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A Map, a Mirror and a Wristwatch

Let me edge into this presentation by telling you something about the children I teach and about some of the changes I saw in the general character development of these kids in the 30 years I spent inside public school classrooms. By a series of accidents, certainly not through my own design, I came to spend about a third of my time with confident white children from prosperous families, about a third of my time with a very mixed group of kids who represented "problem children" of a fairly mild and manageable sort, and a third of my time with black, Puerto Rican, and Dominican children from Harlem and Spanish Harlem; so when I tell you in advance that the observations I'm going to make apply to all of these groups I have earned my opinion in long and arduous action as a front-line practitioner in the school wars our press coverage dimly reflects.

Who are the children I taught? If you spent a short time with them under carefully controlled conditions, as perhaps a visiting businessman or politician might, you would see children who seemed to meet traditional specifications of the genus: alert, intelligent, active, funny, emotional beings who through judicious application of adult attention and some occasional re-sort to tricks and tricky machines can be brought to listen, to question, to analyze, to record, and to respond in a heartening fashion.

It would be an error, however, to fashion a long-range teaching strategy of these quick impressions - yes, my kids look and act as kids have always done, but all of my children are marked deeply by their experience in a secret underworld of the industrial society in decay - the government compulsion school. Schools, too, look as they did prior to 1960, but they are not the same at all. For a whole host of complicated reasons schools have been converted into behavioral training laboratories, where intellectual development - the enlightened historical justification for school-ing children at all - has been abandoned in favor of other forms of training. So in an era of great technical progress my students have been invisibly disfigured by historical placement in a time without moral logic; in a time without an ethical source in God, in natural law, or in other forms of traditional authority, this destines many of them, rich and poor, for meaningless lives of unrooted activity. Only the State, jealous of its final claim to total loyalty, speaks regularly through its rules and laws about proper behavior, and because the voice of the State is, by turns, too rigid, or too pragmatic (conditional/situational ethics), or too dishonest (playing favorites/promising what it cannot deliver), children listen less and less. Nor should they do any differently; their disobedience is an inborn defense: they are trying to save their sanity or their souls, though few would have the language to put it that way.

The children I teach are victims of a very specific human delusion, one which once affected only kings and priests, though now it infects big bureaucrats, public and private, and schoolteachers alike. I refer to the fantastic notion that something called "mass man" actually exists, that human intellectual talent is for the most part a function of economics and social class, and that these conditions can be scientifically man-aged by a huge, intricately articulated bureaucracy which itself is cantilevered with other huge bureaucracies. This is the ultimate statement of scientific materialism on human life since in this view human nature is the result of random environmental factors; if the randomness is removed a good result will be almost automatic. Thus, it is thought, the training of the young, the corporate world of economics, the political world of power, breeding, death, war, amusement, health, and other basic aspects of individual and social life should be centrally con-trolled and regulated because all men and women are the same at the core, need the same things, and are as malleable as plastic.

This peculiar illusion that people are a mass, based on fear, greed, the need to have security, the need to justify special privileges, and other dark sources in the human psyche, leads inevitably to a form of social organization which bleeds significance from individual lives by removing decisions of consequence from the indi-vidual. Without personal significance people go insane, many become outlaws. This is the world of modern bureaucratic society which can only exist in a stable form through the relentless, nearly comprehensive social and psychological training provided by mass schooling. It is easy to pierce the veil of fiction that schooling has anything much to do with reading, writing, or arithmetic. The frightening fact that particular myth is still perpetuated is ample testimony to how unwilling we have been to face a horrifying truth. Schools work exactly as they were designed to work; they produce incomplete and tractable human beings, exactly as they were designed to do. To a scientific morality such a scheme has much to recommend it. It makes management of mass-man seem necessary - and real.

Scientific management is an idea older than Plato. Its theory is found in cabalistic lore attributed to Solomon and in records of pyramid builders before him; but in 20th century schooling the thing derives from certain schemes of the American efficiency engineer, Frederick Taylor, who at the beginning of the present century was the driving force behind the imposition of mechanical ideals on every conceivable plane of human affairs including sexual love (think of sex manuals with their diagrams and recommended sequences), ways in which human energy could be regulated and utilized according to standards of machine productivity. Behind Taylor, of course, were the dreams of cosmic social engineers, intimations that a long-awaited planetary

society was at hand, and that because of the troubling defects of "mass man" it could only be run as a beehive world, or a hospital planet, or a prison state. Such had John Calvin's dark outlook on human nature which had once provided the spine of New England life transformed itself in the public and private plans of those groups which thought of themselves as "progressive". Hell was no longer the destination of most of us after death, Life and Death themselves were only epiphenomena, or-ganizing and regulating society and nature were the only remaining things of meaning in a machine world. Reforming the past.

