

The Rugg Story: Lessons on the Promise and Perils of Curriculum Innovation ¹

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Abstract

This article examines Harold Rugg's social studies program, controversies he inspired, and lessons of his life as an activist. Rugg was a leading educator during the first half of the twentieth century and author of an avante-garde social studies textbook series. Rugg's work resides at the center of the roiling curricular debates of the 20th century, and illustrates both the potential and perils of innovation as seen through the life of one man.

Introduction

Harold O. Rugg was one of a small group of leaders of the Progressive Education movement centered at Teachers College, Columbia University, and a leader among the social frontier group that emerged in the 1930s to argue that schools should play a stronger role in helping to reconstruct the society. He was the author of an innovative and best selling series of social studies textbooks, which ultimately came under attack from "patriotic" and business groups in the prelude to the United States involvement in World War II. The story of his rise and fall encapsulates a significant and central story in the history of American education. The Rugg story reveals a great deal about the direction of schooling in American life, the many alternative roads not taken, and possibilities for the future.

As Kliebard and Wegner noted, Rugg's career "virtually represents in miniature the panorama of educational ideologies that characterized twentieth century curriculum reform in America: scientific curriculum making, child-centered education, and most notably, social

reconstructionism" (1987, 269). Moreover, Rugg's career, and the ideas of his detractors, embody elements of the entire spectrum of social studies ideologies that influenced the making of the curriculum in the twentieth century: education for social efficiency in the form of scientific curriculum making, social studies as social science inquiry, social studies as traditional history and civics, social studies as an issues-oriented and integrated field of study, and social studies as education for social reconstructionism (Evans 2004).

Rugg's story remains important today chiefly because it reminds us that social studies as a broad and integrated field of study has potential for the development of thoughtful and caring citizens, and that it is possible for a social studies reformer to influence the course of events. Rugg's work had a real impact, not only on rhetoric among theorists, but also on schools. His work brought an issues-centered approach to the field to a large segment of U.S. schoolchildren during the 1930s, and thus influenced the education of a generation of U.S. citizens. His textbooks and workbooks together sold more than four million copies during the decade from 1929 to 1939. At the height of their popularity, they were used by an estimated one-third to one-half of the children in junior high schools. Ultimately, they inspired a controversy that changed the course of the curriculum (Winters 1967; Evans 2007).

Rugg's social studies program was pedagogically advanced, integrating the social sciences and history in an issues-centered program focusing on understanding and social

transformation. To this day, the Rugg social science materials serve as a useful prototype for a unified social studies focused on issues and societal problems and aimed at education for social justice (Evans 2007).

Rugg envisioned an entire social studies curriculum centered around "The American Problem," and aimed at leading a thousand year march to a "cooperative commonwealth" (Rugg 1939, 140-41). Rugg's story is a reminder of the potential power of social studies reform. His materials were pedagogically sophisticated and somewhat daring, and they asked tough questions on issues and topics that need to be addressed in a democratic society: the role of business in controlling government, the role of government in regulating business, the influence of men of wealth and property on the Constitution and our form of government, the role of government in providing for the general social welfare, immigration policy, issues related to racial diversity, the role of the United States in world affairs, and myriad others. Furthermore, Rugg's work was built on a thoughtful rationale that combined student interest with social worth—a powerful combination that still has appeal.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Rugg was censured by a media storm fed by conservative "patriotic" and business groups who, in an un-American fashion, did not want schoolchildren, or their parents for that matter, raising questions about the basic structures of American life and the capitalist economic system. The attack on Rugg, on his ideas, textbooks and school materials, was perhaps the first major battle of what I have termed "the war on social studies" (Evans 2004). It is a "war" many progressive educators are still fighting, and, unfortunately, still losing. Rugg's story illustrates the point that being a social critic or progressive

reformer can be dangerous, especially so in education. To openly declare allegiance to ideas that challenge capitalism and its most basic assumptions can, and has—on many occasions—led to serious repercussions.

Rugg's life and work have great resonance today, in the 21st century. The Rugg story raises serious questions about the rationale and purposes for schooling: What kind of citizens and citizen education do we want? How far should schools go in providing opportunities for social criticism? What kinds of activities and materials are appropriate in support of education for social justice? What are its limits, if any? And, behind all of these questions, whose version of "the American way" should schools support?

Teaching for social justice has had many advocates over the years and seems a permanent interest group in the panoply of educational thought. The literature on social justice oriented schooling has mushroomed since the 1970s, an offshoot of critiques of society, and of schooling, developed during the 1960s and later (Ayers, Hunt and Quinn 1998). To a greater degree than many recent advocates of teaching for social justice, Rugg's work achieved a strong presence in schools. Thus, most importantly, the Rugg story, his life and his work, challenges us to make a difference in schools.

Framework

This article provides a brief overview of the Rugg story, but is focused primarily on Rugg's life as an educational activist and the "other" Rugg controversy, which occurred some ten years after the Rugg textbook controversy. It includes an overview of Rugg's social studies ideas, the development of the Rugg pamphlet and textbook series, and a brief description of the major national controversy they inspired. An

examination of Rugg's rationale for social studies, the Rugg social studies program, and the controversies that resulted is of continuing interest for several reasons. First, rationales are important, and are too often neglected (Shaver 1977; Ochoa-Becker 1996). Social studies professionals at all levels have an obligation to consider the foundations of social studies theory embodied in the multiple rationales and orientations to the field. In recent years, rationale deliberations have been largely pre-empted by the rush of support for history, geography, and civics as the core of social studies, driven by a neo-conservative standards and testing agenda for schooling and supported by the nexus of power and money (Singer 2005; Ross and Marker 2005; Evans 2004). These recent trends have undercut thoughtful deliberation on rationales. As a result, much of the current research on teaching in social studies is focused on the teaching of history. In too many instances, it assumes and benefits from a "history as core" orientation, without the thorough deliberations necessary to arrive at a well-grounded rationale for democratic education in schools. Thus, Rugg's rationale and program are important because they provide a thought-provoking alternative, and a seminal vision of education for democratic citizenship.

Second, recent literature on Rugg illustrates continuing interest in the Rugg story but focuses mainly on various aspects of the textbook controversy (i. e., Poland and Boesenberg 2001; Riley and Slater-Stern 2003). While this work adds to our knowledge, it is important to affirm that Rugg's success stemmed from his development of an innovative vision for social studies, which was embodied in the Rugg social science program.

Third, we have a long history of contributions to the literature on issues-centered

social studies from a number of scholars over many years (Hunt and Metcalf 1955 & 1968; Oliver and Shaver 1966; Newmann and Oliver 1970; Engle and Ochoa 1988; Evans and Saxe 1996). The closely related literature on democratic education has also grown exponentially (Apple and Beane 1995; Ochoa-Becker 2007; Gutmann 1999; Ayers, Hunt and Quinn 1998). And, a younger generation of scholars is emerging with similar interests and affinities (i. e., Caron 2005; Koeppen 1999). The literature on issues-centered and democratic education, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, is built upon the foundation established by Harold Rugg and other great progressives during the first half of the 20th century.

Revisiting Rugg's vision will underline several of the main themes of his work and highlight the fact that Rugg was instrumental, a seminal thinker in the world of social studies theory and practice. A full understanding requires that we briefly examine the origins of his ideas, his developing theory, his critique of the standard practices in schools, the key principles and explicit rationale under girding his social science program, and the controversy he inspired.²

Perhaps most poignantly, this article also examines the influence of the textbook controversy on Rugg's persona and the fracas that ensued after Rugg was invited to speak at Ohio State University in the early 1950s, nearly ten years after the propaganda campaign and media frenzy that engulfed Rugg and his books. Finally, the author places Rugg's life and career in perspective, focusing on both the lasting benefits and perils of innovation as seen through the life and work of one man.

