

orthodox position cannot be defended. Such exclusion will inevitably lead to a coercive uniformity of opinion and a static view of the universe that will weaken our chance of survival.

America has been able to adjust to the modern world because new ideas have been permitted under our concept of free inquiry. The approach to a new

idea, and also to an old idea up for reconsideration, should be to appraise it, approve, modify, or reject it as a guide to action—*never to ban it*. Teachers, librarians, authors, publishers, and the public must unite to prevent the burning of the books. For the burning of the books forecasts the decline of the nation.

## *Building America: a Case in Point*

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KIMBALL WILES

At this time the future of *Building America* is an unknown quantity. To ASCD members this situation has particular import and is one of immediate concern. To those members who have worked closely with *Building America* the developments over the course of the past few years have been of particular regret. It is not with the purpose of reviewing the history of this publication or to present an "official statement" that we include the following article. It is presented, rather, as a sample case to illustrate what may happen if free inquiry is not allowed in our schools. To Kimball Wiles, associate professor of education at New York University, and a present member of the *Building America* editorial board, we are indebted for this discussion of what happened to *Building America* in California and its implications for educators everywhere.

ALTHOUGH AMERICAN SOCIETY has many common values, its members also hold conflicting ones. Out of conflicts in basic values which we hold, the nation as a whole and all local communities have issues on which there is controversy. All citizens must deal with controversial issues day by day in meeting the problems of the community and nation. Ability to think through these issues and to take action in terms

of the decisions reached is an essential skill in our democratic society. *No school adequately trains for American citizenship unless it helps its students develop skill in dealing with controversial issues.*

Such skill cannot be developed unless students have experience in studying the issues. Skill comes with practice. Since only about fifty percent of our youth finish high school, study of con-

troversial issues is essential citizenship training at least as low as the junior high school.

### It's Only Realistic

In addition to developing a basic citizenship skill, the study of controversial issues helps to bridge the gap between an idealized academic description of the workings of our society and the practical operation of everyday life. Exploring the realities of life while studying national and international life in school is the best way of keeping the graduate from becoming a disillusioned cynic upon his post-school contact with imperfection. One has only to compare the adults who have had opportunity to really examine controversial issues in school with those who have not had such opportunity to tell which type of education produces the creative, constructive citizen.

The teaching of controversial issues cannot be successful unless students have access to sources which present various points of view. Keeping pupils from seeing certain materials is a propaganda device to load the dice in favor of the conclusion the teacher or persons selecting the material want the pupils to accept. If youth are to learn how to deal with controversial issues they must gain skill in analyzing information to determine the facts, the source of the material, and the slant given it.

In addition, the teacher needs teaching material which attempts to present all sides of the issue being studied in an objective, analytical manner. *Building America*, owned by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, is one type of material which fills this very need.

### The Legislature Acts

For the past fourteen years *Building America* has been used by schools throughout the land and by many governmental agencies, including the armed services. Educators, librarians, parents, and governmental officers have found it an effective teaching tool.

But in January, 1947 the following amendment was added to the California Assembly Bill No. 973:

"Provided, however, that no part of this appropriation may be expended for the purchase of any text or supplement thereto which is in any way a part of 'Building America Series' or a duplication thereof whether known by that name or any other name."

Prior to this action by the legislature, the State Board of Education, acting on recommendation of the State Curriculum Commission, had authorized the adoption of certain issues of *Building America* as supplementary texts for secondary school social studies classes in California. A representative of the Sons of the American Revolution had protested the adoption and the California Senate had established by resolution a Senate Investigating Committee on Education with general powers of investigation.

In July, 1947 the Investigating Committee met and asked the State Board of Education to rescind their adoption of *Building America*. But the Curriculum Commission, at a subsequent meeting, reaffirmed its belief in the worth of *Building America* and kept the publication on the approved list of supplementary textbooks in the State of California. At the October, 1947 meeting of the State Board of Education, a re-

quest of the publishers of *Building America* for execution of the contract was tabled. During the period of controversy over *Building America*, the State Superintendent of Education criticized the legislature for withholding funds for *Building America*. He stated that he would stake his professional reputation upon the proposition that these books were not subversive.

### The Issues Are Complex

Two issues are involved in the California situation, viz, "Is *Building America* unsatisfactory for use in the schools?" and, "Are American schools to be learning situations in which our youth are free to examine all of the evidence or are they to be used to give pupils only the facts which some group, educators or otherwise, feel will lead them to a certain set of conclusions?"

