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THE TROUBLED
CRUSADE

CHAPTER 1

Postwar Initiatives

IN EARLY 1945, with the war in Europe coming to an end, the Senate Committee on Education and Labor opened hearings on a proposal for federal aid to education. The most insistent claimants for federal help were poor districts, which had a difficult time adequately financing their public schools from local property taxes. In addition to the usual statements of support and opposition from interest groups, several teachers told the senators about conditions in their schools. Miss Wilma Upchurch, a teacher from rural Nebraska, stated that her school had 487 pupils and twelve teachers, only seven of whom had college degrees. Because of low salaries, teacher turnover had been 50 percent the year before, and one out of every five teachers in the state had a temporary emergency teaching certificate, usually because of lack of qualifications. Her district, a poor one, taxed itself to the limit and yet was able to spend only forty to forty-seven dollars per pupil annually. "I am sure I could get a job in another state, or maybe I could work at the bomber plant," Miss Upchurch testified, "but I would rather stay in the teaching profession. Somebody has got to teach those children, and I would like to do it."¹

Mrs. Florence Christmas, a black teacher from Copiah County, Mississippi, described her school of 190 children and three teachers. As principal, she taught all subjects in four grades (fifth through eighth) and received \$60 per month for six months. The other two teachers were paid, respectively, \$292 and \$288 for the six-month term. Mrs. Christmas said:

Our school is called Antioch and is located on the same ground as the Antioch Baptist Church. Some of our people in the community are small truck farmers. They have a great love for education. They built their own schoolhouse. It has grown from one room to a three-teacher type school. The money for the building was raised by the teachers, children, and patrons. We gave programs, entertainments, secured pledges from the parents and friends, and gave money from our salaries to help with the building. We have been able to put on one coat of paint, inside and out.

Parents and teachers were still trying to raise \$12.57, Mrs. Christmas said, to "finish paying for the paint," and their next project was to get enough benches "so that all the children may have seats, especially those in the primary room."²

Of six thousand Negro teachers in Mississippi, said Mrs. Christmas, five thousand received less than \$600 per year. During the months when school was not in session, she held a factory job, making containers for vegetables, where she earned almost as much in a week as in a month of teaching. When he heard this, Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas asked her, "Why do you do teaching?"

Mrs. Christmas responded, "Teaching is my profession. I would rather teach."

It was matter-of-factly noted in the record that in Copiah County, where Mrs. Christmas taught, the average salary for white teachers was \$889.53, compared to an annual average for black teachers of \$332.58; the length of the school term was eight months for whites and six months for blacks; of 91 white teachers in the county, 44 had no college degree, while of 126 black teachers, 122 had no college degree. The daily attendance rate for white children was 48 percent; for black children, it was 60 percent. At the Antioch school, the black parents dug down into their pockets to keep the school open for a seventh month.

Educational conditions throughout the South, particularly in rural areas, were equally depressed. Dr. E. B. Norton, the chief state school officer of Alabama, noted that "the only difference between our state and some of the others is that our emergency is not temporary, ours seems to be a permanent emergency." Some eleven thousand of Alabama's twenty thousand teachers had left their jobs in the three years after Pearl Harbor; many of their replacements had no college training. Low pay was one reason: the annual salary for white teachers was \$976, and for black teachers only \$600. Furthermore, more than half the school buildings in the state were heated with open stoves, and more than half lacked electricity.³

Other states, though not so desperately poor as those in the South, echoed similar complaints about teacher shortages caused by low salaries

and competition from defense industries. The Colorado Education Association held that "the schools of Colorado are facing the gravest crisis in all their existence. The salaries are so woefully low that we are losing hundreds of our best teachers to industry and to other States. . . . one out of every three teachers in Colorado is a temporary teacher." A spokesman from Utah declared that 25 percent of the state's teachers did not have proper certification, and in Iowa some eight hundred rural schools were altogether without a teacher.⁴

There were no supplicants at the hearings from city schools, which were generally well staffed and well financed; suburbanization had not yet become a major trend, and city schools provided the standard for teachers' salaries, class size, and facilities, against which rural schools seemed needy and inadequate.

The issue of federal aid to education had been raised periodically in the Congress since the 1870s and had consistently failed to pass, no matter how compelling the demonstration of educational calamity. Invariably, federal aid became a national question when some crisis riveted national attention on the schools. It was debated for several years after World War I, when the army discovered that large numbers of its draftees were illiterate; it became an issue during the Great Depression, when plummeting revenues forced school districts to close schools, fire teachers, cut salaries, and eliminate programs. The education lobby, led by the National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest group of teachers and supervisors, kept up the battle for federal aid during and after the war. Each era produced its own rationale for federal aid, and the major theme of the 1945 hearings—which teachers like Miss Upchurch and Mrs. Christmas dramatized—was the lack of equal opportunity in American education. The plea of the education interest groups was not just that American education was in a state of dire need, but that the incontrovertible fact of sharp inequalities from district to district and from state to state was manifestly unfair.

With the war coming to an end, the NEA and its allies—such as organized labor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers—believed that the time was right to launch a new campaign for federal support of the nation's schools. As they well knew, the obstacles were formidable. Bills for federal aid had traditionally foundered for three reasons: race, religion, and fear of federal control. No matter how bleak the plight of the schools, every effort to formulate legislation had been stymied by conflicts over whether to fund the South's racially segregated schools; whether to fund nonpublic (largely Catholic) schools; and how to prevent federal subsidization from becoming federal domination of local schools.

Every time the issue was raised, different coalitions formed, depending on how these questions were framed in potential legislation. Southerners, whose need for federal aid was greatest, supported it as long as it did not threaten their system of racial segregation. Blacks, organized labor, and liberal congressmen would support federal aid proposals only if they guaranteed equal funding without regard to race. The public school lobby, headed by the NEA, would not support a bill that offered any form of aid to nonpublic schools. But any bill that aided only public schools was opposed by Catholics and by congressmen from districts with large Catholic constituencies. The distribution formula was also a problem: a bill that granted money only to the poorest states risked losing the votes of representatives from states that would get nothing, while a bill that distributed money to every state was either too expensive or spread the aid too thinly to help the poorest states. A sizable number of conservative congressmen, mostly Republicans, opposed any federal aid to education, for fear that it would destroy local control of public schooling.

Yet there was reason to hope that the end of World War II might be the right time to break through these traditional grounds for deadlock. During the war years, Americans had talked a great deal about defending the ideals of democracy and the American way of life, and the education lobby sensed that the time had come to base its appeal on the promise of democratic ideology. But beyond ideology was compelling need. The teacher shortage was a national problem, as were low salaries. There was also a critical need for new classrooms and schools, not only because replacement and repair had been deferred by the Depression and the war, but because as early as 1946 and 1947, it was clear that the fast-rising birthrate would produce a "baby boom" that would overwhelm existing classroom capacity. No less important than sheer physical need was awareness, at least among educational leaders, that the nation was entering an age of technological and scientific advance that required rising levels of education in order to maintain economic growth. And, perhaps more sharply than at any time in the past, there was concern that both of these trends—the growth of population and the rising levels of education—would exacerbate divisions within the society along lines of race and class and intensify inequality unless educational opportunities were equalized across the nation.

Only crisis would stir the Congress to action, and in the years immediately following the war, America's schools were in deep enough trouble to gain a hearing. Benjamin Fine, the education editor of the *New York Times*, wrote in 1947, "America's public school system is confronted with the most serious crisis in its history." After a six-month tour across the coun-

try, Fine reported that three hundred and fifty thousand teachers had left the public schools since 1940 for war service or better jobs; that one of every seven teachers held an emergency ("substandard") certificate; that seventy thousand teaching jobs were unfilled; that six thousand schools would close because of the teacher shortage; that sixty thousand of the nation's teachers had only a high school education or less; that the average teacher's salary was \$37 per week, which was lower than the pay of the average truck driver, garbage collector, or bartender; that 20 percent of all teachers—one hundred and seventy-five thousand—were new to the job each year, a turnover double the prewar rate; that fewer students were entering teaching, and that men were deserting the teaching profession; that twelve major teachers' strikes had taken place in the six months following September, 1946; that teacher morale was at a new low; that "appalling" inequities existed throughout the nation, from the best classrooms (where as much as \$6,000 was spent per classroom unit) to the poorest (where as little as \$100 was spent per classroom unit); that the United States was spending less of its national income on schools than either Great Britain or the Soviet Union; and that school buildings were in a "deplorable state all over the nation."⁵

The sense of crisis extended well beyond the physical and financial needs of American education to larger questions of social policy that were unresolved as the postwar period began. In higher education, educators debated the problem of access, of who should be educated and for how many years, and at whose expense. Should higher education be available only to those who could afford to pay for it and to those talented enough and lucky enough to win a scholarship? Should a greater proportion of young people receive a postsecondary education, and if so, who should pay for it? Should public funds be given only to public institutions or should private colleges and universities also receive federal assistance? In elementary and secondary education, equally vexing problems pervaded the ongoing debates: What was to be done to improve the poor conditions in certain districts and states? How could already poor districts afford to pay higher teacher salaries or to build new schools? Since only the federal government had the taxing and spending power to redistribute funds from wealthy regions to poor regions, how could the traditional stalemate in Congress be broken to pass a federal aid bill? Should federal aid go only to schools that did not permit racial segregation or should it go to all schools based only on need? Should public money go only to public schools or should it go also to nonpublic schools? Was it possible to establish federal "standards" that would not turn into federal domination of local schools? And then there were questions of pedagogy. The rapid

growth of the high school enrollment in the 1930s had been followed by the introduction of new courses and new curricula on behalf of young people who presumably would not benefit from the traditional academic curriculum; the projected growth of postsecondary education, it was believed, would pose similar problems in higher education. This prospect divided educators between those who welcomed the new challenge to higher education to serve a mass enrollment and those who feared that large numbers would require a debasement of the curriculum and a lowering of standards. Until there was consensus on these issues, there would not be any federal funding of the schools or of higher education.

