

Dimensions of Political Unconsciousness

By Ira J. Winn

Introduction

Criticism of the American electorate and of the American political mentality is hardly a new phenomenon. In 1835, for example, in reflecting upon some of the weaknesses of the new republic, Tocqueville commented upon the pressures of conformity that inhere in American society and that seemed to him to threaten the debasement of the character of its citizens. He wrote, "I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America"¹). Yet, the French observer of new world customs and politics was not without hopes for American democracy. His faith lay in the development of the institutions of local self-government and in the continual expansion of active membership in voluntary associations to combat the rise of bureaucratic stateism. His fear was that without those two buffers the individual would be alienated from political power; that as a result, the citizenry would grow apathetic as politics became both hopeless and meaningless²).

Some four generations after the publication of *Democracy in America* the modern day political sociologist is found engrossed in the realities of lonely crowds, organization men, power elites, "the Establishment," and alienated mass man. The force of more than a century of ascendant industrialism and the pressures of international affairs have tended to centralize political power to a degree not contemplated in frontier America. Modern criticism of the public mind reflects as well the combined rise in interest in political sociology as a function of the powerful American presence on the international scene, and the development of new and efficient data-gathering techniques. The latter reveal that the hopes for a vast expansion of voluntary associations have given rise to undue optimism. As Brunner concludes from census and other data, "the popular notion of America as a 'nation of joiners' is patently untrue. The 'joiners' in reality constitute a minority of the population"³).

C. Wright Mills speaks of the deterioration of the voluntary organization as a genuine instrument of public policy formulation. He points to arise in the feelings of insecurity and political impotency as a result of the growth of mass organizations and the decline of such middle level associations as should exist somewhere between the family and the small community on the one hand and the giant units of power so evident in modern society on the other. Issue-centered discussion and the idea of public opinion as a "democratic legitimation," says Mills, becomes but an ideal masquerading as fact. Lacking the kind of contact with effectual and psychologically meaningful publics which might create a reasoning man and a reasoned public opinion,

¹) Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), Vol. 1, pp. 263—276.

²) Lipset, Seymour M. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1963, chapter 1. See also: Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950), pp. 409—424.

³) Brunner, Edmund de S. *An Overview of Adult Education Research* (Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., Chicago, 1959), p. 100.

the citizenry degenerates into an unthinking consumer of the mass media and into an object ripe for mass manipulation⁴).

Implications for Educational Criticism

While Tocqueville's hopes for decentralized government and a dynamic system of popular voluntary associations seems for the most part to have faded with much of the idealism of the nineteenth century, it must be remembered that America is still far better off in these concerns than most countries. Also, and of basic importance, the institution of the free public school has arisen as a key article of faith for believers in popular democracy. Education in the United States has become not only the ladder of social mobility for the masses, but an almost universal touchstone for the solution of all kinds of civic ills. In fact, too frequently is education seen as an easy panacea, rather than the long, tortuous, and rigorous process that eventually yields human excellence.

Thus, criticism of education in America becomes quickly painful, particularly so when it touches the area of preparation for civic responsibility. In a nation which adores the name of equality, any criticism pointing to basic political deficiencies stemming from education can easily be interpreted as "undemocratic". Yet, criticism of civic education is no more a historical novelty than argument over the tariff or the rights of states. A hundred years after Tocqueville, the American Historical Association Commission of the Social Studies observed that in one given decade (1920-1930) a thousand national organizations had gone on record favoring extensive changes in the social studies⁵).

Criticism must always be an ongoing part of educational development and is one of the major strengths of democratic society. But care must be taken to avoid both the evils of negativism and the blasé attitude⁶). While one cannot help smiling with Clarence Darrow's eulogy to the 1918 graduating class at Senn High School in Chicago,

"... You're no more fit to 'go forth and serve' than the man in the moon. You're just a bunch of ignorant kids full of the devil, and you've learned practically nothing to show for the four years you spent here. You can't fool me, because I once spent four years in just such a place!"⁷)

there is no escaping the grim reality of the failure of the war then raging to make the world safe for democracy.

Today there is no room for an indulgent attitude toward apathy or toward the lack of skills necessary for political problem solving. While in an absolute sense the present generation is no less informed than preceding generations (and doubtless it is better informed), relatively and realistically speaking any accounting must measure against the recent and startling explosions in the frontiers of knowledge as well as against the insistent demands of an age of space, the atom, and automation. Yet, in the face of these imperatives, no viable concept of continuing civic education has emerged from the mold of formal education to grip the population and to activate its political sensibilities.

⁴ Mills, C. Wright. "The Mass Society," in *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society*, eds. Eric and Mary Josephson (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 201-227.

⁵ Robert W. Frederick and Paul H. Sheats. *Citizenship Education through the Social Studies* (New York: Row, Peterson & Co., 1936), p. 3.

⁶ C. Wright Mills derides and describes the blasé attitude as "a vagueness of policy (called open-mindedness), a lack of involvement in public affairs (known as reasonableness), and a professional disinterest (known as tolerance)." See Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁷ Irving Stone. *Clarence Darrow for the Defense* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1958), p. 7.

Neither the young, who wish to be treated as adults, or the adults, who so often seek escape into a world of childlike fantasy, for the most part appear to have more than a surface interest in the world beyond their immediate material satisfactions. Under the pressures of the contemporary age, this kind of phantasy life only compounds social disorganization and increases the likelihood of major conflict. Thus, the greater part of the task of civic education today is simply making people aware of the nature of the forces that prevent them from leading creative, socially useful lives; bringing their inner fears and deepest hopes into reference with events seemingly remote and unrelated; and bringing their decision making and judgment up to the demands of an age that has made so much of the traditional way irrelevant.

General Political Knowledge

Political scientists and other informed observers of the American electorate are agreed that there are serious and basic deficiencies in the political knowledge of the man in the street. Campbell and associates, in a summary of ten years of studies of the American voter for the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, conclude that:

In general, public officials and people involved in public relations tend to overestimate the impact that contemporary issues have on the public. They find it difficult to believe that the reams of newspaper copy and the hours of television and radio time could be ignored by any normal person within the reach of those media. The fact seems to be, however, that the human perceptorium is highly selective, and unless it happens to be tuned to a particular wavelength, the message transmitted over that wavelength will be received only as noise. This perpetual screening seems to protect the individual citizen from too strenuous an overload of incoming information⁸).

