London Review of Education, *Vol.* 2, *No.* 2, *July* 2004

Conservative Battles for Public Education within America's Culture Wars: poignant lessons for today from the red scare of the 1950s

STUART J. FOSTER
Institute of Education, University of London, UK

O. L. DAVIS, JR.
The University of Texas at Austin, USA

ABSTRACT Historically public schools and public school teachers have been obvious targets for attacks by conservative critics. However, during the post World War II red scare, the rapid emergence of anti-communist sentiment and super-patriotic zeal dramatically increased their vulnerability. In many respects the arch conservatism of the 1950s has obvious parallels with political trends in American education this century. As in the 1950s, contemporary pressures by well-organised and powerful conservative groups, 'think tanks', politicians, and economic interests have been particularly successful in influencing educational policy and practice on a wide range of issues. Attention to the educational context of the 1950s, therefore, reasonably offers contemporary educators important historical insights into the ways in which socio-political forces profoundly shape and dramatically influence educational policy and practice.

Introduction

Education in the United States currently is embroiled in a bitterly divisive culture war. In battles over its nature and programs, as well as its very existence as a public service to the republic, conservative politicians, pundits, and organizations seek control of, not simply influence over, the nation's schools. Recent disputes have raged over issues such as school sponsorship and required participation in publicly voiced prayers in schools, programmes of multicultural education and environmental education, and science curricula that incorporate 'creationism' in lieu of evolution. Also, a number of more liberal analysts have characterized the recent 'No Child Left Behind Act' as federal transgression of constitutional limits on federal power and as a means by which public schools will continue to lose support until American education is privatised. To be sure, these advocacies for conservative take-over of public education are part and parcel of the larger culture war for major conservative influence if not control of American society. These larger cultural conflicts provide both contexts and stimulation for right-wing enthusiasts' claims. Additionally, dominant slogans in these wars emphasize conservative allegiance to economic principles

ISSN 1474-8460 print; ISSN 1474-8479 online/04/020123-13

DOI: 10.1080/1474846042000229467

(e. g., capitalist market forces, managed efficiency, and privatisation), to political ideas (e. g., 'getting government off people's backs'), and to social values.

Culture wars and related battles over elements of public schooling, however, are not new to the American educational landscape. During the 1917–1918 involvement of the United States in the Great War, for example, the federal government's Committee on Public Information and many locally inspired initiatives sought a vigorous if not ruthless conformity to national wartime objectives and practices. Many American schools made ubiquitous the prominent attention by schoolchildren to the US flag, numbers of school boards and superintendents required students and teachers daily to recite a pledge of allegiance, albeit in various wordings, and required teachers to pledge an oath of loyalty to the United States or lose their teaching positions. Many teachers felt intimidated by war bond and stamp drives which mandated targets that individual schools must meet (Vaughn, 1980; Davis, 1995, in press; O'Leary, 1999).

During the inter-war years, a short-lived red scare and the severe economic depression of the 1930s, coupled with sharp philosophic conflicts over progressive social measures, fostered conservative efforts that frustrated public schooling from its possible incorporation of a variety of liberal proposals. A particularly sobering example was the American Legion's open hostility to a set of social studies textbooks authored by Harold Rugg, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. The Legion's opposition at the local level prompted many schools to jettison usage of these books and one Legion post drew national attention to the burning of the Rugg books at a public bonfire (Counts, 1932; Bagley, 1938; Rugg, 1941; Carbone, 1977; Null, 2003).

World War II offered American schools a short respite from battles related to the culture wars of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the war had an impact on schooling in a number of ways. Still, Americans recognized the immense cultural capital of its public institutions, including schools, and united to maintain them apart from political contest during the war. However, with the war's end, battles over schooling resumed, often focusing on issues prominently contested during the pre-war years (Davis, 1993; Field, 1994; Garrett & Davis, 2003).

Some post-war critics, for example, built cases of anti-intellectualism in schools upon their perceptions of the ruinous influence of John Dewey's progressive education. Other critics saw a nation of individuals who could not read and, consequently, blamed public schools for this condition. Overshadowing these and all other concerns, however, was a 'red scare' disproportionately larger and vastly more comprehensive and destructive than was the 1920s' fright about 'reds in America'. The period of this new 'red scare' is often known as the 'McCarthy era', a time when political and cultural divisions in America appeared especially acute (Bestor, 1953; Flesch, 1955; Griffith, 1970; Caute, 1978; Carleton, 1981, 1986; Fried, 1990).

In a fashion strikingly similar to today's situation, schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s became engaged in bitter socio-political clashes precisely because they wrestled with many of the issues that divided the country at mid-century. Supporters of federal aid to education, racial integration of schools, modern or 'progressive' teaching methods, UNESCO, and a liberal academic philosophy stood in stark contrast to those who argued for the sovereignty of states' rights, racially segregated schools, a 'traditional' and disciplined educational environment, and a strongly nationalistic approach to world affairs (Scott & Hill, 1954; Raywid, 1962; Schrecker, 1986; Kransdorf, 1994; Foster, 2000). Furthermore, as with today, political and cultural wars at mid-century played out at a time during which conservative forces in society typically appeared ascendant in the political arena. Attention to the educational context of the 1950s, therefore, reasonably offer contemporary educators in the United States and elsewhere important insights into the ways in which socio-political forces profoundly shape and determine educational policy and practice at all levels.

