From Correspondence to Contradiction and Change: 
Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited

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INTRODUCTION

Schooling in Capitalist America, by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, is undoubtedly one of the post-World War II classics in the sociology of education. Published 26 years ago, Schooling represents the first social-reproduction perspective to have a major impact on education theory and research in the United States. Indeed, their book and earlier publications—particularly Bowles (1971)—inspired many graduate students in the 1970s, whose subsequent work significantly influenced theory and research in education (Eastern Sociological Society, 2001). Numerous studies test, extend, and support Bowles and Gintis’s work (e.g., Howell and McBroom, 1982; Oaks, 1982; Olneck and Bills, 1980). Others (e.g., Rehberg and Rosenthal, 1978) contest their arguments. Moore (1988:65) observes that the Marxist sociology of education since the 1970s has been in the Anglo-Saxon world “essentially a dialogue with Bowles and Gintis.” And Apple (1982b:125) proclaims Bowles and Gintis to be “among the most provocative and insightful writers we have on the left.” Schooling was instrumental in developing the current political economic approach to the analysis of education. Cole (1988a:7–8) and Moore (1988) credit Schooling with providing a more macro orientation for many radical British sociologists influenced in the 1970s by the “new” sociology of education focus on curriculum content, classroom interaction, and control. Today Schooling continues to be widely cited in introductory sociology of

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education texts as representing the Marxist approach to the sociology of education.3

This paper offers a critical retrospective of this classic work and its influence on North American sociology of education since 1976. I begin with the historical context of the work, then summarize the key arguments and identify and evaluate several of the central criticisms. Enduring contributions of the work are noted. I then point out some striking shifts in contemporary sociological thought since the 1970s and shifts in the thinking of Bowles and Gintis as well. My conclusion is that Schooling was a product of its times but also an enduring influence for much subsequent theory and research in the sociology of education.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Criticism of Liberal Reform

The work of Bowles and Gintis can be situated as part of the New Left critique of American liberalism in the post-World War II period. Liberal public policy had greatly expanded public education with the objective of fostering social mobility and economic equality. A heady optimism had guided educational policymakers immediately after the war. The prevailing functionalist theory in American sociology viewed education as responding effectively to the increasing demands of the new postindustrial society for technical knowledge. Fascination with technological growth focused on how education would contribute to that growth by selecting and training those capable of meeting the new technological challenges (Clark, 1962). Human capital theory (Schultz, 1961) portrayed education as a form of productive investment. Social mobility opportunities were open to all who wanted to improve their situation. Education would become the key institution for instilling those consensual values so vital for a rapidly growing, democratic, and highly differentiated society (Dreeben, 1968; Parsons, 1959).

By the 1960s it was becoming apparent that liberal policy initiatives were falling far short of their idealized objectives. America rediscovered poverty, racial inequality, and gender discrimination. Major studies of schooling began to suggest that the educational system might not be the best place to initiate a strategy for greater economic equality. Ordered by the

3An informal count of citations in the Social Science Citation Index shows that Schooling remained one of the most widely cited books in the sociology of education through the early nineties. Indeed, until 1995 it was cited more frequently than the French classic by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, Reproduction, which appeared in English translation in 1977.
commissioner for education, the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) was widely expected to document sharp economic differences between black and white schools, and to recommend ways that massive federal expenditures on schools would improve academic achievement, especially among black children. But the report concluded that school facilities seemed to have relatively little effect on student achievement and that the problems appeared to stem more from family background than from lack of school resources. Thus it helped shift the search for sources of inequality outside of schools.

The Coleman Report was followed by the work of Christopher Jencks and colleagues (Jencks et al., 1972), whose book *Inequality* dealt a heavy blow to the popular idea that the problem of economic inequality could be addressed by equalizing educational opportunity. This landmark work suggested that schools are limited instruments of social reform and pointed directly to the economy as the strategic area for reform. These critical research findings anticipated the Bowles and Gintis argument that the capitalist class structure shaped the educational system in decisive ways. (Gintis participated in the Jencks research project.)

