

the rationalist myth that "human problems" are soluble merely by applying adequate amounts of money and manpower along lines developed by various social planners. That this lesson has been, or is being, learned is a "consummation devoutly to be wished."

Finally, this same criticism can be levelled at Rostow's enthusiasm for the Johnson and Kennedy domestic records. The turbulence and inflammation of domestic life during the sixties is ascribed to a vague "dynamics of American society and the pathology it had permitted to develop in the heart of the great cities." Of President Kennedy's inability to achieve a substantial legislative pro-

gram, Rostow offers in defense De Gaulle's observation: "Leaders of men . . . are remembered less for the usefulness of what they achieved than for the sweep of their endeavors. Though sometimes reason may condemn them, feeling clothes them in an aura of glory."

His sympathy for JFK even leads him to note: "These words from his Inaugural Address may seem excessively rhetorical in safer, more ambivalent times; but they rang true in his day, as Kennedy acted upon them: 'Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the sur-

vival and success of liberty.'" Suffice it to note that most realist political analysts have applauded the Nixon Doctrine precisely because it repudiates such grandiose sentiments.

Although one could apply these criticisms to other areas of the book, it again should be emphasized that in the final analysis *Diffusion of Power* is a valuable addition to the literature of public policy studies. It is intelligent, well-written, full of useful information, and persuasive, and I know of no other recent work that does as much to provide perspective on such a wide variety of topics.

Wayne H. Valis

Book Review

Inequality: A Reassessment

by Christopher Jencks
Basic Books \$12.50

It has now been nearly a year since the release of Christopher Jencks' *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (first reviewed with *Deschooling Society* in *The Alternative*, February 1973), and the flurry of debate which arose over the book when it first appeared at last shows signs of subsiding. At its height the debate centered on two major questions: first, was Jencks' data accurate and valid? and second, were Jencks' conclusions and political recommendations justifiable on the basis of his data?—or could they be justified even disregarding his data? In recent months, as raging argument has quieted to a murmur, it appears that the controversy may well be settled for good. Experts in fields as diverse as psychology and economics have awarded a near-unanimous "thumbs-up" to the first question, spreading an eerie hush over our community of educators, and a "thumbs-down" to the second question, forcing radical social critiques to disown Jencks in droves.

Jencks' statistics alone, which seem to wreck educators' hopes and social planners' dreams that social inequality can be significantly reduced by a massive reallocation of our nation's resources to ensure "equal opportunity," have aroused much frenzy over the past year but have yet to be seriously challenged. Most of Jencks' data on the effectiveness of public schooling is a face value interpretation of the giant 1967 EEOS ("Coleman") Study, and advocates of "equal opportunity," to their extreme discomfort, have not yet found a comparable study on which they might base a refutation. On the other hand, Jencks' thoroughgoing egalitarianism, which informs all of his recommendations that individual income be equalized by governmental decree, is naive and simplistic. Critics of almost every ideological persuasion have shown his plans to be unworkable. Happily, Jencks is candid about separating the facts from his

opinions, and so helps the reader sift valuable wheat from quite worthless and misleading chaff.

For almost a generation now, the popularized folklore of educators and social scientists has led us to believe we know what generally determines the "success" or "failure" of the average American citizen. Jencks and his associates, who set out to test our preconceptions—in terms of income and occupational status—end up by proving us wrong and show that what we think influences "success" has little or no influence at all. Hereditary I.Q., years of schooling, and "family environment," have a surprisingly small effect on how much money an individual will earn or what status he will hold. Other factors—income or status of parents, cognitive aptitude scores, school grades, quality of schools attended—have practically no effect. Two brothers from the same family who start out in the same schools, Jencks shows, later in life will have incomes and statuses whose average standard deviation (inequality) will be almost as large as for two men randomly chosen from the general population.

Moreover, Jencks demonstrates that the cognitive skills taught by schools not only have little effect on individual "success," but that no public school is much more or less effective at teaching these skills than any other public school. The disparity among achievement scores at a single school is almost as great as the disparity among scores at all schools. Increased expenditures in schooling (for facilities, teachers, etc.) have virtually no impact on effectiveness. In short, Jencks' statistics show that a person's economic or social standing relative to society at large are two, very long steps removed from whatever schooling he may have had. He concludes, quite rightly, that equalizing the resources spent per pupil in the United States, even meticulously equalizing the facilities and teacher/student ratios in each school and forcing everyone to attend school for exactly the same number of years, will do almost nothing to reduce general, social and economic inequality.

