

Social Class and the Egalitarian Ethos:
Case Study from a Rural School Serving Amish Children

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Studies Association,
Cleveland, Ohio, October 2007.

This work was supported in part by the Ohio Department of Education and also by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0119679 (Appalachian Collaborative Center on Learning, Assessment, and Instruction in Mathematics). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation or the Ohio Department of Education.

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Introduction

This paper draws on data from a case study of a rural school located in an Amish community to offer a description of and then to theorize about the manifestation of egalitarianism in schools and communities. In particular, it explores two theoretical perspectives on egalitarianism, one primarily cultural in focus and the other primarily structural.

The culturalist explanation would locate egalitarianism at the nexus of a community's values and norms of practice. Hofstede (2001), for example, contrasts individualist and collectivist cultures as well as cultures with greater and lesser tendencies to ascribe power differentials to different individuals and groups. In contrast, a structural view would focus on the way economic structures influence social relations, thereby creating practices embedding greater and lesser degrees of equality. In a sense, then, one explanation assumes that ideology broadly informs social and economic relations, whereas the other assumes that economic relations broadly inform social dynamics and the ideologies arising from them.

Related Literature

As a basis for interpreting data from the case study presented here, we examine the social science literature on egalitarianism. Two bodies of literature seem particularly germane: egalitarianism as a cultural phenomenon and egalitarianism as an effect of economic structure.

Egalitarianism as a Cultural Phenomenon

Some sociological theorizing and research suggests that cultures differ across ideological dimensions, with each particular cultural manifestation informing the collective identity, idiosyncratic logic, and collective memory of that culture (Dimaggio, 1997). In reference to such ideological dimensions, the culture creates conditions for the meaningful construction of individual identities, social roles, and hierarchical locations within the social structure. For example, long-standing beliefs about gender shape the range of possible identities open to males and females, prescribe and limit their practices, and set rules for their status attainment. Moreover, in some cultures, gender represents a more salient category of difference than other characteristics, and therefore the degree of equality accorded to males and females become an important matter. For other cultures, characteristics like wealth, family name, or religion represent more important categories of difference, and the cultural outlook on social distance (equality and elitism) is enacted more often in reference to one or another of these categories.

Thinking about culture in this way discloses its complexity, and some researchers have sought to find compelling, though inevitably simplistic, schemes for classifying the related cultural variation. Geert Hofstede, for instance, has carried out some of the most thorough investigations of cultural differences in industrialized countries. Hofstede (2001) derived five dimensions along which national cultures varied:

- *Individualism* relates to a culture's tendency to equate individual accomplishment with identity. Members of individualist cultures are concerned primarily with their own interests and those of their immediate families, as compared to members of collectivist societies, who typically

extend concern to several tight “in-groups” (e.g., extended family, clan, or organization) from which detachment is difficult. In-groups protect their members but expect continuing loyalty.

- *Power distance* is the degree to which less powerful members of a society accept inequality as normal. High power distance cultures are more hierarchical. Managers in high power distance cultures are less likely to use consultative management strategies, and subordinates are less likely to challenge or even question their supervisors.
- *Uncertainty avoidance* is the extent to which members of a culture become nervous in situations seen as unpredictable, unclear, or unstructured. Individuals in high uncertainty-avoidance cultures “try to maintain strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute truths” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 308). Participants in low uncertainty-avoidance cultures are much more willing to tolerate ambiguity.
- *Masculinity* refers to the degree to which a culture strives for “maximal distinction between what men are expected to do and what women are expected to do. [Masculine cultures] expect men to be assertive, ambitious, and competitive, to strive for material success and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast (Hofstede, 1986, p. 308).” In a “masculine” culture, external success and competition are prized over personal relationships, nurturing, and security, which are seen as “feminine” and therefore inferior.
- *Long-term orientation* describes a culture’s valuation of past, present, and future. The salient contrast, perhaps, is the difference between a future

orientation and an orientation to past and present. Long-term orientation puts greater value on past and present, whereas short-term orientation is more characteristic of future-oriented nations (such as those in the developed West.) Long term cultures are apt to view time as cyclical, short-term cultures as linear

Using Hofstede's categories, low masculinity might be tantamount to an egalitarian perspective on gender; and low power distance might be equivalent to an egalitarian perspective on characteristics such as wealth, social standing, or religion. One might speculate that cultures with low power distance would also tend toward greater collectivism. But there are doubtless cultures that incorporate unusual combinations of characteristics across the five dimensions.