Of course sociologists (Hollingshead, 1975; Warner et al., 1949; Warner and Lunt, 1941) had investigated class-based inequities in education and community long before Bowles and Gintis. In the sociology of education, concern with the effects of social background on educational performance and attainment and the contribution of schooling to occupational achievement have been long-standing concerns (Davies, 1995:1449; Dreeben, 1994:29). But according to the social-reproduction perspective of Bowles and Gintis, the class-education nexus reflected broader institutional arrangements consisting of a particularly rigid social class structure specific to the capitalist economy. It connected family, work, education, and the economy in a way previously not done.

**Conflict Theory Attack on Functionalism**

The work of Bowles and Gintis emerged as part of the broad wave of criticism in the 1960s and 1970s of the reigning paradigm of functionalism in sociology (Gouldner, 1970). Conflict theory, rooted in the works of Marx and Weber, but also responding to the change and upheaval of the sixties and the rise of the New Left movement, emerged and challenged the fundamental assumptions of functionalist thought. Collins (1971, 1974, 1975) launched his Weberian attack against the functionalist theory of educational stratification in 1971. Education expansion, Collins argued, was fueled more by status-group conflict than pulled by technological demand.
Bowles and Gintis entered this broad critical movement as Marxists who begin their analysis with social class in a capitalist economy rather than with Weberian status groups. They looked first to the character of the forces and social relations of production as the key to understanding the educational system. Under capitalism, the social relations of production, based on private property, create a "hierarchical division of labor." Schools both reflect and work to reproduce those patterns of hierarchical relations and thus contribute to the maintenance of the social class structure. Thus, while Bowles and Gintis did not initiate leftist criticism of schooling, they focused attention on the capitalist economy and in doing so were able to provide a coherent framework in which education, the economy, and the social class structure were linked in a structuralist fashion. By offering a framework showing linkages among the economy, education, and the class structure, Bowles and Gintis reflected both the heritage of Marxism, from which they drew inspiration, and that of structural-functionalism, which they rejected. As economists, they also brought to a largely theoretical body of criticism of schooling by the political left sophisticated statistical techniques of data analysis that were generally associated with mainstream empirical social science.

CORE ARGUMENTS

The Flaws of Liberal Reform

_Schooling_ (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:8–9) begins with an effort to demonstrate three fatal flaws of liberal reform. First, Bowles and Gintis identify a fundamental misunderstanding in liberal thought concerning the historical impact of educational expansion on the economy. Education, Bowles and Gintis charge, "has never been a potent force for economic equality." Rather, they argue that despite enormous increases in secondary and higher education enrollments, educational attainments remain dependent on class background. Moreover, income inequality has not attenuated; indeed, it has increased in the post-World War II period. Bowles and Gintis's central thesis that liberal educational reforms are incapable of solving the economic

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4 Their arguments are brought together in _Schooling_, but many of them had already taken form in earlier publications (Bowles, 1971, 1972a, 1972b; Bowles and Gintis 1972, 1975a, 1975b). See "Educational Research: A Review and an Interpretation" (Karabel and Halsey 1977:1–85) for a useful analysis of the historical context of American society and the sociology of education in which the Bowles and Gintis work appears.

5 Bowles and Gintis fall within the camp of revisionist educational historians (Katz, 1968, 1971; Tyack, 1974) who stress that mass education in nineteenth-century America came in response to conflicts generated by the forces of industrial capitalism and expanding urbanization.
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crisis of late capitalism appears to hold up well in light of more recent work that documents the limited successes of liberal reform efforts over the past decade (Anyon, 1997; Eastern Sociological Society, 2001).

Second, the failure of liberal reform efforts to equalize educational attainments and thereby reduce economic inequality could not be explained by differences in individual cognitive capacities such as IQ. Bowles and Gintis assembled evidence showing that a broad range of noncognitive factors, ranging from class, race, and gender to personality traits, played relatively more important roles in individual chances of economic success. They found that by controlling for social background and educational attainment, IQ had almost no independent effect on adult economic outcomes.

