

RAISING THE BAR: AN ESSAY WHICH EXPLORES
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND
INCARCERATION.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST BATTLES THAT THIS NATION WILL FACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY, WILL NOT BE FOUGHT IN THE TRENCHES OF SOME FAR OFF LAND. THE FRONT LINES WILL NOT BE MANNED BY OUR MILITARY ELITE, AND CASUALTIES WILL NOT BE CARRIED OFF IN FLAG STRAPED COFFINS.

THE FRONT LINES WILL BE IN THE CLASSROOMS, AND THE TRENCHES WILL BE FILLED WITH UNDERPRIDED AND OVERBURDENED TEACHERS. THE CASUALTIES MAY WELL BE MEASURED IN SHATTERED LIVES AND ILLUSIONS; MEASURED IN BROKEN DREAMS AND PROMISES. THOSE CASUALTIES WILL SWELL THE RANKS OF A PRISON POPULATION THAT HAS ALREADY EARNED US THE DUBIOUS DISTINCTION OF HAVING THE HIGHEST PER CAPITA INMATE POPULATION IN THE WORLD.

ALTHOUGH WE MAKE UP ONLY 5% OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, WE HAVE OVER 25% OF ITS INMATES. - THAT DISTINCTION REVEALS TROUBLING SYMPTOMS, BUT AT THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM LIES AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT ONCE SERVED AS AN ENTRÉE TO THE AMERICAN DREAM, AND NOW DELIVERS A STEADY STREAM OF OUR CITIZENS INTO CONFINEMENT.

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As passions flare in "Town Hall meetings" all across these divided States of America, and debates can erupt at the drop of a hat, a silent scream reverberates throughout our educational system - though silent for now, its echo will not just be heard, but felt for generations to come. That scream will bounce off of prison walls and echo through the chambers of legislatures which will wrestle with the rising costs of prisons, and its crippling effect upon state budgets.

How can we expect to maintain our values when our priorities have been misplaced? Where is the outrage? Where is the passion? Where is the debate?

When this nation was founded, over 230 years ago, our forefathers used as some of their guiding principles, "... life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We have come to realize, as a nation, that it is not just "life," but the quality of life. Not just "liberty," but the freedom to rise above our circumstances. Not just "Happiness," but the satisfaction that came from knowing we would be provided with the tools and given the opportunity to reach our potential.

From the very beginning, our government was called upon to "build the infrastructure, train the workforce, and lay the foundation for our economic growth."

Thomas Jefferson championed the creation of a government funded university system that would educate and train talent across the nation - Of all of his accomplishments, he considered the founding of the University of Virginia to be one of his greatest.

In the midst of a civil war, which threatened to tear this nation apart, Abraham Lincoln saw fit to sign the "Morrill Act" in 1862, which created a system of Land Grant Colleges - institutions of higher learning which would lay the foundations for which this war was being fought, a prosperous, and "United" States of America. He knew which battles were worth fighting. He also knew, not only that a "House divided" would not stand, but that an uneducated one would not stand for long.

Today, we have the highest drop out rate in the industrialized world! Half of our 9 yr. olds cannot perform basic multiplication and division. Half of

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OUR TEENS CANNOT UNDERSTAND BASIC FRACTIONS, OR EVEN SPELL THE WORD "LOGARITHM" - NEVERMIND DESCRIBE ITS FUNCTION. ONLY 22% OF THOSE WHO DO MANAGE TO GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL ARE PREPARED TO TAKE COLLEGE LEVEL COURSES IN ENGLISH, SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS... IRONICALLY, WE NOW HAVE A "HOUSE" WHICH CAN'T DIVIDE.

According to AN ESSAY BY NANCY GIBB, "TIME WILL TELL", IN THE SEPT. 21ST, 09 1330E OF TIME MAGAZINE, "... A HEAD SPINNING VIKAL VIDEO, 'did you know?' informs us, THE TOP 10 JOBS IN DEMAND IN 2010 DID NOT EXIST 10 YEARS AGO, SO WE'RE PREPARING KIDS FOR JOBS THEY DON'T GET EXIST USING TECHNOLOGY WE HAVEN'T INVENTED."

How could we, in good conscience, BURDEN A GENERATION WITH WHAT IS SHAPING UP TO BE ONE OF THE GREATEST NATIONAL DEBTS IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION, WITHOUT INVESTING ALL THAT WE POSSIBLY CAN INTO THE VERY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT SHOULD BE PREPARING THEM TO DEAL WITH THOSE "HEAD SPINNING" CHALLENGES OF TOMORROW?

THE FIRST SHOTS OF THE BATTLE HAVE BEEN FIRED WITH SILENCERS. WASTED MINDS ARE BEGINNING TO MOUNT. BE MUTED

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cries of a "... child left behind"
grow into a chorus - the silent
scream is beginning to echo off
of prison walls. When will we hear it?
When will we care? More importantly,
when will we act?

Any military commander facing a
battle would begin by looking at the
demographics, and the logistics, of the
potential battlefield - If the classrooms
of America were viewed as the arena,
what would the field of battle look like?

- 46 million students attend 87,125 schools in 14,471 school districts across the nation (based on 2009 figures)
- 6.2 million of those students have English as a second language (many of whom speak no English at all.)
- 6 million students have disabilities
- 1 in 5 live in abject poverty
- 1 in 5 live with single moms who themselves did not finish High School.
- 1 in 5 may have suffered some form of child abuse.
- 1 in 8 will be hungry. (For many, the school lunch may be the only meal of the day.)
- 2 million are physically abused or neglected.