Origins

Harold Ordway Rugg was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts on January 17, 1886. He attended Fitchburg public schools, worked in a textile mill, and, through good fortune and his own initiative, attended Dartmouth College. He studied civil engineering and worked as a railroad surveyor, then taught civil engineering for two years and became interested in how students learn. His engineering background would later influence his penchant for social engineering as embodied in his evolving ideas for education. He earned a Ph.D. in Education at the University of Illinois under the mentorship of William C. Bagley in 1915, then held a teaching post in educational psychology and statistics at the University of Chicago, engaging in what he would later describe as “an orgy of tabulation” (Rugg 1941, 182).

Rugg was raised in modest circumstances in Fitchburg, always it seemed, with "not enough" of the material goods of life. As a carpenter and cabinet-maker with a fiercely independent streak, his father struggled at times to hold a job. Rugg's sense of deprivation was heightened by his observation of the wealthy among Fitchburg—their power, influence, and luxurious lifestyle. Rugg grew up holding many conventional attitudes, sympathy for the underdog, and an exceptionally strong drive for financial and career success.

It was during his tenure at the University of Chicago that Rugg was called upon to serve on the Army's Committee on the Classification of Personnel during World War I. The Committee was charged with aptitude and intelligence testing and sorting of personnel during the Army's large-scale expansion. During his service, Rugg went through a transformation in his world-view. He embraced a progressive ideology that planted the seed for his conversion from the field of

educational psychology and statistics to social studies. This dramatic transformation was precipitated through his interaction and friendship with others on the Committee, including Arthur Upham Pope, John Coss, and Walter Lippman, and by his introduction through these contacts to contemporary social critics—including Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Randolph Bourne who held an aesthetic orientation and who had written for *The Seven Arts*, a highly regarded literary journal.

Behind Rugg's conversion to social studies and focus on social issues was a new awareness of the displacement and human suffering caused by industrialism and its allied developments, modern warfare, and colonialism. Rather than focus on any one issue, his vision encompassed the broad nexus of forces, issues, and problems that needed to be understood, and overcome, in order to ameliorate human suffering in the world.

In January 1920, Rugg joined the faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he also served as school psychologist for the Lincoln School, one of the leading progressive private schools in the nation, founded with the intention of changing the face of American education. It was at the Lincoln School that Rugg found a laboratory for working out his ideas for the social studies curriculum with a handful of teachers and students. His contact with John Dewey, William H. Kilpatrick, George S. Counts, John L. Childs, Jesse Newlon, R. Bruce Raup and others at Teachers College had a profound influence on his intellectual development, as did his association with the avant-garde in the New York area including creative artists such as Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keefe in Greenwich Village, and his later residence in the arts community of Woodstock, New York, which

inspired Rugg's interest in the arts, in imagination and creativity.

Given time to read and think as per his agreement with his new employers, Rugg set to work exploring the seminal works in history and the social sciences of the late 19th and early 20th century. He read historians such as Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles A. Beard, and James Harvey Robinson, and social scientists including Thorsten Veblen, Charles Horton Cooley, and John Maynard Keynes. As a result of these contacts and of his reading, a new understanding of the problems of modern industrial society, and "a new vista of possibilities," opened before him.

Rugg was strongly influenced by these "frontier thinkers" on the cutting edge of modern scholarship. Moreover, he was profoundly affected by the work and thought of John Dewey, by various forms of social criticism, by the social experiment of Soviet Russia, and by the movement for Technocracy, especially the thought of Howard Scott, who promoted a vision of a society of shared abundance in which the industrial economy would be run by expert technicians in order to end the hardships and class conflict associated with industrial society.

Following this period of intense study, Rugg's conversion to social studies was more or less complete. It was during and shortly after this time that Rugg developed the core of his idea for a "unified" social studies curriculum, crossing but not obliterating disciplinary boundaries, focused on issues and problems and presenting history and the social sciences through the lens of persistent societal issues.

Rugg's notion of a composite or "unified" course was not an entirely original idea, though it was a relatively new development and undoubtedly received its greatest boost from his work. In Rugg's case, it was an idea instigated, in

part, by his old friend, John Coss, with whom he served on the Army's Committee on the Classification of Personnel. Though Rugg's worldview was strongly influenced by his association with other members of that Committee, and by the social criticism contained in the *The Seven Arts*, it was Coss who most directly influenced Rugg's vision for social studies. Coss planned to develop a unified course in Contemporary Civilizations at Columbia College upon his return to his teaching post there after World War I, and he had discussed this intention with Rugg (Rugg 1941, 170). Rugg later attributed many of the core ideas for his unified social science course to Coss (Coss 1923) and adapted them to the secondary level (Winters 1967, 20).

A Developing Theory

Rugg's ideas on social studies began to emerge more fully in the early 1920s in monographs written by Rugg and his research associates and appeared in Rugg's publications in journals and books. Development of his social studies theory occurred in relative synchronicity with the writing and publication of the Rugg Social Science Pamphlets, which would be used to implement his vision in schools. Although Rugg did not publish a single, unified statement of his theory during the early years of his career at Teachers College, his writings provide strong evidence of his developing approach. As it emerged over time, the basic skeletal frame remained relatively constant. Yet, Rugg's continuing intellectual growth at Teachers College, and in the cultural richness of New York City, led to the gradual evolution of a more fully developed rationale.

Rugg's first published articles describing his vision for a new and innovative social studies

began to appear not long after his arrival at the Lincoln School and Teachers College. In two similar articles, which were published in *The Historical Outlook* and *The Elementary School Journal* in May of 1921, Rugg critiqued the work of the Committee on History and Education for Citizenship, known as the Second Committee of Eight of the American Historical Association. Although he defended the need for national committees in developing curricula, he was extremely critical of the Eight for failing to take a “scientific approach” and for neglecting to provide necessary national leadership (Rugg 1921a, 186). Perhaps its most serious deficiency, according to Rugg, was that it “failed to acquaint children with the development of current institutions and problems” (Rugg 1921a, 185).

Rugg proposed that future committees “sweep the board clean” and start anew, developing “carefully thought-out hypotheses of selection ... based upon a principle of social worth “leading inexorably to study of the outstanding “problems” and “issues” of contemporary civilization. Later, in the same article, Rugg critiqued the “encyclopedic presentation of facts, with little or no emphasis upon application of these facts to the understanding of great fundamental relationships.” He then proposed that, “to develop a real power of thought” we should give students “constant practice in generalization,” helping them to understand great movements and causal connections, acquiring information by “gradual accretion” through “making ... interconnections—not mere drill upon isolated topics, events, conditions, personages, etc.” (1921a, 189). These were pointed criticisms of the common curricular and classroom practice of the day that went right to the heart of its deficiency.

In his next publication, which appeared in *The Historical Outlook* in October of 1921, Rugg provided a more fully developed and cogent statement of his emerging theory of social studies. He framed his theory in the context of seven “hypotheses,” which his newly formed research team aimed to either confirm or refute. The hypotheses included emphasis on problem-solving, development of a unified course, student examination of evidence in various forms, current affairs as a window to relevant episodes from the past, and a spiraling or layering of complexity (Rugg 1921b, 252).

The Problem with the Old Order

In the first chapter of the 1923 NSSE yearbook, Rugg asked, in his title: “Do the Social Studies Prepare Pupils Adequately for Life Activities?” He answered, “they do not,” then set out to describe and critique the present curriculum in some detail. First, Rugg argued that the vast majority of our people rarely deliberate thoughtfully on political and social matters. He hypothesized that “critical judgment, instead of impulse, must be the basis upon which our social and political decisions are made...” and that it was the primary responsibility of the social studies curriculum to provide students with “knowledge about the issues of contemporary life and how they came to be what they are ... translated into tendencies to act intelligently upon them ...” (Rugg 1923, 1-2).

“History instruction,” Rugg wrote, “spans six or seven school years from fourth through twelfth grade.” He summarized the present focus of historical study as “international, legalistic, and militaristic” with students expected to learn a great deal of “minutiae” about the past. History instruction deals, he wrote, “with the growth of our nation as a legal and political organization”

but largely ignores the “social, industrial, and intellectual aspects...” (Rugg 1923, 5).

