Abstract

Although Abraham Flexner (1866-1959) is well known as the author of Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching--so well known that this publication's better-known shorthand title is "the Flexner Report"--for many the "real" Flexner remains something of a mystery. Many today believe that he was overly rigid in his goals for medical education and that he did not adequately champion the rights of women and African Americans, harsh criticisms in late-20th-century America. But who really was Abraham Flexner? The author discusses Flexner the education reformer and the man, highlighting his early years in Louisville and his relationship with his family and his wife, his later graduate work and associations with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the General Education Board, and his then-radical proposals for the reshaping of American medical education. Flexner's attitudes toward women and African Americans are also reviewed, and the author shows that Flexner encouraged both women and blacks to pursue higher education in general and medical careers in particular. Finally, the author discusses Flexner's feelings about his own Jewishness and anti-Semitism, his political beliefs, and his personal attributes as described both by the press and by his friends.
Abraham Flexner (November 13, 1866 – September 21, 1959) was an American educator, best known for his role in the 20th century reform of medical and higher education in the United States and Canada. After founding and directing a college-preparatory school in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, Flexner published a critical assessment of the state of the American educational system in 1908 titled The American College: A Criticism. His work attracted the Carnegie Foundation to commission an in-depth evaluation into 155 colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. It was his first book in the year 1908 titled ‘The American College.’ The book highlighted the flaws of the traditional American education and severely criticized various aspects of it. The book displayed Flexner’s strong disdain for traditional education. It subsequently attracted the attention of many readers and prominent personalities including Henry Pritchett, the then President of the ‘Carnegie Foundation’. At that time, Pritchett was searching for someone who could conduct a series of studies of American medical education. Flexner was not a physician but based on the m

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