CHAPTER ONE

CENSORING MOVIES AND TEACHING KIDS TO LOVE WORLD WAR I

ONE OF THE agencies most prone to promote the war spirit is the sandtable,” declared a National School Service bulletin issued by the federal government’s Committee on Public Information during World War I. Using the descriptive title “Natural War Interests of Children,” the bulletin urged teachers to encourage children to play war games. The bulletin claimed, “Children are no longer satisfied to build peaceful ditches, pleasant farms or high mountains.... Now trenches appear fortified by whatever accessible material may serve as cannon.”

World War I set the stage for a continuing debate about the role of censorship and propaganda in shaping public opinion in American society. These events heralded the sharpening of the conflict over control of ideological management, a framework of analysis that I develop in the Introduction to this book. The major struggle on the home front during the war was, in David Kennedy’s words, “the war for the American mind.” Concerned about the possible lack of national unity and the unclear objectives regarding the United States’ entry into the war, the federal government launched a massive propaganda campaign designed to create national unity and justify the war as a war for democracy. The campaign was led by the Committee on Public Information (CPI), which was primarily composed of reformers and educators who believed that the war provided the opportunity to transform America into their vision of a democracy. The CPI used all the major means at its disposal for influencing public opinion, including public schools, movies, advertising, a speakers’ bureau, pamphlets, and magazines. From the perspective of the members of the CPI, they were engaged on a major effort at educating the public in the meaning of democracy and nationalism. As will be clear later, they primarily defined democracy in social, not political, terms and they wanted their vision of democracy to become the new religion of American life.

Immediately prior to America’s entry into World War I, an extensive debate took place over the effect of movies on public morality. Some reformers believed that censorship should be used to make movies a form of public
instruction in moral and social values. Others advocated censorship only of those parts of films which could cause social disorder. This debate continued after World War I with the argument for turning movies into a form of public education winning out in the 1930s. In addition, the movies represented a direct challenge to the role of public schools as the major source of public instruction. Many educators considered films to be in direct competition with the public schools for molding the minds of children (see Chapter 3).

Out of the debate over censorship of movies there developed a relationship between the public schools and the film industry. They needed each other for political and economic reasons. For example, in 1922, Will Hays, president of the newly formed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (M.P.P.D.A.), tried to win educators to his side in the battle against government censorship by appealing for support to the gathered delegates at the annual meeting of the National Education Association (NEA). At the time, the NEA was the largest and most important organization for creating educational policy for the public schools. Hays quoted to the NEA delegates his organization’s pledge to the goals of “establishing and maintaining the highest possible moral and artistic standards in motion picture production, and developing the educational as well as the entertainment value and the general usefulness of the motion picture.” He concluded his speech with the promise, “We accept the challenge in the righteous demand of the American mother that the entertainment and amusement of...youth shall be worthy of their value as a potent factor in the country’s future.”

Hays argued for censorship of movies by the industry, not by the government. In other words, the movie industry took the position that self-censorship would permit the industry to include material in movies for the purpose of public education in desirable social, political, and moral attitudes and behavior, whereas government censorship would only serve to exclude material for the purpose of shielding the population from certain ideas and information that might cause social disorder. Also, the movie industry preferred self-censorship because it was cheaper than making constant revisions required by government censors.

The M.P.P.D.A. was formed to counter demands for increased government censorship of movies. In fact, Hays devoted part of his speech to warning educators about the evils of government censorship of movies. He told the delegates to the NEA convention, “I am against political censorship, of course, because political censorship will not do what is hoped for it in the last analysis.” What Hays offered the educators as an alternative to political censorship was censorship by the industry. In his words, “there is one place and one place only where the evils can be eliminated...and that is at the point where and when pictures are made.” Hays promised his audience that, “Right is right and wrong is wrong, and men know right from wrong. The corrections can be made, real evil
can and must be kept out, the highest standards of art, taste, and morals can be achieved, and it is primarily the duty of the producers to do it."

Besides indicating the position of the movie industry on the issue of censorship, Hays’s appearance before the NEA also illustrates the combination of political and economic pressures that created complex relationships between educators and the entertainment world. As the largest and most influential educational organization, the NEA was considered by the M.P.P.D.A. as essential in its public relations campaign against government censorship. At the same time, educators were placing pressure on the movie industry to change the moral content of films. The movie industry’s public relations campaign convinced educators to support the self-regulatory censorship code. Equally important, educators created new markets for films by introducing high school courses in movie appreciation. All of these events had a direct impact on the moral and political content of both American movies and public schools. As explained in later chapters, by the 1930s youngsters might attend school during weekday hours, listen to the radio in the evening, and attend movies on the weekends. Whether sitting by the radio at home or in rows in schools or movie houses, children received a consciously constructed vision of the workings of the world.

THE EARLY CENSORSHIP OF MOVIES

Advocates of government censorship wanted the removal of scenes and words that might teach audiences how to commit crimes, or cause them to participate in some form of social disturbance. In addition, there was concern about the influence of movies on moral and sexual behavior. On the other hand, those advocating self-censorship wanted films to be controlled for the purpose of teaching social lessons. In other words, these latter censors wanted movie scripts changed at the time of production so that explicit lessons could be taught to audiences.