Proof of the operation of this screening process is easy to find, and the literature of polling is replete with examples of what are appalling gaps in voter awareness in the eyes of any reasonably knowledgeable person. For example, Lane and Sears, in a chapter survey of opinion studies appropriately titled, "Opinions without Information," point to such evidence as this: In August, 1952, just after the highly publicized national nominating conventions, 55 per cent of the public did not know the name of the Republican vice presidential candidate and almost 70 per cent failed to grasp the name of Nixon's Democratic counterpart, John Sparkman. In 1945, immediately after the great war fought to preserve human freedom, only 21 per cent of the American public could name anything definite in the Bill of Rights. In 1955, not yet recovered from the furors over communism raised by the McCarthy charges and investigations, only 33 per cent of the public could identify Karl Marx⁹)! Indeed, Stouffer reports that less than 1 per cent of over 6,000 people scientifically sampled in a 1954 study of communism and civil liberties expressed themselves as concerned with either the challenge of communism or the attack on civil liberties¹⁰).

Hyman and Sheatsley point to the fact that between 20 and 40 per cent of the electorate is regularly found to be without *any* factual information on any given

⁸ Angus Campbell, Phillip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (abridged; New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), p. 99.

⁹ Robert E. Lane and David O. Sears, *Public Opinion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 57-61.

¹⁰ Samuel Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955), p. 59.

issue. They note that three years after the founding of the United Nations, "25 per cent of Americans admitted they never heard of it or could not even vaguely state its purpose." And that at the peak of the 1948 political campaign, 12 per cent of the voters did not know that Dewey was a Republican¹¹). During the same campaign, Campbell and associates illustratively point out, the Democrats had made the Taft-Hartley Act one of the key points of their attack, and President Truman's veto of that legislation (subsequently overridden by a Republican Congress) had been one of the key issues of a well-publicized antagonism between the legislature and the chief executive. Yet, by the end of the political campaign, seven out of every ten Americans had not the remotest idea of what Taft-Hartley was all about¹²).

Recall of "Book Knowledge"

The patterns of recall of factual material—what can be termed a book knowledge of history and civics—is equally dismal, if irregularly so. While variances in results do exist, national surveys taken over the past twenty years have indicated the following symptomatic levels of information retention:

Only 19 per cent of the electorate could name the three branches of government. Fifty-four per cent did not know what a tariff is, or gave incorrect replies in attempting to answer. Forty-six per cent could not explain "filibuster"—but 80 per cent did know the meaning of "veto." In 1951, 45 per cent did not know the term "cold war"; and in 1961, 43 per cent of a national sample were found to be ignorant of H-bomb fall-out. Somewhat less than half the public, at any given time, is able to state correctly which party controls the Congress. Little more than half know how many senators a state sends to Washington. A third cannot explain "monopoly" and two-thirds lack any reasonable idea of the electoral college. Typical of the uneven and unpredictable pattern of remembering, however, is the finding that 63 per cent of those polled in 1952 could give a reasonable explanation of the Marshall Plan; also, 43 per cent could identify Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia¹³).

The results of public information surveys are plainly discouraging. Lane and Sears conclude, "The relatively low amount of information possessed by most persons means that most must decide their political preferences on the basis of simple slogans and catchwords, since more subtle analysis will pass them by"¹⁴). Other political analysts point to the same conclusion. And while the electorate stands generally indicted for an appallingly low level of relatively simple recall knowledge, it is found to be even less politically conscious and more erratic on its grasp of the issues and the parties' positions on the issues.

Grasp of the Issues

Campbell and associates find three conditions necessary for issue oriented political behavior. These are: (a) the awareness of issues through an expression of an opinion

¹¹) Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley, "The Current Status of American Public Opinion," in Daniel Katz et al., *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (New York: Holt-Dryden, 1954), pp. 37—38.

¹²) Campbell et al., *loc. cit.*

¹³) Hazel Erskine, "The Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 26, 1962, pp. 668—677.

¹⁴) Lane and Sears, *loc. cit.* See also: Lindsay Rogers, *The Pollsters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949). The author convincingly demonstrates that the depth of popular ignorance is so great that polls purportedly showing "positions" of the public on various issues are almost meaningless. His contention is that pollsters must face up to their professional obligation to relate the data on public opinion to the deeper question of the knowledge that underlies that opinion. Otherwise, Rogers concludes (p. 239), polling statistics become nothing more than "a means of being precise about matters of which you will remain ignorant."

Also of interest, *Changing Times* (April, 1965, p. 27) reports a poll to find out what magazines people read. Nine per cent said they read *Colliers*, which hasn't been published since 1957.

about them; (b) the perception of what the government is doing about the issues, and (c) the perception of related differences in party policy as regards each issue. Familiarity with issues and policies is considered completely apart from any consideration of accuracy of opinion; in other words, acquaintance is measured simply by "the existence of an opinion that is given some sort of political meaning by its possessor." Yet, accuracy of judgment aside, the Michigan survey group reports that large percentages of the electorate fail to meet even these elementary conditions on most of the important issues of the day. Less than onethird of the population was found to be making all three discriminations, and among this "informed" portion of the electorate there was found very limited agreement on which party advocates which policy. Thus, partisans of opposing views within each party presumed that the party truly reflected their own beliefs. The study concludes that there is "little congruence between member opinion and leadership policy, and little consensus on where the parties do stand"; and that "... articulation between party program, party member opinion, and individual Political decision is weak indeed."¹⁵⁾

Interference with Political Perception

What causes the failure in political perception? For one thing, knowledge of party position requires a more subtle and complex political awareness than does mere knowledge of the existence of the issues. Still, knowledge of party position is in the category of information. The Michigan survey group is led to conclude that the same personal limitations are operative in blocking political perceptions at more complex levels as keep many people from recognizing or paying attention to issues at all to begin with. This leads to the question of political attitudes, to be considered shortly; and it leads back to the question of the screening process which filters the barrage of information daily thrown at the individual in a society dominated by mass communications. Also, indirectly it raises questions about the effectiveness of education.

There are many factors at work in filtering out political perceptions. Key among them is the utility which the individual attaches to the information to which he is exposed; information is both sought and avoided for a wide variety of overt and covert reasons. This is as true of the spheres of political thinking as it is of the thought processes about life in general. The principle is well demonstrated in Love's study of non-credit enrollments; adult study was found to be a function of whether the course is conceived as having a positive value in solving personal problems¹⁶⁾.

Lane and Sears note a host of contributing screening factors, among these being the defense against the irritant quality of news that makes people nervous or afraid; also, the fact that people with prejudices want neither their ideas nor the underlying security challenged; that news can be sought as a status symbol or weapon, or ignored altogether so that the individual will not become dissatisfied with the conditions of his life; and that knowledge may simply have a low time priority compared to the press of business, home, and other of life's demanding activities¹⁷⁾.

