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*The Literacy Myth at Thirty*¹

The new *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* defines “literacy myth” thus:

Literacy Myth refers to the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary and historical, that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility. Despite many unsuccessful attempts to measure it, literacy in this formulation has been invested with immeasurable and indeed almost ineffable qualities, purportedly conferring on practitioners a predilection toward social order, an elevated moral sense, and a metaphorical “state of grace.” Such presumptions have a venerable historical lineage and have been expressed, in different forms, from antiquity through the Renaissance and the Reformation, and again throughout the era of the Enlightenment, during which literacy was linked to progress, order, transformation, and control. Associated with these beliefs is the conviction that the benefits ascribed to literacy cannot be attained in other ways, nor can they be attributed to other factors, whether economic, political, cultural, or individual. Rather, literacy stands alone as the independent and critical variable. Taken together, these attitudes constitute what Graff has called “the Literacy Myth.” Many researchers and commentators have adopted this usage.² (See Fig. 4.1. Note the range of “literacy myths.”)

The inclusion of “literacy myths” in a state-of-the-art multi-volume reference work testifies to the import and power of the phrase descriptively, conceptually, analytically, and metaphorically or rhetorically—not necessarily with full endorsement or consistency—by scholars and commentators in many fields for many years. In much of the academy, this broad recognition of *The Literacy Myth*, the book, and its chief concept, interpretation, and way of understanding is part of the accepted wisdom and discourse—if not always in the ways I intended it. Joining a canon that I set out to challenge and change in the 1970s and 1980s admittedly is sometimes strange or strained. So, too, was the need especially in *The Literacy Myth*’s earlier years to reject charges that, as a critic of

normative perspectives on literacy (in that discourse, a revisionist), to some persons, I was, somehow, anti-literate or a traitor to the educators' cause and investment in claims of the promises of schooling, as we see below. This continues to strike me as odd and unwarranted. After all, I make my way, and my living, through the manipulation of alphabetic symbols and the construction and criticism of texts.³ (See Fig. 4.1. Fig. 4.1 also highlights "new" literacy myths. See Appendix for original arguments in *The Literacy Myth*.)

In this commentary, I reflect on *The Literacy Myth* and the "literacy myth" on the occasion of the book's thirtieth anniversary, a special and also a sobering moment. On the one hand, I speak to its broad influence in a number of fields of study; I also consider some of the criticisms encountered. On the other hand, I discuss what I think are its principal weaknesses and limits. The success of *The Literacy Myth* may be determined at least in part by the extent to which it stimulates new research and thinking that begin to supplant it. After considering the relevance and value of its general arguments for both persisting and newer questions and issues, I reframe my conclusions about social myths and in particular "the literacy myth."

The words "literacy myth" ring familiarly, signifying an uncommon level of recognition. In this, *The Literacy Myth*'s thirtieth year since first publication in 1979, I am humbled by its achievement, impressed by its continuing relevance, but also struck by the resilience and persisting power of "literacy myths" around us and by those who deny their presence and power (see Fig. 4.1). *The Literacy Myth*'s impact is clear, its influence wide.

Most rewarding is the still growing number of scholars and research students who express their gratitude in one form or another. Although many do not share my views entirely, some seek to revise or extend them, and some argue against them, they repeatedly say *The Literacy Myth* "made my work possible," "laid a foundation for me to build on," "gave me the confidence to test and argue against normative views and received wisdom," "legitimated my work," even "changed my life." I can think of no greater appreciation. The book's influence touched many disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, and education. *The Literacy Myth* was important in the making of New Literacy Studies, critical literacy studies, and literacy studies more broadly. It is not too much to claim that the book helped to shape that field. In addition, it is foundational to the field of historical literacy studies and the active pursuit of literacy's place in many other fields of study.

Figure 4.1

Recent Articulations of the Literacy Myth

1. Updating the longstanding Myth of Decline. “Computers are destroying literacy. The signs—students’ declining reading scores, the drop in leisure to just minutes a week, that half the adult population is reading no books in a year—are all pointing to the day when literate American culture becomes a distant memory. By contrast, optimists foresee the Internet ushering in a new, vibrant participatory culture of words.” Howard Gardner, “The End of Literacy? Don’t Stop Reading,” op-ed, *Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 2008.

“But books haven’t vanished. In 2003, 175,000 books were published, an increase of 19 per cent over 2002. Fiction books were published on an average of one every 30 minutes. “Books are the hot medium,” at least about politics, newspapers report. *New York Times*, Apr 25, 2004.

Too many books? Enough—or not enough—readers? People continue to read and to purchase books. That we know far too little about what they read, understand, and take with them, and with what effects, if any, marks another side of the literacy myth and collateral expectations of decline.
2. The United States faces a “perfect storm” owing to the simultaneous and interrelated powerful forces of “economic restructuring that has changed the workplace,” “inadequate levels of literacy and numeracy skills among students and adults,” and “sweeping demographic changes driven by immigration.” “The combination of our relative (mediocre) position with respect to average performance and our leading position with respect to inequality in performance leads to concern about the growing danger to the wellbeing of our nation. This disparity in skills is related to the disparity we see in the educational attainment of our population and to the growing disparities in social and economic outcomes. Ignored, these differences may not only reduce our ability to compete internationally on a high-wage strategy, but also will surely threaten the cohesiveness of the nation.” ETS, *America’s Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation’s Future* (2007), 15.
3. “Low intelligence is attributable to entire categories of work and the people who do that work—often poor people, people of color, and immigrants. Manual work requires little cognitive input. [Relatedly, p]oor academic preparation rules out sustained and serious involvement with core disciplinary topics and material of intellectual consequence.” Ruling dichotomies: brain v. hand, mental v. manual, intellectual v. practical, pure v. applied. Mike Rose, “Intelligence, Knowledge, and the Hand/Brain Divide,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89, 9 (2008), 632-639.
4. “Rebuilding Afghanistan, One Book at a Time”: “[T]he international community has spent many billions of dollars toward the nation’s reconstruction. Yet not much progress can be seen. Poor management and lack of coordination among aid agencies are the major reasons for this dismal record, but another very simple problem has been a failure to make sure that the Afghan people have access to books and other printed materials with the information they need to move forward. This is a serious flaw that affects health care, education, and government itself.... It is important that a high government body like the Ministry of

Figure 4.1 (cont.)

- Education endorse the concept of distributing books to the population. Money is needed too, ideally from both foreign governments and the Afghan government. And experts are needed to write the simple, accurate texts that Afghans need—on subjects from health care and household management to science, culture, history and the environment.” Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Rebuilding Afghanistan, One Book at a Time,” op-ed, *New York Times*, July 19, 2008.
5. “Writing is a Basic Skill” that underlies and leads to other, higher skills. Mark Richardson, “Writing Is Not Just a Basic Skill.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Nov. 7, 2008.
 6. “Cities’ and celebrities’ sponsorship of the public’s engagement with books reminds us of the extraordinary value that society attributes to reading. It is hard to imagine another medium being promoted so aggressively. The almost unquestioned assumption seems to be that reading and talking about reading is a social good.” Wendy Griswold, Terry McDonnell, and Nathan Wright, “Reading and the Reading Class in the Twenty-First Century,” *Annuals Reviews in Sociology* 31 (2005), 127-141.
 7. “READ TO SUCCEED.” The special license plates would cost \$15 above license plates’ normal price. The extra revenue would fund afterschool reading programs for Texas students in kindergarten through third grade. “READ TO SUCCEED,” *Dallas Morning News*, Aug 12, 1996.
 8. Dana Gioia, on NEA’s *Reading at Risk* report: “This report documents a national crisis. Reading develops a capacity for focused attention and imaginative growth that enriches both private and public life. The decline in reading among every segment of the adult population reflects a general collapse in advanced literacy. To lose this human capacity—and all the diverse benefits it fosters—impoverishes both cultural and civic life.”
 9. City literacy/City defining literacy: “Chicago did it. So did Seattle. Even Austin is getting into the act. Should Dallas follow the trend toward collective reading to build community and a civic conscience? Book clubs have long been favored by the erudite who enjoy sharing their insights and discovering new ones. Now city libraries and mayors are joining the effort by encouraging citywide reading of a selected book.” [Began in Seattle with underwriting from the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund. Chicago chose *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Dallas seeks to stay away from controversial reading] “Defining Dallas: Citywide efforts to forge ties,” editorial, *Dallas Morning News* Nov 18, 2002.
 10. “Gov. George W. Bush of Texas today proposed a five-year, \$5 billion program to address what he termed a national literacy crisis among children.... There is nothing more fundamental than teaching our children how to read,” Mr. Bush said .in a speech.... America must confront a national emergency.... Too many of our children cannot read. In the highest poverty schools—I want you to hear this statistic—in the highest poverty schools in America, 68 percent of fourth graders could not read at a basic level in 1998.... We will not tolerate illiteracy amongst the disadvantaged students in the great country called America.... More and more we are divided into two nations: one that reads and one that

Figure 4.1 (cont.)

can't, and therefore one that dreams and one that doesn't. Reading is the basis for all learning, and it must be the foundation for all other education reforms." *New York Times*, March 29, 2000.

