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## Competition or Community? Manifest and Unexpressed Functions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

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**Competition or Community?**  
**Manifest and Unexpressed Functions of**  
**The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

**By: Sara Benjamin**  
**May 8, 2008**

An Honors Thesis: Submitted in requirement for Honors in the Major of Sociology,  
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## **Introduction:**

Any contemporary discussion of the American education system inevitably includes a discussion of current federal policy as set out in *The No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB). Signed into law on January 8, 2002, NCLB has sparked tremendous controversy in the field of education. Although the title would suggest otherwise, NCLB does not aim to make sure no child is left behind. Instead, one might argue, that it aims to provide quantifiable measures of comparison so as to allow the U.S. to assert educational and economic dominance in the global community. Thus, we can see a distinction between the manifest, or publicly stated, and unexpressed functions in the bill. While the stated goal of NCLB is to provide *all* children with a quality education, the unspoken intention of this policy, I believe, is to assert America's place as the economic superpower in the global economy.

Upon first glance, this may seem a cynical position to take. However, a discussion of the correlations between American value shifts and education policy changes will help illustrate this unexpressed function of NCLB. Most critiques of NCLB focus on the publicly articulated manifest functions of the policy. They argue that NCLB is failing because it leaves many children behind. This paper, however, focuses on the unexpressed functions of NCLB that reveal a rather telling, and less social-justice oriented subtext and argues that as Americans have come to value competition, economic production, American self-interest, and individualism over community and equality, the education system has been restructured. We see this in the emphasis placed upon quantitative testing as a means of comparison, rather than being used as a way to provide rationale for more funding for schools in need, better teacher training programs, or the general support

students and schools falling behind. One may draw a link between the changes in dominant American values and the unexpressed functions of education policy such as NCLB to support this contention.

I came to this conclusion about the correlation between contemporary American values and the less than ostensible purpose of NCLB, after having taken a close look at American values and their evolution. With the evolution of American values, the function and goals of education, as well as the policies and reports governing it, have changed. This understanding of NCLB and its unexpressed functions provides a basis for seeing the problems plaguing the American education system as more extensive than simply a resultant of NCLB.

Following this line of reasoning, this paper argues that the reauthorization of NCLB is not important for the long run future of our education system. This is because the unexpressed function of NCLB has more to do with American value shifts than with the policy itself; the policy is a mere symptom of a much greater problem. Value shifts will continue to be reflected in education policy decisions and will place a greater importance in framing the significance of competition, individualism, and economic production in the education system with or without NCLB. Thus, if the true goal is to alter the American education system to enhance the experiences and instruction of all children, we must place a greater value on equality and community over such notions as competition, individualism, and economic productivity. Changing the emphasis will allow policymakers to address the root of the problem facing America's education system rather than momentarily dealing with its symptoms.

With this understanding of the unexpressed function of NCLB and its connection to the changes in dominant American values, the first chapter of this paper begins by defining American values in relation to norms and beliefs. This distinction may help to clarify what values are currently emphasized, so that values may be discussed in relation to education policies and reports later in the paper. I shall discuss theoretical issues pertaining to any discussion of values, mine included, in order to clarify possible confusion about the analysis of American values and their correlation with operating education policies. This paper demonstrates how values become understood and transmitted over time so that the reader may observe such values. This paper also argues the importance of analyzing values in sets within a historical and temporal context rather than as isolated entities. In defining both what values are theoretically and issues that arise from ideologically framed discussions of values, we will better be able to understand the role of American value shifts in relation to education policy transitions.

The second chapter of this paper looks at *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, noting how this policy correlates with American value shifts. It looks at how this policy correlates with both the first set of American values as well as the second set of American values. While the signs of an increasing value of competition, individualism, American self-interest, and economic production began to surface with *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, those values have become more pronounced over time and can be seen more clearly as correlating with NCLB. As a result, the third and fourth chapters look at the correlations between American values and policies and reports leading up to and including *No Child Left Behind*. Using, the theoretical understanding of values outlined in the first chapter, policy justifications and

preferences, for certain policies, speeches by policy makers, and the policies and reports themselves are critiqued as indicators of American values that correlate with both historical and current policies.

The fifth chapter examines the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning initiative that is currently being developed in the state of Maine. In doing so, it aims to provide a better understanding of the lasting effects of NCLB. After examining a presentation by the Commissioner of Education for the state of Maine, Susan Gendron, in order to analyze the values implicit in the initiative. I compare the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning initiative to NCLB and to education policies that precede it. I argue, that while the aim to ensure America's success in the global economy is an unexpressed function of NCLB, it is an explicitly expressed function of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning initiative. My examination leads me to conclude that values of competition, individualism, American self-interest and economic production are becoming more prominent and determinative of our educational policy and the structure of the American educational institution.

The final chapter draws on David Riesman's (2001) analysis of social character and conformity to help provide an explanation for the types of education policies and reports being enacted, policies that correlate with American value shifts. It further analyzes the type of self-consciousness necessary for individuals to resist blind conformity in any society and how an analysis of education policies, such as the one provided in this paper, can aid in the process of becoming critically reflective, or "autonomous."

The largely unspoken and unexamined function of NCLB—to ensure America's place as the economic superpower in the global community—will, I believe, become

evident through an analysis of the historical evolution of American values as they relate to educational policy change. As a result, we will be able to better understand problems plaguing the American education. Hopefully, following this examination, we will be better able to target our action for change not at preventing the reauthorization of NCLB, but at changing dominant American values in a way that emphasizes notions of equality and community, and not competition, individualism, American self-interest and economic production. This shift in values will in turn play a far greater role in addressing the inequities and injustices found in the American education system than will any particular education policy.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Values: A Definition and Theoretical Understanding For Purposes of Analysis**

#### *Differentiating Values, Norms, and Beliefs:*

Because distinctions and definitions of these terms are often murky, lending themselves to extensive sociological debate, I'd like to open discussion about education policy changes as they relate to shifts in American values, by defining them.

Any individual or society holds certain ideas or beliefs. Yet, not all of these beliefs are necessarily values since the term "value" implies an element of "good" or "bad," a preference. Beliefs are deemed true or false by the believer. There is no good or bad in a "belief", only "is" or "is not" (Williams 1970). For example, one may value education (education is good) but believe high stakes tests don't accurately measure academic success. For this individual, high stakes tests are not a matter of preference; they simply do not measure success. Thus, in looking at societal value shifts in relation to the education system, this paper looks at preferences rather than beliefs. A preference for

competition, individualism and economic production does not imply whether or not such concepts exist in reality, only that they are preferred over community and equality.

