
Jonathan Zimmerman

Pennsylvania’s statehouse, the journalist surmised, had “never witnessed such a sight.” Neither had he. Gazing across the galleries, he was astounded to find them packed—with women. Women! Women crowding the benches, women standing in doorways, and women “clustered in bunches of color in the narrow little aisles”—all awaiting news of Pennsylvania’s “scientific temperance” bill, which faced a final vote that afternoon. The bill would require all state public schools to provide instruction in “the nature and effects of alcoholic drinks and other narcotics.” Additionally, all new teachers would be required to pass an examination in the subject, which would have to be taught “as thoroughly as other required branches”—and schools that failed to comply with the legislation risked the loss of state education funds.

Following debate, the measure passed by an overwhelming margin. But the journalist’s report from the Pennsylvania statehouse on 31 March 1885 does not detail the lawmakers’ deliberations. Instead, the writer’s attention remained riveted on the unique configuration of spectators. “When Speaker Graham announced the final vote the gallery became white with waving handkerchiefs,” he wrote. “There wasn’t a sound, save when the members turning in their seats saw the fluttering signals of victory, and . . . burst into applause.”

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1 Amendment Herald (Pittsburgh), Apr. 1885, frame 110, roll 14, Temperance and Prohibition Papers, Ohio Historical Society (joint Ohio Historical Society–Michigan Historical Collections), Scientific Temperance Federation Series (hereafter STF Series).
As always, there was a great deal that the journalist did not report. He did not report—perhaps he did not know—why these members were applauding. In most of their districts, the women had established organizations that pushed for scientific temperance by “creating and focalizing public sentiment upon individual legislators,” in accordance with a published plan of action. The plan called for a mass meeting, a carriage, and a vote: the mass meeting would be held in each lawmaker’s hometown, the carriage would be hired to insure that he attended, and the vote would be tallied at the end of the meeting to insure that he understood. (“This vote,” the plan noted, “will seldom fail to be unanimous”—in favor of scientific temperance, of course.) Later, if the member went back on his word, another meeting might be held—and then another. “Remember at every step that this is a government of the people,” the plan advised, “and therefore reach the law maker through his people.” The women had complied; the plan had worked; and now the “law maker” applauded, fearful of the powerful new force that lurked behind those fluttering handkerchiefs.2

These women, then, were hardly the passive petitioners of the journalist’s fancy. Nor were their politics unique to Pennsylvania. Under the direction of Mary H. Hunt, the peripatetic “Queen of the Lobby,” women would use similar strategies to win compulsory Scientific Temperance Instruction (STI) in every state and territory in America by 1901. But legislative triumphs could not assure compliance within the schools, which routinely flouted state authority. Flooding school boards, offices, and classrooms on behalf of their new laws, STI women clashed, first, with this venerable tradition of localism and, then, with an ascendant cult of expertise. A small cadre of professionals gained control of the schools, eliminating virtually all lay challenges—except Scientific Temperance, which would continue to thrive throughout the Progressive Era.

Indeed, STI would continue, into the present, to underscore the promise and the problems of democratic education in America. Schools in the United States remain dominated by a closed circle of experts, subject only to scattered, sporadic outside pressure. Yet a healthy democracy requires an ongoing, broad-gauged conversation about “individualism” and “community”—about, that is, the rights and the duties of its citizens. Educational policy would seem uniquely suited for such a dialog because schools represent our central public mechanism of social reproduction.

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"Reproduction" need not imply "repression." A genuinely democratic education would allow Americans to debate and transmit consensual values while protecting vital individual liberties. Admittedly, this definition implies a tolerance that would have puzzled most STI women. Tearing a swath through turn-of-the-century schools and legislatures, Mary Hunt and her supporters did not pause to deliberate the rights of dissenters. As the STI experience suggests, however, even citizens who endeavor to restrict conversation may—in practice—enhance it. Unlike the subsequent anti-evolution crusade, Scientific Temperance would engage hundreds of thousands of Americans in a compelling dialog about their schools and their society—without "compelling belief" in anyone.3

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"It is not too much to say that the school boards of the country . . . are in a state of siege at the hands of the mothers." Confidence cascaded off the pages of Mary Hunt's 1880 report. Chosen the previous year to chair the "temperance text-books" committee of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Hunt had called on each local WCTU to select "two or more persons" who would visit their school board to demand that these texts enter the "regular course of study." From Maine to Indiana, women held "mass meetings," petition drives, and teacher institutes—then converged upon school boards to press their case. Dozens of towns had already adopted the books, buckling under this barrage of matronly might. Others were sure to follow.4

But Hunt's hopes proved premature, forcing a shift in strategy. Just a year later, the WCTU would resolve to seek compulsory temperance education laws in state legislatures. School boards, it seems, were not as

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pliant as Hunt had pictured. “[W]e have found our Gilbraltar in the
district board,” complained a Michigan woman. “These gentlemen are
respectful to the voting and tax-paying power that elects them . . . and
in them a solid wall has been found, especially in the cities.” Yet Michigan
was among the handful of states where women could vote in school
board elections—and remove recalcitrant board members, according to
Hunt’s original plan. The plan flopped. “[A] very small percentage of
the women qualified themselves under the provisions of this [school
suffrage] act,” recalled the Vermont WCTU president. “Two years of
trial proved that we needed to raise temperance from a permissive to a
regular study in the schools.” In other words, school suffrage would
never guarantee STI; a statewide, statehouse strategy was needed. After
several early setbacks in New York—which had also instituted school
suffrage—Hunt discarded the election effort and shifted to legislative
lobbying, recruiting local women to organize and “focalize” pressure on
their representatives.5 It worked. In 1884, New York passed its first STI
law.6

In the case of Hunt and STI, then, women’s resistance to suffrage
in the 1880s stemmed not from a lingering “conservatism” or ingrained
passivity (as several scholars have implied)7 but from a well-founded
distrust of electoral processes.8 The grim fate of state constitutional pro-

5 Minutes of the Eighth Convention of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance
Union (Brooklyn, 1881), 41; Address of Mrs. M. L. Lathrop, quoted in “M. B. W.,” “Tenth
Annual Convention of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Michigan, Held at
Adrian, May 23, 24, 25, 26, 27,” Union Signal, 7 June 1883; J. C. Perkins, “History of
Scientific Temperance Instruction in Vermont,” frame 646, roll 14, STF Series. By 1890,
nineteen states had granted some form of “school suffrage” to women. See National
American Woman Suffrage Association, Victory, How Women Won It: A Centennial
Symposium, 1840–1940 (New York, 1940), 165.

6 The New York law was the linchpin of Hunt’s regional strategy, which initially
targeted large eastern states. The Midwest—site of the original WCTU “Crusade”—lagged
slightly behind the East in embracing STI. Slowest of all was the South: nine of the fourteen
states still resisting STI in 1890 hailed from Dixie.