Tidy comparisons of the two distinctive historical periods, of course, are not easily drawn. Nevertheless, such attention to specifics and analogies can be very helpful in educators' and policy analysts' thinking within time (Neustadt & May, 1986). Fifty years ago, American educators acted within very different contexts from those existing today. Two particularly important differences emerge from careful analysis. First, unlike today, much social and educational policy and practice in the late 1940s and early 1950s operated against the backdrop of the anti-Communist fervour of the Cold War (Reeves, 1982; Ravitch, 1983). Second, educators at mid-century typically did not fall victim to the extremely powerful influences of fundamentalist religious conservatism that is so salient in the contemporary period (Scharmann 1994). Nevertheless, despite these differences, significant similarities exist between the two periods that warrant closer attention.

Politics, Parallels, and the Post-War Red Scare

Politicians, commentators, and critics in both historical periods were and are quick to use American public schools as a means not only to exact increased control over the educational enterprises but, also, to influence significant aspects of the general culture. Additionally, they employ the nation's public schools as a surrogate 'enemy' by which they can criticize the nation's failings and frustrations in both domestic affairs and foreign relations. This phenomenon reasonably describes the period immediately following the end of World War II. The transition of American society from wartime austerity to an imagined peacetime was distinguished by a curious dichotomy. On the one hand, the United States entered the post-war world as the world's strongest and most prosperous nation. To most Americans, the nation's and their personal futures appeared uncommonly bright. On the other hand, widespread anxiety, frustration, and unease characterized this era. In particular, new domestic and unfamiliar if not new problems in foreign relations challenged this generation that grew out of the nation's severe economic depression and successfully waged a global war against fascist exploitation. These anxieties and frustrations became manifest in a people who sought to cope with an unfamiliar military 'police action' in Korea, 'Cold War' tensions with the Soviet Union and Soviet bloc nations, rapid urbanization, intense struggles over issues of race, and the advancement of a society consumed with increased commercialism and modernization. Especially salient, by its foreign policy emphasis on 'containment' of communism, the United States hesitantly accepted the role of the world's policeman. Thus, the nation and its people became aware, only tentatively at first, of their continuing and awesome burden of responsibility in world affairs. Overlaying all these troubling concerns was the harrowing and persistent threat of nuclear war (Griffith, 1970; Griffith & Theoharis, 1974; Hodgson, 1978; Oakley, 1986; Foster, 2000).

Americans pursued explanations for their deeply troubling perceptions of personal and national realities. In an attempt to explain the causes of their malaise, many Americans discovered an easy target: the Soviet Union and its 'godless' communist ideology. They resented the apparent duplicity of their wartime ally for its stealth of atomic secrets and many Americans perceived that the Soviet Union, in its quest for world domination, as having targeted the United States to be conquered by military aggression. Conditions in American culture were ripe for the re-emergence of a red scare (Cook, 1971; Caute, 1978; Hodgson, 1978; O'Reilly, 1983; Schrecker, 1986; Foster, 2000). The post-World War II red scare, however, was far more than a simple clash of competing ideologies. Its consequences persisted for many years. It fuelled expanded American military preparedness. As an internal political weapon, this red scare effectively limited free speech and free inquiry and tainted the agenda as well as it soiled the reputation of many Americans who supported liberal or social democratic politics. Innuendo, allegation, and accusation—phrased in the rhetoric of

virulent anti-communism—displaced rational political debate and critical deliberation. The propagation of anti-communist sentiment, therefore, became a powerful tool of ideologues from the political right (Carleton, 1985, 1987). By stirring a brew of emotive issues in a cauldron of anti-communist sentiments, powerful individuals and interest groups worked to create a socio-political climate in which their own politically conservative or reactionary agendas could be enhanced.

The mood of the age, additionally, induced public disaffection and uncertainty. This anxiety was manifest by the emergence of a galaxy of societies and organizations, some local and small, others national and large, which cloaked their conservative agenda in anti-communist rhetoric. The nation's public schools became a major principal target of these anti-communist forces. During the post-war red scare era, schools throughout the United States encountered savage and venomous attacks unprecedented in American educational history. Right-wing groups and individuals used the convenience of the red scare to oppose federal aid to education, to deride campaigns for racially integrated schools, to ridicule progressive philosophy and practices in education, and, very importantly, to blunt advocacy for tax increases to support public schooling.

To serve their own political ends and to destroy liberal and progressive approaches to education, right wing critics repeatedly used the extravagant, hostile, and disparaging rhetoric of the red scare. For example, these strident critics accused many public school teachers and administrators of outright 'subversion' of American values and institutions, of 'advancing the work of the Kremlin' and 'promoting communism,' and of being 'disloyal' or 'un-American.' Charges of communistic influences easily became claims that public schools did not teach 'the fundamentals,' failed to teach appropriate morals, and subverted the traditions and values of American society (Hulburd, 1951; Van Til, 1953; Morris, 1976; Caute, 1978; Ravitch, 1983; Beineke, 1998; Foster, 2000).