From the fifth grade on, geography exhibits a focus on “countless facts ... learned by rote” from textbooks which are “veritable encyclopedias” organized by continent and country, containing “a multiplicity of detail” and trying to “cover too much territory” (Rugg 1923, 5-6).

While acknowledging improvements and innovations contained in the new and rapidly growing course in “Community Civics,” including greater focus on community welfare and conditions in cities, Rugg lamented the fact that “few such innovations” had reached the elementary or junior high school. In those years, and in most government courses at higher levels, the schools continued to “drill students” on the Constitution, and the branches and powers of the federal government, using what was frequently called a structure-of-government approach. Rugg went on, “Our social sciences are dominated by reading courses which stress the acquisition of information. The schools are following the path of least resistance ... based upon ‘no theories at all.’” “The practice implicitly assumes ... that clear thinking and right conduct will issue from the mere acquiring of information” (Rugg 1923, 6-7).

Remarkably, Rugg’s description of the standard practices in social studies of the 1920s bears an eerie resemblance to the modal practice today. Moreover, his criticisms and remedies continue to resonate, and may serve as a potential source for reflection and new directions.

Key Principles of Rugg Social Studies

Rugg’s proposed social science course for the junior high school was built upon eight hypotheses:

First: Contemporary problems and their historical backgrounds can be learned more effectively through one unified social science curriculum than through the separate school subjects.

Second: Each major topic of the course must be of established social value to the rank and file of our people. Unless a topic contributes to an understanding of contemporary life, it can find no place in such a course.

Third: An objective analysis of social needs facilitates the assignment—to each of the major phases of life—its proper amount of attention in the curriculum.

Fourth: Problems shall be based on common experiences of children using personal appeals (e. g. “What would you do if—?”), alternative proposals, and intellectual opposition to obtain interest, and should be illustrated by detailed episodes and by a wealth of maps, graphs, and pictorial material.

Fifth: Reading materials and exercises should be established to stimulate analysis and reasoning. Thus, all units of work shall be presented definitely in problem-solving form.

Sixth: Problem-situations shall be presented first through current affairs. Only those historical backgrounds shall be developed which are crucial for clear thinking about contemporary matters, presented through “sharp contrasts.”

Seventh: Historical backgrounds will be clearer if the history of only one set of related topics is traced at one time. We should teach history longitudinally,

tracing development of a particular topic or activity to the present.

Eighth: *One problem or topic should be considered definitely and thoroughly at one time.* (an admonition to go for depth) (adapted from Rugg 1921a; Rugg 1921b; Rugg 1923).³

And so, by 1923 Rugg had fleshed out the core ideas that were at the heart of his vision for social studies. It was, in essence, a progressive and issues-centered vision centered on curriculum integration. It focused on issues and “problem-situations,” appealed to the interests of the child, balanced with social need and a curriculum that was to be designed in advance of instruction. It also contained a theory on the use of historical material as background to contemporary understanding rather than as content per se. These were innovative ideas that provided a foundation for the further development of Rugg’s social studies materials

Behind Rugg’s Theory: A Rationale

At the heart of his rationale, Rugg posited that development of a curriculum for “a troubled society” required confronting young people with “the most critical problems of that society.” Rugg viewed our society as “troubled” and “faced with big and insistent problems.” He argued that society was also “dynamic” and that the curriculum must be dynamic as well. Hence, there were two fundamental mandates in creating a curriculum: first, selection of “insistent and permanent problems,” and second, to continuously adapt the curriculum to “the problems which experts predict will continue to be insistent in the adult life of the growing generation.” Finally, Rugg held, even at this early date, that the school is “our most important

agency for the improvement of society” (Rugg 1923, 261-262).

To locate these “insistent problems,” Rugg argued that no one was better equipped than the group of writers he labeled “frontier thinkers.” These frontier thinkers included scholars from a variety of fields “out on the firing line of social analysis.” Rugg and his research assistants drew on the “matured statements” contained in more than 150 books of several score of these frontier thinkers. The books were selected using a four-part procedure. First, drawing from *Book Review Digest*, they selected only those works referred to as “books of distinct merit, irrespective of economic or political faith.” Second, they chose books characterized as “important” in book reviews of six weekly and several monthly journals. Third, the list was supplemented by “a canvass” of several thousand books held at Columbia University Library. And fourth, eighty specialists were solicited for “a list of ten books in his own field ... which he would use to obtain statements of problems in his field,” reflecting “deep insight and balanced vision” and chosen “irrespective of economic or political faith” (Rugg 1923, 267).

Rugg’s vision for social studies contained both social theory and psychological theory, although the social theory was dominant, even early on. The social theory held that social studies subjects in schools existed in the context of a troubled society, and that by becoming aware of issues and problems, students would develop a commitment to active citizenship aimed at social improvement. Social value would be the litmus test for selection and inclusion of topics in the curriculum, and social improvement was to be the teleological goal.

The psychological theory held that students were interested in present life conditions and its

related issues and problems; that persistent and relatively permanent issues and problems should be at the heart of the curriculum; and, that history and much of the other social science content should be taught in such a way that these traditional sources of knowledge would interest and illuminate students lives in the present. And, more importantly for Rugg, it should prepare them for lives as active and concerned citizens who would help to improve conditions in a “troubled society.” Thus, while the interests of the child were an important part of Rugg’s theory, he clearly subordinated student interest to social need and the larger goal of social improvement.

Rugg’s thinking, as expressed in the teacher guides he developed in the late 1920s to accompany his textbooks, also emphasized the importance of active learning and student participation that would go far beyond a passive “reading” curriculum. The “active” school would replace the traditional “listening” school (Rugg 1929). Learning through active participation meant that the course would involve a stream of activities rather than students simply reading a textbook, answering questions at the back of the chapter, and listening to the teacher speak. Participation would involve a wide range of activities and formats, including student research in books, magazines, and newspapers; discussion through open forums and debate; preparation of outlines, briefs, and critiques as needed; and, use of new tools of graphic and pictorial display. As Rugg put it, the materials should be arranged in “thought provoking form.” The student must not only gather and “absorb facts,” but must be given constant practice in “making decisions with facts” (Rugg 1929, 5).

To make learning more meaningful, Rugg emphasized selection of a relatively small number of problems, studied in depth, rather than the

superficial treatment of many topics. Selection of topics and materials would be based on social worth. Rugg believed that an understanding of the modern world could best be achieved through a focus on “a few hundred” of the concepts of the social sciences. Finally, Rugg emphasized that students should concentrate on one topic at a time and one particular task (Winters 1968, 36-41; Rugg 1929, 3-12).

The Rugg Social Science Materials

Development of the Rugg social science pamphlets began during the early 1920s. Rugg and his assistants (eventually including his brother Earle Rugg and an assortment of graduate students, editors, and other collaborators) contacted former students and asked them to subscribe, sight unseen, to the social science pamphlet series that he and his entourage had developed experimentally at the Lincoln school. The response was overwhelming. By June 1922, he had received orders for 4,000 copies of each. The second edition of the pamphlet series resulted in about 100,000 copies of each issue being shipped to schools (Nelson 1977; Kay 1969).

The Rugg social science pamphlets were problem-centered and pedagogically advanced. Virtually every topic was introduced through a contemporary issue or problem connected to students' lives. The writing was lively and engaging. Open-ended discussion questions were prominently featured in "open forum" and "group discussions." They also made frequent use of photos, drawings, and cartoons; and provocative topics were given full coverage, including potentially controversial topics such as the influence of business on government, and the influence of men-of-property on the development of the U.S. Constitution.

The Rugg-developed pamphlets were revised and published in textbook form by Ginn and Company—two texts per grade (seventh, eighth and ninth) for junior high schools—beginning in August of 1929, with publication of another volume in the series published every six months thereafter. The series, *Man and His Changing Society*, became a huge financial success, and represents the zenith of issues-centered social studies materials entre into classrooms in the twentieth century.