The new political and social conditions in the nation after the war did not provide an auspicious atmosphere for resolving ideological disagreements or launching policy innovations. The war was followed by a national mood of jubilation, then uncertainty and insecurity. There were good reasons for worry. To begin with, many people feared a resumption of the Depression, which was still relatively fresh in memory. Many who had benefited by the social reforms of the New Deal wondered whether the country would take a sharp turn to the right, as it had after World War I. The earlier world war had been followed by a period of retreat from international involvement, reaction against domestic reforms, the collapse of the League of Nations, the rise of xenophobia, and the excesses of the "Red Scare." Beyond these fundamental concerns about the relationship of the past to the present, there was the awesome new fact of the atomic bomb, the very existence of which presented a compelling argument for international cooperation and for the substitution of reason for coercion in politics. In the atomic age, there was fresh urgency to H. G. Wells's observation that "human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

The mood of the electorate did turn more conservative after the war than it had been during the Roosevelt era. The Republicans gained control of Congress in 1946 for the first time in sixteen years. But even more significant was what did not happen: the New Deal social reforms were not repealed, and the United States did not withdraw from its international responsibilities. For the first time in the nation's history, domestic welfare programs and foreign assistance had broad bipartisan support. Yet the new consensus on issues like social security and the United Nations coexisted with a rising tide of social conflict. A nation that had been disciplined by the exigencies of war and unified by the leadership of a powerful president, both through the Depression and the world war, now found itself in a time of unruliness, labor unrest, shortages of goods, fear of renewed interna-

tional tensions, and anxiety about domestic subversion. And something more was amiss: the helmsman, loved by many, hated by some, was gone, replaced by a man who was an unknown factor. The new president, one Harry S. Truman, was a man without a mandate or even a clear identity. The Republican victory in 1946 indicated that a substantial portion of the public did not wish to see an expansion of the reformism of the New Deal, and the absence of a sympathetic Congress limited any initiatives by Truman.

Besides the obvious political changes, there were subtle social and economic changes that contributed to an uneasy sense of dislocation. Rapid advances in technology and communication, the growth of suburbs, the breakdown of regional traditions, the pursuit of material security, the increase in juvenile delinquency, and the strains on the family—such trends, rarely the stuff of headlines, fed mistrust and anxiety. The very forces that made American society dynamic—technological change, modernization, urbanization, social fluidity, and innovation—contributed to the erosion of cohesive community life.

Perhaps it was only the same yearning for a golden past that every generation seems to feel, yet there was an almost tangible sense that traditional American values were under assault. In this time of tension and flux, many looked to the schools and colleges to protect the heritage of the past and instill traditional values in the rising generation. Others, less concerned with the past, wanted to plan the future and believed that the nation's educational system was key to realizing equal opportunity and economic plenty. Both kinds of critics of education were disappointed by the institutions on which their aspirations rested.

America's schools, it seemed, were fated to be judged by standards that were ever beyond reach, for behind the highly publicized crisis in the schools was a remarkable transformation in the availability of education. The buildings may have been inadequate and the teachers scarce and poorly paid, but more than anywhere else in the world, the children of the United States were going to school. With each passing decade, American youth went to school for a longer portion of the year and for a longer period of their lives. From 1870 to 1940, while the population tripled, school enrollment rates soared. Students in secondary schools increased by a multiple of almost 90, from eighty thousand in 1870 to 7 million in 1940, while college enrollment leapt from sixty thousand to 1.5 million (with another one million part-time students in postsecondary adult education programs).⁶

The rise in educational participation was due both to economic and social factors. In 1900, most male workers were either farmers or laborers.

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

As the century advanced, fewer men worked in these occupations, while more men held white-collar occupations and skilled blue-collar jobs, becoming a majority by midcentury. Technological change created a need for an educated people, and educated people stimulated technological change. Of no less importance was the national commitment to schooling as a means of self-improvement. Even before the tightening-up of compulsory education laws in the 1930s, most children attended school. Schooling was held in high regard even though teaching and intellectuality were not. It helped the individual "get ahead"; it stimulated economic progress by producing an industrious and resourceful work force; it promoted social harmony by teaching children about the history and culture of the nation; it contributed to the nation's well-being by teaching children how the government works and why they should participate as citizens. The value of schooling was an idea on which almost everyone agreed, even though they might differ about what should be taught or who should have the power to pick teachers or textbooks. Indeed, it was the substantial agreement on the power of schooling to affect the future that made educational controversies so emotionally charged.

Educational participation rose steadily during the twentieth century. Not until the 1930s did the idea of universal high school attendance gain currency, after the compulsory schooling age was raised to remove teenage workers from a depressed job market. The high schools had traditionally served as college preparatory institutions, and they adjusted to the new, diverse population with some difficulty. With most children between the ages of five and seventeen in school, new questions were raised. Why did some of them leave school before graduation? What could be done to the high schools' curriculum to extend their "holding power" and keep everyone enrolled until graduation time? During the 1930s—and in some cases, even earlier—high schools began to add new courses for children who were "not bookish": vocational courses, such as bookkeeping and typing, home economics and automobile mechanics; courses on contemporary issues and on the social problems of the teenager. Soon, some high schools offered different kinds of high school diplomas; in addition to the college-preparatory diploma, there was a vocational course, a business course, and a general course.

Because of this new situation in the high schools, educators had two kinds of concerns in the mid-1940s. First, there were school superintendents and leaders in professional groups like the NEA who wondered whether the high schools had diversified their curriculum enough to hold the interest and attendance of all children. They believed that the expansion of the high school enrollment had given the schools a special mission

in a democratic society. Rather than serving only the college-bound, the schools had to become an agency of social adjustment for all American youth, guiding them into adulthood and preparing them to enter occupations suited to their needs as well as to society's. In this new mission, the schools had to meet young people's needs, not only for education in the traditional sense but also for vocation, health, recreation, citizenship, and social competence.

At the same time, there were college and university spokesmen who worried that the extreme diversification of the curriculum in the high school and the growth of specialization in higher education had gotten out of hand. They understood that the rapid multiplication of the number and kinds of courses in high school had been a direct result of the expansion of the high school enrollment and was an effort to provide something of educational value for young people of widely different ability, background, and interests. In response to these developments, they advocated "general education," and in the late 1940s calls for general education were heard throughout secondary and higher education.

Perhaps the most characteristic statement of the case for general education was made in 1945 in "The Redbook," written by Harvard University's Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society. The expansion of the high school enrollment and of the secondary curriculum created two dangers, the committee said: "the alienation of students from each other in mind and outlook because their courses of study for the various diplomas are so distinct, and the disjointedness of any given student's work because instead of being conceived as a whole it falls into scattered parts." As an antidote, they recommended that secondary school youth spend about half their time in a common core of studies, ranging in level of difficulty and in method but sharing the same educational ideals. While others had their own versions of a "core" curriculum, the Harvard committee had correctly identified the central problems of education in a democratic society: How should education be provided for a high school population that was widely varied in talent and need? Should all study the same materials? Should students pursue only the courses that interested them most? Was there some way to strike a balance?

One question that the Harvard committee never raised was whether school was the appropriate place for all of a community's youth. It was never raised because, presumably, it had been settled. In days gone by, restless youngsters had left school to go West, to go to sea, or to find a job in the community. Those options were rapidly disappearing, though many teenagers no doubt would continue to be restless or to find the institution-

alized life of school too limited, no matter how diversified the curriculum. It was not the kind of question that was likely to be raised in the late 1940s, for the more pressing issue to most educators was how to keep more students in high school until graduation and to increase the proportion of the population that was able to attend college. In the middle 1940s educators were concerned that for every 1,000 children who entered fifth grade in 1932, only 455 graduated from high school and only 160 entered college. While these figures represented substantial increases over previous years, the feeling was growing that too much talent was wasted and that the benefits of education must be more broadly, if not universally, dispersed throughout the population.⁸

After the Second World War, when a college education was seen as a ticket to a good job or entry into the professions, the question of access to higher education became a major public issue. It was no secret that admission to college or university was not based solely on ability. Though more youngsters were in school than ever before, it was nonetheless true that some never had a chance to go to college because the elementary and secondary schools they attended were too inadequate to give them a decent preparation. Some were excluded because of their race or religion. Others were prevented from attending college because their families could not afford the cost or the loss of their children's earnings. Nothing had so dramatic an effect on the way the public thought about the issue of opportunity for higher education than a remarkable—and relatively spontaneous—experiment in mass higher education known as the GI Bill.

✓✓✓ The GI Bill of Rights, formally known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, offered the sixteen million men and women who served in the armed forces a federal subsidy to continue their schooling or training. Though the GI Bill ultimately provided a telling argument for expansion of educational opportunity, its sponsors had concerns other than education or opportunity. One group of proponents, the veterans' organizations, lobbied hard to get the best possible package of benefits for their constituents, the returning servicemen, and the final bill included job placement services, unemployment benefits, mortgage guarantees, and educational benefits. Another sponsor, the federal officials in charge of postwar planning, were chiefly interested in preventing joblessness and economic distress. To the veterans, the educational subsidy was one more "goody" in the total package; to the planners, it was a promising way to reduce the number of job-seekers in the period after demobilization.⁹

Signed into law on June 22, 1944, the GI Bill subsidized tuition, books, and fees, as well as providing a monthly subsistence allowance for veter-

ans. The Veterans Administration determined whether veterans were eligible, the veterans selected the school they wanted to attend, and the school decided whether it wanted to admit them. One of the chief reasons for the success of the education program was that it maintained the freedom of servicemen to select their schools, and the freedom of the schools to control their admission policies and their curricula without federal intervention.

When the bill was passed, most educators welcomed the prospect of subsidized students as a way of making up for the underenrollments of the wartime years. But not everyone found the prospect pleasing. James B. Conant, president of Harvard University, worried that the bill would cause a lowering of academic standards; he preferred to see a bill that financed the education of "a carefully selected number of returned veterans." Even more outspoken was Robert M. Hutchins, chancellor of the University of Chicago. In December, 1944, Hutchins wrote an article for the popular magazine *Collier's* called "The Threat to American Education." While he approved of severing the relationship between "the education of a citizen and the income of his parents," he feared that the GI Bill would encourage vocational education in colleges and universities, which would prostitute themselves to get federal dollars. "Educational institutions," he wrote, "... cannot resist money. The GI Bill of Rights gives them a chance to get more money than they ever dreamed of and to do it in the name of patriotism. They will not want to keep out unqualified veterans; they will not want to expel those who fail. . . . Colleges and universities will find themselves converted into educational hobo jungles." Candidates for higher education should be chosen through national examinations, he believed, and colleges should be required to provide half the veterans' tuition, to be sure that only serious students were admitted. Hutchins thought it was outrageous to use education "as a substitute for a dole or for a national program of public works."¹⁰

Hutchins's critique had no effect in Congress or among educators. Few shared his singular devotion to the idea of liberal education untainted by vocationalism or utilitarianism, and no one was in a mood to be stingy with the veterans. By the fall of 1945, with some 88,000 veterans enrolled in college under the GI Bill, Congress liberalized the education benefits in order to make more GIs eligible and to increase the monthly subsistence payments.

