

Why Are K-12 Schools Turning out Radicals?

by Yuriy V. Karpov

More than two decades ago, I was astonished when the first thing that my stepson declared after he came home from school was, “America is an imperialist and racist country.” These days, such declarations do not sound like something extraordinary; rather, as one young man has confessed, “my generation is being raised to hate America.”¹

According to a recent survey, 49.6 percent of young American voters would prefer to live in a socialist country.² Their hatred of “imperialism” reveals itself in their support of any country, movement, or even a terrorist organization that is viewed by them as a “victim of oppression” fighting against “an imperialist oppressor.” Thus, as a December 2023 Harvard CAPS/Harris poll revealed, whereas 81 percent of American respondents backed Israel in its war against Hamas terrorists, 50 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds respondents supported Hamas, and 60 percent of respondents in this age group believed that Hamas’s October 7 massacre was justified by “Palestinian grievances.”³

The fanaticism with which young Americans profess their “progressive” beliefs can be illustrated by their reaction to the victory of Donald Trump, “a fascist, a racist, and a xenophobe,” in the 2016 presidential election. This reaction amounted to nothing less than mass hysteria, which required offering some of them emergency counseling that is usually provided in cases of natural disasters or violent traumas.⁴ Probably among those young fanatics was 12-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks, who, eight years later, gratified his hatred of Donald Trump by attempting to assassinate him and by killing one of Trump’s supporters and wounding two others. Another recent example of an extreme manifestation of this kind of fanaticism is the incident involving Aaron Bushnell, an “anti-imperialistic”⁵ Zoomer, who burned himself to death outside the Israeli embassy while yelling “free Palestine!”

What are the reasons for this state of mind of the new American generation? In her recent publication, Jean Twenge describes the psychological traits that

have been cultivated in Millennials and Zoomers by society.⁶ Specifically, many Millennials have developed a heightened sense of self-esteem not grounded in knowledge and an understanding of the importance of continuous learning (“Why study? I am so smart!”). In adulthood, this “empty self-esteem” often leads to bitter disappointment, frustration, anger, and depression, when Millennials realize that society doesn’t reward their “talents” in accordance with their “sky-high expectations.” For various reasons, many Zoomers also grapple with unhappiness, anger, and pessimism about their future; in addition, they are “nihilistic” and struggle with mental health issues.

In essence, it appears that Greta Thunberg—an angry and unhappy youth with her sour face and psychological problems—may serve as a representative collective portrait of a substantial part of the new generation of Americans. And, just like political activism has helped Greta Thunberg to overcome her depression,⁷ it helps young Americans find meaning in their lives and to stop “feeling worthless and shitty about yourself.”⁸ Conveniently, they are provided with good assistance in their quest to find those responsible for their unhappiness, shattered expectations, and frustration, as well as for the suffering of all the other “victims of oppression and unfairness” worldwide—namely, capitalism, imperialism, and (of course!) the Jews (only in this scenario, the notion of Jews drinking the blood of Christian babies has been replaced

with “Zionists” killing Palestinian babies). There are different sources of this “assistance,” but the primary provider is the school.

The most direct and obvious aspect of schooling that is responsible for brainwashing American students relates to the integration of leftist ideas into the school curriculum. A striking example illustrating this practice is Critical Race Theory, which, as many American parents recently discovered during Covid lockdowns, has already been taught to their children for several years. The following quote from Helen Pluckrose’s and James Lindsey’s masterful study of CRT provides a good summary of what some American students say they are being taught:

We are told that racism is embedded in culture and that we cannot escape it. We hear that white people are inherently racist. We are told that racism is “prejudice plus power,” therefore, only white people can be racist. We are informed that only people of color can talk about racism, that white people need to just listen, and that they don’t have the “racial stamina” to engage it. We hear that not seeing people in terms of their race (being color-blind) is, in fact, racist and an attempt to ignore the pervasive racism that dominates society and perpetuates white privilege.⁹

From this perspective, a future social revolution is the only way to end the “white privilege and racial injustice”; meanwhile, the “white oppressor” (especially, white men) should be trained to be ashamed of and to apologize for their “whiteness.” For example, in a California school, third graders had to

evaluate the degree of their “power and privilege” based on their race and gender.¹⁰ Or, “an elite Manhattan school is teaching white students as young as 6 that they’re born racist and should feel guilty benefiting from ‘white privilege,’ while heaping praise and cupcakes on their black peers.”¹¹

Some proponents of CRT openly express their regrets that, at this point, they cannot go further than just making “white oppressors” feel guilty about their “whiteness.” Thus, the head of an elite school “told the entire faculty that he would fire us all if he could so that he could replace us all with people of color.”¹²

