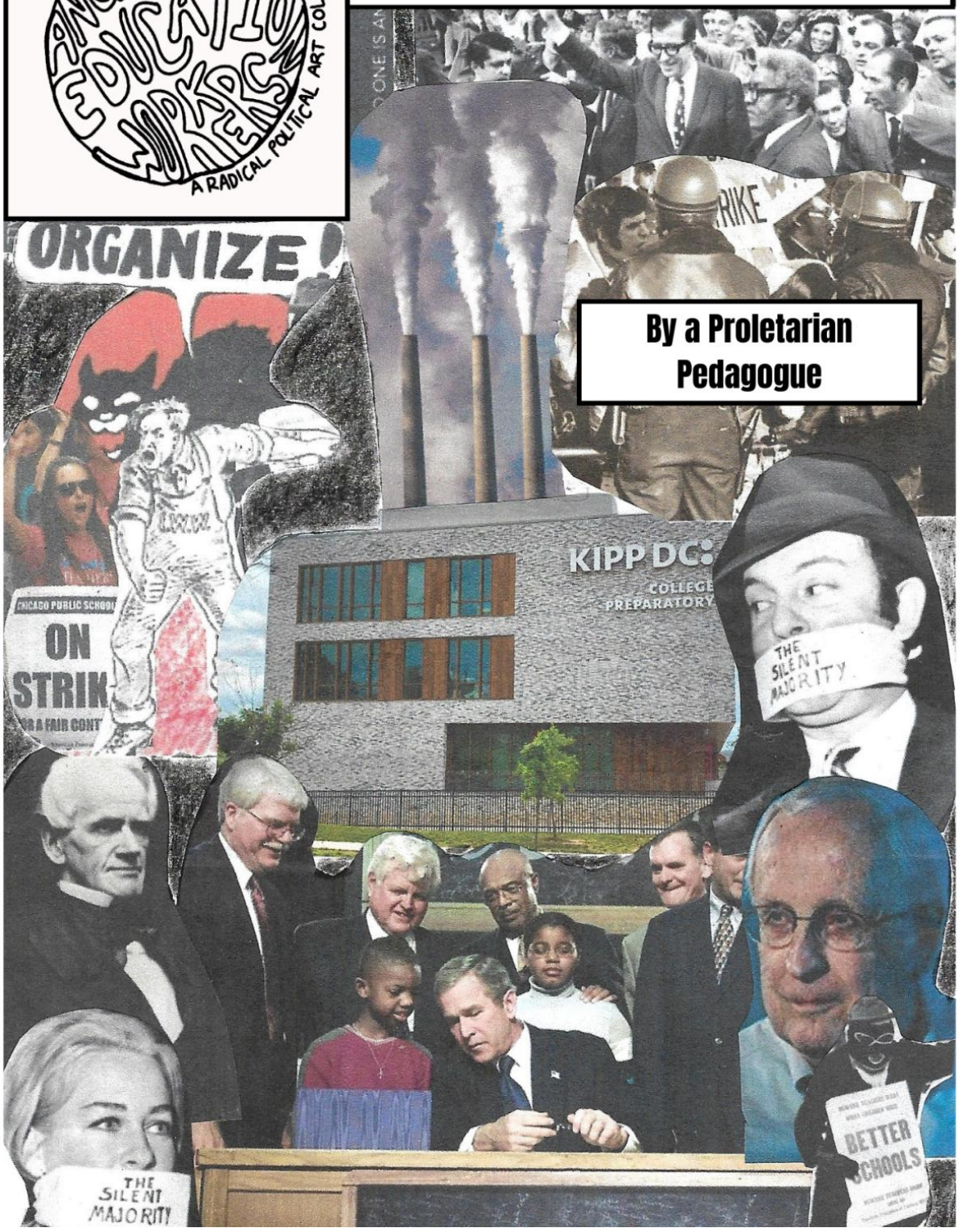
The Industrialization of Education: A Taxonomy of Class Power



By a Proletarian Pedagogue

Phase One, 1890-1930

Two ideals are struggling for supremacy in American life today: one is the industrial ideal dominating through the supremacy of commercialism, which subordinates the worker to the product and the machine; the other, the ideal of democracy, the ideal of the educators, which places humanity above all machines, and demands that all activity shall be the expression of life. If this ideal of the educators cannot be carried over into the industrial field then the ideal of industrialism will be carried over into the school. Those two ideals can no more continue to exist in American life than our nation could have continued half slave and half free. If the school cannot bring joy to the work of the world, the joy must go out of its own life, and work in the school, as in the industrial field, will become drudgery..

It will be well indeed if the teachers have the courage of their convictions and face all that the labor unions have faced with the same courage and perseverance.