Education's Contemporary Critics

Concerns in contemporary America closely mirror many of those manifest at mid-century. Much in the same way as the United States entered the post-war era as the world's most prominent and powerful nation, America marched into the twenty first century without rival. Still, as in the 1950s, the nation recognizes a grave political divide and a host of uncertainties. Terrorist attacks on American soil, divisive conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the subsequent 'war on terrorism', and global instability have profoundly heightened American suspicion of some foreigners and have shaken American confidence. Even before these dramatic and troubling events assumed prominence in the minds of Americans, many political and social conservatives appeared troubled by America's apparent failed sense of direction. Pointing to perceived increases in societal violence, the disintegration of civilized values, a lack of respect for American traditions and heritage, and to what President George W. Bush construed as a deep 'moral chaos,' conservative forces increasingly targeted public schools in their efforts to capture the nation's culture (Neal, 1999).

Not coincidental in an age in which captains of industry and conservative politicians repeatedly voice grave concerns over the future direction of the culture and, in particular, of public schooling, right-wing organizations and pressure groups have flourished. Immensely powerful, well-organized, and generously financed organizations such as the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, The Eagle Forum, Concerned Women for America, the Family Research Council, and the American Family Association enjoy notable and frequent successes in influencing school policy and practice in communities throughout the United States (Jenkinson, 1994; Simmons, 1994; Brinkley, 1999). Ellen Henson Brinkley neatly summarizes the principal concerns of these organizations:

> . . . they look for hints that New Age or secular humanist beliefs are replacing Christianity and religion in the classroom. They complain that the absence of public prayer in school is a sign of a sinful, Godless society. They are concerned about (and sometimes pray for) their children's 'unsaved, ungodly' teachers. They believe that public schools promote moral relativism and that innovative and untested teaching practices have replaced methods that 'worked' in the past. Frills have replaced the basics, in their view, and multicultural literature and revisionist history have diminished patriotism. They tend to believe the worst, ultimately concluding that public schools are a failure. (Brinkley, 1999, pp. 60–61)

In their attempts to exact increasing control of public schooling, a number of right-wing organizations rivet their attention almost exclusively on educational issues. Their intention is clear. They seek to control the agenda and processes of American education. Citizens for Excellence in Education (CEE), headquartered in Costa Mesa, California, has proved particularly adept at influencing the results of local school board elections across the nation. Boasting the support of over a thousand local and state affiliates, the CEE has successfully supported candidates who vehemently advocate policies such as the requirement of school prayer and the adoption of Creation-based science textbooks (Brinkley, 1999). Similarly effective are Mel and Norma Gabler's Education Research Analysts in Longview, Texas. The Gablers' deeply conservative organization, widely renowned for its painstaking line-by-line analysis of public school textbooks, has influenced school textbook adoption and use nationwide as well as in 25 other countries throughout the world (Jenkinson, 1994; Brinkley, 1999; Marshall, 1985). The Gablers' effectiveness in attacking any perceived sign of secular humanism, moral relativism or anti-Americanism in school textbooks is undeniable. It has led not only to acute self-censorship by American publishers, but, also, to advancement of the right-wing agenda in textbooks used in several subjects of the curriculum (Apple, 1991; Loewen, 1995; Foster, 1999). Especially important at the present time are conservative financed 'think tanks' (e.g., the Fordham Foundation, the Heritage Foundation) that issue sharply contentious and highly publicized policy analyses on educational issues.

Education's Critics Mid-Century

Once again the similarities between educational events in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the contemporary period are striking. Unquestionably, the red scare or McCarthy era produced a proliferation of powerful right-wing organizations unparalleled in American educational history (Foster, 2000). Indeed, the National Educational Association tracked as many as 500 separate organizations that they regarded as 'enemies of public schools.' Typically well financed and well co-ordinated, these right-wing organizations effectively fuelled the publics' growing belief that immoral and socialistic schooling increasingly influenced American children.

The most notable 'red scare' critic arguably was Allen A. Zoll who venomously used his organization, the National Council for American Education (NCAE), to assail public education (Hulburd, 1951; Skaife, 1953; Morris, 1976). By appeals to the patriotic loyalties of many influential politicians and wealthy businessmen, Zoll operated a well-financed and strikingly effective organization in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Employing revealing titles such as, 'How Red are the Schools?' 'Progressive Education Increases Delinquency,' 'They Want Your Child,' and 'Awake, America, Awake, and Pray!' Zoll's organization circulated in massive quantity publications critical of public education throughout the United States.