11. "To be considered illiterate in contemporary America is not just to struggle with reading and writing—it is to be deemed unworthy, unproductive, a bad parent, and deserving of remarkably high levels of domestic intervention." Ralf St. Clair and Jennifer A. Sandlin, "Incompetence and Intrusion: On the metaphoric use of illiteracy in US political discourse," *Adult Basic Education*, 14 (2004), 45-59.
12. With Toyota the "proud sponsor" of a full page ad in *The Atlantic* (Dec., 2005) for National Center for Family Literacy: adult woman and apparently African American or multi-racial child:
 - Because I can read,
 - I can understand, I can write a letter.
 - I can fill out a job application.
 - I can finally get off welfare,
 - Because I can read,
 - I can learn. I can help my daughter
 - With her homework,
 - I can inspire her to be better,
 - I can be a role model.
 - Because I can read,
 - I can succeed,
 - I can contribute.
 - I can live
 - my life without fear,
 - without shame.
 - I can be whatever
 - I want to be.
 - Because I can read.
13. Literacy as Freedom, UN Literacy Decade 2003-2012 The Decade was launched under the banner Literacy for all: voice for all, learning for all. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Education for All: Literacy for Life* asserts without qualification that Literacy is a right. "Literacy should be understood within a rights-based approach and among principles of inclusion for human development." Benefits of literacy [for life] include: human benefits—self-esteem, empowerment; political benefits—political participation, democracy, ethnic equality, post-conflict situations; cultural benefits—cultural change, preservation of cultural diversity; social benefits—health, reproductive behavior, education, gender equality; economic benefits—economic growth, returns to investment.
14. "All it takes is books in the home.... Books had a huge effect even when wealth disparities were accounted for.... [I]f Canadians found it important enough to stock their homes with books, more of their children would soar in school, and

Figure 4.1 (cont.)

in life, too. If reading were cool, the sky would be the limit for Canadian 15-year olds, and eventually for the Canadian economy.

“Canada should try to become the world’s most literate nation. The potential benefits are great. A country that is highly literate is more than just smart. It has high aspirations, and the means to achieve its ambitions. A wealth of ideas, rather than natural-resources wealth alone, is the foundation of a nation’s prosperity in the new economy. Literacy is the greatest natural resource a country could have. It’s renewable, too.

“A literate country is not a country of PhDs in English or French literature. It is a country whose young people are prepared for the one constant in their futures—change.... Only the literate can keep up in the learning economy.

“Canada will never be a manufacturing power ... a military power... But it can be a reading power.... Canada needs to become obsessed with reading [like it is with ice hockey.]” “Here’s to a new goal: most literate nation,” *The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 31, 2004.

15. You are What You Read. Leah Price, *New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 23, 2007.
16. “Historian Harvey Graff has worked to debunk the ‘literacy myth’ that links literacy, schooling, modernization, democracy, and individual social mobility, but such critical voices have had little impact on the public or its institutions. Regardless of whether people are actually spending much time reading, they honor and encourage it to a remarkable extent.” Wendy Griswold, Terry McDonnell, and Nathan Wright. “Reading and the Reading Class in the Twenty-First Century.” *Annuals Reviews in Sociology* 31 (2005), 127-141.

The Literacy Myth also contributed to the unusually strong part that historical research has played in the making of literacy studies. It helped to legitimate, define, and shape critical approaches to the study and interpretation of literacy. It suggested frameworks, approaches, sources, and methods.⁴

Of course, not all agree.... Literacy myths continue to sprout like weeds. (See Fig. 4.1.) Consider a telling example. In an intemperate response to my own and Brian Street’s criticisms of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) international report, *Literacy Economy and Society*, Stan Jones, Center for the Study of Adult Literacy, Carleton University, “took grave exception” to our comments.⁵ With the goal of “ending the myth of the ‘Literacy Myth,’” Jones ironically announced: “one of the enduring myths of academic literacy research is that Graff laid to rest ‘the literacy myth’ once and for all. He did not.” (I never claimed any such achievement. I do not believe that that, in fact, is possible.) Jones revealed a frequent misconception of myth and its workings.

Adopting a characteristic common to criticism of *The Literacy Myth*, Jones not only misunderstood social and cultural myth, he also exaggerated the terms and tenor of our criticism of the international quantitative survey. He ignored arguments raised against the intellectual, political, and social context, including the epistemology, of the social scientific research and interpretive traditions in which he worked and its implications for the study of literacy.

With others, Jones missed basic points. Never did Street or I claim that there was *no* relationship between, in Jones' words, literacy and economic success, income and literacy skill, labor force attainment and literacy, and occupational change and literacy. (See Appendix 1) To the contrary, we emphasized their complexity, variability, and contradictoriness in relationships among key factors, and in more general explanatory and interpretive terms that shape expectations, theory, and policy. Never did we allege that literacy was unimportant. Unwittingly, in the mode of his attack, Jones elevated the power of the "literacy myth."⁶ He did nothing to "end the myth of the 'Literacy Myth.'" (See, for example, Fig. 4.1.)

The conception and power of the literacy myth depend, on the one hand, *on the understanding of myth*—including myth as a mode of understanding and communication—and, on the other hand, *on history*—the shaping power of the past. As he did with myth, Jones denied the relevance of historical understanding: "I have never understood why researchers such as Graff and Street who argue that literacy is narrowly specific to time and place should assume that relationships between literacy and anything that held over 100 years ago should necessarily hold today. Surely, any sensible understanding of how societies change must allow for changes in the relationship between personal characteristics and life chances."

Jones mocked arguments that Street and I, as anthropologist and historian, would not, and did not make. He also alluded to the reflexive linking of literacy with change, another literacy myth. The practice of arguing against what is not said is a common tactic of critics of *The Literacy Myth*. There are lessons about literacy—that is, reading and writing—here too.

To the contrary, I pointed to the lack of attention to history in the IALS study, including the historical context of its creation, application, and interpretation. As a faithful adherent of the literacy myth, Jones eschewed social, cultural, political, and economic contexts, including criticism of different conceptions of literacy and epistemologies of its

research. Hostility to qualitative, ethnographic, and historical research or other alternatives to his own statistical, economic data and methods also marks Jones' stance. Conviction in "strong" theories that link possession of literacy directly to major cognitive, economic, political, social, and cultural transformations is another element.⁷

Caught in his own contradictions, Jones cannot see this. There is no place for the benefits of history, especially an interdisciplinary history, in his view.⁸ History's contributions include much needed perspective. They allow us to reach out for new, different, and even multiple understandings of ourselves and others, often in their interrelationships: History mandates focusing and refocusing the lenses of time, place, and alternative spaces. It probes and prompts us to comprehend what has been, what might have been, and what might be: choice, agency, and possibility, in their fullness and their limits. Its values and virtues are rooted in the powers of comparison and criticism, taken together. An underutilized font of needed criticism, history can also be a source of liberation: freedom from the fetters of the present as well as the past. Historical analysis and interpretation often have great power in stimulating fresh views, novel questions, and new understandings. This is the past alive in the present and shaping the future, not a dead hand hanging over us. It is a human science. This is the practice that I tried to develop in *The Literacy Myth* and subsequent research on the history of literacy. The power of the past in the historically-derivative literacy myth's hold on the present demands no less.

Myth as Mode of Analysis, Understanding, and Communication

For the literacy myth, history and myth inseparably intertwine. Myth itself becomes a mode of interpretation—explaining or narrating—and a means to communicate that understanding, not unlike reading and writing themselves (and their analogues). This includes recognizing literacy and the literacy myth as ideology and also as culture, and criticizing that ideology and culture. It also mandates critical exploration of the relationships between and among material reality, social relationships, institutions, policy, expectations, and social theory.

Yet the central, critical role of myth is often misunderstood: Such attitudes about literacy represent a "myth" because they exist apart from and beyond empirical evidence that might clarify the actual functions, meanings, and effects of reading and writing. Like all myths, the literacy myth is not so much a falsehood but an expression of the ideology of those who sanction it and are invested in its outcomes. For this reason,

the literacy myth is powerful, resistant to revision, and longstanding.⁹ Contradicting popular notions, myth is not synonymous with the fictive or the false. By both definition and means of cultural work, myths can *not* be wholly false. For a myth to gain acceptance, it must be grounded in at least some aspects of perceived reality and can not explicitly contradict all ways of thinking or expectations. Partial truths are not falsehoods. (See Fig. 4.1. We can observe the uses of myth in assertions of “literacy myth.”)