Other culturalist interpretations also exist. From a particularly rural perspective, one approach with a uniquely literary quality is that of Raymond Williams (1973; 1989). Williams's great study, *The Country and the City*, deals with the peculiar treatment accorded rural people in English literature. Unlike Hofstede, Williams is not interested in classifying cultures, but in understanding cultural domination—not to say “hegemony.” His outlook on equality therefore is more truly culturalist than Hofstede's—rather than defining the cultural freight of the psyche, Williams is interested in the comparative power of competing cultures.

The most memorable testimony in *The Country and the City*, however, pertains more to the strange mistreatment of rural as a realm of (lost) idyllic life. Williams found that in each literary epoch back to the earliest (from Thomas Hardy to Beowulf), national writers bemoaned the loss of a supposedly better, more gracious, rural past. No matter

how far back one pushes the historical analysis, this theme persists. Williams concludes that the lost idyll never existed. Instead, the idyll helped to create what Williams terms a “structure of feeling” around the idea of rural—an emotive structure, of course, of *loss*. This sense of loss prepares readers to regard contemporary (present-day) rural existence as of lesser importance. Needless to say, most of the great writers in Williams’s analyses cleaved to an urban, and an increasingly *modern* outlook on existence. The exceptions, one might note, have particular appeal for Williams, who was himself neither English nor urban.

Culturally, the structure of feeling about rural loss coordinates rather well with modernism, a theme Williams explored more fully in later work (Williams, 1989). Clearly, from a modernist perspective, rural life and power are passé. Williams, though, is particularly intrigued by the timeless quality of modernism, a timelessness that means the cultural condition of modernism cannot be superseded. From Williams’s standpoint, post-modernism does not establish a rupture between modernism and something else, but extends the modernist project into new territory. This eternal cultural world, in Williams’s view, is centered on the Great World City—that modernist version of the city on the hill—in which the very best of the globe is concentrated and concatenated in an unsurpassed (not to say “unsurpassable”) superiority. Rural places and lifeways can only be consumers of and gawkers at this cosmopolitan superiority. For Williams, this is where the term “hegemonic” is applicable.

In this analysis, Williams is logically brought to a very different project. He would have predicted globalization and the marketing of the values of the Cosmopolis

(that is, of world-class performances) across the globe, but it would have disgusted him. In an essay titled “When Was Modernism?”, he advised,

If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of *post*-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again. (p. 35, original emphasis)

One might claim that, for Williams, modernist culture, global and cultural, represented (represents) the apex of elitism to the point of obliterating both actual community and the ability to imagine or articulate common purpose.

Both culturalist approaches to community have merit, different though they are. Hofstede (working in a distinctly modernist mode, one must remember) suggests the mechanisms by which national cultures construct themselves and present themselves to those of different national origins. His categories have possible utility, though, in grappling with the representations (as in qualitative research) of actual humans in rural places. Hypothetically, individuals in communities as well as in nations might vary on the lines he suggests. Williams’s neo-Marxian literary analysis treats icons of culture as instruments of power, and so his analysis of culture is inherently more political (in the classic, not the parochial, sense of the word). In examining rural communities, in particular, one needs to remind oneself of the differential representations made to condemn rural places as both backward (to be *vilified*) and idyllic (pitiable, since the idyll is long past).