The first issue is less important even though our personal feelings may be involved. *Building America* is only one aspect of the second and major issue. But to get the record straight, let's look at the evidence for and against *Building America* as a teaching tool.

For the prosecution, the California Senate Investigating Committee was "impressed by the obvious undesirability of the books." (Third Report of the Senate Investigating Committee, p. 9)<sup>1</sup> To support their contention, the committee cites the following unsatisfactory qualities of *Building America*:

1) It uses pictures which were supplied by Sovfoto.

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<sup>1</sup> California Legislature 1948 Regular Session. *Third Report Senate Investigating Committee on Education*. Sacramento, California: Senate of State of California, 1948, p. 120.

"The power of the picture to tell a story far excels that of words and here the official Soviet propaganda agency supplies the pictures, scores of them, (sic) for a compulsory textbook for our elementary school children of California. Sovfoto is registered at the U. S. State Department as an agency of a foreign Government, USSR. It was with the knowledge of these facts among others that the Senate of California refused to appropriate the funds to purchase *Building America* as a supplementary or any kind of textbook." (Third Report, Senate Investigating Committee on Education, p. 13)

2) It presents political opinions in a way that they are to be taught as accepted facts. ". . . it has seemed to this committee that another error of *Building America* has been that it invades the field of political thinking slanted as the writers wish it to be. The authors, whoever they may be, whether educators or not, are not necessarily experts and authorities on political action. . . . Political opinions with which many disagree most intensely are presented in a way that they are to be taught as accepted facts." (Third Report, Senate Investigating Committee on Education, p. 14)

3) It prints cartoons unfavorable to Lincoln and Jefferson.

"This cartoon is a lie, a pictured lie by Lincoln's enemies and the enemies of our country."

"In this cartoon President Jefferson is pictured as intemperate both in mind and in habits, as well as attempting to pull down the federal government. This cartoon is also untrue and an attack by Jefferson's enemies which can well be forgotten today." (Third Report Senate Investigating Committee on Education, p. 16)

4) Material presented is not well balanced and based on unknown writers and authors.

"As a general criticism of the material in the 'Building America Series' of publications, I have noted that much valuable,

relevant material has been omitted, apparently not because of a lack of space, but in order to utilize the space to emphasize other ideas. Many illustrations and charts appear to be out of date and often not pertinent to the subject matter announced. Some of these illustrations are credited to known propaganda sources. Furthermore, some of the text appears to be slanted toward the more radical political opinions of the unknown writers or authors, and is therefore of questionable value to any text or supplementary textbook." (Third Report Senate Investigating Committee on Education, pp. 29-30)

5) Authors of *Building America* are affiliated with Communist front organizations.

It is interesting to note that the persons listed as authors of *Building America* are authors of books used as source material in the preparation of *Building America* issues. Representative names from this list are: Sherwood Anderson, Charles A. Beard, Mary Beard, Pearl Buck, Stuart Chase, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Helen Lynd, Robert Lynd, Louis Mumford, Lincoln Steffens, Leland Stowe, and Frank Graham.

6) Members of the Editorial Board of *Building America* have been associated with Communist front organizations.

The Investigating Committee has apparently operated under the assumption that participating in an organization which the Investigating Committee called "Communist sponsored" is the equivalent of being a Communist.

Two members of the present Board of Editors and one former member are cited because they have been associated in other organizations with three prominent American educators who have belonged to numerous "front organizations."

Such smear attempts would be humorous if they were not so dangerous to freedom to examine controversial issues in the schools of America.

## A Grand Jury Speaks

The opinion of the California Sons of the American Revolution and the Senate Investigating Committee on Education was supported by a resolution passed by the Grand Jury of Alameda County, California. It reads:

"Whereas, it has been called to the attention of the Grand Jury of Alameda County that a series of textbooks known as the 'Building America Series' was being used as supplemental reading in the schools of certain counties throughout this state; and

Whereas, *the use of such textbooks was opposed by various patriotic organizations* [italics mine] interested in the education of youth and the development and stimulation of loyalty toward American institutions and traditions;

Whereas, *such organizations had expressed the opinion* [italics mine] that this series of textbooks was critical of the ideas and ideals of our democratic form of government and gave an unfavorable presentation of the historical background and contemporary growth of our country;

now, therefore, be it resolved that we, the Grand Jury of Alameda County, hereby urge and recommend the school authorities of this County that the 'Building America Series' of textbooks not be used in the schools of this County; and be it further that a copy of this resolution be sent to the County Superintendent of Schools, to each of the Boards of Education and Boards of School Trustees in Alameda County, and to the Grand Juries of each of the other counties of this state.

