

the “I” of the self was always a “we,” located within a larger web of intimate human ties and those responsibilities that, for her, flowed from such ties. She can no more think of herself out of the tissue of *unsere Leute* than she can fly. These ties of community were much eroded and altered by the forces of liberalism and capitalism that emerged historically in tandem and that realized, in practice, awesome possibilities for good and ill unthinkable in older social worlds.

What was forgotten was that social bonds of particular and intimate kinds structure human lives; that true human communication, and therefore human wit and warmth and intelligence, develops only where there are these long-standing deep relationships, only where there are homes for the heart. This is the basis of community; this *is* community — commitment, over time, in settings that include (though they may not be defined exclusively by) intimate relations, commitments, possibilities, responsibilities. There is no way to derive a true home — either in the particular or the more general sense of a community — through rational individualism and the image of totally self-reliant, totally independent human beings that emerged with the rise of capitalism and modern relations of exchange. There is what political theorists have called a “possessive” quality in the conception of the individual as it emerged in the West in the past three hundred years. The individual, stripped of his or her intimate ties (and thereby, it turns out, of both home and culture), was viewed as the owner of himself and, in our day, herself. This individual is free only insofar as he or she is the sole “proprietor” of self, free from dependence upon others, free to do or become anything so long as no external constraint forbids it. Society got construed as the aggregate of such free individuals engaging in relations of mutually beneficial exchange through utilitarian calculations and power strategies. The social *contract*, which cannot allow for the particular commitments of intimacy, supplanted the older notion of the social *compact*, which created places and spaces for intimacy.

The social compact is a very different notion from that of contract and it is a vision that has a lingering hold, in America, on working-class, religious, and rural culture. A compact is not a contingent agreement having instrumental aims (intimacy cannot be reduced to stratagems, tricks, manipulations, and wiles), but a solemn commitment to create something “new.” This “new” group gets forged on the heart of a presumed and lived intimacy out of disparate elements — a family, a community, a polity — whose individual members could not remain “as before” once they became part of an exquisitely social mode of existence. The notion of the social compact is of a community whose members share purposes and values that are enforced by moral suasion, not by coercion or manipulation. The idea of the compact, suffused with possibilities and requirements for intimate relations, challenges contractual images that dominate in our day and propel us into the world on a search for intimacy that, by definition, cannot take root in the soil of modern dislocation. The compact locates the human being within a historic and communal framework bounded by birth and death.

Unlike the picture of reality of social contract theorists, the compact ideal takes account of the varying needs of

human beings over a lifetime. Contract theory and possessive individualism, however, are static views; they revolve around consenting, choosing, rational adults who, in principle, could love everybody equally (or not) and could lead a life having no preference among them. Such beings “may be in a sense conceivable to us, but they are certainly not imaginable.” That is why the form of intimacy dissolves when we grab books that tell us how to “get it” or “do it” or “have it.” For intimacy cannot, simply, be had. It isn’t a good on a shelf ready for the plucking and the buying. It emerges in and through our culture or it emerges not at all.

Having a culture and feeling intimate with it, however, does not mean feeling at “one”; that is, one can feel at home (I am an American), yet not fully share the prevailing social identity, perhaps because one fears that total absorption into the dominant culture will erode the terms on which one defines oneself in a particular subculture or set of social relation (families, ethnic groups, *unsere Leute*, for example). Or perhaps because the culture no longer sustains powerful self-definitions. Having shaped and formed a certain social identity, so that one feels “at home” in it, suddenly the terms shift. We awaken to the shock that either our selves are no longer on the same intimate terms with the culture that initially spawned us, or that we can no longer feel at home *with* those selves given shifts in cultural trajectory, force, and impetus. ◊

◆

Emily Dickinson
Leaves a Message to the World,
Now That Her Homestead in Amherst
Has an Answering Machine

