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System also published anti-“collectivist” pamphlets for adults and children after the war.⁵³

⁵¹ The National Association of Manufacturers presented “Industry on Parade” each week on NBC-TV from 1950 to 1960, and “The American Economy,” produced by the CED, the Joint Council on Economic Education, and the American Economic Association, aired on CBS from 1962-64 (see pp. 33-34, below).

⁵² Colleen Ann Moore, “The National Association of Manufacturers: The Voice of Industry and the Free Enterprise Campaign in the Schools, 1929-1949” (dissertation, University of Akron, 1985), pp. 376, 379, 715, 716, 731-2. The NAM, at the peak of its influence during the Truman Administration, even sought to educate Americans about their economy’s beneficence through the pulpit, briefly sending a monthly magazine called *Understanding* to tens of thousands of clergy.

⁵³ Richard Nelson Hill, “The Joint Council on Economic Education: A Program For Curriculum Change” (dissertation, Duke University, 1980), p. 8; and Haig Babian, “Economic Literacy in a Free Society,” *Challenge*, March 1964.

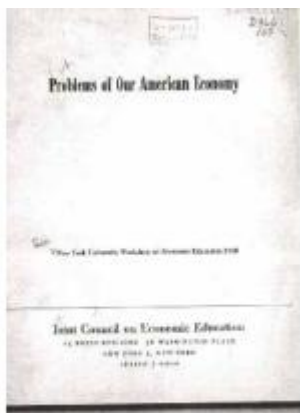
While the NAM-Chamber efforts did reach many schoolchildren, and “Business-Education Days” were launched in 1946 in Michigan and other states by local chambers of commerce for teachers to learn about business, the economic education movement is generally dated to the establishment of the Joint Council on Economic Education (JCEE) in 1949.⁵⁴ G. Derwood Baker, a professor of education at New York University (NYU), began meeting with CED leaders after the war to devise ways of getting economics into the school curriculum and improving America’s economic literacy. Their efforts led to a first, three-week workshop in August 1948 at New York University that brought together administrators of 33 city school systems, seven state departments of public instruction, CED leader Beardsley Ruml, Twentieth Century Fund president J. Frederic Dewhurst, several union representatives such as ILGWU education director Mark Starr, and even Edwin Nourse, Truman’s first CEA chairman.⁵⁵

Progressive by comparison with the anti-statist, free market-oriented NAM and Chamber, the CED was a pivotal player in planning a postwar economy and conceptualizing a postwar America. The brainchild of Commerce Secretary Jesse Jones, and businessmen Paul Hoffman, William Benton, and Beardsley Ruml, the CED was incorporated in 1942 as a way to “enlist the services of the best brains from our universities and business” to solve “the problems of how high productive employment could be attained and maintained in a free society.”⁵⁶ Hoffman,

⁵⁴ Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware: Joint Council on Economic Education Papers.

⁵⁵ NYU Workshop on Economic Education, “Problems of Our American Economy” (1948); CED, “Improving Economic Understanding in the Public Schools” (1950), p. 3; and Hill, “The Joint Council on Economic Education: A Program For Curriculum Change,” pp. 17-21. Starr said that “labor’s stake in economic education is the indispensable base of intelligent citizenship in an advancing community,” quoted in CED, “Improving Economic Understanding in the Public Schools” (1950), p. 15. Former JCEE leaders argue that it was a nonpartisan organization and effort that simply sought to expand “economic literacy,” although they acknowledge that the Cold War did contribute to the movement’s success. Interviews with Stowell Symmes, Williamsburg, Va., October 2, 2004; Mark Schug, February 7, 2005; and Leon Schur, February 15, 2005.

⁵⁶ Hoffman, the president of Studebaker, was enormously influential in shaping postwar beliefs about the United States and its economy. A driving force behind the CED, Hoffman was a key leader of the Advertising Council, later president of the Ford Foundation, and the domestic administrator of the Marshall Plan. Benton was co-founder of the prominent advertising agency, Benton & Bowles, but also was a vice president of the University of Chicago, a



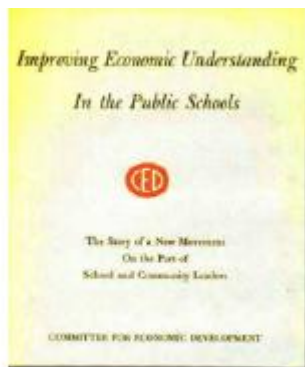
1948 Joint Council on Economic Education publication.