## Librarians Speak Up

For the defense, the California Curriculum Commission and the State Superintendent of Schools have stood firm in support of *Building America*. However, the most complete refutation of the reports of the investigators working for the California Senate has come

from the Committee on Intellectual Freedom of the California Library Association. Its analysis of *Building America* and of the *Third Report of the Senate Investigating Committee*, entitled "The Right to Find Out,"<sup>2</sup> gives volume for volume the conclusions of the Investigating Committee and the findings of the California Library Association. Their report, which points out the misrepresentation of the Senate investigators, is summarized in the statement by Helen Luce, a member of the staff of the San Bernardino County Library in the introduction to the report:

"Librarians in the school department and I have carefully read both the Los Angeles *Times* account of Mr. Combs' findings and the eleven issues of "Building America" which he criticizes as being controversial. We have come to the following conclusions:

"We feel that there is no basis for an investigation and that Mr. Combs' criticisms are unfounded. There are four types of criticism or methods which he uses that should be pointed out and denounced.

"First, he quotes many statements from the text that are not there at all. We have read the books word for word and in many instances do not find the thing he is quoting. It is possible that he worked with a different edition from ours, but where we have two editions, we have read both. Roy E. Simpson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, tells us that he has no information concerning the edition used by Combs, nor has he received a copy of his report.

"Second, by lifting a single sentence out of the context, the meaning and intent are often changed. This is a vicious practice used to put across your own interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> California Library Committee on Intellectual Freedom. *The Right to Find Out*. Reprints available from the ASCD office, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.

In the report to follow, we have endeavored to give full quotations where this has happened. When both good and bad points are mentioned, quoting only the bad, as Mr. Combs frequently does, does not present a true picture of the text.

"Third, Mr. Combs employs exaggerations and places false emphasis. When a few pictures are unflattering, he has a tendency to say that a great many or nearly all are. In the same manner he emphasizes a small portion of the text or illustrations out of all proportion to their real prominence. Specific instances of this type of thing are noted in the report that follows.

"Fourth, Mr. Combs seems to have an aversion to unpleasant facts and pictures being used, even though they may be true. The series, on the other hand, has shown the bad as well as the good, especially for the purpose of indicating progress."

Such is the report of librarians who work daily with presentations of data. They did not find *Building America* biased, slanted, or subversive.

#### Parents Also Defend

The California Parent-Teachers Association took an equally firm stand. Their findings, after a thorough study of *Building America* materials, are summarized by the following quotation from a letter from Mrs. Rollin Brown, President, to Senator Nelson S. Dilworth, Chairman of the Senate Investigating Committee:

"After careful and critical reading of the 'Building America Series' of textbooks in use in the public schools and now under attack, the Education Study Committee of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers finds them well prepared and factual in approach. They are neither subversive nor communistic. The books emphasize the advantages of the democratic

way of life. They stimulate students to assume their responsibilities in upholding and improving the traditional principles of American life."

On one hand, a "patriotic" organization, a grand jury taking the word of the "patriotic" organization, and a Senate investigation committee have stated that *Building America* is unfit for school use. On the other hand, educators, librarians, and parents who have investigated the material have found it satisfactory.

### We Can Act Where We Are

To indicate proposed Association action at this point is not my particular function. But all of us, in our capacity as protectors of the right of free inquiry in the schools, can and should take steps in our immediate situations to insure against a second *Building America* episode. We can:

1) Encourage local school units to invite representatives of community organizations to participate in the selection of teaching materials at all times. Then, when a crisis arises, the teaching profession is not isolated in the fight. It is not a question of professional educators *versus* lay groups. Pressure groups who want certain materials banned are confronted by their peers. The laymen with experience in selection of curricular materials will have developed the basic point of view that will enable them to clarify the basis of choice to other laymen.

There is evidence that such an organization prevents crises from arising. Denver has a curricular materials council which includes representatives of all the special interest groups in the community. To date no serious question has been raised about materials used in the Denver schools.

2) Ask the local board of education to adopt a formal statement of policy which encourages the teaching of controversial

issues and establishes the guiding principles of teaching procedure. Cincinnati, according to the assistant superintendent, has such a stated policy and has found that it decreases the feelings of insecurity that sometimes accompany the examination of controversial issues in the classroom.