“Values” should be defined in relation to “norms.” As Williams (1970) explains, “norms are the more specific, concrete, situation-bound specifications: values are the criteria by which norms themselves may be and are judged” (442). Norms can be thought of as informal rules that govern society and social interaction. For example, it is now the norm for children to attend formal schooling from around the age of five or six up until the age of seventeen or eighteen, at which time a student may or may not continue on with his or her education. This, however, was not always the norm. In early American history, children did not attend formal schooling through the age of seventeen or eighteen. But this says nothing about whether people believe this to be a good or bad thing—whether formal education for children is valuable. Thus, while there are many beliefs and norms to be found in the American education system, they are different from the values informing and justifying education policy decisions. Ultimately, our societal values about education (its function, quality, and content) inform policy decisions. While beliefs and norms may play a role in such decisions and may affect societal values, they are not the focus of this paper. Thus, I examine the evolution of values and their relation to education policy change.

### ***Methodology: Ways to Observe and Quantify Values***

Any inquiry into American values, mine included, necessitates a method of abstraction since values are not easily observable or quantifiable (Van Def and Scarbrough 1995). If there has, in fact, been a shift in American values, correlating with a



shift in education policy, how do we demonstrate both the values of previous generations and those of today? Questioning and observing values is tricky, yet this does not undermine the importance of doing so. Understanding values and changes in American values throughout history is integral to the study of education policy and NCLB.

### ***Attitudinal Patterns***

One way in which values can be observed is through attitudinal patterns. As Van Def and Scarbrough (1995) argue, "...values are relevant for action but get to see 'the light of day' by their contribution to the formulation of attitudes" (40). While it is tempting to look merely at actions to discern values, it is important to recognize that people do not *automatically* act on their values. That is, values are tied to situations that are interpreted ongoingly and whose definitions are taken into account by actors as they shape their lines of action (Blumer 1969). In order to demonstrate a shift in American values, we must look at the shift in attitudes throughout history. As a result, this paper contextualizes values and education policies within a historical framework. This will allow the existence of dominant societal attitudes to be inferred in conjunction with situations.

### ***Preferences and Justifications***

In addition, values can be discerned by looking at preferences and justifications. Thus, in examining the values informing education policy in the United States we look at how values are, "...utilized in selective conduct as criteria for preference or choice or as justifications for proposed or actual behavior" (Williams 1970: 442). As a result, this

paper looks at the discourse of policymakers and how such individuals justify their education policy decisions. This, too, sheds light on dominant societal values.

***Correlation Versus Causation:***

With this basic understanding of values in place, it may seem natural to look at justifications and preferences in education policy as being causative agents in themselves. For example, one may point to an emphasis on competition in society as the cause of many of the policies of NCLB. In fact, many scholars have done just this. However, we must be cautious in asserting that a value is the cause of a form of social change. As Blumer (1962) notes, “society is a framework inside of which social action takes place and is not a determinant of that action...such organization and changes in it are the product of the activity of acting units and not of ‘forces’ which leave some acting units out of account” (189). As a result, values do not determine action. Social action and the interaction with self and others play a role in defining values and influencing the institution of education. As social actors our interpretation of values affects our actions. Blumer further emphasizes two defining features of social reality; it is ongoing action that can be seen in relation to previous action and such action exists in situations (Maines and Morrione 1991). It is important to notice correlations between value shifts and education policy shifts in order to begin to understand the full picture, but we must remain weary of equating such correlations with causations and of reifying value structures. Instead, this paper aims to demonstrate correlations between historical value changes and policy changes to help provide a more complete picture of American society in the hopes of better informing decisions about future policy changes.

Furthermore, values are not, as Talcott Parsons might suggest, universal beliefs and ideals that remain fixed over time and automatically determine individual and collective acts. They are not static in nature and should not be studied as entities in and of themselves, independent of interpretation. We must be conscious of the fact that, “different contexts call upon different values,” (Van Def and Scarbrough 1995: 35). Thus, this paper places dominant American values in historical context so as to demonstrate how such values have evolved. It also argues that values do not, in themselves, cause action.

### **How Values Get Transmitted and Internalized**

Taking these definitional limitations and warnings into account, an understanding of how values get transmitted and internalized on both the individual and collective level will provide another means for determining dominant American values at a given time. Moscovici (1981) suggests that value understandings take place in everyday social interactions. He states that values get transmitted through, “concepts, statements and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter-individual communications,” (181). Thus for Moscovici, words represent underlying attitudes that are informed by values. Billig adds to this understanding of how values get expressed and transmitted within a social context. For Billig (1987), values can be seen as they inform modes of, “arguing and thinking” (209). Thus, in deciphering dominant American values within a specific historical, temporal context we look towards everyday social interactions, concepts, statements, explanations, arguing, and thinking. From these understandings of values we can see the importance of placing them in a social context, since everyday

communications, arguing, and thinking are dependent on the social environment in which such interactions take place. Thus, "...it becomes evident that values are not individual properties but the social properties of persons who share a universe of meaning," (Van Def and Scarbrough 1995: 35). Taking this understanding of the process by which values get transmitted and internalized, we can look to such things as explanations and arguments about education policy to see what values have been internalized by policy makers and how they may inform education policy decisions.

### ***The Importance of Looking At Values in Sets***

Looking at value correlations to education policies, we must acknowledge that any given person or collective group is informed by multiple values at the same time. For example, Americans value both individualism and community. They value competition and at the same time value equality. There is not, in this situation, one over-arching value that informs all attitudes and actions. Thus, it is helpful to examine values in sets. As White (1993) explains, "Change in values is difficult, first, because each value is like a dimension with implications of interlocking, of cumulation in meaning" (66). Thus, values are not isolated entities; they are connected to and built upon other values, making it difficult but necessary to look at value changes as a complex process of interrelated meanings. For the purpose of this analysis I define two sets of American values. The first set includes competition, individualism, American self-interest and economic production. The second set of American values includes equality and community. Some of the values found in these sets reinforce one another, but others are conflicting, creating schisms in attitudes and actions that follow. For the most part the values within each set reinforce

one another (although this is not always the case). However, values in the two different sets often conflict, forcing the public and policymakers to weigh one set of values against the other. For example, Americans value both individualism and equality. Thus, in drafting education policies, decisions must be made as to whether or not policies should force some individuals to act in the interest of the greater good, or whether individualism should dominate over this value of community and equality, in which case individuals should be left to their own devices and act in their own best interest. As American society becomes more complex, the fragmentation and pluralization of values increase, making policy decisions informed by such values harder. Modern societies can be understood using Durkheim's (1933) concept of "organic solidarity." As societies have become increasingly complex through industrialization and modernization, so too have values become greater in number and often conflicting in nature.<sup>1</sup> The important thing to take from this is the idea of tradeoffs. Given the fact that values operate in sets and are often conflicting, policy decisions must be made giving greater weight to one value set over another. This does not imply an ease or simplicity in policy decisions, but rather a recognition of the difficulties associated with such decisions.