Central to the arguments advanced in these propaganda pamphlets was that 'subversive' teachers and communist sympathizers infiltrated American schools. For example, in one blistering attack on America's educators Zoll contended:

> For a generation, *your* tax money has helped pay the salaries of many propagandist-teachers who have been endeavoring to make socialists, or worse, of America's youth; attempting to rob them of their self-reliance and substituting dependence on the government, on doles, on subsidies; seeking to ensnare them with the false doctrine that it is better to have statism than liberty; undermining the Christian principles and ethics upon which this nation was founded; scoffing at everything American and exalting everything collectivist. (Morris, 1976, p. 236)

Masterfully, Zoll exploited local discontentment and contributed to an explosion of red scare activity in communities across the nation. On an impressive scale citizens in school districts small and large were bombarded with Zoll's dramatic literature. Frequently, local tax groups, patriotic organizations, or ultra-conservative citizens used these materials to attack public schools and to influence the outcome of local school board elections. For example, between 1950 and 1952 alone, evidence of Zoll's powerful influence emerged in communities in Michigan, California, Texas, Florida, Colorado, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, and Illinois (Foster, 2000). As the educational historian Robert Iversen concluded, little doubt remains that 'Zoll took his toll' (Iversen, 1959, p. 246).

Another highly influential and well financed critic of education was the National Economic Council (NEC), an organization led for almost two decades by Merlin K. Hart, a noted right-wing activist, neo-fascist sympathizer, and head of New York's oldest chapter of the John Birch Society (Hall, 1952; Morris, 1976). The extremist views of Merwin K. Hart and his colleagues, however, did not represent the position of an isolated reactionary fringe. Significantly, among Hart's supporters and financial backers appeared some of America's prominent economic leaders. Hart allegedly received substantial contributions from leading officials in the General Motors Corporation, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, Eastman Kodak, Beech Aircraft, the Shaeffer Pen Company, and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Hart revealed to a House Select Committee on Lobbying Activities that the NEC received more than$60,000 from Lammot du Pont and his brother Irenee from 1947–1950 (Hall, 1953). Hart's influence also spread to the political arena where his views were received favourably by Congressman Ralph W. Gwinn of New York, Senator James P. Kem of Missouri, and ex-Senator Albert W. Hawkes of New Jersey (Hall, 1952; Foster, 2000).

Many other organizations similarly attacked public education. The Committee for Constitutional Government (CCG), for example, originally founded by wealthy publisher Frank Gannett in New York City in 1937, rapidly grew into another extremely powerful right-wing lobbying organization during the1940s and 1950s. Led by a highly paid executive director, Edward Rumely, and enjoying the political support of New York Congressman Ralph W. Gwinn, the CCG actively campaigned for the elimination of 'socialized education' and sought fervently to remove alleged 'Marxist influences' in the public schools (Raywid, 1963)

To regard such organizations as the NEC and the CCG as ineffective aberrations on the political landscape would be a serious mistake. During the post-war era, for example, the CCG developed into a prominent, influential, and well financed political pressure group that spent almost $2 million on lobbying and distributed 82 million booklets and pamphlets advancing its political agenda. Furthermore, the CCG served as a parent organization to support the archconservative preaching of John T. Flynn whose bombastic opinions were regularly conveyed to more than 500 radio networks and 4,016 weekly newspapers

throughout the United States. In addition, the CCG promoted, through a vast campaign that involved direct mailing of 3,500,000 postcards, the sale of over 10 million copies of Flynn's book, *The Road Ahead*. Littered with anti-communist rhetoric, *The Road Ahead* attacked the *bêtes noires* of the political right: progressive education, textbook authors, and subversive teachers. Heralded and financially assisted by the CCG, Flynn epitomized red scare rhetoric and conviction in the post-war period (Flynn, 1949, 1951; Foster, 1997, 2000).

Flynn, however, formed only part of the red scare arsenal employed by the Committee for Constitutional Government. As a creator, promoter, and distributor of right-wing propaganda in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the CCG severely damaged public confidence in American education. Supported by wealthy business interests, media magnates, and patriotic associations, such organizations as the CCG, the NCAE, and the NEC proved particularly influential in attacking many aspects of American schooling including progressive education, federal aid to schools, 'un-American' textbooks, and 'subversive' teachers.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, public education also received the political invective of a myriad of right-wing organizations already established in American society. Organizations such as the Sons of the American Revolution, the American Legion, and the Minute Women USA appeared eager to join in scathing attacks on education. Furthermore, extremist critics like Texas newspaper millionaire, R. C. Hoiles, who, with his vast$20 million fortune and his extensive newspaper empire in Colorado, California, Florida, New Mexico, Texas, Nebraska, and Ohio, passionately contributed to political attacks against teachers, administrators, and the school curriculum (Fay, 1952; Raywid, 1963; Foster, 2000)

Mirroring the contemporary exploits of the Gablers, the period from 1949–1953 also heralded the pre-eminence of an organization that sought to rid the schools of 'subversive' and 'un-American texts.' Operating under the auspices of the right wing Conference of American Small Business Organizations (CASBO), *The Educational Reviewer* provided the ideal outlet to attack texts deemed too liberal or progressive. In a fashion similar to the operation of the Gablers, *The Educational Reviewer's* critical examination of school textbooks triggered action in communities throughout the United States. Indeed, no better example of CASBO's profound influence on school textbooks existed than the organization's concerted attack on the Magruder texts that first occurred in the summer of 1949 (Iversen, 1959; Nelson & Roberts, 1963; Foster, 2000).