Little did I think about these issues in 1971 when I wrote my first seminar paper on literacy. This was an exploration of the value of the 1861 Canadian Census for the study of literacy by historians of social structure and education. I began to think more about them by 1975 when I completed the dissertation that provided the basis for *The Literacy Myth* in 1979.¹⁰ The semantic crystallization that stimulated the book’s title followed the completion of the dissertation by about two years. I struggled to find the best title for both intellectual and marketing purposes. Initially, its power lay more with expressive rhetoric than influencing discourse. I had no inkling then of its appeal, power, persistence, or prominence.

I was more aware of the questions my foray into literacy data raised with respect to the social and political currents of the 1960s and 1970s, on the one hand, and the new social history and questions of social theory, on the other hand.¹¹ All historical works are at least in part products of their own times. For better *and* for worst, *The Literacy Myth* reflects and grew from the unprecedented interest and concern about education’s relationships with social inequality, declining cities, race, discrimination, poverty, and the radical analysis and prescriptions that accompanied them. Influential critics ranged from Paul Goodman to Paulo Freire with John Holt, Herbert Kohl, Jonathan Kozol, George Dennison, and a number of others in between. With the Vietnam War overheating the social caldron, the plight of inner cities’ protests and “riots” in the streets, radical politics pivoted around race, gender, and age. The contradictions of democracy’s most-favored nation were very real. Those surrounding schooling had very sharp edges. It was no accident that the interests and the methods, sources, and conceptions of historians and historical social scientists were changing at the same time.¹² Researchers probed the roots of current relationships in new ways with renewed vigor. The seeds of contemporary arrangements and the value of social theory mandated new, critical studies. The roots of my own, and others’ focus on literacy, lay here.¹³

The Literacy Myth and Literacy Myths

The Literacy Myth begins with contradictions: “A literacy myth surrounds us. Literacy is considered a basic human right and a tool for productive citizenship and fulfilling lives, yet world illiteracy continues at a high rate. Although literacy is closely associated with basic western values and key elements of our social thought, tests reveal that children are not learning to read.”¹⁴ Problems inherent in the “literacy myth” start with confusions over the meanings of the word “literacy” and efforts to measure it. Literacy has been defined in various ways, many offering imprecise, yet progressively grander conceptions and expectations of what it means to read and write, and what might follow from those practices, attitudinally and cognitively, individually and collectively.¹⁵

The vagueness of such definitions allows for conceptions of literacy that go beyond what has been examined empirically, thus investing literacy with the status of myth. Since mythos is grounded in narrative, and since narratives are fundamentally expressions of values, literacy has been contrasted in its mythic form with a series of opposing values that have resulted in reductive dichotomies such as “oral-literate,” “literate-pre-literate,” “literate-illiterate,” and other binaries that caricature major social changes. In such hierarchical structures, the “oral,” “preliterate,” and “illiterate” serve as the marked and subordinate terms, whereas “literate” and “literacy” assume the status of superior terms. Such hierarchies reinforce the presumed benefits of literacy and thus contribute to the power of the myth. (See Fig. 4.1.)

Only by grounding definitions of literacy in specific, contextualized, and historical particulars can we avoid conferring on literacy the status of myth. In contrast with its presumed transformative “consequences,” literacy historically has been characterized by tensions, continuities, and contradictions. In other words, when examined closely, literacy’s history often contradicts the “literacy myth.” Regardless, major elements of the literacy myth exert powerful influence, for example, the myth of literacy decline; the myth of the superiority of the Roman or Greek alphabet; the myth of literacy’s link to economic development and social advancement; and the myth of literacy and democracy. In contemporary popular discourse, literacy is represented as an unqualified good, a marker of progress, and a metaphorical light making clear the pathway to progress and happiness. The opposing value of “illiteracy,” in contrast, is associated with ignorance, incompetence, and darkness.

Given such sentiments, it is hardly surprising that discussions of literacy are characterized by persistent fears of decline. In this discourse, the decline of literacy is taken as an omnipresent given and signifies generally the end of individual advancement, social progress, and the health of the democracy. Such associations represent a powerful variant of the literacy myth. That the myth of decline is largely unsupported by empirical evidence has done little to reduce its potency in contemporary discourse.¹⁶ Rather, the myth is argued by anecdote, often rooted in nostalgia for the past, and selective reading of evidence. The myth of decline neglects the changing modes of communication, and in particular the increasing importance of media that do not depend completely on print. Literacy myths are also rooted in culture and ideology, institutions and policies, and expectations.

The bias toward the alphabet resulted in what its proponents (and their critics) called a “great divide,” with rational, historical, individualistic literate peoples on one side, and “non-logical,” mythical, communal, oral peoples on the other.¹⁷ The assumed link between literacy and economic success is one of the cornerstones of Western modernization theories. Literacy or at least a minimal amount of education is presumed to be necessary and sufficient for overcoming poverty and surmounting limitations rooted in racial, ethnic, gender, and religious differences. Implicit in this formulation is the belief that individual achievement may reduce the effects of ascribed social and structural inequalities. Despite such expectations, there is little evidence that increasing or high levels of literacy result directly in major economic advances. (In fact, they may well follow from, and depend upon such advances.) Although literacy and education can and have been used to stimulate democratic discourse and practices, literacy has been used to foster political repression and maintain inequitable social conditions.¹⁸ (See Fig. 4.1.)

Revising Literacy

As a recognizable field of literacy studies emerged, literacy’s significance as an important variable for many subjects across the realms of social science and other interdisciplinary histories was accepted. Its relevance expanded just as expectations of its universal powers were qualified and contextualized. Earlier expectations (and theories) that literacy’s contribution to shaping or changing nations, and the men and women within them, was universal, unmediated, independent, and powerful have been quashed, in theory and in history (if not in all practice). Literacy—that is, literacy by itself—is now seldom conceptualized as

independently transformative. To the contrary, we now anticipate and recognize its impact to be shaped by specific historical circumstances, complicated rather than simple, incomplete or uneven, interactive rather than determinative, and mediated by a host of other intervening factors of a personal, structural, or cultural historical nature, rather than universal. In other words, literacy is a historical variable, and it is historically variable.

Social attributes (including ascribed characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, and class) and historical contexts, shaped in turn by time and place, mediate literacy's impacts, for example, on chances for social or geographic mobility. Literacy seems to have a more direct influence on longer distance migration than on shorter moves. That relationship, for example, carries major implications for the historical study of both sending and receiving societies and for immigrants among other migrants. Literacy's links with economic development are both direct and indirect, multiple, and contradictory. For example, its value to skilled artisans may differ radically from its import for unskilled workers. Literacy levels sometimes rise as an effect rather than a cause of industrialization. Industrialization may depress literacy levels through its negative impact on schooling chances for the young, while over a longer term its contribution may be more positive.

This is the story that *The Literacy Myth* began to tell in 1979.¹⁹ It is a story of past, present, and future that we are still writing (indeed, still living). In three nineteenth-century Canadian cities and elsewhere in North America and Western Europe, illiteracy undoubtedly hindered people's advancement culturally, materially, and occupationally (in normative sociological terms). But the level of literacy demanded for survival did not block all progress or adjustment. Class and ethnicity primarily determined social position—not literacy or education by themselves. Literacy exerted an influence which worked cumulatively. Entry into skilled work was more difficult, and some of the limited demands placed upon literacy skills could not be met by illiterate individuals in their circumstances. The responses and techniques useful to work, institutional contacts, and other activities were more often difficult for them to acquire. Nevertheless, demands made on individual illiterates who persisted in the cities seldom precluded occupational stability, economic and property mobility, or the transactions that homeownership entailed. Nor did illiteracy prevent successful adaptation to new urban environments, access to channels of communication, or opportunities for intergenerational mobility. Demands made on literacy for practical

uses in this society were insufficient to deter some success, limited as it was, by these illiterate adults. Illiteracy was restrictive, but its limits were surmountable.

Class, ethnicity, race, and gender were the major barriers of social inequality. The majority of Irish Catholic adults, for example, were literate—and selected migrants—but they stood lowest in wealth and occupation, as did laborers and servants. Women and blacks fared little better, regardless of literacy. Possession of literacy was not in itself an achievement that brought material rewards to individuals. It guaranteed neither success nor a rise from poverty. In practice the meaning of literacy was more limited, mediated by the social structure and narrowly circumscribed for many individuals. Social realities contradicted the promoted promises of literacy. The potential uses of literacy were many, but in common activities potential literacy alone carried few concrete benefits while an imperfect literacy was sufficient for many needs. Literacy's uses were often non-instrumental ones. Yet, the higher uses of literacy and the corresponding benefits and status were often limited.²⁰ On the larger, societal level, literacy even if imperfect was especially important. This related directly to the moral bases of literacy and the reestablishment and maintenance of social and cultural hegemony. Literacy was more central to the training, discipline, morality, and habits it accompanied and advanced than to the specific skills it represented.