Egalitarianism as an Effect of Economic Structure

This line of inquiry accords with Marx's (1867) claim that the economic structure of a group has a determining influence on its superstructure of laws, political activity, and education as well as on its prevailing ideology. One notable application of this principle, though not strictly Marxian, concerns the structure of local economic activity and its effect on community engagement (with widespread engagement taken as emblematic of more egalitarian practice). Much of this work, in fact, has centered on rural communities. The classic study is Goldschmidt's (1947) of farming practices in California. Goldschmidt found that the presence of corporate agriculture negatively influenced a range of quality-of-life indicators in surrounding communities, as compared to communities in which small-scale farming predominated. Even though they are contrary to 100 years of change in American farming, Goldschmidt's findings have, in fact, been reaffirmed by generations of researchers (Lobao, 1991; Mills & Ulmer, 1970; Welsh & Lyson, 2005). Given the history, the "Goldschmidt hypothesis" is understandably controversial—but the findings across the years and the varied methodologies are comparatively robust.

A small body of sociological literature has also explored the influence of economic inequality on community dynamics with a bearing on egalitarianism. Gaventa (1980), for example, examined the economic dynamics leading to the disenfranchisement and resulting apathy of the poor in a rural coal mining community. In *Worlds Apart*, Cynthia Duncan (1999) presented case studies leading her to conclude that democracy and sustainability were promoted in rural communities in which there was a relatively large middle class. Her case studies painted a sharp contrast between communities in

which elites dominated local institutions and communities in which a sizeable middle class promoted wider participation.

Other rural sociologists have also provided evidence supporting what might be called “middle-class theory” (e.g., Chan & Elder, 2001). With this theory, economic structure takes on the coloration of the construct of *socioeconomic status*, which American researchers pioneered to conform with mainstream American dissatisfaction with the Marxian concept of qualitatively different classes (Wright, 2005). Perhaps because of these origins, middle-class theory, at least in its applications to schooling, tends more to concern itself with middle-class mores than with the distribution of resources. The principle here is simple, and it is compatible with Ruby Payne’s (1998) popular “poverty training” workshops: The greater the devotion to middle class ways of being, the more healthy the community (and its school). Payne, of course, argues that schools must teach impoverished children to behave according to middle-class mores. The difficulty with both this line of analysis, and the practical work advocated by Payne is manifold: (1) it does not disclose which middle class promotes overall betterment—the petty bourgeoisie of small-scale self-employment or the corporate middle class of managers (cf. Flora, Flora, Spears, & Swanson, 1992)? (2) it tends to blame poverty on the poor themselves (Gorski, 2006); and (3) because of its origins in American functionalism, it limits the analysts access to the important concept of class struggle.

Despite its conceptual and practical challenges, middle class theory retains strong cultural force in Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin’s America—where hard work, innovation, and cleverness are supposed to make both individuals and communities successful. For the depth of this force, see the discussion in Isaacson’s recent biography

of Franklin (Isaacson, 2003), and, for a specifically agrarian middle-class view of egalitarianism, see Victor Hanson's *The Other Greeks* (Hanson, 1995). A propos of this apology for middle class theory, we observe that when examining the dynamics of rural social class, one need not necessarily embrace an industrial version of class struggle.

Methods

The case study was one of six in a larger study of rural schools serving low-income students. The schools had been honored by the SDE for their high achievement in mathematics during the 2003-04 school year. The schools included one 9-12 high school, two 7-12 high schools, one 5-8 middle school, one K-8 elementary school, and one K-4 elementary school. Our interest was broad, focusing not only on how mathematics was conceived and taught in these places, but also on the culture of each school, teachers' and administrators' views about their work, and the connection between the school and the local community.

For each school, a researcher spent approximately five days collecting data, primarily through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews included one-on-one conversations with adult informants (administrators, teachers, parents, and community members) and focus-group discussions with students. A researcher conducted 25 interviews (lasting from 30–90 minutes) at the site described in this case study, and observed in five classrooms, with visits lasting from one to two hours. All interviews were transcribed, and transcripts were prepared for analysis with Atlas-Ti software.

