



Socializing the Young: The Role of Foundations, 1923-1941. Dennis Raymond Bryson. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2002. 253 pp.

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With this book, Bryson wishes to contribute to what might be called the critical literature on the relation between philanthropic foundations and the development of the social sciences. The focus is on the Rockefeller philanthropies, the work of Lawrence K. Frank, and the development of those disciplines and fields that come under the umbrella of Child Development and Parent Education.

Utilizing a Foucauldian framework, the author describes the “elaboration of certain kinds of programs geared toward the government of the social body” (p. xxx) and the “normalization of cultural practices” (p. xvii). He wishes to “examine the ways in which foundation officers and social scientists have worked together to develop new knowledges and technologies oriented toward ‘socializing’ the young” (p. xxx) within the context of the family and the school. The right type of socialization would, it was hoped, lead to “an orderly and pacified social life” (p. xxxi). Finally, the author promises to show how the foundation programs gave a “significant impetus” to the popularization of expert knowledge that proclaimed the benefits of “permissive child-rearing” (p. 1). These are worthy but daunting tasks.

The book is divided into an introduction, four sections, and a conclusion. The Introduction provides the reader an excellent road map to the books’ arguments, setting up the study substantively and theoretically. Section one tells the story of the social sciences in the United States during the early part of the twentieth century and through the inter-war years, with a particular emphasis on the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM). Section two provides a detailed account of the development of these fields through the Rockefeller programs and through the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. Section three gives centre stage to the concept of culture developed through the Rockefeller educational programs during the Depression, and the creation of the field of Culture and Personality. Section four attempts to trace the links between the inter-war programs described earlier and the post-war “permissive” modes of child rearing. The latent function of the book is to provide an intellectual and professional biography of Frank.

The most satisfying parts of the book are those that illuminate the roles played by people such as Edward Sapir, Robert Lynd, Margaret Mead, Kurt Lewin, and John Dollard, as well as the details of Frank’s incredible career. Frank engineered a discourse coalition between foundation officials, academics, and educators. Faced



with the social problems of the age, Frank (who is quoted here) set out to identify the “master techniques of social progress” (pp. xiv and 63) and through the family and the school “re-make human nature,” transform disorder into social order (p. 64). The science of behaviour would promote the micro-management of the family and contribute to the welfare of the society as a whole.

The “new social science” would draw especially from biology, physiology, experimental psychology, and anthropology. Mothers took on a new and important role because they were supposed to “foster healthy and wholesome personality development in [their] children, thereby assisting in the production of a pacified social life” (p. 90). Education was seen as a means of directing culture. Frank sought through the development of the Culture and Personality field to “promote humanity with an invaluable instrument for reconstructing culture and solving critical social problems” (p. 161).

Anthropology took on a special significance in this story. Culture came to be seen as the basis for regularities and uniformities in behaviour, and therefore a basic building block in creating a new integrated social science. The organismic analogy so central to functionalist anthropology became the basis for studying the personality and the “Normal Child.” Building on the work of Sapir, Robert Lynd defined culture in the same way that sociologists had come to define social structure or social forces. Culture was the patterned behaviour of individuals. Sapir, Ruth Benedict and Mead posited a dynamic relation between personality and culture. For Lynd and Frank, the new field would produce an adequate approach to understanding social change and therefore increase the possibility for prediction and control.

Unfortunately the promise of the introduction is only partially fulfilled. The theoretical frame dealing with governmentality, pacified social spaces, and the biotechnocratic approach to culture are not given more emphasis in the rest of the book. Foucault, Norbert Elias, and Donna Haraway are not mentioned (see index) beyond the first few pages. While the concepts of discipline and pacification do play through the text in thoughtful ways, the argument is somehow not carried forward. Further, the author does not end the book. We learn very little about the lines of contact between the impetus given to the fields of child development and parent education during the interwar years and the popularization of permissive child rearing, most notably by Dr. Benjamin Spock. Finally, the Conclusion (pp. 199-205) does little to draw the argument together.

Despite these criticisms, the author does make the case that the socio-political agenda of the foundations during the interwar years did “inform in significant ways” the



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“formulation of modes of knowledge and techniques oriented toward the production of what were considered to be desirable, sociable types of personality” (p. 199). The author is to be congratulated on giving the reader a historical sense of the utopian optimism of this period in the history of the social sciences. At the same time, he does not lose sight of the fact that Frank and his colleagues in the foundations had social control as their ultimate objective.

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