Historical research and interpretation challenge nineteenth and twentieth century images and understandings of the importance of literacy and, conversely, the negative consequences of its absence. Our notions about the relationships of literacy to such major processes as schooling, long-distance migrations, adaptation and assimilation to new urban environments, and chances for advancement are changing. Social class, ethnicity, race, gender, and geography emerge as key factors, but usually in more complicated and contradictory ways than we long presumed. Literacy's power and influence were seldom independent of other determining and mediating factors. Literacy was not a lynchpin in nineteenth-century society, especially in terms of the achievement of literacy erasing disadvantages stemming from social ascription. Nor did illiterates lack human resources or were they imprisoned in cultures of poverty. (See Appendix *The Literacy Myth: Précis*, Fig. 4.1.)

Experiences of learning literacy include cognitive and non-cognitive influences. This is not to suggest that literacy should be construed as any less important, but that its historical roles are complicated and historically variable. Today, it is difficult to generalize broadly about literacy

as a historical factor. But that only makes it a more compelling subject, with implications for today and tomorrow. The views that literacy's importance and influences depend on specific social and historical contexts, which, in effect, give literacy its meanings; that literacy's impacts are mediated and restricted; that its effects are social and particular; that literacy must be understood as one among a number of communication media and technologies replace an unquestioned certainty that literacy's powers were universal, independent, and determinative.

How Literacy Myths Live On and Do Their Work

Nonetheless, literacy myths live on: among the public, policy-makers, and a number of academics. (See Fig. 4.1) Highlighting the issue, British historian David Vincent speaks to the historical foundations of literacy myths and their continuing impact: "Graff's *Literacy Myth* was engaged not just with the historiography of literacy but also with the educational politics of the late 1970s. He argued with every justification that the expectations invested in the contemporary school system required critical interrogation by historians as much as by other social scientists. But however great the impact of his work and that of other scholars ..., the effect on politicians and administrators appears negligible. The myths have proved remarkably resilient. Literacy lives in forms readily recognizable to the nineteenth-century pedagogues and administrators...." The consequences of the past in the present are enormous: "it is also a direct and immediate threat to the current generation of children, parents, and teachers," continues Vincent.²¹ Criticism has its limits, another lesson relating to literacy (among other matters). Contrary to Stan Jones and others, the need for critical historical work remains compelling. The past and the present are inseparable.

The literacy myth is powerful, resilient, flexible, complex, and historically-rooted.²² Characterized by its contradictoriness, it is marked by the long duration of its hegemony. It is also marked by its potential to work constructively and progressively but at the same time with limiting or negative force, for both individuals and groups. For some persons—perhaps most impressively for African Americans, denied literacy by slave codes—their history and faith joined with the literacy myth's promise of the benefits of reading and writing to both push and pull many people to literacy. They were not alone. For others, the contradictions were too great, the opportunities to gain and practice reading and writing too limited, the payoffs neither frequent nor clear. For many blacks today and recently, the power of the literacy myth has waned,

in part owing to contradictory outcomes. For others with initial social and cultural advantages, the power of the promise seemed true. Their success was not always incumbent on the tenets of the literacy myth, but their experience stood in support of ideologies rooted in access to and achievement of literacy and schooling. This contrasted starkly with those who appeared to fail.

The power of the literacy myth lies in the first place in its resiliency, durability, and persistence. It serves to organize, simultaneously focus but obscure, and offer an explanation for an impressive array of social, economic, and political assumptions, expectations, observations, and theories, on the one hand, and institutions, policies, and their workings, on the other hand. Powerful contradictions lie at its core and in its consequences. As noted, socio-cultural myths, like the literacy myth, are never wholly false. Otherwise they would not gain acceptance or hegemony. Part of the literacy myth's resiliency also stems from the slipperiness of its linguistic or discursive condition. "Myth" is often misunderstood.

In the case of the United States, but elsewhere too, the partial "truths" of the literacy myth functioned within the context of the political and moral economies, political and social ideology, and the dominant culture, as they developed historically. Elemental struggles took place between ideologies of progress (or success) and those of decline (or failure) in the specific contexts of transformations to commercial and then industrial capitalism in an avowedly democratic republic. In the conflicts between the promise of progress and the threat of decline lay many of the ideological and practical contradictions of literacy: from literacy as "liberating" to literacy as restricted and socially and culturally controlling. In other words, the vexed question of "success" v. "failure," and their social and cultural correlates, lay at the core of the development of mass compulsory schooling and its contradictions.

A larger understanding follows from the historical development of school systems in relationship with changing social hierarchies. This pivoted on schools' ability to create a common denominator of a relatively low level of mass literacy. This level of literacy often contributed more to social order, cultural cohesion, and political stability than other possible ends. Although none of this was unique, the achievement of a peculiarly "American synthesis" relating to literacy—what I call "the moral bases" of literacy—took hold with some telling conflicts (including exclusion of literacy to slaves at a time when literacy was linked with individual religious and political salvation) and the dominance of a single standard of language, heritage, history, values, and personal

characteristics. This transpired in the face of the diversity of a society divided by class, race, ethnicity, national origins, and gender. In their own historical timing, these connections were associated with a massive shift in consensus that illiteracy was becoming a greater danger than literacy, especially if literacy was not acquired independently of supervision and instruction. Mass literacy required social and individual controls, proper texts for beginning and practice, proper tutelage, proper environments for acquiring literacy: the “common” school and its desired ends. Here were the engines and the hallmarks of the literacy myth.

Within the synthesis that gave rise to, promoted, and long maintained the hegemony of the literacy myth were dreams of mobility—making it in America—but also the facts of mobility; an evangelical Protestantism rooted in salvation for the individual and safe progress for the nation; a class structure inseparable from capitalism, its needs, and its costs; meritocratic and stratified notions of egalitarianism; radical individualism rooted in processes of social inequalities and conflict, including race, class, gender, ethnic and national origins, age, and region among other distinctions; and limits to collective action. In this constellation of factors, literacy represented an achievement, but for many people one with limits to its usefulness and its rewards. In other words, there were limits to social mobility with the assistance of literacy. Failure, however, had at least as powerful an impact as success. The consequences were the responsibility of individuals and families, not of society or schools.

In its American setting, the literacy myth also held out the promise of (but never quite promised) achievement replacing social ascription on the steps up the social ladder. In these and related ways, schools were central to the diffusion of democratic culture and ideals, but they also mediated the contradictions between democratic ideals and continuing social inequality. “Achievement,” its concomitants and failures, cut deeply into this cultural process. Literacy as symbol and as fact did not always work well together, whether for order, jobs, or citizenship. Regardless, the literacy myth lives on.

Lessons of the Literacy Myth

Myths can be expressions of collective desires, of the many and the few, of their differential agency and power.²³ Perhaps the literacy myth expresses a hope that literacy alone is enough to end poverty, elevate human dignity, and promote a just and democratic world. A less benign reading is that the literacy myth is a means through which to obscure the causes of social and economic inequities in Western society at least

by attributing them to the literacy or illiteracy of different peoples. In such a reading, literacy is a symptom and a symbol. Either way, the consequences of accepting uncritically the literacy myth are continuing to misunderstand the nature of literacy, its development, uses, and potentials to foster or inhibit social and economic development.

To argue that literacy has been accorded the status of myth is not to discount the importance of reading and writing, or to suggest that these are irrelevant in the contemporary world. That is clearly not the case. However, we may contrast the literacy myth, and its seamless connections of literacy to individual and collective advancement, with more complex and often contradictory lessons that are consistent with historical and recent literacy development and practice.

A first critical lesson is that literacy is not an independent variable, as in the myth. It is instead historically founded and grounded, a product of the histories in which it is entangled and interwoven, and which give literacy its meanings. Ignorance of the historical record, in which crucial concepts, arrangements, and expectations about literacy have been fashioned, severely limits understanding. Related to this, second, we must grasp the fundamental complexity of literacy, the extent to which it is a product of the intersection of multiple economic, political, cultural, and other factors. This realization mandates our rejecting the simple binaries of “literate–illiterate,” “oral–written,” and others that have been used to postulate a “great divide.” These constructs have been used to sort individuals and cultures in ways that are as damaging as they are conceptually inadequate. The legacies of literacy point instead to connections, relationships, and interactions.

In the literacy myth, reading and writing are a universal good and ideologically neutral. However, in a third lesson, the history of literacy and schooling demonstrates that no mode or means of learning is neutral. Literacy is a product of the specific circumstances of its acquisition, practice, and uses, and so reflects the ideologies that guide them. School literacy, in particular, is neither unbiased nor the expression of universal norms of reading and writing. It reflects the structures of authority that govern schools and their societies.

Finally, despite the apparent simplicity of the literacy myth, the historical record points to a much richer and diverse record. It underscores the multiple paths to literacy learning; the extraordinary range of instructors, institutions, and other environments; beginning “texts;” and the diversity of motivations for learning to read and write. While mass public schooling today presents the most common route for individu-

als learning to read and write, the diversity of learners, including adult learners, in Europe and North America demands flexible understandings and pedagogies for literacy development. There is no single road to developing literacy. Different societies and cultures have taken different paths toward rising levels of literacy. This suggests that the presumed “consequences” of literacy—individual, economic, and democratic—will always be conditioned by the particularities of time, situation, and the historical moment. (For examples, see Fig. 4.1.)

