

A Letter from the Publisher

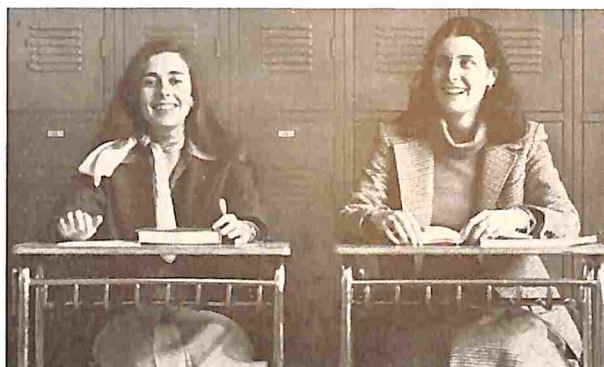
With soaring costs and double-digit truancy, increasing illiteracy and steadily falling Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, many American high schools are clearly in trouble. This week's cover story examines the plight of U.S. secondary education today and profiles three high schools not burdened with the special, severe social problems of the inner cities. The three: Medford High in a Boston suburb, Marshfield High in Coos Bay, Ore., and West High in Iowa City, Iowa.

The story was written by Education Editor Annalyn Swan and researched by Reporter-Researcher Ellie McGrath. Both are recent college graduates who found that their public school years did not prepare them well for what was to come. "I hadn't read enough classics and had never taken essay exams before I got to college," says Swan, who went from Biloxi High in Mississippi to Princeton. "My high school and those we visited for this story don't anticipate the challenges of the outside world; they seem to equate excellence with elitism." McGrath, a 1970 Gloucester (Mass.) graduate, concurs: "It was hard to forgive my high school for

what I had to go through during freshman year at Mount Holyoke. And the schools of the '60s were considered good by today's standards."

For her story, Swan flew out to Coos Bay, where she sat in on classes and interviewed students along with Los Angeles Correspondent Edward Boyer, a former high school and college English and journalism teacher. Occasionally mistaken for a student, Swan found the teen-agers eager to talk. When she asked a class if three or four would like to join her for dinner, 13 newspaper staffers showed up. In Iowa City, Midwest Correspondent Anne Constable found that students and faculty at West High were so excited by the attention that they made TIME's coverage the subject of a school-paper story. McGrath and Boston Correspondent Marlin Levin, who attended classes and talked to students and teachers at Medford High, experienced a similar recep-

tion. Says Levin: "Headmaster William McCormack opened the doors to us and said, 'Here it is, go where you want to go, write what you see. This, for better or for worse, is what we are.'"

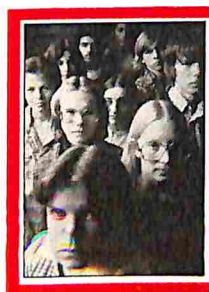


Annalyn Swan and Ellie McGrath revisiting high school

Ralph P. Davidson

Index

The Cover: Photograph by Ted Thai.



62

Cover: Why, with fancy facilities, a smorgasbord of courses and soaring budgets, are today's high school students learning less and disliking it more? For a look at the vexing problems behind the classroom door, see EDUCATION.



14

The Nation: Burns jousts with Carter over the economy. ▶ The President calls off his foreign tour and plans to rev up his energy fight. ▶ Richard Helms, former top spook, gets wrist-slapped for misleading Congress.



34

The World: Brezhnev celebrates a Soviet birthday with a nuclear test-ban proposal. ▶ The U.N. bars arms shipments to South Africa. ▶ Israelis plunge into capitalism. ▶ War-ravaged Beirut regains some of its old hustle.

46

Essay

The Russian Revolution turns 60, still a stolid bureaucracy years away from the classless workers' paradise.

52

Art

A trove of early Irish art—including illuminations from the celebrated Book of Kells—draws crowds as it begins a U.S. tour.

54

Television

Two new PBS serials, *I, Claudius* and *Best of Families*, show that when it comes to family sagas, the British still know best.

56

Science

Dawn of life is pushed back to the first billion years of earth's existence. ▶ Engineered bacteria make human hormone.

61

The Theater

Liza storms Broadway like a tornado. ▶ The godfather of modern drama, Pirandello, reasserts his authority in *Naked*.

76

Economy & Business

Despite a friend in the White House, Nader is losing clout. ▶ Shortages heat up insulation buyers. ▶ Leyland lives.

92

Religion

How the Pope became infallible: a priest's graphic account of Pius IX and Vatican I behind closed doors in 1870.

94

Medicine

Equipment salesman lends a hand—illegally—in operating room. ▶ Cancer patient becomes a cancer columnist.

101

The Law

A Texas-sized murder trial pits a multimillionaire defendant against his wife. ▶ Legal gadfly Raoul Berger strikes again.

106

Books

The Making of an Assassin argues that Oswald acted alone. ▶ *The Book of Sand* shows Jorge Luis Borges at word and play.

116

Music

The Met's brand new *Rigoletto* soars with entrancing sound, but its penny-pinching "unit set" cramps the staging.

7 Letters

51 People
85 Cinema
96 Milestones
114 The Press

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A TALE OF THREE CITIES



46

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