We won't have time here for a clinic in philosophy, but I'll ask you to examine the implications of some of this, if human beings are cleverly disguised mechanisms then where can the notion of "liberty" apply? Liberty and the theological notion of free will are joined irrevocably in a close relationship. You can say, "I don't have time for this lofty stuff," but your own actions will make a liar out of you.

People are free. Or they are bound, determined by forces out of their own control. The society you allow stems from the decision which. So I want you to think of this: if people are not mechanisms (let's say that for the sake of argument) then what is the net effect of treating them so? Adam Smith doesn't talk about this in Wealth of Nations but he does have something to say about it in The Theory of Moral Sentiments. If you treat people like machines the moral effect on them and yourself is lousy.

Or think of this: how can you "educate" a machine at all? Even in a loose usage of that verb, a machine is only improved from outside the mechanism or circuitry. But in a human sense people have a very limited ability to be improved by the attention of others from the outside; most of the job, according to ev-ery major thinker who ever turned attention to this, has to be privately accomplished in the private interior of each individual consciousness. You can't teach courage or perseverance, wisdom or piety. Such things can be learned, it's clear, but taught, no. Yet people only begin to be educated when they tackle such goals - indeed, they are hardly completely human until that moment.

Individual development has to be fought for privately in a free market of plentiful choices, no one can do it for you. Too much interference early on cripples our natural progress toward independence and produces its opposite, dependence. We all recognize the bad effect a too indulgent parent has, we should begin to see the same force at work in a too indulgent school. This formula has been clearly understood by the powerful of this planet for thousands of years; even a cursory inspection of the development of their own young shows plenty of early exposure to unmonitored experience, risk-taking, independence, high performance standards, and many other characteristics which receive only lip service in government schooling, even suburban government schooling. Elite education, where the kid does hard work and does it without interference, is one likely cause for the amazing continuity of certain families throughout history. Yet elite education can be provided at less cost than factory school training. Some irony there. Until roughly the same time of the Jackson presidency in the 19th century rich and poor alike could get this same sort of education in a variety of different ways, but from Horace Mann's time until today those possibilities have been deliberately - I feel tempted to say "scientifically" - closed down for all but the economic elites and a few very determined parents from all the other classes. Why has that happened do you suppose?

In spite of a long-standing knowledge how human education is done right, the model Frederick Taylor, high priest of scientific management, sought to impose was a machine model, a model whose results are highly predictable, one which eliminates risks by setting its sights very low. Although in a limited sense this procedure successfully increases material output when the target is cheap, standardized, mass-produced merchandise, it only manages this productivity by crippling the self-governing spirit. So there's a big price to pay. Whether you decide to pay it or not depends a lot upon your regard for your fellow human beings; perhaps it depends on your idea of God, who knows?

A few years back one of the schools at Harvard issued some advice to its students on planning a career in the new international economy it believed was arriving. It warned sharply that academic classes and professional credentials would be devalued when measured against real world training. Ten qualities were offered as essential to successfully adapt to what Harvard believed was a rapidly changing world of work.

See how many of these you think are regularly taught in the schools of your city, including its "gifted and talented" classes:

- 1) The ability to define problems without a guide.
- 2) The ability to ask hard questions which challenge prevailing assumptions.
- 3) The ability to work in teams without guidance.
- 4) The ability to work absolutely alone.

- 5) The ability to persuade others that your course is the right course.
- 6) The ability to debate issues and techniques in public.
- 7) The ability to reorganize information into new patterns.
- 8) The ability to discard irrelevant data and find what you need from the masses of information.
- 9) The ability to think dialectically.
- 10) The ability to think inductively, deductively, and heuristically.

You might be able to come up with a better list than Harvard did without surrendering any of these fundamental ideas, and yet from where I sit - and I sat around schools for nearly 30 years - I know we don't teach any of these things as a matter of school policy. And for good reason, schools as we know them couldn't function at all if we did. Try to imagine a school where children challenged prevailing assumptions or worked alone without guidance. How about a school where children defined their own problems? If you want your kid to learn what Harvard says is necessary you'll have to arrange it outside school time in between the dentist and MTV. If you are poor you'd better forget it altogether. None of the schools I ever worked for were able to provide any important parts of this vital curriculum for children. All the schools I worked for taught nonsense up front and under the table they taught young people how to be dumb, how to be slavish, how to be frightened, and how to be dependent.

Things weren't always this way in the United States, indeed for the first 250 years of our history schooling here was wildly entrepreneurial; before we had forced schooling on the government model we had abundant schooling of many different types and the result by any historical measure were quite spectacular. Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, the philosophical basis for the American Revolution, sold 600,000 copies to a population of two and a half million colonists (about 75 percent of them African slaves or indentured servants!), James Fenimore Cooper's novels, rich with periodic sentences and dense with allusions, sold five million copies in the first two decades of the 19th century in a population of about eighteen million; Scott's novels matched that sale as did Noah Webster's monumental Speller. All this happened long before compulsion schooling was more than a gleam in the eye of certain interested parties in the early Federal period.

