

EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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In the wake of the many studies of higher education that have appeared in recent months, still another, released last March, deserves the close attention of both academics and interested laymen. The work of a task force appointed by former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Robert Finch, this "Report on Higher Education" has been warmly received by his successor, Elliot Richardson. Far from being consigned to the oblivion that awaits most such documents, the report has received Secretary Richardson's official imprimatur in the form of a signed foreword, and the Secretary has assembled a new task force to seek means for implementing its recommendations. Thus, if the administration eventually develops a federal policy for higher education, this report may well be influential in its shaping.

Cynics are likely to claim that the administration's admiration for the report stems from the fact that it recommends no new, massive, federal expenditure for higher education, and that most of its recommendations are too general to threaten seriously the Establishment. They may also point out that much of the critique of contemporary higher education and many of the recommendations for change will sound familiar to those who have read the recent Carnegie Commission report "Less Time, More Options," and the report of the Assembly on University Goals and Governance. While true in part, such criticisms miss the point of the report.

The task force that prepared the report was not composed of the eminent and illustrious educators and men of affairs who usually grace such groups. Chairman Frank Newman is a young Stanford University administrator, former California businessman, and long-time friend of former Secretary Finch. His eight colleagues on the task

force were largely (two came from HEW) college teachers and administrators who are not widely known to the public but who have given evidence of their capacity for independent and innovative thinking about their profession. The task force was unusual, too, because it was not lavishly funded—it received a modest \$35,000 grant from the Ford Foundation—and eschewed the usual central staff that typically does all of the work and much of the thinking for such groups. Rather, each member of the task force was allowed to hire his own staff—usually one or two part-time students or interns—to help him pursue his own independent investigation.

A major concern of the report is its effort to define what higher education should be all about in the 1970s. It points out that "after a long and satisfying period of growth, high public esteem, and ever increasing financial support, higher education now faces a period of student unrest, public antagonism, and financial uncertainty. Something has gone wrong." And the first half of the report lays out in detail what it is that the task force believes has gone wrong. Typical criticisms:

- Higher education today is asked to serve a far larger and more diverse clientele than in the past, but widening access to colleges and universities accomplishes little without major reforms in the present system. Today fewer than half of those who enter college complete two years of study, and only about one-third complete four years.

- As faculties of colleges and universities have become increasingly professionalized in the course of the past generation, they have brought extraordinary benefits to the nation, but they have done so "at the expense of mil-

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WHY STUDENTS WANT THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

by NAT HENTOFF

There exists among us a subject population as diverse in ethnic and socio-economic composition as the nation itself. In increasing numbers, its members are conducting a stubborn, sometimes explosive, struggle for liberation. Their goal, considering the previous history of this group within the United States, is quite revolutionary. They want their Constitutional rights.

Nearly thirty years ago, it appeared that this colony, coterminous with the mother country, was about to achieve these rights. The United States Supreme Court proclaimed, in *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, that "educating the young for citizenship is reason for scrupulous protection of Constitutional freedoms of the individual, if we are not to strangle the free mind at its source and teach youth to discount important principles of our government as mere platitudes."

Despite the Court's 1943 pronouncement, there has been little significant change, until recently, in the attitudes of most public school administrators toward their students. The latter, compelled by law to attend these institutions, find their Constitutional freedoms routinely violated rather than scrupulously protected by those in charge of the schools. Such basic rights of an American citizen as freedom of speech and assembly, protection from invasion of privacy, and the guarantee of due process of law do not exist for the overwhelming majority of American high school students.

- After the first Earth Day, a student at Grady High School, Atlanta, Georgia, observes: "They let us have an assembly on Earth Day, but the principal

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warned me not to say anything about the war. He says the war is not relevant to high school education."

- A student at Central High School, Muncie, Indiana: "They search the lockers anytime they want to. And we're not allowed to be present when they do. They took a bottle of aspirin out of my locker once and sent it down to Indianapolis to have it analyzed. It cost them a lot of money to find out it was really my aspirin. I get migraine headaches, and I really needed it."

- In a high school in Sumter, South Carolina, a student running for school office is summarily removed from the ballot by the principal because the student has written in the school paper an article critical of the administration.

"But you can't do that!" the boy says. "It's un-Constitutional."

"The constitution of this school," the principal informs the student, "takes precedence over the United States Constitution."

- In September 1970 in Roseville, Michigan, thirty students are refused entry to the high school because of a provision in the school's dress code that says male students' hair must not touch the ears or shirt collars or fall over the eyebrows.

I have not selected extraordinary illustrations, as nearly any high school student in any part of the country can testify. Put plainly, many administrators and teachers in the public schools honestly believe they are educating their charges for citizenship; but because of the way in which *they* were educated, they have a decidedly limited understanding of the nature of and the necessity for student rights. As Edgar Friedenberg noted in *The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms*, "It is idle to talk about civil liberties to adults who were systematically taught in adolescence that they had none; and it is sheer hypocrisy to call such people freedom-loving."

Less harsh is Ed McManus, director of the American Civil Liberties Union affiliate in Milwaukee: "The great majority of schools have a habitual, although not necessarily vicious, disregard for civil liberties. You see, they



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