Such reflections offer a more complex narrative than that of the literacy myth. They may also point toward new and different ways of understanding, using, and benefiting from the broad and still developing potentials that literacy may offer individuals and societies.

Re-viewing The Literacy Myth after thirty years

What would I do differently if crafting *The Literacy Myth* today? An impossible question to answer fully or with assurance, I can identify certain key elements.

The quantitative analysis is the most problematic aspect of the book. While I must admit that the presence of numbers in such a quantity of tables and graphs by itself sufficed to persuade more than a few readers, the statistically-minded were not always swayed. The numerical data are cross-tabulations and percentages. They have the advantage of accessibility, but they do not constitute sophisticated statistical tests of arguments and relationships. To put it squarely: for statistical purposes, the numerical data are weak, albeit suggestive. Moreover, the argument presented, especially in Part I, is multivariate, whereas the data are generally bivariate. As footnote 30 on page 76 explains, at the moment when I began to replicate the analysis with more powerful statistical techniques, computer centers at two universities lost my data tapes. As I wrote in that 1979 footnote, “Multivariate replication, to my great regret, proved impossible.”

Writing today, I would also be more sensitive to the limits of the analysis and the need for more direct temporal and geographic comparisons. I would also make more, interpretively and rhetorically, of the major contradictions that the analysis discovered. I believe that that strategy might provide more ballast to the kind of social historical discourse I was attempting to fashion and deploy—and its continuing relevance and power. In the process, the connections and disconnections of the analysis to issues of social theory, social policy, and social institutions could also be strengthened. In other words, literacy, both as practice and as symbol,

and the literacy myth are contradictory and work dialectically. They can only be understood in those terms.

The Literacy Myth pioneered in its quantitative analysis and in its effort to explore and build arguments from both quantitative and qualitative historical materials. I recognized the insufficiency of either approach or method in and of itself. Today, I would attempt to probe more consistently both when and how the qualitative and the quantitative complement each other and when and how they conflict or contradict. Quantity and quality carry special burdens with respect to the understanding of literacy and its contexts.

Similarly, *The Literacy Myth* innovated with its attention, especially in Chapter 7, to variations in individuals' levels of literacy and the quality of abilities held popularly. Historically, that remains an understudied dimension of literacy. Today, with care and controls, it may be explored further, partly in relationship with the history of the book and the history of reading/readership, two important fields that were barely on the horizon of most historians in the mid- to late-1970s.²⁴ These approaches to research are seldom brought to bear on common questions or problems. They have the potential to break new ground with respect to popular literacy skills and the vexed questions surrounding the actual uses of literacy. They may also be suggestive for questions about literacy's relationships to cognition and economics.

In my view, perhaps the basic limitation of *The Literacy Myth* is the imbalance in the assessment of literacy's advantages or benefits, and literacy's limits—their inseparable, dialectical and contradictory relationships. In 1979, my emphasis fell more fundamentally on the latter. Achieving a greater balance and appreciation of complicated connections proved to be more than I could muster intellectually and discursively in the 1970s. That should be—and is, I believe—becoming an important goal for new research. Laying the foundation and beginning to erect the structure of the literacy myth remain a very satisfying and significant achievement.²⁵

The Literacy Myth: Old and New Directions

Before closing, I comment briefly on a handful of the many matters arising from *The Literacy Myth*. All of these themes merit more critical and comparative historical attention.

First: history of the book and reading. As suggested above, historians of reading, writing, publishing—of “the book,” as their enterprise is typically termed—need to cooperate and collaborate more with histo-

rians of literacy and *vice versa*. Literacy levels are often the missing link in studies of the circulation of print media and the foundations of readership. In the least, literacy rates help to set parameters for closer attention to reading of different kinds. These fields have much to teach each other.²⁶

Second: multiliteracies. Among contemporary scholars of literacy, multiple literacies—dimensions beyond traditional alphabetic or “textual” literacy—the domain of the many proclaimed “new literacies”—from digital and visual to “scientific” and spatial, and beyond—compete for attention and a place on both research agendas and, increasingly, school and university curricula.²⁷ Claims about both “many” and “new” literacies raise fundamental questions in themselves. Partly owing to an apparent lack of sources but perhaps as much to matters of conceptualization and method, in general historians of literacy have not pursued these lines.

Medieval and early modern scholars, however, reveal their promise. Leading examples include Michael Clanchy’s *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* and Stuart Clark’s *Varieties of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*. Increasingly, they are joined by historians of science, technology, and the arts high and everyday who demonstrate, sometimes brilliantly, the centrality of visual and experimental modes of reading, writing, and thinking in creativity, discovery, invention, and other forms of innovation.²⁸ They point toward the need to criticize and possibly rethink the roles we assign to literacy in historical development.

Numeracy, to take one key example, is among the multiple modes of literacy. In *The Literacy Myth*, I offered anecdotal evidence that workers unable to read alphabetic texts were able to count and that colors were sometimes substituted for alphabetic markers. In exciting new research, Jorg Baten and his colleagues argue that numeracy may have been more broadly based than literacy in Western Europe than in the east, even by 1600. They conceptualize it as a form of human capital. Its contribution to economic growth and development may have exceeded popular literacy’s, especially in advance of both mass schooling and industrialization.²⁹

Third: economic growth past. In *The Literacy Myth*, I joined Roger Schofield and others in questioning a direct connection between popular literacy levels, as evidence of skill and/or cognition, and rates of literacy’s spread, and the main lines of historical economic growth and development. That connection lay at the heart of the literacy myth. We argued for a lesser and a less direct connection between literacy and,

in particular, industrialization, compared with, for example, literacy's more direct relationships with commercial capitalism. I urged greater attention to the importance of workplace experience and learning on the job, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, schooling's impact on attitudinal, behavioral, and other noncognitive attributes. No one denied the importance of literacy and education. But they were configured as less direct and independent relationships. For formulations with human capital at their core, and for proponents of the literacy myth, such skepticism verged on sacrilege.

For the past and the present, debate continues about literacy and other levels of education as forms of or direct contributions to human capital. In various formulations, versions of the literacy myth may be located and assessed differently, yet they remain present and influential. In a careful review of education and economic growth, David Mitch points to the variety of relationships examined by scholars. "[C]orrelation is not causation.... Thus, the contribution of rising schooling [or literacy] to economic growth should be examined more directly." With respect to the British industrial revolution, Mitch concludes, "other factors contributed to economic growth other than schooling or human capital more generally.... The British industrial revolution does remain as a prominent instance in which human capital conventionally defined as schooling stagnated in the presence of a notable upsurge in economic growth," despite expectations to the contrary. Such historical instances "call into question the common assumption that education is a necessary prerequisite for economic growth."³⁰ Of course, this does not deny that it is significant.

Fourth: economic growth recent and present. But what of the fate of the literacy myth in more recent decades and the present? Has post-industrialism's dependence on advanced technology and the knowledge economy's dependency on advanced education proved it correct or made it obsolete? Mitch offers a mixed verdict, finding that increases in mass schooling seem to explain growth in relatively short periods of time, "with a more modest impact over longer time.... [S]chooling should not be seen as either a necessary or sufficient condition for generating economic growth." There are many other possible influences.³¹

Others disagree.³² In their new book *The Race Between Education and Technology*, economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz offer the fullest brief for the United States' economic (and political) dependence on human capital whose foundation is rooted in education. In their view, technologies stimulate advances in productivity when they

are they are used by workers prepared to operate new machines. Rising levels of education constitute that preparation and account for what they proclaim “the human capital century.” Goldin and Katz believe that today’s economy requires an even higher level of education and fear that may not be developing.

The argument is powerful but not completely persuasive. It shares much with the beliefs regarding both education and technology that underlay the literacy myth (sometimes adjusted for inflation over time). In a trenchant review, political scientist Andrew Hacker responds, “I’ll grant that their correlations show that education and economic growth have risen in tandem. But it just might be that the causation runs the other way. As the production of goods and services becomes more efficient, not only does national wealth increase, but there is less need for teenage labor. So society finds itself able to underwrite more schools and colleges, and keep more young people in them longer.”³³

Hacker and others point to complications in the relationships among education, high technology, and jobs. While the income gap between college graduates and others has widened, the “outsized sums accruing to the very top tiers” account for a great deal of the difference, not the earnings of graduates as a whole. The intellectual emphasis in much of the college curriculum and the job skills mandated for the workforce do not match well. Even more important is the fact that an enlarging chasm exists between the rising numbers of graduates in technological fields and the more limited number of jobs expected to be available for them. For example, the estimated number of engineers graduating by 2016 is four times greater than the expected number of new jobs.