Calls for censorship of movies occurred almost immediately after Thomas Edison’s commercial introduction of a projection machine in 1894. Two weeks after the introduction of Edison’s machine, protests were heard about the showing of the film Dolorita in the Passion Dance on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. In addition to the content of films, concerns were voiced about the social and moral environment of early movie theaters, and their primarily immigrant and working class audiences. Beginning around 1900, immigrant entrepreneurs rented small stores and refurbished them as nickelodeons, where for a nickel or dime a customer could watch short films. As discussed by historian Lary May, the popularity of nickelodeons spread rapidly through working class and immigrant neighborhoods. Those in New York City increased from 50 in 1900 to 400 by 1908, and attendance reached 200,000 daily. By the 1920s, studio owners were trying to overcome the negative image of movie houses in an attempt to attract middle class families.
Typical of attitudes about nickelodeons was the warning by the Chicago Vice Commission in 1911: "Investigations by individuals interested in the welfare of children have pointed out many instances where children have been influenced by the conditions surrounding some of these shows. Vicious men and boys mix with the crowd...and take liberties with very young girls." Examples given by the Chicago Vice Commission included a nickelodeon owner who assaulted 14 young girls, and a 76-year-old man who enticed young girls to attend movies. One unnamed student of the effect of movies cited by the Chicago Vice Commission declared, "I think the nickel theater is a recruiting station for vice. In the first place from the type of pictures often shown there; in the second place from the association."

The fact that early movies audiences were primarily composed of immigrants and blue collar workers gave an added dimension to concerns about censorship. A fear of some groups was that the content of movies would cause riots and social disruption. The fear of mass social unrest reflected the belief, as The Nation magazine declared in 1913, that movies were the "first democratic art." The journal declared that movies were free of upper class pretensions and that they reflected the ideas of the common people. The magazine also pointed out that the price of movies, when compared with other forms of entertainment, made them accessible to the general population. Five cents was a small sum compared with the cost at the time of $1.20 for a Broadway play or sixty cents for an off-Broadway melodrama. Also, silent films were attractive to immigrants because they did not require a knowledge of spoken English.

The concern about movies as the "first democratic art" extended to arguments that movies were developing a class consciousness. For example, an article in The Atlantic magazine in 1915 stressed the social class differences between audiences for spoken drama and audiences for film. The author, Richard Eaton, warned that "the line of demarcation between theatrical audiences and movie audiences will grow sharper, the one representing entirely the bourgeoisie and upper classes, and the other the proletariat." Eaton went on to state, "The movies will become ever more powerfully a factor in the growth of class consciousness."

In addition to fears about the working class composition of movie audiences, there were concerns in some circles about the political content of early movies. For example in The Candidate (1907), workers throw dirt at an affluent politician after a speech and he is later beaten by his discontented wife. In Down with Women (1907), an upper class male declares women incompetent and condemns women's suffrage. Later in the movie, he encounters women in a variety of occupations, from musician to lawyer to taxi and truck driver. Eventually, he is saved by one woman and defended in court by another. Greedy landlords were condemned in The Eviction (1907) and workers in labor-management struggles were treated sympathetically in films like The Iconoclast (1910).
Bankers and factory owners were also frequently criticized in early silent films. “These favorable attitudes toward the working class and criticisms of the upper class had disappeared from most films made in the United States by the 1930s. According to film historian Terry Christensen, “One movie maker, however, remained sympathetic with workers, immigrants, and the downtrodden in general as they struggled to withstand the pressures of an urban, industrial society. He was, of course, Charlie Chaplin.”

The first government censorship law for movies was passed by the City of Chicago in 1907, which required police review and licensing of movies. In 1909, the law was challenged when Chicago police refused to license The James Boys and Night Riders. The Illinois Supreme Court accepted the argument of the police that censorship of films was necessary to maintain social order. In the words of the Court, the two films “represent nothing but malicious mischief, arson, and murder. They are both immoral, and their exhibition would necessarily be attended with evil effects upon youthful spectators.”

Most government censorship boards operated according to a licensing procedure by which officials would review the films and then decide whether to license them for distribution. Obviously, the film industry resented the process of government censorship because it delayed distribution and created the possibility that each municipality or state would require different changes in a particular film. The delays and constant editing could cost the movie producer a great deal of money. Will Hays, as president of the M.P.P.D.A., argued against government censorship on the grounds that there was lack of agreement on standards among the different censorship boards. Hays argued that this situation was exemplified by particular states’ laws prohibiting the showing of a woman smoking a cigarette. According to Hays, these laws “might eliminate any scene of a social gathering happening in another State.” In another instance, a lawyer on one censorship board would not allow any scenes that depicted lawyers as unethical or crooked. Of importance for political censorship of movies, Hays wrote, “Scenes of strike riots were ordered eliminated from news reels in one State at the same time newspapers were using photographs of the exact incidents recorded in the films.”