During the 1930s, sales of Rugg's textbook series skyrocketed. From 1929 to 1939, the series sold 1,317,960 copies at approximately \$2.00 each, and over 2,687,000 workbooks. Rugg and his associates had created a unified social studies program and his books attracted worldwide attention and imitation. Through force of will, brilliance, hard work, and fortuitous timing he had clearly become the leading social studies educator in the United States (Winters 1967). At their peak, the Rugg program materials were used in more than 4,000 school districts nationwide (Bagenstos 1977).

The six volumes of the junior high school program were "designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to modes of living and insistent problems of the modern world" (Rugg, 1931, p. vi) with the purpose of "introducing young people to the chief conditions and problems which will confront them as citizens of the world," (vi). Rugg defended his development of a "unified" course-of-study by alluding to students' need to "utilize facts, meanings, generalizations, and historical movement" (vi) in understanding modern institutions. He wrote, "Whenever history is needed to understand the present, history is presented." The same is true with "geographic relationship" and economic and social facts and

principles (vi-vii). Although these books contained a great deal of historical narrative, not unlike many other texts, the overarching aim was to make the study of history and the social sciences relevant, interesting, and meaningful to students in service of the ultimate goal of social melioration. In both the pamphlet series and the textbooks, material from history and the social sciences was frequently framed with issues and problems of present concern.

The Gathering Storm

Rugg's scholarly writing underwent a shift in the early 1930s, with a more pointed advocacy of social reconstructionism and the goal of moving toward some form of "collectivism," reflecting concerns spurred by the era of the great depression. It was, in part, these writings and subsequent media coverage of his speaking engagements that attracted the attention of self-appointed censors to Rugg's work. His success as an author, combined with his affiliation with unpopular causes, made him a target for criticism. In 1934, Rugg was listed as a "Communist" in Elizabeth Dilling's *The Red Network* (1934). During 1935 Rugg spoke out against American Legion attempts to censor a classroom magazine, *Scholastic*, because of its perceived liberal bias. For the balance of the decade, in a series of major speeches, Rugg attacked patriotic societies, the Advertising Federation of America, the National Association of Manufacturers, the United States Chamber of Commerce, and the New Deal itself. His comments and outspoken views critical of the American Legion and other groups made him the chief target of their attacks.

By 1939, against the backdrop of dictatorship in Europe and the beginning of World War II, controversies over the Rugg textbooks spread like wildfire, and the American

public was treated to a spectacle that received continuing national media coverage. The attacks centered in the New York metropolitan area and represented an intense campaign orchestrated by relatively few people. The bulk of the attacks came from a combination of business writers and publicists, retired military of the American Legion, professional journalists, and a few loose cannons. The flames were fanned by extensive coverage in the Hearst press. Attacks on the Rugg materials began as part of a blanket attack on American writers and texts, with Rugg gradually becoming the chief target.

Bertie C. Forbes, in his own magazine, attacked the Rugg textbooks in an article titled "Traucherous Teachings" in which he charged Rugg with being against private enterprise and urged boards of education to "cast out" the Rugg books (Forbes, 1939). The Advertising Federation of America, led by Alfred T. Falk, attacked the books for carrying "anti-advertising propaganda." Merwin K. Hart, a native Fascist and president of the New York State Economic Council, charged Rugg with "making a subtle sugar-coated effort to convert youth to Communism," and suggesting that capitalism "has been a failure and that socialism should be substituted in its place" (Myers 1940, 17).

Controversies over the books in a number of cities and towns followed a typical pattern: a complaint, followed by the appointment of a committee to investigate, then debate and, frequently, public hearings. In a number of well publicized cases, Rugg appeared in person to defend the textbook series. The outcome of the controversy varied from place to place. Binghamton, New York, and Englewood, New Jersey, had major controversies covered extensively by local and national media. In a number of cities and towns, including

Binghamton, the books were removed. In Bradner, Ohio, the Superintendent ordered the books taken down to the furnace room and burned.

Two articles that appeared in widely read and nationally circulated magazines generated the next round of controversy. The first of these was an article by Augustin G. Rudd that was published in the April 1940, issue of *Nation's Business*, and was titled, "Our 'Reconstructed' Educational System." Rudd posited that the "entire educational system" had been "reconstructed" with textbooks and courses teaching "that our economic and political institutions are decadent" (Rudd 1940, 27). He blamed the widespread teaching of "social science" [instead of] ... history, geography and U. S. Government," and cited the Rugg textbooks as the major culprit. He argued that Rugg "subtly but surely implied a need for a state-planned economy and socialism" and aimed "to undermine the faith of children in the American way of life" (Rudd 1940, 94).

The second article, by Orlen K. Armstrong, was titled, "Treason in the Textbooks," and appeared in the *American Legion Magazine* for September 1940, and was distributed to one million homes. The American Legion had a long history of trying to persuade the nation's citizens to support its brand of true "Americanism" by distributing pamphlets, suppressing "subversive elements," and supporting textbook criticism (Gellerman 1938). The article contained a bitter denunciation of the writers and teachers of the "new history," and charged that Rugg sought to "cast doubt" upon the "patriotism" of the founding fathers and the constitution and "to condemn the American system" of private enterprise and inculcate "collectivism" (Armstrong 1940, 51-70).

Armstrong attacked fused courses like Rugg's, and described them as "propaganda for a change in our political, economic, and social order" (9).

Meanwhile, the entire controversy garnered increasing national attention. According to an article in *Time* magazine, by the end of the spring term in 1940, the Rugg textbooks had been banned from a half-dozen school systems. Critics objected to the Rugg texts, the article reported, "for picturing the U.S. as a land of unequal opportunity, and giving a class conscious account of the framing of the U.S. Constitution" (Book Burnings 1940, 64-65).

The Storm Unleashed

The next major development in the Rugg story raised the stakes considerably as it involved the activities of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), a business organization with a long history of propaganda campaigns aimed at organized labor, the New Deal, and school curricula. During the 1930s the "brass hats" of big business reclaimed leadership of the NAM and launched a campaign aimed at "business salvation," flooding the nation with propaganda aimed at manufacturing favorable public opinion. They popularized the term "free enterprise" as a replacement for "capitalism," adopting the term at their 1932 convention (Seldes 1968, 112-113). Involvement in the Rugg textbook controversy was part of their larger propaganda campaign. On December 11, 1940, *The New York Times* reported that the NAM announced that it would initiate a survey of textbooks used in schools to see if it could find evidence of subversive teaching. Ralph Robey, an assistant professor of banking at Columbia University, and a columnist for *Newsweek*, was hired by the NAM to prepare a series of abstracts of some 800 currently used social studies

textbooks to show the authors' attitudes toward government and business.

On Saturday, February 22, 1941, a headline at the top of the front page of *The New York Times* read: "UN-AMERICAN TONE SEEN IN TEXTBOOKS ON SOCIAL SCIENCES: Survey of 600 Used in Schools, Finds a Distorted Emphasis on Defects of Democracy, ONLY A FEW CALLED RED." The article reported that a "substantial portion" of the social science textbooks used in schools "tend to criticize our form of government and the system of private enterprise." The article cited the controversy over the Rugg textbooks and noted that several school systems had banned his books from the classroom (Fine 1941, 1, 6).

The story, including the reference to the Rugg controversy, appeared on the front page. The abstracts provided provocative selected quotations from the texts, which raised questions about the functioning of government, the distribution of wealth and incidence of poverty, or the interplay of power and wealth. The quotations were provided without any sense of the remainder of each text, much of which would be found utterly innocuous.

Internal memoranda from the files of the NAM suggest that many in the organization's offices were rather squeamish about the entire enterprise, and feared that it could result in negative publicity for business and the NAM. As it turned out, these worries were well founded.⁴ Protests, corrections, and replies to Dr. Robey's findings came quickly. Leaders of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) made immediate contact with leaders of the NAM asking whether it "repudiates or endorses" Robey's statement (Hunt, 1941a). The NAM President, Walter D. Fuller, responded with a press release stating that Robey's criticisms were

his "personal opinion only" (Fuller 1941). Later, after a storm of stories and editorials in the press, the NAM attempted to further distance itself from the controversy and expressed regret that "distorted" impressions of the project had been given such wide currency (Hunt 1941b, 328).

