



More Than Science and Sputnik: The National Defense Education Act of 1958

Wayne J. Urban

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Sparked by dramatic Soviet achievements, particularly in nuclear technology and the development of the Sputnik space orbiter, the United States responded in the late 1950s with an extraordinary federal investment in education. Designed to overcome a perceived national failure to produce enough qualified scientists, engineers, and mathematicians to compete with the Communist bloc, the effort resulted in the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA). Representative Carl Elliott and Senator Lister Hill both from Alabama, and then Assistant Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Elliot Richardson were the prime movers in shaping of this landmark legislation.

More than Science and Sputnik analyzes the papers of the three leaders to describe the political process that established the NDEA. The book illustrates what the assumptions of the key players were, and why they believed the act was needed.

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