7 Ruth Bordin describes the WCTU as a bridge between “conservative” American
women and more “radical” suffragists; similarly, Barbara Epstein describes the Union as
a temporary way station on the road from domesticity to feminism. Bordin, Woman and
Temperance, 158; Barbara Leslie Epstein, The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism,
and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America (Middletown, Conn., 1981), ch. 5. See
also Janet Giele Zollinger, “Social Change in the Feminine Role: A Comparison of Woman’s
Suffrage and Woman’s Temperance, 1870–1920” (Ph.D. diss., Radcliffe College, 1961);
Ross Evans Paulson, Women’s Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality
and Social Control (Glenview, Ill., 1973). But see also Jack S. Blocker, Jr., “Give to the
Winds Thy Fears”: The Women’s Temperance Crusade, 1873–1874 (Westport, Conn.,
1985), ch. 5; Naomi Rosenthal et al., “Social Movements and Network Analysis: A Case
Study of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Reform in New York State,” American Journal of

8 Hunt continued to encourage women to vote in school elections. Like many other
hibition during the same era merely confirmed these suspicions. Voters defeated twelve of the twenty prohibition referenda held during the decade—and states often failed to enforce the amendments that passed. Surveying the wreckage, Hunt drew a clear and unequivocal lesson. Since “a government of the people cannot compel majorities,” she wrote, voters “must first be convinced that alcohol and kindred narcotics are by nature outlaws, before they will outlaw them.” Here, of course, Hunt joined a debate between persuasion and coercion—“moral suasion” versus “legal suasion”—that had racked temperance and other American reform movements throughout the nineteenth century. Legal suasionists had won a series of smashing victories—the so-called “Maine Laws”—in the early 1850s, only to see state after state repeal prohibition as attention shifted to sectional rivalries and war. Some historians describe a “paradoxical heightening” of prohibition support in the wake of the Maine Law debacle, while others document a renewed appreciation for moral suasion and a skepticism of law. The vast appeal of STI derived, in part, from its ability to bridge these dual streams of temperance sentiment. Simultaneously coercive and persuasive, an STI law used legal suasion by adults to institutionalize moral suasion of the young.

Additionally, of course, STI’s appeal lay in the gender of its advocates. In a landmark article, Paula Baker showed how widening male suffrage and partisanship during the Age of Jackson hinged upon a “domestication” of women, whose “separate sphere” became a symbolic repository for the republican virtues that the tumultuous, competitive world of male politics had jettisoned. More recently, Lori Ginzberg has argued that the rhetoric of separate spheres (among both antebellum actors and their current chroniclers) masks the widespread incursions by WCTU members, however, she “doubted the expediency” of a suffrage-centered strategy. In states where women had won a limited vote, intimidation and red tape often discouraged them from exercising it. Mary H. Hunt, Plan of Work of the Scientific Department of the National and International Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (Boston, 1888), 48; Vermont Chronicle, 9 May 1884, quoted in Deborah P. Clifford, “The Drive for Women’s Municipal Suffrage in Vermont, 1883–1917,” Vermont History 47 (Summer 1979): 179; Carolyn De Swarte Gifford and June O. Underwood, “Intertwined Ribbons: The Equal Suffrage Association and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union” (paper delivered at conference on “The Female Sphere: The Dynamics of Women Together in Nineteenth Century America,” New Harmony, Ind., 8–10 Oct. 1981), 27, 31. On “expediency” in the woman’s suffrage movement, see Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920 (New York, 1965).

*Jack S. Blocker, Jr., American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform (Boston, 1989), 88, 91; Mary H. Hunt, A History of the First Decade of the Department of Scientific Temperance Instruction in Schools and Colleges (Boston, 1892), v. For an account stressing legal suasion after the 1850s, see Ian Tyrrell, “Women and Temperance in Antebellum America, 1830–1860,” Civil War History 28 (June 1982): 141–42; for an account emphasizing moral suasion during the same era, see Blocker, Give to the Winds, 171–72.
women into this purportedly male political realm. Women eagerly participated in every dimension of the early nineteenth-century "Benevolent Empire," including fund-raising, teaching, and petitioning. They clothed their achievements in paeans to "purity," which merely obscured the extent to which their actual activity mirrored their male counterparts. Hunt and her STI minions extended this elaborate charade, reinforcing the equally resilient fiction that schools—and school actors—were "above politics." To evince such impartiality, Hunt's Progressive critics would cite their new skills and credentials; Hunt, by contrast, would invoke the much older tradition of female virtue. "That there are women who make the platform a means to gratify selfish ambition, no one denies, just as there are such men," Hunt admitted, "but as everyone acknowledges woman's moral nature to be purer than man's, than by just so much, do we claim there are fewer such women than men." This revamped gender imagery allowed women to influence legislatures in ways that even men could not. In New York, which had recently barred lobbyists from the floor of the state capitol, Hunt ambled past the guards and "lobbied indefatigably," as an astounded newspaperman noted.10

Finally, Hunt's legislative strategy also echoed the centralizing idiom of the American common school movement. Feuding with a tenacious tradition of local control, antebellum schoolmen like Horace Mann contemplated—but never consummated—state consolidation and regulation of public education. The systems they imagined would not proliferate until after Reconstruction, when most of America—a polity of "courts and parties"—witnessed a dramatic decline of governmental presence and power. But school bureaucracies boomed, as the vast majority of states enacted constitutional or statutory provisions for state and county school superintendents, school taxes, compulsory attendance, teacher institutes, and so on. Yet this growth—like its modest antebellum antecedents—proceeded in staccato rhythm, with large-scale administrative buildups punctuated by occasional contractions. Moreover, the new systems failed to achieve the authority that Mann had craved. Localities

continued to ignore state statutes and to mock state schoolmen, who faced the unenviable task of executing provisions without enforceable penalties. They resorted to pretentious titles that aggravated their opposition—or to desperate pleas that accentuated their impotence.11 Resembling preachers more than bureaucrats, state educators took few other deliberate steps to enlist a suspicious public. For they still supposed that Americans shared “the same ethical system,” as Robert Wiebe writes; hence they sought “not to convince people but simply to rouse them.” After that, educators assumed, “like-minded legions across the land” would “translate their dream into practice.”12

Mary Hunt made no such assumption. Sharing educators’ penchant for state policy, Hunt and her minions added a new accent upon local politics. In place of the informal WCTU “text-book committee,” Hunt’s Department of Scientific Temperance Instruction spawned a vast women’s army of state, county, and local STI “superintendents” to establish and then enforce compulsory alcohol education. For superintendents at each level, Hunt designed a “plan of work” with step-by-step instructions for mobilizing a clientele on behalf of STI. Eschewing political parties, Hunt’s plans stressed direct, single-issue pressure on elected representatives through demonstrations, meetings, petitions, pamphlets, and letters. These plans explicitly presumed attitudinal differences between voters, especially between urban and rural Americans. “Only one-fifth of our population lives in cities,” Hunt’s 1883 plan emphasized. Hence “majorities . . . are in the rural districts,” which are “more easily reached and influenced for temperance” than are cities. “Work chiefly in the rural districts for temperance representatives and senators,” the plan concluded.13

By 1890, less than a decade after the legislative effort began, thirty-five of forty-four states had instituted some form of compulsory temperance education. Yet many school officials still resisted STI, maligning it as “a piece of weak sentimentality” that usurped local prerogative. “School examiners, school boards and school superintendents are, many of them, indifferent to the law—ignore it—and are not dismissed,” an Ohio STI worker complained. But “no law will enforce itself,” she added.