Third, liberal reform efforts aimed at enhancing individual development potential, such as the progressive education movement inspired by the thought of John Dewey or the free-school movement mistakenly identified schools as the source of the problem. Bowles and Gintis (1976:9) argued that the seemingly traditional, irrational, and mindless behaviors found among teachers, administrators, staff, and parents are in fact functionally linked to the social relations of work found in the economy. The educational experience “corresponds” to the experience of work in the capitalist economy. Thus schools do provide an integrative function, as liberal reformers predict, but one that helps reproduce an inequitarian social order rather than attenuate it. School reform can never be ultimately successful without first implementing radical change in the capitalist economy. This appears to be an enduring if unpopular insight today.

The Correspondence Model

The core explanation of inequality, Bowles and Gintis (1976:10–11) contend, can be found in a Marxist analysis of the fundamentally opposing interests between profits for capitalists and wages for workers. Profits are extracted from the surplus value that workers produce above and beyond their wages. Capitalists need to establish hierarchy and control over work so as to enhance profits and trim wages. Education performs two essential functions for this capitalist organization of work. First, it provides technical and social skills that enhance productivity and therefore profits. Second, education provides a legitimization function to “defuse and depoliticize” the exploitative character of work organization for the interests of capitalist profits. Five implications are elaborated from this simple explanatory model (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:11–13). First, the degrees of economic inequality and types of personal development are essentially shaped by the “market, property, and power relationships” that lie at the core of the capitalist economy. Second, schools do not add or subtract from the “overall degree of
inequality and repressive personal development" but serve to perpetuate the social relationships of economic life by legitimating inequality. Meritocratic ideals that govern much modern thinking about schools simply reinforce patterns of class, race, and gender inequities created by capitalism.

Third, these functions are not consciously implemented but occur for structural reasons through the "correspondence principle"—the key concept in *Schooling*. One can see this correspondence at four different levels. First, the authority and control relations between employers and workers in the capitalist workplace are replicated in hierarchical relations between school administrators, teachers, and students, leaving little room for workers to control the content of their jobs and for students to control their curriculum. Second, alienated work for wages in the workplace is paralleled by alienated school work in the classroom. Wages, grades, and threat of unemployment and expulsion all impose external rather than internal motivational systems for work and learning. Third, just as the capitalist workplace is fragmented by levels and types of skill requirements and degrees of control, so academic knowledge is specialized, compartmentalized, and driven by the corrosive dynamics of competition. And finally, just as the lowest job levels in the capitalist enterprise emphasize rule-following, the middle levels, dependability, and the highest levels autonomy and self-direction, a similar hierarchy of values can be observed stretching from the lowest levels and tracks of the educational ladder up through the middle and highest levels.

Because of this correspondence between schools, families, and the workplace, schools reproduce capitalist society in three ways: They allocate students to different levels in the capitalist work hierarchy so that workers' children become workers and capitalists' children become capitalists; they socialize students to have the skills and attitudes appropriate to those different levels (self-direction for managers, but obedience for workers); and they legitimate these processes of allocation and socialization in terms of individual merit.

A fourth implication of the model is that schools can also become arenas of resistance and egalitarian consciousness that oppose the authoritarian relations characterizing the capitalist system. The fifth implication of the model is that "the organization of education...has taken distinct and characteristic forms in different periods of U.S. history."

**KEY CRITICISMS**

**Functionalist Determinism**

*Schooling* represents a kind of neo-Marxian functionalism where the skills, values, and norms transmitted through education correspond directly
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to the needs for hierarchy in the capitalist firm and in the social class structure. The same tightly coupled family/class/education/labor market nexus can also be found in the early work of Carnoy (1974, 1975), Carnoy and Levin (1976), and Anyon (1980)—all inspired by Bowles and Gintis. Apple’s early work (Apple, 1979) in particular uses the idea of the “hidden curriculum” to stress how school knowledge subtly transmits capitalist values.

