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attacked these traditional methods of introducing history to elementary school pupils, arguing that students should study subjects more "relevant" to their lives. For example, Paul Hanna, assigned by the state of Virginia to prepare a new social studies curriculum, said that even though students were "happy and joyful" when they pretended to be knights or Romans, it was more important to have them study "expanding environments," beginning with home and school in first grade and concluding in fourth grade with world exploration and settlement.

In 1934, the American Historical Association issued a report which endorsed the "expanding environments" curriculum. The endorsement helped ensure its quick acceptance by schools across America. Today, observes Ravitch, this approach to teaching social studies has become "the universal curriculum of the elementary school."

Yet there is little evidence that teaching social studies instead of history from kindergarten through the third grade is beneficial to students. In lieu of evidence, curriculum developers have provided a series of "rationalizations," which have never been tested.

Ravitch calls for restoring history to its place in the primary grades. By studying myths and heroes at an early age, she says, students acquire a "cultural literacy" that is lost to those who are exposed only to social studies from "basal readers." "The teachers who bring 'real books' into the classrooms," she says, "should be typical, not mavericks."

Groups Reexamined

"The Wages of Discrimination" by William R. Beer, in *Public Opinion* (July-Aug. 1987), 1150
17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In contemporary America, does discrimination against blacks and women as *groups* still exist? Beer, a Brooklyn College sociologist, thinks not.

While it is true that U.S. blacks and women do, on average, earn less than their white male counterparts, that fact is only part of the story, Beer contends. Black and female workers in the United States tend to be younger and have less education, relative to their white male colleagues. Women still tend to put motherhood ahead of career advancement, while blacks, as a group, suffer from a higher-than-average rate of high school dropout—a significant factor in determining wages. The "collapse" of black families has also hindered their earning potential. "A household headed by an unmarried female is bound to be poorer," Beer argues, "not just because there is only one wage earner, but because the mother often stops her schooling in order to take care of her children."

Yet, when such factors are statistically adjusted, Beer says, "there is little difference between comparable black and white households."

Women already hold a "disproportionately large share of professional jobs," while blacks have made substantial headway, considering the low number of black college graduates in the past, Beer notes. In 1985, women accounted for 44.1 percent of the employed U.S. population, but held 49.1 percent of professional positions. Black Americans, who represent 9.8 percent of those employed, make up 6.3 percent of U.S. professionals. Beer adds that the experiences of black West Indians—mostly from Trinidad,

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Jamaica, and Barbados—in the United States serve as evidence against the theory that systematic racial discrimination has blocked black upward mobility. In 1969, for instance, 15.2 percent of West Indians were in the professions, compared to a 14 percent national average for all Americans. Today, such black families earn almost as much as the average American family—\$34,924 per year—and 37 percent more than does the average U.S. black family (\$22,778).

Furthermore, several opinion surveys show that a majority of U.S. blacks say they have not suffered from racial discrimination in the education, job, or housing markets; nor, according to these surveys, have a majority of women suffered from sex discrimination in the office.

“Any policy that aims at treating [any] Americans as group victims of discrimination, rather than as individuals,” Beer concludes, “is based on sociologically untenable ground.”

Reckoning Poverty

“Mismeasuring Poverty and Progress” by John C. Weicher, in *The Cato Journal* (Winter 1987), 224 Second St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

Measuring the U.S. poverty rate is no easy task.

In 1969, Washington chose to gauge the official poverty line in terms of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rather than the cost of food, as it had been doing since 1965. That decision, argues Weicher, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was a “mistake” that “has colored and distorted perceptions of the poverty problem.”

For measuring poverty, says Weicher, the CPI places too much emphasis on the cost of buying a home—and not enough on the cost of living in one. In any year, only three percent of U.S. households purchase a dwelling; the costs that they confront have little relation to those faced by Americans who already own homes (80 percent of U.S. households), or who rent. In addition, inflation strongly influences housing prices, further accentuating what Weicher calls “a gross distortion of actual behavior” in the CPI tabulations. Not until 1983 did the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics alter the CPI to more accurately reflect housing costs, using instead a “rental equivalence” index.

As a result of CPI-borne distortions, Weicher contends, the number of poor people and the poverty rate in the United States have been overstated, and continue to be. In 1982, for example, the official poverty rate was 15 percent, while the rate as adjusted by Weicher, using the post-1983 CPI, was 13.2 percent. That same year, poor Americans numbered “officially” 34.4 million; the adjusted number is 30.3 million.

Recalculating the poverty line also alters the pattern of U.S. poverty. For example, the official poverty rate reached its lowest level in 1973. Weicher’s adjusted rate bottomed out in 1978. Such adjustments accentuate the “feminization” of poverty, raising the proportion of female-headed poor households from 48.1 percent to 49.8 percent in 1984. Geographically, the retabulation lessens the increase in the urban poor: officially, the number rose from 6.0 to 6.7 million between 1970 and 1980; with the adjustment, the number climbed only from 5.7 to 5.8 million.