White (1993) connects this understanding of values to value shifts by asserting, "The main shift occurs in how given values are mapped onto sorts of interaction, and in

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Durkheim depicts societal history as a gradual shift from mechanical to organic solidarity. "Mechanical solidarity" is found in simple, pre-industrial, homogeneous times. In such societies, there is no specialization or differentiation of function. Instead, "the ideas and tendencies common to all the members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member" (Durkheim 1964: 129). "Organic solidarity," on the other hand, is what we find today in more complex societies. Under this concept of "organic solidarity," each part of society serves a different function that contributes to society (or the organ) as a whole. As society becomes more complex and there is a division of labor, values differentiate as well (Durkheim 1964).

how actors sequence among the set in giving an accounting of action” (67). Thus, shifts in values occur in how they are sequenced. Values in both the first and second set have existed since the beginning of the United States; but, the first set has come to dominate over the second. This re-sequencing of American values began in the 1960’s and continues today. The way in which this happens, however, is not random and the key to understanding value shifts in relation to NCLB will be in discerning patterns that illuminate the set of values that are informing and justifying social action today. Williams (1970) adds to this understanding of the importance of looking at values in sets, stating:

...the generalized value-orientations that may lie behind specific institutional arrangements are not easily disentangled...[and this] is complicated by the fact that such relatively specific evaluations represent a mixture of values, as such, together with knowledge, cognitive beliefs, and a wide variety of other factors peculiar to the actual social situations in which we look for evidence of values (450).

Thus, in looking at educational policy shifts over time, it is difficult to untangle the multitude of values informing policy decisions. Both sets of values being examined in this paper affect education policies. Though I highlight some values over others in this paper, one should not eliminate other factors affecting education policy decisions like bureaucratic limitations (policy compromises to make sure legislation passes, for example) to policy decisions. Taking these considerations into account, I begin to analyze American values as they correlate with education policies, beginning with *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*.

## **Chapter 2: Correlations Between American Values and *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965***

*The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* is a reauthorized version of *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA). Thus, we begin with the first version of this policy. The ESEA was created under Lyndon Johnson’s administration and was influenced by a shift towards federal government and away from local and state control.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the 1960’s, the federal government played only a minor role in education policy, much of which was at the state and local levels.<sup>3</sup> As Representative John Brademas explained, “Many of us in Congress and some presidents of both parties perceived that there were indeed genuine needs—in housing, health, and education—to which state and city governments were simply not responding” (Ohio Education Association 2007).

### ***Correlations Between the Second Set of Values and The ESEA***

During the Johnson administration, Americans held both sets of American values (value set 1 includes competition, individualism, economic production, and American self interest, whereas value set 2 includes equality and community). However, the dominance of the first set of values over the second was less pronounced than it is today. Americans, during the 1960s, still highly valued community involvement and equality. In the 1960s altruism, philanthropy, and volunteerism were much higher than they are today. For example, in 1964, the total giving by individuals as a fraction of the national income was 2.26 percent. In 1998 this relative percentage decreased by 29 percent when

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that NCLB was a reauthorization of a policy that was drafted under the Johnson administration makes it less surprising that the bill places an emphasis on federal regulation. While contemporary politics has seen a trend towards localization, politics in the 1960’s was more federally focused. History, therefore, must be examined when critiquing NCLB and education policy in general.

<sup>3</sup> The only exceptions to this were the minor payments for things such as vocational education, teacher training, and curriculum development. Other than those few areas, the state and local governments were in charge of education policy (Kantor 1991: 47-48).

only 1.61 percent of the national income went towards giving (Putnam 2000: 123). As a result, a correlation can be seen between American values and the federal governmental involvement in areas such as education. In the 1960s Americans understood the second set of American values as more dominant than they do today. It can be inferred that the ESEA was enacted because of this effort to have more federal governmental involvement in education, correlated with a more dominant value of community and equality.

The ESEA as a federal regulatory policy changed education policy in a number of ways. Most importantly, it redefined the way in which people thought about educational change and the possibility for government involvement. More concretely, between 1960 and 1970, with the enactment of the ESEA, the federal government, "...increased federal aid to elementary and secondary schools from about a half a billion dollars to \$3.5 billion and expanded the number of federal education programs more than six-fold, from 20 to 130, many designed to equalize educational opportunity for poor and educationally disadvantaged students" (Kantor 1991: 48). This correlates with the second set of values since it increased government involvement in education. While there are a number of problems with the ESEA, it is clear that the intentions of this policy were noble. In fact, "educational policymakers all hailed the bill as 'a social breakthrough of the first magnitude' that promised not only to revolutionize the federal role in education but to equalize educational opportunity for disadvantaged children and eliminate poverty as well" (Kantor 1991: 49). Here, again, we can see a value of community involvement to help alleviate poverty. Its intention was to equalize educational opportunity and, thus, the community as a whole.



### ***Correlations Between the First Set of Values and the ESEA:***

This need for government involvement in a wide variety of areas does not fully explain the context in which the ESEA was enacted. This bill was enacted as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty."<sup>4</sup> As a result, much of the debate surrounding education policy at the time was focused on the "culture of poverty" theory which, briefly stated, explains the ills of poverty as a cultural phenomenon in which morals and values get reinforced through a sub-culture of the population.<sup>5</sup> As Sandra Stein (2004) notes, "Talk of cultural deprivation, the vicious cycle (or circle) of poverty, and the role of culture as a *cause* of poverty framed the arguments used to advocate passage of the bill" (33). Thus, a major factor in the passage of the ESEA was the understanding of the need to fix the "culture of poverty" through education.