Magruder's *American Government* had been a classic school civics textbook studied in schools for more than a quarter of a century. Used by the United States armed forces and by thousands of schools in each of the then 48 states, Magruder's book overwhelmingly was the most widely used text in its field. The catalyst for the assault on the *American Government* text was a review published in *The Educational Reviewer* in July 1949 that claimed that Magruder's work followed 'the Communist Party line.' Meticulously *The Educational Reviewer* pointed out passages in the text that, it alleged, exemplified the subversive nature of the book. As testimony to the effectiveness of the network of red scare organizations and their influential supporters, the 'review' triggered a sensational storm of protest in many communities throughout the country. Almost immediately, boards of education banned the book in Houston, Texas, Washington, DC, and New Haven, Connecticut. Censorship campaigns against the book, many of them extremely successful, also mushroomed in communities in Florida, Georgia, Iowa, New Jersey, Michigan, Oregon, Ohio, California, Montana, Alabama, Arkansas, and Washington (Raywid, 1963; Foster, 2000).

The Magruder episode proved symptomatic of other censorship campaigns at mid-century. Right-wing attacks appeared devastatingly effective in altering the educational climate in scores of communities. School boards were thrown into disarray as a result of the countless charges against classroom materials and endless hours of acrimonious debate and

discussion were expended on textbook scrutiny. As in New York, special textbook commissions were often established to investigate charges of subversion. Significantly, at a time when schools confronted the very real problems of overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated buildings, and acute teacher shortages, the desperately needed attention of school boards was diverted to chasing numerous illusory allegations against school textbooks.

The Impact of Right-Wing Attacks at Mid-Century

Little doubt remains that, directly or indirectly, right-wing groups had a profound impact on all aspects of American public education (Caute, 1978; Zilversmit, 1993; Fariello, 1995; Foster, 1997, 2000; Beineke, 1998). As a result of nationwide educational purges and state and congressional investigating committees, hundreds of teachers lost their jobs. Others lived in a state of constant anxiety through fear of dismissal or worried for loss of their professional integrity and their status in the local community. For many, the trauma and uncertainty of the times strained personal and family relations, led to marriage break-ups and, in some cases, prompted suicides (Caute, 1978; Iversen, 1959; Schrecker, 1986; Kransdorf, 1994).

Although these teacher dismissals remain dramatic, arguably the most troublesome aspect of the period was the political and educational climate that they induced. As University of Chicago Chancellor Robert Maynard Hutchins noted in 1954, 'The question is not how many teachers have been fired, but how many think they might be . . . You don't have to fire many teachers to intimidate them all. The entire teaching profession of the US is intimidated' (Hutchins, 1954, p. 2). A survey of teachers in Houston, Texas, for example, revealed an alarming atmosphere of fear and intimidation among these members of the teaching profession. Indeed, 58% of the Houston teachers sampled indicated that political groups had exerted intense pressure on them to slant the curriculum toward a certain political belief and more than 40% of Houston teachers expected to lose their job for expressing their personal political views (National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, 1954; Craig, 2002).

That some towns and cities may have emerged from the post-war era with little direct experience of ideological warfare cannot disguise the reality that right-wing attacks threw scores of communities across the United States into turmoil, and, in many towns and cities, it exacted an enormous educational price. By 1950, for example, state legislatures passed more than 300 laws dealing with subversive practices, thirty states mandated loyalty oaths for teachers and many conducted invasive investigations into alleged communist activities in the schools (Iversen, 1959; Caute, 1978; Schrecker, 1986; Kransdorf, 1994). Conclusive evidence also exists to suggest that politically motivated attacks emerged both in large urban areas such as Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New York, as well as in small communities such as San Angelo (Texas), Muskogee (Oklahoma), and Tenafly (New Jersey). Attacks appeared on the west coast in cities like Portland (Oregon) and on the east coast in places such as New Haven (Connecticut). Birmingham (Alabama), Columbus (Ohio), Denver (Colorado), and Battle Creek (Michigan), for example, also fell victim to ideological attack (Foster, 2000). America's anti-Communist fervour knew no geographical boundaries; it erupted across the entire nation.

John Bainbridge writing in *McCall's*, a popular women's magazine, poignantly remarked of the age that:

> A bewildering disease that threatens to reach epidemic proportions has infected the public schools of America. It has struck in scores of communities from coast

> to coast. It is spreading at a gallop. It contaminates the rich and poor community alike, and its effects are malignant. (Bainbridge, 1952)

Deeply conservative organizations and their political allies clearly were effective in determining significant dimensions of the climate in which educators worked. By mid-century, many American teachers appeared acutely fearful of engaging in any subject matter that might be construed as subversive or controversial. They used textbooks and other instructional materials cautiously; self-censorship among teachers appeared common, and teachers used curriculum materials judiciously for fear of alienating political forces in the community. Overall, this chilling climate induced what Kalman Seigel of the *New York Times* described as a 'subtle creeping paralysis of freedom of thought and speech' in communities across the nation (Seigel, 1952, p. 16).