Benton, and their associates felt strongly that business and academia had been separate—if not antagonistic—for too long, and that both sectors could benefit from the wisdom of the other.

Even more importantly, the CED had a strong sense of public purpose—a belief that American society, economics, and politics could be made better by conducting careful, objective research into social and economic problems that could lead to “findings and recommendations for business and public policy which will contribute to the strengthening of our free society, and to the maintenance of high employment, increasing productivity and living standards, greater economic stability, and greater opportunity for all people.”⁵⁷ The CED’s commitment to an economically informed citizenry took many forms. In addition to taking a lead in economic education, it distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of its many booklets, placed editorials in hundreds of newspapers, and had its research quoted in thousands of articles each year.

Truman Administration appointee, publisher of the Encyclopedia Britannica, a delegate to several United Nations agencies, and a Democratic Senator from Connecticut from 1949 to 1953. Ruml, an economist, was a dean at the University of Chicago, an executive at Macy’s, and a New Deal adviser who proposed income-tax withholding. James T. Howard, “Improving Economic Understanding in the Public Schools” (CED, 1950), p. 17.

⁵⁷ Karl Schriftgiesser, *Business Comes of Age: The Story of the Committee for Economic Development and its Impact upon the Economic Policies of the United States, 1942-1960* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 27.



1950 Committee for Economic Development publication

Baker, who headed the JCEE from 1949 to 1955, described the 1949 workshop as “a first attempt to help teachers, curriculum developers and school administrators develop a realistic understanding of the functional operation of our economy.” However, Dewhurst captured what was to be the true flavor of much economic education. Reprising his massive report, *America’s Needs and Resources*, published in 1947, he spoke of “America’s fame” stemming from “our immense standard of living” in which one-fifteenth of the world’s people produced one-third of its goods. The link to national goals was explicitly stated by Ernest O. Melby, dean of NYU’s School of Education: “If we are interested in the survival of our way of life, there is no kind of education more important than that which seeks to make the average American intelligent about our economic system and effective as a citizen in relation to it.”⁵⁸

Clearly, there was a tension in the movement’s goals. Baker and Nourse and many economists believed that economics was a critical subject for children to be able to better understand their world and become better citizens. The CED and the Twentieth Century Fund – which were later joined by the Ad Council, the NAM, the Chamber of Commerce, the Ford Foundation, and others, and which paid many of the movement’s bills – agreed. However, they

⁵⁸ NYU Workshop on Economic Education, “Problems of Our American Economy” (1948); G. Derwood Baker, “The Joint Council on Economic Education,” *Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 7 (March 1950); and Interview with Stowell Symmes, Williamsburg, Va., October 2, 2004.

defined better citizenship also as greater productivity, output, and consumption, and an understanding of America predicated on its prodigious economic capacity. The heavy Cold War overlay that American freedom depended on growth and prosperity, which brought both power and its citizens' happiness and loyalty, was often explicit.⁵⁹

A 1949 Michigan State College workshop report stated these overlapping goals. The purpose of the "American economic system . . . is to enable every individual to become a happy and useful citizen." Because economic decisions by businessmen, workers, consumers, and government are so important, "a high level of economic understanding is necessary. We must act now to improve economic understanding if we are to raise the standard of living and enjoy the benefits of full production, distribution and consumption."⁶⁰ But the underlying message was one of urgency to increase U.S. economic strength and insure a society of abundance. Better and faster production was emphasized as a goal of economic education by many educators and business leaders. As an educator told Congress, "first graders can learn that the faster and better men can produce goods and services, the more wishes and dreams can be fulfilled."⁶¹

