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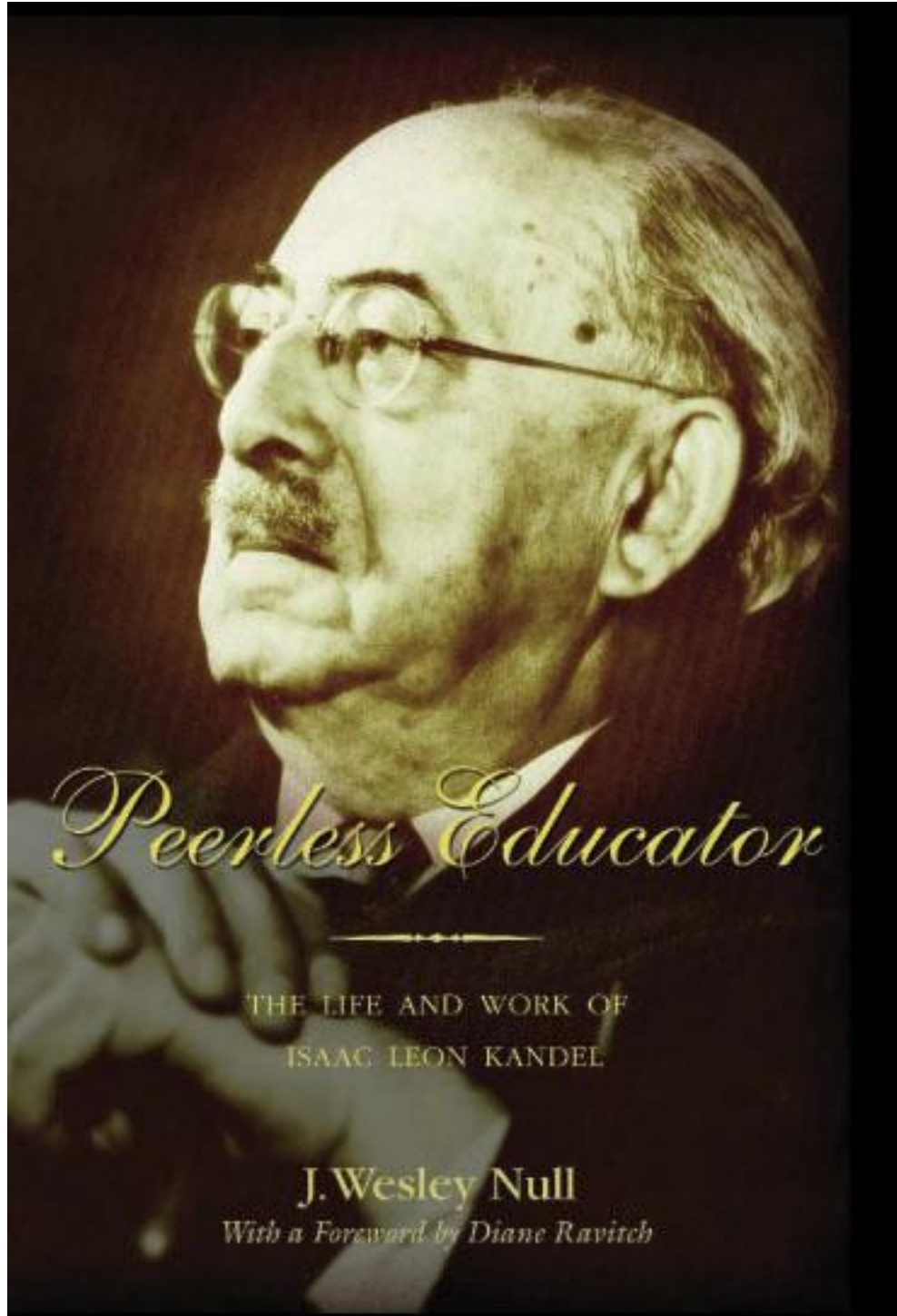
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J. Wesley Null in *Peerless Educator: The Life and Work of Isaac Leon Kandel* documents and narrates the life of an education scholar, Isaac Kandel, whose prolific and wide range of scholarship is worthy of emulation. Null documents the impressive life of Isaac Kandel, a historical figure who worked in several notable positions, such as a Teacher's College professor between 1923 and 1946 during the heyday of Progressive Education, a close friend and associate of William Bagley (an earlier biography project of J. Wesley Null), and a scholar who served in an international capacity that helped spawn the field of comparative education. But Null's project in the *Peerless Educator* moves beyond the basic descriptive biographical project, for Null rearticulates the perennial debate between "progressive" and "traditional" educational reformers

and scholars. In providing the social and political context of Kandel's rise in academic circles, which occurred on both sides of the Atlantic in New York City and Manchester, England, Null necessarily defines and illustrates the problematic and ever-changing attempts to define Progressivism from the vantage point of a scholar who was divisively anti-Progressive, or a "democratic traditionalist" in Null's words. In the end, the reader is left with a text with a two-fold purpose to provide a biography but also to redraw the lines between traditional and



progressive camps that should make readers rethink their own positions on this debate.