The sudden discovery that school students are taught about “inborn racism” of all white people turned out to be “too much” for a large portion of the American public. At least thirty-five states have passed or are considering laws restricting the teaching of CRT.¹³ But a somewhat less radical program of the “correct” ideological education of young Americans, actively promoted by *New York Times Magazine’s* “The 1619 Project,” had, by 2021, already been adopted by over 4,500 schools nationwide.¹⁴ The goal of this program is “to reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.”¹⁵

The major premise of the project is that all the events in American history are rooted in the hatred of black people by white people. The specific “findings” of the contributors to this Project

are that the American Revolution was fought to primarily preserve slavery; that it is black Americans who have made true “our democracy’s founding ideals”; that American capitalism is especially brutal; that the existence of physical racial differences is simply a myth; and that “everybody is always stealing black music.”¹⁶

The support by many American youth of Hamas terrorists is simply a result of their extension of the notion of “imperialist white oppressors” vs. “colored victims of oppression” to international events, which is explicitly promoted by their mentors at school. According to a *Free Press* report,¹⁷ the “Brown University Choices Program,” which describes Israel as a “Zionist enterprise in Palestine,” an “apartheid state,” a “settler colony,” and a “military occupier,” has already been utilized for one million secondary school students across all fifty states. Some teachers, however, do not want to postpone their “anti-Zionist” propaganda till secondary school, and they start indoctrinating children already in elementary school.¹⁸ Expectedly, the negative attitude toward Israel promoted at schools has been shown to transfer to Jews in general, with 67 percent of young people aged 18 to 24 viewing Jews as “oppressors” who should be treated as such.¹⁹

Why do America’s youngsters seem to be absorbing these dogmas relatively uncritically? One possibility is that these dogmas align well with youths’ self-identification as “victims of unfairness” and provide a foundation for

their social activism, offering a sense of purpose in their lives. A bigger problem may be that the American system of school instruction simply fails to teach students the foundational knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to question any ideology they are exposed to.

The low level of basic knowledge among American school students has been the focus of attention since the publication of the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education with a title that speaks for itself: *A Nation at Risk*.²⁰ The report revealed that among seventeen year-old students, 40 percent could not draw inferences from a written text, two-thirds could not solve several-step math problems, 80 percent could not write a persuasive essay, and that on many academic tests American students performed well below their peers from other industrialized societies.

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education published the report *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years After a Nation at Risk*. The goal of the report was “to review the progress we have made” over twenty-five years, but the general conclusion was already formulated on the first page of the report: “If we were ‘at risk’ in 1983, we are at even greater risk now.”²¹ In particular, the report indicated that “educational achievement of 17-year-old students has largely stagnated” since *A Nation at Risk*’s publication.²²

To improve the learning outcomes of American students, from time to time,

attempts are made to reform the American educational system. The most recent such reform was the development of Common Core Standards, the set of academic goals for each grade level, and the implementation of these Standards into school instruction in 2010.²³ The advocates of Common Core Standards promised that they would make it possible to engage the students in meaningful learning, to facilitate the development of their critical thinking, and to prepare them for successful learning at colleges and universities.

Alas, not long ago, the National Assessment of Educational Progress tested the students who had been entirely educated by the Common Core for three years, and the results of the test turned out to be lower than those of students who had not been educated by the Common Core.²⁴

Unfortunately, the Common Core curriculum is not the only failed attempt at reform. Another such example is the so-called “constructivist instruction,” advocated for over sixty years, according to which scientific knowledge should not be taught to students directly but rather “discovered” by students themselves. The learning outcomes of constructivist instruction have been consistently very poor, which has led to the following conclusion:

After a half-century of advocacy associated with instruction using minimal guidance, it appears that there is no body of research supporting the technique. In so far as there is any evidence from controlled studies, it almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional

guidance rather than constructivist-based minimal guidance during the instruction of novice to intermediate learners. Even for students with considerable prior knowledge, strong guidance while learning is most often found to be equally effective as unguided approaches.²⁵

However, constructivists simply ignore experimental data about poor outcomes of constructivist instruction²⁶ and continue to successfully promote this approach, which remains overwhelmingly popular among American educators.

American children's learning suffers not only from the poor methods of school instruction but also from the "progressivist" ideological dogmas that have a huge impact on school practices. One of these dogmas is "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion."