Government officials and educators consistently underestimated the number of veterans who would use their education benefits. In the fall of 1946, to the surprise of those who had confidently predicted that veterans would shun higher education after their years on the battlefield, 1,013,000

veterans enrolled, nearly doubling the nation's college student population. Campus life was transformed by their presence. Quonset huts sprouted to house the students and, in some cases, their spouses. Many colleges doubled their usual enrollment to make room for the veterans. Certain sophomore traditions such as freshman "beanies," student mud-fights, and freshman paddling, disappeared with the arrival of the older students. In many colleges, classes began early in the morning and concluded late at night. Inexperienced teachers, some of them graduate students, were pressed into duty to teach the bumper crop of undergraduates. Classes were jammed, facilities were strained beyond capacity, but somehow everyone took the situation in stride.¹¹

What was even more surprising than the deluge of veterans on campus, however, was their academic performance. Far from undermining academic standards, as Hutchins and Conant had feared, the veterans consistently outperformed other students. Among educators, the veterans quickly established a reputation as the hardest working, best motivated generation ever to pass through the nation's colleges. Harvard's president, James B. Conant, withdrew his earlier criticism and concluded that the veterans at Harvard were "the most mature and promising students Harvard has ever had." *Fortune* described the class of 1949 as "the best class the country has ever produced . . . the most mature . . . the most responsible . . . the most self-disciplined group the colleges have ever had."¹²

The GI Bill was the most ambitious venture in mass higher education that had ever been attempted by any society. During the seven years in which the benefits were available, 7.8 million veterans used them to attend universities, colleges, high schools, trade schools, and training programs. Of that number, 2,232,000 attended institutions of higher education. No other society had ever subsidized so large and nonselective a portion of its population in institutions of higher education. For the first time, the link between income and educational opportunity was broken: every GI, without regard to background, was entitled to the same educational subsidy. The number of veterans who would probably not have gone to college or university without the subsidy has been estimated at between 20 to 25 percent, or between 450,000 and 550,000 people. These men and women (2.9 percent of the veterans in college were women) undoubtedly contributed to the dramatic expansion of American science and technology in the decades after the war. The veterans' presence on campus broke the genteel cocoon in which much of higher education had been wrapped, in some cases only temporarily, in others, permanently. This meant, for example, the introduction of married students' quarters, new flexibility of scheduling and calendar, and the discovery that age was an irrelevant

criterion for higher education. The GIs' "uncritical acceptance" of "larger classes, larger colleges, and increased use of graduate students as teachers" may have been, in the view of one scholar, "a major legacy of the G.I. Bill." In 1948, only ten universities had an enrollment bigger than 20,000; by 1967, there were fifty-five. One historian called the GI Bill "the most important educational and social transformation in American history."¹³

Whatever else it was, the GI Bill was a successful investment in human resources. For educators and for the public, its great lesson was that college should not be reserved for the children of the well-to-do. The doors were opened for all who wished to come, and those who came helped themselves and added to society's stock of skilled and productive citizens. On the tenth anniversary of its passage, *Newsweek* summarized its benefits, but noted dourly that not everyone who went to college at government expense gained from the experience: "Their appearance at college came largely from a growing—and debatable—American conviction that everyone, regardless of ability, ought somehow to go to college." Though it originated in a compromise between officials who wanted to stave off unemployment and veterans' groups that wanted a good package of benefits, the GI Bill's most lasting effect was probably its encouragement of the conviction that "everyone, regardless of ability, ought somehow to go to college."¹⁴

The problems of overcrowding caused by the GI Bill presented a rare opportunity for educators who had a vision of a vastly expanded system of higher education. As professional educators saw it, the great struggle of the nineteenth century had been the fight to establish the principle of free universal public schooling; the great struggle of the first half of the twentieth century had been to make secondary schooling universal; and the goal for the present was to make higher education a right, not just a privilege, for all Americans. In the summer of 1946, the American Council on Education, an association of some six hundred colleges and universities, called together a conference to discuss the crisis on American campuses, which was associated with the doubling of enrollments, the rapid erection of housing and classrooms, and the recruitment of inexperienced faculty members. The leadership of the American Council on Education had been deeply involved in drafting the education section of the GI Bill, and they were eager to use the present crisis to encourage even greater expansion of higher education. In response to the council's requests, President Truman appointed the President's Commission on Higher Education in July 1946.

The Commission issued a series of reports between December, 1947,

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

and February, 1948, collectively entitled *Higher Education for American Democracy*. It was a many-sided answer to the question, "How can higher education make society more democratic?" The thesis of the report was that, with the advance of science, technology, and industrialization, more and more students would seek higher education to prepare them for effective participation in contemporary society. Institutions of higher education should welcome this expansion, remove all barriers to its progress, and change in whatever ways were necessary to meet the diverse needs of students. A vastly expanded network of postsecondary institutions, the commission believed, would promote international understanding, the solution of social problems, general education for individual development, vocational education for occupational development, and a fuller realization of democratic living. Specifically, the commission maintained that the number of students in higher education should double to 4.6 million by 1960. According to its estimates, "at least 49 percent of our population has the mental ability to complete 14 years of schooling" and "at least 32 percent of our population has the mental ability to complete an advanced liberal or specialized professional education." The kind and amount of education people receive, the commission insisted, should depend solely on their abilities, "not on the family or community into which they happened to be born, or, worse still, on the color of skin or the religion of their parents." It vigorously condemned racial segregation, which was legal in seventeen states and the District of Columbia, and the denial of educational opportunity to black youth in states where segregation was not legal. The commission denounced the "quota system" or *numerus clausus* in higher education, which was an unacknowledged but widely practiced method of restricting the admission of blacks and Jews.¹⁵

The ultimate educational goal of the American people, the commission urged, should be "an educational system in which at no level—high school, college, graduate school or professional school—will a qualified individual in any part of the country encounter an insuperable economic barrier to the attainment of the kind of education suited to his aptitudes and interests." The commission recommended, first, that each state create administrative machinery for statewide planning of new institutions of higher education; second, that state planners prepare for a rapid expansion of two-year community colleges (not junior colleges), which would "fit into the community life as the high school has done"; third, that the federal government establish a program of scholarships, based primarily on need, for at least 20 percent of all undergraduates, and a program of graduate fellowships, based on ability; fourth, that the federal government provide financial aid for public institutions; and fifth, that segregation legislation

be repealed and that new laws be passed banning discrimination in admissions.¹⁶

The public debate about the commission's report revealed a good deal about how educators and others viewed the prospect of a vastly enlarged mission for higher education in American society. The *New York Times* predicted that the report "may well become a landmark in the history of higher education in this country." *Life* magazine, one of the most popular mass magazines, declared in an unusual full-page editorial that access to college should be "a civic birthright," like high school: "Almost any experience of two years of full-time post-high-school study would be more humanizing than instantly to freeze, as so many young people must, into a rigid life pattern." Their clinching argument was an appeal to the American belief that education was good in and of itself: "Education alone cannot heal the world's wounds. But it can help. A basic principle of American democracy is the more education, the better."¹⁷

Many supporters and critics of the report wondered whether Americans put too much emphasis on the college degree for its own sake. Several mentioned a popular movie, *The Senator Was Indiscreet*, in which "Senator Melvin Gassaway Ashton" promised in his presidential campaign to have the federal government send every man, woman, and child in the nation to Harvard. Others quoted a remark of Barrett Wendell, a Harvard professor who years before had proposed facetiously that every American be endowed at birth with a college degree, so that only those who were truly interested in the pursuit of learning would go to college.

Critics of the report expressed a variety of concerns: first, that an increase of college enrollment to 4.6 million would dangerously lower academic standards, thereby destroying the educational environment that produces leaders; second, that this expansion would force institutions of higher education to adopt a vocational orientation; third, that the proposed federal role would establish political control over public institutions and drive private institutions out of existence; and, fourth, that there might be a dangerous oversupply of degree-bearers for whom there were not enough jobs. In short, the critics raised serious questions about whether democratization of higher education was feasible or desirable, and about whether it would change the nature, purpose, and control of public and private institutions.¹⁸

The Very Reverend Robert I. Gannon, president of Fordham University, warned that the commission's program "threatens to suffocate us with tides of mediocrity." He complained that "the fraud in the present campaign for educational inflation consists in spreading our national culture perilously thin and calling it 'democracy of education.'" In a more temper-

ate vein, the liberal Catholic journal *Commonweal* objected, "To make higher education available to every American of genuine college caliber regardless of his purse it seems hardly necessary to gather everybody in, regardless. Or is the idea growing that higher education is primarily a useful social—rather than an intellectual—experience, which should be open to all?"¹⁹

Many college presidents attacked the report as a threat to academic standards or to the future of private colleges, but the most searing critique came from the University of Chicago's iconoclastic Robert M. Hutchins, who held that the report was like the educational system itself:

It is big and booming. It is confused, confusing, and contradictory. It has something for everybody. It is generous, ignoble, bold, timid, naive, and optimistic. It is filled with the spirit of universal brotherhood and the sense of American superiority. It has great faith in money. It has great faith in courses. It is antihumanistic and anti-intellectual. It is confident that vices can be turned into virtues by making them larger. Its heart is in the right place: its head does not work very well. . . . The cry is "more": more money, more buildings, more professors, more students, more everything.

