RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

"Unfulfilled Expectations: Home and School Influences on Literacy."

Harvard Univ. Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138. 251 pp. $29.95.
Authors: *Catherine E. Snow, Wendy S. Barnes, Jean Chandler, et al.*

In 1982, Snow, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and her colleagues, ended an 18-month study of how children from low-income families learn to read and write on an optimistic note. "Only a few of them were in serious academic trouble then," the researchers recall, "and even those scoring the lowest on our tests showed the capacity to make great gains under the influence of excellent teachers."

But when the researchers did a follow-up study four years later, their hopes were dashed. "Few of the students . . . had continued to make gains in literacy consonant with their abilities. Only a small minority were taking courses that would qualify them for . . . college. Several were high school dropouts."

During 1980–82, Snow and her colleagues went into the homes and classrooms of 32 grade school children of average ability and various backgrounds.

Two facets of literacy—word recognition skills and vocabulary—were strongly influenced by the "literacy environment" of the home, the mother's own level of education, and her educational expectations for the child. (The father's background mattered much less.) The quality of schools also made a difference, but a considerably smaller one.

A third facet, reading comprehension, is more complicated. But schools and families seemed to be able to compensate for each other's failings. In the 1980–82 study, all children—including those from the worst homes—who had excellent teaching for two years made the expected gains in reading comprehension.

The schools provided very little instruction in how to write. And parents did have a big impact there, the researchers found. The "good writers" tended to live in more organized households, and to have more positive relationships with their parents.

Parental involvement in the schools bolstered student literacy, the researchers found, but was often stymied by miscommunication. The parents expected to be notified by the teachers when academic problems arose. But report cards often painted a rosy—and inaccurate—picture. During the study's first year, nearly three-fourths of the children got A's and B's in reading, even though about half were reading below grade level. But when parents did contact teachers, children did better.

As the years went by, however, that happened less and less. Parental involvement declined as the children advanced into adolescence. Many parents, because of their own academic shortcomings, did not feel competent to help their children. Schools simply could not compensate for parental withdrawal.

Parents who continued to try to help and support their children, though, apparently made a difference. Asked to write essays about a person they admired, adolescents who were doing well in school tended to write about parents (or others) who gave them academic or psychological support. Youths who were not doing well typically admired those who provided for their basic physical needs. One ninth grader wrote: "I admire my mother and father because they feed me and give me a roof over my head."

That, sadly, is not enough to nurture a literate citizen.

"Peace Corps' Challenges in the 1990s."

Editorial Research Reports, Congressional Quarterly, 1414 22nd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037. 15 pp. $7.
Author: *Richard L. Worsnop*

The Peace Corps, born 30 years ago March 1 during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, still projects an image of youthful "vigah" and idealism—and that image still bears some resemblance to reality. But today's Peace Corps fields less than half as many volunteers (6,100) as the Corps of 1966. Its budget ($186 million) is also down, in constant dollars, by more than half, says Worsnop, associate editor of Editorial Research Reports.

Some other changes may be for the better. During the 1960s, up to 85 percent of the volunteers were under age 26; today, only about half are. In the early years, nearly 60 per-

cent of volunteers were young generalists possessing only bachelor's degrees in the liberal arts; today, generalists account for only about 30 percent of volunteers, with most of the others being specialists in business, engineering, health, or social work. Although the Peace Corps today has many fewer volunteers than it did in its '60s heyday, they are spread more widely: Volunteers are in 73 countries, more than ever before. And more countries are seeking volunteers now than did in recent decades.

After the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe, the Peace Corps sent 84 volunteers to Poland, 53 to Hungary, and 22 to Czechoslovakia. Many more were due to go to the region this year. Poland is scheduled eventually to have 213 volunteers, one of the largest Peace Corps contingents in the world. Honduras, with 339 volunteers as of January, has the largest number, followed by Botswana (306), Guatemala (244), Thailand (219), and Zaire (210).

The move into Eastern Europe brought the Peace Corps new public attention, but it also aroused concern among those committed to the agency's traditional mission of helping poor people in poor countries. Thanks to a $17.4 million budget increase for 1991, however, the agency's expansion is not now being made at the expense of its programs in the Third World.

Over the decades, one Peace Corps veteran observed, the Corps has shown it "can adapt itself to different countries and different situations," which helps to explain why it has survived adversity at home.

"Energy in Developing Countries"

Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402–9325. 148 pp. $7.

