



Independent

NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE

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What I Saw at the Global Revolution in Education

By James Tooley*



For the past two decades I've been on an incredible journey. It was always such a buzz when I flew into an unfamiliar country. As the plane approaches the airport, I'm always peering down, searching, investigating. I think: *Those slums may be where I find something that sensible people say doesn't exist, can't exist.*

I negotiate customs and immigration, dodging officials seeking bribes (a risk that landed me a stint in an Indian prison, but that's another story). Sometimes I am met by people I've been in touch with, and they tell me, "You won't find what you're looking for here." Often I venture alone, taking a taxi to a cheap hotel, then quickly going into those slums I've spotted from the plane or that I've inferred from my driver might be promising.

The smells, the colors, the hubbub. The familiar unfamiliar. I ask if anyone knows of what I am looking for. Of course they do. "Take that alleyway, turn left where the women are braiding their hair, there's one on your right."

And there it is. A simple building housing an extraordinary kind of school. A low-cost private school that pushes the boundaries of our understanding of what private enterprise can deliver to the poor. Then I find another, and another, and I marvel at the spirit of educational entrepreneurship that can reach places that governments cannot or choose not to reach.

I've explored sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia, and more recently Latin America for years now. I never fail to feel the same excitement I felt the first time I ventured into slums and found low-cost private schools. People denied their existence, but everywhere it is the same story: an extraordinary revolution of schools serving a majority of urban poor children, outperforming public schools, and, not surprisingly, poor families' preferred choice.

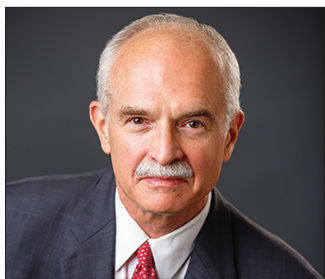
These schools emerge despite extraordinary obstacles, such as abject poverty and civil strife. One school entrepreneur said something I'll never forget, when we were speaking about the massive number of requirements his school had to meet—things like a half-acre playground, completely unattainable in the crowded slums. "Sometimes," he said, "government is the obstacle of the people."

I've spoken about these schools for years at seminars in America, and always someone asks, "Why is this revolution only happening elsewhere?"

(continued on page 7)

*James Tooley, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Buckingham and Senior Fellow at the Independent Institute, has been called "the Indiana Jones of education policy." His research on low-cost private schools has taken him to South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, northern Nigeria, Ghana, and 17 other countries on four continents. His new book is *Really Good Schools: Global Lessons for High-Caliber, Low-Cost Education* (Independent Institute 2021) (see page 3).

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Reopening with *Really Good Schools*

DAVID THEROUX
President

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an enormous crisis across America as government lockdowns and other restrictions persist, just as our book by Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan*, would predict. In addition to the health harms to those afflicted, small businesses destroyed, and the economy disrupted, the unprecedented shutdowns of public schools across the country may be endangering the future of an entire generation of children.

Although President Joe Biden promised to reopen most public schools in the U.S. within his first 100 days in office, the White House later backed off, saying that this *really* meant in-person learning only one day a week. Why? The teachers' unions, one of

Biden's biggest funders, have been using the pandemic to play politics with the well-being of children to insist on demands for massive new funding and much more. Despite CDC guidelines showing that the probability of children getting or transmitting COVID-19 is minuscule, over 50 million children remain locked out of schools. And, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine's Martin Makary has noted in "We'll Have Herd Immunity by April" (*Wall Street Journal*) that "Covid Cases are down 77% in six weeks. Experts should level with the publics about the good news."

Distraught parents facing health worries, unemployment, and strained families are increasingly losing trust in the public-school system as they frantically seek out workable educational alternatives. Many parents unimpressed with remote learning are enrolling their children in private and charter schools or augmenting home schooling with "learning pods" and micro-schooling. In the process, millions of children are being rescued from the abysmal failures of public schools and the pervasive "progressive" indoctrination.

However, what can the many other parents do who cannot afford such alternatives, espe-

cially during shutdowns and economic turmoil, as they frantically juggle work and children now at home? Our pathbreaking new book, *Really Good Schools: Global Lessons for High-Caliber, Low-Cost Education* by our Senior Fellow James Tooley (see pp. 1 and 3), shatters the prevailing myth that, absent government, affordable, high-quality schools for the poor could not exist. But they do. And they are ubiquitous and in high demand across the developing world, proving that if simply legalized, self-organized, private education is not just possible but flourishing—often enrolling far more students than "free" (i.e., expensive) government schools and at very low prices in reach of even the most impoverished families.