This neo-Marxian functionalism soon comes under attack, however, from those who stress the contradictory character of capitalism, including some who initially accepted Bowles and Gintis’s view of the tight fit between capital and schooling (Apple, 1982a; Katznelson and Weir, 1985; Wexler, 1976). Critics (Apple, 1982b; Giroux, 1983; Wexler, 1987; Willis, 1977) argue that the early work of Bowles and Gintis is too structural, too determinative, too mechanical, giving insufficient attention to processes of resistance, contradiction, and contestation. Working-class youth are portrayed as passive victims of the selecting and sorting action of schools.

Contradiction as well as correspondence characterize the relationship between education and work (Carter, 1974). Carnoy and Levin (1985:2–4), for example, repudiate their earlier Marxist functionalist perspective to emphasize the “central paradox” in the relationship between education and work, where education produces the skills, values, and norms that enhance the hierarchy of social relations in the capitalist firm and also fosters democratic values that directly conflict with that hierarchy. Schools, Carnoy and Levin argue, are structurally connected to the political as well as economic spheres—a view that Bowles and Gintis (Gintis 1980; Gintis and Bowles 1980) later come to share, calling it the contradiction between “property rights” and “person rights.”

A new orientation emerged that perceived “reproduction through resistance,” where opposition to school by working-class youth would be seen as a youthful expression of proletarian culture. The study of reproducing patterns of educational and social inequality gives way to the search for sources of contradiction, conflict, and resistance. Foremost among these critics is the British sociologist Paul Willis (1977).

Bowles and Gintis (1976:12–13) acknowledge in Schooling that there are arenas of conflict and resistance. They write that “the authoritarian classroom does produce docile workers, but it also produces misfits and rebels.” Bowles and Gintis sees that the experience of the universities in the sixties demonstrates the capacity of education to foster criticism and protest of capitalist social relations. Universities helped to generate the radical student movement. Bowles and Gintis acknowledge that the types of training needed to enhance productivity come in conflict with the demand for profits. And they see how outside groups use schools for goals opposed to the profit goal of capital. But the clear emphasis in their early work is on how schools reflect
and reproduce rather than challenge the capitalist social order. Later, they modify this view, giving greater emphasis to how education can occasionally contradict capitalist interest (Bowles and Gintis, 1981).

Change

Although Bowles and Gintis (Eastern Sociological Society, 2001) have acknowledged as reasonable the criticism that *Schooling* embraced an overly functionalist orientation, the frequent charge that they simply neglected agency and change is based more on a caricature than a careful reading of their work.⁶ *Schooling* does offer elements of a theory of change, though Bowles and Gintis do not elaborate it in any detail.

First, and most prominent in the book, is the idea that educational change occurs in response to internal contradictions between capital accumulation and reproduction. Indeed, Bowles and Gintis see the expansion of mass education as essentially stemming from that underlying contradiction. Moreover, they suggest that the growth of the state is an institutional response to deflect and absorb the contradictions of accumulation and reproduction in the capitalist workplace (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:233–234). This fairly orthodox Marxist explanation simply contends that education accommodates itself to the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. *Schooling* did not look at the dynamics of change internal to education itself as the authors admit (Gintis and Bowles, 1980:20). Subsequently, they have come to view internal dynamics as a “form of contradictory delimitation” (Gintis and Bowles, 1980:24), where the emphasis is more on contradiction than adaptation in response to a lack of fit.

Second, the functionalist depiction of a corresponding nexus between the social relations of production and the social relations of schooling is nuanced and tempered by historical analysis of American education. Confronted with the actual historical record, Bowles and Gintis (1976:236) acknowledge that “the economic and educational systems possess fairly distinct and independent internal dynamics of reproduction and development.” They do not present themselves as theoreticians of the “relative autonomy” of state institutions, but the idea that education can follow its own specific institutional dynamics is certainly present in their work—although it is a historical observation rather than a theoretical claim.

