

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION BY MAXINE MCCLINTOCK

Cambridge, MA 02138

To Whom It May Concern:

The culminating activity of the American history course at Alden is a seven to ten page research essay. The topic is chosen and researched by the student. Moreover the theme the student develops, has to address one of the themes that was discussed throughout the year. In Emilia Carlyle's case, she chose to write about 1960's teenage etiquette books and Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. In her essay, Emilia made the following analysis: "By 1963, housewives all over America were experiencing a constant, vague, and seemingly insupportable dissatisfaction with the role of women in American culture they were being taught as given advice as to how they should do to fit into the traditional mold of the perfect wife and mother. This dissatisfaction, which I would label this problem, 'the problem' that has no name, and defined the societal forces that caused it the feminine mystique in her book of the same title. Pressure to adhere to the feminine mystique did not begin when women were married and grown, however. It began much earlier, when it began to affect teenagers, even young girls. The rules of etiquette, as presented by Lina A. Haupt's *The Secret Book of Etiquette and Etiquetting*, are a perfect example of the pressures placed on female teenagers. This Emilia both illustrated and contributed to the feminine mystique."

Letters of Recommendation

To come right to the point, Emilia possesses one of the most sophisticated understandings of the past that I have encountered. She perceives history as a web of interdependent links and not as a linear narrative, which is the way most individuals interpret the past. During a class discussion, she demonstrated her ability to recognize complex causal connections by explaining why women's historical record is so sparse compared to that of men's. In essence, she was thinking about history as a contingent set of decisions made by individuals, rather than a fixed body of information that marginally appears in a textbook's table of contents.

Emilia linked women's history to the historical profession and to a narrow field of study. She pointed out that until women were trained as professional historians the questions that would present them as historical actors generally went unasked. Emilia continued to argue against what she called the parochial view of the primary source. She explained that, for the most part, previous generations of women were not formally educated, and therefore reluctant to write about their circumstances. Moreover, these women's male counterparts generally viewed female experience as insignificant and not worth recording. Owing to these conditions, Emilia noted that one of the problems historians face when researching women's history was to figure out what type of non-traditional sources would be historically acceptable and informative. What became evident by the end of the discussion was that Emilia was thinking about the reciprocal relationship between historical content and method, a relationship most people, except for the professional field to recognize.

To her credit, Emilia demonstrates acuity of intellect that goes beyond the mundane standards of formal instruction. Like many of her peers at Alden, she has done well in her course work. However what distinguishes Emilia from other equally competent students is her robust intellectual curiosity, her sense of humor, and her compassion. The life of the mind for many high school students is bounded by the curriculum they are taking and the short-term reward of the grade. Emilia, on the other hand, uses her schooling as a springboard for inquiry. The classroom provides her with the necessary analytic tools that she then deploys to make sense of the world outside Alden's doors.

I have often thought that Emilia has developed a keen sense of humor because of her intellectual risk taking. Humor is the resource Emilia draws upon to put disappointments and setbacks into perspective. It is the attribute that prevents her from becoming absorbed in adolescent cynicism; a pose a good number of her associates strike when the world does not bend to their wills. Others also benefit from Emilia's sense of humor. In a school as competitive as Alden, Emilia's wit often defuses a tense situation and allows others to gain some distance about what is troubling them.

In closing, I would consider fortunate any institution of higher learning that Emilia attends. She will bring a vigorous intellectual curiosity, a sense of humor, and a humane attitude to the campus. In my opinion, these qualities are the foundation of a liberal education.

Sincerely yours,

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To come right to the point, Emilia possesses one of the most sophisticated understandings of the past that I have encountered. She perceives history as a web fashioned out of interdependent links and not as a linear narrative, which is the way most individuals interpret the past. During a class discussion, she demonstrated her ability to recognize complex causal connections by explaining why women's historical record is so sparse compared to that of men's. In essence, she was thinking about history as a contingent set of decisions made by individuals, rather than a fixed body of information that magically appears in a textbook's table of contents.

Emilia linked women's historical invisibility to the historical profession and to a narrow definition of what counts as history. She pointed out that until women were trained as professional historians the questions that would present them as historical actors generally went unasked. Emilia continued to argue against what she called the parochial view of the primary source. She explained that, for the most part, previous generations of women were not formally educated, and therefore reluctant to write about their circumstances. Moreover, these women's male counterparts generally viewed female experience as insignificant and not worth recording. Owing to these conditions, Emilia noted that one of the problems historians face when researching women's history was to figure out what type of non-textual sources would be historically acceptable and informative. What became evident by the end of the discussion was that Emilia was thinking about the reciprocal relationship between historical content and method, a relationship most people, except for the professional, fail to recognize.