Fulfillment would demand the perpetual vigilance of STI superintendents, who continued to cajole stubborn schoolmen. "It is amusing when girls of some local unions go to the superintendents of schools," wrote a Virginia woman, "and when these worthies will not come to terms, to hear these girls say, 'But no matter what you think, the code of Virginia requires you to teach it.'" To prepare local STI workers for these negotiations, WCTUs across the country sponsored "mock school boards" where the state STI superintendent (or Hunt, if she could attend) fielded questions from women masquerading as irate board members. Additional advice came from Hunt's plans and editorials in the Union Signal, the WCTU's national organ. To sway a school official, "do not go prancing up to his gates on your hobby horse, aggressively demanding admittance," the Signal warned. "Remember also the exceeding sensitiveness [sic] to their own dignity which comes with a 'little brief authority.' The average school director is enveloped in it. . . . You must study your men. What will have great weight with one will have little with another."\textsuperscript{14}

Most importantly, Hunt urged, local superintendents must visit the schools in their districts to observe STI lessons, examinations, recitations, and textbooks. "It is our duty not to take the word of some school official," Hunt wrote, "but to visit the school and carefully and wisely ascertain for ourselves if the study is faithfully pursued by all pupils." In each of the twenty-three towns in Massachusetts's Hampshire County, for example, a woman selected by the local WCTU monitored the schools and reported to county STI superintendent H. A. Orcutt. Orcutt's 1889 records reveal that these local agents collected information on 292 schools, noting for each town the total number and grade level of students receiving STI, the nature of examinations, and the type of textbook (if any) in use. In regions too remote to support a WCTU, the state STI superintendent often recruited a local woman to inspect the schools: 30 such agents served in Maine, yielding a state total of 128 local superintendents even though Maine had only 98 WCTUs. By 1898, Pennsylvania would boast 774 superintendents, the largest statewide total; Wisconsin, meanwhile, won the distinction for the most new agents enlisted in that year, 34.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{15} Mary H. Hunt, "Scientific Temperance Instruction," Union Signal, 9 Jan. 1890; Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Pathfinder, 19–21; Hunt, History of Scientific Temperance Instruction, 58, 53.
"Correspondence Room" in Mary Hunt's Boston home, which also served as the national headquarters for the Scientific Temperance movement. From Mary H. Hunt, *An Epoch of the Nineteenth Century* (Boston, 1897), 47. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The "Scientific Temperance Museum," also part of Mary Hunt's national headquarters, featured WCTU-sponsored textbooks, copies of state STI laws, and pens that governors had used to sign these measures. From Hunt, *Epoch of Nineteenth Century*, 27. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.
Within many of the schools that these women visited, a different bureaucratic transformation was under way. Enjoying greater influence than their counterparts atop state systems, city school superintendents had devised standardized structures—grade divisions, sequential curricula, and uniform examinations—to classify students and teachers along a single spectrum. In the same spirit, meanwhile, new draconian codes of behavior required students quite literally to toe the line. “The pupil must have his lessons ready at the appointed time, must rise at the tap of the bell, move to the line, return; in short, go through all the evolutions with equal precision,” wrote William T. Harris, chief publicist for these innovations. Finally, local school boards issued complex employee regulations, including a “delineation of duties” for each position. Yet nascent school bureaucracies were hounded from infancy by a nagging antibureaucratic critique, which skewered the very standardization that Harris celebrated. In Massachusetts, for example, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., and other opponents likened the new school systems to prisons and their advocates to “drill sergeants,” whose rigid rules and dictatorial demeanor insulated schools from lay control. As Michael B. Katz has shown, patrician critics like Adams pinned their hopes for reform on their own personal initiative—on “charisma,” the Weberian antithesis of bureaucracy. A quixotic St. George confronts the bureaucratic dragon; but in Katz’s saga, the dragon slays St. George. Thereafter, it rebuffs every challenger in its path. “As the organization of urban education became more complex,” Katz concludes, “laymen had progressively less power to influence school policy.”

Yet STI laymen—or laywomen, we should say—could influence school policy, by mimicking the multi-tiered structure that the schoolmen sought to impose. Like Katz, Hunt recognized that charisma alone could never check bureaucracy. Only bureaucracy could check bureaucracy. Yet STI and the “One Best System” of schools embodied different types of bureaucracy. Scientific Temperance’s success sprang not just from its comprehensive structure but from its decentralized mode of operation. Vesting authority in each superintendent rather than in the “National Office,” STI fostered an internal democracy that belied contemporary

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paeans to Hunt's "army." But it worked. In the ensuing battle surrounding Progressive education, a movement of experts devoted to curbing "lay influence" in schools, STI's women warriors would continue to hold down the fort—and to wield "influence," against all odds, in American schools.

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"I should as soon think of talking about the democratization of the treatment of appendicitis [as] the democratization of schools." At the podium stood Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University and perhaps the most prominent spokesman for "Progressive" reform in educational administration. "The fundamental confusion is this: Democracy is a principle of government; the schools belong to the administration; and a democracy is as much entitled as a monarchy to have its business well done." The Merchant's Club of Chicago, Butler's audience at this 1906 affair, burst into applause. A decade earlier, he had spearheaded the successful drive to replace New York City's ward-based school trustees with a citywide board of mayoral appointees. Across urban America, a similar pattern of centralization emerged. Legislatures vested authority in small, cross-city boards, which selected superintendents to command streamlined new school systems. Quickly, the boards became blue-blood bastions. The new five-member Boston School Board boasted five "Harvard men"—a far cry from the riff-raff that had served previously, as a gleeful Charles W. Eliot noted. Yet the boards granted wide discretion and autonomy to their superintendents, who represented a new breed as well. Animated by a generic Protestantism that fused the American Republic to the Kingdom of God, earlier school leaders had spanned the nascent nation to promote common schools in His name. Progressive superintendents, by contrast, emulated engineers rather than evangelists; their watchwords were science and efficiency, not Scripture and enlightenment.

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These new superintendents retained the millennial optimism—the “moral earnestness and sense of mission”—of their predecessors. Yet they rejected the older vision of redemption via democratic participation. Progressive reformers outside the schools would struggle to reconcile this democratic ideal with government by experts, the pivot of their new bureaucratic politics. They seized upon interest groups, which would represent citizens indirectly via new functional units—and would coordinate with credentialed, professional administrators to construct a frictionless utopia. “These were the years,” concludes Richard McCormick, “when governments at every level began to take explicit account of clashing interests and to assume the responsibility for adjusting them through regulation, administration, and planning.”