In terms of the biography project, Null assumes the approach of an intellectual biographer with "particular attention to [Kandel's] views on educational philosophy, curriculum, and comparative education" (p. xix). In this regard, the reader comes to know Kandel in the context in which he would develop his educational philosophy. Kandel was born in Romania in 1881, migrated to Manchester, England, in 1885 during the Victorian age in order to live in the largest Jewish

community in England, numbering 35,000, to escape the hardships imposed on Eastern European Jewish communities (pp. 25-43). In response to the pervasive “Jewish Question,” Kandel would mediate between the British and Jewish cultures to learn that “assimilation was protection against discrimination” (p. 38). Kandel’s educational experience is very important to understand as well. Kandel attended a British public elementary school during the era that witnessed the proliferation of universal education and consequently internalized the British education ideals of citizenship and non-sectarian Christian morality (p. 42). Kandel later attended the prestigious Manchester Grammar School, which was rooted in Christianity and classical scholarship (p. 46). Despite excelling in a curriculum grounded in the classics, humanities and religion, Kandel was not awarded a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge and instead attended the University of Manchester in 1899, an institution that oriented itself toward educating males for public service using a non-sectarian curriculum and civic purpose. Kandel received his bachelor’s degree in classics and later received his masters in education at the University of Manchester, at which point he sought to “perpetuate the ancient traditions that he had been studying for fifteen years” (p. 61).



J. Wesley Null

A classical and moral education would prepare Kandel for his career. By happenstance, he met William Chandler Bagley at the University of Jena, Germany, and decided to move to New York City to study for his PhD at Teachers College (pp. 79-81). Kandel’s dissertation is instructive in outlining his general educational philosophy and scholarship. Kandel’s work focused on German teacher education and how national ideals shaped a national education system. He recommended high-quality curriculum teacher education with a liberal arts focus and criticized rigid bureaucracy and radical curriculum changes, which were becoming key components of the burgeoning Progressive movement. (pp. 98-100).

Teachers College was also definitive for Kandel because there he met William Heard Kilpatrick and Paul Monroe, both affiliated with educational history. Kilpatrick would serve (more than Dewey) as the Progressive figurehead against which Kandel would write. Monroe would influence Kandel greatly as a member of his dissertation committee but would crucially recommend Kandel for positions as, first, a research specialist for the Carnegie Foundation in 1914 and later to a professorship appointment at Teachers College in 1923 as part of the International Institute. Beyond this capacity of a Teachers College professor, Kandel would serve in an international capacity, becoming well known in the field as a founder of comparative education. Kandel, for instance, edited the *Educational Yearbook*, which published essays by leading representative scholars of education from different countries (pp. 141-143). In addition to this important scholarly project, Kandel served on the U.S. Education Mission to Japan that was charged with reporting on Japan’s wartime education system in order to democratize Japanese education (pp. 205-208). Kandel also worked with UNESCO to establish a minimum Fundamental Education for all world citizens, which was to argue that “universal liberal education is a human right” (p. 217). Finally, Kandel returned to head an American Studies program at the University of Manchester until 1950 (p. 238).

The more important aspect of this text, however, emerges as Null pays close historical attention to “[Kandel’s] life, his thought, and the way in which his views clashed with the views of others from his time period” (p. xix). Null makes sure that his project resonates with similar debates today for “good educational history...must have something to say about application” (p. xx). The thrust of Null’s text therefore lies in his positioning of Kandel in the larger Progressive versus Traditionalist debate. Null interestingly redefines Progressivism in this text. He rearticulates David Tyack’s widely accepted administrative and pedagogical progressive binary. Instead of administrative progressives, Null proffered the term “systematic progressives,” who, in Null’s analysis, rejected humanistic liberal curriculum, encouraged the complete adoption of scientific

analysis and methodology, and sought to produce or “discover” an efficient system to be applied to American education (p. 132). Null replaces the notion of pedagogical progressives with “existentialist progressives,” which are those more aligned with the Dewey camp that encouraged the incorporation of behavioral and developmental psychology into teaching. For Null, the existentialist progressives were known for “worshiping the wants, needs and desires of children” (p. 133). Null found that the Progressives commonly placed significant emphasis on the individual, used “romantic rhetoric” often with the promise of some type of Utopia. They made the ideas of progress, efficiency, problem-solving and individual advancement fundamental in education (p. 135). Furthermore, for Null, the Progressive movement represented an “attack on the idea of curriculum itself” (p. 149).

Similarly, Null divides the Traditionalist camp into two components. The “aristocratic traditionalists” represented the old guard that largely rejected a liberal, universal education. Null found this camp to be elitist, gender discriminatory, and reactionary in their rejection of universal education (p. 136). The second component is composed of the “democratic traditionalists.” For Null, Isaac Kandel was a democratic traditionalist. In general terms, the democratic traditionalist believed in traditions and advocated universal liberal arts education, something rejected, according to Null, by the Progressives. Such traditionalists also incorporated science into their methodology, but maintained a “larger social and philosophical vision that puts the common good of humanity at its end” (p. 137). The move to redefine and rearticulate this debate is crucial for Null, for he sees that this tradition was marginalized during the early to mid twentieth century, but also because it represents a tradition that must be reclaimed. Anticipating the question as to why this idea did not take hold in educational theory, Null demonstrated that the democratic traditional project was ignored and marginalized because such an approach was philosophical in the time when behavioral psychology and positivist methodology dominated educational theory and practice. Additionally, this approach would not yield the simple, “ready made” answers that many demanded (p. 17).

