American Education and Its Inefficiency for the Future of Labor with Special Consideration to Disadvantaged Groups

Gavin Melendez  
BIS 393 Labor In the 21st Century  
June 30, 2020

“Education in the United States is an entity that has been changed, molded, and formatted to the era numerous times to best educate its people” is what people would like to hear, but there has really only been one major change in American education and a few minor ones and only in the past couple of decades. In this paper, the history of education will be followed through the lens of how the U.S. education system has historically excluded many people and has been very reluctant to change, leading the nation to an exclusionary status in modern era. This will be followed by the founding of private and public education in Colonial and early America leading into famous cases that will establish a modern exclusionary status and how this affected the 21st century of education. Once a thorough base of this exclusionary history is presented, there will be recommendations on how to fix this crisis as to prevent a collapse of the working class as technology continues to grow and take more jobs as the years pass. These jobs that are being replaced are and will be predominately “low-skill level” jobs, though the term coinage is disagreeable at best, which will predominately affect those who are disadvantaged either socially or economically, slowing gnawing away at the working class. This is all to suggest that education in the United States, which was founded in a discriminatory procedure, has not evolved far enough to adequately prepare or provide for the future of labor and those who will partake in it.

The first known, official school to open its doors in Colonial America was the Boston Latin School, established in April of 1635 and was originally held in the house of Philemon Pormort due in great influence from the Reverend John Cotton. Early on, the classes taught Latin, Greek, and basic subjects while adamantine “dissidence of dissent” (History of BLS). This school was for boys only and meant for those who could afford it, alienating many other colonists in the Boston area. As time went on and other colonies were founded along with what had been considered schools at the time. Even later on, the first girls' school would be founded in August of 1727 when Ursaline nuns arrived from France to start the Ursalines’ School for Girls; founded two years after the first other school having been founded in New France, otherwise known as the Louisiana Territory. The first school, founded by Capuchin monks, was a school for boys which was met with less enthusiasm than the arrival of the Ursalines (Robenstine). According to Cambridge University’s report on the History of Education, the French government had planned this sort of academia to be settled into their colony to attract more colonists. Those in charge of establishing the colony understood that they were late to the game of settling in America - as the English already had settlers from Maine to the Carolinas at the time - as well as a cultural battle to fight for cultural dominance. The French political policy plan for implementing these schools was to, “achieve social and cultural dominance … and the New Orleans settlement in particular provide and exemplary case of the use of education, especially for females, for social and political purposes.” (Robenstine). The journal goes on to say, “What is so noteworthy about the value of the family unit is the importance it places on the role of women in the colonial context, and in attracting them to and keeping them in the colony” (Robenstine). In this context, the French governing class had implemented schooling for girls only as a tool of its political campaign and in keeping families there. In English colonies, before the Ursaline school, girls were taught to read scripture and poetry but not to write. Education for girls and women were not exclusive to New France, however. For the English planter class, it was very rare that girls would get an education, but not uncommon for boys to learn basics. This was more often done in individuals’ homes, rather than a traditional classroom setting. The education that girls would receive focused on reading, but not writing, and women’s reproductive roles. A journal on educating daughters in the late 17th century and into the 18th century writes, “Until the late eighteenth century, their studies centered on sacred writing and pious texts” (Clinton). They taught in these ways as to push the agenda that, “female education promoted the socialization of women into "true womanhood" and away from the temptation of political rights and the even more dangerous beguilement – feminism” (Clinton). The true enemy of a developing nation, in their eyes – feminism. In the era, schooling was meant to prepare boys for their future in the labor field, from planter to banker, boys who could afford it got an education and those who could not were put to work in the agricultural fields. From the early days of educating girls to the first girls’ school opening, the girls were not taught as an equal or for the betterment of society or their selves. Rather, the girls were taught in an environment of discrimination as a tool for either preparing them as an ornamental wife or as a governmental attempt to coerce familial units to build a community that would benefit that government over another.