Hutchins was particularly exercised by what he called the "omnibus fallacy" of education, the idea that "there is nothing which education cannot do and it can do everything equally well." He saw no reason to "increase the number of students, to prolong the period of their incarceration in schools, to spend twice the money, but spend it in the same way, when the system is headed in no direction, or in the wrong direction, or in all directions at once."²⁰

After the dust of the debate settled, what impact did the report of the President's Commission on Higher Education have? In an immediate sense, very little: the president and the Congress, embroiled in other problems, ignored its recommendations—no hearings were called, no legislation was offered. But in other, less tangible ways, its effects were widespread. First, it gave great impetus to the burgeoning community college movement, and especially, to the drive to convert junior colleges, which had been regarded as either adjuncts to universities or extensions of high schools, to community colleges designed to meet the educational needs of the local community, with comprehensive offerings and little or no tuition. Second, members of the commission spread out in the states, colleges, and communities as bearers of the report's message, and they were a considerable network; among their number were future college presidents, planners of state systems of community colleges, state commissioners of education, and even a future U.S. commissioner of education (Earl McGrath, who served in Truman's administration from 1949 to 1953). Third, while little was done

to implement the proposals of the commission at a national level, its recommendation that enrollment double to 4.6 million students by 1960 was uncannily close to actual enrollment figures. Even without the proposed federal assistance to students and public institutions, the commission's proposal had proved an accurate prediction by 1963. Last, the commission's stern denunciation of segregation and discrimination helped to chip away at the legitimacy of such policies; in the eyes of leading educators, there could be no defense of discrimination. In future discussions of education and social policy, the issue of racial inequality could no longer be ignored.

Although racism was deeply embedded in American life and law, the experience of the war heightened the contradiction between the reality of racism and the ideals of American democracy. The painfulness of the contrast was presented most acutely to blacks, particularly the one million blacks who served in the armed forces. They had encountered racism in their daily lives before the war, but as members of the armed services, they found themselves in the odd position of being discriminated against by the American government, a government that daily proclaimed that the goal of the war was to defend the principles of democracy and to defeat malignant exponents of racial superiority. Northern blacks stationed in the South were subjected to the humiliating laws and practices of the segregated states; southern blacks who traveled North realized that the rigid racial separatism of their home communities was not immutable; and those who were sent overseas encountered cultures where racial prejudice was unknown. Among many who served in the military or who had, for the first time, a good job in a war industry, the war years were the beginning of a new consciousness, a new willingness to insist that the society make real the promises of its democratic creed.

The war and the democratic rhetoric it inspired contributed to delegitimizing prejudice. Recognizing that the United States could not fight racism abroad while practicing it at home, a growing number of whites began to criticize openly the nation's racial caste system. Wendell L. Willkie, the unsuccessful Republican presidential candidate in 1940, wrote in 1944 that the war "has made us conscious of the contradiction between our treatment of our Negro minority and the ideals for which we are fighting." The perpetuation of racism, he declared, would harm America's standing in the world, for so long as "we continue to practice an ugly discrimination at home against our minorities . . . we cannot expect small nations and men of other races and colors to credit the good faith of our professed purposes." *Fortune* magazine sharply criticized both employers

and labor unions for their continuing exclusion of blacks from employment. Racial discrimination, wrote the editors in 1942, impaired the war effort, damaged America's relations with other nations, and corroded the national conscience. "No serious review of the nation's status could ever overlook the contradiction between America's dream and the Negro reality," they stated. "In the consciousness of all peoples in the world this war is being fought for and against the idea of racial superiority. America's Constitution, like Christianity, is based on the principle that every man is born with the inalienable right to equality of opportunity. Whether or not this assumption is 'realistic'—we must either stick to it or change sides." The erosion of prejudice was also advanced by social scientists, whose research on the irrationality of group prejudice undermined the ideology of white supremacy. Of particular importance as a powerful indictment of racism was Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944, which surveyed racial relations and summarized the findings of modern social science.²¹

Nonetheless, the outlook for political change on racial matters was not promising at the end of the war. Reactionaries and racists held key seats in Congress, and the Democratic party—which had won the allegiance of blacks during the Depression—was dependent on the electoral votes of the "solid South." Even President Roosevelt, beloved as a friend of the underdog, avoided making specific commitments on behalf of the civil rights of blacks, to appease his powerful southern allies. So bland was the Democratic party's 1944 platform on the issue of civil rights that the NAACP said sarcastically, "To call the section on the Negro a plank is a misnomer. It is best characterized as a splinter."²²

No one knew what to expect on civil rights issues from Harry S. Truman. When he unexpectedly assumed the presidency on April 12, 1945, Truman had been vice-president for only eighty-two days; before then he had been known as the senator from Missouri who had investigated war profiteers. Lacking the artfulness of his predecessor, Truman was not able simultaneously to command the loyalty of blacks and white southern politicians. Though the political ramifications did not become clear until the 1948 election, Truman cast his lot on December 5, 1946, when he appointed a President's Committee on Civil Rights to study the status of civil rights and civil liberties and to recommend new legislation. It was no accident that the committee of fifteen consisted entirely of moderates and liberals and included two Catholics, two Jews, two labor leaders, two blacks, two liberal southerners, and—perhaps to enhance its credibility—the president of General Electric as its chairman. In his memoirs, Truman wrote that he set up the committee "because of the repeated

anti-minority incidents immediately after the war in which homes were invaded, property was destroyed, and a number of innocent lives were taken."²³

As a former senator, Truman knew that the chance of getting civil rights legislation through the Congress, with its southern committee chairmen, was nil. When the leadership of the Committee on Civil Rights asked him whether he wanted them only to make recommendations or to engage in "mass education as to our findings," the president told them that "the one thing he was interested in was in going to the public." In addition to documenting the extent of the problems, he told them "that the most practical and far-reaching aspect of our work would be whatever plans we devised for mass education of the public." The job of the committee, the president said, was to put before the American public an agenda for change, a list of particulars, and to begin the process of public education that must precede political and social change.²⁴

In late 1947, the Committee for Civil Rights delivered its report to the president. It was a concise documentation of civil rights violations, accompanied by specific proposals for governmental action. For the first time, a presidential commission declared that the problem of civil rights was not a Negro problem or a Jewish problem, but a national problem, a problem of bringing America's practice into congruence with its ideals. In prose that was simple and direct, the committee detailed the severity of discrimination in the United States:

- Six blacks had been lynched by mobs in 1946. Twenty-two people had been rescued from lynch mobs. All but one of the would-be victims were Negroes. Due to the attitudes of local police and juries, members of lynch mobs were rarely prosecuted, rarely arrested, rarely convicted.
- Police brutality was flagrant in the South. The police in some communities subjected prisoners to beatings, third-degree tactics, pistol whippings, and illegal searches.
- In some communities, prisoners could not get a fair trial, either because members of minority groups were systematically excluded from jury service or because the accused could not afford to hire legal counsel.
- The right to vote was restricted unconstitutionally in many states in order to prevent or minimize black participation. Some southern states, for example, had imposed a poll tax or had required prospective voters to interpret the state constitution to the satisfaction of local officials. Such devices kept the electorate small and unrepresentative; in the 1944 election, 18.3 percent of potential voters in the eight poll-tax states had voted, compared to 68.7 percent in the other forty states.
- Discrimination in the armed forces persisted despite proclamations to the contrary. Negroes were barred from enlistment in any branch of the Marine Corps except as stewards; 80 percent of Negro sailors were cooks or stewards;

the army maintained a limit of 10 percent in all its sectors for Negroes. Only a tiny proportion of officers in any of the services were Negroes.

- Blacks were the victims of unfair employment practices and of wage discrimination. Whites and blacks with the same education were paid differently for the same work.
- Blacks were routinely excluded from hotels, restaurants, and other places of public accommodation.
- Health care facilities discriminated against Negroes. Many hospitals did not admit Negro patients or permit Negro doctors on their staff. Negro students were barred from most medical schools. "Medical schools graduate approximately 5,000 students a year, but only about 145 of these are Negro. And of these 145, 130 are from two Negro schools."
- School segregation, enforced by law in seventeen states and the District of Columbia, was manifestly unfair. "Whatever test is used—expenditure per pupil, teachers' salaries, the number of pupils per teacher, transportation of students, adequacy of school buildings and educational equipment, length of school term, extent of curriculum—Negro students are invariably at a disadvantage."²⁵

The committee unanimously recommended the elimination of segregation and discrimination based on race, color, creed, or national origin from all aspects of American life. It proposed a federal antilynching law; abolition of the poll tax; strengthening of the civil rights section of the Justice Department; federal protection of the right to vote; new legislation to end all discrimination in the armed forces; a ban on segregation and discrimination in employment, housing, health facilities, interstate transportation, and places of public accommodation.

Only two issues split the committee, and both were educational issues. While everyone agreed that segregation was wrong, the committee argued at length whether to recommend a ban on federal aid to racially segregated schools. Even as the committee was deliberating, the Congress was considering a program of federal aid to elementary and secondary schools that had a good chance of passing. The members of the committee realized that their recommendations might affect the fate of the bill before Congress. The committee had to choose whether to recommend that federal aid be equitably divided between black and white schools in the South or to recommend that no federal aid go to any segregated school. The choice was not that simple: only three years before, in 1944, a federal aid bill had been killed when conservative Republican Senator William Langer attached an amendment to deny federal aid to segregated schools; as he expected, the bill's southern supporters voted against it and defeated the bill. Because of the dire financial needs of southern schools, and especially

black southern schools, the NAACP in 1947 was supporting federal aid so long as it was fairly apportioned between white and black schools.

The southern members of the committee argued that the South would reject federal aid rather than permit the federal government to dictate its way of life. ~~Some nonsouthern members opposed federal sanctions because they believed that prejudice stemmed from inferior education and that no step should be endorsed that might retard the improvement of southern schools.~~ To cut off funds from communities that were blighted by ignorance, worried one member, was to remove "the very means of redemption." Morris Ernst, a liberal lawyer from New York, led the fight for federal sanctions against segregated schools; he held that the committee would look foolish if it endorsed "segregation plus a lot more money." Others agreed, including Sadie Alexander, a black lawyer from Philadelphia, who objected to permitting the South "to set a pattern for the entire United States." The most telling argument came from Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn of New York:

I am deeply disturbed by this notion that by putting more money and better teachers into a segregated school system in the South you will thereby take an appreciable step toward the eventual elimination of segregation. You won't. Children don't learn from books, but from the life they are living, and the basic truth of a Southern educational system lies not in what you teach but in the fact that the white child knows that the colored child isn't good enough to go to school with him, and I don't care how much money you put into it, so long as you tell a white child, merely by implication, that the Negro child can't sit next to him in school, you are licked.