Following the democratic traditionalist framework, Null makes it clear that teachers should teach a common culture, which he sees as fundamental for the survival of American democracy. The curriculum should also espouse “the eternal ideas that have shaped civilization” in a liberal arts curriculum (pp. 9-10). Moreover, Kandel’s work in comparative education leads Null to conclude that a focus on international peace is the only viable long-term approach to problems like terrorism. Ultimately, education should incorporate Kandel’s goal “to identify universal principles of humanity that...should be taught in all countries to all young citizens” (p. 13). The result would be to implement a core curriculum grounded in morality. Like Kandel during the Progressive era of education, Null proposed that educational theory reject pragmatism and industrialism as ends. Instead, educators should expand the curriculum to include philosophically humanist considerations. In the end, ethics and morality are imperative, yet dangerously lacking components in American education. Null maintains that contemporary policy needs “morally engaged, philosophically minded decision makers who can think long-term, communicate with the general public and serve the common good” (p. 21). As Null concludes, “liberal education is a religious ideal that transforms the inner constitution of a person’s character” (p. 277). In terms of methodology, historical and philosophical understandings need to be the foundation of teacher education programs. The contemporary context, Null argues, demands that the ideas put forth by Kandel be rediscovered and incorporated into education.

While Null’s nuanced typology structures Kandel’s life and his larger philosophical conflict in an ordered way—which helps rearticulate a longstanding debate in the field—his distinction between Progressive and Traditionalist camps is problematic at times. Null draws a stark contrast between the two sides that may tacitly serve the contemporary debate between Diane Ravitch and others rather than demonstrating valid historical interpretation. The “progressives,” already a loaded and broadly encompassing term (which Null acknowledges), are presented at times as a movement marked by anti-democratic, wholly individualistic and otherwise explicitly socially harmful tendencies. The harmful effects of behavioral psychology and an uncritical acceptance of a

scientific positivist methodology are duly noted, but this should not be used as the sole criterion to define the Progressive movement. Pedagogical progressives would use science as just one means to benefit both the individual *and* society. Basing historical analysis on the assumption that the Progressives did not consider the larger social good leads to some unfounded (and sometimes harsh) indictments. For instance, at one point it was claimed that Progressives were “worshiping the wants needs and desires of children” and succumbing to the use of “romantic language” (p. 133). The reader is later instructed that Dewey rejected “truth, beauty and goodness” (p. 196). Worse yet for the American student, the reader is also informed that the “radical” Progressives, led by George Counts, espoused an ideology that flirted “with totalitarian ideologies that rejected equal educational opportunity” (p. 166). This could also be problematic if one considers the notion that the Progressive movement was not the dominant paradigm it is often alleged to be in the history of education. Progressivism was not the panacea that some claimed it to be, but illustrating the Progressive movement in such language only serves to portray Kandel as a martyr for a righteous cause, politically establishing the conservative as the victim within the contemporary debate.

Another aspect of Null’s provocative argument should be noted as well. In an era when many critics rightfully claim that too many scholars critically describe without suggesting an alternative course of action, Null suggests that morality be re-incorporated into the American curriculum, that a common culture be transmitted in schools, and a core curriculum be adopted. With the help of a foreword in *Peerless Educator* by Diane Ravitch, these lines are clearly drawn. Null’s position is courageous in that it takes a firm stance, but it is problematic at the same time because Null’s idea is not fully articulated for those who are inherently skeptical of notions such as one common culture, morality, and a core curriculum. The question remains as to whose culture and morality should be taught and how. Moreover, besides the safeguard of a moral and common education *for all*, if this notion were to be taken seriously by practitioners, how is it possible to avoid the inherent discrimination and harmful effects historians have documented in the “moral” policy of the Native American boarding school movement, for instance. Moreover, it would need to be demonstrated how a common culture and curriculum could reflect the socially and often ideologically diverse nature of American culture. More is needed to persuade the opposition if a serious dialogue on a national curriculum is to be held.

In the end, Null has contributed a well-written text that boldly rearticulates current debates in education over the nature of the American curriculum and teacher education programs that should help readers reexamine and redefine their own positions in this ongoing debate. On these merits alone, Null’s *Peerless Educator* is a worthwhile and important text. In terms of biography, Null has contributed a well-documented biography that is indicative of the high-quality scholarship that can be found in the history of education. Null’s claim in the introduction to be writing an intellectual biography is modest, for he incorporates the social, political, personal, and cultural contexts of Kandel’s life that makes this biography a much more comprehensive biography than Null himself claims. Null’s *Peerless Educator* may not end the debate over the aims of American education, but it is an important contribution to the debate and a model illustration of historical scholarship.

About the Reviewer

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