So far the facts still stand—surpris-

ingly uncontroverted in months of debate. But beyond this point, Jencks' conclusions turn from sense to nonsense and the further Jencks wanders from his own area of expertise, statistics and education, the more puzzling his ideas become. Jencks somehow assumes, first of all, that our society's one, overriding purpose is to bring about a drastic reduction in economic inequality. He reasons that there are two ways of achieving this: (1) to bestow upon every citizen an equal level of competence, so that everyone will have an equivalent "earning-power" in our *laissez-faire* economy, or (2) to "change the rules of the game," and directly reduce the rewards of competence and/or "success" and the costs of incompetence and/or "failure." Those who have followed the first path, trying to reach income and status equality by achieving "equal opportunity," have failed, and Jencks' analysis ably shows why they failed: neither they nor he nor anyone knows what causes competence or "success." So Jencks opts for the second alternative, which of course means the end of a capitalist society as we know it. Incomes, he suggests, are to be made more equal for specific occupations by legislative fiat (the standard socialist approach), or by positive and negative income taxes, steeply graduated on either side of the average income level, or by mandatory "employment insurance" which would allow minor income discrepancies, in true Orwellian fashion, according to innate intelligence, family background, and "objective" aptitude tests.

Jencks' proposals are frightening to contemplate. He defends his basic premise—the more equality the better—with such an improbable argument that the reader can be glad he spends only a couple of pages on it. His syllogism runs as follows: (a) every individual's happiness is of equal value, (b) according to Bentham, society should provide the greatest good to the greatest number, (c) according to the law of diminishing returns, increasing increments of income are less valuable to those with high incomes than to those with low incomes, (d) therefore, the smaller the disparity between incomes, the greater the total satisfaction, and the better the society. Jencks conjures up an army of hopeless vagaries. What

is his "happiness"? How should his "value" be measured? Does "value" mean value to the individual, to the society, or to the civilization? Why is everyone's "happiness" of equal value? Why does Jencks prefer Bentham's dic-

tum over the more prestigious political theories of an Aristotle or a Locke? The law of diminishing returns does not apply to education (as Jencks himself admits)—those with more education place greater value on additional learn-

ing than those with less education—so why should the law apply to monetary income? So much for egalitarianism's theoretical groundwork.

Because much of what we think causes "success" actually doesn't make



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much difference one way or the other, Jencks tells us that "success" is largely a matter of luck or chance, and that perhaps "success" has more to do with luck than any sort of on-the-job competence. Once the idea of luck is introduced, of course, the stage is set. Jencks can then go on to advocate greater equality as an effort not to deny an individual the rewards of good work, but to "neutralize the effects of luck." No one would consent to the former, but who would object to eliminating the whims of economic insecurity? Fortunately, Jencks' critics have refused to be taken by such sophistry. Ernest van den Haag (*National Review*, Feb. 16, 1973) writes in reply that there may well be more to "luck" than what meets the social scientist's eye: "'Luck,'" observes van den Haag, "is but a residual category: that which has not been satisfactorily explained. Most likely 'luck' here refers in part to a set of abilities, as yet unknown, or unmeasured, which may cause some to earn more income than others. (Jencks half-recognizes as much, but in his argument, wholly forgets it.) These abilities—imagination? drive? initiative? talent? persistence? decisiveness? boldness? prudence? discretion?—may be scarce; their optimal combination may be scarcer still. Comparatively high earnings may be needed to draw (and keep) people with these characteristics into jobs in which they are most useful."

Even assuming that van den Haag is wrong and that earnings are dependent largely on "luck" (i.e., acts of God, pure and simple, from cancer at one extreme to winning lottery tickets at the other), surely the moral imperative to equalize is weaker than our wish to reward what little, extant human virtue remains. We could take the matter one step further: even if "success" were *totally* dependent on blind chance, our society and economy might still be in sore need of those hardy fellows willing to gamble for the highest stakes—for example, the corporation that will spend years in the wilderness looking for minerals and return either bankrupt or millions of dollars richer. Under an equalized income, who would bother with risk? And with everyone's incentive to assume risk cut roughly in half (Jencks suggests that incomes be equalized by 50 percent above and below the median income), who could predict the economic consequences, on investment? on technological and organizational innovation? on the production and protection of natural resources?