Third, because of the “independent internal dynamics of the two systems” of education and the economy, the accommodation process confronts

⁶Julia Wrigley (Eastern Sociological Society, 2001) recounts from her experience as editor of *Sociology of Education* that she encountered this criticism of their work in the early 1990s when it almost seemed obligatory to include in the first paragraphs of submitted manuscripts a condemnation of Bowles and Gintis for the neglect of agency.
the ever-present possibility of a significant mismatch" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:236). In their review of the historical study of expansion and reform in American education, Bowles and Gintis see periods of “mismatch,” “disjunction,” and “lack of fit” that become significant driving forces for change in education. Two primary mechanisms are specified to account for the accommodation of the educational system to the economy. The first is the politics of “pluralist accommodation,” by which they mean “the relatively uncoordinated pursuit of interests by millions of individuals and groups as mediated by local school boards, the market for private educational services, and other decentralized decision-making arenas.” (1976:236). This mechanism resembles the observations of pluralist political science (Dahl, 1961, 1967). Bowles and Gintis suggest a number of structural conditions that can affect this day-to-day, “free market” process, though ultimately it depends on the economy.

The second mechanism appears only in periods of crisis when the disjunction between education and the economy takes on the form of overt class conflict, and education becomes an arena of visible group conflict. Bowles and Gintis see a few key instances in American history of this mechanism when crisis and disjuncture led to social and educational reform efforts: the rural and urban unrest of the 1840s, the development of worker’s organizations in the mid-nineteenth century, the activism of craft unions in the early twentieth century, and the 1960s student movement (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:238–239).

Despite their emphasis on the central role of education in reproducing capitalist relations of social inequality, Bowles and Gintis remain fundamentally optimistic about the possibilities of change. Indeed, they admit somewhat uneasily that this optimism stands in sharp contrast to the “preponderant influence of the capitalist class” stressed throughout the book. It “may seem out of place in a book which has laid such stress on the reproduction of consciousness and skills consistent with capitalist expansion” (1976:277). Nonetheless, this optimism separates their version of social reproduction theory from strict structuralist versions, such as that of Althusser (1972), that offer little prospect for change. Bowles and Gintis at least see possible breaches in the system that hold potential for transformation. Yet, their message seems deceptively simple: get out there and struggle. Schooling ends with a shift from determinism to voluntarism, which reflects the spirit of the student movement of the sixties. It leaves unresolved a tension between the determinist and voluntarist aspects of their analysis.7

7 Already in 1980 Gintis and Bowles acknowledged that one of the shortcomings of Schooling is “its weak and possibly voluntaristic political prescriptions for educational change” (1980:16). Gintis (Eastern Sociological Society, 2001) recently recalled that their thinking in the mid-seventies did not take up change in a systematic way and seemed in retrospect too voluntaristic, as many critics charged.
Process and Culture

Schooling was also sharply criticized for not offering suitable insight into the actual processes in schools that perpetuate capitalist social relations (Apple and Weis, 1985; Connell et al., 1982; Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977, 1983). The book ignored the black box of what actually occurred in the reproduction process in schooling. Their work did suggest, however, kinds of data that might be important to consider and motivated numerous scholars, such as Jean Anyon in Ghetto Schooling (Anyon, 1997), to examine how schools actually do reproduce disadvantage.

