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### "Irrationalism and the New Reformism": Two Replies

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dear Editor:

Raywid's article "Irrationalism and the New Reformism,"\* in the May issue of *Educational Leadership*, is misleading because it is based on a false premise in which the real is confused with the ideal. She defines rationalism as discussion, analysis, and weighing of alternatives which she assumes American leaders have been practicing generation after generation. Any group opposing these "traditional practices" is said to be anti-rational, and ideas coming from anti-rational groups are suspect, such as making Afro-American history compulsory for all students.

Further, according to such an assumption, it was rationalism that destroyed the American Indians' main source of sustenance and put them on reservations away from the newly arrived; it was rationalism that forced human beings to bondage and developed its justifications so well for hundreds of years that the resulting racism is a real functional component of the American national character today; it was rationalism that led to the series of compromises during the first half of the 19th Century and eventually the Civil

War; it was rationalism that pardoned the ex-slaveowners with deliberate speed and left the protection and acculturation of the new freedmen to the states; it was rationalism that considered corporations as individuals with freedom and absolute rights, giving rise to today's tyranny of the industrial-military complex; it was rationalism that guided the passing of immigration laws favoring immigrants from northern Europe compared to southern Europe and the Far East; it is rationalism that allows education (especially social studies) across the country to be uniformly WASP-oriented in spite of the cultural plurality that exists;<sup>1</sup> and finally, it is rationalism that spouts tradition in the face of change resulting in a Janus-like society.

While the foregoing is far from being exhaustive of pervading practices indicating the rationalism of American leaders, the above does indicate the kind of rationalism which the various reform groups oppose. The various groups reject the attitude of self-interest, the attitude of "business as usual" which pervades and perverts the political

<sup>1</sup> Milton M. Gordon. "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality." In: Vincent Rogers, editor. *A Sourcebook for Social Studies*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: The Macmillan Company, 1969. pp. 114-30.

Judah J. Harris. *The Treatment of Religion in Elementary School Social Studies*. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1963.

\* Mary Anne Raywid. "Irrationalism and the New Reformism." *Educational Leadership* 26 (8): 743-48; May 1969.

process in the name of democracy disguising a game of greed.

In addition to the false premise, Raywid assumes erroneously that American schools are dedicated to teaching children how to think critically. I can only say in response that Raywid must not be familiar with either school practices or the related literature which indicates that children learn very little in school about current social-political problems,<sup>2</sup> that most elementary teachers do not discuss controversial issues in the classroom,<sup>3</sup> that textbooks (teachers' main source of instruction and evaluation) do not stress thinking processes,<sup>4</sup> and that the school's social

structure inhibits rational inquiry<sup>5</sup> and teaches the child to be stupid.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, I suggest that Raywid should use rationalism in considering just what the reform groups really oppose and why.

JOHN FORD

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Dear Editor:

I was flattered to find myself quoted in Mary Anne Raywid's article, "Irrationalism

<sup>2</sup> Frederick R. Smith and James A. Mackey, "Creating an Appropriate Social Setting for Inquiry," *Phi Delta Kappan* 50: 462-66; April 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Jules Henry, "Golden Rule Days: American Schoolrooms," *Culture Against Man*. New York: Random House, 1963. pp. 283-321.

<sup>2</sup> Alice Miel. *The Short-Changed Children of Suburbia*. New York: Institute of Human Relations Press, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> J. D. McAulay. "Controversial Issues in the Social Studies." *Education* 86: 27-30; September 1965.

<sup>4</sup> O. L. Davis, Jr., and Francis P. Hunkins. "Textbook Questions: What Thinking Processes Do They Foster?" *Peabody Journal of Education* 43: 285-92; March 1966.

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and the New Reformism,"<sup>1</sup> which appeared in your May 1969 issue. However, my sense of pride was dispelled when I discovered that the author's argument was not at all in line with the thinking in my article from which she had quoted.

The gist of Professor Raywid's piece was that irrationalism and anti-rationalism have come to the fore as ideas destructive of education and other institutions. With this proposition few members of the academic community would quibble. But flowing from this generalization are certain ancillary statements whose logic must be challenged.

Early in her article, Professor Raywid states that "A direct, frontal attack on reason has played a prominent part in many of the activities of the New Left, Black Militants, and student demonstrators across the nation."<sup>2</sup> She might also have written that a direct, frontal attack on injustice and inequities in American life has been made by these same groups. For surely, the fruits of these groups' labors have been a "mixed bag of tricks." As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., among others, has pointed out, Columbia University's restructuring is a direct result of the crisis on that campus. But more important, Professor Raywid should have sought an explanation for the phenomenon she discusses. Is the irrationality merely capricious, or is it a function of some failing on the part of America's institutions? This is, I believe, the threshold question.

In the case of black militants, this nation's racist performance over the past one hundred years does little to convince Negroes that "discussion" and "weighing alternatives" are tactical desiderata. The demand that Afro-American history courses be compulsory "for all students" disturbs Professor Raywid. One hopes she is equally troubled by the systematic exclusion of Negroes from labor unions, and more important, that she sees some relationship between these two situations. It is characteristic of the uneven achievement of social progress in America

<sup>1</sup> Mary Anne Raywid. "Irrationalism and the New Reformism." *Educational Leadership* 26 (8): 743-48; May 1969.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 743.