Pierre duPont de Nemours, who had a monopoly on gunpowder sales for the War of 1812 said in a book he wrote in that year, *National Education in the United States*, that "less than four in every thousand cannot read and do numbers" with great facility, and the habit of Bible reading at the breakfast table had led to such skill in argumentation among the young that he predicted the new nation would soon hold a corner on the world's supply of lawyers. Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America*, whose first volume appeared in 1835, confirmed duPont's conclusions, and a book written a few years later by another French aristocrat, Michael Chevalier, said in astonishment that the American farmer had such a mind that he entered the fields in the morning with the plow in one hand and Descartes in the other!

Literacy in language and number was, from the beginning, highly valued in the New World, far beyond practical need. It was as if the promise that each mind could soar to unprece-dented achievement beyond the limit of class-bound European practice inspired the commonality to take what its natural gifts offered. In this new scheme schooling was everywhere considered important, but nowhere was it considered very important. The principle that the educated man, like Benjamin Franklin, is largely self-taught was the real dynamic honored, and though the decision to proceed in this fashion was probably an accident of time and place in the last New World on the planet rather than any determination of scientific pedagogy, by some unlucky happenstance it is exactly the brilliant spring of development twentieth century institutional schooling has broken.

Lesson XXVII, "The Self-Taught Mathematician", used at one-room schools in the northeast in the year 1833 (20 years before the first compulsion school law) for children who would to-day be fourth to sixth graders is a revealing window into the attitudes toward learning present fifty years after we became a nation. It is the story of Edmund Stone, a self-educated Scottish mathematician born at the beginning of the 18th century. His father was gardener to the Duke of Argyle. One day when the Duke was walking in his garden he observed a Latin copy of Newton's *Principia* lying on the grass and thinking it had been brought from his own library sought to carry it back to its place. Stone, a boy of eighteen, rushed forward to claim the book for his own.

"Yours?" said the Duke. "Do you then understand *Geometry*, *Latin*, and *Newton*?"

"I know a little of them," replied the young man.

The Duke, surprised, entered into a conversation with the young man who had not the slightest acquaintance with schooling and was astonished at the force, the accuracy, and the candor of his answers.

"But how," said the Duke, "came you by the knowledge of these things?"

Stone replied, "A servant taught me to read when I was eight. Does one need to know anything more than the twenty-six letters in order to learn everything else that one wishes?"

"I first learned to read. The masons were then at work upon your house. I approached them one day and observed that the architect used a rule and compasses, and that he made calculations. I inquired what might be the meaning and use of these things. I was informed there was a science called arithmetic. So I purchased a book of arithmetic and I learned it. I was told there was another science called geometry; I got the necessary books and I learned geometry. By reading I learned that there were good books in these two sciences in Latin. I bought a dictionary and I learned Latin. I understood also that there were good books in French. I bought a dictionary and I learned French."

"And this, my Lord, is what I have done; it seems to me that we may learn everything when we know the twenty-six letters of the alphabet."

Stone went to London at the age of twenty-three and published his first work, *A Treatise on Mathematical Instruments*. Two years later he was chosen a Fellow of the Royal Society. And such was the lesson conveyed to five and ten-year-olds in Boston in 1833, if you knew how to read well you could learn anything you chose by yourself. Let me stick my schoolteacher's nose in here for a moment to say that this is obviously the same lesson I learned at my mother's knee in Monongahela a hundred years after "The Self-Taught Mathematician" was taught in Boston and two hundred years after Stone himself had learned it. I knew how to read well before I was five, thanks to my mother, and never had much difficulty learning anything I chose to learn after that. It was only after the coming of an enormous, multi-layered, densely articulated form of government schooling, a form imposed on the total population at the beginning of the twentieth century, not with the intention of enhancing literacy but of controlling and shaping behavior, that Stone's lesson was pushed into the background or in places discarded entirely. Learn to read well and you can teach yourself everything.

I want to show you just how far modern schooling is a radical deviation from the past by taking you back to George Washington's boyhood as the middle of the eighteenth century approached. If you watch carefully as the images unfold you'll catch a glimpse of just what the average kid is capable of if an opportunity is extended to develop fully, and you will even see a little of what simple, inexpensive schooling can do when stripped of administrative ranks, expert hierarchies, specialized materials, and psychological counselors. It will be a revelation so pay close attention!

George Washington was no genius, as all his friends would hasten to agree; John Adams, his contemporary, called him "too illiterate, unlearned, unread for his station and reputation,"; Jefferson, his fellow Virginian, declared he liked to spend his time "chiefly in action, reading little." As a teenager Washington loved two things, dancing and horseback riding, and he studied both formally with a passion not supplied by schoolteachers.