Organizationally, the movement was conceived as a decentralized network of local committees, with workshops held around the country to provide teachers and school administrators with in-service professional development in economics. By the mid 1960s, there were forty-five state, local, and regional councils of economic education. Efforts also were made to get schools of education, economics departments, and business to collaborate to provide pre-

⁵⁹ JCEE economist Lawrence Senesh described the four goals of economic education as promoting "growth, stability, security, and freedom." Quoted in Harold J. Bienvu, "Economic Education: Problems and Progress," *Elementary School Journal* vol. 59, no. 2 (November 1958). The JCEE's associate director, Edward J. Allen, said as much, asserting that economic understanding is essential to preserve freedom in our "most titanic struggle." Edward J. Allen, "Program of the JCEE," *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 30, no. 2 (February 1959).

⁶⁰ CED, "Improving Economic Understanding in the Public Schools" (1950), p. 8.

⁶¹ Lawrence Senesh, quoted in Joint Economic Committee, subcommittee on economic progress. "Economic Education," vol. II: "Related Materials" (1967).

service training for teachers and develop curriculum materials for students. Despite the CED's strong backing, the movement grew slowly at first. Many economists initially balked at the idea of simplifying their work for children, although figures ranging from Edwin Nourse and Charles Schultze, later LBJ's chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, and *Fortune* journalist Todd May advised the JCEE and participated in their workshops during the mid 1950s.⁶² The American Economic Association (AEA) only deigned to lend its support in 1957, but its support—and the support of others —grew substantially over the succeeding decade.⁶³

Increasing numbers of summer workshops were held to instruct teachers in the workings of the U.S. economy, develop materials for classroom use, and build community support. The JCEE established a College and University Program in 1957 to bring together schools of education and economics departments to teach aspiring teachers. With AEA backing, about fifteen “centers of economic education” were created at colleges such as the State University of Iowa and Purdue University. By the 1970s, more than two hundred centers existed.⁶⁴

Shortly after M. L. Frankel succeeded Baker in 1955,⁶⁵ the JCEE began publishing extensive bibliographies of supplementary materials for classrooms. The first, thirty-six page bibliography included of materials produced mostly by business trade associations and individual businesses, ranging from the Ad Council's “Miracle of America” to the Twentieth Century Fund's digest, “U.S.A.—Measure of a Nation” (1949). Seeking to be nonpartisan, a few publications by the AFL, the CIO, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Planning

⁶² Statement of Dr. M.L. Frankel, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Economic Progress of the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *Economic Education*, April 21, 1967, p. 58; and Interviews, Charles L. Schultze, Washington, D.C., June 3, 2005; and Todd May, July 24, 2004.

⁶³ Hill, “The Joint Council on Economic Education: A Program For Curriculum Change,” p. 111.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 107, 115-16; and Stowell Symmes Interview, October 2, 2004.

⁶⁵ Frankel led the organization well into the 1970s.

Association, the National Council of Churches, and the Methodist Church (“Christianity and Wealth”) also were included.⁶⁶

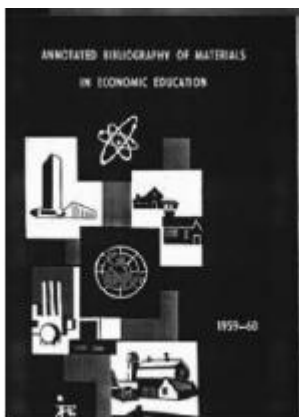
“U.S.A.—Measure of a Nation” spent 98 of its 101 pages boasting that no people had ever been so wealthy, that Americans have more and spend more than anyone else, and yet “few Americans appreciate how prodigious our performance has been.” Its twenty-one brief chapters provided a sector-by-sector picture of American abundance, illustrated by colorful graphs.⁶⁷ The Fund’s 1957 sequel, *U.S.A. in New Dimensions: The Measure and Promise of America’s Resources*, also intended for student and public education, followed the same format, but reflected the characteristically mid 1950s economic euphoria. Not only had America made “giant advances,” bringing it five times the per capita wealth of the world as a whole but a society in which people of all economic strata had the same goods, and that—barring atomic warfare—there was nothing of which the U.S. economy was not capable.⁶⁸ The Fund also produced a twenty minute film for schools called *Productivity—Key to Plenty*.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Joint Council on Economic Education, “Bibliography of Free and Inexpensive Materials for Economic Education” (1955). Some other titles included the Ad Council’s “An Examination of the American Economic System,” the Chamber’s “Free Markets and Free Men,” the NAM’s “Industry’s Goal: Building a Better America,” and materials by the Conference Board, the American Institute of Management, the CED, the American Bankers Association, Chase Manhattan, Standard Oil of New Jersey, US Steel, Ford, and Chrysler (“Modern Industry and Human Values”). Reprints of *New York Times*, *Fortune*, *Saturday Review*, *Life* (“U.S. Growth: Our Biggest Year”), and *Business Week* (“25 Years that Remade America” also were included in the JCEE’s bibliography.

