PROFILES OF FAMOUS EDUCATORS

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KILPATRICK

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In the context of American education, William Heard Kilpatrick may be best known as a colleague of, and collaborator with, John Dewey, with whom he worked at Teachers College, Columbia University. Kilpatrick’s development and advocacy of ‘the project method’ is another accomplishment for which he is widely recognized. Yet the ideas, life and commitments of William Heard Kilpatrick go well beyond these relatively cursory understandings. In this essay, I describe and analyze some of the central features of Kilpatrick’s ideas and activities, while trying to develop a more complete picture of this important figure in the history of progressive education.

William Heard Kilpatrick was born on 20 November 1871, the first child of the Reverend Dr. James Hines Kilpatrick and his second wife, Edna Perrin Heard; they were married on 20 December 1870. Before that marriage, Reverend Kilpatrick, a widower, cared for the three sons and two daughters who had been born to him and his first wife. The elder Kilpatrick had moved to White Plains, Georgia, in 1853, after graduating from Mercer University, with the express purpose of teaching in school. After teaching one year, however, he became pastor of the White Plains Baptist Church, a position in which he continued until his death in 1908. More than simply an influential member of the clergy, the Reverend Kilpatrick was a central figure in the political, civic and legal activities of this small agricultural town. Indeed, he is even said to have ‘pulled teeth for anyone who came to his home’—a skill he had developed as the owner of a 1,600 acre plantation that included at least thirty slaves, an inheritance from his father. His religious convictions, as well as