Cutting across these relationships is another pattern that raises even more questions for the literacy myth. Hacker notes that the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* “lists hundreds of jobs involved with high-tech instruments, including installing, repairing, and debugging them. These workers outnumber college-trained scientists, and even engineers.” These technicians are most often high school graduates who meet the demands of their jobs primarily with the knowledge gained at work. High-tech employers do not always seek workers with degrees.³⁴ Yet these technicians are central to the needs of a post-industrial knowledge economy as we know it, despite their uncomfortable connection with the expectations derived from the literacy myth.

That is not all. There is good reason to envision today’s economy in different terms. Connecting the present with the past, in *One Nation*

Divisible, Katz and Stern write: “Much like early twentieth-century America . . . , abrupt economic change—the introduction of new technologies and modes of organizing work—led in two quite different directions, toward a high and a low road to increased productivity” The resulting bifurcation of work creates a great divide between a high path to raising productivity through high-performance workplaces, worker training and participation, wage incentives, and job security. The low road reduces labor costs by outsourcing labor, employing fixed-term and part-time contracts, and lobbying government to reduce real minimum wages and the power of unions.³⁵ It owes little to literacy and education.

Many of the fastest growing jobs cluster on the low road. In one analysis, jobs in the lowest quartile of earnings will account for about 40 percent of growth in the top thirty occupations. These include many food and service workers, clerks, guards, nurses, and computer software engineers. Katz and Stern summarize: “Less than 25 percent of the top thirty jobs will require a bachelor’s degree or higher; 54 percent will require short on-the-job training. Outside the top thirty, 25 percent of new jobs will require a bachelor’s degree or more—but almost 50 percent will require no more than short-to-medium-term on-the-job training.” Seventy-five percent will require less than an associate’s degree.³⁶ Poorly paid, dead-end jobs that lack benefits also appear within the most technologically sophisticated industries. Contrary to many predictions, models, and expectations, the literacy myth remains very much with us in the early twenty-first century, often contradictorily as the post-industrial economy takes this bifurcated form.

Fifth: developing nations past and present. The last century and a half witnessed what we may call the globalization of the literacy myth.³⁷ Literacy—usually in one or another form of the literacy myth—takes pride of place, at least symbolically, in many designs for rapid economic and social development. In some cases, the inspiration lies in an image, not a clear and accurate vision, of an earlier developing west. In others, it may be an elaborate blueprint. In some cases, the imperative or stimulus is internal to the target state, in Tokugawa Japan, Russia and the Soviet Union, or China, among prominent cases. In others, especially after World War II, impetus, “aid,” or detailed plan was exported from the west by development specialists in universities, NGOs, government agencies, or the United Nations. Both could be embedded in national literacy campaigns.³⁸ Both derived to some extent from myths about the place of literacy in modernization. Ironically, a number of efforts included alphabetic or linguistic reform and simplification based on erroneous

assumptions about indigenous alphabets or characters that followed from the literacy myth's canonization of the classical Greek alphabet.

Thus the adoption of the literacy myth could derive from a limited understanding, or a better comprehension of efforts at making societies, economies, or polities more literate, and their limits; in effect acts of imitation or mimesis. At stake was the effort to compete or catch-up with, or surpass other nations, sometimes from a foundation in a different or opposing political ideology or organization. We know too little about the actual operation of these attempts at mass literacy and their impacts. There is reason to believe that they may be more effective at raising literacy rates and beginning accelerated development in the short- than in the long-run. In the longer-term, both literacy and other stimuli for growth may stall or decline. Further growth depends on internal developments aimed at supporting it, greater resources to commit, institutional articulation, and social and cultural changes, at home and abroad, that sometimes precede but at other times follow economic development.

With its decidedly mixed record of assisting literacy and development, UNESCO remains one of the last bastions of unqualified literacy myths. Its most recent World Literacy Decade, 2003-2012, proclaimed under the banner of *Literacy as Freedom: Education for All (EFA), Literacy for Life*. At the launch in February, 2003, Deputy Secretary General Louise Frechette stressed, "literacy remains part of the unfinished business of the 20th century. One of the success stories of the 21st century must be the extension of literacy to include all humankind."

Emphasizing that two-thirds of all illiterate adults were women, Ms. Frechette declared literacy a prerequisite for a "healthy, just and prosperous world": "When women are educated and empowered, the benefits can be seen immediately: families are healthier; they are better fed; their income, savings and reinvestments go up. And what is true of families is true of communities—ultimately, indeed, of whole countries." "Literacy and Gender" constituted the focus of the first two years. With its emphasis on literacy as freedom, the initiative was designed to "free people from ignorance, incapacity and exclusion" and empower them for action, choices and participation.³⁹ Here is the literacy myth in action. Ironically, UNESCO lacked the funds to tell the world about its latest campaign for Literacy for Life.

The Future of the Literacy Myth: Increasing Its Legibility and Transparency

The final sentences of *The Literacy Myth* comprise one important element that I would change, and several that I would not:

The underlying assumptions of the importance of literacy ... have been maintained to the present, uncritically accepted, for the most part, and constantly promulgated. These assumptions, tied to modern social thought and theories of society, of social change, and of social development, form the basis of the "literacy myth." The paradigms of progressive, evolutionary social thought have outlived their usefulness and are in a state of crisis, as more and more critics and commentators illustrate. This does not mean of course that literacy ... has not been important or can not be potentially more important.

If we are to understand the meanings of literacy and its different values, past and present, these assumptions must be criticized, the needs reexamined, the demands reevaluated. The variable and differential contributions of literacy to different levels of society and different individuals must be confronted. Demands, abilities, and uses must be matched in more flexible and realistic ways, and the uses of literacy seen for their worth, historically and at present. Literacy, finally, can no longer be seen as a universalistic quantity or quality to be possessed however unequally by all in theory. Needs, aspirations, and expectations must be best met for all members of society.⁴⁰

The Literacy Myth ends with these words: "literacy must be accorded a new understanding—in historical context. If its social meanings are to be understood and its value best utilized, the 'myth of literacy' must be exploded."

Is it possible to lose or overcome, transcend, or explode the literacy myth? Or is our critical task a *different* one: to understand and mold it for individual and collective well-being and progress? Do we in fact *need to retain* literacy myths? Can the literacy myth be transformed and redirected?

Our task is *not* to disprove or "explode" the literacy myth, but to understand it, and reinterpret it to serve more equitable, progressive humane goals. The most useful future for the literacy myth depends on increasing its legibility and transparency. In an age of multiple literacies and economic decline, we have no choice. The costs of waiting are too great.

Appendix

What *The Literacy Myth* (1979) Actually Stated: A Précis

The Literacy Myth begins “A literacy myth surrounds us. Literacy is considered a basic human right and a tool for productive citizenship and fulfilling lives, yet world illiteracy continues at a high rate. Although literacy is closely associated with basic western values and key elements of our social thought, tests reveal that children are not learning to read” (2).

“[I]lliterates clearly seized a variety of approaches to adaptation and adjustment, in confronting their urban environments and in attempting to reduce the social structural forces they met. Family formation, family structure, patterns of home and property ownership, residential patterns—these were all drawn on by the illiterates, as they sought to survive and sometimes succeed in an unequal society. These were not the actions of marginal, disorganized, or isolated men and women, whose illiteracy was paralytic...” (113).

“Three themes unify this analysis of literacy and illiteracy.... Each holds significance for revision and re-interpretation. These threads...converged in the thought (113) and assumptions about the uneducated, the immigrant, and the poor, contributing to arguments and social theories that have dominated discussions of the importance of literacy to both the nineteenth and the twentieth century... (114).

“The first theme concerns the nineteenth-century views of immigrants, especially the Irish and Catholics, as the illiterate, disorderly, dissolute, and unwashed dregs of their society who brought their problems to North America with themselves. Despite this long-accepted conclusion, the great majority of migrants to these cities, regardless of origins, religion, age, or sex, were literate, confirming other research which directly relates distance of migration to literacy. North America received a select group of immigrants, including the Irish, who, nevertheless, often remained poor despite their education. The illiterate, moreover, were selected as well—negatively—by the disadvantage of their ascriptive characteristics, especially in ethnicity, but also in race, sex, and age” (114).

“Second theme: Social thought and social ideals have, for the past two centuries, stressed the preemption of ascription by achievement as the basis of success and mobility, and the importance of education and literacy in overcoming disadvantages deriving from social origins. In the

three cities, in 1861, however, ascription remained dominant. Only rarely was the achievement of literacy sufficient to counteract the depressing effects of inherited characteristics, of ethnicity, race, and sex. The process of stratification, with its basis in rigid social inequality ordered the illiterates as it did those who were educated. Only at the level of skilled work and its rewards did literacy carry a meaningful influence. Literacy, overall, did not have an independent impact on the social structure: ethnicity, primarily, mediated its role, while literacy largely reinforced that of ethnicity. Literacy's very distribution, along with its economic value, followed this pattern of ethnic differentiation. . . . Illiteracy (114) of course was a depressing factor; the converse, however, did not hold true." [illiteracy a greater disadvantage than literacy an advantage] (115).