The United States Supreme Court supported government censorship of movies as necessary for maintaining social order. A challenge to state censorship occurred in 1915 when the Mutual Film Corporation appealed to the United States Supreme Court a decision regarding the Ohio censorship board. The Mutual Film Corporation was engaged in the distribution of films in Ohio. The company complained that the Ohio requirement that all films be submitted to a state censorship board delayed distribution and was injurious to business. The lawyers for the company argued that the requirement that films be censored before their distribution was a violation of the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment.
In a decision that was not overturned until the 1950s, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to extend the protection of the First and the Fourteenth Amendments to movies. The court reasoned that films were a business enterprise and, consequently, its decision argues, “We immediately feel that the argument is wrong or strained which extends the guarantee of free speech to the multitudinous shows which are advertised on the billboards of our cities and towns, and which regards them as emblems of public safety....” The U.S. Supreme Court decision argued that censorship of movies is necessary for maintaining social order. In the words of the Court, movies represent a major threat to public safety. Its decision expressed concern about the role of movies in educating the general public. The Court decision argues, “Their [the movies’] power of amusement, and, it may be, education, the audiences they assemble, not of women alone nor of men alone, but together, not only adults only but of children, make them the more insidious in corruption by pretense of worth....”

In 1921, Ellis Oberholtzer, Secretary of the Pennsylvania State Board of Motion Picture Censors, compared state censorship to government control of public schools: “The efforts which are made to convert the unlikeliest of young human beings at school into useful citizens are many. From the care of their teeth and the public feeding of them when they are hungry up to the old purely educational processes developed to the nth degree, our social efficiency has been tried and proved. I for one fail to see, therefore, how by any fair system of reasoning we can be held to be without some duty to inquire into the course of the film man with his 15,000 or more picture houses set in every nook and corner of the land at the door of each inhabitant.” Oberholtzer placed censorship in the general category of government responsibility for the actions of citizens. “The misbehavior of this citizen [influenced by movies]...,” Oberholtzer concluded, “is not beyond our concern.”

In an earlier article, Oberholtzer rejected the argument made by advocates of self-regulation that movies should teach social and moral lessons. The role of government censorship was to remove from films any scenes that might contribute to lawlessness or moral decay. This is an important distinction, as noted earlier, because it made government censorship of movies primarily a negative act of removing offensive scenes, whereas proponents of self-regulation argued that they wanted to transform movies into positive educational lessons.

Oberholtzer claimed that the film maker used the argument that movies could teach morals as justification for including material “to enliven his theme and lend zest, or ‘punch,’ as he calls it, to his product....” Oberholtzer illustrated his argument with a report from the British Board of Film Censors on movies containing scenes depicting the use of drugs. He quoted from the report, “It is said for such films that they serve to warn the public against the dangers of the abuse of drugs, but the Board decided that there being no reason to suppose that
this habit was prevalent in this country..., the evils of arousing curiosity in the minds of those to who it was a novel idea far outweighed the possible good that might accrue by warning the small minority who indulged in the practice." Declared Oberholtzer, "I am, therefore, not to be beguiled by the protestations of such a picture man. I have met him and he resembles a teacher less than any one I have ever seen." In rejecting the whole argument that self-regulation would create movies that taught lessons, Oberholtzer stated, "It is clear that a theater is not a proper place for the inculcation of such lessons, or the theater man a proper person to bear such delicate messages to the young. We have the church, the school, the home and our social organizations...."

Sometimes public protests caused government censors to remove socially controversial scenes. For instance, race relations became a major concern of censors after protests by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) over the film Birth of a Nation. The film was released in 1915 and received wide public attention because of its innovative film techniques and its endorsement by national political and social leaders, including President Woodrow Wilson. In addition, the film's distribution was timed for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the ending of the Civil War. The NAACP and the African-American community in general objected to the negative portrayal of emancipated slaves and to the depiction of the Ku Kux Klan as the savior of Southern society after the Civil War.

The membership rolls of the NAACP swelled as it led national protests against the film. Ironically, the protests of the NAACP caused government censors to eliminate scenes from later movies that might, as determined by the censors, lead to race riots. On the other hand, however, film makers feared a loss of profits if movies were banned by Southern censors. Consequently, movies made by major companies in the 1920s and 1930s avoided any meaningful depiction of problems in race relations, and primarily presented African-Americans in stereotyped roles as servants.

In some cases, government censors banned movies and scenes depicting organized labor in a favorable manner. The most extreme incident was reported in 1915 when the Ohio censors banned the entire movie titled The Strike of Coaldale. According to a contemporary report, the movie's "sole offense was that it dramatized the victory of labor and mildly sided with the cause of labor."