Channing Tobias, a black social worker, pointed out that a recommendation for sanctions against segregated schools might well cause the defeat of the federal aid bill, but he believed that the time had come "to say what is really in our hearts on this question of segregation and be willing to take what comes." And those who worried that the Congress would never pass federal sanctions were rebuked by James Carey, an official of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Carey insisted that it was not the job of the committee to decide what was acceptable to the Congress, but to declare what was right: "If we could get a report and give it widespread publicity where people can see it, that this is the opinion of the people, of a cross section of the American society, it is the policy of the Federal Government, it goes way beyond what we expect to get even during the present Administration. . . . This represents our aspirations, and this is what we should seek." With an apologetic dissent from its two southern members,

the committee endorsed the principle that no federal aid should be given to racially segregated schools.²⁶

The second issue that split the committee was whether, in admissions to educational institutions, there should be an absolute ban on discrimination based on race, color, creed, or national origin. No one favored racial or religious discrimination, but John Dickey, president of Dartmouth College, contended that educational institutions should have the right to take race, religion, and social background into account in order to have a diverse student body; he was especially interested in keeping a balance among students from different religious backgrounds at Dartmouth. Members who were associated with denominational schools worried that an absolute ban might destroy the character of their institutions. However, the black and Jewish members of the committee resolutely defended an absolute ban for all but denominational schools, since it would be impossible to determine whether an institution had discriminated for reasons of diversity or for reasons of bigotry. The final report recommended laws "prohibiting discrimination in the admission and treatment of students based on race, color, creed, or national origin," exempting denominational schools. The report noted: "There is a substantial division within the committee on this recommendation. A majority favors it."²⁷

Even before the committee issued its report, President Truman dramatically asserted his own civil rights views in an address to the NAACP on June 29, 1947. He was the first president ever to accept an invitation to speak to the NAACP. The night before he spoke, he wrote his sister: "I've got to make a speech to the Society for the Advancement of Colored People tomorrow and I wish I didn't have to make it. Mrs. R. and Walter White, Wayne Morse, Senator from Oregon, & your brother are the speakers. . . . Mamma won't like what I have to say because I wind up quoting Old Abe. But I believe what I say and I am hopeful we may implement it." Whatever his inner qualms, Truman delivered a forthright pledge to make the federal government the defender of the "rights and equalities of all Americans. And when I say all Americans—I mean all Americans." He stated that "every citizen in a truly democratic society" should have "the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in the making of public decisions through the ballot, and the right to a fair trial in a fair court." Truman won praise from the NAACP, the black press, and metropolitan newspapers in the North, but he was roundly criticized by the press in the South and the West, especially for his statement that everyone has the "right" to a home, a job, education, and medical care. These, said his critics, are to be earned, not guaranteed by government.²⁸

Truman made civil rights the centerpiece of his 1948 state of the union address to Congress. "Our first goal," he held, "is to secure fully the essential human rights of our citizens." He condemned the fact "that some of our citizens are still denied equal opportunity for education, for jobs and for economic advancement, and for the expression of their views at the polls. Most serious of all, some are denied equal protection under the laws. Whether discrimination is based on race, or creed, or color, or land of origin, it is utterly contrary to American ideals of democracy." Less than a month later, on February 2, 1948, Truman sent the Congress a special message on civil rights, incorporating the recommendations of his Committee on Civil Rights.²⁹

The president's advocacy of civil rights infuriated southern politicians. Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi predicted that the South would withhold its votes in the presidential election and throw the election to the House of Representatives, where "a southern man would emerge as president." Others threatened to filibuster against the president's proposals. Southerners showed their contempt for Truman by walking out of the Democratic convention in 1948 and endorsing Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina as the "Dixiecrat" candidate for president. At the same time, the left wing of the Democratic party, irked by Truman's firm stand against Soviet expansionism in Europe, abandoned him to support Henry Wallace, the former vice-president, as the candidate of the Progressive party. Though Truman eked out a victory in 1948 against Republican Thomas Dewey, no one might reasonably have predicted that alienating both the right and the left wing of the party was a prescient political strategy.³⁰

Each year, in his State of the Union message, Truman proposed a civil rights program, and each year the southern-dominated Congress quietly killed it. But there were things he could do without the Congress. On July 26, 1948, he issued an executive order ending racial segregation in the armed forces and banning discrimination in federal employment. The Federal Housing Administration was directed to drop its ban on insuring homes in racially mixed neighborhoods. And Truman's Justice Department established a significant precedent by filing an amicus brief in the Supreme Court supporting the NAACP's attack on racially restrictive covenants in housing.³¹

Through the work of the Committee on Civil Rights and by his own willingness to take a stand, President Truman set in motion a process of public education. In the struggle to resolve "the American dilemma," the contradiction between ideals and practices, the first requirement was to make the public aware of the dilemma. This was the tack of the Committee

on Civil Rights. The value of its work—and of the president's doomed proposals—was to give legitimacy and encouragement to the growing movement for civil rights. Segregationists claimed that the nascent civil rights movement was led by agitators and Communists; the president of the United States said that its goals embodied the highest aspirations of the Constitution. In the decades ahead, events moved so quickly and public opinion shifted so decisively that the views of Truman and his Committee on Civil Rights came to sound commonplace, when in fact they had been uncommonly courageous.

When the war ended, the NEA had many reasons to feel hopeful about the prospects for federal aid to education. For one thing, there was wide recognition that many of the nation's elementary and secondary schools were in dire straits; the teacher shortage was a national problem, and many districts had exhausted their taxing powers. For another, President Truman was the first chief executive to support it. And then, the race issue, which had killed federal aid in 1944, was neutralized since the NAACP was willing to go along with the principle of fair apportionment of federal funds to white and black schools. But most important, Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, ranking Republican on the Senate Education and Labor Committee and one of the leaders of the conservative wing of the Republican party, switched sides. Taft's recruitment to the cause of federal aid to education was a significant coup for the education lobby. He had been instrumental in defeating federal aid during the war, and his change of heart surprised friend and foe alike. Though he was an outspoken critic of the New Deal and of big government, Taft became persuaded—after private meetings with NEA spokesmen—that federal aid to education was necessary. Several years later, when he was asked why he was so "conservative" in some areas and yet so "liberal" in support of federal aid to education, Taft explained that children "were entitled, not as a matter of privilege but as a matter of right, to a decent roof, decent meals, decent medical care and a decent place in which to go to school. The rest, as they grow older, was up to them." And, he added, "Education is socialistic anyway, and has been for a hundred and fifty years."³²

With Taft enlisted, the leaders of the NEA renewed their campaign for federal aid. They knew they could count on the backing of a broad spectrum of civic, professional, religious, and social welfare organizations. The NAACP was prepared to support federal aid so long as it guaranteed an "equitable" distribution of funds between white and black schools in the South. Southern congressmen, whose schools were the poorest in the nation, could be counted on so long as prospective legislation offered no

threat to racial segregation or to the states' control and distribution of their own school funds. Southerners had another reason to press for federal aid: beginning in 1938, federal courts began to require equalization of the salaries of black and white teachers and of facilities in segregated districts. The implications of the trend were clear, and southerners realized that equalization had to move faster in order to ward off new challenges to their separate-and-still-unequal school systems.

The only serious problem for the education lobby was the religious issue. The NEA was a public school organization, and it traditionally opposed the granting of any federal funds to nonpublic schools; in this position it was supported by some important allies, particularly by Protestant and Jewish groups that rejected any compromise of the principle of separation of church and state. But this posture was deeply offensive to Catholics, who opposed the passage of any federal assistance program that excluded children in nonpublic schools. To exclude their children, Catholics argued, would discriminate against them solely on religious grounds, would penalize them for exercising their religious freedom, and would deny Catholics benefits for which they were taxed. Until the mid-1930s, Catholics had resolutely opposed any federal aid to education; they feared that it would inevitably lead to federal control of education, to centralized efforts to homogenize the schools, and to the destruction of Catholic schools. However, by the mid-1940s, Catholic schools had participated beneficially in the New Deal's National Youth Administration, the federal school lunch program, and the GI Bill. These experiences made them willing to support federal aid to education if it included a fair share for Catholic schools. To the extent that benefits were available to public school children, argued Catholic spokesmen, they should be equally available to children in nonpublic schools.

The major opposition to federal aid legislation came from business and industrial groups, led by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. The chamber insisted that the financing and control of education should remain at the state and local level. In part the chamber was concerned about economy, but principally it objected to federal involvement in education. The most zealous opponents of federal aid were ultraconservative groups like the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), which believed that federal aid would destroy local initiative and traditional values by empowering a centralized bureaucracy. While the DAR never faltered in its stand, the Chamber of Commerce went through a brief period of irresolution after the war because of the national teacher shortage. Also fearful of federal control, the National Association of Manufacturers consistently opposed federal aid, but other groups wavered: the American Legion and

the American Farm Bureau Federation supported federal aid until the early 1950s, when they switched to the opposition.

Since at least the early 1940s, federal aid to education had the potential to command a majority of Congress. Those who opposed federal aid on principle were a minority, but those who supported it on principle were persistently divided among themselves. The religious issue, and to a lesser extent the racial issue, kept supporters of federal aid at odds with each other. By the time the war ended, the devastating effects of the teacher shortage and the glaring inequalities among schools were documented in thousands of pages of testimony. Every new congressional hearing brought forth many of the same witnesses and, frequently, the same recitation of facts. The cause seemed to have reached a stalemate, and even President Truman's support was not enough to move it forward. Though Truman was committed to federal aid, it was but one of many issues before him; he never authorized the preparation of an administration bill nor threw his support to any bill in particular nor made any effort to produce a compromise among the interested groups. It was only when Taft took over the leadership of the fight for federal aid in the Senate that new life was breathed into the campaign.