### We Can Present a United Front

There are implications, also, for a united stand on this question. As members of the teaching profession we can take nation-wide action.

1) We must not ignore an attack on teaching materials or method in which we believe. The opposition will not dissolve if we remain aloof or above argument.

2) We must move to oppose such attacks on a national basis. If the opponents of the study of controversial issues are well versed in the use of the media of communication, any charges instituted go across the continent. National groups must mobilize to form nation-wide public opinion to support local groups in their attempts to combat restriction of freedom to examine issues and arrive at independent conclusions.

3) We must have full-time personnel available in our professional organizations who can take leadership in spear-heading counter measures.

4) We cannot assume that the public understands. The ideas, programs, and battles that are familiar to us and accepted by us may be little known outside of professional circles. When an issue involving the right of children to learn arises, we must have means of carrying it to the public and it cannot be a makeshift, haphazard, voluntary means.

### This Is the American Birthright

While the fate of *Building America* is important to us, it is only one of a series of battles to maintain freedom of inquiry in our schools. Other materials are being *banned* too. The article

preceding gives information concerning these. Unless we become positive in our beliefs and action, other materials will receive the same treatment. The right of children to learn will be further restricted. The basic issue is whether special interest groups will be able to keep schools from examining materials which question the values the special interest group holds.

In a society that has a multiplicity of values, as does ours, education in schools can be restricted to the presenting of values held in common by the group, *or* it can allow a certain portion of the population to dictate the values that shall be taught, *or* it can make the right to examine all values available to all members of the population.

If we accept the first alternative, the function of education becomes teaching skills and indoctrination of the common values. If we take the second course, we are immediately confronted with the decision as to who will decide which of our values will be taught.

On the other hand, if we believe in a type of education which gives students opportunity to examine all points of view or sets of values and to arrive

at the ones they feel are most desirable in terms of our social situation, educators must make their position very clear to forces seeking to interfere with the right to exercise intelligence.

This issue is not one that concerns education alone. It is fundamental in American democracy. If we believe in the right of people to make up their own minds, to make their own decisions about who will govern them and how they will be governed, to decide for themselves the type of social restrictions that they will place upon themselves, *we must believe in the right of citizens to have all of the information available.* Intelligent decisions cannot be made without access to all data. If citizens are given only the information that certain groups consider desirable, democracy is a farce and men are manipulated by those who control the sources of information.

Unless we recognize the issue and begin to fight for the type of learning situation in which there is free play of the intelligence and encouragement to examine the multiple points of view and values, we will lose our birthright as citizens of democracy.

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*It is encouraging to see* that people in public life as well as educators are deploring the censoring of materials. Recently there appeared a statement entitled *An Appeal to Reason and Conscience*, signed by over 100 prominent citizens concerning the action of the New York City schools in banning *The Nation*. We wish we could reprint this appeal in its entirety, but space does not permit. The following quotations are from the statement:

- The exclusion from public institutions, by public officials, of future issues of newspapers, magazines or other periodicals on the basis of particular material published in the past, rather than

on the basis of the character of the publication as a whole, cannot be defended even as censorship. It is extra-judicial punishment pure and simple, and it involves a power of intimidation and pos-

sible blackmail in officials of government which no free society can tolerate and which a free press could not long survive.

- Ignorance is notoriously the worst foundation for tolerance, and the American people have never felt that it was the purpose of education to teach their children to be blind.

- The truth is that the suppression of ideas impoverishes human life and warps the human mind in an increasing and progressive sickness.

- The only test with books and periodicals as with men is the individual test—the decision of each case on its merits. Is this book or this periodical, *regarded as a whole*, a serious and responsible exercise of the right of free inquiry and free report? If it is, and if it deals with matters within the general interest of the citizens, in terms which students can understand, then there is no justification for its suppression because an article, or a group of articles, or several passages scattered through various articles, are objectionable to special groups, whatever the grounds of the objection. If it is not a responsible exercise of the right of free inquiry and free report—if, for example, a publication, considered as a whole, is found to be an attempt not to get at the truth but to disseminate hatred of a race or a faith or a group by the distortion or suppression of the truth or by forgery and lies—then it should receive the special handling that such material is generally accorded by American libraries.

- One of the principal purposes of American education should be to see to it that no generation grows up in ignorance of the controversial issues it will have to face.

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