An alternative cultural reproduction perspective emerged offering distinctively different emphases. More emphasis came to be given to diverse types of cultural resources and institutions than to broad structural features of capitalist class reproduction. Educational institutions were seen as “relatively autonomous” from underlying economic and social constraints. More emphasis was given to agency and to sources of potential conflict and resistance within schools. Researchers insisted on the importance of ethnographic study of actual processes through which structures reproduced. Bernstein (1971, 1973) and Bourdieu (1973; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) were early and key architects of this widely influential theory of cultural reproduction. Correspondence theory stressed the connection between education and the social relations of production, whereas the work of Bernstein and Bourdieu shifted the focus to class relations more generally. Differences in education were seen more in terms of class and class-fraction language and cultural differences than in terms of conflict at the point of production. Many contemporary education researchers (Lareau, 1989; MacLeod, 1995; Sadovnik, 1995), who drew inspiration from the issues raised by Schooling, today find important complements in the work of Bernstein and Bourdieu to help us better understand processes of inequality in schooling.

Schools Create Inequality

Schooling portrayed schools as reflections of inequality in the social class structure. In criticism of liberal reform, Bowles and Gintis played down the impact that schools could have independently of the class structure. Subsequent research suggests the problem might be more complex in that schools can create inequality as well as reflect and reinforce existing patterns funneled into them from the social class structure. Work on school tracking (Rosenbaum, 1976), for example, points up how schools as organizations (with formalized systems of classification and tracking) can be independent sources of educational inequality.
Race and Gender Differences

While acknowledging racial and gender differentiations in their 1976 work, Bowles and Gintis did not make them central components of their analysis (Cole, 1988a:10–12; Wolpe, 1988). Schooling mentions gender and race divisions crosscutting class differences but does not examine them in any depth. Many critics have subsequently argued that the educational deck can also be stacked against racial and ethnic minorities (Ogbu, 1978) and women (Byrne, 1978). Today we understand racial formation as a complex process that has economic, political, and cultural components but does not reduce to any one (Omi and Winant, 1983). Gender likewise cannot be captured in its specificity by class analysis. Patriarchal relations have their own specificities and histories that do not simply reflect social class relations (Hartmann, 1981). Bowles and Gintis now acknowledge this insufficiency in their earlier analyses and place more emphasis on race and gender differences today.8

Bowles and Gintis are of course not alone today in stressing the dynamics of race and gender as well as class in stratification processes and structures.9 Yet their willingness to accord more attention to gender and race does not appear to lead them to embrace the “parallelist” position of Apple (1982b, 1988:120–122), in which the relative importance of race, gender, and class in any situation is determined empirically rather than theoretically. Class remains theoretically more important in their understanding of social stratification.

Religion

Religion was not a concern in Schooling. Indeed, it does not even appear in the index. Yet religious education has always been an important part of the American educational landscape and arguably more important since the 1970s at the primary and secondary levels. Religion seems increasingly important today in American education, particular in curriculum debates and in the development of an independent sector of parochial, noncatholic schooling.

8That Bowles and Gintis paid little attention to gender in Schooling illustrates to what extent traditional Marxist conceptions of labor in factory settings guided their thinking. As Apple points out, had they followed a broader concept of labor and looked at the “labor process inside the school” (Apple, 1988:120), where many teachers at the primary and secondary level were women, then gender issues might have been more salient to them.

9Several of the key resistance theorists and critics of Bowles and Gintis (Apple, 1989; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991, 1993; Giroux and McLaren, 1989; Weis, 1990; Wexler, 1987; Willis, 1983) have assumed a “post-Marxist” position that extends the analysis of inequality beyond social class to include gender and race.
SHIFTS IN THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION AND SOCIETY
SINCE THE 1970S

The current thinking of many American sociologists about education and society seems strikingly different from the perspective Bowles and Gintis advanced in the 1970s. The following observations of shifts in dominant currents of thought in the sociology of education come from personal observations, an informal review of the last 20 years of the Sociology of Education, and observations made at a recent panel discussion on Schooling (Eastern Sociological Society, 2001).