With Taft in charge, the federal aid to education movement became binpartisan, and even more important, gained skilled leadership and a legislative strategy. Taft's considerable skills went into the drafting of a new bill. To attract the votes of the "have" states, Taft provided a flat grant of five dollars per child in all states (but divided only among children in public schools); to defuse the religious issue, Taft permitted each state to decide whether to distribute federal funds to nonpublic schools; to resolve the racial issue, Taft included a provision for equitable distribution of funds as well as an amendment barring federal interference in segregation. In the compromises that were hammered out, no interest group emerged victorious, which made it possible for all of them to join behind the Taft bill, though grudgingly. The NEA approved the bill even though it included the possibility of limited public aid to nonpublic schools. The NAACP endorsed the bill, while complaining that southern states could not be trusted to distribute federal funds fairly. Catholics were unhappy about the very limited concessions to their interests, but they did not oppose the bill. Introduced in 1946, the Taft bill emerged from committee in 1947 and was finally passed by the Senate on April 1, 1948, by a vote of 58 to 22. It was the first time in sixty years that the Senate had approved general federal aid to education.³³

Unfortunately, there was no advocate of federal aid in the House of Representatives with the stature of Robert Taft. Aside from his talents as

a legislator, Taft had the advantage of being a Republican leader in a Republican-controlled Senate. In the House, neither Republicans nor Democrats were committed to passing a bill, and the presidential campaign of 1948 created a new reason to defer action. The Republican candidate, Thomas Dewey, ignored the issue, and President Truman excoriated the "Do-Nothing" Eightieth Congress for failing to pass it. Consequently, the Republican majority in the House was in no mood to press for legislation that might appear to give the president a political victory.

Federal aid legislation was blocked not only by partisan politics but by the eruption of religious conflict. Taft's compromise—to let each state decide whether to grant public funds to nonpublic schools—had satisfied the Senate but it was a tenuous compromise. A Supreme Court decision in 1947 made it increasingly difficult to find a middle ground between those who favored public funds for nonpublic schools and those who absolutely opposed it.

The township of Ewing, New Jersey, reimbursed parents for the cost of school bus transportation, regardless of whether their children went to public or Catholic schools. A taxpayer had sued, claiming that it was unconstitutional to use public funds on behalf of church schools. In early 1947, the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that the town's policy was constitutional. Speaking for the majority, Justice Hugo Black held that the state subsidy for school bus transportation was comparable to providing

such general government services as ordinary police and fire protection, connections for sewage disposal, public highways and sidewalks. Of course, cutting off church schools from these services . . . would make it far more difficult for the schools to operate. But such is obviously not the purpose of the First Amendment. That Amendment requires the state to be a neutral in its relations with groups of religious believers and nonbelievers; it does not require the state to be their adversary. State power is no more to be used so as to handicap religions than it is to favor them.

In an apparent effort to quell the fears of those who might see the decision as a dangerous precedent, Black stated, "The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approve the slightest breach. New Jersey has not breached it here."³⁴

The four dissenting justices maintained that the purpose of the First Amendment had been "to create a complete and permanent separation of the spheres of religious activity and civil authority by comprehensively forbidding every form of public aid or support for religion." They held that "Payment of transportation is no more, nor is it any the less essential to

education, whether religious or secular, than payment for tuitions, for teachers' salaries, for buildings, equipment and necessary materials." There was no legal discrimination against Catholic children by denying them transportation funds, they held, because all children had the same right to attend public school.

Known as the *Everson* decision, the Court's narrow ruling provoked cries of outrage from Protestant groups, which saw it as the first step toward full public support for parochial schools. In an editorial entitled "Now Will Protestants Awake?" the liberal Protestant *Christian Century* charged that Catholics were "using these apparently insignificant matters as the thin edge of the wedge which would ultimately crack open the Constitution and give the Church the privileged position in the United States which it professedly seeks." What was at stake, the editorialist warned, was nothing less than "the ultimate character of American culture and the destiny of Protestantism in this country." A Southern Baptist spokesman warned that "this ominous decision casts a shadow" that might in time "darken the torch of religious liberty in our beloved land." Other national Protestant leaders characterized the decision as a serious threat to the public schools and to religious liberty, called on their followers to resist new Catholic demands for public funds, and urged President Truman to recall his envoy to the Vatican. Their responses echoed nineteenth-century fears of a Catholic "plot" to dominate America.³⁵

Catholics interpreted the *Everson* decision to mean that their schools were ineligible to receive public funds for teachers or buildings, and they abandoned their demand for full and equal participation in any future federal aid. They did, however, insist on their right to public subsidies for auxiliary services such as transportation, nonreligious textbooks, and health services. The "child benefit" theory was that if the state provided textbooks or health services or some other benefit to children in public schools, it should provide the same benefit to all children, regardless of the school they attended, because the benefit went to the child, not the school, and served a public purpose. Although Catholics adjusted their goals to the limits set by the Supreme Court, they believed that the wall-of-separation argument was a cover for anti-Catholic pleading, since there were numerous examples of productive relationships between the federal government and nonpublic institutions, such as the GI Bill, the federal school lunch program, and federal aid to hospitals, in which federal funds were dispersed without discrimination between public and nonpublic recipients. The "child benefit" theory was the basis of not only the *Everson* decision, but also the *Cochran* decision of 1930, when the Supreme Court had approved a Louisiana law permitting the state to furnish nonreligious text-

books to children in parochial schools. By 1946, five states (Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oregon, and West Virginia) provided free textbooks to all children.³⁶

In a different climate, the *Everson* decision might have provided the basis for a compromise between the NEA and Catholics, which would have removed the major barrier to federal aid legislation. But the effect of the decision was to sharpen the polarization between Catholics and public school partisans. Catholics became convinced that there was no reason to accept legislation that gave them less than the Supreme Court approved. On the other side, the decision inflamed anti-Catholic opinion and unleashed a torrent of attacks on Catholic motives.

To prevent any further Catholic inroads on public funds, a new organization was established in January 1948: Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State (POAU). Its founders included prominent Protestant leaders, such as Dr. Louie D. Newton, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Reverend G. Bromley Oxnam, Bishop of the Methodist church for the New York area, and Dr. John A. Mackay, president of the Princeton Theological Seminary. POAU became a vehement opponent of any form of public aid to nonpublic schools; it treated the Catholics' demand for auxiliary services as a step toward "total support" of parochial schools and warned that the Roman Catholic church had made "ominous progress in its strategy of winning for itself a position of special privilege in relation to the state."³⁷

The temperature of the religious conflict was raised even higher as a result of several articles in the *Nation* by Paul Blanshard attacking the Catholic church. Blanshard acknowledged candidly "the tremendous revival" of anti-Catholic feeling in the United States, especially among liberals, which he attributed not to bigotry but to "a growing educational aggressiveness on the part of the [Catholic] hierarchy." Anti-Catholicism was spreading, he asserted, because of "the extension of bus transportation at public expense to pupils of parochial schools in nineteen states and the fight of various Catholic lobbies in Washington against any federal aid to education in which parochial schools do not share." In other words, Catholics were responsible for provoking bigotry by claiming the benefits approved by the Supreme Court in the *Everson* decision.³⁸

The central thesis of his articles, which ran in the fall of 1947 and the spring of 1948 (and which were then expanded into a book, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*), was that Catholic policies and Catholic power threatened American freedom. He criticized the church for its policies in medicine, morals, science, and education; its hierarchical organization; its undemocratic character; its sympathy for fascism; its censorship of books and

movies; and its efforts to impose on non-Catholics its views on divorce, birth control, and abortion. Though he tried to disassociate himself from traditional anti-Catholic nativism, he nonetheless criticized Catholic rituals and religious practices, such as clerical garb, celibacy, and the medievalism of Catholic ceremonies. He called Catholic schools "a system of segregated schools under costumed religious teachers" which cultivated "separatism and intolerance." He claimed that priests were encouraging their followers to procreate in order to gain numerical supremacy in America, and he warned that if Catholics became a majority, "the most striking and immediate result . . . would be the transfer of control of education, religion, and family relationships to the Catholic hierarchy." To rouse public opinion against any federal aid for nonpublic schools, Blanshard forecast that the "struggle between American democracy and the Catholic hierarchy depends upon the survival and expansion of the public school."³⁹

Blanshard's anti-Catholic polemic created a sensation. School officials in New York City and Newark, New Jersey, canceled their subscriptions to the *Nation*, which led to charges that the Catholic church was crushing freedom of the press. The New York City superintendent of schools, a Lutheran, contended that the schools should neither promote nor attack religion and that the New York schools had not violated the *Nation's* rights by not subscribing to it. A committee of more than a hundred prominent New Yorkers signed "An Appeal to Reason and Conscience in Defense of the Right of Freedom of Inquiry in the United States" to protest the removal of the *Nation* from school libraries, but the state commissioner of education defended the right of the local school board to "determine the periodicals to which it wished to subscribe." Meanwhile, the *Nation* printed an extra 50,000 copies of the Blanshard series to meet public demand, and Blanshard's book was a national best-seller for six months. Though some newspapers would not advertise it and some stores would not sell it, it eventually went through twenty-six printings and sold 240,000 hardcover copies.⁴⁰

In March, 1948, in the midst of the controversy over the Blanshard articles, the Supreme Court announced the *McCullum* decision, which offered yet another definition of the height of the wall separating church and state. In an 8-to-1 decision, the Court found that an Illinois law permitting released-time for religious instruction in public schools during regular school hours was unconstitutional. Justice Hugo Black declared for the majority (which included the Court's only Catholic member) that a public school system could not be used "to aid any or all religious faiths or sects in the dissemination of their doctrines and ideals."⁴¹

It was in this rancorous atmosphere that the Congress once again took up the question of federal aid to education. After the 1948 election, the chances for federal aid seemed better than ever. Truman had won the presidential election, and the Democratic party had gained control of both houses of Congress. In his 1949 State of the Union message, the president urged Congress to pass federal aid to education, though once again he avoided endorsing any particular bill. The Senate acted promptly to draw up legislation that was similar to the previous year's Taft bill, which had passed the Senate and stalled in the House.

Catholics tried to convince the Senate to incorporate the child-benefit theory of the *Everson* decision in its legislation. Baltimore's Archbishop Francis P. Keogh, chairman of the Department of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, testified: "All we want for our children are just the necessary services where they are now difficult to get—a textbook, a bus ride, some medical and dental aid. We don't want anyone to build our schools. We don't want a penny for the salaries of our teachers." The Senate responded by passing a separate health services bill, which provided \$35 million for medical and dental examinations for all children, as a companion measure to the general federal aid bill. Taft insisted that the federal aid bill should neither compel nor forbid the use of public funds for nonpublic schools; his view was that the issue should be fought out in the states, so that the states could maintain control of their schools without federal interference. The federal aid bill passed the Senate on May 5, 1949, by 58 to 15, with bipartisan support.⁴²

Now the focus shifted to the House Committee on Education and Labor, which was known as an ideological battleground. Because it handled labor issues, the committee attracted the extremes of both parties, the most conservative Republicans and the most liberal Democrats. It was a committee in which it was easy to provoke dissension but difficult to build consensus. On May 9, 1949, the chairman of the committee, John Lesinski, a pro-labor Democrat and Catholic from Detroit, assigned federal aid legislation to a subcommittee headed by Graham A. Barden, the second ranking Democrat on the committee, a conservative former schoolteacher from North Carolina, and a supporter of federal aid for public schools.