Parents in America can now learn that the education of their children is indeed possible—and likely far better—without teachers' unions and government meddling with absurd age-driven grade levels, worse testing regimes, and politically correct propaganda. And having experienced the first-fruits of educational freedom, parents can be open to ever greater educational opportunities. Thankfully, they now have *Really Good Schools* to show the way.

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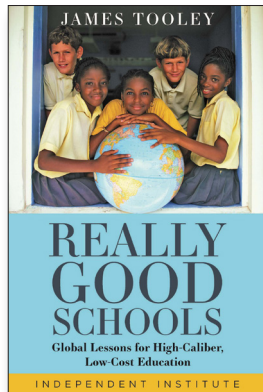
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NEW BOOK

Really Good Schools



A quiet revolution in education is taking place across the developing world—the astounding growth of private schools serving the poor, even in the impoverished regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

No one has done more to investigate and explain the phenomenon than senior fellow **James Tooley**, whose pioneering research on low-cost private schooling has taken him to some of the most troubled spots on the planet. In his new book, *Really Good Schools: Global Lessons for High-Caliber, Low-Cost Education*, he illuminates key features of this global transformation, the implications for government involvement in education, and the best steps for enabling America to become a world leader in K-12 education. Tooley even offers tips for education entrepreneurs.

By Tooley’s estimates, low-cost private schools (which deliver higher quality than their public counterparts) now educate 70 percent or more of urban schoolchildren, including those on the poverty line, and a large minority (perhaps 30 percent) of rural children. Sub-Saharan Africa probably has 74 million students in low-cost private schools, and India alone may have 450,000 low-cost private schools teaching 92 million students.

More tellingly than statistics are Tooley’s conversations with parents from Liberia to India who have lost trust in state power over education. In low-cost private schools they find accountability and its fruit: teachers who show up to class, give students their attention, and provide a safe environment for girls.

Tooley also raises key questions about the framework of education. While numerous problems emerge from its control by government, the most common may be students’ boredom and sense of dread. These are not inherent in education per se. Instruction in music and martial arts has

standards and testing yet keeps many students highly engaged. Other examples of a successful non-governmental framework of education are the acclaimed International Baccalaureate program and India’s NIIT technology training certification. The picture that emerges is a learning landscape rich in variety, engagement, and quality control—if government doesn’t control the framework of education.

What lessons does all this offer for America’s K-12 education?

Some “realist” pundits, such as Charles Murray, believe that educational reform cannot boost achievement for most students. Wrong, says Tooley. Major reforms could measurably improve outcomes precisely because the current system is so rigid, uncreative, and lacking in accountability. Real success at scale eludes vouchers and charter schools due to organized opposition by vested interests. A more ambitious vision for improving American education may prove to be more practical.

Today, a low-cost, private-school business model could be financially sustainable with tuition as low as \$3,000 per year—about \$58 per week. Families just above the federal poverty level have an average annual discretionary income of \$6,040 and could afford to enroll one child and possibly two children. So, why hasn’t the global revolution in low-cost private schooling reached America’s shores?

With numerous U.S. states having a favorable regulatory climate and several large cities having additional factors making them attractive for low-cost private schools, it may be just a matter of time before America’s school children enjoy the same educational liberation that their less-wealthy peers in the developing world now take for granted.

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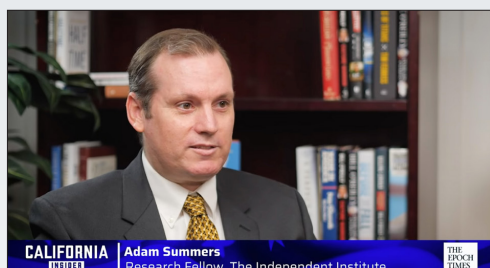
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Author, *News and the Culture of Lying and The Suicidal Corporation*

Independent Institute in the News

Center on Entrepreneurial Innovation

“California’s government has an information technology problem, which is odd for a state whose tech industry is one of the leading drivers of its economy and whose capitol is just a couple of hours from Silicon Valley... It is time the government began to emulate the success and innovation of the many private-sector technology companies that call this state home.”