Schools were the great exception. Educational reformers displayed the same devotion to expertise, of course—but without the corresponding commitment to group participation. Attacked as undemocratic, nervous Progressives in other municipal realms proclaimed a new harmony of science and society; but schoolmen like Butler pleaded guilty as charged, exulting in the unabashed elitism of their project. “The leaders of the intellectual life of the city will have to evolve a plan,” wrote Andrew S. Draper, superintendent of several school systems, “and the masses will have to be educated to its support.” Other Progressives, following McCormick’s prescription, might speak of “formally recognizing and adjusting group differences” among segments of the population; schoolmen would speak only of winning their compliance. Policy itself was usually pre-ordained by a tiny, inbred network of academics, foundation researchers, and superintendents that placed friends and students in offices, shaped state and federal legislation, and otherwise dominated American schools for the next half-century. This “Educational Trust” did not lack critics, of course; teacher leaders like Margaret Haley blasted its hierarchical organizational reforms, while dissident theorists like John Dewey and George Counts denounced the Trust’s mechanical, formalistic curricula. Yet even radicals who opposed the Trust’s “undemocratic” style of educational policy seemed to support—or at least accept—its undemocratic style of educational policy-making.

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21 Tyack and Hansot, Managers of Virtue, 204.
Several historians have recently sought to revise this insular image, claiming that a broad range of American citizens influenced school politics. Paul E. Peterson argues that foreign languages, vocational education, and other curricular changes represented attempts by public schools to compete with private institutions that already offered such novelties. Yet this "organizational imperative" reflects only the most indirect form of citizen "influence." Dissenting groups in Peterson's account did not organize large, permanent efforts to affect public schools, but instead withdrew into private enclaves. Decisions remained firmly in the hands of schoolmen, who clearly sought to lure dissenters but rarely faced serious challenges from them. In another pluralist account, William J. Reese depicts schools as "contested terrain" where business-backed bureaucrats faced off against "grass-roots, community-oriented" groups like parent associations. Rejecting the rigid, standardized formalism of Harris and other "administrative progressives," these citizens were instrumental in catapulting a new generation of schoolmen into power. Yet, thereafter, a "cooperative spirit" pervaded local activists, who routinely deferred to the school professionals they had anointed.22

Against this backdrop of expert hegemony, Scientific Temperance represented a stark aberration: an informed, involved "lay polity" that took on the Educational Trust—and won. But in the context of Progressive Era politics in general, STI represented an even greater aberration. At a time when successful private interest groups and public agencies (like urban schools) increasingly emulated "business principles" of corporate consolidation, STI retained a democratic, federated operation. The corporate model vested authority in a central office, which coordinated and directed all subordinate units; but STI's federated model allowed these units to retain their autonomy, granting central leaders advisory powers only. This federated system was no less "bureaucratic" than the corporate framework. Instead, it was a different kind of bureaucracy, patterned after nineteenth-century public institutions rather than twentieth-century private ones. Like the Progressives they chronicle, however, historians have been seduced by the "business model." Too blithely, they have assumed that all bureaucracies required corporate-type consolidation to achieve "efficiency" and "innovation"; otherwise they perish,

"The Queen of the Lobby"

consigned to the dustheap of organizational history. Yet STI shows that there was more than one road to bureaucratic bliss. It did not follow Robert Michels’s allegedly “iron law of oligarchy,” which claimed that even the most democratically spirited organizations will develop strict hierarchies—and will concentrate control at the top—in pursuit of their objectives. Without consolidating, STI blazed a wide trail across the American polity. Without sacrificing democracy, it achieved efficiency.23

The loose, federated design of the Department of Scientific Temperance Instruction paralleled STI’s parent, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. The women who framed the first WCTU constitution in 1874 explicitly structured it “after the manner of our national political divisions.” Each county president would serve as a vice-president of her district society, each district president as a vice-president of the state society, and each state president as a vice-president of the national WCTU. (In 1884, WCTU president Frances Willard would call on county societies to divide into local unions—“the only missing link in following out the political subdivisions that men have found convenient and desirable.”) Together with the national officers, the state presidents would comprise the “executive committee” of the WCTU’s annual convention, where each state was represented by a delegation varying in size according to its seats in Congress. Later, the Union would alter this system to make each delegation proportional to the paid WCTU membership in the state. Nevertheless, the WCTU retained and even broadened its territorial structure, consciously mimicking male political institutions as well as male political “subdivisions,” “The strength of the great parties is the perfection of their organization,” proclaimed Willard. “The power of our gov-

ernment is in the fact that from school district to Commonwealth it is mapped, grouped, and officered" [italics added].

Yet like political parties, the WCTU would establish functional as well as geographical offices to pursue its multifarious goals. "This is the age of experts and specialists," Willard declared in her 1880 presidential address. "We must find out what each woman who makes this cause her life-work can do best, then set her at that and see that she is taken care of." The convention proceeded to create twenty-one functional departments—including Scientific Temperance Instruction—and to elect superintendents, who were empowered "to originate, to advise and to direct plans of work relating to their several departments." Like all WCTU plans and policies, however, this organizational overhaul remained purely optional—never obligatory—at auxiliary levels. Each state, district, county, and local union retained the right to choose which nationally devised departments it would add to its own structure. Similarly, functional superintendents at each level—like presidents and other officers—would be selected by the auxiliary unions themselves, not by their departmental "superiors." Yet in practice, as we saw in the case of STI, superintendents were often recruited via departmental hierarchies. "No State Superintendent fulfills her whole duty unless she uses her best efforts to secure, in each county, a County Superintendent of her Department with whom she can work in harmony," a WCTU handbook admonished. "No County Superintendent fulfills her official obligations unless she steadily labors to secure in each local Union a Superintendent of her Department with whom she is in constant cooperation." Moreover, national plans instructed superintendents to heed departmental leaders outside their aux-

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24 Minutes of the First Convention of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Chicago, 1874), 32; Mary H. Hunt, "The Call for a New Army," School Physiology Journal 7 (Mar. 1898): 129; Bordin, Woman and Temperance, 26–27, 39; Frances Willard, Woman and Temperance; or, the Work and Works of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (New York, 1972; orig. 1883), 160–63; New York State Woman's Christian Temperance Union, W.C.T.U. Handbook, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1890), 4; Minutes of the Eleventh Convention of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Chicago, 1884), 62; Minutes of the Sixth Convention of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Cleveland, 1879), 65; Minutes of the Ninth Convention of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (Brooklyn, 1882), lixxiii–lxiv.


iliary unions rather than divisional leaders within them.28 Theoretically, then, a superintendent was caught in the classic bureaucratic bind of multiple masters: whereas functional superiors enlisted and instructed her, regional chapters confirmed her appointment and could veto her actions. Yet the absence of "clear lines of authority"—the hallmark of corporate-model bureaucracies—proved far more of a boon than a burden. It helped enhance STI morale and motivation. It helps explain STI strength and survival.