The colony of Georgia held unique stances on education throughout the colonial era and was more progressive, educationally, than even the home country of England. Georgia was the last colony to be founded; however, those travelling there to live did not do so with ease. Georgia Historical Society writes that when these colonizers first arrived, they were very poor and their main concern was with safety and survival, not the education of the following generations (Clinton). As the colony grew a bit, education was as most things were in most of the other colonies and in England, which is that there would be a teacher who would teach in the teacher’s home or the homes of the paying family to educate the child in reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, things were beginning to change as Georgia began to settle in the early to mid-1700s. The five main towns during the provincial period were Savannah, Ebenezer, Augusta, Darien, Sunbury. The teachers in these towns who would meet with the children had complaints from parents of, “drunkenness, profanity, seduction, and the transient nature of schoolmasters” (Arthur). To solve this problem, Reverends would commission the teachers and train/oversee them. Some of these Reverends were very well accoladed; 4 of them had been professors at Francke School in Halle, a German university (Arthur). What was fascinating to see was that there were slave and Native schools, which were segregated, and the white schools were coeducational between girls and boys, which was not seen elsewhere until later. Then something very unique happens, parliament allocates funds to Georgia before even giving England its first educational public grant; what more for the children was that the government wanted to encourage, “parents to send them [to school]; and … do the same for the Indian children” (Arthur). The colony of Georgia was very progressive with education – although not with other things - concerning their selves with the education of boys, girls, slaves, and Natives and, “provided education for all children regardless of nationality, race, or gender” and that “The Ebenezer … often expressed an interest in instructing slaves” (Arthur) along with being the first area under British control to get public funding for education. There is further evidence to suggest that slaves were welcomed in the same church as whites in an entry dated October 18, 1752 and a different entry dated June 27, 1753 that a minister advised a slaveholder to educate their slave’s newborn girl, “just as if it were their own child” (Jones). This all changed however, when the first slave codes were enacted in 1755 and slavery was vehemently reintroduced and there was little to no uproar about its reinstitution from the populace. Previously, groups had been petitioning to parliament for slavery to be enabled as to financially help the colony, as free labor does, but parliament was apprehensive until the defeat of Spanish, of which the England feared would turn slaves against colonizers (Wood). Attendance records for these institutions that taught whites, blacks, natives, and girls seem to mostly not exist after the introduction of the Slave Codes. An accepted theory is that the Reverends who taught these minority groups were none too pleased about these codes and continued to teach but halted their attendance records (Arthur). Slavery was thereon a crux of colony economy until the 13th U.S. Amendment had criminalized slavery – except in the form of prison punishment, of course.

Advancement in the educational system evolved to fit the next advancement for American technology – the industrial era, and it did a wonderful job at the time. As technology advances, so too should institutions that govern how generations grow and learn. This next advancement for education in the U.S. is when the country began to shift from an agricultural to industrial society around the late 1800s. When educational leaders saw this shift, they formed what would be known as the Committee of Ten in 1893 to transform classrooms (Dintersmith). This style, also known as standardized factory model, had worked tremendously – growing U.S. GDP from $3,500 to $23,00 over the course of the 20th century, an astounding growth (Dintersmith). This model was so successful that is still used to this day. However, despite the former success of this model, it is not in the best interest to the future of the nation and the future of the labor force that this model continues its use. Dintersmith, the author of *What School Could Be: Insights and Inspiration from Teachers across America,* written in 2018, was in a meeting after an annual TED talk conference wherein he posed a question to leading technologists in a group conference about the future of technology and work replacement. One of them chimed in that, “Within twenty years, building the size of this sixty-story Fairmont luxury hotel will be 3D printed” (Dintersmith). If there are any construction workers reading this and are concerned, that is to be expected. Construction is a large industry; if their work were to be replaced, there would be a lot of people out of jobs. Another large industry is service yet, “there is not a single measure or marker of school that concerns how well a young person gets along with others.” (Bleske). Fast forward and the nation is led to a historical case, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1) 1954, which had stated that de facto school segregation is thereon federally illegal and schools are no longer permitted to separate people of color from those whose skin was white (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954). However, segregation will continue in other ways, disadvantaging the black community into outdated, understaffed, and underpaid school systems which will prepare even fewer than the outdated schools found in suburban, predominately white neighborhood. This is very important for the future of labor in the nation along with equal social rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Educators and policy makers had seen this importance after Brown v. Board in wanting to close the “achievement gap”. However, considering the standardized factory model still in use, “performance… isn’t based on authentic achievement but on differences in standardized test scores” (Dintersmith) and the improvements a nation will see are only as good as the seed it sows. And the seeds sown into American education are decaying. This decay and segregation were further heightened by the supreme court cases of San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez of 1973 and Milliken v. Bradley of 1974. The former of which declared that states are not legally required to allocate education grants equally to all school districts, schools will be financed by ad valorem property taxes (San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 1973). The latter declares that in order to desegregate, school districts do not have to force integration (Milliken v. Bradley, 1974); they believe that integration will happen naturally if allowed - an American favorite of invisible hands. The NAACP had argued that, “Detroit Board and state government actively increased school segregation by implementing an optional attendance zone policy, building new schools in white neighborhoods, and drawing boundaries that created the most racially segregated schools possible” (Meinke). This caused a “white flight”, wherein there is a massive outward migration from the city by predominately white communities who had built up new schools and homes out of reach for the less affluent living in urban society. Law professor and former member of Detroit’s Board of Education said on Milliken v. Bradley, ““If the Supreme Court had sanctioned a regional school integration plan... white flight would have been discouraged and Metro Detroit would not be the most segregated region in the U.S. today.”” (Meinke). This issue unfortunately does not stop at the city or state level. In 1967, former president Johnson commissioned a report known as the Kerner Report to study national civil unrest. In relation to this “white flight” and de jure segregation the report replies, “Pervasive discrimination and segregation in employment, education and housing, which have resulted in the continuing exclusion of great numbers of Negroes from the benefits of economic progress.” (Kerner). While everyone will be disadvantaged as technology begins to replace jobs, the excluded communities will be hit exponentially harder as the evidence will show these communities already at an extreme disadvantage and this pre-existing disadvantage will destroy communities, lives, and a working class.