These studies paid off for Washington because the grace they communicated to all his actions allowed him to physically dominate any gathering. Think of Michael Jordan the basketball player of whom it has been said he plays so well it's exactly as if the other players aren't even playing the same game. Well, that was Washington thanks to his twin obsessions. Listen to his friend George Mercer describe him as a young man:

He is straight as an Indian, measuring six feet, two inches in his stockings and weighing 175 pounds.... His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength.

Wouldn't everyone wish this for their own son? Washington got there by spending a great deal of time doing things that government schools ignore and would hardly teach.

Washington was no intellectual giant his friends agreed, but because of the unusual position he holds in American mythology it might be useful to see what subjects his average mind studied as a boy, the better to understand just what it is we have accomplished by 20th century state schooling. First we should note that al-though Washington didn't attend school until he was 11 (the same age, incidentally, that Woodrow Wilson learned to read) he had no trouble learning reading, writing, and arithmetic on his own. None at all, nor did any of his contemporaries who cared to learn such things have much difficulty whether they were rich or poor. Indeed in most places in the colonies or the early republic you couldn't go to school at all until you had first become literate. Few wanted to waste their time teaching what was so easy to learn. There is an enormous amount of evidence that colonial America was comprehensively literate wherever literacy was valued; children be-came literate

because they wanted to be and because they were expected to be because it isn't hard to do.

But back to George at eleven on his way to school for the first time. What did he begin to study there? How about geometry, trigonometry, and surveying? Is that what your own average-minded eleven-year-old studies in sixth grade? Why not do you suppose? Or perhaps you think it was only a dumbed-down version of those things that Washington got, some kid's game. Well, maybe, but how do you account for this? Two thousand days after Washington first picked up a surveyor's transit in school at the age of eleven he assumed the office of official surveyor of Culpepper County, Virginia, a wonderful way to make a living in early America. Not only was the job highly paid but the frontier surveyor could pick out and keep the best land for himself.

For the next three years Washington earned in modern purchasing power about \$100,000 a year. Perhaps his social connections helped this fatherless boy to get the position, but in a frontier society anyone would be crazy to give a boy serious work unless he could actually do it. I mean, what would the neighbors say? Almost at once Washington began speculating in land; by the time he was twenty-one he had leveraged his knowledge and capital into 2,500 acres of prime land in Frederick County, Virginia. Not a bad place then or now to own a few acres.

Washington had no father and as we know he was no genius, but learned geometry, trigonometry and surveying in school starting when he was eleven, and he was rich by his own effort at twenty-one. In school he studied frequently used legal forms including bills of exchange, tobacco receipts, bail bonds, servant indentures, wills, land conveyances, leases and patents. From these forms he was able to recreate the theory, philosophy and custom which had produced them. He had an average mind but by all accounts this steeping in grown-up reality hardly bored him. I had the same sort of experience with disruptive Harlem kids 250 years later. They stopped being hoodlums when I gave them real things to do. When did we lose the understanding that young people yearn for this kind of knowledge? Or was that yearning disregarded deliberately in order to create a different social reality?

On his own hook young Washington decided to scientifically study what might be called "gentlemanly deportment", how to be well regarded by the best people. Out of his journals I've taken his rule 56 to illustrate how he gathered his own character in hand, becoming his own father:

Rule 56

Associate yourself with men of good Quality if you Esteem your own reputation.

A sharp kid, that one; is it any wonder he became our first President?

Washington also studied geography and astronomy, gaining a knowledge thereby of the continents, the globe, and the heavens. In light of the putdowns of his reading you'll be interested to know that he read regularly the famous and elegant "Spectator" from London, which was sort of like the "New Yorker" before Tina Brown got her hooks on it. By the time he was 18 he had read all the writings of Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Daniel Defoe. But he read much more than the great English novelists, he read, too, Seneca's *Morals*, Julius Caesar's *Commentaries*, and the major writings of other Roman generals. What an amazing standard Adams and Jefferson must have had to consider Washington illiterate.

At 16 he began writing memos to himself about the design of his own clothing; years later he became his own architect for the magnificent estate of Mt. Vernon.

George Washington, as we now know, had an average mind in the eyes of the people who knew him best, yet he had no apparent difficulty studying the spots off technical manuals about agriculture and economics without a guide. The mysterious nature of money particularly interested him, he perceived that to the learned money was a much less valuable thing than wealth. Using his own research about such things, Washington was able to figure out that the talk of British bankers, politicians, and creditors about the importance of internationalism and global markets was a cunning way to drain his own re-sources into their pockets. He saw that the economics of tobacco farming (which had been forced on Virginia) made the tobacco farmer dependent on international factors, put his well-being out of his own control.

