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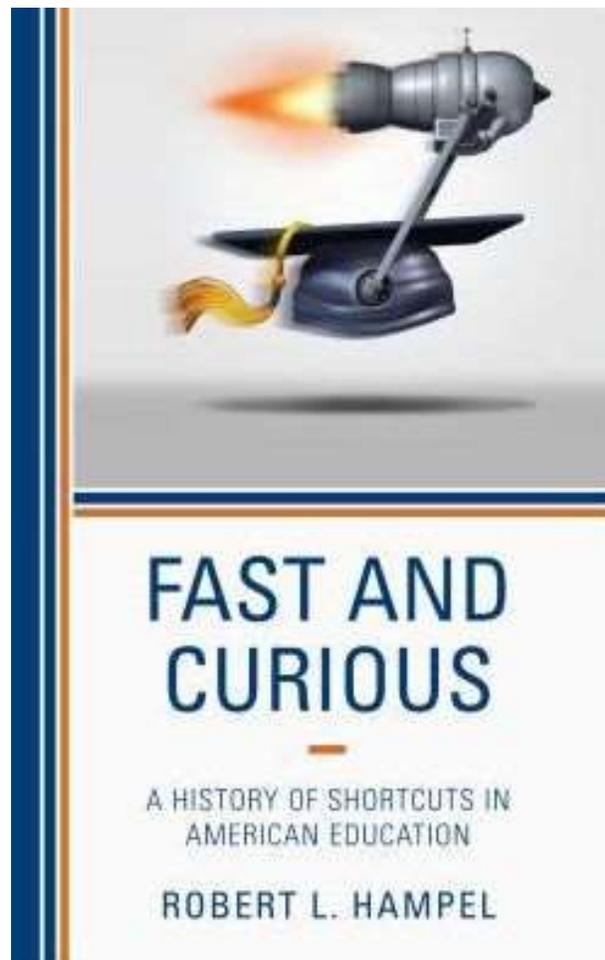
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Robert Hampel's *Fast and Curious* is a brief and efficient history of American efforts to provide brief and efficient education. Hampel focuses on correspondence schools such as the Famous Artists School, collections of high culture such as the Mortimer Adler's Great Books collection of canonical literature, three-year baccalaureates and other attempts to abbreviate college and graduate programs, as well as shorthand courses, speed reading, and their ilk.

Hampel describes his project as an historical perspective on fears about educational shortcuts – inspired by fears of colleagues that drugs for learning would eclipse educational psychology as a field. In roving the landscape of 19th and 20th century shortcuts, Hampel focuses on two types, what he calls “faster and easier” shortcuts and “faster and harder” shortcuts. These types do not refer to the realities of Americans who tried these shortcuts but rather to their appeal.

In the category of “faster and easier,” he places 20th-century correspondence schools and collections of “great literature” that



promised to provide shortcuts to credentials and to high culture. He traces the rise and fall of Albert Dorne's Famous Artists School from its start in suburban Connecticut during the 1940s to its demise in 1973. Boasting notables such as Norman Rockwell, Famous Artists and other correspondence schools promised to provide a path to success for those who were otherwise bound in their communities and dead-end jobs. In describing shortcuts to culture, Hampel includes a range of products from the Harvard Classics, also known as the "five-foot shelf," to that ubiquitous digest series of great works that grated on teachers everywhere, Cliffs Notes. What Hampel argues that they had in common was the promise of a fast path to cultural knowledge.

Hampel's second category is "faster and harder," in which he discusses shorter paths through formal higher education credentials and various techniques to shorten acquisition of knowledge from shorthand to Evelyn Wood. Hampel points out that in the 19th century, students rarely stayed long in college, and the primary effort of collegians was to extend courses of study, not shorten them. The dissenters from this trend included efforts to establish the Doctor of Arts pedagogical degree, dual enrollment courses, calls for three-year undergraduate degrees, experiments such as Simon's Rock, and competency-based education. In the end, few of these efforts lasted, and the role of the persisters such as Advanced Placement courses and dual enrollment has served less to shorten college than to provide momentum so that students will actually finish.

The last substantive chapter in *Fast and Curious* is a curious collection of the simplified spelling movement, shorthand schools, and speed-reading fads, stretching from the late 19th century to the last few decades. Other than specialized uses such as court reporting or occasional alternative spellings such as *thru*, none of these efforts has thrived. In the end, Hampel concludes, Americans have a penchant for believing in practical shortcuts

despite the persistent norms of regularized schedules of formal schooling.

Hampel contributes in three areas. First, *Fast and Curious* fits into the small literature on autodidacticism (see Kett, 1994). Much of the marketing of shortcuts depended on Americans' willingness to believe in the value of autonomous striving for knowledge and recognition. Self-efficacy may not have been efficacious except for correspondence school bottom lines, but Hampel documents how many American shortcuts have relied on individual self-confidence in the capacity to learn outside more formal, scaffolded structures that we call schools.

In addition, Hampel's story is one that relies on the institutional traces of cultural norms – using the success or failure of these shortcuts to tell us about American culture more broadly. In this way, the work follows Zelizer (1985) and her reliance on court records to make a case for the evolution of the priceless child. Some will be as upset with Hampel's focus on institutional documentation as with Zelizer's when her book was new. There is quite a bit to learn from this type of argument, as long as one understands that Hampel does not address much about the reception and uses of either short-and-easier or short-and-harder efforts.

Third, Hampel's book is one more volume on the growing shelf skeptical of educational "disruption." Whether one wishes to compare Hampel with a fellow historian such as Cuban (1986, 2009) or contemporary critics such as Watters (2014), Stoll (1996), or Morozov (2013), there is an inherent pessimism in Hampel's story about the belief that shortcuts are likely to be effective, except as marketing and ideology and American hype.

Finally, Hampel provides some of the subaltern story of American credentialism. For those who recognized the growing value of formal credentials in the 20th century, correspondence schools provided an appealing alternative, one they might still yet attain.

Anyone could buy a shelf of Will and Ariel Durant or the Encyclopedia Britannica, and if no one other than a young puppy truly digested it, well, it was on the shelf as a visible attempt at acquiring cultural capital. One could do much worse than assign Hampel and McMillan Cottom (2017) as reading for a course that explored the uses and abuses of credentialism.

Hampel excludes some types of shortcuts, such as cheating. He also avoids the world of elementary and secondary education except for the story of Cliffs Notes and brief references to dual-enrollment courses. These are limits, not flaws.

Of somewhat greater concern is the collapsing of awkward collections into two of the chapters. It is not clear how Cliffs Notes is the same shortcut to culture as the collection of books associated with Harvard or the University of Chicago. In the former case, the market for quick digests was explicitly tied to

success in formal schooling to the extent that college bookstores have willingly sold Cliffs Notes and its imitators. No college bookstore has sold Mortimer Adler's collection of his selected classics to 19-year-old students. Similarly, the last chapter matches two attempts at skills shortcuts (shorthand and speed reading) with an attempt to change American spelling more broadly. For whatever else we might fault "Melvil Dui" (Ogren, 2017), one can hardly argue that he and his compatriots only thought of simplified spelling as shortcuts for skills. One suspects that a slightly longer book and more unified chapters might have made a more coherent argument.

Despite the awkwardness of some chapters, *Fast and Curious* is a unique work that should be in the hands of anyone who believes in shortcuts, not to mention those who wish to educate the Pollyannaish about the history of such beliefs.

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