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that while students have demanded black studies programs on 140 campuses since January 1, 1969,<sup>3</sup> there are still fewer Negro union plumbers or electricians in America than there are Negro Ph.D.'s.<sup>4</sup> Blacks have learned which institutions are most susceptible to pressure and change. They understand hypocrisy and double standards. These lessons have not been lost upon our minorities.

The behavior of student demonstrators, admittedly excessive and violent, may be explained by the disparity between the real and the ideal. Had parents and teachers not taught the youth of this generation the values of freedom and equality, we might not be faced with the behavior Professor Raywid deplores. The problem may be that our college population has learned democracy's lessons too well, and rather than merely paying lip service to our noble ideals has decided to put thoughts into action.

Academics and civil libertarians must do more than decry the rejection of democratic processes; they must look deeply into the cause and effect relationship of current upheavals. As one student leader put it, we should spend less time deploring student disobedience and more time analyzing the society which tolerates situations that make violence inevitable.

The New Left, many of whose actions are anti-rational, must also be better understood. What causes it to reject orderly, due process? One explanation is that America's greatest exponents of peaceful change were violently removed from the political scene. When Martin Luther King and two Kennedys were assassinated, the New Left's hope of evolutionary change died with them. And when Eugene McCarthy arose to fill the political vacuum, his bid for power was cruelly squelched by establishment politicians, leaving many young leftists with a complete sense of alienation and despair.

A nation torn by internal dissent was

<sup>3</sup> Steven V. Roberts. "Black Studies Aim To Change Things." *The New York Times*, May 15, 1969. p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> "A National Disgrace: What Unions Do to Blacks." *Look* 32: 34; Nov. 12, 1968.

offered a choice for President between a Southern segregationist, a 1940's liberal with somewhat tarnished credentials, and a reconstituted conservative whose political deftness consisted of avoiding commitment on all major issues. This is the stuff of which revolutions are made! A second explanation for the New Left's penchant for the irrational is the Vietnamese fiasco. Here is a war whose architects were men of intellect, liberality, and above all, reason. If men of this caliber could blithely pursue such an immoral undertaking, what faith could one have in the process of reason?

None of the analysis above is designed to detract from the validity of Professor Raywid's premise. Social scientists must continue to reject authoritarian ideologues, but they must do more. They are, I believe, obligated to examine the pathology of a sick society and to work for the elimination of causes rather than merely railing against symptoms. It is suggested that once the gap between the American Dream and the Ameri-

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can Reality has been closed, sacred reason will once more be enshrined.

Having analyzed the rejection of reason by radical groups, the argument that "the irrationalist . . . urges the substitution of feeling and emotion in approaching tasks that we have been assigning to reason and knowledge"<sup>5</sup> must be examined. It is at this juncture that Professor Raywid makes reference to my article which dealt with the "new wave" of educational authors.<sup>6</sup> I wrote about what I thought was a considerable contribution being made by such young and inspired teachers as Jonathon Kozol, Herbert Kohl, and John Holt. While I contended that they showed more concern with the affective aspects of learning than with academic excellence, I was comparing them to writers of the 'fifties such as Conant, Bestor, and Keats.

I did not mean to imply that they were, in any sense, anti-intellectual. Quite the contrary, the inference to be drawn was that the cognitive and affective domains are not mutually exclusive categories. Here I part company with Professor Raywid, who does not believe in "passionate involvement" and "intense emotional engagement." My belief that emotion is the *sine qua non* of meaningful education as well as social progress was most eloquently stated in a famous speech made by George S. Counts.

<sup>5</sup> Raywid, *op. cit.*, p. 744.

<sup>6</sup> Harold W. Sobel. "The New Wave of Educational Literature." *Phi Delta Kappan* 50 (2): 109-11; October 1968.

There is the . . . fallacy that education is primarily intellectualistic in its processes and goals. . . . We are moved by no great faiths; we are touched by no great passions. We can view a world order rushing rapidly towards collapse with no more concern than the outcome of a horse race; we can see injustice, crime, and misery in their most terrible forms all about us and, if we are not directly affected, register the emotions of a scientist studying white rats in a laboratory.<sup>7</sup>

Counts' strictures about the antiseptic quality of education in the 1930's were most prophetic. I hold that emotion and passion have their place in the classroom, not as substitutes for reason, but as handmaidens in the search for truth. A strong sense of outrage over injustice has kept many a scholar poring over musty tomes. I see nothing alien to the academic tradition in commitment to a lofty ideal.

In this response to Professor Raywid I have tried to make two points. First, that post-mortems over the demise of reason are less fruitful than efforts to alleviate those conditions which breed unreasonableness, and second, that dispassionateness is neither sound pedagogy nor the antidote to ideological despotism.

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<sup>7</sup> George S. Counts. *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* New York: The John Day Company, 1932. pp. 22-23.

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