So Washington, in his early 20s, began experimenting with domestic industry - where he could keep a close eye on things himself. First he tried to grow hemp. That's called marijuana today, but presumably he was growing it for rope, not to smoke. He was 25. It didn't work. Next he tried to grow flax. He was 28. It didn't work. But because Washington had been educated to think for himself and not to wait for a teacher to tell him what to do he kept trying. At 31 he hit on wheat. That first year he sold 257 bushels. The third year 2,600 bushels. The seventh year 7,500 bushels. He built flour mills in various parts of Virginia and marketed his own brand of flour, think of it, "George Washington's Finest Home Grown Flour", accept no imported substitutes! While that business was maturing he turned his attention to building fishing boats. By 1772 his boats were pulling

in 900,000 herring a year. George Washington was no genius, but partly because he got an education and wasn't compelled to waste all his youth in a government school scheme he did okay for himself.

There is no public school in the United States set up to allow a George Washington to happen; an Andrew Carnegie, from a poor family, who was well on his way to becoming rich at age 13 through a combination of hard work and intelligence, would be referred for psychological counseling; a Thomas Edison would find himself in Special Ed. No doubt about it.

Anyone who can read independently and runs a comparison with the present school product and what the American past proved kids can do will discover the magnitude of our government school institution's negative accomplishment.

In its movement toward programmatic society at the turn of the 20th century, scientific management found ways to break apart the natural sanctuaries of family, religion, tradition and place where a student might flee to escape his allotted mechanical destiny. It is one of the rich ironies of 20th century secular schooling that certain traditional religious groups like the Amish, the Mennonites, the Quakers, the Mormons, the orthodox Jews, The Jesuits and a few others found ways to aggressively preserve religious sources of private meaning - and became prosperous and significant citizens as a direct result. But many of the rest of us were flushed clean away from our roots. We were forcibly retrained to regard our own families, churches and neighbors as expendable, disposable, exchangeable - to think of them as conditional on good performance.

Now if historic families, those timeless families which continue to exist for centuries have one distinguishing characteristic that cannot be duplicated by temporary, rootless families, it is the property of conferring categorical significance on their members. Categorical significance means that you count because you are, because you exist, not because of something you can do, or whether you are successful, strong, or beautiful. Being categorical cannot survive grading or comparison. This point cannot be overemphasized because networks which only simulate family, like school, the army, the workplace, your bridge club, etc., just can't do it. Categorical significance is the opposite of conditional significance, that form of status operating in networks where the respect you receive is directly proportional to your performance. The Prodigal Son parable is the Western world's symbolic illustration and it helps to think of it if you want to measure whether this priceless quality is present or absent. Does your family love you in spite of anything? Do you love them in spite of anything? Reciprocity in a good family is almost beside the point.

Back to the children I teach. I have noticed no one talks to my kids though everyone commands their time. Because of seating arrangements in orderly rows, because of the solitary nature of television and computer operation, my children have very little ability to talk, even to each other. They have been socialized to speak only to children their own age, and then only at approved intervals. Partly as a result of this and partly from a confluence of other reasons, I notice with increasing discomfort that children do not know who they are, where they are, or even what time it is.

Certainly I mean that metaphorically, but also I mean it literally: certain basic tools of self-knowledge like mirrors, maps, clocks, and so on are kept away from children - at least in any classroom you would care to visit in New York City. Other basic tools aren't around either, like hammers, chisels, saws, glue, telephones, calendars, typewriters, paper, pens, scissors, rulers. They just aren't there, at least not in accessible places. Schools are stripped bare of effective tools, not because of lack of money but because the autonomy that tools confer works against the collective socialization logic schools are about.

Tools constitute a curriculum of power. This seems something too fundamental to belabor. It is hard to make tool-competent people into a proletariat. Did you ever wonder why kids don't do the cooking and serving in a school, or the glazing, wiring, plumbing, roofing, and furniture repair? I've wondered about that often. At any rate a malaise follows the withdrawal of tools from common life. Of 62 functioning classrooms in my intermediate school there is a clock in exactly one of them. And it's been years since I saw a student wear a wristwatch. What could be going on? Something spooky I can tell you.

The clock, Lewis Mumford tells us, is the foremost machine of modern techniques, not merely a means of keeping track of the hours but a way to synchronize the actions of diverse individuals. And the watch is the personalization of time, a major stimulus to the individuality we cherish as a salient aspect of Western civilization. The turning hands of a watch (not a digital obviously) are a measure of time used and time remaining, time spent and time wasted, time past and time to come. As such it is a key to personal achievement and productivity. The watch is a defense against panic in a time of turbulence such as we all surely agree our kids are living through at present.

Just as my children have no clocks or wristwatches, they are seldom in a class-room that offers a mirror in which to see themselves, to verify their inner states outwardly, to try on attitudes with. A reflecting surface is one important way we come to know ourselves. If classrooms have none, then television - in the mental room it creates - is worse. Television takes a very thin sample of human physical types and broadcasts this unrepresentative fragment endlessly. Most of the black people

on television have white features, have you noticed? How do you suppose that happens? And most of the white kids who are featured in that vaguely precise way we call "ethnic" are hardly ever shown in television commercials or program-ming. In the mirror of American school- and video- culture, most of us are invisible non-persons, white or black.