—**Adam Summers** on *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 11/18/20



ADAM SUMMERS IN
CALIFORNIA INSIDER, 11/18/20

“The experts, or technocrats, want to tell us how to live our lives, can fail on a variety of axes. We have these general lockdowns that are trying to keep people inside to reduce spread of coronavirus. But you know what reduces deaths even better than keeping people inside? Helping nursing homes staff better, be safer, and protecting their patients.”

—**Abigail Devereaux** on *One America News Network*, 12/30/20

Center on Healthcare Choices

“Seniors on Medicare are the only people in the country who cannot have a Health Savings Account or direct, 24/7 access to a primary-care physician as an alternative to the emergency room. As I argue in my book *New Way to Care*, we desperately need to reform Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the disability system, and other forms of social insurance that were designed in a different century to meet different needs.”

—**John C. Goodman** in *National Review*, 2/9/21

Center on Educational Excellence

“The educational programs that Biden wishes to promote haven’t worked. Yes, he may be able to subsidize his political constituency. Yes, he may be

able to give the agitators some of what they want. But it will be at the expense of children and their education.”

—**Williamson M. Evers** in *The American Spectator*, 12/30/20

Center on Global Prosperity

“Few things are more urgent today than championing the values of Western civilization in the world’s liberal democracies, which have been weakened by the dislocations of globalization, mass migration, the Great Recession, and, now, the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.K.’s departure from the EU will not help win that fight within Europe.”

—**Alvaro Vargas Llosa** in *Fortune*, 1/27/21

Center on Peace and Liberty

“More disturbing might be Big Tech’s aiding of law enforcement’s violations of the rights of individuals at home and contributions to the military’s violation of human rights abroad. . . . Big Tech’s relationship with the American national security establishment may be stronger than was previously thought.”

—**Ivan Eland** in *The American Conservative*, 1/30/21



ABIGAIL DEVEREAUX ON
ONE AMERICA NEWS NETWORK, 12/30/20

Center on Law and Justice

“For decades, the NRA has fought New York diktats tooth-and-nail, always against anti–Second Amendment courts. But, as a result of President Donald J. Trump’s judicial appointments, the Second Circuit has been flipped to a majority of Republican-appointed judges. And the appointment of Amy Coney Barrett to the U.S. Supreme Court fuels hope that the Second Amendment might not continue being treated as a second-class right, even in New York.”

—**Stephen P. Halbrook** in *America’s 1st Freedom*, 1/26/21

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THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Great Literature and the Political Economy of Liberty

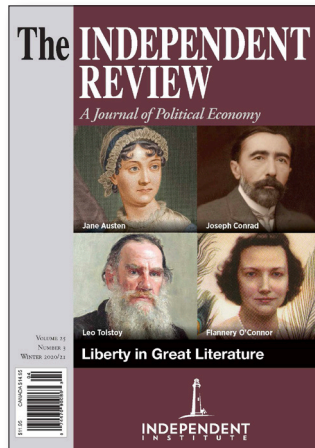
What do great novels, plays, and short stories say about the political and economic arrangements that make for a flourishing society? Contributors to *The Independent Review's* Winter 2020/21 symposium answer this question by examining classic literature from Ancient Greece to the twentieth century. Here's a quick rundown.

Legal prohibitions against murder, robbery, and theft can be justified by social utility, but do some taboos require a different type of justification? In *The Clouds* (419 B.C.), Aristophanes suggests that only a religious culture can give liberal rights their nonconditional status as moral imperatives, according to **William P. Baumgarth Sr.** (Fordham Univ.).

Economists have long used *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as a teaching tool for elucidating resource allocation and exchange, but they often depart significantly from the details in Daniel Defoe's deserted-island adventure story, explain **Steven G. Horwitz** (St. Lawrence Univ.) and **Sarah Skwire** (Liberty Fund).

Jane Austen's novels (1811–17) not only teach the virtues we should practice in order to lead fulfilling lives, but they also depict economic arrangements that recognize the dignity of all and promote human flourishing, according to **Michelle Albert Vachris** (Virginia Wesleyan Univ.) and **Cecil E. Bohanon** (Ball State Univ.).

The story of two young lovers hindered by war, famine, plague, and a jealous nobleman, *The Betrothed* (1827), is both one of the world's greatest works of historical fiction and one of the best treatises of political economy ever penned, claims **Alberto Mingardi** (IULM University in



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Milan and Chapman University).

When President Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe in November 1862, he reportedly addressed her as the author whose book started the Civil War. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe shows why slavery befits neither the enslaver nor the enslaved, explains **Robert E. Wright** (Augustana Univ.).

