Preface

NEVER BEFORE IN HUMAN SOCIETY have so many individuals dedicated so much time, energy, and resources to becoming educated. What social scientists call the education revolution has caused unprecedented growth in the number of people going to school throughout the world. With each new generation the amount of education and required academic degrees spiral upward, so that what our grandparents' generation considered a normal education would now be woefully inadequate. In just 150 years, or across four generations of a family, formal education has gone from a special experience for the few to an ordinary one for most all. While it is now routine for children and youth to spend thirteen to seventeen-plus years sitting long hours in classrooms doing the cognitive work of schooling, it is a remarkable anthropological change.

It is obvious that the world is becoming more educated; what is not so obvious is how much this revolutionizes human society. When the big picture of the education revolution is considered, it is frequently underappreciated. The common opinion, including that of most intellectuals, is that all of this schooling has occurred because society has changed and one "needs it" to live in a complex and sophisticated world. Or more darkly, that education is mostly a myth and serves the purposes of the powerful to reproduce a world where they win. But both opinions miss the real story behind the education revolution: the ubiquitous massive growth and spread of education has transformed our world into a schooled society—a wholly new type of society where dimensions of education reach into, and change, nearly every facet of human life. Formal education, from early childhood to the upper reaches of the university and into lifelong learning programs, has become such an extensive undertaking that society is influenced by its logic and ideas more than the other way around, and this has been so for some time. In fact, it will be shown that along with large-scale capitalism and representative political democracy, the educa-

tion revolution should be thought of as a key founding social revolution of late modern and postindustrial forms of global society.

Unfortunately, the scholarly dialogue about what caused the rise of complex, nontraditional human societies is mostly silent about the impact of educating large numbers of people; intellectually the education revolution is a distinctly quiet one. To end the silence, four decades of research by social scientists is leading to a new way to think about the effects of education on society, opening up a much broader appreciation of how education transforms everyday life. Supported by an innovative theoretical perspective known as neo-institutionalism, a radically new assessment of the quiet revolution's transformation of society is emerging, where education not only transforms individuals—a considerable feat in and of itself—but also produces a widespread culture of education having the legitimate power to construct new types of minds, knowledge, experts, politics, and religions; a new definition of personal success and failure; new conceptions of profit-making, work, and workplaces; new ways in which social mobility occurs; a new privileging of a narrow range of human capabilities; and more. At the same time, like all robust social and moral orders of the past, the emerging schooled society takes no prisoners: increasingly one either plays the education game or risks being marginalized with a wounded self-image. Similarly, the schooled society has edged out older, traditional ways of understanding many central things of life, and some once valued ways of living have disappeared as a result. And because the same general form of education has surfaced most everywhere, the cultural transformation and the demands of the education revolution are a global phenomenon; for better or worse, the education revolution constructs and sustains significant understandings and meanings of the global culture.

To appreciate the dimensions of the emerging schooled society, one needs to dispense with the usual ways of thinking about education and the state of society. Too often, and paradoxically, education is considered either the savior or the whipping boy of postindustrial society. On the savior side, one hears the expectation that education will make the better individual and the better society, to the point that education has become the accepted master solution to all manner of personal and social problems. Low-income nations and foreign aid agencies invest heavily in human capital develop-

ment, as governments across the world make education one of their largest expenditures. Parents incessantly discuss their children's educational progress and their local school's challenges and their remedies. Sophisticated nations with long historical-cultural heritages often condemn their own future if they think their system of formal education is not world-class. Subpar universities are assumed to leave a nation out of the coming knowledge society and the global construction of new economies.

At the same time, an uneasiness about education and its role in post-industrial society exists in some quarters. It always seems to be inadequate or dumbed down from unspecified past glories. It is frequently considered as only ineptly meeting the needs of an evolving world, and the routine assumption is that there is too much education for too many people, or too little access to quality basic schooling for it to matter much. And universities are faulted for offering a watered-down version of essential knowledge needed for the common good. Business leaders routinely complain of an ill-trained workforce, and on any given day public pundits suggest that education problems jeopardize our very future.