The advocates of self-regulation, as opposed to government censorship, explicitly argued that the role of self-regulation should be to assure that movie audiences were taught moral and social lessons. They criticized government censorship because it only removed negative scenes without controlling the general theme of a film. One of the earliest arguments for self-censorship was given by John Collier, a co-founder of the National Board of Review or, as it was sometimes called, the National Board of Censorship.
The National Board of Review was organized after New York City police, under orders from the mayor and chief of police, closed 550 movie houses on Christmas Day, 1908, for violating Sunday closing laws. The closings were part of a larger crusade against vice. In reaction to police actions, theater owners organized the National Board of Review in hopes that self-censorship would stop future vice raids. Officially organized in March 1909, in conjunction with the People’s Institute, a reform organization located in the immigrant section of lower Manhattan, the work of the Board was supported by movie producers, and also by police and city government officials.

The National Board of Review received financial support from the film industry. From the standpoint of movie producers, they hoped that Board approval of a movie would mean its nationwide acceptance and, consequently, avoidance of problems with government censors. It was believed that the illustrious membership of the Board would aid in national acceptance of its standards. At the same time, board members hoped that reforming movies would contribute, like the settlement house, to the reform of urban life. The majority of members of the executive committee of the National Board of Review were wealthy Protestant males, including Andrew Carnegie, Samuel Gompers, presidents of major universities, and “representatives from the Federal Council of Churches, the YMCA, the New York School Board, the Society for the Prevention of Crime headed by the most powerful vice crusader in the city, the Rev. Charles Parkhurst, and the moralistic Postal Inspector, Anthony Comstock.”

Collier presented the guiding philosophy of the organization in a series of magazine articles in The Survey. As Collier explained, the Board’s censorship code emphasized the important role of movies in teaching morality. In this sense, the censors wanted the movies to teach the public uplifting moral lessons, like schools. The code stressed the importance of movies’ depicting good winning out over evil: “The results of the crime [shown in movies] should be in the long run disastrous to the criminal so that the impression is that crime will inevitably find one out. The result [punishment] should always take a reasonable proportion of the film.” In addition, the code stressed the role of government in maintaining a moral society. “As a general rule,” the code argues, “it is preferable to have retribution come through the hands of authorized officers of the law, rather than through revenge or other unlawful or extra-legal means.” Of course, the Board also expressed a great deal of interest in the portrayal of sexual relationships. The Board’s standards would “not allow the extended display of personal allurements, the exposure of alleged physical charms and passionate, protracted embraces” and it would “also disapprove the showing of men turning lightly from woman to woman, or women turning lightly from man to man in intimate sexual relationships.”

Collier argued that government censorship impedes the traditional role of art as a source of social change. “The challenge of the old and the institution
of the new," Collier wrote, "are a responsibility of the drama, no less than is the
inculcation of accepted virtues...." The heavy hand of government censorship,
Collier insisted, undermined the social role of art by the application of absolute
standards. He maintained that one of the values of voluntary censorship was
inconsistency. "Until censorship can discriminate, can limit the audience, can
prescribe the destination of the censored product," he wrote, "it is nothing but a
bludgeon-like imposition, by some element momentarily in power, of its preju-
dices on the mass of the people." The important thing about the Board of
Review, was "that being without legal power it is without legal responsibility
and can be inconsistent...." 27

It was inconsistency in the application of standards that allowed the
National Board of Review, according to Collier, to support films that taught
moral and social lessons. For instance, one of Collier's articles included pictures
from a film of a boy torturing a cat. Even though the board prohibited depiction
of brutality, these scenes were approved because they were "essential in a plot
dealing with the relation of defective mentality to juvenile crime. The boy who is
here shown torturing a cat is later restored by medical treatment to normality." 28

Collier's arguments reflected some reformers' belief in the importance
of shaping public opinion as an element in social change. It was this belief that
attracted many reformers to the work of the Committee on Public Information
(CPI) during World War I. Both the war and the formation of the CPI seemed to
many reformers a golden opportunity to reform American society and spread
the doctrines of social democracy.

THE COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC
INFORMATION (CPI) AND
THE MOLDING OF PUBLIC OPINION

On April 13, 1917, within two weeks after President Woodrow Wilson
asked Congress to declare war, the CPI was established to create a national spir-
it to support the war effort. The Wilson administration organized the CPI to deal
with the potential threats of strong opposition to entry into the war, the large
German-American population, and the presence of great numbers of immi-
grants. The 1910 census estimated that one out of every three Americans either
was foreign born or had a foreign-born parent. Ten million of those falling into
these categories had ties with the Central Powers. 29

President Wilson justified the war as a war for democracy. This was the
theme the CPI tried to sell to the American people. In its campaign, the CPI
linked nationalism with democracy and presented democracy as the secular reli-
gion of America. Reflecting this belief, the chair of the Committee, George
Creel, stated in 1918, "Democracy is a religion with me, and throughout my
whole adult life I have preached America as the hope of the world." 30
Of the many means used by the CPI to influence public opinion, one of the most important from the perspective of this book was the public schools. The CPI’s Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation was lead by Guy Stanton Ford. Ford was a professor of European history, who just prior to working for the CPI was Dean of the University of Minnesota’s graduate school. As head of the Division, he hired large numbers of muckraking writers to produce pamphlets to support the war effort. In addition, he selected educator William Bagley to edit the National School Service (NSS), a bulletin designed to create favorable attitudes about nationalism and democratic citizenship among students in the public schools. In 1918, Ford told the delegates to the annual meeting of the NEA, “The Committee on Public Information and the schools have a great common war task to make an Americanized, nationalized American nation.”