Here STI invites comparison with the Anti-Saloon League, the WCTU's stepson and the key organizational dynamo behind national prohibition. According to K. Austin Kerr, the ASL borrowed its nonpartisan strategy from the WCTU wing that opposed endorsement of the Prohibition party. (Hunt was a prominent spokeswoman for this wing, fearing that "the bitterness of political partisan differences" would stem STI's legislative successes.) Yet the ASL grafted a new corporate structure onto this old strategy, mimicking the "business model" of the modern firm by centralizing authority in a national office. A tight ring of managers formulated all major ASL policy, including the selection of state superintendents—who were moved like chessmen across the country, as the managers saw fit. "It is certain that any real influence from the rank and file is not within the contemplation of the League," wrote Peter Odegard, a contemporary observer. "To allow complete democracy would destroy the unity of purpose necessary, dissipate leadership and prevent quick, effective action. Much fruitless dissension is avoided by centralized control, and the League sacrifices democracy for effective leadership." Yet STI achieved "effective action" without sacrificing democracy. Its loose, federated structure lent it the range and flexibility to enforce its will—even in the face of a powerful assault from the Educational Trust.29

Like scientists who savaged Hunt and her "fanatical followers" for teaching inaccuracies about alcohol, educators grounded their critique of STI in the bedrock of Progressive authority: credentialed knowledge.30

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28 See, for example, E. G. Greene, Pathfinder for the Organization and Work of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (New York, 1884), 39, 41.
30 At the root of STI's dispute with scientists lay the question of whether alcohol should be classed as "food" or "poison." Hunt and her allies acknowledged laboratory evidence that the body oxidizes alcohol like other foods—but continued to insist that the addictive
Earlier schoolmen had phrased their objections in the language of localism, skewering STI laws as egregious encroachments upon community control. As in most nineteenth-century school controversies, the dispute had centered around the proper level of democratic rule: state, local, or somewhere in between. Progressive educators, by contrast, derided any democratic rule—at least in curricular questions that were best left to experts. “If my child had scarlet fever, it would be the height of folly for me to call in a physician and demand that he cure him by the use of cod liver oil,” a Massachusetts superintendent complained. “Those who have had little or no experience in dealing with children and who have studied neither pedagogy nor psychology should be content to leave the details and the method of achieving the desired result to those who have.”

At the heart of both these disciplines lay the new “child-study” movement, STI’s key academic antagonist. Rejecting William T. Harris’s emphasis upon uniform sequence, “child-study” stressed the natural virtues and especially the natural development of the individual student. Like the “muscular Christianity” that was sweeping American colleges, however, child-study celebrated a particular set of “manly” virtues—strength, energy, and courage—that schools had supposedly stifled by harping upon sin. Scientific Temperance epitomized this error, a school superintendent wrote, because it appeals “chiefly to fear” rather than “to manliness and the moral nature” within each child. “The trembling hand, the thick speech, the dull senses, the poisoned blood... the poverty, crime, and misery of the drunkard are hysterically held up to the gaze of the children,” he complained, “but the steady hand, the distinct speech, the quick senses... the success and happiness of the temperate man are scarcely mentioned.” In the worst case, educators claimed, this perversion provoked students’ curiosity—and promoted intemperance. Usually, however, STI’s tedium, monotony, and “slavish adherence to text-books” suppressed “manly” inquisitiveness—which was almost as bad.


1 F. C. Atwell to R. H. Magwood, 5 Apr. 1904, frames 739–42, roll 12, STF Series.


3 Ferguson, “Temperance Teaching in Connecticut,” 1036; Argus (Albany), 1 Aug. 1895, frame 213, roll 10, STF Series. In arguing that “the educational profession as a whole was sympathetic” to Scientific Temperance, STI’s most recent historians confute “old” Progressive educators (like Harris) who supported STI and “new” child-study Progressives who skewered it. Tyack et al., *Law and the Shaping of Public Education*, 158.
Never one to shun battle, Hunt tried to parry each thrust of this new Progressive pedagogy. We simply must teach the dangers of alcohol, she insisted, for the same reasons that we must tell a boy paddling on the Niagara River about the falls that lurk below: otherwise, he may not know that death awaits him. Would he be bored? Not if teachers followed the graded curriculum and the STI recommendation of three lessons per week for fourteen weeks. If the forty-odd lessons that most state laws required are spread out across the school year, Hunt wrote, "the pupil's interest is not so well sustained, nor proficiency so easily acquired." Yet this was as much as Hunt would concede to child-study theorists promoting "interest" over "subject." Quoting a sympathetic state legislator, Hunt emphasized that "children do not always want to do what we know they ought to do." They ought to learn the hazards of drink; and we must ensure that they do so, interested or not. Herein lay the value of textbooks, the indispensable guarantor of STI. Without standardized texts, Hunt argued, teachers would fail to present the appropriate material.34

Yet without teacher cooperation, no text—indeed, no law—would make a difference. Convinced that teachers had been "prejudiced" by child-study propaganda, STI workers streamed back into the schools to "win the school ma'ams."35 They also organized parlor meetings, receptions, and teas where STI workers and instructors could socialize in more informal settings. Hunt's plans counseled caution during such contacts, when the slightest condescension might sway teachers in the wrong direction. "Theoretically, of course, any one has a right to visit the schools and find out what work is being done," Hunt wrote, "but as you know, there are a great many different ways of doing this and each union should send its most able woman." Ultimately, the fate of STI—and of the nation, in Hunt's view—rested upon the tact and tenacity of these individual volunteers. Invoking a military metaphor that more accurately captured the nature of her organization, Hunt repeatedly emphasized that the national office could offer only general, hortatory "ammunition" to STI workers; for in the heat of combat, the soldier on the field remained the best judge of strategy. "It is very difficult to advise exactly what course


to pursue without knowing the persons with whom you have to deal," she wrote apologetically to a local STI worker in Illinois, who had sought assistance in enforcing the law in her school. "Methods have to be adapted to 'temperament.'" The same principle applied to negotiations with state school boards, textbook committees, and even other members of the WCTU. "Not knowing your state thoroughly, I can not say of course whether it would be better for you to work directly through the district or county [WCTU] superintendents," Hunt told the Nebraska state superintendent. "Someone who is familiar with the conditions can probably advise you on this point better than I."36

Yet across America—even, increasingly, in rural school systems—STI women could expect to provoke the ire of newly minted educational experts.37 "The effort of these reforming women . . . is interfering with what is none of their business," wrote one Connecticut critic, "and establishes a dangerous precedent which we are attempting to throw out of our political system, and which we ought not to allow to be introduced into our educational system." That precedent, of course, was democratic participation. As party commitment and other forms of political activity plummeted, STI women found themselves paddling against the corporate current—and gaining new insight into its strength and sources. In democratic movements, Lawrence Goodwyn has written, people struggling against one aspect of "the received hierarchical order" discover "a number of exploitative qualities about that hierarchy that they did not previously grasp." Struggling against new educational experts, STI workers came to realize—and reject—the new credentialed bases of Progressive power. In Utica, New York, Mary E. Tallman marched into the office of "school superintendent George Griffith, P.H.D. [sic]," and ridiculed his naive child-study predilection for teaching "good" rather than "evil." If the superintendent were strolling with his son and chanced to encounter a drunk, Tallman asked, wouldn't he warn the child? Educators "dislike very much being interfered with in their elaboration of an educational system," wrote Mrs. E. O. Orr from tiny West Galaway, New York. "None of [them] have taken very kindly to the new departure of being watched, questioned or advised by their constituents."38

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37 As David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot have noted, small-town superintendents during this era often "acquired new ideas about education in their training and in their professional associations" and "became carriers of an adopted cosmopolitanism." Tyack and Hansot, Managers of Virtue, 178.