⁶⁷ Thomas R. Carskadon and Rudolf Modley, *U.S.A. Measure of a Nation: A Graphic Presentation of America’s Needs and Resources* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund/ The Macmillan Company, 1949), foreword, pp. 1, 97, 98. Only incidentally, at the end, does the book suggest that we not “overlook in our national exuberance” other values such as relationships, art, and spiritual ideals.

⁶⁸ Thomas R. Carskadon and George Soule’s *U.S.A. in New Dimensions: The Measure and Promise of America’s Resources* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund/The Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 120-124. This 124-page, illustrated booklet included the Fund’s oft-repeated line: “Of all the great industrial nations, the one that clings most tenaciously to private capitalism has come closest to the socialist goal of providing abundance for all in a classless society.”

⁶⁹ Twentieth Century Fund and Encyclopedia Britannica Films, “Productivity: Key to Plenty” (Chicago, 1951).



Joint Council on Economic Education Bibliography, 1959-60.

Succeeding bibliographies between the late 1950s and early 1960s grew to become lengthy tomes, underwritten by the CED, the Ford Foundation, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Crown-Zellerbach Foundation, the Sidney Hillman Foundation, the Reader's Digest Foundation, the Twentieth Century Fund, the W. Alton Jones Foundation, the Whirlpool Foundation, the AFL-CIO, and the Calvin J. Kazanjian Economic Foundation.⁷⁰ While specialized reports on housing statistics and foreign aid were included among the hundreds of titles, most materials—and those produced in greatest number for mass distribution—were celebrations of American abundance and the economic system that made it possible. When not reciting the macroeconomic litany of American successes—as in *Fortune's* “The Amazing Secret of Economic Growth” (1957) and “What a Country” (1956) or the New York Stock Exchange's “America Embraces a People's Capitalism” (1956)—the imperative to produce and spend were drilled into children in materials such as General Motors' “American Battle for Abundance” (1955) and *Business Week's* “For Americans Today—Money is to Spend.” Many publications offered a gee-whiz picture of America's future, driven by technology and economic growth, such as the Chamber's “The World of Tomorrow: What Will It Be Like?” (1956) and

⁷⁰ Kazanjian, of the Peter Paul Mounds candy fortune, was a particularly active supporter of economic education.

Peter Drucker's *Harper's* series, "America's Next 20 Years" (1955). The near unanimity of mid-1950s America's celebration of the abundant society was evident in pamphlets such as the AFL-CIO's "Pioneers of Progress: Higher Living Standards" (1956) and the National Council of Churches of Christ's "American Abundance" (1956).⁷¹ The Chamber's 1959 "The National Income and its Distribution" explained aggregate production and spending, and its "'Promise of Economic Growth" the following year devoted fifty-five pages to the beneficence of growth. In 1961, its "Goals of Economic Policy" enumerated five "consensus" goals – free enterprise, growth, efficiency, stability, and security.⁷²