- 2 MILLION ARE "CATCH KEY KIDS" WHO COME HOME TO AN EMPTY HOME.
- 500,000 WILL BE FROM FOSTER HOMES OR OTHER INSTITUTIONS.
- 500,000 WILL BE HOMELESS.
- 400,000 ARE "CRACK BABIES".
- 1.2 MILLION WILL DROP OUT OF SCHOOL EACH YEAR.
- HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS ARE 8 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO WIND UP IN PRISON AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES.

So much for the battlefield.

What of the teachers who will fire the trenches?

- 3 MILLION TEACHERS FACE THOSE TREMENDOUS CHALLENGES ON A DAILY BASIS.
- HALF OF THEM HAVE MASTERS DEGREES.
- ONE THIRD OF THEM WILL QUIT WITHIN THE FIRST 10 YEARS BECAUSE OF THE NEGATIVE ATMOSPHERE, POLITICAL FINGER POINTING, AND "BURN OUT."
- COUNTING HOURS WORKED, THE AVERAGE TEACHER DOES IN 9 MONTHS WHAT IT TAKES "40 HOUR WORKERS" 11.5 MONTHS TO DO.
- THE AVERAGE TEACHER SPENDS \$400 A YEAR IN PERSONAL FUNDS ON BASICALLY NEEDED SUPPLIES.

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MOST STATES HAVE A "LAST HIRED, FIRST FIRED" policy which ALMOST INSURES THAT ENTHUSIASTIC "NEW TEACHERS" WILL SOON BECOME DISCOURAGED.

UNDERPAID AND OVERBURDENED, THEY ARE THE UNSUNG HEROES IN AN UNDECLARED WAR.

WHAT OF THE CASUALTIES?

THEY WILL NOT BE SHOWN INTO DOVER AIR FORCE BASE AMID MILITARY HONORS, BUT BUSED INTO CORRECTION INSTITUTIONS SURROUNDED BY "RAZOR WIRE". THEY WILL BECOME A PART OF AMERICA'S PRIVILEGED PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING SEGMENTS OF OUR ECONOMY - IF IN FLORIDA, WHEREAS \$6,814 PER YEAR HAD BEEN SPENT ON THEIR "EDUCATION"; \$32,265 WILL BE EXPENDED FOR THEIR "CORRECTION". (2009 FIGURES) IF IN CALIFORNIA, THAT FIGURE WILL BE OVER \$41,000 PER YEAR, PER INMATE. WHERE ONCE THEIR VOICES DIDN'T COUNT, THEY WILL LEARN TO "SHIT UP FOR COUNT" 7 TIMES A DAY - OUR CHILDREN CAN'T VOTE, CAMPAIGN OR HIRE POLICYMAKERS, THEY CAN ONLY TRUST US TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

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75% of America's 2 million plus inmates are High School drop outs! 90% of them will eventually be released. (At the current rate of 700,000 per year) with no diploma, and a felony conviction, they will likely face a future that revolves around poverty, crime and recidivism.

It's been determined that the 1.2 million drop outs from "07" alone will cost the nation \$369 billion in "lost productivity" during their lifetimes. (That's based upon lower wages, unemployment, etc.) However, that figure does not take into account the possible costs of incarceration, subsidized healthcare, public assistance, or the accumulated costs to society of poverty driven crimes of opportunity.

In 2010, the Federal Government allocated \$49.7 billion for education, and \$708.3 billion for defense! - On 3/28/10, the "War on Terror," which began in Afghanistan in October 2001, officially became America's longest running military conflict. It surpassed Viet Nam's 8 years, 5 months, and 20 days... In that time, over 9 million students have dropped out of school - the cost of military expenditures at that time were approaching \$1 trillion.

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The price our society may ultimately have to pay in "lost productivity, crime, prison costs, subsidized healthcare, and public assistance will be staggering, and potentially catastrophic.

Students in the 50's were told that in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack, they would be safe if they got beneath their desks and sat very still. If they entered the 21st century being told there would be, "No child left behind" - today we have a "Race for the top," but for those who fall through the cracks, they will find a safety net made of steel bars and razor wire.

The "vision" that made this nation great, must not be blurred by those who would see fit to bail out Wall St. bankers with M.B.A.s, and yet balk at reinforcing one of the principal things that made this nation great - our future, and that of our children, must not be sacrificed upon an altar of greed, nor left to wither at the roots from neglect.

The "values" that made this nation great, must not be cast aside - the "strength" that earned this nation respect, must not be displayed only →

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through our use of force, but also
through our determination to ensure
that all of our children are provided
with an opportunity to reach the top -
if they are to be limited, let it
be by their own abilities, and not
by the narrowness of our expectations.

The fruit of our labors, and the
best of all our dreams must be sown
into the minds of those who will one
day carry the burden of our monumental
national debt - if they are to face
that debt tomorrow, then we must
meet our obligations today.

It has been said that the fall
of every great society begins with the
neglect of its people - let us not neglect
the tools that our children will need to
"stand and deliver"; or, surely, they will
have to learn how to "sit up for count."

During the Korean War, a general
was questioned about his decision to retreat
when his men were losing a battle. His
response was, "We're not retreating, we're
advancing in another direction." - let us resolve
to acknowledge the battle that lies ahead,
and to advance in the right direction.
It's not just our future that's at stake,
but the future of this great nation -
and if we're not 'raising the bar'
then we're dropping the ball!