I draw two points from this connection between the ESEA and the "culture of poverty" theory in order to better understand the correlation between American values and the ESEA. First, this reason for passing the ESEA speaks to first set of American values, which includes individualism. The culture of poverty analysis relies on the understanding that *individuals* are responsible for their own financial situation. Therefore, those who are living in this culture of poverty have done

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<sup>4</sup> Lyndon Johnson in a State of the Union address on January 8, 1964 declared a "War on Poverty." In this address he stated, "Poverty is a national problem, requiring improved national organization and support" (Government Printing Office 1965). However, he emphasized the support and action of all Americans in this fight against poverty, making it a civic responsibility to end poverty. This "war on poverty" extended to all spheres of government involvement including education, economics, health, etc... For more information see Humphrey 1966 and Brauer 1982.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the "culture of poverty" theory see Lewis 1961, 1966a, 1966b, Roach and Gursslin 1967 and Harvey and Reed 1996.

something to deserve such poverty. Under this theory, individuals living in poverty are held responsible because it is believed that their morals and values are deficient. For example, poverty is explained by the lack of value of hard work found in poor communities. Thus, it is easy to understand Johnson's statement that, "Our war on poverty can be won only if those who are poverty's prisoners can break the chains of ignorance" (Government Printing Office 1965: 1563). From this statement we can see the emphasis placed on the *individual* in terms of instigating change. According to Johnson, "those who are poverty's prisoners" must act to change their financial situation. Education is seen as the tool with which to change the culture of poverty so as to end poverty. Therefore, there is a correlation between the first set of American values and this understanding of the need for education, which is rooted in the culture of poverty theory.

This theory ignores structural understandings of the causes of poverty. For example, it neglects to mention factors such as institutionalized racism that may create barriers for individuals attempting to escape poverty. Instead, this theory blames the victim (or the collective of victims) living in poverty for having poor values and thus creating his or her own financial situation. A policy based on such understandings of the reasons behind poverty, I would argue, has little chance of being successful. It will not improve education for the poor or combat poverty as a whole since there are many structural forces at play limiting the opportunities for *individuals* to escape poverty on their own.

### ***Correlations Between the Second Set of American Values and The ESEA:***

It is also important to draw from this justification for the passage of the ESEA, the correlation between this policy and the second set of American values. Though the “culture of poverty” theory places blame on the victim (those who are poor), the solution, in part, is still believed to be community—or in this case, government—involvement. It was understood in the political climate of the 1960’s, that government should play a role in addressing both poverty and the education of the poor. Here, we see a correlation between the ESEA and a value of community. This value of community can be seen in the findings of the General Social Survey. In 1975, 30.3% were in favor of governmental action to improve the standard of living of the poor (General Social Survey 2008). While, this percentage may seem low, it is actually high *relatively speaking* since it is almost double the percentage of people who feel the same way today. Furthermore, while a more active role in education on the part of the government may or may not be viewed as a way of helping poor Americans (I believe that it is.), it is still a demonstration of a correlation between a value placed on government involvement (community) over non-involvement (individualism) with policy decisions. While, *No Child Left Behind* is a reauthorized version of the ESEA, we will later see how the value of community involvement has diminished overtime and thus the first set of values has become dominant over the second set of values.

### **Chapter 3: Correlations Between American Values and A Nation At Risk:**

At the same time as federal legislation was implemented to better regulate and provide support for American public education, the report *A Nation At Risk* was released. This report instantly became a landmark both in terms of its influence on public opinion and education policy. Much of what was published in *A Nation At Risk* has been used to justify education policy since it was released in 1983. Drawing on the aforementioned analysis of values, the use of this report for justification of education policies makes it a useful tool in assessing dominant American values during and after the 1980s.

### ***Correlations Between A Nation At Risk And The First Set of American Values***

There are several key aspects of *A Nation At Risk* that deserve a more detailed analysis. To begin with, this report strongly correlates with the first set of American values. The report poses a clear division between the United States and all other countries, between us and them. *A Nation At Risk* states, “International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times” (United States Government 2008a). Thus, what is deemed academic success is meaningless without other countries as points of comparison. The report does not insist that all students be able to read by the end of first grade because this will be a valuable skill for them as they develop and mature. Instead, what is important is that American children be able to read at an equivalent or earlier age than children in our competing countries. Thus, we are defining our own academic success in relation to that of other countries. This understanding of academic success as a comparison is only dangerous when it occurs at the expense of improving education quality and equality, as

with the case of *No Child Left Behind*. The emphasis on comparison implies a value of competition, a value that is part of the first set of American values.

The dominance of the value of competition found in *A Nation At Risk* is also found more generally in polling data taken around the same time. In a Roper poll, participants were asked to give indicators of a “good life.” The percentage of Americans who believed a “job that pays more than average” was a good indicator of a “good life,” rose from 45 percent in 1975 to 63 percent in 1996 (Putnam 2000: 273). From this polling data we can see an increase in the understanding of success as a comparison between others and ourselves. The indication of a “good life” was not a monetary figure. Instead, it was a relative amount of money, a comparison between an individual and the average. This may be interpreted as an increase in the value of competition (a value within the first set of American values). As a result, we can see *A Nation At Risk* in conjunction with this increasing dominance of the first set of American values. At the same time that polling data suggests an increase in the value placed on competition and comparison, reports such as *A Nation At Risk* emphasize similar values.

*A Nation At Risk* further illustrates this rise in the dominance of the first set of values by placing an emphasis on American self-interest (another value included in the first set of American values). As *A Nation At Risk* (1983) states:

The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer (United States Government 2008a).

Thus, it is clear that while we live in a “global village,” the emphasis is on American self-interest rather than any notions of community and the need to serve the interest of all citizens of the world. At a time when there is an increasing amount of discussion of the effects of globalization, this report makes it clear that such effects are deemed dangerous to our country’s standing in the world, rather than beneficial to all. Furthermore, while competition globally is often put into terms of material production, *A Nation At Risk* incorporates the competition of “ideas” as well. Thus, it is not sufficient for our country to produce more material goods than any other country in the world; we must also produce better ideas. This competition of ideas focuses our attention on the institution of education. Schools are held responsible for the future standing of the United States within the “global village.” As a result, the institution of education is important in terms of serving the American interest over anyone else’s. America is seen in competition with other nations because a value is placed on American self-interest rather than community and equality throughout the world.

### ***The Lasting Effects of A Nation At Risk***

As a report aimed at providing policymakers and the public with information needed to make future policy decisions, it is not surprising that this report has been used to justify subsequent education policy decisions. In fact, tracking education policy since *A Nation At Risk* was released we can see the lasting effects of this report. There has been a change in the structuring of the institution of education so as to focus on competition with other countries rather than on cooperation or on some kind of nationally defined academic success. As Ginsberg and Lyche (2008) found in a study on the lasting effects

of *A Nation At Risk*, almost 25 years later, the anxiety about the state of American education created by this report, still exists. In fact, as they predicted, "...the collective percentage of education news stories were most positive prior to the release of *A Nation At Risk* in the years 1980-1983, with nearly 80% of stories positive in that time period. That percentage positive dropped to 53% in the period from 1984 to 1987" (Ginsberg and Lyche 2008: 21). It is unlikely that any real decrease in the quality of education occurred in those few years. What did happen to change the tone of news about education was the release of *A Nation At Risk*.