Maps and children are kept apart, too, so some of my 14-year-old children think it is 100,000 miles to California, some think it is 9,000,000 miles. I seldom have more than one kid a year who can come within a thousand miles of the reality. My kids don't know what a mile is, not really, although I think they could pass a test on it; in similar fashion they don't know what democracy is, or what money is, or what an economy is, or how to fix anything. They've heard of Mogadishu and Saddam Hussein but they couldn't tell you the name of the tree outside their window if their life depended on it. That's what so-called global thinking since 1910 has done to reality, it put a utopian spin on things. Some of them can do quadratic equations, but they can't sew a button on a shirt or fry an egg; they can bubble in answers with a number two pencil but they can't build a wall. Many of them have no idea that most of the men and women on earth believe in God, or how that might affect the way they live.

The whole dull liar's world that government schooling has created is a form of abstract witchcraft, mumbo jumbo leading nowhere like Mogadishu or Saddam Hussein. The truth is that my kids are unable to plot a future because they don't know where they are or who they are. How can you know who you are if you don't know your own family, and how can you know your own family if none of you are home together very often? Who arranged things this way, because surely they didn't just happen?

Nobody I ever taught had any idea how many people live in New York City or what significance such a fact might have, few know what the city abuts upon, how long ago the Revolution was fought there, or why or who the enemy was. They have been deprived of the proper experience to care about such things. This is the characteristic profile of a proletariat, it cares about very little except avoiding punishment and filling its belly. People aren't proles by nature but by training, a proletariat doesn't just happen, it is made.

The fact we are a revolutionary nation and what that did to our subsequent his-tory good and bad has been carefully screened from the view of children, even from ones who can parrot words about Patrick Henry and Sam Adams; the magnificent Second Amendment to our Constitution with its vast trust in the common sense of the common people, and its vast mistrust of government has been perverted by the rhetoric of our academic leadership into an eccentric privilege of misfits and scoundrels. We have the right to bear arms mainly as protection against our own government going astray, only secondarily to protect our homes. The proof of that lies in looking at what the British colonists in America did with guns when the British government went astray - they pitched it out on its ears and became Americans. They couldn't have done that without personal firearms. The possibility such a situation might arise again is commemorated in the Second Amendment. But someone de-cided you weren't supposed to learn that so you don't. Can you imagine why?

In the ongoing condition of derangement among my kids caused by ignorance of basic facts like knowing where they are you'd think one specific remedy would be giant wall maps of the neighborhood, the city, the state, the nation, and the world; you would think these things would be permanent decorations in every classroom and every corridor of the school hive, but you would be mistaken. What maps there are will be found in "social studies" rooms, but most often not even there. Whose interest is served by kids not knowing basic stuff like this?

I could go on and on about other fundamental, inexpensive tools missing from my students' lives but the point of this progression has been to draw a radical conclusion:

SCHOOL IS A BARRIER TO EDUCATION

It is quite impossible to think this happened by accident, although I am prepared to grant that the original group of social engineers who set up the school machine is dead, and for the most part the peculiar motives they had in a very successful free market in American schooling have been forgotten. School perpetuates it-self today in the ugly form it was given originally because it has become the most profitable business in the United States. We need to look no further than that for a conspiracy. Structural reform of schooling would disenfranchise an enormous number of comfortable people. Talk about change is per-mitted, but never more than minor tinkering follows.

Schools are barriers to the education of children. This is particularly true for children of poverty, but I believe the statement holds for all classes of the young. Schools are black holes. If they miss the decisive significance of a mirror, a map, and a wristwatch, you can be certain anything else of importance has been missed, too. Reform will only come about when there is an angry national debate about the real purpose of these warehouse institutions, a debate in which sham defenses like "teaching children to read" are finally thrown aside and reality faced square on. Schools do exactly what they were assigned to

do in the first decade of the 20th century - they contain the poor. Having taught poor children for many years I don't think they need to be feared any more than rich kids, but I want to be certain to put the bell on the cat. Fear of the poor in the United States first crested with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, that's the event that started the real drive for government schools. Who knew what the poor were capable of in a revolutionary democracy, better to get them locked up where they could be watched. Fear of the poor crested a second time just before and just after the Civil War when waves of Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Italy poured into this country strong, re-resourceful, energetic, and child-loving - people with family ties who couldn't easily be pushed around.