The Defense

A defense against the attacks on the Rugg textbooks was mounted on several fronts. The Academic Freedom Committee of NCSS issued a statement supporting academic freedom, and later prepared "a packet of reading matter on freedom of teaching in the social studies area," which included a 66-page booklet on fending off attacks on textbooks (Curti 1941). The Council of the American Historical Association asked Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger to draft a statement regarding controversial issues in textbooks. The statement, which was approved by the Council, gave strong support for the inclusion of controversial questions in "the historical account," and for encouraging a "spirit of inquiry" in young people (American Historical Association 1941, 488).

Rugg himself was undoubtedly the chief advocate for the defense of social studies, and the Rugg textbooks, against the attackers. Likewise, numerous friends and colleagues rushed to his defense. One of the most active groups was the American Committee on Democracy and Intellectual Freedom, organized in the late 1930s to address a range of intellectual freedom issues, and chaired by Franz Boaz at Columbia University (ACDIF 1941). Among other groups that furnished support were the Association of Textbook Publishers, and Rugg's associates at the journal *Frontiers of Democracy*. Even John Dewey came to Rugg's defense in an opinion editorial piece which appeared in *The New York*

Times (Dewey 1940). Like several groups and individuals, Dewey defended Rugg on the grounds of intellectual freedom even though he did not always agree with Rugg's ideas or actions, and clearly did not think of Rugg as a major thinker (Dewey 1944).

Rugg gave an able defense of his work, and attempted to meet every attack directly, appearing in person whenever possible. Rugg's confrontations with his accusers followed a familiar pattern. First, he would be accused of being a Communist, then he would be criticized over his plan for a socialistic society in *The Great Technology*. When pressed, critic after critic would admit that they had not read the books. Under siege on every side, Rugg wrote an autobiographical work to tell his side of the story. *That Men May Understand* was published in April of 1941, and received generally favorable reviews (Rugg 1941). *Publishers Weekly* endorsed the book and joined Rugg in attacking his critics, accusing Dilling, Forbes, and Hart of working on "the prejudices of the American people" and calling Rugg's book "a vigorous and adequate reply to his critics" (Melcher 1941, 1533).

Discussion of the attacks continued in the professional literature. One article, written by a school superintendent, argued that many of the attacks were part of a deliberate effort to undermine "public confidence in the schools so that school appropriations may be reduced" (Dannelly 1941, 32). Another author provided a larger historical context for the attacks and suggested that they were part of a larger "War on Social Studies" (Gould 1941, 83-91). The real animus of the critics, he wrote, "is against the whole modern conception of the social studies as a realistic approach to life" (90). In opposition to the critics, he argued that young people have "the

right to know what the world is all about and to learn what can be done about it" (91). As was clear to a number of observers at the time, many of Rugg's critics had links to Fascism—defined as dictatorship of the corporate elite. According to independent journalist George Seldes, publisher of the newsletter *In fact*, the NAM was "the center of American Fascism" (Seldes 1943, 80, 100). It was the "the peak association of big business ... [and] ... the most powerful private organization in the country," and it was organizing a great propaganda campaign aimed at "manufacturing public opinion" that suited its interests (Seldes 1947, 43, 61).

As it turned out, February 22, 1941, the date of the Robey story, was a watershed in the war on social studies. Tension had been building within the movement for integrated social studies, and a focus on issues and problems with a meliorist or reconstructionist purpose gathered steam. The tide turned after the Robey article. By 1943, American Legion officers believed they had ousted the textbooks from approximately 1500 communities (Shumaker 1943, cited in Jones 1957). By the middle of the decade, the Rugg textbook series and program had fallen from prominence and had virtually disappeared.

The Aftermath

By the fall of 1942, it was clear that Rugg's struggle to maintain a presence for his textbooks in the schools was over, and that his efforts had largely failed. Even in the schools that had decided to keep the Rugg program, it would only be used until money was available to purchase the next set of books. The impact of the textbook controversy on Rugg's fortunes as a scholar and as a leader among progressive educators was enormous. As late as 1939, it seemed that everything he touched in his

professional life turned to gold. His school materials (quite literally) created a small personal fortune. After the fall of the Rugg textbooks, however, Rugg's leadership in social studies and his visions of a large personal fortune were finished.

The impact of all of this on him must have been immense, although he never admitted it publicly. Rugg's friends and colleagues expressed somewhat contradictory opinions about how this affected him (Nelson 1975). Two younger colleagues, Paul Hanna and R. Freeman Butts, believed that the fight left Rugg feeling embittered. Butts remarked in an interview, "Harold became much more embittered after the American Legion thing" (Butts 1974, cited in Nelson 1975). However, one close personal friend of Rugg's, Frederick L. Redefer, who lived an hour's drive from Woodstock, and visited frequently until Rugg's death, thought that Rugg still wanted recognition, and said "Rugg's ego was so enormous that even after 1942, he felt he could sell new books and come back" (Redefer 1974, cited in Nelson 1975). One former student, who returned to Teachers College after the war, described Rugg as being "somewhat withdrawn," while another described him as "disillusioned" by his friends' and colleagues' failure to support him during the controversy (Winters 1968, 192). Rugg himself later expressed disappointment over the same phenomena (Davis 2006). Although most of Rugg's close friends and colleagues publicly supported his defense, at least one anonymous colleague communicated his disdain for Rugg to Dean Russell (Confidential undated). Another friend of Rugg's, Alf Evers, a writer who lived in Woodstock and saw him frequently during Rugg's later years, supports the theory that the controversy affected him deeply, and stated in a recent interview, "He felt very keenly that

rejection,” but that Rugg “took it well.” “It was all very fresh in his mind. Rugg said he ‘lived through it.’ He didn’t seem embittered,” though “he did feel that he hadn’t been treated very well ... and he never went back to social studies” (Evers 2003).

Another friend, Florence Cramer, wife of painter Konrad Cramer, noted in her journal, a party at the Rugg home that the couple attended on Saturday, June 7, 1941. The party was given in honor of Waldo Frank, whom she talked with for a while. She described Frank as “an unusually simple man and sincere person with a quiet kingly manner that was disarming.” She noted that the Rugg’s “son Harold is handsome—a blond four year old—he was playing with a toy bow and arrow when we arrived,” and that “the Rugg’s looked well—Harold seems happier than last year and Louise said her school (she was Director of the Walt Whitman School) has done well” (Cramer 1941).

Family members recall a somewhat more severe impact on Rugg’s persona. Rugg’s nephew, who visited Rugg in Woodstock with Earle Rugg (Harold’s brother) and his family a few times during those years, thought that the episode “dealt a severe blow to Harold” (Rugg 2003). Katharine Alling, Rugg’s step-daughter who knew Rugg from the early 1940s and lived with him much of the time from 1947 until her marriage to Norman Alling in 1957, stated that he was deeply hurt by the controversy and seemed at times, “rather bitter about it ... He had a very nice income from the textbooks, and he lost that. He believed that he was viciously and unjustly attacked.” Whenever the topic came up in later years, there would be an “edge in his voice” (Alling 2005).

Although Rugg suffered some financial hardship when his texts were withdrawn from the

market, he was able to retain ownership of his country estate in Woodstock and maintain an apartment in Manhattan. While a significant downsizing in his vision of personal fortune was apparent, and must have been a difficult blow given his affinities, the loss of audience and of his position of leadership in the school curriculum surely must have been even more devastating. He was still a prominent figure, and more famous than ever because of the attacks on his work, but his influence on the public schools was greatly weakened.

Some years later, Rugg was interviewed for a story on progressive education that appeared in *Colliers Magazine*. Asked where he stood ideologically, Rugg replied, “I am a New Dealer, but they [people who have taken exception to school textbooks he has written] object to me.” He went on, “They don’t call me Communist anymore though, because I’ve threatened to sue.” From the 1930s and for the remainder of his life, Rugg was suspected by conservatives and admired by liberals. Always, he remained a controversial progressive educator (Whitman 1954, 36).