Critics may argue that as a nation we had legitimate concerns about our country's education and that we were in fact at risk. Here, the point must be stressed that there were and continue to be serious shortcomings in the American education system. Real changes do need to be made to continue to better the education system and afford a quality education for all students. However, the timing of the report *A Nation At Risk* is what must be critiqued. Was there any reason that in 1983 we as a country should have been more alarmed about the state of education? The answer is "No." As Ginsberg and Lyche (2008) succinctly articulate, "It's as if the logic behind the harsh language in *A Nation at Risk* was not logical at all. The economy improved, and no nation competes with us economically, scientifically, or militarily, yet schools are still labeled as woeful and inferior" (11). Zhao (2006) agrees with this and further contends that we are now in a position to look back and see whether any of these fears were warranted. However, 25 years later we are still the superpower in the world and little has changed for the better in our education system. Zhao (2006) reports that in the past few decades,

the core innovations that drove the global digital revolution were created in the United States; the leaders of the computer and

Internet industries are from the United States. Moreover, nearly two-thirds of the 300,000 patents issued in 2002 went to Americans (Florida, 2005). In the meantime, the countries that spurred the alarm, Japan and South Korea, have been in an economic recession for more than a decade (28).

The timing of *A Nation At Risk* does make sense, however, when correlated with the increase in the dominance of the first set of American values. As Americans began to value competition, American self-interest, individualism and economic production over community and equality, so too did reports like *A Nation At Risk* focus on such ideas.

#### **Chapter 4: Correlations Between American Values and Education Policies After the Release of *A Nation At Risk*:**

*The Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 was reauthorized in 1988 and again in 1994. In both of these reauthorizations, the effects of *A Nation At Risk* could begin to be seen. However, a closer look at the latest version of this policy, *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* provides the most clear example of the effects of *A Nation At Risk* on contemporary education policy. One of the key components of NCLB is its emphasis on accountability and “adequate yearly progress.” Both of these concepts are better understood in conjunction with the unexpressed function of NCLB, namely, to secure America’s dominance in the global economy. This unexpressed function of NCLB must also be understood in correlation with the increasing dominance of the first set of American values over the second set.

#### ***What Is Accountability?***



One of the major components of NCLB is the emphasis on accountability and assessment. NCLB mandates that each state shall develop a plan that, “shall demonstrate that the State has developed and is implementing a single, statewide State accountability system that will be effective in ensuring that all local educational agencies, public elementary schools, and public secondary schools make adequate yearly progress...” (U.S. Department of Education 2008c: Section 1111 (b) (2) (a)). Here, the questions must be asked, what is accountability and what adequate yearly progress? Though both terms are repeatedly used in this legislation, the definitions of both terms are hard to extrapolate from both the policy itself and supplementary resources regarding NCLB provided by the U.S. Department of Education. As the U.S. Department of Education defines it, accountability means that, “*No Child Left Behind* holds schools and school districts accountable for results. Schools are responsible for making sure your child is learning” (U.S. Department of Education 2008b). This is taken directly from the Department of Education’s web page on NCLB facts and key terms. One thing becomes clear from this definition of accountability, the definition of accountability is unclear. The U.S. Department of Education uses the word “accountable” in their definition of “accountability.” This poor definition seems somewhat ironic coming from a governmental department set up to improve and regulate the quality of education in the United States. The ambiguity within NCLB has proven frustrating for educators and policymakers alike (Benjamin 2007).

***Accountability In Terms of Quantifiable Standards:***

Briefly stated, NCLB mandates that State Education Agencies make “adequate yearly progress” based on plans that, “shall demonstrate that the State has adopted challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards” (U.S. Department of Education 2008: Section 1111 (b) (1) (a)). In practical terms, accountability becomes linked to “adequate yearly progress” standards within the context of NCLB. “Adequate yearly progress” is the term used in NCLB to define the quantifiable standards measured at the state level. If your child’s school has met “adequate yearly progress standards,” according to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), “your child’s school has met state reading and math goals.” However, these reading and math goals (and soon to be science goals as well) are defined by the state and thus are highly variable between states.<sup>6</sup> Whether a state makes “adequate yearly progress” or not, has to do with whether or not a certain percentage of students (defined by the state) has met reading and math standards (defined by the state). The calculations of such measures are often complicated. Briefly stated, however, Massachusetts measures the improvement needed to make “adequate yearly progress standards” by using combined results of the MCAS ELA and mathematics tests (Massachusetts Department of Education 2008). By comparison, Maine follows the *Maine Learning Results* standards and uses the SAT and the MEA tests for measurement (Maine Department of Education 2008b). In addition to the use of different standardized tests, the markers of success and failure vary and are even often missing from state websites because of the

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the fact that states define “adequate yearly progress” standards has led to what scholars have identified as the “dumbing down” of tests phenomenon. Not wanting their schools to be labeled “failing,” the standards for making “adequate yearly progress” have been loosened so that most schools will not be sanctioned by the federal government. This further undermines the credibility of both accountability and the standards associated with it (“adequate yearly progress”) (Ravitch 2005).

complicated method of calculation involved. Thus, there is no national definition of either accountability or adequate yearly progress.

### ***The Manifest Function of NCLB and Problems with Measuring Adequate Yearly***

#### ***Progress***

In theory, the ability to track progress sounds appealing. However, in practice, the quantifiable results gathered from standardized state tests to measure “adequate yearly progress” serve little purpose when examining the manifest functions of NCLB (to ensure that no child is left behind). As Amrein and Berliner (2001) found in their study on the effects of high stakes testing, “Although test scores are often promoted as diagnostic tools useful for identifying a student’s achievement deficits and assets, they are rarely used for such purposes when they emanate from large-scale testing programs.” There are two related reasons for this. First, the results of these tests are not often released until the summer after the school year to which they are relevant. This means that teachers do not have the ability to learn and build from the results. While an argument could be made that it is the responsibility of the following year’s teacher to react to the results, this becomes next to impossible to do. There are a wide range of preventative variables standing in the way, such as the new makeup of the class, potential school transferability (students may switch schools and their test scores do not follow them to the new school), and the fact that the new teacher does not know what was and was not taught to each individual child entering his or her classroom for the first time. There are simply too many complicating factors standing in the way of making large-scale standardized testing meaningful if the results are published after the end of the school year.