Although the Senate bill had been carefully drafted to satisfy a diverse coalition, Congressman Barden decided that it was unacceptable. The bill had strong language forbidding any federal agency from interfering in local schools, but Barden insisted that it was not strong enough: "I have taken part in the authorization of appropriations and the passing of laws and thought I knew what I was doing, and then spent the rest of my time crawling on my knees to some administrator, please, won't he please, do

what we had in mind when we passed it. . . . Now, that is why we are afraid to let them get their hooks, so to speak, in our school system." He explained that "there are some features in the Senate bill so objectionable to me that I could not find myself going over to it. I am not going to accept it; that's all." One feature that was particularly objectionable to Barden was the Taft bill's laissez-faire attitude toward public funding of nonpublic schools. When a spokesman from the National Catholic Welfare Conference appeared before his committee, Barden told him, "I am just as far in one direction as you can possibly be in the other. So we could not get together." During three weeks of hearings, Barden scuttled the Senate bill and pushed his own bill to the fore. The Barden bill differed from the Senate bill in three important respects: it limited federal funding solely to public schools, it expressly barred federal expenditures for transportation and health services, and it removed the language that required southern states to make a "just and equitable" distribution of funds between white and black schools. On July 7, 1949, the Barden subcommittee reported the Barden bill to the full committee.⁴³

The emergence of the Barden bill as the center of attention shattered the fragile consensus that Taft had carefully constructed between the partisans of public and nonpublic schools. The public school coalition got everything it wanted, and the Catholics were cut out altogether. Instead of holding out for the Senate bill, which had a good chance of passing because of its minimal concessions to Catholic interests, the NEA quickly embraced the Barden bill and urged its members to support it. The Barden bill was acclaimed by leading educators, by POAU, and by numerous organizations representing Protestants, Jews, veterans, and civic groups; the education editor of the *New York Times* testified before Barden's subcommittee that the bill was "the best thing . . . that has ever come out in the halls of Congress in 30 years in an effort to bring about a Federal measure."⁴⁴

Predictably, Catholics were outraged. They had reluctantly abandoned their claim to participate fully in any federal aid program, and now the Barden bill denied them even auxiliary services. An official of the National Catholic Welfare Conference called it "the worst and most objectionable federal aid to education bill ever approved by any congressional committee." Barden was sharply attacked by Francis Cardinal Spellman, the archbishop of New York, on June 19, 1949, at a meeting of fifteen thousand Catholics. Spellman received first-page treatment when he denounced Barden as a "new apostle of bigotry," called his supporters "disciples of discrimination," and accused them of venting "venom upon children" in "a sin shocking as it is incomprehensible." Advocates of the

Barden bill, said Spellman, were "conducting a craven crusade of religious prejudice against Catholic children" by advancing an "irrational, un-American, discriminatory thesis that the public school is the only truly American school." The archbishop declared, "We must oppose any bill that fails to guarantee at least non-religious textbooks, bus rides and health services for all the children of all Americans." On the following Sunday, the Barden bill was attacked in Catholic churches throughout the country, and Catholics were urged to write their congressmen. The Catholic press inveighed against the Barden bill, and congressional offices received an "avalanche of letters and telegrams from angry Catholic voters."⁴⁵

John Lesinski, the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, was not happy with the Barden bill. On June 27, he declared that the bill was "anti-Catholic and anti-Negro. It is my opinion that he drew it up purposely because he did not want any aid to education and wanted to kill it." Lesinski was supported by John W. McCormack, majority leader of the House, who called the Barden bill "grossly unfair" to Catholics and Negroes. Barden insisted that the real issue was his prohibition against public funds for nonpublic schools, because his bill provided equal spending for all pupils, without regard to their race, and he implied that his critics were acting on behalf of the Catholic hierarchy. Lesinski refused to convene a meeting of the full committee to consider the Barden bill and vowed that "as long as I have the breath to prevent it, the Barden bill will never come out."⁴⁶

Any chance of moderating the rising level of religious animosity was dashed by a public controversy between Cardinal Spellman and Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the summer of 1949. The Spellman-Roosevelt exchange was one of those public events that serves as a symbolic vehicle for large political issues, in this instance dramatizing the depth of hostility and misunderstanding between Catholics and liberals. In his June attack on Congressman Barden, Cardinal Spellman had already expressed his bitter opposition to the Barden bill and its supporters, especially to those liberals who posed "as angels of light and liberty" while crusading against the rights of Catholic children. Mrs. Roosevelt, a revered figure among American liberals, had not hesitated to disagree with Catholic leaders in the past. According to Joseph P. Lash, her biographer,

the leaders of the Catholic church responsible for its political interests had long been unhappy about Mrs. Roosevelt. Her friendliness toward Loyalist Spain in the thirties, her support, even though discreet, of birth control, her sponsorship of the American Youth Congress and other organizations in which the Communists had been heavily represented had vexed the clergy to

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

the point of public expression of its displeasure even while she was First Lady. She, on her side, had become increasingly concerned over the growth in temporal power of an institution that she felt was aggressively conservative in social and political matters

In 1948, she had incurred the displeasure of Catholic leaders when she joined the protest against the banning of the *Nation* from the New York City schools. Mrs. Roosevelt believed that Cardinal Spellman and his associates were particularly angry because she had been instrumental in maintaining the diplomatic isolation of Franco Spain at the United Nations.⁴⁷

On June 23, 1949, four days after Cardinal Spellman's denunciation of the Barden bill, Mrs. Roosevelt disagreed with the cardinal in her column in the *New York World Telegram*. She wrote:

The controversy brought about by the request made by Francis Cardinal Spellman that Catholic schools should share in Federal aid funds forces upon the citizens of the country the kind of decision that is going to be very difficult to make.

Those of us who believe in the right of any human being to belong to whatever church he sees fit, and to worship God in his own way, cannot be accused of prejudice when we do not want to see public education connected with religious control of the schools, which are paid for by taxpayers' money.

Private schools, she believed, should receive "no tax funds of any kind." After receiving several letters accusing her of anti-Catholic bias, Mrs. Roosevelt reiterated her views in another column on July 8. Many of her correspondents apparently assumed that she was endorsing the Barden bill, which coincided with her own position, for in a third column, published on July 15, Mrs. Roosevelt noted, "I have not read the [Barden] bill carefully, and I have been rather careful not to say if I am for or against any particular bill or bills."⁴⁸

On July 21, Cardinal Spellman sent to the press and to Mrs. Roosevelt a vitriolic attack on the views of the former first lady. The cardinal accused Mrs. Roosevelt of allying herself with Congressman Barden and of condemning Spellman "for defending Catholic children against those who would deny them their constitutional rights of equality with other American children." Spellman declared, "You could have acted only from misinformation, ignorance or prejudice, not from knowledge and understanding!" He too, he said, opposed religious control of tax-supported schools. But, he insisted, "If the Federal Government provides a bottle of milk to each child in a public school it should provide milk for all school children. I believe that if Federal funds are used to transport children to public

Postwar Initiatives

schools they should be used to transport parochial school children. I believe if through the use of Federal funds the children who attend public schools are immunized from contagious diseases that all children should be protected from these diseases." He accused Mrs. Roosevelt of flagrant anti-Catholic bias. "Why," he asked, "do you repeatedly plead causes that are anti-Catholic?" He warned Mrs. Roosevelt that

even though you may again use your column to attack me and again accuse me of starting a controversy, I shall not again publicly acknowledge you.

For, whatever you may say in the future, your record of anti-Catholicism stands for all to see—a record which you yourself wrote on the pages of history which cannot be recalled—documents of discrimination unworthy of an American mother!⁴⁹

Mrs. Roosevelt responded to the cardinal, denying any religious bigotry and restating her opposition to public funding of nonpublic schools. In closing her letter, she said, "I assure you that I have no sense of being 'an unworthy American mother.' The final judgment, my dear Cardinal Spellman, of the worthiness of all human beings is in the hands of God."⁵⁰

The exchange of letters was front-page news across the nation. Four thousand letters were sent to Mrs. Roosevelt and 90 percent of them were favorable. Mrs. Roosevelt was defended by editorials in large metropolitan newspapers, by Protestant and Jewish leaders, and by organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union; she was defended also by some Catholics who agreed with her views and by some who were embarrassed by the vituperative language used by the cardinal. Although Mrs. Roosevelt was told by a Washington journalist that she had been "attacked by Catholic priests in pulpits here last Sunday, so it is Church policy," Cardinal Spellman attracted few supporters. In the court of public opinion, Mrs. Roosevelt was a clear winner, largely because Cardinal Spellman blundered in turning legitimate Catholic grievances into a personal attack on Mrs. Roosevelt.⁵¹

The substantive issues were muddled by the controversy, for Mrs. Roosevelt was uninformed about the status of the federal aid legislation at the time she wrote her columns. She did not seem to realize that the Supreme Court had already approved the use of state funds for bus transportation and nonreligious textbooks, nor that there was a conflict within the Congress between the Senate bill and the Barden bill. In her columns, she erroneously implied that the Catholic church sought full public funding for its schools. In letters that Mrs. Roosevelt wrote during the summer of 1949, she expressed doubts about the true motives of Cardinal Spellman. She would not be surprised to learn, she wrote to a friend, "that the

Cardinal had had word from the Vatican and that the letter was partly written there. . . . The whole episode with Cardinal Spellman, as far as I am concerned, is only part of a much larger situation. I think they felt the time had come to form a Catholic party in this country and hoped it could be accomplished. It was a disappointment to them that it did not turn out quite the way they hoped." Like the POAU, Mrs. Roosevelt treated the Catholic appeal for auxiliary services as part of a long-range, foot-in-the-door strategy to win not only full public support of their schools, but political power on a national scale.⁵²