As the seemingly incompatible visions of savior or whipping boy vie for our attention, they inadvertently promote the same assumption about education and society: the former blindly follows changes in the latter, and thus mostly just trains (or indoctrinates) individuals for positions in society. Yet this assumption is increasingly inadequate to understand the growing array of educational phenomena and their impacts. This book turns the assumption on its head by arguing that widespread education and the values, ideas, and norms that it fosters make it a robust primary institution that now uniquely shapes society far more than it reacts to it. Indeed it is education's success in shaping culture that creates the tandem savior and whipping boy images: massive secular faith in education along with frustration at unmet, albeit unrealistic, grand expectations do not come from a weak derivative institution; rather, just the opposite.

The theoretical perspective here is about how major social institutions constitute society, and how they guide behavior and emotions and influence the conscious experience of society. After a long decline in empirical support for the original institutional theory (essentially functionalism), neo-institutionalism emerged over the past decades as a viable alternative

to Marxist accounts of the origins and persistence of the structure of society. Although fruitful in shaping a productive research agenda about the effects of education on society, as a theory neo-institutionalism is mostly an insider's game, not very accessible even to other social scientists and analysts of education. A major objective here is to explain in a comprehensive fashion, as well as critique, this perspective as a working theory about the rise and consequences of the education revolution.

A challenge in examining such a vital and common institution as education is to find a way to understand what is historically unique about the everyday normal. This is undertaken in two ways. The first part of the book describes the dimensions of the education revolution and why education grew into the vigorous institution it is today. These chapters argue that the schooled society's roots are in the historical development of the university, specifically the unique social charters and functions of its Western form. Over the course of the education revolution, schooling and society in general have been pulled towards the knowledge-production and educational logic of the university. Examined here is the now extensive knowledge conglomerate of the university, its shaping of new knowledge and its credentialing of people who in turn gain the authority to enact such knowledge in everyday life; in particular, this process was intensified over the past fifty years by a supercharged form of the research university and mass higher education. This is illustrated through analyses of three research fields, their academic degrees, and the resulting occupations, all created by the university—one example each from the sciences, the social sciences, and business and formal organizations. The conclusion is that the university, with an eight-hundred-year development of its institutional charters, is perhaps the single most dynamic creator of cultural understandings in postindustrial society.

The second part explores the argument that if education is a primary founding institution of society, then there should be ample evidence that it influences non-educational institutions. Analysis of such influence on six institutions finds that the schooled society is the foundation on which many mega social trends (some thought of as good; others, as disconcerting) have been built, and with some highly ironic results. The much heralded knowledge society, the rise of new economies, and the growth in profes-

sionalism of many jobs and the workplace are direct results of the education revolution. So are the growth of contentious politics and the politicizing of ever more issues of everyday life. A world made up of an expanding population of massive formal organizations, business and otherwise, rests directly on the capacities and sentiments of educated individuals, and also on the ideas fostered by a culture of education. In religious arenas, the schooled society has not caused widespread secularization as much as it creates capacity for mass religious belief and practice. Concepts of the self, along with understandings of personal failure and success, are increasingly defined by the logic of education, as are mechanisms to ensure a normal life. And all types of traditional ways for individuals to find a place in society have been supplanted by the logic behind academic degrees. These, and other major trends, are all upon us as a result of the schooled society.

I have thought about, and played with, the ideas here ever since my graduate student days at Johns Hopkins. Numerous collaborators and colleagues over the years have helped me develop the arguments, and I owe all of them much gratitude. Almost a decade's worth of graduate students in my seminars on the sociology of education were hapless audiences to many rehearsals of the arguments herein; I appreciate their patience and generous, constructive feedback. I also thank Stacey Bielick, David Bills, David Brown, Henry Brzycki, Claudia Buchmann, Regina Deil-Amen, Roger Finke, David Frank, Saamira Halabi, Floyd Hammack, Gillian Hampden-Thomas, Michael Hout, David Kamens, Hugh Lauder, Gero Lenhardt, John Meyer, Justin Powell, Alan Sadovnik, Daniel Salinas, Maryellen Schaub, Evan Schofer, Thomas Smith, William Smith, Manfred Stock, Armend Tahirsylaj, Kate Wahl, Alex Wiseman, and Michael Young for helpful comments on earlier drafts. And a special note of appreciation goes to Emily Anderson for pulling it all together at the end; to Adrienne Henck and Haram Jeon for bibliographic assistance; and to Emily Smith Greenaway for completing the occupational prestige analysis. Lastly, portions of Chapters 6 and 7 were previously published in the *Journal of Education and Work* and *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, respectively (Baker 2009, 2011).