Secondly, there are too few questions on any one topic for the test to be useful as a diagnostic tool (Amrein and Berliner 2001). This point speaks to the superficiality of many of the tests used for measuring “adequate yearly progress.” They cover a wide topic and in doing so are unable to provide a level of depth that would generate meaningful information.

Thus, it becomes clear in trying to answer questions about the meaning of accountability and how “adequate yearly progress” measures accountability, that neither do much in terms of furthering the manifest function of NCLB. While there is extensive debate about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of high stakes testing to measure school accountability such discussion misses the larger point; what is measured does not matter in terms of whether or not students are actually receiving a “quality” education. Since we, as a society, cannot define requirements that must be met in order to receive a quality education, our purpose must lie elsewhere. Thus, we must turn our attention to the unexpressed function of NCLB in order to understand NCLB’s emphasis on accountability and adequate yearly progress.

### ***The Disconnect Between the Manifest Function of NCLB and Adequate Yearly***

#### ***Progress:***

President Bush, in addressing Horace Greeley Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois, regarding the need for *No Child Left Behind* reauthorization, on January 7, 2008 stated, “It’s really important to measure. It’s also important to disaggregate results, which is like a fancy word for we want to know whether or not each student is learning. We want to make sure that no child is left behind” (The White House 2008) Yet, it is clear

that measuring results, in the way setup by NCLB, does little to “make sure that no child is left behind” and thus does little to serve the manifest function of NCLB. Somewhere along the way the importance of measuring gets across without the importance of following through with such measurements and doing something to instill change that improves educational quality and equality. This is best demonstrated by the sanctions placed on schools that do not make “adequate yearly progress” standards. If a school does not meet “adequate yearly progress” standards, it is listed as such and required to make a two-year improvement plan. If the school does not meet “adequate yearly progress” standards again, it must fund supplemental education services and provide the option and transportation for students to attend a different school within the same district. If a school does not meet these standards for a fourth consecutive year, it must do one of a list of things that involves replacing teachers deemed to be responsible, or extending the school year or school day (placing a strain on resources without providing additional funds), among other things (Learning First Alliance 2003: 7-8). These sanctions demonstrate the lack of support given to schools that do not meet “adequate yearly progress” standards. Instead of support for improvement, things are taken away from schools such as funding, teachers, students and control. Thus, while President Bush reiterates the manifest function of NCLB by insisting that, “We want to make sure no child is left behind,” the resources to build upon and learn from measurements produced using standardized tests are missing from both education policies and the discourse surrounding these policies. As a result, we can better understand NCLB by focusing on the unexpressed function of this policy.

***The Unexpressed Function of NCLB--Quantifying As a Means of Comparison:***

Because adequate yearly progress and accountability mandates present in NCLB do little to further the manifest function of NCLB, such mandates can be better understood using the unexpressed function of NCLB. In correlation with the trend of American values, we can see that the purpose of NCLB is not purely to make sure that no child is left behind, but rather to be able to assert America's dominance in the world through a "superior" education system. Thus, what is important is that we are able to quantifiably measure and compare, albeit arbitrarily, education at the local, state, and national level. In testimony given to the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee on February 26, 2008, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings began, "All of us agree that in today's competitive world, developing human capital is a top priority" (U.S. Department of Education 2008d). In discussing the education budget and the funding needed for NCLB, Spellings began not with the importance of educational quality and equality for all children, but with the need for human capital in a competitive world. We can see this emphasis on competition in correlation with the increasing dominance of the first set of American values discussed earlier. I do not mean to imply that educational quality and equality are not correlated with the stated need for human capital in a competitive world, but that the priority placed on human capital over equality is not reflective of the stated purpose of NCLB.

In addition, Bush stated in the same speech delivered at Horace Greeley Elementary School that we measure because, "We want to know whether or not this nation is going to be competitive, and whether or not it's going to be hopeful" (The White House 2008). Thus, it is not only clear that President Bush and Secretary of

Education Margaret Spellings are focused on global competition as it pertains to NCLB, they see such competition as the *reason* for measuring “adequate yearly progress.” This implies the unexpressed function of NCLB: to ensure the United States’ dominance in the global economy.

***Quantification For America’s Self Interest:***

In addition to the obvious correlations between the value of competition and the focus of NCLB as mandating quantifiable results that can be used for comparisons between the U.S. education system and that of other countries, NCLB also demonstrates an increasing value on American interests over others. Again, we see this increase in the dominance of values belonging to the first set of American values (which includes the value of American self-interest) in polling data. While there is no data generated on this topic from the 1970’s for comparison, it is clear that Americans today feel that we as a country should act in America’s best interest. When asked in 2006 whether America should follow its own interests, even if this leads to conflicts with other nations, 46.8 percent either agreed or strongly agreed whereas only 29.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining 24.4 percent did not agree or disagree with the statement (General Social Survey 2008). Thus, over one and a half times the number of Americans believe that we should act in our country’s best interest regardless of the effects on other countries, compared to those who do not. In correlation with this trend in American values, it is not surprising that we generate education policies that focuses on improving America’s standing in the world rather than on trying to improve American education in the context of a global community. The pursuit of such self-interest easily lends itself to

an increase in competition with other countries and the need for quantifiable markers of educational success and progress in comparison to others. This can be seen in contrast to any evidence that we are moving towards leaving no child behind. As a result, accountability and adequate yearly progress measures stressed in NCLB can best be understood when looking at the unexpressed function of NCLB and the correlations with the evolution of American dominant values. If we see NCLB as a policy that aims to ensure America's preeminence in the global community correlated with an increase in the weight given to values such as competition, economic production, American self-interest, and individualism (the first set of values), NCLB is meeting its goals. NCLB is only deemed unsuccessful when understood in conjunction with the manifest function of this policy—to ensure that no child is left behind. Because of this correlation between NCLB and changes in American values, the unexpressed function of NCLB will be expressed in future policies as well. As a result, the reauthorization of NCLB does not matter. Whether or not NCLB is reauthorized this year education policies will continue to be informed by the first set of American values and will continue to see the function of education as ensuring America's dominance in the global economy.

## **Chapter 5: The Lasting Effects of NCLB Demonstrated By Maine's 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **Learning Initiative**

Given this understanding of the unexpressed function of NCLB, the emphasis on quantifiable measurements of education rather than on any real education quality or equality improvements makes more sense. What is truly important to gain from the requirements posed by NCLB is a way to compare schools, districts, states, and nations.