The public acrimony was brought to a close, at least rhetorically, when worried leaders of the New York Democratic party brought about a reconciliation. In early August, the cardinal called her and asked for her comments on a new statement of his views; a representative of the cardinal traveled to her home and together they worked on the text of the cardinal's statement and Mrs. Roosevelt's response. The cardinal restated his position that nonpublic schools should receive auxiliary services and said clearly that Catholics did not expect "general public support" or public funds for buildings or teachers. While he said nothing new, his tone was conciliatory, and Mrs. Roosevelt wrote that his statement was "clarifying and fair." A few weeks later, Cardinal Spellman paid a social call. In the days after her public reconciliation with Cardinal Spellman, Mrs. Roosevelt confided her continuing distrust of Catholic intentions in a letter to Agnes Meyer, a journalist, partisan of public school aid, and wife of the *Washington Post* publisher. Mrs. Roosevelt said, "I am more convinced than ever that they will never help us to get federal aid for education unless they think they are going to get it too for parochial schools." And she remained convinced that "auxiliary services" would never satisfy Catholic demands. According to Joseph P. Lash, she predicted "that the church would work to get as many states and as many Supreme Court decisions as possible upholding the constitutionality of state funds for parochial schools, 'and in the long run they are sure if it is constitutional for states, it may be declared constitutional for federal funds to be used not only for auxiliary services but for all services equally. Once that is done they control the schools, or at least a great part of them.'" ⁵³

While Mrs. Roosevelt, because of her great personal dignity, scored a clear triumph in the encounter, Cardinal Spellman forcefully made the point that the Barden bill was unacceptable to the Catholic church. The point was not wasted on John Lesinski, the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, who refused to convene the committee during the month of July. Under pressure from other committee members, Lesinski finally called a committee meeting on August 2, which promptly

turned into a debacle. The committee refused to vote on the Barden bill and voted down every other measure that was proposed. Federal aid to education was dead for 1949.

Federal aid proponents, having tried so hard for so many years, were not about to quit. With the opening of the 1950 session, hopes rose once again that the deadlock might be broken. Once again, President Truman called for passage of federal aid to education. Lesinski announced that the committee would begin in February to work out their differences and compose an acceptable measure. Catholics, who had previously asked for an allocation of 10 percent of the total federal funds for auxiliary services, moderated their position and stated that 2 percent would be acceptable to them. Another compromise acceptable to the Catholic leaders was offered by Representative John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts; he suggested passing the Senate bill with an amendment permitting federal subsidy of bus transportation for nonpublic school children, which was consistent with the Supreme Court's *Everson* decision. After meeting in closed session for a month, the committee voted not to report any bill until the president assured them that there would be no federal control of schools; their concern was prompted because the Federal Children's Bureau had published a pamphlet, "Your Child from Six to Twelve," in which one passage appeared to speak "slightingly" of home ownership and another passage dealt with sex education. Within a day, Truman responded with a vigorous assertion of opposition to federal control of schools: "When I say I am opposed to Federal control of schools, I mean I am opposed to control by any officer or department of the Federal Government, whether it be the United States Office of Education, the Federal Security Agency [predecessor to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] or any other bureau or official." With no further reason to delay, the committee prepared to vote. But on the very same day, Graham Barden publicly attacked Cardinal Spellman at a New York meeting of a group opposed to aid for parochial schools. Though the Spellman-Roosevelt controversy had been amicably settled eight months earlier, Barden used the occasion to brand Spellman "a cruel authoritarian" for having "attacked a great, noble American lady and mother." Barden recounted the abuse that had been heaped on him the previous year by Spellman and other Catholics and intoned, "Let there be no question as to who injected the religious issue into the Federal school aid problem." Given the timing of his remarks, there could be little doubt that Barden was using the occasion to rekindle the religious animosity that had killed federal aid in 1949. Barden shared the rostrum with Mrs. Roosevelt, who avoided any reference to personalities or to her confrontation with the cardinal. But Mrs. Roosevelt stated

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

her firm opposition to both the Senate bill, which permitted states to spend federal funds in accordance with their own state laws, and the Kennedy amendment, that would permit the use of federal funds for school bus transportation.⁵⁴

On the following day, March 7, the House Committee on Education and Labor voted down the Kennedy amendment, 16 to 9; it was defeated by an alliance of Republicans and the public school bloc. On March 14, 1950, the unamended Senate bill was brought to a vote and defeated 13 to 12 by a coalition of seven conservative Republicans and six Democrats; the six Democrats included two who opposed any aid whatsoever. And that was the end of federal aid to education in 1950. Seventeen of the twenty-five members of the House Committee on Education and Labor favored the principle of federal aid, but it proved to be impossible to compromise the differences among them, particularly the religious differences.

In May 1950, John Lesinski died and was replaced as chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor by Graham Barden. Predictably, Barden was objectionable to Catholics, organized labor, and blacks. Where federal aid to education was concerned, only the NEA was pleased, and his ascension to the leadership slot made the NEA less willing to consider any compromise on the issue of aid to nonpublic schools. Though Barden was the hero of the NEA and of many liberals and Protestants during the controversy over his bill in 1949, his record as committee chairman suggests that he was an inconstant champion. One study, published in 1962, notes that in his eight years as chairman, "Barden led the Committee in such a way as to create rather than resolve internal conflicts. Most of the time, he worked tirelessly to defeat federal aid legislation; and on the single occasion, in 1949, when he accepted a federal aid bill he did so on such restrictive and uncompromising grounds that he triggered the most acrimonious of all Committee conflicts."⁵⁵

During his tenure as committee chairman, Barden used "a skillful combination of formal prerogative, informal maneuver and personal talent" to block federal aid bills. According to his biographer, Barden believed that what he kept from happening was even more important than what he caused to happen; he liked to say that he "never knew the Republic to be endangered by a bill that was not passed." He decided after the contretemps over federal aid in 1949 "that the question of Federal aid to public schools is not as important to the future welfare and happiness of this nation as separation of church and state—and if it has reached the point that that is the choice, then my choice is already made." Like northern liberals and the public school lobby, Barden wanted federal aid, but not if it meant a penny

~~for nonpublic school children. His hard-line tactics, which were supported by the leadership of the education lobby, undoubtedly prevented the passage of federal aid in 1949, at a moment when its prospects were good.~~⁵⁶

A ground for compromise was always available, based on Supreme Court decisions. The Court had already ruled that nonreligious textbooks and bus transportation could be provided by the states to children in nonpublic schools, if they were already provided to children in public schools; very likely, this "child benefit" theory would have permitted government to provide all children with essential health and welfare services. Spokesmen for the Catholic church, after the *Everson* decision, continually reiterated their willingness to accept only auxiliary services, forsaking any claim to teachers' salaries and construction funds. But there was among the leadership of Protestants, liberals, and professional educators a deep distrust of the Catholic church that was stronger than their desire for federal aid to education. When Catholic educators talked about the right of parochial school children to immunizations, their critics reacted in terms of Franco, the Vatican, and the threat of a clerical state. If the Catholic leadership sometimes did a poor job of separating its spiritual activities from its political interests, so also did its critics fail to distinguish between their political grievances against the Catholic church and the legitimate claims of Catholic children.

It became an accepted axiom of the American political scene in the years between 1950 and 1965 that it was impossible to pass general federal aid to education. Truman's successor, the immensely popular Dwight D. Eisenhower, tried repeatedly to get the Congress to pass federal aid for school construction to ease the strains caused by the baby boom. But the moment had passed, and it was no longer possible to fashion a consensus. Not only was the religious issue an apparently immovable obstacle, but after the Supreme Court declared school segregation unconstitutional in 1954, the racial issue became another irreconcilable dispute. Blacks and liberals insisted that federal funds must not be allocated to racially segregated schools, and southern congressmen opposed any legislation that would meddle with their racially separate school systems.

When the campaign for general federal aid to education foundered in 1950, Congress fashioned a substitute measure that served as a sort of consolation prize for some of the rejected claimants. As prospects for the larger program faded, Congress approved a program of aid to "federally impacted areas," which updated a program enacted in 1940 to help districts whose schools were temporarily overcrowded by children of federal defense workers. The districts that became eligible in 1950 for this categorical assistance were concentrated in the South, where many defense installa-

THE TROUBLED CRUSADE

tions were located. It was supposed to offset the expenses of districts burdened by an influx of military personnel and their families, who used local schools without paying real estate taxes. Over the years, Congress redefined eligibility for impact aid to include ever larger numbers of districts across the nation, and the program survived into the 1980s as a covert version of federal aid, entirely untouched by the political controversies that blocked the passage of general federal aid to education.

By midcentury, many of the apparently settled questions in American education were open for debate. None was resolved, but the important fact was that the status quo was no longer secure. Major educational issues, previously considered the proper province of local school districts or of individual institutions of higher education, had begun to move into the arena of national politics, to be discussed by national commissions, congressional committees, federal courts, and the political parties. The change was an abrupt departure from the past, too abrupt perhaps to permit political consensus and decision making. Whatever the future might bring, the clear implication of the postwar years was that American education had become the object of a variety of campaigns and crusades to change it, to save it, to improve it, to use it for social and economic purposes. The collapse of the battle for federal aid was only one facet of the changing politics of education: the efforts of so many different interests to control or redirect educational institutions raised the stakes, increased the number of participants, and changed the nature of the issues. The question in educational controversies became not, what kind of curriculum or teaching is best? but more often than not, what kind of society will such an arrangement promote? As the tendency grew to think about educational issues as social problems, the issues themselves became national in scope, and educational institutions were often thrust into the center of major social conflicts, serving as a hostage or a prize for partisans in ideological and political disputes.

CHAPTER 2

The Rise and Fall of Progressive Education

DESPITE the objective problems of American schools in the immediate postwar years—the teacher shortage, the low salaries, the need for buildings, and the uncertainty of future funding—American educators took pride in the fact that they shared a common philosophy about the role and the purpose of the schools. They knew what they needed—more money—and they knew why—to educate all American youth. By the 1940s, the ideals and tenets of progressive education had become the dominant American pedagogy. If one were to judge by the publications of the U.S. Office of Education, the various state departments of education, city school boards, and professional education associations, as well as by the textbooks that were required reading in schools of education, progressive education was the conventional wisdom, the lingua franca of American educators. Whether progressive practices were equally commonplace is another issue, but there can be little doubt that the language and ideas of progressive education permeated public education.

The triumph of progressive education consisted largely in the fact that by the mid-1940s it was no longer referred to as progressive education but as “modern education,” the “new education,” or simply, “good educational practice.” The education profession’s view of itself, its history, and