

INPUT AND INSIGHT  
AN  
ASSESSMENT OF ATTITUDE

by

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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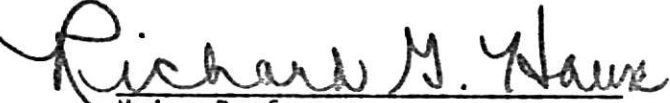
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WITH GRATITUDE TO DR. RICHARD G. HAUSE, WHO GAVE ME THE IDEA  
IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND TO THE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH XI, CONCORDIA  
HIGH SCHOOL, WHO TOLD ME WHAT THEY THOUGHT

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## INTRODUCTION

How does one kill his lion in America today? This is a question posed by Margaret Mead, a well-known American anthropologist. In some African tribes a boy has passed into manhood when he goes out and kills a lion. At this point he knows, and so does everyone else, that he is a man. In America things are not so simple. To begin with, there are many, many lions to be killed, not just one, and a quandary evolves concerning just which one to slay first. After that, there is the question of methods and weapons. Just how does one go about killing a lion and proving maturity, anyway?<sup>1</sup> And then what does one do with the carcass after the deed is accomplished? Often by the time a particular lion has been encountered, the would-be hunter is already bogged down in the morass of everyday living and is too confused or entrapped to be able to utilize his opportunity intelligently. Sadly enough, many Americans live out their lives at a level of immaturity compelling them to worship at the shrine of a cult of youth which denies the worth of anyone over thirty years of age. A current world plague seems to be the "generation gap," with everyone madly scrambling to stay on the young side of the precipice.

Educators agree that the school is in crisis and that education must be revamped, re-molded, and re-charged, preferably as of the day before yesterday. It must teach two-year-olds to read, and even to type! It must promote career information in grades K-12; it must provide continuing education for its adults; it must make the golden age more golden. In effect, it must be all things to all people.

Common sense dictates that this is an impossible task. American

ingenuity says, "Let's give it a try." And so we jump on our horses and ride off in all directions at once, looking not for a lion to slay, but for a dragon to beat to death with a stick. More trouble lies in the fact that we don't know where we are going or what to do after we get there. And perhaps the generation gap is at fault. Again, Margaret Mead relates that today's children can no longer turn to any older person who has ever lived in the world before to tell them what to do because there just is no one who can predict to what ends we should be educating. There was a time when we knew, or thought we knew, exactly what each child needed to know and why. One of our basic inheritances as Americans is a reverence for the value of education. The Puritans knew that every child must learn to read so that he could read the Bible and learn the word of God firsthand, not through the mumblings of a priest. They so strongly felt this to be an essential value that they founded Harvard College only sixteen years after the landing of the Mayflower and printed their first volume, The Bay Psalm Book, some four years later. Indeed, they knew what they wanted!

At various other stages in the development of America we have known what we wanted and have set out to get it. After World War II, when we learned from draftee examinations that a surprising number of young men in North Carolina were deficient in health and education, we boarded the band wagon for physical education and better reading programs. As soon as Russia launched Sputnik, however, we abandoned the so-called "soft" education and launched our own private missile in the form of programs of math and science to gear the gifted child to space supremacy.<sup>2</sup> These directions were great while they lasted, and the dragon was duly slain and digested.

But now things seem different, somehow. "God is dead"; wars end "not with a bang, but with a whimper" (albeit it is more like a sigh of relief),

and the voice of the turtle is not heard in the land (not very clearly, at least). What is worth knowing, anyway? Learners are both mobile and diverse. Twenty-five percent of the families in America move annually. Children of practically all of these families have grown up in front of a television set which is capable of carrying them into all areas of human experience and existence.<sup>3</sup> They have acquired an amazing array of technical knowledge, as well as a somewhat over-realistic view of drugs, sex, the "fuzz," and the "establishment." They have seen extremes in poverty and affluence, and if they are confused, their elders are even more so. It is not surprising that those who don't turn to violence dissolve in apathy. And the things the schools attempt to teach them are on the top of a list headed "Who Needs That?"

There is a Basuto proverb which is used as an epigraph in Robert Ruark's book about Africa called Something of Value. It states, "If a man does away with his traditional way of living and throws away his good customs, he had better first make certain he has something of value to replace them."<sup>4</sup> Ruark contends that the major mistake of the white man in dealing with Africa's blacks was to deny them this exchange. But there is more to this issue as it concerns American schools. The time has long since gone when adults can pass on their traditional values to the young. Children no longer accept without question (if they ever did) the answers they are given. What is worth knowing? What is worth having? What is worth doing? If the over-thirty generation cannot tell them (and if they will not listen) they will have to find out for themselves. "Tell it like it is, man!" The question is, "How is it?" or better, "How do we find out how it is?" Louis Rath in Values in Teaching urges educators to help the child clarify his own values and find out what is important to him in the time in which he lives. Since that time will change as years go by, he needs to be able to probe deeply into his own thinking so

that he may see what causes him to believe as he does. Perhaps this is a logical starting point in the search for a way out of the classroom dilemma. What are values, anyway? And how does the curriculum of a school help a student to define his own?