This comparison based on easily measured numbers will afford policymakers the ability to make decisions about where to direct funding to provide the United States with a competitive edge. The emphasis placed on quantifying education has become engrained in the education culture over the last several years and will persist whether or not NCLB is reauthorized this year.<sup>7</sup> This concentration on quantified measures of success and progress has been extended to state legislation not directly connected to NCLB as well. Again, a correlation with American value shifts can help illuminate the persistence of policies similar to NCLB regardless of reauthorization prospects.

One way in which the unexpressed function of NCLB, its emphasis on quantifying academic achievements for the purpose of comparison, and its correlation with American value trends can be demonstrated as long lasting and engrained in the culture of education, is through education policy being drafted in the state of Maine. Legislation is being drafted in Maine with a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills<sup>8</sup>. These skills include media and technology skills, learning and career skills, as well as innovation skills, although none of these skills are defined in detail. In support of legislation like this one, the Partnership For 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2007b) reports that in the study *Are They Really Ready to Work?* “Employers said that the future U.S. workforce is

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<sup>7</sup> Michele Moses and Michel Nanna (2007) discuss the ways in which such testing and quantification have become ingrained in the culture of education. For example, they point to the fact standardized testing has become so commonplace in the United States that its legitimacy is rarely questioned. They also point to the fact that the language of testing, “has become deeply entrenched in the mainstream culture’s lexicon” (Moses and Nanna 2007: 64). For more information see Deron Boyles (1998).

<sup>8</sup> Maine is not alone in these efforts to promote 21<sup>st</sup> century learning gains. Many schools are feeling pressure to do so and following the lead of states like Maine in terms of implementing policy that is modeled after NCLB (Maine Department of Education).

‘woefully ill-prepared for the demands of today’s (and tomorrow’s) workforce’ and they cited 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as ‘very important’ to success at work.”

The rhetoric of *Are They Really Ready to Work?* is very similar to that of *A Nation At Risk*. Both instill a sense of inadequacy on the part of the American education system and in doing so invoke anxiety within the public. While *Are They Really Ready to Work?* claims that the workforce is “woefully ill-prepared for the demands of today’s (and tomorrow’s) workforce,” *A Nation At Risk* (1983) states, “Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (Partnership For 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills 2007b and United States Department of Education 2008a). Thus, what was started in the 1980’s continues today; reports are still being published that insist what is wrong with our education system is that we are not seen as the “unchallenged” leaders in such fields as science and technology, fields that are believed to be pertinent to the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. The purpose of education policy, according to both of these reports, should be understood as ensuring America’s dominance in the global community. While this is the unexpressed function of NCLB, this function is explicitly stated in Maine’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative.

In a PowerPoint presentation given by the Maine Commissioner of Education, Susan Gendron, references are made to the economic threat our country faces if our students are not taught 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. Commissioner Gendron cites a *Times Magazine* article that insists:

This is a story about the big public conversation the nation is not having about education...whether an entire generation of kids will fail to make the grade in the global economy because they can’t think their way

through abstract problems, work in teams, distinguish good information from bad, or speak a language other than English (Gendron 2007: 10).

Thus, it is clear that the “global economy” is the focus when it comes to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. This policy strives to bring such a discussion to the forefront, rather than hide this function as done in NCLB. How other countries perceive us intellectually and how economically competitive we are in the world is the stated purpose of this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative. Here, again, a value is placed on competition and American self-interest.

The following chart is used to demonstrate how such goals of this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative are to be achieved:

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

(Maine Department of Education 2008)

The core subjects and themes of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning are demonstrated in the rainbow blocks of this chart. Below the rainbow, we can see the use of standards and assessments

as the primary means for demonstrating 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. Here we see a clear connection to NCLB. What becomes essential to this initiative is the quantification of results so as to be able to compare 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills to that of other states and countries, rather than any real achievement of these skills. A value is placed on competition and American self-interest; and, individualism wins out over community. However, the goals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative are not unexpressed as with NCLB. Instead, it is publicly articulated that education policies such as this aim to provide quantifiable comparisons with other countries to demonstrate American economic dominance.

### ***Correlations Between American Values and The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative***

Again, this understanding of the purpose of education in terms of economic success in the world and the understanding of children as economic producers can be seen in correlation with American value shifts. In 1975, 38 percent of participants identified “a lot of money” and “a job that contributes to the welfare of society” as indicators of a “good life.” However, in 1996, 63 percent of participants cited making a lot of money as an important indicator of a “good life” over other variables (Putnam 2000: 273). Thus, we value making a lot of money more in recent years than we did even thirty years ago. Correlated to this value of monetary success is a notion of global economic success as the purpose of education in the United States. Only if we educate our children can we as a society maintain our dominance in the global economy and ultimately succeed. This is the manifest function of Maine’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative.

Furthermore, this push towards achieving 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to compete in the global economy can be seen in the language we use to describe students today. As Jonathan Kozol articulated in a speech given at Colby College on February 28, 2008, children are increasingly being referred to as future producers in both the literature and policy pertaining to education. Kozol further claims that we as a society drill and train students to be, “predictable and reliable producers.” As a result, we focus on student gains in terms of production and predictability rather than equality of opportunity or the personal gains of acquiring an education. Education is seen as a benefit to society rather than a benefit to the individual. Thus, it is not surprising that we have become more explicit in our goals for American dominance in the global community.

This idea of students as potential producers can be seen in reports informing Maine’s 21<sup>st</sup> century learning initiative as well. For example, Terry Ryan (2000), a Senior Researcher for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative (the British organization that brought light to this topic in the United States and led to the creation of initiatives like the one found in Maine) writes:

What this [research] means for education and learning is that during the industrial age, where brawn counted more than brains, we could get away with investing only in some of the potential of some of our children. But in the new economy, which depends on knowledge, ingenuity and innovation, on mobilizing the talents of all – getting the best out of everyone – it is essential to develop all the potential of all our children (7).

From this understanding of education, it is clear that providing an education for all students has very little to do with the value of equality for all Americans. Instead, it has to do with the value of material gain, competition, and overall American success.

Whereas the old economy allowed some children to fall through the cracks of the system

and get left behind, in the new economy, “it is essential to develop all the potential of all our children,” for the economic benefit of American society.