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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION BY MAXINE MCCLINTOCK PDF

Here is an antidote to the talk about failing schools, education reform, test scores, teacher-value, curricular controversies, school choice. It is about what counts—a young person's self-formation and a teacher's work to support it. It's a quiet book, an illustration of what happens as thoughtful students interact with sensitive adults. Its title, *Letters of Recommendation*, hints at the angst felt about getting accepted by college, employer, and the world at large. But that angst hides the real challenge—forming an aware, purposeful sense of self. *Letters of Recommendation* shows this pedagogical problem when all the externals are right. Emilia, a girl who seemingly has it all, asks an admired teacher, Doc, for a letter of recommendation supporting early admission to a top college. Emilia withdraws the request, beginning to doubt what she's doing, and why, and what she really wants in life. Doc senses her unease. Letters result, back and forth through the school year, with subtle attention to the girl's emerging sense of self and the teacher's presence, both humane and professional. The year ends, the exchange stops; life's externals appear settled for now, with the larger questions deepened, but still open, as they always are. *Letters* offers no easy steps, no how-to's, no magic methods. Instead, it heightens awareness of what goes on as good education takes place. It affirms a student's self-reliance in the face of felt uncertainties and a teacher's trust that her presence as a full, human person has value and meaning in the work of education. The letters themselves do not exemplify an instructional method, but serve to direct attention to the inner lives of a student and her teacher. The letters create a thought-provoking book, a pedagogical dialogue. And the dialogue's privileged setting does not celebrate the rich and famous. It is a way to set aside the material complications, which intrude in our lives and make it difficult to concentrate on what is essential, not only for the few, but for each and all.

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the true meaning of education

By Jorj

In *Letters of Recommendation*, McClintock explores weighty themes such as the difference between schooling and education, success as a means versus as an end into itself. These lofty themes are humanized and made accessible by the book's format as an epistolary novel. These are very important ideas no matter what stage in life and education you are in. The book bears the imprint of McClintock's excellent prowess as a mentor and her thoughtfulness and empathy with her students. Through *Letters*, readers can benefit from McClintock's long experience as a teacher and her expertise in knowing students and the power of true education.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Rewarding Account of Contemporary Education Through the Eyes of a Student, a Teacher, and a College Choice

By Christopher M Nichols

This is a remarkable and rewarding book. In the best tradition of John Dewey's vision of education as a journey that makes for a more fully formed, flourishing human beings as well as a more informed citizenry, Maxine McClintock has constructed an intricate and compelling account not just of the fictional student Emilia's winding "senior year odyssey" toward college (and beyond) but also of the mentor-mentee educative process by which both share insights, learn, and develop through intellectual exchanges. The erudition here is striking and subtle. William James, Randolph Bourne, Dewey, Thomas Jefferson, and scores of other major thinkers appear and serve to propel the narrative as well as the analysis, provoking much bigger questions and concerns than simply: where should Emilia go to school? This is a book that interrogates the proper and best role of intellectuals and educators in society. It ponders the city "as educator." It critiques and embraces the drawbacks as well as the opportunities provided by Emilia's elite private school. It investigates the history of ideas and the "purposes of a liberal arts education" in a democracy. And it challenges readers to consider how self-awareness is and might be enabled via education as the book probes how and why this is not happening more in the U.S. At the core of this book, then, lies the so-called "education crisis" and the "crisis of the humanities" as integral to the "dysfunctional meritocracy" endemic to the contemporary educational landscape.

Blending radical and conservative solutions, the book takes the form of a dialogue of sorts (akin in form to a more accessible Dialogues of Plato perhaps?) to focus on the individual person as the primary "ends" of education. Thus, Letters of Recommendation concludes the Emilia-Doc exchange by calling out poignantly "to recover our original intent of equal educational excellence for all." There is much more to this rich extended essay than a brief review can detail, so do read it. The best audiences for this book are teachers, professors, parents of students navigating college selection/admission, and especially high school and college age students, but it is also a work that could and should be widely read by citizens far beyond this important audience.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Big Ideas in a Small Frame

By Grace

Within a small frame this book packs more substantial thinking about education than most books three times its size. Letters of Recommendation takes the form of an epistolary exchange between a bright but perplexed high school senior and her patient, savvy history teacher. The main topic of their conversation is the student's upcoming decision about her college choice, but in the course of their letters the women discuss important moments in U.S. history, philosophies of teaching and learning, and the growing inequality in American educational institutions today.

The epistolary novel begins with Emilia writing to Doc that she "made a big mistake" when she asked Doc to recommend her for early admission to Harvard. Included in the witty, profound, and often provocative exchanges that follow are dialogues about the difference between education and schooling, reflections on what is gained and lost inside the "bubble" of an elite private school, and honest portrayals of one adolescent's struggle to deal with the competing pulls of homework and friendship.

A constant backdrop for the women's communications is the heady, vibrant, cultural life of New York City, and woven throughout their exchanges is the thematic thread of the city as educator. Might not the city provide at least as valuable an education for an open-minded 18-year-old as Harvard? Couldn't a young inquisitive person learn as much from exploring the museums, libraries, and streets of a great city as she

would from the formal, institutionalized, "higher" education of a university?

At issue are questions about how young people best learn, what constitutes the most important knowledge, and what true education is about. Letters of Recommendation can fit easily into a backpack, purse, or briefcase. It's a great read.

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