The NAM, which continued its pre-war efforts to reach schoolchildren, and the CED published their own catalogues of study materials that schools could order. In late 1940s pamphlets such as "The Free Enterprise System" and "Our Material Progress," NAM writers emphasized that the American economic system and business leadership was providing Americans with the highest standard of living in the world—a standard which they promised would only improve.⁷³ The NAM's annual "Ed Aids for High Schools" and companion volume for colleges, included booklets such as "A Comparison of Three Economic Systems" (1958), which proclaimed: "The amount of economic freedom we enjoy in the United States has brought us many rewards, among them our very high standard of living." Between 1959 and 1963, the NAM claimed to have distributed 3.5 million copies of its eleven-page booklet *Industry and the American Economy* series to schools. It also produced and distributed posters such as "You Sure Can Go Places in America!" and films such as "Tomorrow's America," "The American Business System" (a ten-part, six-hour production), and all two-hundred "Industry on Parade" shows

⁷¹ Joint Council on Economic Education, "Bibliography of Free and Inexpensive Materials for Economic Education" (1957).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Colleen Ann Moore, "The National Association of Manufacturers: The Voice of Industry and the Free Enterprise Campaign in the Schools, 1929-1949" (dissertation, University of Akron, 1985), p. 659.

broadcast on television. In one “American Business System” film, students were told “how abundantly the needs and wants of the American people are met through a business system of free choice.”⁷⁴

Many other groups jumped onto the economic education bandwagon. Leonard Reed’s rightwing Foundation for Economic Education, supported by Sun Oil Company chairman J. Howard Pew, distributed its libertarian monthly, the *Freeman* and Henry Hazlitt’s “Economics in One Lesson” to thousands of high school principals.⁷⁵ While anti-communist groups like Reed’s or the Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System tried to get their anti-collectivist message into schools, liberal organizations such as the National Planning Association, unions, and the Brookings Institution also distributed materials to schools.⁷⁶

Educators at the State University of Iowa, a hotbed of economic education, created curricular materials such as “How the American Economy is Organized” and “Measuring the Performance of the Economy” (1956), a thirty-nine page pamphlet that explained GNP and national income accounting to high-schoolers. Commercial curriculum developers such as Curriculum Resources published “America and the World Economy” and the eighty-four page “Our Labor Force” (1961). “Business and the American Way,” a seventy-six page booklet produced in 1955 by Oxford Social Studies Pamphlets, emphasized the importance of productivity, while its ninety-two page, 1960 sequel, “Labor and the American Way” discussed the history and functions of unions.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware: National Association of Manufacturers Records, 1917-1970, Accession 1411, Series 6, Box 219; and CED, “Study Materials for Economic Education in the Schools” (October 1961); and Hagley, Joint Council on Economic Education Papers.

⁷⁵ Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware: National Association of Manufacturers Records, 1917-1970, Accession 1411, Series 6, Box 99.

⁷⁶ C.W. McKee and H.G. Moulton, “A Survey of Economic Education” (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1951).

⁷⁷ CED Study Materials for Economic Education in the Schools,” October 1961.

By the late 1950s, other educators had begun to develop their own materials to supplement those produced by business and other organizations. The Council for Advancement of Secondary Education produced a 116 page text, *American Capitalism: An Introduction for Young Citizens* (1958). Calling the American system “modified free enterprise,” the book emphasized the nation’s disproportionate share of the world’s wealth, its rapid growth, and its “substantial progress” toward achieving equity, as well as the critical line between free enterprise and America’s other freedoms.⁷⁸

The JCEE and the National Council for the Social Studies began producing an “Economic Life” series of resource units in 1955, the State University of Iowa created a “Primer of Economics” series, and JCEE economist Lawrence Senesh produced a 150-frame filmstrip, “Our Growing America,” in 1956. Although Senesh recognized the problems of unemployment, low incomes for some, and falling farm income, its concluding frames proclaimed, “We have a good and growing economy—an economy that is good to people by providing them with material abundance. The steady per capita increase in our real GNP is the material abundance.”⁷⁹

Despite the JCEE’s insistence on the “objectivity” and nonpartisanship of their activities and materials, economic education clearly had a message that went far beyond supply and demand curves and savings-investment-consumption functions. As Antonio Gramsci or John Kenneth Galbraith would argue, the intertwined messages about U.S. style “people’s capitalism” bestowing classless, and ever-increasing abundance on its people were treated as “second nature” or “conventional wisdom.” These were assumptions not to be questioned.