## **Chapter 6: One Possible Explanation For the Increasing Dominance of The First Set of American Values and Correlative Changes in Education Policies**

In order to better understand why Americans may increasingly value the first set of American values over the second and the correlations between this value shift and education policies, we might look to Riesman’s analysis of social character. Riesman (2001) defines character as, “...the more or less permanent socially and historically conditioned organization of an individual’s drives and satisfactions—the kind of ‘set’ with which he approaches the world and people” (4). Given this definition we can see values as part of the “drives and satisfactions” of ones character. Social character, by comparison, is the shared character of social groups as defined by actions. Thus we can see values as a contributing factor to ones social character. Riesman, in his book *The Lonely Crowd*, argues that there has been a transition in social character from “tradition-directed” to “inner-directed” and lastly to “other-directed.” Such transitions, he argues, are shaped by a given historical context and the ways in which society “enforces conformity and molds social character in a definably different way” (Riesman 2001: 8). Thus, what Riesman argues is that the ways in which social character, and by extension values, change is inextricably linked to societal conformity. While Riesman goes into great detail about the historical contexts in which each of the three types of social character can be found, the discussion of “other-directed” character is most relevant to the increase in relative importance of competition as a value since he argues that today

we increasingly live in an “other-directed” society.<sup>9</sup> However, Riesman cautions that although we are increasingly becoming “other-directed” as a society, we must strive to become “autonomous” individuals within that society. Riesman defines autonomous individuals as, “...those who on the whole are capable of conforming to the behavioral norms of their society—a capacity that anomics usually lack—but are free to choose whether to conform or not” (Riesman 2001: 242). This paper aims to provide an example of the type of introspection that an autonomous individual would need to exhibit, in order to make choices for him or herself in an “other-directed” society without merely conforming.

For example, we must be self-conscious enough to recognize the connections between the societal trend towards becoming “other-directed” and reports like *A Nation At Risk*. We must question *A Nation At Risk* rather than blindly conform to societal pressures brought on by education policies and reports such as this one. In order to do so we must recognize the symptoms of “other-directedness” prevalent in *A Nation at Risk* and other justifications for NCLB. First, it may be useful to clearly define “other-directedness.” Riesman (2001) defines individuals in an “other-directed” society as those that look to others—whether they are close friends or more distant acquaintances—for direction and guidance. This source of direction becomes internalized until, “It is only [through] the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others,” that an individual finds direction in life (Riesman 2001: 21). This “other-directedness” extends beyond superficialities such as clothes and bank credits that are characteristic of conformity within “inner-directed” societies. “Other-directedness” is

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see Richard Sennett (1998).

emotionally controlled not by shame as in “tradition directed” societies or guilt as in “inner-directed” societies, but by anxiety (Riesman 2001: 25).

With this understanding that we as individuals and as a society are becoming more “other-directed,” it makes sense that education policies and reports are highly concentrated on other countries and how we as a society are seen in the global world. *A Nation At Risk* is an “other-directed” policy. It defines American success in terms of what *others* see to be reality. What *A Nation At Risk* is truly saying is that we as Americans should be concerned because other countries are going to see us as less dominant. We will be less “successful” because other countries will see themselves as ahead of the United States not merely in terms of economic production, but in terms of ideas as well. Furthermore, we must address this precarious situation by changing the way other countries see us. In return, we may see ourselves as better by comparison.

### ***The Use of Anxiety To Promote Social Change***

Furthermore, the way in which *A Nation At Risk* elicits the need for change is through what is commonly referred to as a “politics of fear<sup>10</sup>.” *A Nation At Risk* sends an alarming message to the American public about the future of our country in relation to the rest of the world. It urges social change not by instilling shame or guilt amongst the public as in “tradition-directed” or “inner-directed” societies respectively, but by creating

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<sup>10</sup> The term “politics of fear,” is used in a number of contexts. However, this strategy for eliciting a response can be seen throughout history. From Nazi Germany to the current Bush administrations plea for American support to evade Iraq, fear acts as a powerful tool in rallying support. Essentially, it plays on the idea that people respond in more immediate and extreme ways when a level of fear and anxiety is created. The notion of urgency that fear instills can serve the purpose of instigating change such as with education reform.



feelings of anxiety. The report is written in an alarming tone; one which creates panic and fear within the nation. As the report begins, “Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (United States Government 2008a). Reading such words one cannot help but feel anxious about the future of our country and its social standing in the world. The report goes onto assert, “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (United States Government 2008a). Thus, a comparison is made between the crises in education to that of war, the extreme in positing emotions of fear and anxiety. As a result, we can see how this report demonstrates Riesman’s claim that we are increasingly becoming “other-directed” and to some extent this may help explain our tendency to increasingly value competition with others as we increasingly define ourselves against others. While anxiety can be used to promote conformity in an “other-directed” society, the autonomous individual will not fall for such a ploy. Instead, the autonomous will be self-conscious and, “systematically question themselves in anticipation of the questions of others” (Riesman 2001: 256). The autonomous individual, being introspective, will be, “free to chose whether to conform or not” (Riesman 2001: 242). Thus, Riesman argues that regardless of the society we live in (tradition, inner-directed, or other-directed) we must strive to become autonomous rather than blindly conform to the society. Because A Nation At Risk is used to justify current education policies like NCLB and Maine’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative, we can see how by extension these policies too can better be

understood using Riesman's contention that we increasingly live in an "other-directed" society and need to strive for "autonomy."

### **Conclusion:**

Overall, we can see the importance of looking at shifts in American values in correlation with education policy changes over time. As Americans have increasingly given weight to the first set of American values—competition, individualism, American self-interest, and economic production—such values are increasingly reflected in education policies. This emphasis on the first set of American values over the second set—equality and community—can be useful in understanding both the manifest and unexpressed functions of NCLB. While the first set of values pertains to the manifest function of NCLB—to ensure that no child is left behind—the second set of values relates to the unexpressed function of NCLB—to ensure America's dominance in the global economy.

Using the unexpressed function of NCLB, this policy can be seen as a success since quantifiable measures of success and progress are being produced. These quantified measurements may be used for purposes of comparison at the local, state, national, and global levels. As a result, the United States is able to better compare itself with other countries in terms of educational achievements and will be able to claim dominance within the international community.

Because of the correlation between NCLB, other education policies and reports, and American dominant values, the unexpressed function of this policy will continue to

be reflected in future education policies. This is demonstrated by Maine's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiative, which is currently being drafted and states American dominance in the global economy as a manifest function rather than leaving this function unexpressed. Thus, I argue that reauthorization of NCLB really does not matter. If we as a society seek to ensure that no child is left behind in our country's education system, we have to do more than fight to repeal NCLB, we need to address dominant American value trends. We need to emphasize the second set of values (equality and community) over the first and correlate such values with education policies. As it stands now, little will be done to ensure that no child is left behind because the first set of American values is increasingly dominant over the second set of values and education policies continue to correlate with such values. If we, as Americans, seek to provide a quality education for all children, we need to address the dominant American values that lie at the root of the problem rather than specific policies that are merely symptomatic effects of value shifts.

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