Yet this “new departure” owed much to the older tradition of popular politics. Indeed, STI retained both the decentralized structure and the “intense, dogmatic cast of mind” (a tendency “to imagine a black-and-white world of absolutes”) that had characterized Gilded Age political parties. Michael McGerr has maintained that the “spectacular” style of nineteenth-century parties re-emerged within the women’s suffrage campaigns of the early twentieth century, yielding the same “sense of power” and communal participation for women that political parties had provided for men. Here his argument mirrors Goodwyn’s masterful evocation of Populist rituals, like mass encampments and wagon trains, which “fulfilled the democratic promise” by allowing people “to ‘see themselves’ experimenting in new democratic forms.” Born of history’s impassioned but occasionally impetuous romance with anthropology, neither interpretation indicates whether these rituals of power bore any demonstrable relation to the actual exertion of power—“the chance of a man or of a number of men[sic] to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action,” in Max Weber’s venerable parlance. STI women did not engage in the “public rituals of solidarity and power” that distinguished nineteenth-century partisans and twentieth-century suffragists; instead, they engaged in power itself, realizing their own will even against the resistance of powerful men. A continuous and often contentious engagement with legislators, school board members, and finally educational experts allowed STI women to “see themselves” actually affecting democracy—not just “experimenting” in it.39

Yet the experts could take comfort in the prescient prediction that history was on their side. “The twentieth century,” wrote one schoolman,

will doubtless witness marvelous progress in many lines of effort. That progress will be made, as progress always has been made, through intense thought and study rather than through mere sentiment and feeling. I do not undervalue the work sometimes accomplished by enthusiasts . . . but they need to be directed and controlled, else they are like wild engines, whose speed is dangerous and whose destination is uncertain. Clear-headed, practical men and women must direct any reform, if the results are to be beneficial and lasting.40


Since then, "practical men and women—a small network of professionals—have indeed "directed and controlled" public education in the United States. Educaters of all stripes continued to resist "lay influence" on schools during the 1930s, when a new ideological revival swept America and a new President gave his imprimatur to interest-group politics.41 Even in the 1950s and 1960s, when civil-rights activists and other fledgling citizen groups swaggered into the educational arena, their demands often spawned "more complex and fragmented bureaucracies" rather than more responsive schools, as David Tyack has noted. Nowhere was this clearer than in curricular questions, where "the politics of expertise loom ever larger" now that a host of federal and state experts have joined local professionals in determining what children learn.42 But the results—for our schools, for our society, for ourselves—have been less than beneficial. In delegating educational policy to experts, we discard our main chance to deliberate the values we wish to bequeath to our young. Americans instinctively recoil at such a task, fearing that popularly determined curricula might erode important civil liberties. "Collective action can be monstrous," Stephen Holmes reminds us, "and 'group aims' may include genocide." How, then, are we to reconcile virtue and liberty, our desire to privilege certain ideas as "good" but also to preserve the "free mind" of the individual?43 Comparing Scientific Temperance to its notorious descendant, the anti-evolution movement, we may hazard an answer.

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"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children." So began John Dewey's The School and Society, the first and perhaps most famous synopsis of Dewey's educational philosophy. Rejecting the arcane formalism of "subject"-based study as well as the naive romanticism of purely "child-centered" curricula, Dewey insisted that the school could transcend this dualism (indeed, all dualisms) by transforming itself—into "a miniature community, an embryonic society." Here children would receive what Dewey

called an education for "social progress," the skills and resources to meet
the changing circumstances of a changing world. "Any other ideal for
our schools is narrow and unlively; acted upon, it destroys our democ-

cracy," Dewey declared.44

Yet how can we be certain that "the community" (wherever and
whatever that is) "must" desire such an ideal? As Amy Gutmann has
recently argued, Dewey's creed of democratic education hinged upon a
fundamentally undemocratic premise: that schools must privilege a pre-
established set of values ("what the best and wisest parent wants"),
regardless of the popular will. Dewey's writings are peppered with paens
to citizen participation, which he termed the "keynote of democracy." 
Yet the very cradle of participatory democracy, the school, would con-
tradict this principle by excluding "outside" democratic participation.
The public, in Dewey's scheme, would not deliberate the content or
contours of his "embryonic society"; instead, the embryonic society—
like the egg before the chicken—would hatch a deliberative public.45

Liberal pretenses notwithstanding, all curricula—indeed, all
schools—privilege some values over others. Why democratic deliberation?
Following Gutmann, let us consider the alternatives. The Platonic
solution—to teach children a unitary ideal or Truth, as gleaned by phi-
losopher-kings—does not help us identify who has ascended to this ex-
on a moral exemplar, moreover, we could not impose his or her regime
except at great moral costs. Absolute truth yields absolute repression
(exile from Athens, as Plato foresaw) for the unenlightened, violating
their freedom to choose alternatives. By contrast, the Millsian or liberal
solution—teach children autonomy, by maximizing their potential
choices and eschewing "bias" in schools—prizes this freedom above all,
regardless of whatever other virtues the community hopes to inculcate.
This solution does not deliver the "neutrality" it promises; no solution
does. But that is not the problem. The problem is that the liberal ideal—

44 John Dewey, "The School and Society" [1900], in The Child and the Curriculum
and The School and Society (Chicago, 1956), 7, 18. See also Lawrence Cremin, The
Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957 (New
York, 1961), 135-42.

45 Gutmann, Democratic Education, 13; Benjamin Barber, Strong Democracy: Particip-
atory Politics for a New Age (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), 139. See also Richard M. Battistoni,
Public Schooling and the Education of Democratic Citizens (Jackson, Miss., 1985); ch. 2.

46 For alternative—but equally undemocratic—formulations of the Platonic Good in
education, see Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education
Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students (New York, 1987);
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (Boston, 1987);
Henry A. Giroux, Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition
(South Hadley, Mass., 1983).
like the Platonic one—obliterates the tension between liberty and virtue. Both schemas, in other words, pretend that we must select between them. Either "we must educate children so that they are free to choose among the widest range of lives because freedom of choice is the paramount good, or we must educate children so that they will choose the life that is best because a rightly ordered soul is the paramount good." Give us liberty or give us virtue.47

Democratic education, by contrast, accepts—indeed, celebrates—this central tension. Admittedly, we cannot maximize both liberty and virtue. Yet we need not pick one or the other. Enter deliberation: only a broad public debate will yield a consensual balance between our rightful respect for individual freedoms and our equally rightful impulse to orient individuals in the directions that we deem desirable. Yet this consensus, like democracy itself, exists in time. So it changes over time, Robert Nash reminds us, "as we change our minds about how best to describe human beings and the world we inhabit." Since we cannot assume that today's consensus will apply tomorrow, we must not restrict the capacity of citizens to critique it. Thus we arrive at the key constraint upon deliberative democracy: it must not dissuade, prevent, or exclude citizens from deliberating. The decisions that stem from our debate do not have to be right. But they do have to be restrained, so that they do not squelch future debates. "For every educational practice or institution," Gutmann concludes, "we must therefore ask whether the practice or institution in its actual context restricts (or impedes) rational inquiry" [italics added].48