Essentially, therefore, right-wing attackers who employed the tactics of red scare had a profound, dramatic, and persisting impact on American education. They influenced how teachers taught, what they taught, why they taught, and, in some cases, if they taught. They affected the shape and substance of the school curriculum, the use of instructional materials, and the content of school textbooks. In addition they seriously damaged the efficacy of progressive education and the future direction of educational policy and practice.

Above all, however, attention to the repression of the late 1940s and early 1950s reveals the extent to which the educational discourse increasingly was determined by the political right. In communities throughout the nation, conservative forces shaped the educational agenda as liberals and progressives found themselves squarely on the defensive. The actions of the National Educational Association (NEA), for example, provide a useful illustration of how an apparently liberal-progressive organization all but surrendered to the prevailing conservative agendas dominant a mid-century.

As the world's largest organization of educators, the NEA boasted nearly half a million members at mid-century. It understood itself as a professional organization as distinguished from a labour union. Its membership, therefore, included both teachers and school administrators. Almost instinctively, it sought to protect and to defend the rights of all educators at local, state, and national levels. Indeed, conscious of the destabilising impact of the red scare, the NEA established the National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education in the 1940s for the express purpose of fending off serious attacks on teachers and the public schools (Foster, 1997, 2000; Urban, 2000). Still, despite its conscientious activities, even the NEA and its Defense Commission, as it was commonly called, contributed to the educational discourse established by the various forces of the political right-wing (Foster, 1997, 2000; Urban, 2000).

For example, in an attempt to appear conservatively respectable, the 1949 NEA conference overwhelming voted to exclude communist party members from the teaching profession and further resolved, 'the responsibility of the schools is to teach the superiority of the American way of life' (NEA Addresses and Proceedings, 1949, p. 157). Shunning one of the underlying precepts of free and objective inquiry, many within the NEA supported the notion that courses and curriculum materials explicitly should be both anti-communist and slanted in favour of American democracy. Indeed, reflecting the mood of the age, NEA president Andrew Holt argued in 1949 that teachers were duty bound to inspire 'our children with a love of democracy that will be inoculated against the false ideology of communism' (NEA Addresses and Proceedings, 1949, p. 119). Subsequently, teachers across the nation typically shunned topics considered to be controversial and, specifically, taught about the Soviet Union, if at all, from a distinctly pro-Western and anti-communist perspective. In an effort to disassociate itself from whiff of militancy or labour activism, the NEA also resolved not to support the growing wave of teacher strikes that surfaced at mid-

century (Murphy, 1990; Foster, 2000). Furthermore, although the NEA repeatedly objected to loyalty oaths and Congressional investigations, not once did the organization encourage teachers to refuse to sign loyalty oaths or to shun co-operation with state and federal investigations.

The extent to which erstwhile liberal educators succumbed to the agenda of the political right also was reflected in the tendency of many educators to distance themselves from the philosophy of educational progressivism. Increasingly in this period, rather than to defend their progressive instincts, many educators chose to disassociate themselves with what they perceived to be at best a controversial, and at worst an explicitly un-American, educational philosophy. Routinely, educators went on the defensive. Teachers and administrators elected to use the term 'modern' rather than 'progressive' in order to reflect their educational (and political) position (Zilversmit, 1993; Beineke, 1998).

Accordingly, rather than devote energy to seemingly contentious issues such as 'life adjustment education' and the 'child cantered curriculum,' educators chose instead to champion publicly the 'Three Rs,' the 'fundamentals of instruction,' and loyalty to American traditions (Foster, 2000, p. 184). In no small measure, therefore, conservative critics consistently proved influential in undermining the progressive education movement, in shifting the school curriculum to the political right, and in forcing educators across the land to defend their practice and to adopt more cautious, conservative, and traditional approaches.

Lessons Learned and Not Learned

The shift in the direction of educational policy, practice, and philosophy during the 1950s has obvious parallels with the political trends of contemporary American education. In recent years, conservative forces have been particularly successful in influencing educational policy and practice on a wide range of issues. For example, the discrediting of the national history standards, the demise of bilingual education in California, the centrality of creationism in the Kansas school science curriculum, and the advocacy of educational vouchers in various formats by the Bush administration and in a growing number of states are symptomatic of the increasing influence of right-wing politics on American schools. As in the 1950s, contemporary American education also is increasingly responsive to the political discourse of the political right-wing. Contemporary political debates revolve around the efficacy of educational accountability, high stakes testing, moral and character education, patriotic history, 'back to basics' traditional teaching, and cultural literacy (see Hunter, 1991; Whitson, 1994; Nash *et al.*, 1997; Foster, 1998; Apple, 1999, 2001). Still, American educators, to an extent unlike their counterparts in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, accept legislated requirements mainly without political action. Thus, they have acquiesced to imposed curriculum standards, high stakes tests, and other mandates advanced by right-wing educators.