Developing countries have been fast increasing their consumption of oil and other commercial sources of energy—from 17 percent of total global consumption in 1973 to 23 percent in 1985. By 2020, their demand for commercial energy could triple, increasing their share to 40 percent.

But many of these countries are already deeply in debt and are going to be very hard-pressed to pay for this increase. The Congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) thinks it has a way to help: make technological improvements to boost efficiency. That would not only reduce the need for energy, it would cut pollution, too.

Five developing countries—China, India, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa—are now among the world's largest consumers of commercial energy (oil, gas, coal, and electricity). China alone accounts for nearly 10 percent of world use. Africa's 50 countries, by contrast, use less than 3 percent.

Most people in the developing world—in particular, the 2.5 billion living in rural villages—use noncommercial energy: firewood, charcoal, crop wastes, or animal dung. Developing countries account for 85 percent of the world's biomass fuel consumption, and use is growing; it generates air pollution, as well as carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse gases."

As developing countries become more industrialized and urbanized, they shift toward using oil and other types of commercial energy—and their energy needs grow. Three-fourths of developing countries rely on energy imports; many are almost completely dependent on oil imports.

To increase the energy supply on the scale required "would severely strain financial, manpower, and environmental resources," OTA says. But if enough energy does not materialize, economic and social development could be thwarted. OTA looks to technological improvements to help to resolve the dilemma.

For example, switching from wood stoves to more efficient kerosene or liquefied petroleum gas ones could cut energy use (and pollution) significantly, since cooking is the largest single use of energy in many countries. Another potential place to save energy, OTA says, is in steel production. Plants in India and China use twice as much energy as those in the United States and Japan. Some developing countries have already cut energy use in steel production. South Korea's steel industry is the world's most efficient. Other promising technologies for improving energy efficiency are to be explored in a later OTA report.

COMMENTARY

We welcome timely letters from readers, especially those who wish to amplify or correct information published in the Quarterly *and/or react to the views expressed in our essays. The writer's telephone number and address should be included. For reasons of space, letters are usually edited for publication. Some letters are received in response to the editors' requests for comment.*

African Realities

Kwame Anthony Appiah's article ["Altered States," *WQ*, Winter '91] develops in a readable way the reasons that one's hopes for the reconstitution of African polities lie in a vibrant civil society. We are confronted in the 1990s with both African and Eastern European societies trying to deconstruct bloated, bureaucratic, kleptocratic, centralized states to free up the energies and initiatives of civil society. In much of Eastern Europe civil society has to be reconstituted as well, but in many associations, marketing societies and educational institutions survive to reclaim their autonomy from malfunctioning military and authoritarian regimes.

Two points jump out of Dr. Appiah's articles. The first, historical. While the British practice of "indirect rule" was a disaster for centralized nationalism and the transfer of power, it may in retrospect be closer to the multistranded fabric of African polities than we thought in the 1960s. The second, prospective. What seems to be required in the arduous task of African nation-creation is a new kind of constitutional convention. The key parties at interest—such as ethnic groups, churches, trading associations, universities, labor unions, farmers' groups, urban political parties—have to come together to determine for themselves what are the reciprocally necessary characteristics of the state they want. A larger state cannot survive if its citizens always think of themselves, and therefore shape their civic and kin obligations principally as Ashanti or Yoruba or Luo. The African state has to be rebuilt from the bottom up by its own people who can articulate the realities of common interest. Much the same is true of Yugoslavia—or, it appears, of the badly fraying bonds of the Soviet Union. That there are people as perceptive and articulate as Dr. Appiah provides ground for a modest hope that this large and critical task can be pushed forward in Ghana and other parts of Africa.

Prosser Gifford
Director of Scholarly Programs
The Library of Congress

Lessons Learned

I welcome Robert Dallek ["The President We Love To Blame," *WQ*, Winter '91] to the multiform historical inquiry concerning Lyndon Johnson's career and what we can learn through that subject about the United States since the 1930s. I hope Dallek discovers what the rest of us miss and teaches what the rest of us fail to understand.

Dallek firmly establishes his moral superiority over Robert Caro and me by stating that we, Caro and I, "have merely vilified" Johnson. I put aside that accusation until some other time. Here, it is more apposite to point out that in the course of Dallek's reflections, although they occupy only seven pages of the *Wilson Quarterly*, Dallek himself vilifies Johnson, as any Johnson loyalist will already have observed. Dallek tells us here once again about Johnson's "reputation as a political operator who lied to the public throughout his career," his "own corrupt campaign practices," and his "few qualms about misleading the Congress and the public" as he waged war in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam.