Several close colleagues and former students later remarked on his gallantry and perseverance in standing up for his beliefs regardless of the costs. One in particular captured Rugg’s outward approach to the controversy when he wrote that Rugg was “...setting a precedent for writers. Pull no punches—hold your ground!” Moreover, he went on, Rugg was widely admired for standing up to the attacks. “Liberals and forward-looking men the country over have always identified themselves with you as an honest, courageous educator” (Fox 1951).

Years later, when asked about the impact of the textbook controversy on his work, Rugg responded:

I'm doing now what I should have been doing 20 years ago ... I was very much, my work was very much interfered with about the beginning of World War Two by the various reactionary groups in the country who destroyed my earlier work in the social sciences. The American Legion, for example.

I gave four or five years of my life to that, which I ought not to have had to do ... Even though I hadn't retired from Teachers College, I more or less withdrew from all sorts of things. It took another four or five years to get going.

See, I gave twenty years to the work in the social sciences, and I'd say that was ten years more than I should have given. I ought to have done my work at Lincoln, and put the stuff together once and then quit, but I couldn't. I was a slave to the books. I had so many of them, you see. And it was a treadmill, until they got me off. After a while I recognized, that's a good thing, probably, because I was free, I was really free (Rugg 1957).

Although he was able to regroup and continued his writing and professional activities, in some important ways Rugg was never the same. His marriage of thirteen years to Louise Krueger ended in 1943. Louise Krueger Rugg was not only his wife but also his partner in writing a set of elementary school social studies texts and the mother of his son, Harald, born in 1936. Young Harald would have been about seven years old at the time of the divorce. Simply from the timing of the divorce, one suspects that this change in his personal life, occurring in the wake of the textbook controversy, was somehow related

to his emotional state. Moreover, unlike his previous divorce and re-marriage, this time he would spend several years as a single divorcee, as if those years were needed to help him through his most difficult passage.

If nothing else, despite the many charges and claims made by Rugg's detractors, the Rugg Social Science series was an expression of a grand vision in the progressive tradition—that social studies education in schools could prepare students for social life with an honest and comprehensive look at social realities of the past and present, and imbue them with a desire to make the world a better place. That vision was shattered. Rugg's leadership in social studies had ended. Though he referred to, and critiqued his attackers in some of his later works (Rugg 1943; Rugg 1952), and even joked about the controversy in a letter to his brother Earle in later years (Rugg 1958, cited in Nelson 1975), he never attempted another textbook series for public school use, nor did he write any new materials on the social studies curriculum. Instead, he turned the page of life to a new chapter and turned his attention to new topics of interest. However, he never gave up his either his progressive ideals or his social reconstructionist beliefs, and continued to uphold them in his writing and professional involvements to the end.

That Rugg remained true to his beliefs is a testimony to his make-up. The textbook controversy and attacks on the social frontier group had at least two immediate effects. First, the attacks led many of Rugg's colleagues to back down. Counts and Childs were motivated by the attacks to state, in unequivocal terms, their commitment to American ideals. They no longer believed that education had a revolutionary role to perform or that schools should serve on the forefront of social change (Childs 1950; Counts

1945). Second, the broad hysteria over subversion in schools and textbooks “fused together in the conservative mind progressive education and the ideology of the radical educationists” (Bowers 1970, 49). From that point forward, many conservatives would begin to regard the entire frontier group as part of a Marxist conspiracy to undermine national security. The result was a continuing drumbeat of conservative zealots, throughout the 1950s and beyond, imbued with the mission of extinguishing progressive education in the schools.

Though progressive education writ large was not quite dead, it was clearly under siege. That the siege would be lifted temporarily during and immediately after World War Two is understandable in hindsight, given the enormous focus on the war effort. The Rugg controversy was perhaps the first major battle in what I have previously described as the war on social studies, and it signaled the beginning of the end for progressive education. Though it would take another decade for the looming deluge of attacks on progressive education to begin in earnest, the general trend had shifted; a line had been crossed. In hindsight, it is apparent that the attacks on Rugg marked an important turning point in the nation’s educational history.

The Ohio State Controversy

With Rugg, it seemed controversy was never far away. Shortly after his retirement from Teachers College in May 1951, he gave lectures at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, on July 10 and 11, 1951, at the annual Boyd H. Bode Educational Conference. The speeches were given before an audience of 500 graduate students, most of whom were school teachers from around the nation. In his address to the audience on July 10, Rugg described his approach

to teaching as the “good life” and the “new concept.” He stated that the enemies of the “good life” are ever present, and cited the “cheap Americanism” of patriotic groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and Sons of the American Revolution. He also reportedly said:

...I see no hope for the “good life” if business is carried on by private enterprise. It will be the will of the minority...

...We’ve let the Un-American Activities Committee frighten us. [They argue] We should abandon democracy, awake from the dark ages and be prepared to lose our little area of freedom (FBI Memo 1951, 4).

Rugg also reportedly said that a serious depression might actually help reawaken the American people to their responsibilities and benefits (Rugg Assailed 1951).

In his July 11 speech, Rugg reportedly expressed hope for eventual “world control of power production.” He stated that he did not believe his predicted depression would materialize in the near future, but that through a future nationwide period of unemployment people would be made to think. He also reportedly spoke of the growing systems of limitless atomic power production (FBI Memo 1951, 4).

Finally, referring to the controversy surrounding himself and his writings, Rugg was quoted as saying:

The names of the patrioteers and organizations change, but their devilish motives never change. Most of them are crooked and subversive of the American way. The appalling fact is that parents and teachers of middle age stand and do

nothing after the bigoted attacks of the late 30's and early 40's. The Un-American committees have got us backed right out of the ring. They're in every town in America, led by professional rabble-rousers and backed by large sums of money. They are merchants of conflict—yellow newspapers with disgruntled editors, the commentator with a yen for the microphone, lap-dog women, business men's clubs, Rotary, the American Legion, chronic letter writers and the prestige hunters. These are the real enemies—and the active ones—of education (FBI Memo 1951, 4-5).

Although Donald P. Cottrell, dean of the College of Education, came to Rugg's defense, supporting his appearance on the grounds of academic freedom and the need for diversity of viewpoints, the University President, Dr. Howard L. Bevis, issued a statement stating that Rugg's lectures on the campus implied no sponsorship of Rugg's views by the University. President Bevis also stated that he disagreed with much of what Rugg reportedly said, but that "freedom of speech allows wide latitude of expression" (FBI Memo 1951). The speech touched off yet another controversy over Rugg, although this time the most heated controversy was largely confined to the Columbus, Ohio, area and its vicinity. The speech also spurred a renewed investigation of Rugg by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Stirred by media reports and a local campaign launched by Rugg opponents, readers of the local papers wrote to express their concerns over Rugg's appearance. Some attacked Rugg and his ideas, while others decried the use of tax dollars to support such a radical guest speaker. Several letters attacked the leadership and faculty of the graduate school of the College of Education who were responsible for, and funded

Rugg's appearance. Among the letters were the following:

... We vehemently protest the appearance of Dr. Rugg, author of the controversial Rugg textbooks which have been eliminated from numbers of schools and which have been the target of numerous patriotic organizations ... The Ohio State University is supported by the people of Ohio. Let the people speak! Do we want Harold G. Rugg at our University? (FBI Memo 1951, 1).

... [Rugg] is a notorious left-wing writer of Socialistic textbooks and one of the original group of collectivist teachers who have warped the minds of American schoolchildren for two decades ... Harold Rugg is a socialist. He has been the leading part of the undermining apparatus of our education philosophy. He should not have been invited to speak at the OSU conference ... (FBI Memo 1951, 2).

... Will teachers attending this conference bring this so-called "new concept" to our children next fall? Ohio State University needs a thorough investigation by the people of Ohio for bringing speakers of this type to the campus (FBI Memo 1951, 4).