In education circles, Bagley was known as a leading proponent of education for social efficiency. This particular educational doctrine dominated the goals of public schooling in the early twentieth century. Beginning in the 1890s, educators, business people, labor leaders, social reformers, religious leaders, and social scientists argued that the modern world of urban living and large industries required a new concept of morality and good character. The term that began to appear in educational discussions was “social efficiency.” The phrase was applied to school curriculum, organization, and goals. When educators of the period spoke of a “socially efficient character” they meant an individual who knew a particular skill needed by modern society and who knew how to cooperate with fellow workers. Expertise and cooperation were the goals of social efficiency educators, goals shared by many others in the U.S. A cooperative person was desired by both business and labor. In business, cooperation was essential for the operation of modern corporations. Expert and specialized employees needed to know how to cooperate. For labor, cooperation was essential for the organization of unions. Urban reformers argued that cooperation was necessary for people to be able to live in a reasonable manner in modern cities. Many educators and social scientists argued that the modern world required that the school become the new social center of urban life.

Bagley believed that the schools should take on the goal of social efficiency because the World War meant the United States assuming economic and political supremacy in the world. He linked the goals of social efficiency and American economic and political superiority in a speech he gave to the Harvard Teachers Association in 1916, prior to America’s entry into the war. The speech was in honor of the newly established chair of education at Harvard. Bagley told his audience that the World War was causing the financial collapse of Europe and would make the United States preeminent in power and wealth.

The assumption of this role of world leadership would require, he argued, “the formulation of educational policies primarily in terms of national life rather
than in terms of sectional, local, class and individual demands and interests.” In speaking of these national educational policies, Bagley peppered his address with references to “collective strength” and the “collective intelligence of the democratic group.” He also told his audience, in the spirit of social efficiency, that “public interest is more readily aroused by, and public funds more readily available for educational plans that promote economic betterment....”

This belief in the necessity of a national educational policy guided Bagley’s editorship of the National School Service (NSS). Bagley joined other members of the CPI and other educators in believing that the public schools should be a vehicle for spreading the doctrines of democracy. And, as indicated already, democracy in this context was primarily defined as a form of social organization.

The formation of the NSS was prompted, in part, by a resolution passed at the April 1918 meeting of the NEA calling for the creation of a clearinghouse for propaganda directed at the schools. In addition, the United States Commissioner of Education, Philander P. Claxton, had recommended that the CPI prepare a bulletin to be distributed to the schools. Under the guidance of Guy Stanton Ford, the NSS was created in the fall of 1918 with William Bagley as editor. The historian of the CPI, Stephen Vaughn, argues that the general attitude of the members of the CPI toward public schools was best expressed by one member, Carl Becker, when he wrote that the “chief purpose of free education in a democratic society is to make good citizens rather than good scholars.”

At the same NEA meeting in 1918 where a clearinghouse for propaganda for the schools was proposed, Bagley outlined his beliefs on the place of education in the war effort. Like many associated with the CPI, he seemed to welcome the war as an opportunity for implementing reforms in American schools. The two major opportunities brought by the war, from Bagley’s perspective, were the development of a “new nationalism” and the “growth and development of a new and persuasive and comprehensive meaning for the word ‘democracy’.” The new nationalism, he argued, was giving “birth...[to] a new, fresh, and vigorous sense of national unity.” This new nationalism provided the opportunity to spread the concept of democracy.

Bagley believed that local control of educational policy was a major hindrance in adapting the public schools to the needs of the United States as a world leader. In his 1918 speech before the NEA, he presented the new nationalism as a means of overcoming the localism of educational policy. The combination of the war and the new national spirit opened the door for the federal government to exercise leadership in a national educational policy. Included in Bagley’s proposals was a call for federal financing of the public school system. Bagley told the educators, “But now with this new national awakening we find that state boundaries can be easily and quickly transcended. The golden hour of American education has struck.”

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Bagley placed his arguments for social efficiency within a particular definition of democracy. Bagley and the Progressives associated with the CPI identified two major components of democracy: cooperation and equality of opportunity. This concept of democracy was included in the long-awaited report on the organization of the American high school issued by the NEA in 1918. Issued in the midst of the fervor over the war effort, the document reflects concerns about national unity and cooperation. As elaborated in Chapter 2, the document defined the goals, organization, and social structure of the American comprehensive high school. It became a guiding document for the development of the high school for at least the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, the report gave clear support to the goals of social efficiency as defined by educators like Bagley.

The report, *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, states that the goals of the comprehensive high school should contain the two components of democracy specified within the framework of social efficiency—specialization and unification, that is cooperation. According to the report, character education, within the social organization of a democracy, is to be linked to one’s contribution to society. This is what is meant by the term “specialization” in *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. Reflecting the concept of equality of opportunity, the report announces that, “The purpose of democracy is so to organize society that each member may develop his personality primarily through activities designed for the well-being of his fellow members and of society as a whole.”