American teachers' associations and unions appear to be even more timid than they were in the 1950s. Many Americans, particularly conservatives, view both the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers as fronts for the Democratic party. This perception adds no strength, for example, to the NEA opposition to voucher systems on the basis that these plans would drain resources from already under-funded public schools. Further, state affiliates of the NEA, especially, no longer influence state legislation, a severe blow to the efficacy of these organizations. Most state political and educational officials have fallen into line on the implementation of the federal 'No Child Left Behind' legislation. Although a few state governors and legislators recently have joined educators in their serious objections to the NCLB, little evidence exists to suggest that these statements are anything other than political posturing. Especially important, teachers and administrators in local districts are

under intense pressure simply 'to go along' with the new legislative mandates and bureaucratic regulations. Serious opposition has not occurred.

To suggest, however, that conservatives have enjoyed things entirely their own way in the battle for cultural control of the schools would be a misleading conclusion. Nevertheless, their successes are very serious. Significantly, to the extent that citizens of the United States truly value critical thought, free inquiry, equality of educational opportunity, and respect for diverse and multiple perspectives, then much can be learned from mindful reflection of events fifty years ago. Indeed, a look back to the late 1940s and early 1950s offers a sobering and often painful reminder that the stakes are high and much is to play for in contemporary political battles for the control of American education.

Correspondence: Stuart Foster, Senior Lecturer, School of Arts and Humanities, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL. Email: s.foster@ioe.ac.uk

References

Apple, M.W. (1999) *Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, New York, Routledge.

Apple, M.W. (2001) *Educating the 'Right' Way: markets, standards, god, and inequality*, New York, RoutledgeFalmer.

Apple, M.W. & Christian-Smith, L.K. (1991) *The Politics of the Textbook*, New York, Routledge.

Bagley, W.C. (1938) An essentialist's platform for the advancement of American education, *Educational Administration and Supervision*, 24, 241–256.

Bainbridge, J. (1952) Danger's ahead in the public schools, *McCall's*, October, 56–61.

Beineke, J.A. (1998) *And There Were Giants in the Land: the life of William Heard Kilpatrick*, New York, Peter Lang.

Bestor, A.E. (1953) *Educational Wastelands: the retreat from learning in our public school*, Urbana, IL, University of Illlinois Press.

Brinkley, E.H. (1999) *Caught Off Guard: teachers re-thinking censorship and controversy*, Boston, MA, Allyn & Bacon.

Carbone, P.F. (1977) *The Social and Educational Thought of Harold Rugg*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press.

Carleton, D.E. (1981) McCarthyism in local elections: the Houston School Board election of 1952, *Houston Review*, 3, 169.

Carleton, D.E. (1985) *Red Scare! Right Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas*, Austin, TX, Texas Monthly Press.

Carleton, D.E. (1986) McCarthyism in Houston: the George Ebey affair, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 80, 174–176.

Carleton, D.E. (1987) McCarthyism was more than McCarthy: documenting the red scare at the state and local level, *The Midwestern Archivist*, 12, 13–19.

Caute, D. (1978) *The Great Fear: the anti-communist purge under Truman and Eisenhower*, New York, Simon & Schuster.

Cook, J.F. (1971) *The Nightmare Decade: the life and times of Senator Joe McCarthy*, New York, Random House.

Counts, G.S. (1932) *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* New York, John Day.

Craig, C.J. (2002) Nelda Mae Davis. In M.S. Crocco & O.L. Davis, Jr. (eds) *Building a Legacy; Women in Social Studies Education 1784–1984*, Silver Spring, MD, National Council for the Social Studies.

Davis, O.L., Jr. (1993) The American school curriculum goes to war, 1941–1945: oversight, neglect, and discovery, *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 8, 112–127.

Davis, O.L., Jr. (1995) More than patriotism and citizenship: toward a revised interpretation of changes in the American school curriculum during World War I. In L.M. Burlbaw (ed.) *Curriculum History—1994*, Texas, Society for the Study of Curriculum History.

Davis, O.L., Jr. (in press) Schooling in the service of the state: Great War foreshadowing of changed American purpose. In S.L. Field & L.M. Burlbaw (eds) *Explorations in Curriculum History*, Greenwich, Information Age Publishing.

Fariello, G. (1995) *Red Scare: memories of American inquisition*, New York, Norton.

Fay, L.C. (1952) Abolish public schools, *Nation's Schools*, 50, 31–36.

Field, S.L. (1994) Scrap drives, stamp sales, and school spirit: examples of elementary social studies during World War II, *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 23, 441–460.

Flesch, R.F. (1955) *Why Johnny Can't Read—and What You Can Do About It*, New York, Harper.

Flynn, J.T. (1949) *The road ahead: America's creeping revolution*, New York, Devin Adair Co.

Flynn, J.T. (1951) Who owns your child's mind? *The Reader's Digest*, 59, 23–28.

Foster, S.J. (1997) The National Education Association's National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education confronts the 'red scare' in American Public Schools, 1947–1954, *Education and Culture: Journal of the John Dewey Society*, 16, 1–16.

Foster, S.J. (1998) Politics, parallels, and perennial curriculum questions: the battle over school history in England and the United States, *The Curriculum Journal*, 9, 153–164.

Foster, S.J. (1999) The struggle for American identity: treatment of ethnic groups in United States history textbooks, *History of Education*, 28, 251–279.

Foster, S.J. (2000) *Red Alert! Educators Confront the 'Red Scare' in American Public Education, 1947–1954*, New York, Peter Lang.

