

not just in Texas but nationally. Esparza argues aptly at the close of the book that his study “provides a new lens for exploring Mexican and Mexican American civil rights activism in the United States” (p. 172).

Dr. Jesús Jesse Esparza’s *Raza Schools* is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship in Mexican American educational history, illuminating the ways schools were used to imagine and enact new approaches to activism, citizenship, and cultural affirmation. It serves as another historical blow to any misguided belief that Mexican Americans did not hold education and schooling in the highest regard. In fact, as Esparza soundly demonstrates, Mexican Americans venerated schools, viewing them as the cornerstone of community life and a symbol of hope. This book is inspiring and necessary reading for anyone interested in educational history, ethnic studies, Latina/o/x studies, and Texas history.

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## Samuel W. Franklin. *The Cult of Creativity: A Surprisingly Recent History*

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What exactly is creativity? Where did it come from, and why is our present culture seemingly obsessed with it? Samuel W. Franklin offers a convincing answer to this question in his book *The Cult of Creativity: A Surprisingly Recent History*.

Although prior generations spoke of *genius*, *individuality*, *ingenuity*, *cleverness*, and *originality*, according to Franklin, the concept of *creativity* did not emerge until the 1950s, as part of an impulse to “reconcile fundamental tensions between the individual and mass society, the extraordinary and the everyday, the spiritual and crassly materialistic, the rebellious and the status quo” (p. 7). Fears of succumbing to communism propaganda on the one hand and suburban conformity on the other inspired psychologists to begin exploring creativity as the key to educating free-thinking individuals for a healthy democratic society. Psychologists had difficulty defining and assessing the concept of creativity with precision, but this ambiguity helped its spread, because it allowed advocates to adapt the concept to changing circumstances and conditions.

Particularly, the creativity idea was flexible enough to flourish during both the consensus liberal impulses of the 1950s and the free-thinking, countercultural impulses of the 1960s. In fact, most of Franklin’s narrative focuses on these two decades. Both Cold War scientists and feminist pioneer Betty Friedan considered creative work to be

a form of self-actualization that enriched lives and fulfilled human potential. Despite their successes in spreading the idea of creativity to the broader public, psychologists were, according to Franklin, never able to escape the “tautological spiral” of defining creativity as something that creative people do (p. 48). In other words, the creativity concept could only be explained *ex post facto*. As a result, most of the people psychologists identified as creative tended to be those who were already in power (i.e., upper-middle-class men) or those who society had already identified as geniuses. This fact undercut the democratic aspirations of the idea.

Franklin traces the origins of the study of creativity to the Utah Conferences on the Identification of Scientific Talent, organized by psychologist Calvin Taylor in 1955. Out of these conferences emerged the idea that creativity was not something that aligned directly with intelligence, nor was it something that only geniuses had. “Creativity was ... more democratic than genius,” Franklin explains, “not only more ideologically palatable, but also easier to study and so made the findings of these studies potentially more valuable to users of psychological tests in education, industry, and the military” (p. 33). The first creativity assessment was created by J. P. Guilford in the 1950s, and it claimed to test “divergent thinking” and “tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 74). Simultaneously, advertising executive Alexander Faickney Osborn invented the idea of “brain-storming” to collectively generate creative ideas (p. 65). Osborn popularized creativity and brainstorming by authoring books such as *Applied Imagination - Principles and Procedures of Creative Thinking* (1953) and through his work at the Creative Education Foundation and the Creative Problem-Solving Institute. Osborn, Franklin argues, “believed that by helping Americans put knowledge about creativity to practical use he could help solve every kind of problem, from marital disputes to the Cold War” (p. 54). By the 1960s, creativity advocates expanded the idea beyond its initial focus on the solving of practical problems and shifted it toward “human thriving, expression and individualization” (p. 79). By 1961, William J. J. Gordon had published *Synectics: The Development of Creative Capacity*, which introduced a process for generating ideas that he pitched directly to corporations seeking to harness the creative potential of their employees. If you like Pringles potato chips and the Swiffer mop, then you have Gordon’s Synectics creativity sessions to thank, even though most of the ideas generated in these sessions led nowhere.

Although creativity began as a psychological concept tied to the arts and sciences, it was soon co-opted by advertisers and corporate leaders, who introduced brainstorming to generate innovative ideas and make rank-and-file workers feel included and valued. Although Franklin laments this pivot of the creativity idea toward postindustrial capitalism, he views it as inevitable. “Creativity never existed outside capitalism,” he concludes. “If we know one thing about capitalism, it’s that it loves novelty” (p. 203). Thus, creativity reflected a rising neoliberal social order in which individual innovations and disruptive technologies were considered the keys to solving all social problems. As a result, Franklin insists, “ongoing collective projects of change” were marginalized and dismissed (p. 208).

Despite the relevance of creativity to schooling, there is not a lot of educational history in the book. The first mention of schooling does not appear until page 70, and

Franklin never dedicates more than a few paragraphs to the role of fostering creativity in classrooms. Familiar names to educational historians such as Abraham Maslow, Jerome Bruner, and Carl Rogers appear throughout the text, as these leading psychologists weighed in on the promise and limitations of the creativity idea, but Franklin does not follow the impact of their ideas into educational settings. The chapter on “The Creative Child” mostly covers Ellis Paul Torrance and the creation of his Torrance Tests for Creative Thinking and their use in trying to identify future scientists to help win the Cold War (p. 117). Although Franklin briefly discusses the International Center for Creativity Studies at Buffalo State College and the Hasso Plattner Institute for Design Thinking at Stanford, there is little attempt to trace the spread of the creativity idea in higher education. I was also surprised to see no discussion of the rise of STEM/STEAM education, or a fuller discussion of gifted education, because these ideas arose alongside the rise of the creativity concept. Nor did Franklin mention the popularity of creativity-based television programs such as *Project Runway*, *LEGO Masters*, *Domino Masters*, *Guy’s Grocery Games*, and *The Great British Bake Off*.

Despite these minor oversights, *The Cult of Creativity* is a well-written, well-paced, and well-argued book that can be read alongside Jamie Cohen-Cole’s *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (2014) and Merve Emre’s *The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Myers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing* (2018), both accounts of relatively recent concepts forged during the Cold War that still offer explanatory power for millions of educators today.

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