We must, that is, look to history—"actual context"—to decide whether democratically determined curricula inhibit the critical discussion that democracy demands. As its most recent historians have reminded us, Scientific Temperance represented only one of several popular movements to alter the content of American public school education during the last century.49 In the 1920s, for example, a ferocious campaign to prevent the teaching of evolution swept the nation. Groups like the Bible Crusaders of America and the Flying Fundamentalists charged into battle, introducing thirty-seven anti-evolution measures in twenty state legislatures. Only five states passed such bills, but numerous local and state school boards also banned Darwin—and bore witness to the or-

47 Gutmann, "Democratic Education in Difficult Times," 11. See also idem, Democratic Education, ch. 1.
49 Tyack et al., Law and the Shaping of Public Education, ch. 6.
organizational sophistication of the anti-evolutionists, whose local chapters mirrored STI in structure.\textsuperscript{50}

Yet in substance—in the actual operation of the laws—anti-evolution alone proved "repressive." By invoking this phrase, we are NOT invoking the following well-known but ill-considered criticisms:

\textbf{Anti-evolutionism reflected only a rural, "backwoods" segment of public opinion.} Although historians continue to mouth this canard, it is almost surely wrong. It is also beside the point. Regardless of the movement's popularity outside of southern, rural areas, it clearly represented a majority attitude \textit{within} many of those areas. In Arkansas, the only state submitting an anti-evolution law to popular referendum, the measure passed by almost a two-to-one margin. Indeed, majoritarianism constituted a major strand of the anti-evolutionists' appeal. The people pay the taxes, argued William Jennings Bryan; and "the hand that writes the paycheck rules the school." Should it? The "backwoods" interpretation dodges the question of majoritarianism by denying the presence of a majority.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{Anti-evolutionism sprang from "religious" sentiment.} Of course it did. Divinely revealed religion, in fact, represented the other key thread of the anti-Darwin argument. Evolution contradicted not just the will of the people but the will of God—and eroded children's faith in Him. Without the Fall from the Garden of Eden, proponents argued, there was no sin; without sin, no salvation; without salvation, no god; and without God, no Christianity. Yet it is absurd to term the movement repressive solely because it derived "from religion." At some level, so did every key precept and principle in American government—including the notion of individual freedom, which liberals seek to insulate from the wrath of "religious" ideas.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Anti-evolutionism constrained teachers.} All laws regarding curriculum—indeed, all laws regarding schools—"constrain" teachers, by limiting their discretion. Yet such limits do not constitute prima facie schoolhouse "repression" any more than wide teacher discretion constitutes schoolhouse "democracy." Borrowing from studies of "workers' control" in industrial settings, David Hogan has celebrated the brief

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 166, 156; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., \textit{Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution} (Nashville, Tenn., 1969), 36, 39, 246.


"democratic" period when Chicago teachers wrested authority from administrators. Yet from a lay perspective, government by teachers' councils may be no more democratic than government by superintendents. In each case, school officials—not school patrons—retain control of policy decisions. By associating schools with factories, of course, historians unwittingly mimic the very formulation for which they have skewered Progressive Era "efficiency experts" who backed the notorious Gary Plan and other "industrial" reforms. Unlike factory workers, however, teachers are paid in public monies to provide a public service. Hence a teacher-operated, internally democratic school might be externally undemocratic, if the teachers' policies neglect the expressed desires of the citizenry.

Anti-evolutionism embodied ignorant prejudices. This view boasted a distinguished literary pedigree, including the febrile fulminations of H. L. Mencken and the wry aphorisms of Walter Lippmann. Yet it also enlisted academics like Yale President James R. Angell, who announced that anti-evolution measures "could not be seriously entertained by any really intelligent person." Nicholas Murray Butler, commenting on the same laws, glumly noted that "educational curricula had been delivered into the hands of the intellectually unfit." Yet this neo-Platonist critique begs the same questions that Plato did. Who shall determine truth and falsity, knowledge and ignorance? Lippmann never wavered in his answer. "Guidance for a school can come ultimately only from educators," he wrote, "and the question of what shall be taught as biology can be determined only by biologists. The votes of a majority do not settle anything here and they are entitled to no respect whatever."

The democratic theory of education, however, reverses Lippmann by privileging "the votes of a majority"—unless these decisions hamper critical discussion and debate. For our purposes, it is irrelevant whether anti-evolutionism was rural, religious, restrictive upon teachers, or "in-

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54 Indeed, “teachers’ control” may be less democratic, because teachers receive less public scrutiny—and less public pressure—than high-profile, mayoral- or board-appointed superintendents experience.
56 Bailey, Southern White Protestantism, 76; Gatewood, Controversy, 286.
tellectually unfit.” It was all of the above, to varying degrees. But none of these enumerated characteristics necessarily implies that anti-evolution was intellectually repressive. Given the proper deliberative atmosphere, even the instruction of patent mistruths can spawn critical inquiry. Yet in practice (in “actual context”) anti-evolution smothered such inquiry—not because it denied “truth” or came “from religion,” but rather because its explicitly religious rationale prevented skeptics from questioning truth.

Indeed, it branded such skeptics infidels. “The greatest menace to the public school system today is . . . its Godlessness,” Bryan declared. Since “Godlessness” stemmed from the doctrines of evolution, it followed that teachers who discussed such doctrines were themselves atheists—and must be silenced. Across the nation (not just its southern perimeter) school boards barred teachers from even mentioning Darwin. Instructors brazen enough to do so risked summary discharge. In several instances, boards established new hiring policies explicitly excluding “Darwinian” applicants. Universities were not immune. Bryan liked to boast that he had personally engineered the suspension or dismissal of several “infidel” professors who had dared to teach evolution—and whose well-publicized fate reminded academics around the country about the perils of doing so. Meanwhile, states scrambled to bring textbooks into accord with the new laws and regulations. Books discussing evolution disappeared from the classroom; in at least four states, they were publicly burned. In Arkansas, the state superintendent of instruction ordered the removal of Encyclopedia Britannica, the World Book Encyclopedia, and Webster’s International Dictionary from schools, because all three alluded to Darwin. In Georgia, the state legislature held up an appropriation for a library, for fear that its shelves might contain illegal evolution-related materials.

No such “chilling effect” accompanied Scientific Temperance Instruction. Of course STI sprang from “religious” premises: indeed, Hunt’s defense of child depravity—like Bryan’s diatribe against Darwin—re-

58 By “intellectually unfit,” I mean only that most advocates of anti-evolution did not possess the educational background or credentials of the “modernists” who opposed them. I do not, however, share Butler’s fear of their influence—nor do I think the matter is relevant in evaluating whether anti-evolution was “repressive.”