Many studies speak of the lack of interest in public affairs common among the lower socioeconomic groups and other people of low self-esteem. These people tend to be preoccupied with personal problems and take such a restricted view of the world outside their immediate and concrete environment that public affairs information

¹⁵⁾ Campbell *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 98—107.

¹⁶⁾ Robert Love, "The Use of Motivation Research to Determine Interest in Adult College Level Training," *Education Record*, 34, July 1953, p. 210—218.

¹⁷⁾ Lane and Sears, *op. cit.*, pp. 64—66.

rarely becomes more than a blur on a distant horizon. The political sociologist, Seymour Lipset, sums up the screening effects imposed by low socioeconomic status:

... educational attainment is less than that of men with higher socio-economic status, and his association as a child with others of similar background not only fails to stimulate his intellectual interests but also creates an atmosphere which prevents his educational experience from increasing his general social sophistication and his understanding of different groups and ideas. Leaving school relatively early, he is surrounded on the job by others with a similarly restricted cultural, educational, and family background. Little external influence impinges on his limited environment. From early childhood, he has sought immediate gratifications, rather than engaged in activities which might have long-term rewards. The logic of both his adult employment and his family situation reinforces this limited time perspective. As the sociologist C. C. North has put it, isolation from heterogeneous environments, characteristic of low status, operates to "limit the source of information, to retard the development of efficiency in judgment and reasoning abilities, and to confine the attention to more trivial interests in life"¹⁸).

Influence of Formal Education

While not nearly the most important element contributing to political inclination and disposition, education has undoubtedly been established as the single most vital factor affecting the reception and storage of political information and motivating political activity. Knowledge in and of itself has a great effect in heightening interest. The person who makes sense out of what to many people is but another blurred incident in an endless shadowland of political nonsense will derive personal satisfaction from his insight and a new motivation to seek further. Formal education is so powerful a factor that it effects political behavior in a way that goes beyond even class and status implications. Beyond the demonstrated direct relationship between amount of formal education and voter participation¹⁹) and between formal education and the existence of stable democracy²⁰), Campbell and associates point to the simple effect on political behavior of the element of sheer information:

The greater an individual's education, the more likely he is to attend to sources of political information and to know "what is going on." His view of political objects and events will be more specific and more highly differentiated. The educated person is distinct from the less educated not only in the number of facts about politics at his command, but also in the sophistication of the concepts he employs to maintain a sense of order and meaning amid the flood of information. In fact, it is psychologically sound to presume that the two phenomena go hand in hand²¹).

Yet, in any wholly realistic sense, education cannot be viewed as a panacea. There is indication of a point of diminishing returns, at which the amount of formal study seems no longer to be key factor in continuing retention of political information. McClintock and Turner, in a comparison of the levels of information of freshmen and seniors at seven colleges, found no significant differences between the two groups, once grade point and sex factors were accounted for²²). Further, it must be remem-

¹⁸) Lipset, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁹) Campbell *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 252—254.

²⁰) Lipset, *op. cit.*, pp. 36—40.

²¹) Campbell *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

²²) C. McClintock and H. Turner, "The Impact of College upon Political Knowledge, Participation, and Values," *Human Relations*, 15, 1962, pp. 172—176.

bered that relatively few among the electorate attain a plane of assimilation of political knowledge that reflects a high degree of sophisticated political cognition and interest. Despite all the years of formal education generally achieved in America, less than one-third of the population is found to have reached even the most primitive limits of issue oriented perception. While younger people seem to know more than adults of the previous generation, this may be merely a function of their closeness to school days, and the similarity between opinion polling items and the examination processes of formal education. More indicative for the syndrome of political ignorance would seem to be the fact that in the course of their education, few Americans develop the habit of reading books. According to one Gallup poll study completed in 1955, 61 per cent of the population had not read a book—any book—in the preceding year; and 73 per cent had not read one in preceding month²³).

Awareness of the quantitative level of formal education of an electorate thus must be qualified by evaluation of the product, and ultimately by examination of the process. Viewed relative to the general level of world impoverishment, education can be seen as the great lever of progress of the industrialized nations, and particularly the United States. But seen against the standards expressed in the expectations of early American idealists, education as the path to a peaceful and well-ordered world is still more hope than reality.

Even the simplest kinds of political decision making have far reaching implications as a result of the conditions imposed by modern science. Politics becomes remote and unreal today as the general plane of education falls to rise at more than snail's pace. As people seem only slowly to grasp even the rudiments of political knowledge, there is cause for considerable anxiety.

Attitude toward Politics

As a general rule, it may be concluded that people are distracted from public affairs by the pressures of personal problems. The connections between personal problems and broader public issues seem only dimly understood or appreciated. When public affairs do manage to occupy their attention, the inclination is to view them as projections of personal vested interest. Thus, during the height of the cold war, in the latter part of the 1940's, survey evidence established that the majority of Americans were not really interested in foreign affairs except as it might effect their primary concern with housing, prices, the possibilities of depression, and other economic concerns²⁴).

In a general review of survey evidence on political apathy, Hyman and Sheatsley find several other key indications. One study found a third of the public quick to admit that things would not be much different if they were prevented from voting. Another investigation discovered only 6 per cent of those interviewed could offer any specific suggestion on what personally could be done that might help to prevent another war. Less than half of another sample could bring anything to mind that might help the United Nations to become more successful.

There is in general a lack of American participation in political affairs, a feeling of futility about the role the individual can play, and a tendency to leave the actual implementation of decision to "the government" or "the experts"²⁵).

²³) The Gallup Poll, as reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1955.

See also: Gordon Duppee, "Can Johnny's Parents Read?", *Saturday Review*, June 2, 1956, pp. 5—7+.

²⁴) Hyman and Sheatsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 35—36.

²⁵) *Ibid.*, pp. 38—39.

Few adults do anything more politically active than vote, but educated people do turn out at the polls much more frequently than the less educated; also, they take a greater interest in talking about politics and exerting influence on the opinions of others. There is evident a direct relationship between amount of formal education and a sense of political efficacy. Not only does the better educated person feel more confidence in the impact he can make, but in many senses he identifies himself as a functioning cog in the greater structure of power. Doubtless, the feelings of political potency noticeable among the better educated segments of the electorate reflect in large part their greater socioeconomic status and influence in the community²⁶).