⁷⁸ Laurence E. Leamer and Dorothy Lampen Thomson. *American Capitalism: An Introduction* (New York: Council for Advancement of Secondary Education, 1958, 1968), pp. 2, 62, 77, 89, 22.

⁷⁹ Personal papers of Stowell Symmes; JCEE, “Our Growing America,” Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware: Joint Council on Economic Education Papers; and CED, “Study Materials for Economic Education in the Schools,” October 1961.

At a tenth anniversary banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, the JCEE celebrated its progress not only with educators but economic luminaries such as past CEA chairmen Edwin Nourse and Arthur Burns, foundation and union leaders, and a raft of businessmen from companies such as Standard Oil of New Jersey and McKinsey.⁸⁰ Held in the aftermath of Sputnik and Khrushchev's challenge to economically overtake the United States by 1970, several speakers explicitly linked economic education to the survival of free enterprise and America itself. Donald David, the CED's chairman and vice chairman of the Ford Foundation, insisted that economic education was vital because,

“we are engaged in a life and death economic struggle with those who do not believe in our form of free society. The side that wins this war is going to be the side that demonstrates its ability to find people the greatest satisfactions, the best hope of fulfilling their noblest aspirations. This means economic growth, stability, and security.”⁸¹

The 1960s were a time of heady expansion of economic education. In July 1960, the CED and the American Economic Association (AEA) established a task force of five economists and two secondary-school educators to chart the future teaching of economics in the schools. Fourteen months later, the task force issued its seventy-eight page report, *“Economic Education in the Schools,”* calling on the nation to vastly step up its efforts “to meet our responsibilities as citizens and as participants in a basically private enterprise economy.” The report criticized the “dry and sterile” treatment of economics in history or “Problems of American Democracy” courses, teachers’ poor understanding of economics and biases, and most students’ lack of awareness that a paramount goal of the nation is “how to obtain stable economic growth.” The report reflected faith in a mixed economy and general agreement on “goals [such] as higher living standards, maximum economic freedom for the individual, and less inequality of

⁸⁰ Joint Council on Economic Education, “Education for the Economic Challenges of Tomorrow: A Report of a Symposium in Conjunction with the 10th Anniversary of the JCEE, 1949-1959” (New York, 1959).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21. Marvin Bower, managing director of McKinsey, echoed this message.

opportunity.” The task force recommended that more time in the high school curricula be devoted to economics and that schools should build “economic understanding from the time the child enters first grade.” It urged that all social studies teachers be required to take college level economics courses for certification, that professional development be expanded, that economists play a larger role in developing curricula, and that government and the public should join the private and nonprofit sectors in supporting economic education.⁸²

An estimated 129,000 copies of the task force report were distributed, and the National Education Association, the National School Board Association, and many local school boards and state education agencies pledged to adopt its principles. In addition, the CED distributed kits containing forty-seven recommended teaching materials to 24,500 principals.⁸³ The task force marked a turning point not only for the movement but also for professional economists’ involvement in it. The AEA created its own textbook review committee, with support from the Ford Foundation, and published its report in 1963, with an introduction by economists Paul Samuelson and Ben Lewis. The organization also created an internal task force on economic education, and devoted its May 1961 and May 1963 issues of the *American Economic Review*, as well as much of the association’s annual meetings in both years, to the effectiveness and role of economic education in the schools.⁸⁴

⁸² CED, “Economic Education in the Schools” (National Task Force on Economic Education, September 1961), pp. 7, 9, 15, 22, 43, 64-78. Task force members included Paul Samuelson, the JCEE’s M.L. Frankel, and longtime economic education advocate and Stanford economist G.L. Bach.

⁸³ Karl Schriftgiesser, *Business and Public Policy: The Role of the Committee for Economic Development, 1942-1967* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp 209-10.