The concept of *diversity* requires equal representation of members of different groups in various facets of society, organizations, or communities. The fact that black children are grossly underrepresented in selective gifted programs is interpreted by the proponents of diversity as a product of structural racism and a clear violation of the concept of diversity. Two simple "solutions" to this problem have usually been promulgated in progressive enclaves: gifted programs are either closed,²⁷ or entrance exams are eliminated and students are admitted to these programs based on the results of a lottery.²⁸

The concept of *equity*, in contrast to the concept of *equality*, entails not simply providing equal opportunities to everybody but rather ensuring that

everybody achieves equal outcomes. Therefore, since black students, on average, perform less well than white students or Asian students in math,²⁹ the conclusion is drawn that "focusing on the 'right answer' to math equations is an example of white supremacy."³⁰

From this perspective, the teacher should not point out students' mistakes because by doing so the teacher "dismisses students' own ways of processing."³¹ Politicians and school officials in Oregon have arrived at a similar "solution" to promote "racial equity": since many minority children fail the "essential skills" tests, it was decided to simply eliminate these tests.³²

Finally, the concept of *inclusion* requires that students with disabilities are integrated into general education classrooms. Accordingly, more than 63 percent of children with learning disabilities spend at least 80 percent of classroom time in the so-called "inclusive classrooms."³³

Even in a general education class, however, it is difficult to find the level of instruction that would suit all students; the presence of children with different cognitive abilities or learning disabilities in class makes this task virtually impossible. My graduate students have reported that, when teaching in inclusive classrooms, they would start a lesson with a general introduction, and then would divide their students into several subgroups based on their performance levels and teach each subgroup separately. Consequently, they

would spend only a portion of the class time with each subgroup.

No wonder “placement data may suggest that SWDs [students with disabilities] are being exposed to the general-education curriculum, but achievement data suggest that they are not actually learning the curriculum.”³⁴ Children without disabilities also “have lower academic and behavioral outcomes when they are taught in classrooms that include SWDs, particularly students with an EBD [emotional or behavioral disorder].”³⁵

It is hard to disagree with the observation that “the words ‘diversity, equity and inclusion’ sound just, and are often supported by well-intentioned people, but their effects are the opposite of noble sentiments.”³⁶

Summarizing data about learning outcomes of American school students, scholar of cognitive learning processes John Bruer writes:

Many if not most students ... can't rise above the rote, factual level to think critically or creatively. They can't apply what they know flexibly and spontaneously to solve ill-structured, ambiguous problems that require interpretation ... Current curricula and teaching methods successfully impart facts and rote skills to most students but fail to impart high-order reasoning and learning skills.³⁷

Alas, even this gloomy evaluation turns out to be too optimistic: Not only are American students unable to “think critically or creatively,” but they also lack basic factual knowledge. The astonishing ignorance of American youth has become a popular topic in stand-

up comedy. Bill Maher, for example, quotes the following examples of young Americans’ answers: “Who was the first person to land on the *Sun*?”—“Neil Armstrong”; “What is the biggest city in the world?”—“Asia” or “Europe”; “In which country is Venice (Italy) located?”—“Paris”; “Where is Queen Elizabeth from?”—“Egypt” or “Brazil.”³⁸

Considering these findings, it becomes more understandable why so many American young people are susceptible to progressive or anti-Israel brainwashing. They simply do not know that attempts to build “fair” socialist societies have almost always ended up poor or with concentrations camps, and have subjugated both members of the “oppressed” groups in whose name socialist revolutions took place, as well as “the useful idiots” from the “privileged” classes who enthusiastically supported the socialist revolution.

Neither do they know basic facts about the Arab-Israeli conflict, which resulted, among other outcomes, in the problem of “Palestinian refugees,” nor that millions of Israeli Jews are as indigenous to the lands of “Palestine” as the Palestinian “indigenous people,” but are instead declared “settlers” and “military occupiers.” Moreover, it turned out that more than 50 percent of students who supported the chant “From the river to the sea Palestine will be free,” were not even able to name the river and the sea referenced in the chant!³⁹

It is important to note, however, that it is in no way clear that factual knowledge of historic and political realities by

itself would help change the ideological views of the young generation. Many times, when I have asked such young people why they supported socialism despite the failures of past attempts to build socialist societies, their consistent response was: “It was done the wrong way and by the wrong people!” While the illogic of this kind of thinking seems clear enough, perhaps it requires critical thinking abilities to recognize that if numerous attempts to implement an idea have failed, there is likely an inherent flaw in that idea. Unfortunately, as previously quoted data indicate, schools often fail to cultivate these critical thinking abilities in students.

The integration of leftist ideas into school instruction, inadequate school curricula and teaching methods, and the dominance of progressive ideological dogmas in school practices have led to the expected outcome: American k-12 school graduates who are ignorant and incapable of critical thinking but are deeply engaged in left-wing political activism. In 1958, the poet and Marxist Allen Ginsberg shouted at the “bourgeois society:” “We’ll get you through your children!”⁴⁰ Now, sixty-five years later, this threat has become a reality.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Touro University or any of its departments or affiliates.

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