Influence of Socioeconomic Status

In contrast, lower status people tend not only to have less education, but they also participate less in formal organizations, vote less, are less informed on political matters, are more distrustful of politics, and are less interested in public affairs²⁷). The evidence further suggests that there is a direct relationship between poor education, low socioeconomic status, and the development of authoritarian attitudes. . . . "Isolation, a punishing childhood, economic and occupational insecurities, and a lack of sophistication are conducive to withdrawal or even apathy, and to strong mobilization of hostility. The same underlying factors which predispose individuals toward support of extremist movements under certain conditions may result in total withdrawal from political activity and concern under other conditions"²⁸).

The person of low status is more likely to make judgments which reflect a poverty of historical time perspective and a lack of a rational ideological structure. As is, few Americans—roughly between 3 and 15 per cent according to Campbell and associates—have any clearly patterned sense of ideology; consequently most people are able to mix their stands on public issues without any realization of contradictory tendencies or lack of logical consistency. With little opportunity for culturally rich associations, or for continual stretching of the imagination and testing of judgment at increased planes of difficulty, either at home or at work, the citizen of low socioeconomic status is particularly an easy subject for suggestibility; thus arises a goodly share of the attractiveness of the strong leader and the authoritarian doctrine²⁹). The importance of a culturally full home life for the nourishing of political man is further underscored in a study of a midwest world affairs audience. Robert and Carolyn Hattery *et al.* have found that a stimulating family life was most instrumental in initiating interest in world affairs; equally significant for education is the discovery that teachers and the mass media were listed as factors of least influence³⁰).

Political Cynicism and Withdrawal

In a comparative study of political attitudes in five countries, Almand and Verba found distrust of politics generally less, and interest in politics more, in the United States than in the United Kingdom, Mexico, West Germany and Italy³¹). Nevertheless, there is more historical reason for being politically cynical in at least the three latter countries. Further, none of those foreign nations have a public system of com-

²⁶) Campbell, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 251—253.

²⁷) Lipset, *op. cit.*, pp. 102—103.

²⁸) *Ibid.*, pp. 103—104; 115—116.

²⁹) *Ibid.*, pp. 108—110.

³⁰) Robert and Carolyn Hattery, *loc. cit.*

³¹) Gabriel Almand and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), chaps. 3—4 and 7—8.

prehensive schools that approaches the scope of American education. Considering the avowed citizenship goals of the American social studies curricula, it would be foolish to seek rationalization for poor performance in the negative accomplishments or attitudes of others.

Of greater significance to American education is a complex study of the political attitudes of American party activists as compared to a random sampling of the general population. Herbert McClosky found that on every measure, the politically active, who also tend to have more education and to be of higher socioeconomic status, not only are more aware of ideological differences, more supportive of democratic "rules of the game", and more consistent in political preferences, but on the whole they are much less cynical and much more affirmative toward the political process³²). On questions such as the following, for example, three thousand party members who had some part in the Democratic or Republican conventions showed more indication of faith in the democratic process than did the sample of the national electorate:

<i>Measurement of Political Cynicism*</i>	<i>Per Cent Agreeing</i>	
	<i>Influentials</i>	<i>General Electorate</i>
Most political parties care only about winning elections and nothing more	28.3	46.2
The people who really "run" the country do not even get known by the voters	40.2	60.5
No matter what the people think, a few people will always run things anyway	30.0	53.8
All politics is controlled by political bosses	15.6	45.9

"Familiarity, it seems, far from breeding contempt", concludes McClosky, "greatly increases respect, hope and support for the nation's political institutions and practices." He finds the people as a whole confused in their reactions to the political system and often gripped by a feeling of almost hopeless political ineffectuality. But "however strongly they mistrust the men and the procedures through which public policies are fashioned, most voters seem not to be greatly dissatisfied with the outcome. They may be cynical about the operation of the political system, but they do not question its legitimacy³³).

Contrasting Views on Mass Participation

Participation in the political process, at least at complex levels, is shown to be an important factor in the development of positive political insights and feelings of democratic political efficacy. However, it must be noted that several studies conclude that high participation per se at the voting level is not necessarily a good thing for democracy. The facts of non-voting are wide open to interpretation, and the arguments extend inevitably to the centuries-old issue of the degree of trust that can be placed in the hands of the people.

Election statistics indicate that from a high of 80 per cent of the eligible voters casting ballots in the Bryan-McKinley campaign of 1896, in what was then a predominantly rural America, the voting percentages in national elections have shown

* From McClosky, *op. cit.*, Table 6, p. 370. (Selected illustrative items.)
³²) Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics", *American Political Science Review*, June 1964, pp. 361-382.
³³) *Ibid.*, pp. 370-372.

a downward trend to a low of 40 per cent in 1920, and a fairly consistent 60 or so per cent of the population in the years following World War II³⁴). David Riesman points out that it is of no help to democracy to bring the politically unaware to the polls; the lower socioeconomic groups, with their poverty of education, have been found to be no great defenders of civil rights or international cooperation, although they do tend to be strong in their defense of economic liberalism³⁵). Lipset finds that high levels of voter participation under conditions of tension or crisis may reflect the actual decline of social cohesion and the breakdown of the democratic process, as was shown in the dramatic rise in voting in the chaos of the Weimar Republic; further, he echoes Riesman and Glazer in inferring that voting may not be a good indication of strength of participation (viewed as commitment to democracy); presence at the polling place may reflect merely an unthinking compulsion of middle-class conformity³⁶).

Francis G. Wilson, in a rational analysis of the inactive electorate and social revolution, observed during the growth period of the Nazi tyranny that the entrance of the habitual non-voter into the political arenas can be a significant danger signal. Poetically he has summed up the early stage of liberal disenchantment with mass man:

If, with Horace, one must accept as final that "the short span of life forbids us to cherish long hopes," it may be that the permanence of non-voting in our democratic societies must be recognized as part of the general liquidation of more generous hopes for the sovereignty of the people . . .

When men have what they want from the political order, there is insufficient excitement in campaigns to draw all of them to the ballot box on election day . . .

Government by the few voters who make an appearance on election day may be corrupt, it may be the very foundation of the continuance of the old party oligarchy, but at least it is certain that the political waste is less than the mass of the people will stand³⁷).