From Class to Identity Politics

Even if class-based patterns in education now appear to be more well documented than they were when Bowles and Gintis were writing in the 1970s, a class-based analysis and class-based politics in education have fallen from favor in much contemporary sociology of education. Bowles and Gintis not only documented enduring class differences in education but also articulated a vision for a politically unified social movement that would enhance the transition to a more egalitarian socialist alternative. While they acknowledged that class awareness was frequently divided along lines of race and gender, they advocated a unified, class-based politics. Today we see much more concern for identity politics, where the basis of social cohesion is built around a variety of racial, ethnic, and gender distinctions rather than on class. Contemporary identity politics affirms lines of social division that Bowles and Gintis in the 1970s wanted to transcend in order to bring about basic social change.

From a Social Power to an Individual Achievement Perspective

Bowles and Gintis placed individual academic achievement within a broader array of power relations, a perspective that is frequently missing in the sociology of education today. The emphasis in the contemporary professional literature seems to have shifted away from social power toward an individual achievement orientation. We now have a deeper understanding of the resources of family background and organization and of interactional processes in schooling, better data sets, and more sophisticated measures of academic achievement than were available to Bowles and Gintis in the 1970s. We have a better understanding of what goes on in the classroom, of how different levels of instruction affect students of different class backgrounds.
expansion of property rights,” in liberal democratic societies (Bowles and Gintis, 1986:93). In Schooling (Bowles and Gintis, 1976:282) they proclaimed that “we support the development of a revolutionary socialist movement in the United States.” Today, they see no socialist alternative to capitalism. In Democracy and Capitalism (Bowles and Gintis, 1986) the socialist ideal is replaced by a vision of a postliberal democracy.

The Marxist base/superstructure model, which informed the analysis in Schooling, is no longer there. Subsequent work shows Bowles and Gintis shifting to a more complex and differentiated mode of social analysis. They conceptualize society as an ensemble of structured arenas of activities they call “sites” and types of “practices” that are structured by specific kinds of dynamics, such as appropriation, politics, culture, or distribution (Bowles and Gintis, 1986; Gintis and Bowles, 1980). The site of capitalist production, for example, is characterized by relations set by the dynamics of private appropriation and market distribution. The liberal democratic state is a site where individual rights find expression. The modern family is a site governed by the power and kinship of patriarchy.

Bowles and Gintis stress the specific character of the various sites and types of practices but also emphasize how the characteristics of one site can “delimit” those of others in contradictory ways or be “exported” by individuals and groups from one to the other to create new forms of contradictions and change. The authors argue that discourses concerning personal rights developed in the political sphere become “transportable” to other spheres, such as education, the family, and the economy. Indeed, they see the transportation of discourses on personal rights into the economy as a progressive challenge to the traditional rights of property in that sphere. Conflicts in one sphere can extend and have a significant impact on another sphere.

This clearly represents a broader and more flexible application of the correspondence principle, one that further distances itself from the simple base/superstructure model. This shift shows Bowles and Gintis to be part of a general intellectual movement in sociology away from what Mills (1959) called “grand theory” and toward more differentiated levels of analysis. Yet, as Apple (1982b:125–128) insightfully points out, Bowles and Gintis seem to assume that the transported ideas are progressive and will fall into the hands of progressive groups in other spheres. But the experience of Reaganism in the United States and Thatcherism in the United Kingdom during the 1980s shows that “transportable discourses” do not always benefit the political left. Discourses of populism and democracy are not intrinsic to the political left but can be articulated for the benefit of the political right as well.

By 1980 Bowles and Gintis saw education as embodying its own internal contradictory dynamic. As a subsystem of the state site, education legitimates the rights of property in reproducing the political structure of
capitalist production. Yet it also is a carrier of the rights vested in persons. “Education reproduces rights vested in property while itself organized in terms of rights vested in persons” (Gintis and Bowles, 1980:28). This opposition between types of rights was already a theme in *Schooling*. But in that work the opposition pitted two different systems against each other: the economy and education. Here Bowles and Gintis are much more willing to see this opposition within education itself.