Initial analysis made use of *a priori* codes, drawn from a wide reading of the literature on rural education, mathematics education, school improvement, and social class dynamics. The data of interest to the analysis presented here focused on the character of the community and informants' perspectives about school-community relations, and therefore it tended to be categorized within one or more of the following four initial codes: "community engaged," "community disengaged," "community elitist," and "community egalitarian." Quotes classified using these codes were recoded in a more fine-grained way using an inductive, constant-comparative method. The recoding process yielded a total of 33 codes that pertained to the case presented here, 16 of which had some bearing on social class. Quotes relating to these codes were then reviewed in an effort to identify salient themes explaining the character of social class relations in the six schools. Case studies for each of the schools—the current one, of course, included—explored each of the four emergent themes: (1) *in loco parentis*, (2) teaching middle-class behaviors, (3) extolling the virtue of a college degree, and (4) "othering" the children of the poor.

Case Study Findings

Willemsburg Elementary School enrolls about 200 students in its nine grade levels (i.e., K-8). It is one of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in a rural school district with an overall student enrollment of about 1,700.

By conventional standards, most district residents are poor and working class. Among households in the district, about 30% have annual incomes less than \$30,000 and about 45% have incomes from \$30,000 up to \$60,000 (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2006). Approximately 40% of students are considered economically disadvantaged by the SEA. The median household income in the district is approximately \$39,000. Average teacher salary is about \$41,000 and about 25% of the faculty hold at least a master's degrees. Although all students at Willemsburg Elementary are white, the school was arguably the most culturally diverse of all schools in our study because approximately 40% of its students¹ are Amish.

Willemsburg was unique among the schools in the larger study for exhibiting no directly—and very few indirectly—disparaging remarks about the poor. The Willemsburg transcripts, like those from all of the schools, exhibit variance on the themes identified in the study overall. But the variance included almost no evidence of negative views about the poor or even of much awareness of social class as a salient construct. Instead, the evidence pointed to a pervasive egalitarianism that perhaps came from or perhaps produced a collectivist and communitarian ethos.

A comment from one parent captured the communitarian spirit that seemed to characterize this school, in league with its community:

¹ As reported by the principal. Amish schools were first built in 1925 as the “English” school-consolidation movement began to close rural public schools (Dewalt, 2006). Prior to that date, the Amish attended only public schools. During the 20th century the Amish won the constitutional right, affirmed by the United States Supreme Court, to educate their children outside the public system and exempt from state laws that would otherwise compel their school attendance beyond the 8th grade. Given the contentious legal and the divergent cultural history, the presence of such numbers of Amish children at Willemsburg Elementary is remarkable, but by no means novel. In the US county that is home to the largest Amish settlement (Amish population circa 30,000), one-third of Amish children attend “English” schools (McConnell & Hurst, 2006). At Willemsburg a new principal altered the school culture and seemed to have effectively invited Amish patrons to entrust their children to the school. This principal has most recently established a special 7th and 8th grade for children of Amish patrons. The curriculum in these classes focuses on activities (“place-based” and “authentic”) relevant to Amish intentions for their children. We observed that all students in the 7th and 8th grade were Amish males. (English children attend the district’s consolidated middle school: as yet no English parents have asked that their children attend the Willemsburg 7th and 8th grades.) It is of interest that this rural school, with grades 7 and 8 previously removed to the district’s consolidated middle school has, with the implementation of an “Amish” program, restored the purloined grades to the Willemsburg community. If the Amish remain at the Willemsburg school, one might anticipate that some “English” students may one day join their Amish classmates in grades 7 and 8.

There's not a difference between the rich and the poor². I mean, you can have a club and you've got poor, you've got all kinds of incomes in there and it's not—it doesn't make a difference. You've got, especially with the Amish, you need help with something, they're right there to help. And they're a big factor in this community. I mean, it's, and it's not just the Amish. I mean, anybody in the community would do almost anything for you.

In loco parentis. In the other schools in the study, educators explicitly claimed to have a parental sort of concern for the children of the poor, whom they believed lacked appropriate parenting from their own families. But at Willemsburg, the stance was different. Instead of seeking to take the place of parents, the educators engaged parents as active participants in the life of the school. In fact, the Willemsburg community as a whole exhibited ownership of the school, playing an important role in defining its mission, contributing to its governance, and participating in its daily life. The superintendent claimed, for instance, “We want to create an atmosphere or a climate where parents and even beyond parents, community members in general, feel welcome at our schools.” The superintendent went further than this in characterizing the culture of Willemsburg Elementary School.

