

considered show of force that actually permitted the Chechens to display their own guerrilla-like military prowess. By day the tank column was swarmed by civilian protesters; that night it was smashed by the rocket-propelled grenades of Chechen fighters. It was spirit, not numbers, that counted: The authors estimate that at first the Chechens were able to counter the 40,000-strong Russian invasion force with only about 1,000 fighters. Purposely permitted by the Chechens to penetrate to the center of the city, the Russian Maikop Brigade was first surrounded and then destroyed.

Russia responded ferociously. The authors claim that at one point, Grozny was hit with the heaviest artillery bombardment since World War II, which seems an overstatement in light of the firepower used in the Iran-Iraq War. Three months later, the Russians took Grozny. According to the authors, 27,000 civilians were killed

in the process, many of them ethnic Russians who, unlike the Chechens, had no relatives in outlying villages to whom they could flee.

Moving the war southward into the mountains of the Chechen countryside, Russian forces committed a variety of atrocities, from burning villages to terrorizing prisoners by throwing them from hovering helicopters. The Chechens sometimes were equally vicious. Even so, to the Russians the war seemed all but won.

Backs to the wall, the Chechens responded in mid-1995 with what is generally called terrorism, but what contemporary military theorists analyze as an "asymmetrical response": They drove north into a Russian town and took hostage some 1,200 people in a hospital, spectacularly humiliating a Russian government that thought it had resolved the Chechen problem. Months later Chechen fighters roared back out of their mountain retreats. In August 1996 they recaptured the

remains of Grozny from 12,000 under-trained and demoralized Russian troops. A Russian sergeant told the authors, "The (Chechen) fighters aren't scared to move around and we are, that is the difference. They are the bosses here." By the end of the month, Moscow had agreed to recognize Chechen independence, and Russian troops again withdrew.

This book should be read as a companion to the recent *Philadelphia Inquirer* series on the U.S. Army's disastrous firefight in Somalia in October 1993. Both works should be required as cautionary reading for policymakers and pundits prone to underestimating the difficulty of intervening in the cities of the Third World, whether Baghdad, Mogadishu, or Grozny. The two studies also should prove instructive to anyone who thinks future wars will be high-tech, low-sweat affairs.

THOMAS E. RICKS, *The Wall Street Journal's* Pentagon correspondent, is the author of *Making the Corps*.

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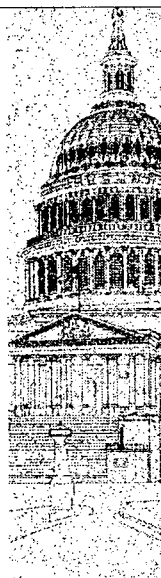
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Programmed to Fail

by Thomas Toch

THE LONGER AMERICAN KIDS stay in school, the further they fall behind their counterparts in other industrialized countries. That's the troubling finding of a big international study of students' math and science skills conducted over the past couple of years. U.S. fourth-graders end up near the top of the global pile in science and above average in math; eighth-graders are slightly above average in science and below average in math; 12th-graders outperform only Cyprus and South Africa among 21 nations in a test of general math and science knowledge. The 12th-grade results, released only a few weeks ago to front-page coverage in the major dailies, explode the conventional wisdom that our top students are as good as those of our economic competitors: U.S. kids ended up tied for last on a special test of physics and advanced math. To add insult to injury, Asian nations, whose students routinely turn

in world-beating performances in math and science, sat out the 12th-grade study.

Not surprisingly, pundits have taken to their hobby horses in the wake of these results, venting their pet peeves with the educational system and trumpeting favorite reform nostrums. But the simplest and most important lesson to be drawn from the Third International Math and Science Study is that expectations are a lot lower and the curricula much less rigorous in U.S. secondary schools than in those of other industrialized nations. Virtually all students in other developed countries take algebra by the eighth grade, for example, while only a quarter of U.S. students do so. Ross Perot was right when, as head of a Texas school reform commission in the 1980s, he railed against 12-coach football teams and electric cleat cleaners, deriding high schools in America as "places dedicated to play."

At one time, the U.S. could tolerate a small role for subjects like French and physics in many high schools because we had an industrial economy that required most workers to use their hands rather than their heads. But in the modern knowledge-based economy workers increasingly need the sort of rigorous education that was once largely reserved for the gifted and the privileged. That's the thesis underlying the school reform movement of the past 15 years, and it's the core belief of the new book *Standards for Our Schools*, by Marc Tucker and Judy Coddling.

Tucker arguably has been the most influential school reformer in the nation over the past decade and a half, though he has received far less recognition than such peers as TheodoreSizer, Ernest Boyer, and Albert Shanker. Many of the most significant reforms now in place in U.S. schools can be traced to his writings, from the breaking of the vice grip of public-education bureaucracies through "site-based management" of schools, to the linking of teacher pay to performance through a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the establishment of national curriculum standards and tests, both of which he has drafted through his non-profit National Center for Education and the Economy and affiliated organizations.

In contrast to many in the school reform world, Tucker has both a capacity for the fine grain of individual reforms and a big-picture sense of how the many parts of an educational system fit together. Just as importantly, he has the coalition-building instincts of a politician: He has raised millions of dollars of public and private monies to fund major reform projects that involve not only thousands of teachers but also dozens of governors.

This book is a blueprint for the changes in the educational system that Tucker believes are needed to achieve his holy grail of high expectations for all students. He and Coddling, a former high school principal, leave no part of the system unexamined: Abandon middle schools, they urge, and replace them with more personal elementary schools that run through the eighth grade; replace elementary generalist teachers with science teachers and other specialists; give financial incentives to schools that raise student achievement; supplement textbooks with paperback "concept books" that explain the key ideas in every core course; narrow the mission of high schools to rigorous instruction in core subjects, leaving vocational education and other work of traditional "comprehensive high schools" to other institutions. Such ideas and others in the book are sound, if not always original to Tucker.