A rejection of Marxism is also apparent in their view of government when they contrast the principle of “majority rule” in government with “top-down control” of schools. This contrasts sharply with the Marxist view of all state institutions—including education—as devoid of genuine democratic practices (Bowles and Gintis, 1986). Bowles and Gintis contend that the fundamental motivations for struggle are no longer for the ownership of the means of production, as most Marxists stress, but freedom, human rights, and access to valued resources. The emphasis is on control rather than ownership.

Their more recent emphasis on individual freedom rather than property ownership is not entirely new, however. It resonates already in the form of democratizing the workplace, which they stress in their 1976 work. In *Schooling* they wrote, “In the United States, democratic forms in the electoral sphere of political life are paralleled by highly dictatorial forms in the economic sphere. Thus we believe that the key to reform is the democratization of economic relationships” (Bowles and Gintis, 1986, 1976:14). They wanted to extend forms of democratic process already present in political life to the economic sphere.

These sound like themes of liberal reform from thinkers who do not identify themselves as liberals. Bowles and Gintis remain sharply critical of liberal thought for refusing to extend the idea of democratic process beyond the public sphere of politics to the private sphere of the economy. They see poverty as the number one problem in America and assert the importance of devising public policy to reduce poverty. And they continue to see schools as woefully lacking in democratic process.

Nevertheless, Bowles and Gintis embrace many liberal reform measures today, such as school vouchers, charter schools, and earned income credits. Although sharp critics in the 1970s of earlier liberal reform efforts in American history, today they take a more measured, concrete, pragmatic interest in specific kinds of public policy measures. Moreover, they are much more willing to celebrate market mechanisms in the distribution of resources and the expansion of educational opportunity than *Schooling* would suggest. They likewise are willing today to draw much more from fundamental sociobiology and rational-actor assumptions about what motivates individuals to struggle than one would ever imagine from reading their 1976 book (Eastern Sociological Society, 2001).
CONCLUSION

Schooling grew out of and reflects the spirit and concerns of the student movement and the turmoil in American society in the sixties. It is a product of its times. Yet the book has been important to many contemporary theorists and researchers in education who were graduate students in the 1970s and whose subsequent work reflects its influence. Schooling offers some enduring insights on matters that remain troublesome in American education. It reminds us of the troubling and persistent effect of social class background on educational attainment and the limits of liberal educational reform efforts.12

Schooling was widely criticized for focusing too much on the political economy of schooling and thereby neglecting to offer a sufficiently complex picture of the cultural processes and politics at work in creating educational inequality. Yet the macroeconomic emphasis given by the authors at the time was an important corrective to views that either narrowly focused on the internal characteristics of schools or offered a reductionist and simple functionalist connection of schooling to the economy.13 Without Bowles and Gintis, our current knowledge about the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of schooling might not have been possible.

Reading Schooling today shows how much has changed in current research priorities in education. Preoccupations with individual achievement have displaced concerns over power. Bowles and Gintis have themselves shifted positions as they reject today the Marxist project that informed Schooling. Today they support many market-oriented reform proposals, such as vouchers and charter schools, that seem foreign to the political orientation of Schooling. Their recent work places more emphasis on the value (rather than the pernicious effects) of preparing young people for productive adult work lives, and the kinds of reforms they now advocate are designed to improve the material conditions and expand the freedom of the members of a capitalist society, not to inaugurate socialism. Still, their sharp criticism of liberal reform continues to ring true: school reform outside of economic reform is incomplete; school reform designed to correct economic inequality is ineffective.

12Bowles and Gintis (2002b) find in more recent work on better data sets robust evidence of the persistence of economic inheritance and the relative unimportance of IQ and school enhanced cognitive skills in the intergenerational transmission of inequality. Moreover, they find further support for the correspondence principle in that noncognitive behavioral and attitudinal traits appear substantially rewarded in the labor market (Bowles et al., 2002).

13Apple notes that many of the critics of Bowles and Gintis forget just how “mechanistic and reductionist” were the major alternatives of a “vulgar Marxism” and a “theoretical economics” that Bowles and Gintis reacted against in the 1970s (1988:114).
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