59 According to the theory developed here, even the hilarious bill proposed in one state legislature to change the value of pi from 3.1416 to 3.000 (“because the Bible described Solomon’s vase as three times as far around as across”) would not necessarily qualify as “repressive.” We would deem it repressive only if it squelched deliberation—if, for instance, students were not allowed to question the legislature’s act. Nelkin, Creation Controversy, 31.

flected a Biblical literalism that "high-critic" theologians mocked. Of course STI constrained teachers: laws often specified the number and length of temperance lessons, the age of the pupils that must receive them, which age groups must have textbooks, the total pages that texts must devote to STI—and the penalties for teachers or (more commonly) schools that failed to comply. Yet neither STI's religious roots nor its statutory stipulations restricted democratic deliberation, inside or outside of schools. Naturally, parents and teachers raised objections to STI. Yet the test of repression, Gutmann reminds us, "is not popularity among citizens, parents, teachers, or public officials. Repression entails restriction of rational inquiry, not conflict with personal beliefs, however deeply held those beliefs." Despite its religious origins, Scientific Temperance rested upon secular standards of reasoning and thus remained fair game for debate: one could question STI without questioning the sanctity of God. Despite its constraints upon teachers, Scientific Temperance did not dictate how they would teach and thus preserved their deliberative freedom: they could instruct STI without forsaking their own critical consciousness, a necessary condition for developing the same capacity in their students.

Of course, STI women did not consciously aim to provoke such classroom inquiry. Indeed, there are plenty of indications that they tried to prevent it. Hunt and her allies consistently warned teachers against discussing "the ethical and moral sides" of temperance, both "better taught in the home and Sunday school." In public institutions, Hunt insisted, instructors need only dispense the unitary truths of science—including the "poisonous" nature of alcohol. As physiologists and other laboratory experts undermined this claim, however, Hunt was forced to reject these popular demands upon school curricula should be rejected if they are "motivated by . . . the desire to restrict familiarity or inquiry." Yet both the STI experience and more recent curricular controversies suggest that this "intentionalist" standard is far too strict, excluding censorious impulses that—in practice—often enhance critical inquiry. Kenneth Strike, "A Field Guide of Censors: Toward a Concept of Censorship in Public Schools," Teachers College Review 87 (Winter 1985): 246; Boyd, "The Changing Politics of Curricular Policy-Making," 604.

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61 See Ferenc Morton Szasz, The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880–1930 (University, Ala., 1982).

62 Immigrant parents often worried that STI would alienate them from their offspring. See, for example, Mary H. Hunt, "Practical Working of the Ainsworth School Physiology Law in New York State," School Physiology Journal (Oct. 1896), 21. Teachers, meanwhile, complained about the "overdrawn" statements in textbooks and the young age at which students were introduced to the subject. Male teachers seemed more likely than female instructors to resist STI. See, for example, teacher surveys at frame 381, roll 11, frame 398, roll 12, frame 410, roll 12, and frame 508, roll 12, STF Series.

63 Gutmann, "Democratic Education in Difficult Times," 17; idem, Democratic Education, 103–4, 76, 42–44.

64 Kenneth Strike has suggested that popular demands upon school curricula should be rejected if they are "motivated by . . . the desire to restrict familiarity or inquiry." Yet both the STI experience and more recent curricular controversies suggest that this "intentionalist" standard is far too strict, excluding censorious impulses that—in practice—often enhance critical inquiry. Kenneth Strike, "A Field Guide of Censors: Toward a Concept of Censorship in Public Schools," Teachers College Review 87 (Winter 1985): 246; Boyd, "The Changing Politics of Curricular Policy-Making," 604.
shift ground. Unable to enlist prominent American scientists for her STI "Advisory Board," she loaded it with clergymen and educators because "this subject is one of morals and pedagogy as well as of physiology and hygiene," as one board member admitted. Within the classroom, meanwhile, STI attempts to "dictate methods" came to naught—or turned teachers against the subject, as Hunt often warned. Local STI workers must exercise "special care" during classroom visits, she wrote, so teachers are not "antagonized" and they "may feel that we come to them in a spirit of helpfulness rather than criticism." These were not the words of a woman who suppressed schoolhouse inquiry, no matter how much she and her minions may have wished to do so.65

In a similar vein, Hunt sought to create a "cartel" of WCTU-endorsed textbooks and to exclude other books—and, therefore, other opinions—from the market, as Philip J. Pauly has recently argued. But she failed. No evidence suggests that she "scared away writers and publishers interested in preparing books that would be real alternatives to the books she promoted," as Pauly claims. On the contrary—and much to Hunt's dismay—such books kept appearing. From Pennsylvania to Oregon, competing publishers flooded school boards and schoolhouses with free samples of their wares; and thousands of districts adopted these "unscientific and unpedagogical" texts, as Hunt complained. The problem seemed particularly acute in the South, where books were often selected by state commissions and rival texts prevailed. Even the notorious American Book Company—which merged four large companies that published "correct" STI books, in exchange for Hunt's endorsement—continued to publish unendorsed books, as well. Indeed, Hunt would eventually break with this "book trust," charging that the company promoted the unendorsed texts more often—and more enthusiastically—than the endorsed ones.66

Despite its patently repressive impulses, then, STI engaged literally hundreds of thousands of Americans in precisely the sort of "conversation . . . about the meaning and value of our common life" that eludes Robert


Bellah and his colleagues in their 1985 bestseller, Habits of the Heart. As many critics have noted, the authors' call for such a dialog lacks any indication about how their exclusively middle-class respondents—sequestered in atomistic "lifestyle enclaves"—might begin the dialog with each other, let alone with the members of other classes. The STI experience suggests that school policies can provide the necessary forum for a truly broad-gauged debate—but only if the policies at issue extend across localities. Debate within an enclave reinforces exclusivity: it "enhances the immediate tie between neighbors," writes Benjamin Barber, "but it thereby subverts the wider ties required by democracy." Scientific Temperance nurtured these ties by alternately focusing deliberation at local and state levels, where citizens, teachers, and their legislative representatives began the process of creative consensus—"an agreement that arises out of common talk, common decision, and common work."67

Indeed, consensus arises—or, more correctly, can arise—out of our common schools, which enter the 1990s under a torrent of scholarly and popular abuse. Strange bedfellows on the left and right have joined hands to demand the "privatization" or even abolition of American public schools, which allegedly "compel belief" and hence undermine the constitutionally guaranteed liberties of parents and students.68 Here Scientific Temperance provides a vivid counterexample, a massive popular movement that allowed Americans to deliberate and transmit consensual values without violating individuals' capacity to deliberate these values. Since Horace Mann, however, school officials have avoided questions of religious or political controversy, fearing that they will insult parental sensibilities—and shrink enrollments.69 The result has been a curriculum of colossal incoherence and vacuity, as critics correctly note. But the answer is not to abandon our common schools and retreat to enclaves of the like-minded, reinforcing prejudices and parochialisms. Instead, we should aim toward a new conversation about our schools, "an argument in the best sense," repressive of none and—just as important—accessible to all.70 Scientific Temperance reminds us that we can reinfuse our schools with questions that matter—and can rediscover the integrative potential of democratic education in America.

67 Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart, 303, 335; Barber, Strong Democracy, 235, 224. For critiques of Bellah et al., see Charles H. Reynolds and Ralph V. Norman, eds., Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart (Berkeley, Calif, 1988).


70 Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart, 303.