Some critics believe Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1867) is too disjointed to be a true literary masterpiece. **Goffrey Brennan** (Duke Univ.) and **A. M. C. Waterman** (St. John's College, Winnipeg), however, argue that it is precisely the epic novel's digressions on the philosophy of history that raise it from a mere tale of Napoleon's invasion of Russia to the highest realms of contemplative discourse.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) doesn't see the England of his time as Utopia, but he does view it as a model to be emulated elsewhere, albeit one that other societies would find it difficult to adapt, explains **Robert M. Whaples** (Wake Forest Univ.).

In stories such as *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and *The Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka (1883–1924)

depicts societies as closed systems that hinder the individual's natural yearning for freedom. **Antony W. Dnes** (Univ. of Hull) shows how they differ from societies of consensual trade, free markets, the common law, political pluralism, and individual rights.

Ralph Ellison voices the frustrations of African Americans before the civil rights era in his classic 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*. The book also shows how philanthropy can go awry when it's based on falsehoods and serves donors' ideologies at the expense of the dignity of the intended beneficiaries, explain **Cecil E. Bohanon** and **Michelle Albert Vachris** in their second essay for the symposium.

The stories of Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964) illustrate the evils of racial segregation and its consequences. As poet **Anemone Beaulier** and **Scott A. Beaulier** (North Dakota State Univ.) explain, O'Connor makes it clear that clinging to prejudices leads only to our physical and metaphysical peril.

This issue also includes Paul Craig Roberts taking to task Wikipedia and academic economists for misrepresenting supply-side economics. Roberts would know: he was one of its leading theoreticians during the Reagan era.

Also, in this issue: numerous in-depth book reviews, most of them web exclusives! See www.IndependentReview.org.

Thoroughly researched, peer-reviewed, and based on scholarship of the highest caliber, *The Independent Review* is the acclaimed interdisciplinary journal devoted to the study of political economy and the critical analysis of government policy.

CALIFORNIA GOLDEN FLEECE® AWARD

COVID-19 and California's Policy Mistakes



In the early months of the COVID-19 outbreak, California, like other states, was woefully unprepared and lacked the flexibility needed to respond effectively to the emerging pandemic. On March 19, 2020, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Executive Order N-33-20, a statewide shelter-in-place order, resulting in months of quarantine for tens of millions. In addition, scores of regulatory barriers hampered private-sector responses to the crisis and put further stress on the healthcare system.

Investigating this calamity, **Lawrence J. McQuillan, Jonathan Hofer, and Douglas E. Koehler** document key findings and offer solutions in *COVID in California: How Government Regulations Created Critical Healthcare Shortages — Permanent Patient-Centered Reforms Needed*. The report marks the eleventh entry for the *California Golden Fleece® Award*, the Independent Institute's quarterly exposé of waste, fraud, and abuse in state programs. Here are some of the report's findings:

Equipment Shortages. Federal and state actions caused shortages of critical medical supplies. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection enforced Federal Drug Administration rules delaying the distribution of sanitization equipment, masks, and various medical devices. Despite recommendations to maintain a stockpile of masks after the 2009 Swine Flu outbreak, the state had allowed its supply of 21 million N95 masks to expire.

The ventilator shortage hit California especially hard. Although Gov. Newsom stated last March that at least 10,000 ventilators were needed, by the end of July only 188 had been secured. (The state had created a stockpile of ventilators in response to the 20006 avian flu scare, but had dismantled it in 2011.)

Healthcare Worker Shortages. Before the outbreak, California was already suffering major shortages of healthcare workers, with one study projecting a shortfall of 140,000 nurses by 2030.

The state Board of Registered Nursing reported that more than 21,000 qualified students were denied enrollment in nursing programs in 2016–2017. The personnel shortage, which the pandemic exacerbated, is partly of the government's own making. Another study counted 251,100 California healthcare workers receiving unemployment benefits, in part due to lack of adequate protective equipment.

Botched COVID-19 Testing. Procuring tests was a disaster from the start. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention botched the initial rollout and covered up its mistakes, while the FDA prevented privately developed tests from reaching the market.

Vaccines. California struggled to get its allotted vaccines into people's arms, surpassing only three other states (Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia) during the first four weeks of vaccine distribution. PrepMod, the state's electronic vaccine management platform, suffered major technical glitches that delayed vaccine rollouts in Los Angeles County.