Susan [the Willemsburg principal] uses the phrase “learning community,” and I think we really have that here—a learning community, where it's not just about teachers and it's not just about the school personnel, but it's really about the community at large.

This passage is an unusual testament from any American educator in the 21st century, and

² This passage is notable for being the *only* one in the entire Willemsburg transcripts in which the word *poor* appears. The word *poverty* does not appear at all.

especially from a superintendent. As Paul Theobald (1997) asserts, the ideology, rhetoric, and practice of American schooling centers itself on benefits accumulating to individuals. Instead of *taking the place* of parents, the Willemsburg school would seem to *take the part* of community. Instead of supplanting an allegedly troubled role (parent), the school appears to augment an acknowledged legitimate role (i.e., sustaining community).

Teachers' practices implemented this perspective on a daily basis, and we observed numerous parents taking teachers up on the offer to participate actively. As one teacher commented,

My door's always open. They can spend 15 minutes; they can spend the whole day, any day they want. I think that's important, so that they can see what's going on in the classroom and so I always welcome them by doing that.

And a parent volunteer evaluated the engagement of parents in the following way: "Most of the time, it's good, by inviting parents in, and you're opening yourself up to them seeing and hearing things—not always good. But I think it carries over into the school."

As this comment suggests, Willemsburg educators were attentive to parents' and community members' perspectives, even when those perspectives challenged professional consensus. We saw ample evidence of such dynamics—perhaps most dramatically in the decision of the district to establish a seventh and eighth grade program designed explicitly for the needs of Amish families.

Teaching middle-class behavior. Because the school was not setting out to rescue the poor, teaching middle class behavior—accumulation, "high" aspirations, planning, orderliness—was not an explicit agenda. We found no reference in the transcript material to a middle class, for instance. Nonetheless, the middle-income (\$30-60,000) bracket in

the district contained the plurality of households. It may be that “middle-class values” simply prevailed as the informing ethos at Willemsburg.

Given the influence of Amish culture, however, another interpretation seems more plausible. On this view, values were at play, but they were grounded in the agrarian conservatism of Amish culture. As one of the “English” community members noted,

We are a farming community with simple values. We believe in helping one another, being honest and trustworthy, and having respect for one another. I think you can see that in most of our students. The Amish are certainly a factor. While their beliefs may be different, you couldn't ask for better people when it comes to helping others. Most of the Amish children mirror these qualities that they see in their parents.

Certainly the norms implicit in what we observed fit with this interpretation. For example, we observed few instances of discipline being imposed, and neither parents nor teachers spoke of it in interviews (in sharp contrast to what we heard at the other schools in the study). Second, classrooms at Willemsburg notably used more cooperative learning tactics than other schools in the study. Cooperation was such a theme, in fact, that the principal led the entire school in reciting the related school mission over the intercom: “*United Effort, United Responsibility, United Success.*” If, as Theobald has it, schooling along conventional (arguably middle-class) American lines centers on individualism, then something else—more communitarian and less individual, more cooperative and less competitive—was going on at this school, and seemed deeply entrenched there.

Extolling the virtue of a college degree. With 40% of its students coming from homes of Amish patrons, readers will not be surprised to hear that Willemsburg

Elementary did not “extol” college-going. In part, silence on this point³ may be a function of school level; we did, however, hear mention of the importance of college attendance among elementary teachers elsewhere. The school and district personnel were nonetheless aware that most Amish children would *not* attend college—a decision they appeared to respect and which they even seemed to understand. Arguably, such an appreciation gave Willemsburg educators a different outlook on college attendance from that held by educators elsewhere—where college-going was regarded as a social marker of success in life.

Even though preparation for college was not a motive for educating children well, academic engagement was much in evidence at Willemsburg. The teachers we observed involved students in learning activities throughout the day, and inquiry and discovery methods were more in evidence at this school than at any other in the study.