Likewise, McClosky concludes from his empirical analysis made a generation later that "political apathy seems for most men the more 'natural,' state. Although political matters are in a sense 'everyone's concern,' it is just as unreasonable to hope that all men will sustain a lively interest in politics as it would be to expect everyone to become addicted to chamber music, electronics, poetry or baseball." He finds that the unknowing elements of the electorate, being strongly apathetic, fail to contribute to the vitality of the democratic system; but by the same token neither do they upset it³⁸). Indeed, in the view of the political scientists who emphasize "leaving well enough alone," apathy actually gives people the feeling that they share values which in fact they do not share and thus, in effect, apathy serves to reduce conflict!

These disheartening views on voter participation stem from relatively recently gained knowledge about the attitudes and political behavior of the electorate.

In a narrow sense, they offer a painful rebuke to the hopes of those democratic idealists who place an abiding faith in the extension of the ballot to the masses. As Riesman has commented, believers in liberal democracy have felt an increasing

³⁴) Lipset, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

³⁵) David Riesman, "Private People and Public Policy," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 15, 1959, pp. 204—205.

³⁶) Lipset, *op. cit.*, pp. 228—229 and 186.

³⁷) Francis G. Wilson, "The Inactive Electorate and Social Revolution," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 16, March 1936, pp. 73—76.

³⁸) McClosky, *op. cit.*, pp. 374—376.

hopelessness over the continual lack of debate over serious issues, partly a function of long-imposed cold war pressures, and more so because of increasing evidence of man's fragmented and irrational political cognition. These irrational forces sometimes appeal to intellectuals as a basis for a last desperate effort at manipulation of mass man so as to wake him from his lethargy, "as when we try to scare people into wisdom only to discover, in many cases, that they lack the imagination to be frightened"³⁹).

But in a larger sense, there is no necessary impasse between those democratic "realists" who argue for leaving well enough alone, and their "idealistic" compatriots who continue to view increased participation as the mainstay of truly democratic government. Both interpreters of the political scene are agreed that education is the key to the paradox. They differ mainly over what constitutes education—over whether participation is a regenerative and educative force.

As there are dangers in mass participation, so are there equal dangers in acceptance of apathy and political control by a minority of activists. Believers in the liberal democratic principle are quick to point out that democracy, after all, implies calculated risk; and that insurance is intended to be in the hands of the people. Defense of a democratically controlled foreign policy, perhaps the most sensitive issue of all, is thus constructed by Mulford Q. Sibley, in the liberal pattern of a counter to the argument of mass apathy and unconcern:

No democrat would argue that the people are technically well-informed in foreign affairs, but he would contend that with communications adequate and relevant information available (today it is *not*, due to less than democratic attitudes in high places), leaders could present genuine alternatives and the community could make a competent final decision after hearing all the decisions weighed. No democrat would argue that all the decisions made democratically will be "right" decisions; but he will contend that in the long run they are more likely to be "right" than decisions made undemocratically, and that the risk is far less than that involved in discarding democratic methods on the plea of public necessity⁴⁰).

Beyond what might at first appear to be the patent optimism of such stands lies a long history of faith in the democratic process; and a long tradition of counterbalancing arguments going back to the well-known divisions in political outlook between Jefferson and Hamilton. Those who hold with the value of enlarged mass participation are unable to accept the more recent conclusions favoring leaving well enough alone, as anything but the sweet lemon of rationalization.

However dismal the facts of apathy appear, they see that the other side of the coin presents an even unhappier state of stoic, if not tolerant acceptance of the status quo. Political stoicism is intolerable to proponents of a broad-based liberal democracy. Thus the basis for their own rationalization, which may be construed as follows:

It is the impoverished and the weak, the relatively disorganized elements of society who are the most inactive politically. By the same token, they are the ones most hurt by their own failure, or society's unconcern or unwillingness to apply the political pressures which will bring about correctives. Historically viewed, a society based upon a small percentage of ruling activists, however much their avowed democratic intentions, seldom leans toward reform until only after the most pained outcries of the downtrodden and outraged. Such a society raises the serious portent of a power corrupting elite. It disregards the fact of long disenfranchisement of the supposedly

³⁹) Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴⁰) Mulford Q. Sibley, "Can Foreign Policy Be Democratic?", *Readings in American Foreign Policy*, eds. Robert Goldwin, R. Lerner and G. Stourzh (Chicago: American Foundation for Political Education, 1952), p. 31.

sophisticated urban voter by virtue of malproportionment, gerrymandering and other successfully employed devices of the hack politician. And it offends the political honor of those who have suffered much under the blows of discriminatory legislation. Therefore, the remedy for apathy lies not in stoicism but in the educative force of active involvement in all aspects of the political process, including voting. The model for the 1960's is found in the civil rights protest movement.

Interpretive Analysis

The arguments over political participation are wide and endless, and they gain in meaning only as they focus on the educative process. The task of developing healthy political attitudes and a high degree of political participation is seen to be a joint problem of home and school. All observers seem agreed that formal education is the long run controlling factor in the development of democratic political attitudes and a sound political structure; however, the liberal democratic inclination, shaken though it may be by fresh evidences of voter indifference, is to look with suspicion at what might be conceived as too great a reliance on formal, long run processes that sometimes taste of pie in the sky.

The race between mass education and political catastrophe is a paradox. On the one hand it is known that the amount of formal education is the vital factor seemingly effecting the growth of more responsible political behavior and attitudes. On the other hand, close inspection of even the fairly well educated product reveals a rate and a kind of growth that is too slow, too restricted, and too undependable for the demands of the present age. The irony is that traditionally oriented mass education seems to breed its own inertia, which some observers see as a normal function of mass society.

The danger is especially clear as regards the development of knowledge and attitudes toward fundamental human rights. These form the mainstay of civic education and compose the final focus of inquiry into the general bounds of political unconsciousness of the electorate.

Consensus on Fundamental Rights of the People

The reason given for a recent essay contest aimed at stimulating greater awareness and better teaching of the Bill of Rights was stated in these terms:

... because national surveys have revealed repeatedly that students and adults neither know, understand nor value the principles embodied in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights. This conclusion is shared by all who have had the occasion to test the extent of this knowledge in various ways⁴¹).

The evidence to back this conclusion, much like the findings already reported, is a function of relatively recent development of the survey research field. The data reinforce some long-held suspicions about the public's attitudes toward fundamental democratic values. Nevertheless, they do not demolish the conclusion of some observers who find that there does exist an ingested "American creed" based upon an idealized sense of justice. Sociologist Gunnar Myrdal's long-debated view that Americans possess a common feeling for equal justice and fair play is best understood in terms of a vague and ruminating force in the dimmer recesses of the conflict-arousing American conscience⁴²). In other words the lack of consensus on prac-

tical issues of democratic principle should come as no great shock to the layman or the sophisticated observer. As Prothro and Grigg*) comment in an introduction to their study of consensus, "Every village cynic knows that the local churchgoer who sings the creed with greatest fervor often abandons the same ideas when they are put in less lyrical form. Political scientists are certainly not so naive as to expect much greater consistency in secular spheres⁴³)".