"Within these basic limits, literacy could be important, of course, to individual men and women as well as to their society. Though most of the differences remain revealingly small, literacy did result in occupational and economic advantages. Skilled work may not always have required literacy, but literacy facilitated opportunities for entry to it, and consequently, commensurate remuneration. Literacy, to be sure, carried little independent influence and its absence precluded few kinds of work; yet the acquisition of literacy brought to some individuals potential advantages in social and cultural areas as in material ones. Access to a rapidly expanding print culture (not, though, altogether distinct or isolated from oral and community patterns), literature, additional news and information, and some channels of communication were open to those able to read and write" (115).

"Third theme. A "culture-of-poverty" interpretation has predominated in discussions of the poor, the immigrants, and the uneducated. Generally assumed to be disorganized, unstable, irrational, and threatening to social order, without schooling their plight was assured. Illiterates in the three cities, contrary to stereotypical expectations, proved themselves to be far more adaptive, integrated, and resourceful in confronting the urban environment with its unequal society. Using their traditions and human material resources effectively and impressively, they strove to protect themselves and their families against the ravages of the marketplace and poverty" [purchased homes, regulated family size] (115).

"The place of the illiterate in this society . . . broadens our perspective. Illiteracy undoubtedly hindered people's advancement culturally, materially, and occupationally (in normative sociological terms), but the level of literacy demanded for survival was not one to block all

progress or adjustment. Class and ethnicity primarily determined social position—not literacy or education by themselves. Literacy exerted an influence which worked cumulatively; entry into skilled work was more difficult, and even some of the limited demands placed upon literacy skills could not be met by such disadvantaged individuals. The responses and techniques useful to work, institutional contacts, and other activities were more difficult for them to acquire. Nevertheless, demands made on individual illiterates who persisted in the cities seldom precluded occupational stability, economic and property mobility, or the transactions that homeownership entailed. Nor did illiteracy prevent successful adaptation to new urban environments, access to channels of communication or opportunities for intergenerational mobility. Demands made on literacy for practical uses in this society were insufficient to deter some success, limited as it was, by these illiterate adults. Illiteracy was restrictive, but its limits were surmountable. Class, ethnicity, and sex were the major barriers of social inequality. The majority of Irish Catholic adults, for example, were literate—and selected migrants—but they stood lowest in wealth and occupation, as did laborers and servants. Women and blacks fared little better, regardless of literacy. Possession of literacy was not in itself an achievement that brought material rewards to individuals; it guaranteed neither success nor a rise from poverty. In practice the meaning of literacy was more limited, mediated by the social structure and narrowly circumscribed for many individuals; social realities contradicted the promoted promises of literacy. The potential uses of literacy were many, but in common activities potential literacy alone carried few concrete benefits while an imperfect literacy was sufficient for many needs. Literacy's uses were often noninstrumental ones. Yet, the higher uses of literacy and the corresponding benefits and status were often precluded" (320-321).

"On the larger, societal level, literacy even if imperfect was especially important. This related directly to the moral bases of literacy and the reestablishment and maintenance of social and cultural hegemony. Literacy was more central to the training, discipline, morality, and habits it accompanied and advanced than to the specific skills it represented. In this way, we can understand the significance of literacy's perceived contribution to attitudinal and value preparation and socialization, relatively unchanging from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century. Here as well, we may locate the full meaning of the contradictions between the perceived and promoted influences of literacy and schooling and the existential reality. Literacy, it seems certain, was not the benefit

to individuals that it was promised to be; nevertheless, it had sufficient impact at the level of skilled work and in its consensual acceptance for its larger limitations and other purposes to the blurred and largely ignored. Consequently, on the basic level of social and economic progress and those who determined it, literacy was more valuable to the society's goals and needs than to those of most individuals within it. Conceptually, as should be clear, the meaning, needs, and assessment of literacy shift as the focus moves from one level of society to another. The needs for literacy, and the demands made, differed not only from the larger unit to the individual, but also from individual to individual, much as the ideals for literacy's role and the practical needs and uses of literacy were not always synonymous. Individual employment of reading and writing and the uses that reformers promoted for popular literacy were not the same, as we have seen, and, in fact, they could be contradictory, as nineteenth-century reading habits indicate. These contradiction or conflicts, however, did not interfere with the everyday employment of literacy or its social purposes" (321).

Notes

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2. Harvey J. Graff and John Duffy "Literacy Myths," *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd ed., Vol. 2 Literacy, ed. Brian V. Street and Nancy Hornberger (Berlin and New York: Springer, 2007), 41, chapter 3 above. In what follows, I draw on that article. In general, see Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City*, Studies in Social Discontinuity (New York: Academic Press, 1979; new edition with new introduction, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publications, 1991); *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); *The Labyrinths of Literacy* Composition, Literacy, and Culture Series (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

For different but related views of literacy myths, see Ruth Finnegan, "Literacy versus non-literacy: The great divide," in *Modes of Thought*, ed. R. Horton and R. Finnegan. (London: Faber and Faber, 1973); J. McQuillan, "Seven myths about literacy in the United States," *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 6(1), (1998), retrieved January 9, 2006 from <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=6&ndn=1>; Elspeth Stuckey, *The Violence of Literacy* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boyton Cook, 1990).

For the field of historical studies of literacy in general, see "Bibliography of the History of Literacy in Western Europe and North America," in *Literacy and*

Historical Development: A Reader, ed. Harvey J. Graff (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007.), 417-439; chapter 9 below.

Recently, I returned to the more active pursuit of literacy and literacy studies as the Ohio Eminent Scholar in Literacy Studies, director of LiteracyStudies@OSU, a university-wide interdisciplinary initiative, and Professor of English and History at The Ohio State University, beginning in 2004.

See Figure 4.1 for outline and highlights of literacy myths, past and present. It presents recent articulations of the literacy myth, mostly from nonacademic, more popular sources. Note the range and conceptions of the myths.

3. Beginning in the 1970s, my work developed explicitly against the grain and against the canon. I comment later on the period in which the research and writing took place. That is important in reading *The Literacy Myth* after 30 years. Although this may seem the stuff of bad jokes, in the late 1970s and 1980s, accusations that I was somehow anti-literate and a traitor to the beliefs of the academy, rooted in myth of individual advancement through educational achievement, were not so funny. In the United States, the predominant association in such responses was with the impact of schooling of the children of immigrants.

Fig. 4.1 highlights “new” literacy myths. See also Appendix on original arguments in *The Literacy Myth*.

4. Among many signs of influence is the foundational dependence of such classic works as Brian Street’s *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1984). See also Colin Lankshear with Moira Lawler, *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution* (London: Falmer Press, 1987), among many other examples. In addition, there are translations, reprints and anthologizations, keynote addresses, and the like. *The Literacy Myth*’s role in the development of LiteracyStudies@OSU is another testament. More recently, see the studies of John Duffy, *Writing from these Roots: The Historical Development of Literacy in a Hmong-American Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2007) and Lesley Bartlett, *The Word and the World: The Cultural Politics of Literacy in Brazil* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2010); “Literacy’s Verb: Exploring What Literacy Is and What Literacy Does,” *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28, (2008), 737-753; “Human Capital or Human Connections? The Cultural Meanings of Education in Brazil,” *Teachers College Record* 109 (2007): 1613-1636; “To Seem and to Feel: Situated Identities and Literacy Practices,” *Teachers College Record*, 10 (2007), 51-69.
5. See Harvey J. Graff “The Persisting Power and Costs of the Literacy Myth: A Comment on *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)*, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development and Statistics Canada (1995),” *Literacy Across the Curriculum*, Centre for Literacy, Montreal, 12, 2 (1996), 4-5; and Brian V Street, “*Literacy, Economy and Society: A Review*, *Literacy Across the Curriculum*, Centre for Literacy, Montreal, 12, 3 (1995), 8-15 [both reprinted in *Working Papers on Literacy*, Centre for Literacy, No. 1, 1997]. Graff’s and Street’s comments were invited by the Centre for Literacy, Montreal.

Stan Jones replied, “Ending the Myth of the ‘Literacy Myth’: A response to critiques of the International Adult Literacy Survey,” *Literacy Across the Curriculum*, Centre for Literacy, Montreal, 12, 4 (1996), 10-17 [reprinted in *Working Papers on Literacy*, 1997]. Jones is author of the data analysis chapters in that landmark report and also the Canadian report, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*.

Graff and Street responded, “A Response to Stan Jones, ‘Ending the Myth of the “Literacy Myth”: A Response to Critiques....,’” *Literacy Across the Curriculum*,

Centre for Literacy, Montreal, 13, 1 (1997), 4–6. [reprinted in Working Papers on Literacy, 1997].

See also Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, with its dependence on *The Literacy Myth*. Similarly, among many examples of *The Literacy Myth*'s influence, see Colin Lankshear, *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution* or Rab Houston, "The Literacy Myth? Illiteracy in Scotland, 1630-1760," *Past and Present*, 96 (1982), 81-102.