⁸⁴ In 1961, papers included ones by G.L. Bach, Paul R. Olson, and Howard S. Ellis; “Economic Education: Challenge to Our Profession,” *American Economic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Papers and Proceedings of the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. (May 1961). In 1963, papers included ones by John R. Coleman, George J. Stigler, and Lewis E. Wagner; “Economic Education,” *American Economic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, Papers and Proceedings of the Seventy-Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. (May 1963). As longtime economic-education proponent and University of Wisconsin professor Leon Schur said, the task force report made economic education more respectable among economists; Interview with Leon Schur, February 15, 2005; and Interview with Stowell Symmes, October 2, 2004.

Perhaps the single most ambitious economic education effort was a remarkable 160 part television series, “The American Economy,” produced by the CED, AEA, JCEE, and the Learning Resources Institute, with support from the Ford Foundation and eighty-five companies, and aired on CBS’s College of the Air and fifty-nine educational TV stations in 1962-1963 and 1963-1964. Aimed at high-school teachers, but reaching an unprecedented weekly audience of one and a quarter million households, each half-hour show was narrated by economist John Coleman, president of Haverford College and the Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank, and featured experts discussing various facets of economics and the American economy. The extraordinarily detailed series included episodes devoted to the workings of the market economy, GNP, twentieth-century economic history, the role of money, how corporations operate, poverty and income security, unions, government’s role, trade, competing economic systems, and “America’s unfinished business.” The star-studded expert “lecturers” included economists Robert Heilbroner, Paul Samuelson, Walter Heller, Milton Friedman, and Arthur Burns, as well as Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, businessmen such as Henry Ford II and David Rockefeller, and labor leader Walter Reuther. The splendors of America’s productivity and wealth were intertwined with a conceptual tour d’horizon of economic concepts. McGraw-Hill published an accompanying textbook, and thousands of teachers earned course credit from 350 colleges. The series was recycled and widely sold to schools well into the 1970s.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ John R. Coleman, “Economic Literacy: What Role for Television?” *American Economic Review* Vol. 53, No. 2 (May 1963); Learning Resources Institute, “Prospectus for ‘The American Economy,’ Dec. 1961 and March 20, 1962, in Departments and Agencies: Council of Economic Advisers, Box 73, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston Mass.; Statement of Dr. M.L. Frankel, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Economic Progress of the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *Economic Education*, April 21, 1967, p. 59; Karl Schrifgiesser, *Business and Public Policy: The Role of the Committee for Economic Development, 1942-1967* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp 209-10; and Interview with Stowell Symmes, October 2, 2004. JFK’s Secretary of Commerce Luther Hodges lauded the series in a January 15, 1963 speech, urging all adults to watch; *Vital Speeches* vol. XXIX, no., 9, p. 288.

The JCEE developed and widely disseminated an overarching curriculum framework, the Developmental Economic Education Program (DEEP), which outlined a progression of economic concepts to be learned from kindergarten through high school. A 1967 curriculum sequence developed for elementary school students instructed kindergarteners that goods and services depended on income, first graders of the interdependence of businessman, producer, and consumer, second graders of America's broad distribution of ownership; and third graders of the interdependent "loop" between businesses and households. Another urged that first graders learn about the division of labor, trading, the complexity of the market, and the importance of government, with second graders ready to move on to the advanced concepts of "the social and economic significance of market price" and the workings of competition.⁸⁶

In April 1967, the Joint Economic Committee's subcommittee on economic progress chaired by Wright Patman, held three days of hearings on economic education. Witnesses bewailed Americans' economic illiteracy, and the inaccurate and biased economics being taught to students, and emphasized that good, widespread economic education was vital for citizen participation, helping Americans make decisions, and enhance the "wealth and physical strength of the United States." McKinsey's Marvin Bower told the committee that economic education was important for children to learn how the American system "has made ours the most productive and powerful nation in the world with the highest standard of living."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Personal papers of Stowell Symmes; and Statement of Lawrence Senesh, Professor of Economic Education, Purdue University, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Economic Progress of the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *Economic Education*, April 17, 1967, p. 41. By 1989, DEEP was in 1,836 school districts covering 39 percent of America's students; William B. Walstad and John C. Soper, "Effective Economic Education in the Schools" (JCEE, 1991), in Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware: Joint Council on Economic Education Papers.