I believe it is correct to say that the beneficial effects of Johnson's Great Society programs have been dismissed, distorted, ignored, and denied by journalists and policy analysts, many of whom have been running with the pack during the Reagan-Bush period and that Johnson must be credited with his real contributions to social policy in the United States. However, this statement, this orientation, will come as no surprise to anyone who has been paying attention to the relevant studies of Great Society programs by scholars who are true to the data. Elsewhere I have expressed my opinion that Johnson was the greatest civil rights president since Lincoln, and I am glad to see that, judging from his sketch, Dallek is thinking along compatible lines.

I was hoping we might derive from Dallek's presentation of his views some solid indication of his own fresh perspective on our subject. But no: reasonably enough, we will have to wait for those books. I wish him the best of luck. However, the next time he condemns those others of us who have been occupied with this subject for indulging "our sense of moral superiority," his point will be more logically made if he can keep his own weakness for that indulgence under better control.

Ronnie Dugger
Wellfleet, Mass.

Polling History

In his perceptive essay on Lyndon Johnson, Robert Dallek emphasizes the very low standing of LBJ in the eyes of the general public. Dallek cites a 1988 Harris poll in which people ranked Johnson near the bottom of all recent American presidents, behind even Richard Nixon. He goes on to argue that historians, by their neglect of Johnson, have allowed journalists like Ronnie Dugger and Robert Caro to send "his already tarnished reputation into a free fall."

What Dallek fails to note is the mounting evidence that historians and political scientists hold a much higher opinion of Lyndon Johnson than do the American people. Three polls of scholars taken in the early 1980s ranked him among the top dozen American presidents. In David L. Porter's survey of 41 American historians in 1981, LBJ finished an impressive 11th, among the "near great," while Steve Neal's poll of 49 historians and political scientists who had written extensively on the presidency listed Johnson in the 12th position, just ahead of Kennedy and far ahead of Nixon, who ranked next to last. The most extensive poll of historians, conducted by Robert K. Murray and Tim H. Blessing in 1982, placed Johnson 10th, just behind John Adams among the "above average" presidents.

The explanation for this startling gap between the way scholars and the general public view Lyndon Johnson lies in the very nature of presidential popularity. Leaders such as Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy invariably do well in broad public opinion polls because people tend to admire them as human beings. There was nothing likable about Lyndon Johnson. Yet historians who have in the past probed beyond personal characteristics for more tangible evidence of presidential leadership have discovered many of the positive traits that Dallek finds praiseworthy.

It is fashionable to write about the "tragedy" of Lyndon Johnson—his rapid fall from grace between 1964 and 1968, his doomed effort to try for both guns and butter, even his apparent awareness as early as 1965 that Vietnam would become his downfall. But perhaps the greatest tragedy of all for Johnson was the fact that he followed the charismatic Jack Kennedy. No matter what he did, LBJ could never duplicate JFK's hold on the public imagination. As a loyal successor, he pursued Kennedy's policies to their logical conclusion. Yet LBJ never received the adulation that would have been heaped on Kennedy for the Great Society; instead he became the scapegoat for the failure of Vietnam. Historians know better and with the publication of books such as Dallek's forthcoming biography of Lyndon Johnson, perhaps LBJ will finally win some measure of public redemption. But don't count on it.

Robert Divine
University of Texas-Austin

Songs of Praise

I was introduced to the *Wilson Quarterly* several years ago by a friend. Since then I have learned to appreciate it more with each issue. I just finished the summer issue today. I had the impression of having listened to a masterful symphony. There's always so much in the *WQ*! So, thank you all for a very cogent, reliable, readable journal.

Dean Holt
Columbia, Maryland

Protest

I wish to record my grave concern regarding the quality of the *Wilson Quarterly* review of recent articles on Cuba [Autumn '90, pp. 134–135]. The reviewer grossly misrepresented my article in the Summer issue of *Foreign Policy*. Among the most serious errors were: the statement that my article "sees only strength" in the Cuban government's position; the claim that I forecast "reductions in Soviet aid are unlikely"; and the suggestion that I believe "the fall of Ortega and Noriega strengthened Castro." Either the reviewer did not read my article carefully, or he/she intentionally misrepresented my position.

In my article I state that "Cuba's economy is ailing and will suffer still more as a consequence of stagnating or declining aid from the USSR." I also state that "immediate collapse" of the Cuban system is not likely, a statement vindicated by the continuation of the regime many months after my article appeared, but that the "longer term outlook remains less certain." I then list a range of possible scenarios, one of which is "either violent or peaceful overthrow" of the government.