It was this democratic organization of society that was to provide all citizens with equality of opportunity. In this context, equality of opportunity meant giving everyone an equal chance to find a job best suited to her or his individual talents. And, of course, if everyone found a job suited to his or her talents, then the industrial efficiency of society would be increased. In the rhetoric of the times, equality of opportunity meant an efficient use of human resources.

The report declares that the specialized and differentiated curriculum of the comprehensive high school would train each student to perform a specific task benefiting society. Within the linkage of schooling and equality of opportunity, the report proposes (in bold type) that “education in a democracy... should develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society toward ever-nobler ends.”

The report also stresses what it calls “the democratic ideal of unification”—the second component of democracy in *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. This concept of unification, of course, reflected the nationalism advocated by supporters of the war effort. The report defines unification as that part of the ideal of democracy that brings people together and gives them “common ideas, common ideals, and common modes of thought, feeling, and action that make for cooperation, social cohesion, and social solidarity.”
The leaders of the CPI combined this social definition of democracy with spiritual and religious qualities. Chairman Creel not only portrayed democracy as a religion but also as a continuous religious struggle. Creel wrote, "Democracy has never been, and never can be, other than a theory of spiritual progress.... Democracy is not an automatic device but the struggle everlasting."41 Stuart P. Sherman, a professor of English at the University of Illinois and an editor of the Cambridge History of American Literature, also emphasized the religious qualities of democracy in an essay he wrote for the CPI. Even after the war, he continued preaching on what he referred to as the "religion of democracy."42

Sherman’s essay for the CPI, “American and Allied Ideals,” was originally given as a lecture in 1917 to the National Council of Teachers of English. For Sherman, the concept of democracy included what he considered to be the basic values of American civilization. These values were embodied in American literature, the intellectual heritage of the founders of the nation, and our shared cultural ideals. Within the context of this definition, democracy was threatened by the culture of Germany and the culture of immigrants who had recently arrived on America’s shores. Thus the war effort had to be both external, against German arms and internal, against anti-democratic values. Therefore, he argued, since anyone not believing in democratic values was a threat to the nation, it was necessary for people in the United States to be indoctrinated with democratic values.43

The members of the CPI considered themselves on a mission to spread the religion of democracy. In fact, the head of the CPI’s Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation, Guy Stanton Ford, actually lamented the end of the war because it curtailed the efforts to educate the public on the meaning of democracy. In his words, “the Germans spoiled some perfectly good enterprises by ending the war when they did.”44

When Bagley assumed charge of the National School Service (NSS) in the fall of 1918, he was faced with the problem of distributing propaganda to a school system that had multiple layers of control, from state governments through county superintendents to local school boards. These multiple layers of control also posed a problem in achieving another of Bagley’s goals, namely, a national educational policy. To overcome this problem, the decision was made to distribute the NSS directly to individual schools, using a national school building address list compiled by the federal Bureau of Education.

In general, the NSS bulletin stressed the patriotic duties of citizens and the necessity of unswerving loyalty to the country. Democracy was equated with Americanism, and the NSS bulletin, like other publications of the CPI, defined democracy primarily by what the CPI believed to be the culture and ideals of the United States. Good citizenship was presented as the fulfillment of duties and responsibilities to society, as opposed to active individual participa-
tion in political activities. This concept of passive rather than active citizenship persisted in the schools after the war.

Notably absent from the literature of the CPI and the NSS were discussions of democracy involving the exercise by individuals of political power. In fact, Bagley rejected ideas of democracy that included direct control of the government by the people. Like other social efficiency educators, he believed that government should be operated by experts with the consent of the people. Thus, in addition to teaching loyalty, duties, and service to the country, the role of education according to social efficiency educators was to educate students to want to be governed by experts. 45

The major part of each issue of the NSS was devoted to detailed lessons for elementary and high school classes designed to teach patriotism, the evils of the enemy, and the principles of "democracy." In addition, the lessons were planned to increase students' interest in and acceptance of modern warfare. For instance, the NSS bulletins recommended turning children's games into war games. As already indicated, one bulletin was titled "Natural War Interests of Children." Besides applauding the use of the sand table as a means of sustaining the interest of children in war, the bulletin states:

No form of occupation material can claim exemption from war service. Drawings of ponies and friendly cows are supplanted by galloping cavalry horses. Crayoned ships sail the ocean bringing supplies to our soldiers, while bits of folded paper floating through the air become miniature air ships. Clay cannon, bullets, and soldiers are a common sight on the modeling table. Soldier games and marching songs are called for. 'Over There' seems to be known to all and is more popular than the most tuneful childish melody. 46

The bulletin goes on to encourage teachers to promote war games in the classroom. "The primary teacher," the bulletin states, "who is awake to her opportunities will allow this natural war interest of the children to run its course. More than that, she will follow the lead thus given her by the children themselves and will provide the mediums for its full play." 47