Trying to push them led to a series of violent national strikes, railroad strikes in Chicago and steel strikes in Pittsburgh. Remember when Andy Carnegie sent an army of Pinkertons to shoot the steel strikers at Homestead? The Pinkertons got shot instead. It was those strikes which finally nailed the children in the school coffin where they've rested for just about a century. What nobody figured on was the ambitious reach of civil service bureaucrats. They would not rest content as guardians of the poor alone, but would seek to wax fatter so the destiny of all children would be in their hands. Thus was the road to Outcomes-Based Education paved.

Who will fix this thing now it has become a central core of the American econ-omy, the single largest hiring agent, the largest contractor? We can't count on much help from professional school reformers or from state education departments because the business is their bread and butter.

And yet, even without our experts we're going to have to find some way to sidestep official owners of the school monopoly and relieve the terrible stresses growing up absurd this way causes. The elasticity of our children is nearly exhausted. I've deliberately borrowed a term from the world of structural engineering because I think it applies. When building materials lose their elasticity they don't fail immediately but pass through a stage of plastic behavior, where the deformations don't return to true but take some dangerous and unpredictable course. Our children as a class have begun to display plastic behavior.

What else would you call our world's record teenage sui-cide rate, teenage murder rate, and our national all-encompassing addictions to violence, alcohol, drugs, commercial entertainments, the narcotic-like addiction we have to magical machines, and a long list of other aberrations. Each generation we have produced since the very recent invention of government compulsion-school seems to me less elastic, more plastic than the one before it.

There are many fine and inexpensive ways to inspire children to provide a first-class education for themselves, we all know a few of them. But whether it's going to be possible to get an education in the new schools of the year 2000 will depend on political decisions made by those who hold power in trust for all of us. Or perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps it will depend on defiant personal decisions of simple people, like the quiet revolution of homeschoolers taking place under our noses right now, which to me seems the most exciting social movement since the pioneers, a revolution in which our type of factory schooling is not contested at all, just treated as monumentally irrelevant, which it certainly is.

Give me a minute to be visionary. If we closed the government schools, divided half the tax money currently spent on these places among parents with kids to educate, and spent the other half on free libraries, on underwriting apprenticeships for every young person, and on subsidizing any group who wanted to open a school a current of fresh air would sweep away the past in a short time. If further we made provisions for a continuous public dialogue on the local level - so that people in the street began to count once again - if we strictly limited political terms of office in order to weaken the protective legislative net around businesses which profit from mass schooling, and if we launched a national program of family revival with all the energy we reserve for wars we would soon find the American school night-mare changing into a dream we could all be proud of.

That isn't going to happen, I know.

Very well. The next best thing then is to deconstruct mass schooling, minimizing the "school" aspect of the thing and maximizing the educational one. What that means in simple terms is trusting children, trusting parents, trusting families, trusting communities to be the main architects in the training of the young. It means reversing the familiar teacher/student equation so that toxic professionalism which sees teaching, wronghead-edly, as the key to learning can be relegated to the Prussian nightmare from whence it sprang. That's a formula for a priesthood, not for an education. Socrates in the Apology told us that if we professionalized teaching two bad results would occur: first, what is easy to learn would be made to appear difficult; and second, what can be learned quickly would be stretched out indefinitely to provide some security for the pedagogue. Is there anyone who doesn't recognize this is precisely what we have allowed to happen? Even this simpler goal of deconstructing institutional schooling will require enough courage to challenge deeply rooted assumptions such as the assumption that the poor are stupid, bestial, or criminal. And it will require a great amount of stamina because this school monster is alive and growing, and very, very strong.

Now let me give you some practical suggestions drawn from a lifetime teaching and thinking about schools. I've arranged them in no particular order. Even invoking a few of these safeguards would bring beneficial changes to a school or district. I have ten suggestions in all, and you will likely have some of your own to add as you hear mine.

1) **Make Everybody Teach.** The ghastly proliferation of non-teaching jobs began when it was imposed on schools by local and state politicians and the new Germanic teacher colleges about the turn of the century. It is wasteful and demoralizing. There should be no such thing as a non-teaching principal, assistant principal, coordinator, specialist, or any other category of school employee who doesn't actually spend regular time on intellectual undertakings with groups of children.

2) **Simplify the curriculum and make it intelligent.** The purpose which confinement schooling can be most productively turned to is the development of the intellect. Such development is valuable for everyone and my long experience with ghetto kids taught me they are as capable of this development as any. Every other purpose schooling has been turned to is better accomplished outside of school, with the time freed up by taking a sledgehammer to the current silliness and confusion; each child could have apprenticeships, internships, and independent study throughout the community in areas of their own deepest concern.

3) **Let no school exceed a few hundred in size.** Time to shut the factory schools forever. They are hideously expensive to maintain, they degrade the children they encompass, they hurt the neighborhoods in which they stand, they present ready markets for every kind of commercial hanky-panky. If schools were miniaturized a lot of worthless businesses would go belly-up on the spot. Make schools small and make them independent and autonomous. Everyone knows that is the right way, but not everyone knows that it is the inexpensive way, too. And make these small schools local. Curtail busing, neighborhoods need their own children and vice versa.