One great fallacy of Jencks' egalitarianism, a fallacy that certainly no economist could overlook, is his assumption that all incoming revenue (in effect, the GNP, what our society earns by what it produces) is a single, vast reservoir of resources, ready to be sliced up in whatever way seems equitable. Once Jencks presents the issue in these terms, that is to say, once the revenue itself is removed from the process by which it is earned, we can quibble about all sorts of utopian programs for distributing it. Who is to say that equal slices are all that less fair than unequal slices? Again, Jencks is clouding our better

judgment. In fact, as we all know, the GNP is nothing but the estimated total of millions of individual transactions. Behind the GNP are countless jobs performed, prices haggled over and agreed upon, and dearly treasured dollars handed from one party to another. Recipients do their best to jack the price up, purchasers to push it down; resources are thereby allocated to where they are most needed, and individuals are encouraged to produce what is most needed. In short, the GNP is not fixed, nor is it a lump sum, waiting to be divided. The mechanics of a capitalist economy operate at the level of the indi-

The American Salad

Our agents at the Baltimore *Sun* report that a solicitation from the Diners Club of America was received recently at the *Sun* offices, addressed to Mr. H.L. Mencken. The Diners Club informed Mr. Mencken that it knew how much he traveled and "under the circumstances membership would be extremely beneficial." Unfortunately, Mr. Mencken's mailing address has been changed, for he passed away some seventeen years ago. So it is not surprising that the Diners Club's thoughtful solicitation was received instead by Mr. Joe Moran, editor of the obituaries for the *Sun*. When our agents asked Mr. Moran to recall that great American's autumnal days in the editorial offices of the *Sun*, a wistful Mr. Moran mused nostalgically: "He was the biggest smart aleck I have ever met." Alas, and goddamn!

vidual transaction, and Jencks, by leading us into the labyrinthine intricacies of the mythical GNP, only diverts our attention from how our economy actually functions. Jencks seems to have no acquaintance with a fundamental rule of capitalist economics: allotting more resources to those who are most effective in producing resources yields still more resources for everyone else.

Nathan Keyfitz, responding to Jencks (*Public Interest*, Spring, 1973) translates this rule into a more complicated axiom of human nature. Jencks assumes, he writes, that "much of our GNP serves to mark social differences." But Keyfitz then asks whether in truth it might just as well be the reverse, whether—above a certain minimal income needed for survival—"the purpose of social differences is to give people an incentive to work hard and thus raise incomes."

The first suggests that wiping out social distinctions would mean we could use our income for more "useful" purposes. The second suggests that wiping out all social distinctions (and hope of such distinctions) would return us—who knows?—to the economic level of an agrarian village.

In sum, the problems with Jencks' egalitarian society have yet to be solved. They are far more fundamental than the problems of a socialist society. We await some genius who can figure out a way, in an egalitarian society, for (1) motivating people to perform tasks efficient-

ly and well, (2) providing incentives for assuming risks, and (3) allocating individual or organizational talent. The centralized planning of a socialist economy, in theory at least, can provide for all of this. Indeed, capitalist incentives usually have a way of sneaking in the back door of socialist economies, and recent studies have shown that inequality in European socialist nations is generally no smaller than in capitalist nations. An egalitarian economy, however, changes the "rules of the game" so drastically that we would certainly have to change human nature first—and Jencks, who shows us how little we know about the everyday task of giving a child a good education—certainly can't hold out much hope here!

So now that we have had a year to mull it over, what do we do with Jencks' *Reassessment*? Simple. We take a pair of scissors and exorcize the passages in which Jencks delves into his own opinions and recommendations, and we save the rest as a well-executed and important work of research. Actually (and many readers have found this ironic), *Reassessment*'s statistics are a resounding testimonial to the fulfillment of the American dream. They may disappoint, on the one hand, the hopes of social environmentalists, our modern day standard-bearers of that old and quite American enthusiasm for making us all more democratic and equal by giving each child a better upbringing and a better education. But on the other hand, they indicate that we have in fact achieved a society with an extraordinary amount of social mobility, a society in which anyone has the opportunity to succeed by virtue of his talent, experience, wisdom, "drive," or any one of a host of hidden virtues. They attest too to the strength of the principles of a capitalist economy by showing that an individual's monetary income cannot be predicted or planned for in advance no matter how much we know about his background. Perhaps unintentionally, Jencks has destroyed the "social class determinism" theories of the Old Left, and he has offered a passing challenge to the nascent "geneticist" school (of Herrnstein, Jensen, Shockley, and others). Jencks reassures us that we are free from the bonds of any identifiable, generation-to-generation caste structure. His statistics confirm—despite confused and confusing rhetoric—that American immigrants did not leave the Old World in vain after all. □

Neil Howe

NOTICE

Due to a nationwide paper shortage, the November issue of *The Alternative* may be late in arriving at your address. Please be patient while we try to survive the wage-price controls.

Thank you.

★
The
Bootblack
Stand
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★
George
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Plunkitt
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Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, is celebrating the publication of his new book, which is now available at avant-garde bookstores throughout New Jersey. Dr. Plunkitt's book is about the importance of altruism in politics and it is titled What's in It for Me? Although Dr. Plunkitt expects to earn ten million dollars from sales of his new book, he has agreed to continue to advise public figures through this column. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, c/o The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

There is mischief afoot in Washington, and the Ervin committee proves it. What was the Senate up to by putting the most ignorant and lazy man in the United States Senate on such a highly publicized committee? Is this Nixon's scheming yet again?