In our research protocols, the place of and conduct of mathematics education was an issue specifically addressed in interviews. We wanted to know what educators were doing with mathematics and why. Willemsburg Elementary was the only school in the study to have adopted a “reform” curriculum. The impetus for the adoption reportedly came from teachers, who wanted a more “authentic” or “hands-on” format. The faculty investigated alternatives and the school eventually adopted *Everyday Math* (University of Chicago School Mathematics Project, 2006). Parents reportedly had difficulty accepting the program, but teachers worked (“united effort, united responsibility”) to help them understand it. There are many comments to this effect in the transcript data, but one parent’s remarks characterized the general sentiment:

The new math program? Ah, there’s been a lot of talk about it. I don’t know. I

³ The only use of the word *college* is in the recollection of teachers’ own undergraduate experiences.

suppose it would be the community, it would just be me talking to other parents and all of us, especially in the beginning of the year, you know, freaking out, you know, about what they were doing....So, there was a lot of concern, but as the year's progressed and I've seen what they've been introduced to and actually understand, you know, fractions. It's amazing what, and even my first grader, and then I've talked quite a bit to the teachers about, you know, if I have a concern, you know, where it's going, so, you know, that helps....I think it's so important to know what's going on and they always, you know, are very responsive to that, so, in our individual case, that really helps our experience in school.

Teachers appeared to have been successful in “selling” the program to a skeptical (and arguably “conservative”) community. It may be that taking the part of the community, being united and responsible about the adoption decision, and making themselves open to concerns was the basis for this apparent success. Mathematics reform adoptions often founder, even in affluent districts, for lack of parental understanding (e.g., Lubienski, 2002). In this small school of 200 students, and perhaps notably, the impetus for engagement with a “reform curriculum” arose with the teachers—it was not a top-down mandate, as is frequently the case in large school and districts.

“Othering” the children of the poor. At Willemsburg, the children of the “others” were Amish. This religious minority group is clearly different from the “English” (i.e., those who speak just English and not the Amish dialect of German). The Amish live among the English as a linguistically and culturally distinct rural minority. The distinction between Amish and English is dramatically reinforced by the divergent ways

the two groups engage the world. Amish are as unmistakable as Hasidic Jews. The Amish are easy, and perhaps frequent, targets of “othering.”

There was a time at Willemsburg, not long past, when the Amish were seemingly “othered,” or at least not invited to benefit from the local public school (which their taxes support). An “English” parent told the story from her standpoint as someone who elected to rejoin the community after a time away. We quote at some length because of this interviewee’s sense of the cultural dynamics involved, and of the community’s responsibility to care for this “other”:

Previous principals—or a particular principal, really—damaged the relationship between the school and the community and that was before...we moved back here. So I know that coming in, I had discussions with her [the new principal]... and... I think there’s a real sense of our community, and involving the community....Also, you know, the Amish-versus-the-English, you know, where they have their own schools ... you know, so those parents are choosing to send their kids here, which is probably a little bit of a descent within their church and stuff. So, they’re making the commitment to come here and the Amish community is very supportive. So, it’s a good feeling and when I drive down into our little town and into our school, I mean, everybody waves and it’s very much what we wanted and why we moved back here.

A school board member found a benefit to the school from welcoming and caring for the children of Amish patrons:

I think that because so many of our students are Amish, there’s somewhat of an [academic] urgency, because they often don’t go to school, or very many don’t,

... past the eighth grade. There's a seriousness about getting what we can in the years that we have. And I think that that seriousness, or that commitment, follows through into the English community.

Of the board, this member observed, "We're everyday people...people from the community. We interact ... very well with the community and that's the overall function. We're common folks." Whether or not the Amish influence was responsible for this world view, prevailing norms supported a generous and inclusive version of community life. As one parent described it,

We are a very close knit community—almost like a very large family. People are generous with their help....If we need new [fire] equipment, the entire community pitches in to raise the money.

Discussion

We have puzzled now, for some time, about this school, which we have elsewhere identified as the "positive outlier" in a study where the central tendency of the data seemed to be "saving the children of the poor," a project of retrieving children of the local poor for the local middle class and rural community (Howley, Howley, Howley, & Howley, 2006). If there were comparatively impoverished families in Willemsburg, none of the educators and none of the community members with whom we spoke argued in favor of their retrieval. Apparently no one believed such a project to be necessary.