And let us save ourselves a fortune although the construction industry will scream bloody murder. Let us recognize there is no proper shape for a school building, schools can be any-where and look like anything. In a very short time desktop computers will allow libraries of information to be everywhere, too, and contact with the best minds in every pursuit. Then what will the excuse for schools be-come?

4) **Sharply constrict the power and size** of state Departments of Education and large-city centralized school boards, they are a paradise for grifters and grafters and even if they were not their long-range interventions are irrelevant at best and horribly damaging at worst - in addition to being expensive. Decentralize school down to the neighborhood school level. In that one bold move families would be given control over the professionals in their children's lives. Each school under this governance would have its own citizen managing board elected from among neighbors. And full autonomy in purchasing and curriculum decisions. That's not a new idea, that's the way we had it for hundreds of years during which this country schooled - and educated - quite well.

5) **Get rid of standardized tests completely.** Measure accomplishment by performance, most often performance against a personal standard, not ranking against a class or larger entity. Standardized tests don't work. Is that news to anybody? What a scam! They correlate with nothing of human value, their very existence perverts curriculum into an advance preparation for the extravagant ritual administration of the tests. Is this a good thing? Why do you think that? If you don't then why do you put up with it? Would you hire a newspaper reporter on the basis of his test scores in journalism? Would you hire a hair stylist who had an "A" average in Beauty School? Wouldn't you ask for a demonstration? I hope so. The fact is nobody is crazy enough to hire anyone on the basis of grades and test scores for important work with one glaring exception - government jobs, and government licensing. The reason for that is that tests are poor predictors of the future unless the competition is rigged in advance by only allowing people who score well on tests to have jobs. That is the whole sorry story of the government licensing racket in this century.

6) **End the teacher certification monopoly** which is only kept alive by illicit agreement between teacher institutes and the state legislature. It makes colleges rich, it supports an army of unnecessary occupational titles, and it deprives children and unlicensed but competent adults from having valuable educational connections with each other.

Once again, it's hard to break the illusion that certification is there to protect the children so let me help. Think of this: the legendary private schools of this nation, Exeter, Andover, St. Paul's, Groton, Culver Military, wouldn't dream of restricting themselves to certified teachers. Why should we? Let anyone who can demonstrate performance competency before a citizen board, a parent body, or a group of students then be licensed to teach.

7) **Restore the primary experience base** we have stolen from kids' lives.

Kids need to do, not sit in chairs. The school diet of confinement, test worship, bell addiction, and dependence on low-grade secondary experience in the form of semiliterate printed material cracks children away from their own innate understanding of how to learn and why. Let children engage in real tasks, not synthetic games and simulations. Field curriculum, critical thinking, apprenticeships, team projects, independent study, actual jobs, and other themes of primary experience must be restored to the life of the young.

8) **Install permanent parent and community facilities** in every school, in a prominent place near the front office. We need to create a tidal movement of real life in and out of the dead waters of school. Open these places on a daily basis to family and other community resource people and rig these rooms with appropriate equipment to allow parent partnerships with their own kids. Frequently release kids from classwork to work with their own parents, frequently substitute parents and other adults for professional staff in classrooms, too.

9) **Understand clearly** that total schooling is psychologically and procedurally unsound.

Give children some private time, some private space, some choice of subjects, methods, and even the company they keep. Does that sound like a college? It is meant to. Human beings, a group of which children are a part, do not do well under constant surveillance and tabulation. Keep from numbering, ranking, and labeling kids so the human being can't be seen under the weight of the numbers.

10) **Teach children to think critically** so they can challenge the hidden assumptions of the world around them including the assumptions of the school world.

This type of thinking power has always been at the center of the world's élite educational systems. Policy makers are taught to think, the rest of the mass is not or is only taught partially. We could end this age-old means of social control in several short generations. What a society would look like where education instead of schooling happened for everyone I have no more idea than you do, but it would restore the exhilarating flux in human affairs we had in the early Federal period of this nation's history under President Jackson - before the dead hand of state schooling closed the door on it. Well, I said ten suggestions, but here's one more, number eleven:

11) **We have to get down to business** and provide legitimate choices to people; schooling can indeed be compulsory but education requires volition, anti-compulsion is essential to become educate - there is no one right way to do it nor is there one right way to grow up successfully, either. That kind of thinking has had a century and abundant treasure to prove itself and what it has done is to prove itself a fraud.

The word "public" in our form of public education has not had real meaning for a long time; public schooling will make a comeback when we strip control from the Egyptian pyramid of dubious experts and force our government to return full free market choice to the people. This is the only curriculum of necessity we need to see imposed by compulsion on everyone, the return of decision-making power to individuals and families. I hope we won't have to use guns to bring this second American revolution about.

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