by X.J. Kennedy

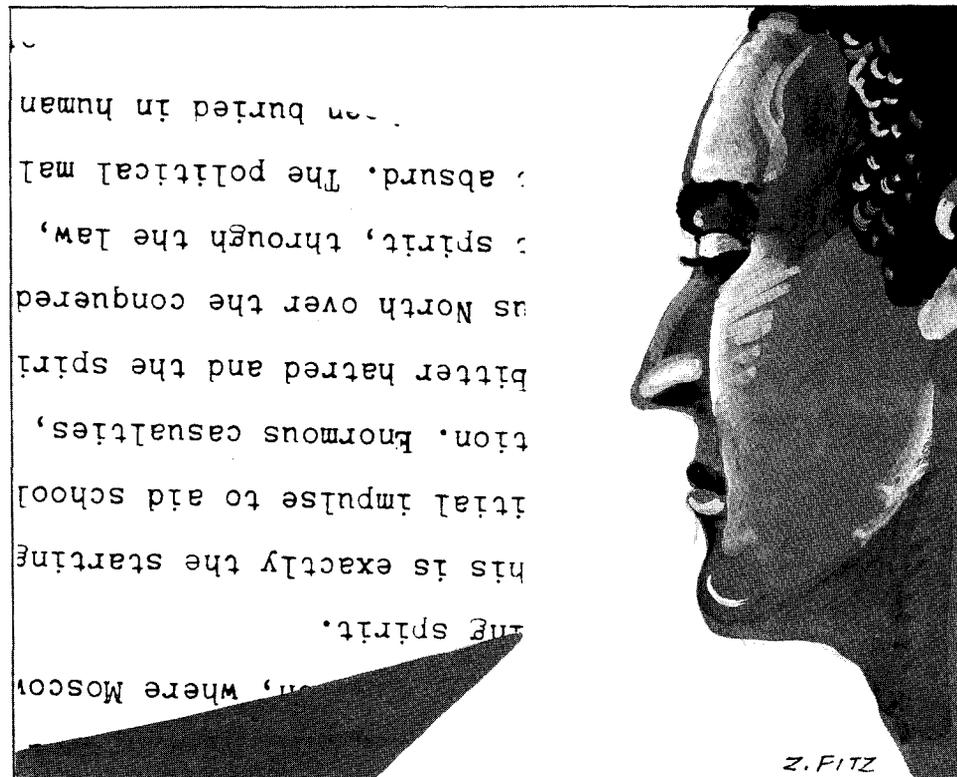
Because I could not stop for Breath
 Past Altitudes — of Earth —
 Upon a reel of Tape I leave
 Directions to my Hearth —

For All who will not let Me lie
 Unruffled in escape —
 Speak quickly — or I'll intercept
 Your Message with — a Beep.

Though often I had dialed and rung
 The Bastion of the Bee —
 The Answer I had hungered for
 Was seldom Home — to Me —

Education for a Conquered Nation

by John Chodes



Declining test scores. Illiterate, spiritless, and passive graduates who have little motivation to find a job or succeed. Youngsters with no skills to compete in the marketplace. This is the tragic record of American public education, after billions of dollars and 127 years of direct federal funding.

The results seem more appropriate for a rebellious Soviet-bloc satellite nation, where Moscow wants to break its freedom-loving spirit.

And in fact this is exactly the starting point for Washington's initial impulse to aid schooling. Civil war. Massive destruction. Enormous casualties, higher than World War II. Bitter hatred and the spirit of vendetta by the victorious North over the conquered Confederate enemy. And that spirit, through the law, lives on today. This is not absurd. The political malice of the 1860's has long since been buried in human terms. But not in the law, which has a strange life of its own. It has an unswerving trajectory that can go on indefinitely without deflecting from its original mandate, even when that purpose is long extinct.

This is the case now. Children of the 1980's are being given an education that was deemed appropriate for an 1860's Confederate child. We will never recover from our

literacy tailspin until we perceive this and understand Uncle Sam's original motive for aiding schools.

The Morrill Act

Washington jumped squarely into education in 1862. The Civil War was raging. The Union Army had been suffering major reverses. Robert E. Lee maneuvered to bring the war to the North, and the Union was not sure it would win. In such an atmosphere the Morrill Act passed Congress. This was the closest that Washington had ever come to direct aid to education. Its stated objective was to fund colleges that teach agriculture and mechanic arts, via money raised through federal land-grant sales. The true objective was to bring the Northern perspective to the reconquered areas of the South, to teach the rebel's children "respect for national authority"—to break their rebellious spirit forever. The three R's had absolutely nothing to do with this landmark bill.

Senator J.P. Wickersham stated this clearly in 1865: "What can education do for the non-slave-holding whites of the South? The great majority are deplorably ignorant. . . . It is this ignorance that enables the rebel leaders to create a prejudice in the minds of this class of persons against the North and to induce them to enlist in their armies. As long as they are ignorant they will remain tools of political

John Chodes is a playwright living in New York City.