... If our nation is to be destroyed by teachers indoctrinated by a bunch of fuzzy-minded, hair-brained, so-called educators, I for one protest having my hard-earned tax dollars pay for that destruction (Student's Mother 1951).

Following what appeared to be a genuine public outcry over Rugg's appearance, on July 17, 1951, Ohio Governor Frank J. Lausche asked the trustees of Ohio State University to check into the

matter. The previous day, two members of the state's newly formed Un-American Activities Committee of the Ohio Legislature and an OSU trustee stated that Rugg's conference appearance would be investigated.

An editorial in the *Columbus Dispatch* on July 23 supported an investigation of Rugg's appearance, "its sponsorship, financing and the political philosophies being fostered in the College of Education." The editors stated, "These moves are in order ... The question is whether or not (teachers) are being indoctrinated with the subversive political ideas advocated by a notorious and discredited propagandist" (Campus Probe 1951). A much longer editorial expressing similar sentiments appeared in the *Columbus State Journal* on August 31, identifying Rugg as "the nation's most notorious Marxist educator" and reading:

The Rugg episode cannot be laughed off. Somebody or a group brought him here for a purpose, if none other than to provide an audience of potential missionaries and to give them the opportunity to hear and see the fountain head, the master, the messiah of the movement to build through the school system a new body of American citizenry, receptive and reconciled and blindly eager to accept an American counterpart of Soviet totalitarianism... (Rugg Episode 1951).

The editorial went on to state that it suspected the College of Education at OSU had been "substantially infiltrated," and that many boards of education had avoided employing graduates from the school, especially in social studies.

On August 12, it was reported in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* that the Ohio American

Legion had called for the removal of the Rugg textbooks from Ohio schools, repeating their usual charges that the books were "biased in their presentation by advocating socialistic government for the United States" (FBI Memo 1951, 13).

Most of the letters on the controversy called for an investigation of university policies, but a few defended Rugg's appearance under the idea that one of the functions of a university is to provide a forum for all ideas, even those which are unpopular, so that each may be judged on its merits. Therefore, unpopular persons and ideas should be given a hearing. A number of faculty members apparently expressed this defense of the Rugg appearance, maintaining that a university faculty, within a democracy, has the right to select the program to be presented to its students.

Also coming to Rugg's defense was the Communist Party of Ohio, which circulated 250 copies of a mimeographed circular entitled, "The Luxury of Silence," to certain members of the OSU faculty and others. The circular blasted the acquiescence of campus liberals to the will of the "DISPATCH gang" in the witch-hunt, and "the reality of TRUMAN's bi-partisan police state" (FBI Memo 1951, 11).

Then, on September 4, the *New York Times* reported, in its back pages, that the Ohio State University Board of Trustees had attacked Rugg's speech as "un-American" and condemned the invitation given Rugg to speak at the university. In its statement, the Board of Trustees said, "the function of the university is teaching, not indoctrination. The university must not be used as an agency of un-American propaganda. Every effort will be made to carry out these purposes." The article also noted, "Dr. Rugg has not been listed by any Government agency as un-American" (Trustees Assail 1951, 29). A similar article, appearing in the *Cincinnati Times-Star*,

reported that the invitation was “not in accordance with the traditions and objectives of Ohio State University,” and noted that in order to avoid a recurrence of such an incident, all future speakers would have to be cleared through the office of the University president (FBI Memo 1951, 12).

The FBI Investigates.

FBI surveillance of Rugg, which covered the Ohio State controversy in great detail, actually began many years earlier, when the Bureau began receiving unsolicited materials on Rugg in 1942. The bureau did not begin its Rugg file on its own, but started the file when the Washington Field Office was given materials “gratuitously” by Mr. Walter Steele, publisher of the *National Republic* magazine. One of the earliest items in the file was a manuscript on Rugg by Augustin G. Rudd, titled, “What is the Rugg Social System?” This manuscript had appeared in the *National Republic* magazine and was subsequently reprinted in *Rugg Philosophy Analyzed* and circulated by the American Legion. In addition, the file contained an article published in the April 1938 issue of *The Beacon Light*, a periodical printed by a right wing California group, titled, “Atheistic Communism in Our Schools” (FBI 2003). The files also reportedly contained reprints of articles by many of Rugg’s most determined critics. Despite opening a file, the Bureau apparently did little else to investigate Rugg during the war years (Nelson and Singleton 1977).

However, by the early 1950s, the climate had changed, the cold war was intensifying, the McCarthy era was in full bloom (Shrecker 1998), and the Bureau was apparently moved to launch a security investigation of Rugg following the controversy over his speaking engagement at Ohio State University. A lengthy report was filed by the Bureau’s office in Cincinnati on October 1,

1951, detailing the controversy and summarizing several other “pamphlets, books, and leaflets” furnished by a local informant—materials “which she had accumulated over a number of years,” including *Rugg Philosophy Analyzed, Vol. III* (National Americanism Commission 1941), and the pamphlet, *Undermining Our Republic: Do you know what the children are being taught in our public schools? You’ll be surprised...*, published by the Guardians of American Education (Rudd, Hicks and Falk 1941).

Apparently no further action was taken by the Bureau at that time, but on April 30, 1953, the head of the New York Bureau requested authority “to conduct the necessary investigation of this person (Harold O. Rugg) to determine whether he should or should not be included in the Security Index.” The request referenced the letter of October 1, 1951, from the Cincinnati office. The Director of the New York Office was given authorization on May 15, 1953, by the Bureau’s Director, J. Edgar Hoover (FBI file 2003).

The subsequent investigation led to reports by the Boston and New York Bureaus of the FBI. Agents in Boston prepared a detailed report based on their contact with Dartmouth College where they viewed his records, including his alumni file which contained a good deal of biographical information on Rugg’s life and career. The alumni file included a number of articles critical of Rugg as well as his defense published in the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* of January, 1941, titled, “That Men May Understand.” In the article, as in his book of the same title, Rugg categorically denied ever being a Communist or Socialist (Rugg 1941). The FBI report also contained a report on Rugg’s address to the Progressive Education Association meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, on March 2, 1934, in which he reportedly stated that efforts would be made

“to organize 14,000,000 persons into a ‘pressure group’ to force more radical changes in the economic system” (FBI file 2003).

Agents in New York City prepared a detailed, 14-page report that advised the Director on Rugg’s residences, his professional affiliations, his voting registration, and included reports from a variety of informants—many “of unknown reliability” and a few who were deemed “reliable informants.” The synopsis of facts of the report read, in part:

Reliable informant advised Rugg not a Communist but “one of CP’s favorites...” Reliable informants advised subj. associated with persons known to be members of Communist front organizations, 1949 to 1950. (FBI File 2003)

The report contained a good deal of information and misinformation about Rugg gathered from miscellaneous informants. At one point he is cited by an informant for being “openly sympathetic with Communist theories” and for his “lack of morals.” Throughout the report, Rugg’s activities and professional and political affiliations were subjected to close scrutiny, including his involvement with The Progressive Citizens of America, and the International Judicial Association, both deemed “communist front organizations.” One dossier cited in the report, “Red-ucators at Columbia University,” published by Allen Zoll’s National Council for American Education, listed Rugg as “un-American.” However, the FBI report stated, “It is not to be assumed that because a professor or teacher is included in this list, it is conclusive evidence that he is a Communist. He may be simply naïve” (FBI Memo 1953, 4).

The report also included references to selected speeches and writings, reported on

charges from the usual critics, and included new allegations from a few loose cannons. In June of 1954, a recommendation was made that a Security Index Card be prepared because Rugg was a Communist. However, in July, Director J. Edgar Hoover rejected the nomination of Rugg to the Security Index because there was insufficient information to warrant the recommendation. Hoover advised the New York office to “remain alert to report any additional information indicating subject’s affiliation with the Communist Party or Communist front organizations...” (Nelson and Singleton 1977, 20). From the time of the authorization in 1953, until his death in 1960, whether he knew it or not, Rugg was under continuing, but apparently sporadic, surveillance by the FBI. Three reports were filed on Rugg in 1959, but they apparently led to no further action (Nelson and Singleton 1977).