An important wartime pamphlet for high school students was prepared by one of Bagley's assistants, Samuel Harding. The CPI distributed enough copies of the pamphlet to reach every senior high school student in the United States. Entitled "Study of the Great War," it was first published in the January 1918 issue of The History Teacher's Magazine. Because of teacher demand for the article, the CPI decided to sell it as a pamphlet for five cents a copy. By the end of the war, 700,000 copies of the pamphlet had been sold and 40,000 additional copies of the January 1918 issue of The History Teacher's Magazine had been reprinted and sold by the publisher. 48

The pamphlet primarily attempts to drum up hatred of the Germans with
statements such as, “Germany does not really wage war. She assassinates, massacres, poisons, tortures, intrigues; she commits every crime in the calendar, such as arson, pillage, murder, and rape.” After seven chapters of building up high school students’ hatred of Germany, the pamphlet concludes with the promise that an allied victory would probably result in the end of warfare on earth.

Patriotic lessons for elementary grades were delayed until August 1918 because the first version written for the CPI took a negative view of the role of nationalism in the world. The final version recommended the integration of war themes into all subjects. The pamphlet suggested focusing on “Stories of War Incidents,” “Celebrations of Special Holidays,” and “Talks on the War and the Children’s Relation to It.” In addition, it recommended systematic instruction in patriotism, beginning with two 15-minute periods each week for the first and second grades of elementary school and increasing amounts of time for students in higher grades.

One of the themes that runs throughout the pamphlet for the elementary school grades is the need for educators to work on the emotions of children and to avoid creating emotions that would lead children to a rejection of war. In other words, emotions were to be whipped up in support of the Allied war effort and for the United States, but the emotions related to the horror of war were to be avoided. The pamphlet states, “In teaching the war to young pupils, the appeal should be directed primarily to the imagination and to the emotions. It is not enough that our pupils shall be informed of the events of the war.... Their imaginations must be awakened and their feelings aroused to an appreciation of the significance of the great happenings of the time.”

In contrast to the enthusiasm the teacher was to display for patriotism and support of the Allied cause, the teacher is cautioned not to dwell on the “horrors inseparable from war and peculiarly characteristic of the present struggle.” The pamphlet warns that focusing on the horror of war might cause “Permanent injury...to young children through emphasis on the terrible and repulsive.”

One might speculate on the effect on young children of the promotion of war games, the creation of emotional attachment to the war cause, and the avoidance of discussions of the horrors of war. It is certainly possible that this combination of instruction would teach children to love war and to glorify the life of the American combatant. Much of the rhetoric of the CPI promised that the war would end all wars. But, in reality, the effect of the material actually distributed to the public schools might have been to prepare students to accept a world that was permanently at war.

The issue of teaching about war in public schools continued as an issue through the 1920s. Efforts were made to require compulsory participation of high school students in the Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC) as part of a general campaign against teaching radical ideas in schools. General Pershing declared in the 1920s, “I firmly believe that a sane program of military training
for every young man is a great immunity against idle, insidious and foolish propaganda of the I.W.W., the parlor Bolsheviks and all other shades of Reds of which there are too many right now.” In 1925, the Inspector General of the Army warned that liberals and church workers opposed to compulsory ROTC in the schools were acting as agents of Communism. “Revolutionary forces,” he said, “are at work… in our schools.”

Howard Beales, selected during the 1930s by the American Historical Association’s Commission on Social Studies in the Schools to investigate intellectual freedom in public schools, found that in the 1920s teachers advocating militarism were favored over those who were pacifist. Beales described cases of teachers fired in the 1920s for being pacifists: “Trouble has not been made for teachers who advocate military training, or urge boys to join cadet corps, or propagandize for armament programs of the D.A.R., the American Legion, or the National Security League.” Beales believed advocates of peace were at a disadvantage in influencing schools because of their lack of organization and relative weakness compared with the power and money of the federal government.

The campaign in the public schools during World War I was only part of the massive effort by the CPI to build support for the war. A bureau was organized to blanket the nation with four-minute speeches drafted by the CPI. Speakers were given careful instructions for their presentations in movie houses, at public meetings, at meetings of service clubs, and at any other gatherings that were considered appropriate. This was certainly one of the most ambitious public speaking projects ever initiated in the United States. These messages were written to build nationalism and win support for the war effort. In September 1918 alone, forty thousand speeches were given across the country. In Illinois, by the end of the war, Four-Minute Men were speaking weekly to some 800,000 people. By the end of the project, an estimated one million four-minute speeches had been given to 400 million people.

The CPI also launched what its Chair, Creel, called the “greatest adventure in advertising.” The country was blanketed with posters carrying a variety of pro-war messages. Posters depicting menacing German soldiers were used to sell Liberty Bonds. Others showed soldiers rushing from their loved ones back to camp with the message “He Must Not Overstay His Leave!” One of the more grotesque posters is titled “This is Kultur,” showing German soldiers cutting off the hands of a victim while in the background another German soldier is strangling a woman. One series of posters told readers how to write cheerful letters to their loved ones and another series warned against the spread of rumors that would aid the enemy.