Yet, what may not be enough to arouse shock among supposedly detached scientific observers nevertheless is cause for extreme concern on the part of those charged with civic education. Evidence of the lack of public concern with civil liberties (or with communism) has already been indicated in mention of Stouffer's findings; in 1954, even less than five per cent of a large national sample were barely aroused by either subject⁴⁴). In a November 1945 poll by NORC, significant in that it was taken in the year of termination of a long period of world war fought in the name of liberty, only twenty-one per cent of Americans could offer correct answers to the following question: What do you know about the Bill of Rights? Do you know anything it says?⁴⁵).

Hyman and Sheatsley point to the lip service that is so frequently paid to democratic principles. They note that while Americans generally may agree about abstract principles of justice, only fifty-nine per cent of a national cross section taken after the war were willing to grant loyal Japanese, who are American citizens, equal opportunity with other people to get any kind of a job. Further, only twenty-five per cent were found to favor admitting displaced people from war-torn Europe⁴⁶).

In the comparative study of party influentials and the general electorate reported by McClosky in 1964, evidence was developed as to voters' attitudes to ward the "rules of the game" of democratic politics. These "rules" refer to principles, such as are embodied in the supreme law of the land, which are vital to sustain democratic institutions; put another way, they are generally interpreted to mean a respect for minority rights and the procedures for democratically gaining and holding political power. On twelve items of measurement, the general public was found to show a consistently greater proximity to the 50 per cent mark of complete disagreement or utter lack of consensus on the fundamental principles. While party professionals achieved a substantial consensus favoring democracy on eight items tested, the general electorate did not reach it at all. Nor did they attain it on a separate measure of specific applications of fair procedure in the areas of freedom of expression and the equality of man.

The few exemplary items and results following are indicative of the strong contradictions measured in the national cross-section of the voting population; in addition it reveals the extent to which many people have failed to grasp the nature of basic Constitutional guarantees to the people⁴⁷):

*) The authors criticize theorists such as Myrdal for producing evaluative studies largely lacking in "tight" empirical controls. It is relevant to note that this kind of criticism has risen to a level of internecine warfare among American social scientists and has resulted in a compulsion for data gathering to the virtual exclusion of central concerns of value. However, social research avoiding central focus on value considerations only sidesteps the main issues and therefore has little implication for education and social change. Reasonable answers to important value-centered questions are thus frequently of greater significance than exact answers to questions that avoid values and problems of value judgment.

⁴³) James Prothro and Charles W. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of American Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement", *Journal of Politics*, 22, Spring 1960, p. 281.

⁴⁴) Stouffer, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁵) National Opinion Research Council poll, reported in Lane and Sears, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁴⁶) Hyman and Sheatsley, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁷) McClosky, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-373.

⁴¹) "Bill of Rights Teaching Plan Backed", *Bakersfield Californian*, July 23, 1964.

⁴²) Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1944), Introduction and Chapter 1.

If Congressional committees stuck strictly to the rules and gave every witness his rights, they would never succeed in exposing the many dangerous subversives they have turned up. agreed: 47.4 %

The true American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it. agreed: 34.6 %.

A book that contains wrong political views cannot be a good book and does not deserve to be published. agreed: 50.3 %.

The majority has the right to abolish minorities if it wants to. agreed: 20.4 %

When the country is in great danger we may have to force people to testify against themselves even if it violates their rights. agreed: 36.3 %.

Freedom does not give anyone the right to teach foreign ideas in our schools. agreed: 56.7 %.

Regardless of what some people say, there are certain races in the world that just won't mix with Americans. agreed: 50.4 %.

Almost any unfairness or brutality may have to be justified when some great purpose is being carried out. agreed: 32.8 %.

Who Carries the Democratic Creed?

McClosky reaches the conclusion that the electorate is unified only when it comes to freedom in the abstract; also, that it is the more highly educated, articulate minority, and especially the party activists, who are "the major repositories of the public conscience." Any danger to America is seen to lie not in the threat that people purposely will support a hostile ideology, or even in the fact of a lack of general understanding and support of democratic ideology. Rather, the danger is viewed as existing mainly in times of instability when the unknowing and normally apathetic are drawn into the political arenas; then, they may fail to defend democracy because they do not recognize its institutions and they may get involved in misguided efforts destructive of democracy but done in the name of democracy⁴⁸).

Since apathy breeds inactivity among the unknowing, McClosky reaffirms his argument that apathy has the positive value of reducing political conflict and instability.

As has already been indicated, this view today receives the support of many political scientists. Indeed, Robert Dahl, in an analysis of the operation of power in democratic society, concludes that political stability depends more on the acceptance of democratic norms than on any general belief in them or any deep understanding of their rational base⁴⁹).

Prothro and Grigg likewise find that consensus, as measured by items assessing specific application of democratic principles, is all but absent among the general electorate; also, they confirm that only a small segment of the public serves as carriers of the American creed of due process and majority rule. They conclude that democracy does not require a large measure of ideological consensus and that amount of education, but not income or community of residence, is the most important basis of disagreement over democratic norms. Finally, they assert that apathy has a functional nature and value, for people do not always do what they believe; and the uneducated, in particular, do not tend to follow out the undemocratic principles they so often express on the questionnaires⁵⁰).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 373—376.

⁴⁹ Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961), chap. 28.

⁵⁰ Prothro and Grigg, *op. cit.*, pp. 284—291.

Stouffer's research on conformity and civil liberties points up the fact that people are exhibiting latent tendencies in their responses to poll items. The degree to which they would actually be stirred to action in real life may be quite another thing. Tendencies toward ambivalence are shown even on verbal and paper tests, as demonstrated by people's willingness to accede to the firing of a hypothetical communist radio singer (63 per cent yes), but their much greater reluctance to get involved in a boycott of the sponsor's product (36.7 per cent yes). Stirring people to action seems more often a question of who is doing the arousing. Stouffer concludes that leader types are usually more easily activated and that such people tend to spread an influence that is more liberal and more tolerant of views other than their own⁵¹).