Although the controversy surrounding Rugg’s appearance at Ohio State in 1951 was the last major conflagration in which Rugg was actively involved, during the McCarthy era, and even later, there was a continuing series of attacks and critical commentary on the Rugg textbook series and Rugg’s educational, political, and social ideas. During the deluge of attacks on progressive education that occurred during the 1950s, Rugg and other frontier thinkers, especially Counts and Dewey, were subjected to a revival of those attacks. The American Legion used the Rugg controversy as an ongoing warning to progressives and published articles during the 1950s recalling their victory over Rugg (Kuhn 1958). Furthermore, one of Rugg’s chief critics, Augustin G. Rudd, published a memoir recalling his role in the Rugg controversy and renewing his allegations (1957).

Despite the controversies and the unfortunate fate that befell him, Rugg continued to maintain his beliefs, and persisted in supporting education for social reconstruction, although his public profile was forever altered and subdued. On May 17, 1960, Rugg died of a heart attack at his home in Woodstock.

Conclusion

What can we learn from an account of Harold Rugg's story, and by examining his vision and rationale for social studies? A number of implications might be drawn from Rugg's life and his work on social studies. First, and perhaps most important, Rugg's example illustrates the importance, and the potential impact, of dreaming big and bold visions of reform, not only as a well-spring for inspiration, but as a source of ideas for practical action and praxis, with the aim of social improvement. Rugg's social studies materials were innovative, engaging, well written, and pedagogically advanced. They went beyond narrative and description to pose challenging questions and issues—frequently framing narrative with a problem to be solved, and by inserting “open forum” discussion questions at key points in the text. Many subsequent scholars in social studies have drawn on Rugg and developed similar ideas; although none have had as much impact on classrooms (Hunt and Metcalf 1955; Oliver and Shaver 1966; Engle and Ochoa 1988; Evans and Saxe 1996).

Rugg had a worthy social and pedagogical vision combined with a bold personality and the courage to persist in upholding his convictions. His educational vision was pedagogically advanced and forward-looking. He seriously questioned capitalism and its apparatus and influences. Moreover, Rugg's basic critique is largely still relevant. We need a renewed

questioning of capitalism and of the mainstream institutions in American life. It is healthy to ask such questions, and to ask schoolchildren, beginning at a fairly early age, to wrestle with these questions and the difficult issues they raise.

At its heart, the progressive approach to schooling championed by Rugg and others held that students must be challenged to confront social realities, to understand how the problems and dilemmas of the contemporary world came to be what they are and to think about what might be done about it. Thus, Rugg's work was, in a modest way, revolutionary in character. It was a call to action, a call to confront the persistent issues at the heart of our social and economic structures, issues that are typically left out of school. He called for students to find their own individual voices, “to say what I think, my way,” as they wrestle with the social dilemmas of our times (Rugg 1956).

Second, though his textbooks and ideas were sure to inspire some criticism, Harold Rugg did not deserve his fate. Rugg was a seminal thinker—fully worthy of the recognition and financial fortune that sometimes accompanies a brilliant idea combined with hard work. The controversy that engulfed Rugg, and the defense offered by him and those who rose to support him, implies that some dreams are worth fighting for, even though the struggle may take its toll. It is particularly vital to keep Rugg's curricular vision alive—to recognize the personal costs of educational controversy, and to honor his integrity and courage in continuing to stand up for his beliefs, no matter the costs. Rugg lived his convictions and set an example that can serve as a continuing inspiration for today's scholar and citizen.

In the present era, it is especially important to keep alternative visions alive, to

nurture deep dreams of justice and fair play, and to make sure that critics of a liberal or issues-centered social studies are met with a stout defense. The attacks on Rugg, particularly the sustained campaigns carried on by the American Legion and the NAM, present early examples of the financial power of interest group and organization (Evans 2007). Recently, the revival of traditional history, supported by similar forms of interest group financing, has had a significant influence on the direction of the social studies curriculum, in effect, purchasing a conservative vision for the future of schooling and society (Evans 2004; Stehle 1997; Selden 2004; Singer 2005). This trend runs counter to the notion of a social studies focused on questions, and is leading to what Paulo Freire once called “the castration of curiosity” (Freire and Macedo 1998, 222). It must be challenged, openly confronted, by those supporting a progressive vision of social studies education and of democratic life.

Third, Rugg did make a few mistakes. Education for social justice can take many forms. There was some justification for the charge that Rugg presented more evidence in his textbooks and school materials on the side of the questions that he supported. So, it seems, in order to survive in schools, we must learn to include a balance of materials, sources, and interpretations, and challenge students to make up their own minds about the meaning of past and present institutions and societal dilemmas. Although this may not silence all critics, it is more easily defensible as part of the “American way,” and as a clear example of John Dewey’s method of intelligence applied to the social studies arena.

Moreover, by examining the Rugg textbook controversy in some depth, we can learn a great deal about the fine line between engaging in social criticism and incurring the wrath of

critics. Curricula cannot be neutral. However, it can strive to present multiple alternatives and to be fair to a full range of perspectives. Given current trends reflecting a conservative restoration in schools and society, we need greater emphasis on social criticism in social studies. Questions of social justice seem especially pertinent today, given the economic stratification and hegemonic power of elites in our nation and the world. In the United States, wealth is highly concentrated: the top one percent control 40 percent of the financial wealth, and the top 20 percent control 84 percent of total wealth. Moreover, numerous studies show that the distribution of wealth has been extremely concentrated throughout U.S. history (Domhoff 2006). Raising questions about this ongoing reality should be an important part of social studies curricula today, just as it was in the materials created by Harold Rugg.

Rugg’s vision and social studies program remain a compelling prototype, a model of education for democracy. One can imagine a slightly revised version of the Rugg program, updated for the 21st century, making education in social studies more vibrant and meaningful. However, given the interest among many social studies leaders in progressive, critical, and social justice approaches to education, given the context of an era of standards, centralized curriculum making, and high-stakes testing, and given the present climate of national and international crisis, it behooves us to be aware of, or be defeated by, the successes, the failures, and the mistakes—the “lessons”—of Harold Rugg.

Notes

¹ This manuscript is drawn from a recent book, Ronald W. Evans, *This Happened in America: Harold Rugg and the Censure of Social Studies* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age

Publishing, 2007). Portions of the manuscript also appeared in recent articles and book chapters with a different emphasis, including: Ronald W. Evans, "The Rugg Prototype for Democratic Education," *International Journal of Social Education* 22 (2): 101-127; Ronald W. Evans, "Social studies vs. the United States of America: Harold Rugg and teaching for social justice," in K. L. Riley. ed. *Social Reconstruction: People, Politics, Perspectives*, pp. 45-68 (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2006); and Ronald W. Evans, "Harold Rugg: Apostle of the modern social studies curriculum," In S. Totten, and J. Pedersen, eds., *Addressing Social Issues in the Classroom and Beyond: The Pedagogical Efforts of Pioneers in the Field* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing 2007).

² Although Rugg's advocacy of education for social reconstructionism became more strident in the early 1930s, his rationale for social studies instruction and his social studies program changed little over time. It is also important to point out that his social studies vision and program developed long before his bold advocacy of social reconstructionism, a point that was largely lost on his critics.

³ This listing of Rugg's "hypotheses" is a composite based on the two works cited.

⁴ See especially, C. E. Harrison, inter-office memo. to W. B. Weisenburger, 25 July 1940; C. E. Harrison to H. W. Prentis, 10 January 1941, and attached inter-office memo., C. E. Harrison to W. B. Weisenburger, 10 January 1941; C. E. Harrison to H. W. Prentis, 19 March 1941, all contained in "Robey Textbook Survey" folder, National Industrial Information Committee, Subject Files, box 847, series 111, National Association of Manufacturers Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware.

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