Californians deserve a high-quality, affordable healthcare system able to respond quickly and flexibly to fight emerging threats and offer lifesaving breakthroughs. *COVID in California* offers five recommendations for improving health outcomes:

- Expand and make permanent the deregulation provisions in Gov. Newsom's Executive Order N-68-20, which allows manufacturers of over-the-counter drugs to operate in the state without a license from the Dept. of Public Health.
- Permanently expand scope-of-practice allowances for medical personnel;
- Reduce barriers to entering the nursing workforce;
- Free up testing so that private labs can receive ad hoc expedited testing approval;
- Reform intellectual property protections to ensure a competitive environment for new medical innovations.

"The emergency liberalizations need to be continued in perpetuity in order to help Californians, pandemic or no pandemic, especially low-income Californians living in communities underserved by healthcare facilities," the report states. "If it is the right thing to do now, it is the right thing to continue doing in the future."

COVID in California is available at www.independent.org/publications/cagoldenfleece/.

Government “Stimulus” and Economic Recovery

In response to pandemic-related disruptions, governments around the world sought to revive their economies by unleashing the most expansionary monetary and fiscal policies in history, including a U.S. stimulus effort 11 percent of GDP.

The scope of this intervention prompted Independent Institute Research Fellow **R. David Ranson** to write his Executive Summary, *Does Government “Stimulus” Really Stimulate?* His short answer: No, not really. Government actions to stimulate output and spending were “ineffective in speeding the economic recovery,” Ranson writes.

Although economies rebounded from their tumble in early 2020, the recoveries were not associated with the size of government stimulus. “The vigor of the recovery was roughly proportionate to the depth of the setback that preceded it,” Ranson continues. “The more complete the government-imposed economic shutdown, the more severe the setback. And the more complete the reopening, the

more impressive the recovery.”

Ranson also notes that the U.S. recovery kept its momentum in the second half of 2020 despite the pause in the Federal Reserve’s credit expansion and the expiration of extra federal benefits last spring. So why did the monetary and fiscal relief contribute little or nothing to economic recovery? This is largely because (1) banks reduce their lending during periods of heightened uncertainty and (2) households use most of their temporary windfalls to pay down their debts.

See www.independent.org/publications/executive_summaries/.



Join Us at Independent TV

Do you miss in-person events? So do we! Viewers of our online public-affairs programs, however, have seen the Independent Institute make lemonade from the lemons of COVID-19 and stay-at-home policies.

Since its debut episode on July 29, 2020, our *Independent Outlook* discussion series has been viewed (as of this writing) more than 29,000 times via Facebook (13,102 views), YouTube (11,767), Twitter (3,207), and thinkspot (1,073). All episodes are archived on the multimedia section of our website and tagged “Independent TV”. Here are two that convey the program’s breadth:

- “Impeachment, Black History, Civil Liberties, Woke Tyranny, and School Shutdowns” (Feb. 10). Topics: What did the second Trump impeachment trial distract us from? How has Big Government been used to harm African

Americans? Which interest groups have Biden’s Executive Orders rewarded for their support of his election? Why have teachers’ unions opposed school re-openings?

- Capitol Protest Fallout, Censorship, Unfettered Biden Agenda, and China (Jan. 13). Topics: What should make of the January 6 storming the U.S. Capitol? What’s going on with de-platforming, censorship, and Parler? Will the Biden agenda move leftward now that the GOP has lost control of the Senate? Has China gotten worse?

Also on our website, you can find (as of this writing) 689 video interviews and presentations with leading authors, influencers, and Independent Institute Fellows.

Visit www.independent.org/multimedia/.

GLOBAL REVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

(continued from page 1)

Why not here?” *Really Good Schools* is my answer to that question. The spirit of educational entrepreneurship that rises, again and again in the most unpromising situations, that flourishes even when governments try to stamp it out—is it relevant to America, to England? My short answer: Yes, it is! I’ve witnessed something remarkable happening

across the developing world in the last 20 years: a low-cost, private education movement rebutting government control. I’m confident that in the next 20 years I will see something just as noteworthy happening in America and Britain too. Education, including the framework of education, can be reclaimed from government.

MISSION

Together, We Provide an Independent Voice

Independent Institute remains firm in our commitment to steer clear of government funding of any kind. An *independent* voice—one guided by thorough research and the principles of a free society—is crucial for solving our most pressing social and economic challenges. This is why we rely solely on tax-deductible contributions from supporters like you. Your generosity ensures that we remain fully equipped to promote the innovative, robust, and liberty-affirming policy solutions that we have become known for.

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