Led now by the history of discriminatory practices, it is seen that school has not been fair to a substantial number of Americans, most noticeably those of color and those of low socioeconomic standing, and it continues to be so. So how does this get fixed? Recommendations in 1968 made by the Kerner report and the administration were, “Sharply increased efforts to eliminate de facto segregation in our schools through substantial federal aid to school systems seeking to desegregate either within the system or in cooperation with neighboring school systems.” and, “Revision of state aid formulas to assure more per student aid to districts having a high proportion of disadvantaged school-age children” (Kerner) along with many other recommendations. These recommendations were not followed. Increasing funding into school is another great option, but historically been discouraged as seen through Milliken v. Bradley and a bit farther in history as Brown v. Board was being argued. A member of a grassroots organization wrote to Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson about the writer’s beliefs that he spoke “on behalf of “the taxpaying citizens as individuals, as well as parents” who, he said, did not want to have to accept blacks on an equality basis”” (Walsh). American voters have a history of not wanting to be the one funding a school which they would never see, or their child would never go to. Yet the nation also has a history of spending a lot of money to bolster our rankings – examples include No Child Left Behind in 2002, Race To The Top in 2009, Every Student Succeeds in 2015 – yet, despite these attempts, why is America ranked 24th in science and reading and 39th in math (DeSilver)? Very little is spent federally on school improvement programs - .0768% of the $6.9 trillion budget for fiscal year 2019 (USASpending). These programs, while they have done some excellent work, are weak in comparison to the change that needs to be made. These programs will not be sufficient as technology continues to advance, taking more and more jobs each year. Do not assume that there is an implication of “robots taking over”, but the fear of mass job replacement by technology is viable. Between 2011 and 2016, China has seen a 267% increased usage of automation in sectors other than automotive and 199% increase in automotive industry; while United States has seen a 40% increase in non-automotive sectors (Cellan-Jones). According to Netlix documentary *American Factory*, “up to 375 million people globally will need to find entirely new kinds of jobs by 2030”– a mere decade (Reichert & Bognar). As this approaches, what are schools doing to prepare students for this new technological revolution? Technology giant Amazon’s chief technologist Tye Brady, on the topic of robots taking human jobs, says, “humans will always be needed” (Cellan-Jones). What is taught and how it is taught is public education must change and while no definitive answer will be given in this paper, there are alternatives. American philosopher John Dewey gives another approach to how education can be formed. He claims that if you, “Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results.” (Dintersmith). As it is now, premier education is only for those who can afford it, which is fewer each year. Pew research provides data which states that, “the wealth gap between America’s richest and poorer families more than doubled from 1989 to 2016” (Schaeffer). Wealth status is another consideration in the battle for better education as those who are food insecure, feel unsafe, may be homeless or home insecure, and are at a higher risk for dropout, drug usage, or suicide (Bustamante). It is admirable that people in such situations would continue schooling at all, but the odds are not in their favor. A child who is dealing with any or all these issues is to sit in a class would not want to learn about biology, calculus, or Dickinson – there would be little to no drive. Bustamante’s educational data reveals that, “Students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds or low-income families are 2.4 times more likely to drop out of high school than students in middle SES families, and 10 times more likely to drop out than higher SES students. **Poverty and socioeconomic background directly correlates with high school dropout rates**” (Bustamante). Considering this rising rate of inequality and correlation between poverty and dropout rates, it only makes sense to be sure that any reformation of public education needs to be affordable for all. Additionally, considering the rate of automation and technology taking jobs, this must happen soon. If this is beginning to sound gloomy then the right picture is being painted, there must be massive overhaul and reformation to schooling if a thriving working, middle class is to be sustained.