Fried, R.M. (1990) *Nightmare in Red: the McCarthy era in perspective*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Garrett, A.W. & Davis, O.L., Jr. (2003) A time of uncertainty and change: school mathematics from World War II until the new math. In M.A. Stanic & J. Kilpatrick (eds) *A History of School Mathematics*, Reston, VA, The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Griffith, R. (1970) *Politics of Fear: Joseph McCarthy and the Senate*, Lexington, KY, University of Kentucky Press.

Griffith, R. & Theoharis, A. (1974) *The Specter: original essays on the Cold War and the origins of McCarthyism*, New York, Franklin Watts.

Hall, G.D. (1952) *The Hate Campaign Against the U. N.: one world under attack*, Boston, MA, Beacon Press.

Hodgson, G. (1978) *America In Our Time*, New York, First Vintage Books.

Hulburd, D. (1951) *This Happened in Pasadena*, New York, Macmillan.

Hunter, J.D. (1991) *Culture Wars: the struggle to define America*, New York, Basic Books.

Hutchins, R.M. (1954) Liberal vs. practical education. In C.W. Scott & C.M. Hill (eds) *Public Education Under Criticism*, New York, Prentice Hall.

Iversen, R. (1959) *The Communists and the Schools*, New York, Harcourt Brace.

Jenkinson, E.B. (1994) Tactics used to remove books and courses from schools. In J. Simmons (ed.) *Censorship: a threat to reading, learning, thinking*, Newark, NJ, International Reading Association.

Kransdorf, M. (1994) *A Matter of Loyalty: the Los Angeles School Board vs Frances Eisenberg*, San Francisco, CA, Caddo Gap Press.

Loewen, J.W. (1995) *Lies My Teacher Told Me: everything your American history textbook got wrong*, New York, New Press.

MARSHALL, J.D. (1985) The politics of curriculum decisions manifested through the selection and adoption of textbooks for Texas, Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin.

MORRIS, R.C. (1976) Era of Anxiety: an historical account of the effects of and reactions to right wing forces affecting education during the years 1949–1954, Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana State University.

MURPHY, M. (1990) *Blackboard Unions*, New York, Cornell University Press.

NASH, G.B., CRABTREE, C. & DUNN, R. E. (1997) *History on Trial: culture wars and the teaching of the past*, New York, Knopf.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY THROUGH EDUCATION (1954) *Report of an Investigation Houston, Texas: the study of factors related to educational unrest in a large school system*, Washington DC, National Education Association.

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES (1949) *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Annual Meeting*, Washington DC, NEA.

NEAL, T.M. (1999) Citing 'moral chaos,' Bush urges religion in schools, *The Washington Post*, November 3, A09.

NELSON, J.E. & ROBERTS, G. (1963) *The Censors and the Schools*, Boston, MA, Little, Brown.

NEUSTADT, R.E. & MAY, E.R. (1986) *Thinking in Time; the uses of history for decision makers*, New York, The Free Press.

NULL, J.W. (2003) *A Disciplined Progressive Educator: the life and career of William Chandler Bagley*, New York, Peter Lang.

OAKLEY, J.R. (1986) *God's Country: America in the fifties*, New York, December Books.

O'LEARY, C. (1999) *To Die For: the paradox of American patriotism*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

O'REILLY, K. (1983) *Hoover and the Un-Americans*, Philadelphia, PA, Temple University.

RAVITCH, D. (1983) *The Troubled Crusade*, New York, Basic Books.

RAYWID, M.A. (1962) *The Ax-Grinders*, New York, Macmillan.

REEVES, T.C. (1982) *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: a biography*, New York, Stein & Day.

RUGG, H.O. (1941) *That Men May Understand*, New York, Doubleday, Doran & Co.

SCHARMANN, L.C. (1994) Teaching evolution past and present. In J. SIMMONS (ed.) *Censorship: a threat to reading, learning, thinking*, Newark, NJ, International Reading Association.

SCHRECKER, E.W. (1986) *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the universities*, New York, Oxford University Press.

SCOTT, C.W. & HILL, C.M. (1954) *Public education under criticism*, New York, Prentice Hall.

SEIGEL, K. (1952) *New Crises for Education*, New York, Newsweek Club and Educational Bureaus.

SKAIFE, R.A. (1953) Groups affecting education. In W. VAN TIL (ed.) *Forces Affecting American Education: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1953 Yearbook*, Washington DC, National Education Association.

URBAN, W.J. (2000) *Gender, race, and the National Education Association: professionalism and its limitations*, New York, RoutledgeFalmer.

VAN TIL, W. (1953) *Forces Affecting American Education*, Washington DC, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

VAUGHN, S. (1980) *Holding fast the inner lines: democracy, nationalism, and the committee of public information*, Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press.

WHITSON, J.A. (1994) Critical literacy versus censorship across the curriculum. In J. SIMMONS (ed.) *Censorship: a threat to reading, learning, thinking*, Newark, NJ, International Reading Association.

ZILVERSMIT, A. (1993) *Changing Schools: progressive education theory and practice*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.