Apprehensively,
Ashly Tamborine
Ex. Sec.

Citizens for Better Government
Washington, D.C.

My dear Miss Tamborine:

I have had a very difficult time deciding which senator you refer to. I shall operate under the assumption that you are referring to New Mexico's Senator Montoya, the Desert Demosthenes, as I am fond of calling him.

According to the story as I have heard it, there was actually only one senator who really wanted to be on the Ervin committee—the others on the committee are serving as punishment for various

infractions of the Senate code regarding shooting rubber bands and launching paper airplanes while on the Senate floor. I speak naturally of Senator Kennedy. Fortunately several astute Democrats finally talked him out of it, for they realized that were his curious daily habits exposed to the public eye, their chances of getting him into the presidency would be slim and none. They hoodwinked poor Senator Montoya into taking his place by an amusing subterfuge. He actually thinks he is participating in a new television show similar to "What's My Line."

—GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

I spent the better part of the summer watching the televised Watergate hearings. The sight of Senator Ervin impressed me. To think that a man of his age can look so young and possess such a sharp mind! I realize you have many high friends in important places and I would like you to find out for me how

Senator Ervin remains in such robust health. Please send your reply to me at the Indiana State Mental Hospital where my wife has installed me after I became emotionally involved with my moth collection.

Opel Thorston
Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear Opel:

I too share your enthusiasm for Senator Ervin. Several years ago I authored a small treatise on American politics, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* I believe it was called, in which I drew the distinction between honest and dishonest graft. The notion struck many political scientists as provocative and abhorrent in the extreme. Senator Ervin's recent behavior indicates that this distinguished constitutional expert also adheres to my dichotomy. There is a difference between the foul play of the Watergate variety and the more traditional boodling of gentlemen like Bobby Baker, and Senator Ervin seems to agree.

In 1964 when certain senatorial spoilsports tried to whip up a Senate investigation of the Democratic Administration on the basis of Mr. Baker's misfortunes, Senator Ervin moved with admirable speed to help stifle the investigation by voting it down in all the protean manifestations that these vicious Republicans wrapped it in on the Senate floor. Senator Ervin, like many other redoubtable patriots in the Senate, knows the difference between honest and dishonest graft. I admire him a lot.

I met him in a local saloon the other day and I addressed your question to him. The great man replies: "If you want to have a long active life in the U.S. Senate, never smoke and never take a drink. . . in public."

—GWP

★
The
Great
American
Column
★



★
by
C. H.
Simonds
★

No More Minorities!

Good afternoon. I am delighted so many of you could make it, what with all this sunspot activity and the price of copra. I hope to chat with you individually over punch and cookies after the lecture.

Consider, brethren, the Republic. She is sore beset. I do not refer to the late sordid transactions in Washington, just now undergoing an inquisition every bit as sordid; or even to the alarming rise of mixed nude bathing in the coastal provinces. It is to the Minorities Explosion that I address myself; and I take my text from Mr. Abe Martin of Brown

County, Indiana: "Nobody ever fergits where they buried the hatchet."

A television network has, according to the newspapers, canceled a vulgar entertainment called *Bridget Loves Bernie*. Bridget is a sweet Catholic girl; Bernie is a nice Jewish boy; they are married; their respective parents have difficulty adjusting to this and to one another—and thereby hangs a situation comedy than which I would sooner watch *Celebrity Bowling*.

The series is being dropped because of objections from "the Jewish community." Objections to what, I cannot imag-

ine: I viewed it once and my wife tuned it in occasionally when I was away at Klonvocations; we can assure you there was nothing offensive in sight. The Jewish parents were portrayed as kindly, earthly-wise, warmhearted and heartwarming, something Sholem Aleichem might have dreamed up in a diabetic stupor. They stood in nice contrast to the rigid, chilly, button-arsed Catholic parents. (No protests were forthcoming from the Catholic community, preoccupied as it is with the question whether Father Phil's and Sister Liz's first baby will have a tail, or merely cloven feet.)

Anyhow, objections there were to something that I, not being of the Hebrew persuasion, must have missed. Or am I monstrously insensitive? Must I squintingly reexamine my every attitude? Is my beloved morning bagel a grotesque overcompensation? Of course not. But I wonder how many BLB-watchers have been made to feel just a trifle . . . guilty.

One must be careful. My copy of *Little Black Sambo* (he was the hero of my

(continued on page 29)