“Wow, that sounds expensive” is a general first thought when the idea of an immediate, total reformation of an entire country’s public education system is mentioned, and no one would be wrong for thinking so. However, if one were to try to quantify in dollars the expenditure of decimating an entire working class of a nation, what total might that be? While the price would be steep, surely – which can only be imagined, there seemingly is no data on price to reform all American education – the cost to not do so would be higher still. There are programs being tested to show the efficiency of unorthodox teaching methods; one of these methods was a study done on early education and later-life effects. The study done by Dr. Reynolds, a professor of the Institute of Child Development at University of Minnesota concluded in one study that, “early education programs can impact life-course outcomes necessary for economic success and good health” (Reynolds, et. al.) and another study on early education intervention done by the same professor concluded his study with, “Participation in an established early childhood intervention for low-income children was associated with better educational and social outcomes up to age 20 years. These findings are among the strongest evidence that established programs administered through public schools can promote children's long-term success.” (Reynolds et. al., Long-term Effects). Another piece that is often brought up is how to measure the success of a particular program – if the nation does away with standardized testing, how will success be measured? This one is a bit tougher to navigate as success measurement is arbitrary. It could be measured by community economic growth, drops in teen suicides, acceptance rates into universities, or perhaps the rate of new technological advancements. Whatever it may be, the way things are now is a farce. Teenagers are stressed, unmotivated, and likely to cheat as to obtain what they are taught is the ultimate goal – wealth and status. “A survey of over 1,400 high school students found 97% of students admitted to cheating at least one time in the past year, and 75% admitted to cheating 4 or more times in the past year. 26% admitted to being “repeat offenders” who admitted to cheating multiple times in a variety of ways.” (Galloway, et. al.). If cheating, rising inequality and teen suicide rates, but a rising GDP is a sign of a successful education system then one would be a fool to willingly put their child through it. On his tour across all 50 states to talk to 200 schools, Dintersmith happened across a scenario as following, “A mother, daughter in tow, asks for advice on getting her thirteen-year-old into either Harvard or Stanford, explaining that her “gifted” child has already skipped two grades. During the conversation, the little girl burst into tears. The mother begins to sob when asked, “Is any college acceptance, no matter how prestigious, worth this?”” (Dintersmith). Which raises a handful of questions that cannot be answered in such a short report and answers will vary depending on who you ask. If you ask a sociologist or someone who works corporate for Pearson, you will get opposite ends of the spectrum for an answer.

When education was first being established in what would later be known as the United States, it was founded in a discriminatory procedure; as time had passed and technology has advanced, public education has not evolved far enough to adequately prepare or provide for the future of labor and those who will partake in it. Being there only one major revolution in education is not to be expected from a nation who prides itself on being the forefront of innovation and advancement. There needs to be serious upheaval of the current state of education and it needs to be reformed – the roots that were established have long since rot and the fruit it bears is wasteful for the time and money put into it. If more research is to be done on this topic, recommendations would be to focus on correlations between graduation rates, gender, race, age, and institution. There are numerous private schools and charter schools that yield success, but more study needs to be done on if these most successful programs are viable on a mass-scale level. Additionally, “success” would need to be quantified in the study; the topic written about above is more about showcasing the issue rather than offering one definitive solution – that can be left for the professionals. And lastly, a further study into the school to prison pipeline which was not covered in this paper is recommended. In any case, the issue of ill preparation for the future of labor as technology continues its advancement must be taken seriously if there is hope for a strong working class.