Consensus among Young Adults

Survey research evidence arising from study of the attitudes toward democracy of the youthful population is particularly disheartening. While many findings seemingly indicate that democratic beliefs are a function of formal education, intensive study of the knowledge and attitudes of high school and college students reveals a shamefully large pattern of ignorance and authoritarianism; the studies point to basic failures in American civic education. This paradox is explainable, at least in part, in terms of the richer associations which come with increased years of schooling. As put by Brunner, "It is rather clear . . . that adults with more education have internalized and comprehended democratic philosophy far better than their less educated peers. No responsible social scientist would infer from this that education 'caused' the difference found, but he might well infer that adults with more formal education have had relevant experiences which are different from those of the less well educated"⁵²).

The influence of formal civic education on the formation of healthy political attitudes is generally shown to be negligible. In fact, in one study of 15,000 students in 103 high schools across the nation, it was discovered that students who had taken government or civics courses tended to be less in agreement with the Bill of Rights than students who had not enrolled in such courses. Roy E. Horton, the author of the study dealing with the values of youth in relation to American freedoms, found no evidence of any positive effects stemming from such courses. Rather, he found, for example, that democratic responses correlated most significantly with the amount of education completed by the respondent's mother⁵³).

In a somewhat similar finding emphasizing the power of parental influence and home life, Drucker and Remmers found that students whose fathers had taken a more general education curriculum had better citizenship attitudes than those whose fathers had chosen a narrow or technical specialization⁵⁴). Further, studies and predictions of election outcomes demonstrate conclusively that young people reflect their parent's political orientation very closely⁵⁵).

Nevertheless, such evidence is not meant to discount the potential for change which is supposed to manifest itself in the course of American schooling. This power is born witness to in the value transformations that occur despite parental pressures among the millions of children of immigrants to American shores. The facts of civic

⁵¹ Stouffer, *op. cit.*, pp. 26—27 and 43—48.

⁵² Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁵³ Roy E. Horton, Jr., "American Freedom and the Values of Youth," Doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 1955.

⁵⁴ A. J. Drucker and H. H. Remmers, "Citizenship Attitudes of Graduated Seniors at Purdue University, U. S. College Graduates and High School Pupils," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 42, 1951, pp. 231—235.

⁵⁵ H. H. Remmers, "Early Socialization in American Political Behavior," *American Voting Behavior*, eds. Eugene Burdick and A. Brodbeck (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), pp. 55—67.

education deficiency among youth follows along similar lines of deficiency among parents; the adage is doubtless true, that what Johnny doesn't know, the chances are his parents don't know either.

Attitudes of Secondary School Students

The public opinion polls of the Purdue University Bureau of Educational Reference have provided the most continuous measures of the attitudes of youth. In a series of surveys extending well over a decade and involving 8,000 to 10,000 or more students in each sampling, evidence of weaknesses in civic education have been well established. Although there may be a range of responses to any given item in one year as compared to the next and though there are instances where one may quarrel with the validity of specific items of measurement, there is no escaping the general conclusion. The patterns of responses favoring authoritarianism and restrictions on civil rights of the people show shifts of 5 to 20 per cent or even more over a decade, but this does not change the fact that there are substantial segments of the student population who have not come to understand the basic meaning of Constitutional rights. As noted in the Williamstown Report which is directed toward improvement of civic education, the young adults often qualified their undemocratic views expressed in the polls, but even in so doing they missed the whole point of the basic universality of the Bill of Rights. In failing to see that these rights are for all people and for all times, they demonstrated an ignorance of the fact that Constitutional rights are particularly important and meaningful in the most delicate situations of conflict; these often involve the lone individual or small minority arraigned by some arbitrary or capricious judgment of government officials⁵⁶). Illustrative findings as to the opinions of high school students in the period 1951 — 1960 are drawn from the reports of Remmers and Franklin⁵⁷):

A consistent one-third of those polled in the course of the decade agreed that "Some of the petitions which have been circulated should not be allowed by the government." Another one-third expressed uncertainty on this item.

In 1960, 42 per cent would go along with the right of the police or FBI to give a man the "third degree" which was seen as sometimes necessary to make a man talk. Twenty-three per cent expressed themselves as uncertain on this issue.

In 1958, 47 per cent would be willing to restrict the right to vote of those who "have wild ideas and don't use good sense." Three years later a six point decrease in the percentage agreeing with restriction was noted.

In 1951, 54 per cent of those polled felt that foreigners should have the same right as other citizens; nine years later, this percentage was down to only 42 per cent.

Sixty per cent would favor censorship of books and movies in a 1960 survey; 15 per cent additional were not certain.

Approximately one-third of the high school students would be willing to forgo the right of a person to be free from search and seizure without a warrant.

More revealing of the frame of mind of the teenagers are the reasons given for willingness to impose censorship on newspapers and magazines (by frequency of choice)⁵⁸):

⁵⁶) The Report of the Williamstown Workshop, *Education that Security and Liberty May Prosper Together* (New York: Civil Liberties Educational Foundation, Inc., 1962), p. 9. (Hereafter referred to as the Williamstown Report or Conference.)

⁵⁷) H. H. Remmers and R. D. Franklin, "Sweet Land of Liberty," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 44, October 1962, pp. 22—27.

⁵⁸) *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Sex perversion, sexual promiscuity, pornography	63 %
Irreligion, profanity, atheism, etc.	43 %
Political: un-Americanism, radicalism, etc.	35 %
Violence, assault, sadism, gore, etc.	28 %
Shouldn't be limited or prohibited for any reason	15 %

Attitudes of College Students

College and university students fail to show up much better on surveys of attitudes toward democratic principles. More than half a thousand students interviewed in one university indicated that protections against double jeopardy should be waived for some persons. A greater percentage were willing to deny the right of some accused persons to confront those giving witness against them. Many seemed to feel that Constitutional protections should not be extended to unpopular or antisocial individuals⁵⁹).

In a different study of upperclassmen and graduate students at an eastern university, Nash discovered that only 34 per cent could correctly identify the source of a questionnaire paraphrased and constructed from the Bill of Rights. This was remindful of a similar survey conducted by an enterprising reporter about a decade ago, when more than half the people approached on the streets of several cities declined to sign a petition drawn from the basic American documents of liberty; the main reason given for the abstention at that time was that the petition had "communist overtones". Nash, in his college sample, found that among the areas of highest disagreement with civil rights were the principle of peaceable assembly and right of confrontation of an accuser; among areas of greatest agreement were the right to trial by jury and the necessity of being informed of the nature of the accusation against one⁶⁰).