The CPI also organized a War Cooperating Committee, to use the talents of the film industry to produce training and propaganda movies. The committee included movie greats D.W. Griffith, Cecil B. DeMille, and William Fox. The short duration of American participation in the war—from April 1917 to
November 1918—did not allow enough time to produce a large number of films. The major ones were Pershing’s Crusaders, America’s Answer, and Official War Review. Under the auspices of the CPI, a film starring Douglas Fairbanks was produced with the descriptive title, Swat the Kaiser.56

The war also affected the content of public school textbooks. Since the United States was allied with Great Britain, it was considered necessary to downplay the tension between the two nations during the American Revolution. Bagley, as former head of the National School Service, recalled in an interview in 1932, “There was a tendency to change textbooks during the War to soft-peddle the American Revolutionary War.” In keeping with the desire for removal from textbooks of all suggestions of a basic conflict between the two nations, publisher George Putnam told an English audience in 1918, “Textbooks are now being prepared which will present a juster account of the events of 1775-1783, 1812-1815 and 1861-1865.”57 As discussed in Chapter 2, the pro-British bias in textbooks during World War I became a major issue in the 1920s.

In summary the brief period of America’s direct engagement in World War I, from 1917 to 1918, saw the Committee on Public Information launch one of the most massive attempts at ideological management in the history of the United States. From the standpoint of the public schools, it was the first major attempt to bring the goals of locally controlled schools into line with the policy objectives of the federal government. This pattern was repeated during and after World War II.58 Thus, the end of World War I, as pointed out in the next chapter, did not mean the end of national attempts to use the public schools to mold children according to a particular concept of good citizenship. Nor did it end attempts to influence other means for molding public opinion.

**Conclusion**

In 1921 Walter Lippmann wrote in Public Opinion, in reference to the work of the Creel Committee on Public Information, “The Administration was trying, and while the war continued it very largely succeeded, I believe, in creating something that might almost be called one public opinion all over America.”59 As a leading progressive journalist and co-editor along with Walter Weyl and Herbert Croly of the journal The New Republic, Lippmann was disillusioned by the reactionary political mood that gripped the United States after the war. One of the issues the war created for Lippmann was the role of public opinion in a democracy. Interspersing his book with examples of censorship and propaganda methods used during the war, Lippmann cynically states, “the manufacture of consent is capable of great refinements...and the opportunities for manipulation [are] open to anyone who understands the process.”60

The major problem for a modern democratic government, Lippmann maintains, is the inability of the average voter to understand the workings of a
complex economic and political system. The idea of a rational and knowledgeable voter, Lippmann argues, is a product of a time when the United States was primarily composed of geographically small and simple communities. In these conditions, it was easy for voters to know and understand the workings of their immediate society. But as American society became more complex during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it became more difficult for the voter to understand political and economic issues. The modern voter, Lippmann maintains, is often reduced to voting yes or no without fully understanding the issues involved. Very often, he contends, voting is based on pictures or symbols in the voter’s mind and not on an understanding of the issues. Thus, different events and issues can have different meanings for particular individuals depending on the pictures in their minds. An apparently unified public opinion might be, according to Lippmann, a result of general acceptance of a symbol that actually means different things to different people.

For instance, public opinion might support the idea of Americanism. But Americanism can mean to one person “preservation of isolationism..., [to] the second...rejection of a politician who clashes with his idea of what an American president should be, [and to] the third...a call to resist revolution.” In using this example, Lippmann was undoubtedly thinking of the Americanism campaign that swept through the United States at the end of World War I. “The symbol [Americanism],” he stated, “in itself signifies literally no one thing in particular, but it can be associated with almost anything. And because of that it can become the common bond of common feelings, even though those feelings were originally attached to disparate ideas.”

While Lippmann does present methods for manipulating public opinion, his primary concern is the role of knowledge in a modern democracy. He dismissed the idea that newspapers could be an unbiased source of information for the voter, and urged the establishment of government bureaus that would present the public with factual information. These bureaus would be operated by intellectuals who would work in an environment free from political bias and pressure. He proposed ways of structuring the bureaus so that they could operate independently and be protected from pressure from special interest groups. In this manner, knowledge dispensed by the bureaus would inform and not manipulate voters.

The solution offered by Lippmann reflects the progressive faith in the role of the expert and the social scientist. Certainly, a number of issues can be raised about the possibility of expert intellectuals dispensing unbiased information to the public. However, the important thing is not Lippmann’s solution, but his recognition of the problem of the politics of knowledge in a modern democratic society.

Lippmann’s book touches on a real set of problems that emerged after World War I. Various groups began to compete for influence over the mecha-
nisms for molding public opinion. As discussed in the next chapter, advocacy groups struggled to have the public schools teach their particular version of Americanism and citizenship. And, as described in Chapter 3, the influence of movies on the general public continued to be a concern throughout the 1920s.