

Abolish Slavery!

Part V

The draft — and the military — are the most obvious and blatant examples of slavery in American life today. But there are others — and these areas suffer a great deal more neglect. One all-pervasive example of slavery in present-day America is the enslavement of our children, known as *compulsory attendance laws*. Compulsory attendance laws mean that up to a certain age — sometimes sixteen, sometimes eighteen — our entire population of children is forced into a penned enclosure, often more or less devoid of true education, known as a “school.” Most often, furthermore, this is a “public” (or governmental) school.

Now schooling may be a great thing but, like many other good things, it is *not* great for everyone. Many people have neither the inclination nor the ability for schooling, and many of them would be far better off spending these eager and formative years working in a job of their choice, than in spending them miserable, resigned, or embittered, in a supposedly benevolent house of detention known as a public school. Why is there so much juvenile delinquency these days? Well, at the risk of oversimplifying, wouldn't *you* tend to become delinquent if *you* were penned up in a school by force of governmental bayonet, in a place for which you had neither the ability nor the inclination?

America grew great in a society where very few men went to high school, let alone college, and where many workers and businessmen developed and prospered on the job, and without wasting many years trying to become scholars, a task for which they were not suited. It is absurd to think that everyone needs or should get a college education, and it is unfortunate that many businessmen have been brainwashed by this generally held myth so that almost any job above the status of ditch digger these days requires a high school, or even a college, diploma. Worst of all, millions of youngsters have had their spirits broken, and their careers thwarted or shattered, by means of this coerced channeling into the world of schooling and scholarship.

It is often believed that, in this modern world of advancing technology, lengthy school attendance has become necessary. Actually, this is not true at all. Recent studies and experiments have shown that school drop-outs, after not learning anything in eight or ten years of compulsory schooling, have, in a few short weeks, been able to learn enough from private industrial training to take jobs successfully in industry.

There is *one* shrewd method to this madness: the more kids artificially kept out of the labor market, the more the government “deals with” the unemployment problem, and the more people are kept off the labor force who would otherwise compete with, and crack, the artificially high structure of minimum wage laws and union-imposed wage rates. Hence, the labor unions — who, for similar reasons, impose absurdly long periods of apprenticeship training, for low wages, upon their fledgling members — have been the most eager to keep the youngsters out of the labor force by use of the State bayonet. As the eminent Paul Goodman has written in his brilliant work, “Compulsory Mis-education,” “Twist it and turn it as you will, there is no logic to the proposal to extend compulsory schooling *except* as a device to keep the unemployed off the streets by putting them into concentration camps called school.”

Fortunately, in recent years, writers and sociologists like Goodman and Edgar Z. Friedenberg have turned a caustic light on our system of compulsory schooling; for the first time in many decades, this mischievous system is coming under careful and critical scrutiny.