The theories of both Hofstede (2001) and Williams (1973, 1989) seem to offer interpretative advantages. On Hofstede's terms, the Willemsburg transcripts offer abundant evidence of a local culture rather at odds with American norms. This

observation can, in fact, be argued for at least four of the five dimensions of culture identified by Hofstede: (1) individualism seems clearly muted from the American norm⁴, certainly as suggested by the school's slogan ("united effort, etc."); (2) minimal power distance is clearly indicated by the near-disuse of terms related to poverty—an extreme egalitarianism in a nation already ranked low on power distance; (3) uncertainty avoidance is perhaps implied by the way in which the reform mathematics program was adopted by arguably cautious teachers and by the community's insistence on open communication; (4) as with individualism, the evidence in favor of a judgment of a "feminine" culture from the Willemsburg data seems strong to us: relationships, nurturing, and cooperation are all in evidence from both community and educator informants, as is a lack of testimony stressing "success."; finally (5) there is evidence, in this agrarian community, of a longer time orientation than prevails in the national culture; interviewees articulate the past and connect it to present and future..

Among others, Paul Theobald (1997) has specifically noted the cyclical time-orientation and risk averse character of agrarian communities. These observations are germane to the cultural dissonance between the prevailing Willemsburg ethos and the national "culture" of the US as diagnosed by Hofstede. The link is historical and concerns the conversion of the United States from a strongly agrarian society to an industrial and post-industrial world power. The conversion has made of the once agrarian nation of small holders the world leader of a modernist, cosmopolitan society of transnational corporations. The history links the analysis of Hofstede, the avowed modernist, to the

⁴ Scores for nations studied by Hofstede are available in his printed works but also online at <http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/>. Briefly, the US is low on power distance, highest of all nations on individualism, high-middle on masculinity, low-middle on uncertainty avoidance, and low on long-term orientation.

critique of Williams, who is avowedly hostile to modernism in its varied manifestations. Willemsburg looks to us like one of Williams durable marginalia—and its durability is perhaps a proof of the viability of the culture on view there.

In this assessment of durability, moreover, one must particularly prize the strong contribution of the Amish culture. Indeed, it seems that the school and the community receive a great deal of instruction from their Amish neighbors and colleagues. Donald Kraybill (see., e.g., Kraybill & Olshan, 1994), among others (including Paul Theobald and Wendell Berry) has argued for a view of the Amish that disclose them as considerate users of technology, whose consideration is exercised in the name of sustaining community. Nothing in the interview transcripts, in fact, suggests that our “English” interviewees saw the Amish as quaint, ineffectual, or backward. Instead, they seemed to acknowledge a remarkable contribution to the health of both school and community.

One might ask if there are any implications to be drawn from this community’s accomplishment for the rest of the nation. Of course, there are—and they have often been drawn by others. David Orr has argued, for instance, the need to “re-ruralize” American education. Implicit in Wendell Berry’s many observations is the need to divest American farming from its dangerous dependence on fossil fuels—to make agriculture less industrial and more agrarian. The Amish show how this might be done—their project is not standardized, not globalized, and not acquisitive in an industrial or capitalist sense. Beyond specifically rural themes, however, the Willemsburg counter-text to the national culture suggests that community (as many scholars have argued) is a clearly functional part of life. Its functionality is perhaps so great, that once supplanted by a primary devotion to individualism, human lives are subject to otherwise avoidable threats and

disasters. Individualist competition may not provide all the benefits that the champions of American leadership of globalization suggest it will.

There is, in conclusion, another implication, perhaps less contentious, to draw. This school was the only one among those we studied to retain its honor as “doing well by impoverished students” over the long term. The others in the study were neither identified in the prior nor in the subsequent years. United effort continued to yield united result in the Willemsburg school. Perhaps an education founded on cooperation, hard work, and relationships is a truer one than the schooling (so prevalent) founded on greed (global economic combat) and vanity (individual victory over all other global economic warriors). One imagines that Raymond Williams would agree.

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