⁸⁷ Joint Economic Committee, hearings of the subcommittee on economic progress, *Economic Education*, April 14, 17, 21, 1967, and vol. II; Related Materials. Statement of Marvin Bower, managing director, McKinsey & Co., pp. 29-31. Witnesses included economist and CEA member James Duesenberry, several businessmen, a union official, school officials, and economic education leaders such as M. L. Frankel, Lawrence Senesh, and Leon Schur.

Economic education continued to expand, although the emphasis on the U.S. economy's achievements diminished. The number of children taking economics courses increased significantly by the 1980s, particularly after California and other states began requiring economics, and about two million high school students were in such courses at any given time by the early twenty-first century.⁸⁸ A Test of Economic Understanding was developed in 1964, and a *Journal of Economic Education* was launched four years later. High school textbooks were published, film series such as *Trade-Offs* and *Give and Take Were Produced*, a *Test of Economic Literacy* was developed in 1979, and the College Board developed its own advanced placement economics test in 1989.⁸⁹

Yet, a shift in emphasis began in the 1970s. Personal finance and a focus on the “world of work” increasingly gained the upper hand. Courses such as Financial Fitness for Life became popular and the Securities Industries Association (SIA) developed a stock market game to “teach the role of markets” in the U.S. that was widely played in high schools in the late twentieth century. By the early twenty-first century, financial-services organizations such as the NASDAQ and Citigroup were especially active in these efforts.⁹⁰ Groups such as Junior Achievement, which had long been involved in instructing schoolchildren about business, sent business people into schools as guest speakers, treating economic education as a way to teach how American businesses operate. “School-to-Work” and job-shadowing initiatives in the Clinton years aimed to teach secondary students about occupations and the labor market.

⁸⁸ Interview with Mark Schug, February 7, 2005. Walstad estimated that 29 percent of high school students were taking economics by 1987; Walstad, “Economic Instruction in the High Schools.”

⁸⁹ Interview with Stowell Symmes, October 2, 2004; William B. Walstad, “Economic Instruction in the High Schools,” *Journal of Economic Literature* vol. 30, no. 4 (December 1992); Richard Nelson Hill, “The Joint Council on Economic Education: A Program For Curriculum Change” (dissertation, Duke University, 1980).

⁹⁰ Interviews with Mark Schug, February 7 2005; Leon Schur, February 15, 2005; and Stowell Symmes, October 2, 2004. The JCEE changed its name to Economics America/the National Council on Economic Education in 1992. A February 4, 2003 SIA press release predicted that 550,000 high school students would play in 2002-03; http://www.sia.com/press/2003_press_releases/html/pr_stock_market_game.html.

Conclusion

Economic education continued in the early twenty-first century, yet its role in crafting and conveying an image of America as a cornucopia of abundance—a miraculously productive economy rather than as a polity and society founded on individual liberty, democratic participation, and free expression—had largely come to an end by the mid-to-late 1960s. The period between the early-to-mid-1950s and the mid 1960s was striking in the way that American schoolchildren learned about their country. Tens of millions of children born between the late Depression and the first half of the Baby Boom were taught that theirs was not so much the country of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, of brave settlers and a melting pot that made *e pluribus unum*. Instead, it was a nation that led the world in auto production and telephone use, where productivity was the reigning credo, and which—thanks to a new system of “democratic capitalism”—had solved the age old problem of economics: Scarcity was no more; abundance was here to stay. And everybody in America could share in it.

Amid the babel of messages of the era—including anti-communism—the source of patriotic pride for American youth was their *economy*, not their polity or society, not ideals frayed by McCarthyism and the threat of thermonuclear war. As Fremont Wirth, as well as Henry Bragdon and Samuel McCutcheon, wrote, and as the abundant source materials of the economic education movement seconded, America’s greatness lay in its wealth and standard of living. Indeed, as *Scholastic* had conceded, it was “difficult for an American to describe [their economy and nation] without sounding like a pompous braggart.”⁹¹

⁹¹ See *Senior Scholastic*, “Special Issue: The American Economy 1962—From Main Street to Wall Street,” April 18, 1962.