The linchpin of school improvement, Tucker argues, is national standards. "Countries where achievement is high have clear national standards," he writes, "and all the links in the chain are tied to the standards." Tough universal standards are particularly important in the U.S., he points out, because many local educators — in sharp contrast to their counterparts in Asia — believe that natural talent rather than hard work is the defining factor in student achievement. Tucker also argues, persuasively, that many educators won't buy into tough standards unless the standards are backed up by tests that have consequences for both students and their teachers. He therefore proposes

giving schools financial and other rewards for lifting scores on tests based on such standards.

Not surprisingly, Tucker takes pains to promote his own organization's new standards and tests. The president's proposed national tests in reading and math are a good but flawed idea, Tucker argues, because they don't peg test questions to a specific set of achievement standards. Not that it matters. Students are unlikely ever to take the Clinton tests, since the plan has been quashed in Congress by an improbable coalition of conservative Republicans bent on defending "local control" in education and liberal Democrats who worry that higher standards would slow the advancement of minorities.

The reality, of course, is that local control and high standards have proven to be mutually exclusive in most American communities, and the notion that higher expectations would leave minority students less well off educationally simply isn't compelling. The average African-American 12th-grader reads at the level of the average white eighth-grader, and 40 percent of Hispanic students drop out of school. They have nowhere to go but up.

The good news is that moderates in both parties are embracing the idea of tougher standards linked to tougher tests. A meeting of governors and CEO's convened by Gov.

Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin and IBM's Lou Gerstner two years ago has resulted in the creation of an organization that's helping to introduce new standards in the states. And a few states, notably New York and Maryland, are phasing in tough end-of-course high school exams that should make a difference. These steps are remarkable in a nation where the mention of centralized standards and tests would have been heresy only a decade ago. But it remains to be seen whether the political center will prevail against both the left and the right on the standards issue. If not, it's unlikely that the rankings of U.S. students in international studies will budge.

THOMAS TOCH is a senior writer at U.S. News & World Report.

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Arianna's World

by Mickey Kaus

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON IS A SOCIAL climber who married oil heir Michael Huffington, insinuated herself into the inner circles of the national Republican party, and then got divorced from her husband after he lost his bid to become a U.S. senator from California. One would like to believe she is deeply evil. Unfortunately, she is also charming and witty (at least if you don't work for her) and seems to genuinely care about political ideas. That, and her willingness to trash fellow Republicans, has increased her value as a member of the pundit-entertainment complex even as her serious political ambitions grow evermore unrealistic.

Greetings From the Lincoln Bedroom must have seemed like a good idea: a satirical Lewis Carrollish fantasy in which the droll, idealistic Arianna spends a harrowing weekend in the through-the-looking-glass world of the Clinton White House. But just as the galleys went out to reviewers, the Lewinsky scandal broke. With impressive speed, Huffington has turned out a revised Monicafied version, heavily overloaded with lame oral sex jokes, but at least not totally obsolete.

Judging from the acknowledgments, Huffington had a lot of help, though one of those she thanks, her friend Harry Shearer, can't have had that much to do with this project. If he had, it would have been a lot funnier. Nothing in *Lincoln Bedroom* is as good as Shearer's imaginary visions of Clinton and Gingrich on his weekly public radio program "Le Show." Huffington's purpose is too didactic: basically to show that everyone in Washington is mired in a sea of corruption and hollow compromise — everyone, that is, except humble little Arianna/Alice, who (as the book's setup would have it) arrives for her White House weekend after losing a bet and contributing \$300 to the Democratic National Committee. She goes to a séance with the Red Queen (Hillary),

meets a hideous two-faced creature called The Bipartisan, attends various shakedowns with corporate donors, and worries about a "late-night visit from the Fonder-in-Chief." The main voices of wisdom she encounters are Socks (who talks) and, yes, an ancient black servant named Walter, who says things like, "You don't want nothing to do with them Bipartisans, Mrs. Huffington."

The book ends with a nauseating sitcom-like moment of sanctimony when poor Arianna is chased back to her room by a horrifying mob only to be rescued by (yes, again!) the ghost of Abraham Lincoln, who delivers a lecture on the real meaning of leadership. (Hint: it's not just following the polls!) In between there are lots of semen-stained dresses, kneepads, and, oddly, urine jokes. I admit I laughed out loud once, but only once — I don't want to say at what. There is a weak Maya Angelou parody, a "Contract with Corporate America" that reads like an out-take from *The Nation*, and a brave attempt to find double-entendres in Clinton's recent State of the Union address, even though rotating teams of White House speechwriters combed Clinton's text to remove virtually every possible unwanted laugh. It also takes some gall for the just-divorced Huffington, a sometime follower of guru John-Roger, to ask whether Bill and Hillary are "really married" and to make fun of the president for consorting with "self-esteem counselors! recovered-memory channelers! licensed astrologers!"

Which isn't to say Huffington has lost all her charm. There's a good bit with a statue-like Al Gore stashed in a catacomb-like Great Hall of the Vice-Presidents.

Socks is an appealing, fully developed character, and the meeting with the monstrous Bipartisan has a genuine Carroll-like quality. ("The Bipartisan smiled and frowned at the same time.") Huffington's Sam Donaldson yells "Hold on, Mr. President," after a news conference, and then when the president actually stops to answer, doesn't have a question. ("No president ever held on before, sir. I'm sorry. I'll go now.") There may even be a profound insight in the political pointers Huff-

GREETINGS FROM THE LINCOLN BEDROOM

Arianna Huffington
Crown Publishers, \$23