Works Cited

Arthur, L. (2000). A New Look at Schooling and Literacy: The Colony of Georgia. *The Georgia Historical Quarterly,* *84*(4), 563-588. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/40584304History of Boston Latin School. (n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2020, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20070502223937/http://www.bls.org/cfml/l3tmpl_history.cfm>

Bleske, B. (2019, March 19). The Myth of So-Called 'Factory Education'. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://medium.com/s/story/are-schools-really-factories-ed539f6b2ebe>

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). (n.d.). Retrieved June 25, 2020, from <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/>

Bustamante, J. (2019, September 23). U.S. High School Dropout Rate [2020]: Statistics & Trends. Retrieved July 01, 2020, from https://educationdata.org/high-school-dropout-rate/

Cellan-Jones, R. (2019, June 26). Robots 'to replace up to 20 million factory jobs' by 2030. Retrieved June 30, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48760799>

Clinton, C. (1982). Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic. Journal of the Early Republic, 2(1), 39-60. doi:10.2307/3122534

DeSilver, D. (2017, February 15). U.S. academic achievement lags that of many other countries. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/15/u-s-students-internationally-math-science/>

Dintersmith, T. (2018). What School Could Be: Insights and Inspiration from Teachers across America. PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvc7734v

Galloway, M. K., Conner, J. O., & Pope, D. (2009). Stanford Survey of Adolescent School Experiences. Presentation at Challenge Success May Conference, Stanford, CA.

History of Boston Latin School. (n.d.). Retrieved June 27, 2020, from <https://archive.is/20070502223937/http://www.bls.org/cfml/l3tmpl_history.cfm>

Jones, George Fenwick (1984). The Salzburger Saga: Religious Exiles and Other Germans Along the Savannah. University of Georgia Press, (Athens, Ga., 1984), 114

Kerner, O., et. al. (1968). Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <file:///C:/Users/gavin/Downloads/kerner_commission_full_report.pdf>

Meinke, S. (2011). Milliken v Bradley: The Northern Battle for Desegregation. *Michigan Bar Journal,* september, 20-22. doi:http://www.michbar.org/file/journal/pdf/pdf4article1911.pdf

Milliken v. Bradley, 418 U.S. 717 (1974). (n.d.). Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/418/717/>

Reichert, J., & Bognar, S. (Directors). (2019, January 25). *American Factory* [Video file]. Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81090071?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2Ceecec6b5-29d1-4977-b93a-681fb2290ae2-803995277%2C26aa8d2e72bf2b1e1e5dcd2f2162ffe0ebec590b%3A94f997c175d44a0baa604e10114ad52efde4ccac%2C%2C>

Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Ou, S. R., Arteaga, I. A., & White, B. A. (2011). School-based early childhood education and age-28 well-being: effects by timing, dosage, and subgroups. Science (New York, N.Y.), 333(6040), 360–364. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1203618>

Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D. L., & Mann, E. A. (2001). Long-term effects of an early childhood intervention on educational achievement and juvenile arrest: A 15-year follow-up of low-income children in public schools. JAMA, 285(18), 2339–2346. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.285.18.2339>

Robenstine, C. (1992). French Colonial Policy and the Education of Women and Minorities: Louisiana in the Early Eighteenth Century. History of Education Quarterly, 32(2), 193-211. doi:10.2307/368985

San Antonio Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1 (1973). (n.d.). Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/411/1/>

Schaeffer, K. (2020, February 07). 6 facts about economic inequality in the U.S. Retrieved July 01, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/07/6-facts-about-economic-inequality-in-the-u-s/>

USAspending.gov. (n.d.). Retrieved June 28, 2020, from <https://www.usaspending.gov/>

Walsh, C. (2018). The White Man’s Tax Dollar: Segregationists and Backlash. In Racial Taxation: Schools, Segregation, and Taxpayer Citizenship, 1869–1973 (pp. 85-108). CHAPEL HILL: University of North Carolina Press. Retrieved June 30, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469638966\_walsh.9](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469638966_walsh.9)

Wood, B. (2002, September 19). Slavery in Colonial Georgia. Retrieved June 21, 2020, from <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/slavery-colonial> georgia