6. An example of Jones's exaggerations: "Harvey Graff (1996) and Brian Street (1996) have both claimed in recent issues of this newsletter that the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) misrepresents what literacy is and makes false claims about the relationship between literacy and other characteristics of individuals and societies."
7. See Graff and Street comments; Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*; Graff, "Assessing the History of Literacy in the 1990s: Themes and Questions," in *Escribir y leer en Occidente*, ed. Armando Petrucci and M. Gimeno Blay (Valencia, Spain: Universitat de Valencia, 1995), 5-46, chapter 5 below; Graff, "Literacy Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies: Reflections on History and Theory," in *The Scope of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Raphael Foshay, forthcoming, chapter 7, below; Graff and Duffy, "Literacy Myths," chapter 3 below.
8. On interdisciplinarity in literacy studies, see Graff, "Literacy, Myths, and Legacies: Lessons from the History of Literacy," in *The Labyrinths of Literacy*, Composition, Literacy, and Culture Series (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 318-349; and Graff, "Literacy Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies." More generally, see Graff, "The Shock of the "New" Histories": Social Science Histories and Historical Literacies," Presidential Address, Social Science History Association, 2000, *Social Science History*, 25, 4 (Winter 2001), 483-533; Graff, "Literacy as Social Science History: Its Past and Future," in *Looking Backward and Looking Forward: Perspectives in Social Science History*, ed. Harvey J. Graff, Leslie Page Moch, and Philip McMichael (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 153-154; Graff, "General Introduction" and "Introduction to Historical Studies of Literacy," special double issue, *Interchange*, 34, 2-3 (2003), "Understanding Literacy in its Historical Contexts: Past Approaches and Work in Progress," co-editor with Alison Mackinnon, Bengt Sandin, and Ian Winchester, 117-122, 123-131.
9. Graff and Duffy, "Literacy Myths," 42.
10. More explicit in my mind were the recent ground-breaking articles by Lawrence Stone and Roger Schofield: Stone, "Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900," *Past & Present* 42 (1969), 69-139, and Schofield, "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-industrial England," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 311-325.
11. I have written about the latter in "The Shock of the "New" Histories": Social Science Histories and Historical Literacies," Presidential Address, Social Science History Association, 2000, *Social Science History*, 25 (2001), 483-533.
12. See Graff, "The Shock of the "New" Histories"; Graff, "Assessing the History of Literacy," and with respect to the history of education, see Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), Katz, "The Origins of Public Education," *History of Education Quarterly*, 16 (1976), 381-408, Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).
13. See Fig. 4.1. Note the play of past and present in the figure.
14. *The Literacy Myth*, 2. This and the following paragraphs draw on Graff and Duffy, "Literacy Myths," especially 42-43.

15. In my historical work, I begin with basic levels of alphabetic literacy: reading and writing.
16. See for example, J. McQuillan, "Seven myths about literacy in the United States," *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 6(1), (1998), retrieved January 9, 2006 from <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=6&dn=1>; R. St. Clair and J. Sadlin, "Incompetence and Intrusion: On the Metaphorical Use of Illiteracy in U.S. Political Discourse," *Adult Basic Education*, 14 (2004), 45-59. See also Carl Kaestle, Helen Damon-Moore, Lawrence C. Stedman, Katherine Tinsley, and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
17. See, for example, Jack Goody, and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) (originally published in 1963), 27-68; and compare with Ruth Finnegan, "Literacy versus Non-literacy: The Great Divide," in *Modes of Thought*, ed. R. Horton and R. Finnegan (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 112-144; Kathleen Gough, "Implications of Literacy in Traditional China and India," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Goody, 69-84; John Duffy, *Writing from these Roots*.
18. See Fig. 4.1. Again note the play of past and present in the figure. For further discussion, see below.
19. See also Graff, *Legacies and Labyrinths*; Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Rab Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2002); David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).
20. This draws on *The Literacy Myth*, 320-321.
21. David Vincent, "The Progress of Literacy," *Victorian Studies* 45 (Spring 2003), 418-419. See also Wendy Griswold, Terry McDonnell, and Nathan Wright, "Reading and the Reading Class in the Twenty-First Century," *Annual Reviews in Sociology* 31 (2005), 127-141; and R. St. Clair, and J. Sadlin, "Incompetence and Intrusion."
22. This brief discussion draws on my joint keynote presentation with Deborah Brandt, "Continuing the Conversation on Literacy Past, Present and Future," for the NCTE Assembly of Research, The Ohio State University, February, 2005.
23. Discussion of lessons draws on Graff and Duffy, "Literacy Myths," 49-51.
24. SHARP, the Society for the History of Authorship, Readers, and Publishing, is one organization with which to begin. See also, for example, Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds. *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1999); David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., *Book History Reader*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006) and *An Introduction to Book History* (London: Routledge, 2005).
25. Of course, much needs to be done. For discussions of that, see Graff, "Assessing the History" and "Literacies, Myths, and Legacies."
26. See above; for example, for some of the possibilities, see Scott E. Casper, Jeffery D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship, eds., *The Industrial Book, 1840-1880*, Vol. 3 of *A History of the Book in America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Graff, *The Literacy Myth*, ch. 7.
27. See, for example, New London Group, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies designing Social Futures," in *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*, ed. Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (London: Routledge, 2000), 9-37.
28. See Michael T Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Stuart Clark, *Varieties of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. For science and technology, see for example, Eugene Ferguson, "The Mind's Eye:

- Nonverbal Thought in Technology," *Science*, 197 (1977), 827-836; Ellen J. Esrock, *The Reader's Eye: Visual Imaging as Reader Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Arthur I. Miller, *Insights of Genius: Imagery and Creativity in Science and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000 (1996)); Luc Pauwels, ed., *Visual Cultures of Science* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2006).
29. Graff, *The Literacy Myth*, ch. 5; Brian A'Hearn, Jorg Baten, and Dorothee Crayen, "Quantifying Quantitative Literacy: Age Heaping and the History of Human Capital," *Journal of Economic History*, 69 (2009), 783-808. Thanks to David Mitch for telling me about this work and to Baten for sharing this article in advance of publication.
30. Mitch, "Education and Economic Growth in Historical Perspective," *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples, July 26, 2005. <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/mitch.education>; Mitch, "The Role of Education and Skill in the British Industrial Revolution," in *The British Industrial Revolution: An Economic Perspective*, ed. Joel Mokyr (Boulder: Westview, 1999), 241-279. See also, David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe*. (Oxford: Polity, 2000). Note that literacy and schooling are not perfectly synonymous or interchangeable. Nor are specific job skills and more general cognitive advances.
31. Mitch, "Education and Economic Growth."
32. See Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Sascha O. Becker and Ludger Woessmann, "Was Weber Wrong: A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, forthcoming; online at <http://epub.uni-muenchen.de>. For a very different economic analysis, see Lant Pritchett, "Does Learning to Add up Add up? The Returns to Schooling in Aggregate Data," in *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Vol. 1, ed. Eric A. Hanushek and Finis Welch (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2006), 635-695.
- For a very interesting argument for an increasing value of literacy, specifically of writing, as a development of the so-called knowledge economy or society, see Deborah Brandt, "Writing for a Living: Literacy and the Knowledge Economy," *Written Communication*, 22 (2005), 166-197, "Drafting U.S. Literacy," *College English*, 66 (May 2004) 485-502, "Changing Literacy," *Teachers College Record*, 105 (2003), 245-260. She writes, for example, "Some analysts estimate that knowledge, most of it codified in writing, now composes about three fourths of the value added in the production of goods and services.... Writers put knowledge in tangible, and thereby transactional, form," "Writing for a Living," 166, 167. Writing itself is productive and a force of productivity, in this view.
33. Andrew Hacker, "Can We Make America Smarter?" *New York Review of Books*, April 30, 2009. Hacker notes that the United States can not expect to repeat the doubling of degrees in the 1960s.
34. Hacker, "Can We Make America."
35. Michael B. Katz and Mark J. Stern, *One Nation Divisible: What American Was and What It Is Becoming* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 180. See also Doug Henwood, *After the New Economy* (New York: The New Press, 2003); Jeff Madrick, "Goodbye, Horatio Alger," *The Nation*, Feb. 5, 2007.
36. Katz and Stern, *One Nation Divisible*, 181. See also Henwood, *After the New Economy*.
37. Of course, the process began much earlier in the history of the expansion of the West.
38. See Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, ed., *National Literacy Campaigns in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Plenum, 1987, 2nd ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2008).

39. *Literacy for Life. Education For All Global Monitoring Report, 2006* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005); *United Nations Literacy Decade: Education for All. Second Progress Report to the General Assembly for the period 2005-2006; Education for All by 2015. Will We Make It? EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008* (Paris: UNESCO/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Joseph P. Farrell, "Literacy and International Development: Education and Literacy as Basic Human Rights," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy*, ed. David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 518-534; Arnove and Graff, ed., *National Literacy Campaigns*.
40. *The Literacy Myth*, 323-324.