A Problem of Interpretation

Response patterns on surveys of student attitude and opinion about human rights cannot be viewed as universally bad, however. The polls show spotty areas of significant consensus. For example, the Purdue studies show that 87 per cent were agreed that the police have no right to hold a person without a formal charge; 88 per cent defended the right of the worst type of criminal to have a lawyer; and two-thirds or more strongly disapproved of racial segregation in schools. But then there remains the problem of interpreting the word "only". For what educator can honestly console himself with the statistic that "only" a third of American students favor segregation or are opposed to the right of free petition? That "only" 42 per cent would go along with an occasional use of the third-degree? The problem is even more complicated, of course, by the knowledge that these same students are representative of the more educated segments of the population.

Conclusion

In this chapter some of the broader dimensions of the problem of political unconsciousness of the general public have been scrutinized. The level of information of the man in the street has been shown to be seriously fragmented and his support of democratic and Constitutional principles to be relatively minimal and undependable. The general attitude toward political involvement may be summed up in the

⁵⁹) "Current Affairs and the Social Studies," Bulletin No. 17, *Current Events Magazine* (Middletown, Conn.), 1963.

⁶⁰) Paul Nash, "Should We Abandon the Bill of Rights?", *Social Education*, 23, 1959, pp. 371—372.

statistic that two-thirds of a national sampling of the American electorate indicated they would not wish to see their son enter politics⁶¹). Any serious student of the political scene could not help but agree that the understanding of politics and political ideas by the American public "is in any event too rudimentary at present to speak of ideological 'consensus' among its members"⁶²).

The ignorance displayed by the man in the street, even of the most fundamental political and historical facts and concepts, is proven abysmal. In fact, so great has the degree of ignorance been established to be that pollster Sam Lubell, after sounding out public opinion immediately following the first Sputnik, concluded that it was impossible to reach people by political arguments. The only way to get through to them, he lamented, is to manipulate the entire economy and thus bring about responses through the only things they seemed interested in responding to—paychecks, inflation, and unemployment⁶³). In the words of David Riesman, the informational level of the public "is of a newsreel quality, snippets without context. People seem to forget items of information which might seem vital to us—for example, at the very height of the uproar over McCarthy, polls showed that as many as a quarter of the respondents didn't know who he was"⁶⁴).

It was this very kind of political unconsciousness that motivated the trenchant political observer, H. L. Mencken, to refer to the public as the "boobsoisie". Yet, others have concluded that one does not have to be a political cobbler to know that the shoes of government policy do not fit, and, of course, there is always room for differences of opinion over what exactly constitutes essential knowledge. Then too, the political scene is far from universally bleak. No objective observer can overlook the data that show an increased political participation, more democratic attitudes, and higher levels of information all correlated with amount of formal education and rising socio-economic status. Thus, to some extent, surveys of the political knowledge of the electorate must be taken with a grain of salt, although five grains of aspirin as well doubtless would not be amiss. But this strange medication may be but an inherent price of the ambivalence of our educational system and even a function of the historical paradox of democratic government.

The astute analyst, James Bryce, on surveying fifty years of foreign relations, concluded that for all its many faults, popular democracies have shown themselves far more adept at making the right policy decisions. Also, they have shown more respect for moral principles than have either monarchies or oligarchies or other power aristocracies. "Whatever faults modern democracies may have committed in this field of administration", writes Bryce, "the faults chargeable on monarchs and oligarchies have been less pardonable and more harmful to the peace and progress of mankind"⁶⁵). Perhaps most simply put, the guiding faith of democracy lies in the adage of Lincoln that you can't fool all of the people all of the time; and equally it may lie in the Jeffersonian dictum: "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education"⁶⁶).

⁶¹) Hyman and Sheatsley, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶²) McClosky, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

⁶³) Samuel Lubell, as referred to in Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁶⁴) Riesman, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁶⁵) James Bryce, "Democracy and Foreign Policy," in *Modern Democracies*, vol. II (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1921), p. 383.

⁶⁶) Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Jarvis," quoted in *Thomas Jefferson on Democracy* by Saul K. Padover (New York: Mentor Books, 1946), pp. 89–90.

But all this cannot serve to absolve the electorate of its responsibility to learn; especially is this true in an age wherein both the time for decision has been dramatically shortened and the consequences of political decision have become portentous. The whole question of voter knowledge, participation, and political attitude thus begins and ends in the efficacy of the educational system.

It is well established that democratic beliefs must be learned like any other beliefs; that persons with chauvinistic or authoritarian views generally have the least knowledge and understanding of democratic institutions; that personal problems distract people from taking greater interest in the political process. Research also has established a high correlation between amount of formal education (and socio-economic status) and political articulateness and grasp of democratic ideology. But this latter finding is, of course, relative to the very small amount of political information and interest held by most people. Despite all that is known about the dimensions of political unconsciousness, students of the American scene have generally failed to draw the necessary inferences to and from the educational system.

Thus, to the politician the public easily can assume the shape of a great beast that must be fed a diet of paternalism in order to keep it from yowling. But to much of the public the politician is seen as less of a giver of food than as chief among those who feed at the public treasury. To the political scientist, the apparent decline of ideologies may be seen as a positive factor in reducing political friction. However, that decline may ill prove but an intellectual vacuum that draws open a Pandora's box of political positioning through the arts of Madison Avenue. Those techniques of mass persuasion, aimed at a citizenry lacking a feeling for ideological structure, are much less susceptible to the brakes of rational critique, and result in the kind of grotesque shadow boxing that haunts the Viet Nam policy crises and that create flickerings of doubt about the future of democratic foreign policy.

It appears that under the pressures of the impersonality of modern society, and because of the failure to educate successfully for democratic responsibility, politics has moved closer to the state of dissociation, feared by Toqueville, that reflects in the lack of understanding of ideology and in the lack of consensus on fundamental principles. Indeed, a threat exists to the ideals of democratic community perhaps less because certain policies of a government may be bad or poorly executed, or even because certain democratic principles are not seen clearly as universal virtues. More elemental, it is simply because for far too many Americans those ideals or those policies are personally meaningless because politics itself never was made meaningful. Thus the electorate seems incapable of logically grasping political events and political implications.

Pouring into young and old more of the same educational materials that have not worked up to now does not come under the heading of a practical suggestion. The need is not simply for more education, but for a change in its quality and direction. While few answers have been forthcoming from the experts (because they have not been asking the right questions), it must be acknowledged that something is amiss with the formal aspects of the political socialization process; nor is this judgment meant to discount the congruent influences of home and community.

Thus we turn now to inquire more pointedly into educational factors. In seeking some clues as to the reasons for malfunction, we must examine student responses and make a closer inspection of the exact nature of their incapacities.