I never mention the fall of Ortega and contrary to suggesting that Noriega's removal strengthened Castro, I state that the change of government in Panama "may soon shut down" Cuba's embargo-circumventing operations there.

Gillian Gunn
Senior Associate
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Editor's note: We believe our summary was fair, but it should have said that Gillian Gunn sees "mainly" strength in Cuba.

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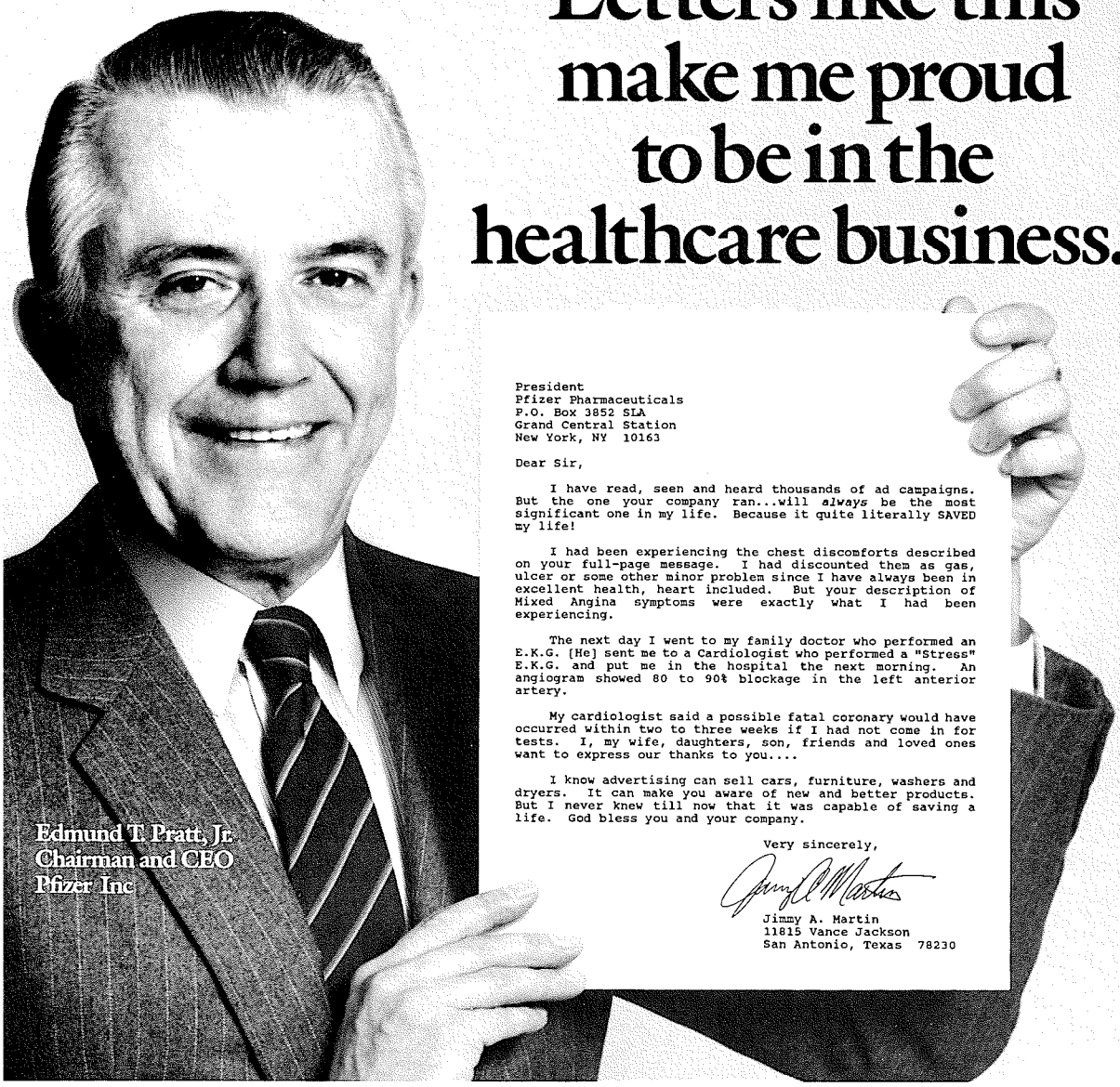

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