-Margaret Haley, "Why Teachers Should Organize," 1904 speech to the National Education Association convention

Industrial Ecology

America never deindustrialized. It just scaled down its manufacturing industries while industrializing other parts of the economy—like education. We must expand our concept of production beyond the factory floor if we're to ever have any hope of understanding ourselves and our situations as workers. Education is an industry with the same exploitation and disparities of power, privilege, and resources as any other. It has transformed from local, community-based schools to an industry in the same way the retail, service, logistics, legal, healthcare, hospitality, railroad, construction, maritime, agricultural, and more industries have. A critical inspection of the history of American education reveals how corporations, politicians, and 'the voters' have designed schools, libraries, archives, museums, and research facilities as factories. Factories that extract profit from education workers and students. But first, we must answer some fundamental questions:

1. What is an industry? What is industrialization?
2. What comprises the education industry?
3. How did the emergence and development of capitalist production lead to the industrialization of education?
4. What does pre-industrialized education look like?

5. What is capital? And what is capitalism? How do we analyze class in the 21st Century?
6. In education, who are the workers? And who are the bosses?

We'll deal with the last question first. Among the workers we find janitors, teachers, paraprofessionals, interventionists, sports coaches, librarians, substitutes, adjuncts, graduate workers, docents, food service workers, library techs, social workers, and SPED teachers. Among the bosses we find administrative bureaucracies like the Department of Education, charter school management companies, school boards, and distant education corporations like Scholastic, Pearson, or Great Minds. Principals, assistant principals, deans, academic coaches, library directors, museum directors, and other administrators form a managerial middle class. Often forgotten in that middle class are education researchers, policy writers, and curriculum developers.

If you're reading this, you're probably a worker. This text is for all education workers—whether you're a school nurse, on maintenance staff, a security guard, a library associate, a clerical worker, or whatever else. If you work in a place engaged in education production, this will hopefully help you analyze your corner of the industry in a broader framework. That said, K-12 schools are the center of gravity for this piece. They formed the bedrock institutions of the industry, and to this day, almost half of the entire industry's economic output is in

K-12 schools. We will weave in the history of post-secondary education, libraries, and museums whenever possible. But we encourage others to write their own inquiries into the industrialization of other educational sectors.

Future inquiries could include detailed taxonomies of specific, local educational systems. Where are the schools, the libraries, the museums? Who works in them?

How are workers already acting collectively to build power and resist capitalist domination? What divisions exist that bosses take advantage of? How can we intervene to organize with other working-class folks while countering division with solidarity? Look up and look around! Leave nothing unexamined, if you can. And write it down! We need to analyze and discuss our experiences collectively—as worker-intellectuals, not as "professionals" or academics. For more examples of this style of workers inquiry, please check out the writings of the AngryWorkers political collective in the UK.

We oppose capitalism as a system. Capitalism cannot be reformed—

not for long, at least. It is a system that relies on the movement of capital to produce economic wealth. Capital comes in two forms: money and commodity. The money form is just that: money, including bank deposits, hard cash, and other liquid assets. The commodity form includes resources that can be bought and sold on the market with money. Its role is to bring the labor power of workers from lots of different places together to cooperate to generate unprecedented wealth. This wealth is generated collectively—by billions of workers around the world.

But that socially created wealth is not distributed equally. Instead, the employer, whose only use is that they have more money than everyone else, takes the product of workers' labor and sells it for a profit. Only part of that profit ever goes back to the worker. For the factory owner, the restaurateur, or the school board member, the impulse is to pay workers as little as possible while extracting the maximum labor. This is exploitation. All profits are effectively unpaid wages. Bosses squeeze more surplus value—time spent working more than you'd need to survive—out of the workers by reducing wages and lengthening work hours. Or by making those hours more intense and demanding.

Big capitalists—corporate executives, banking magnates, and Wall Street traders—are less than one percent of the population. But they call all the important shots, though most of them haven't worked in any of the industries they own shares in. Surrounding them is the middle class. People use that term sloppily in America. Often, they're referring to anyone with a college degree, or any degree of comfort or social standing. Middle class seems like a cultural mindset rather than a coherent class. There is, however, a concrete middle-class. They're the small business owners, small fry landlords, preachers, and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, administrators, scientists, and principals (AngryWorkers2020). These folks usually place in the top fifteen to twenty percent of the economy. The rest, 80 percent, is the working class and lower strata.

Supporters of capitalism usually reply that capitalists provide the machines, facilities, and tools. Who built the machines and buildings? Who crafted the tools? Workers did. Machines "copied the artisan's physical movements and transferred it onto an apparatus, such as the weaving loom or the spinning machine. Major investment was necessary for engines to move these machines, while workers who operated them could be paid much less…and the independent artisans died a rapid social death" (AngryWorkers 2019).

Another reply is that capitalists take on the financial risk of owning the operation. Who **dies** when the machine fucks up or the employer

refuses to follow covid protocols? Workers! Who loses when privatized schools without proper oversight fail? Workers and students! We build the whole world with our combined labor. But capitalists use industrialized production to steal our labor and our time for their own private profit. The IWW recognizes this monstrous system for what it is, and organizes to overthrow it for the sake of all humanity.

Whether we like it or not, the pandemic revealed just how desperate our situation is. We must look that reality in the face and organize. School, library, and museum administrators harangue us for every mistake and expect us to do more with less staff and funding. Stories of assaults against staff in educational facilities are proliferating as the American Empire's social fabric deteriorates. Meanwhile, corporate profits in education keep growing.

Industrial Taxonomy

An industry is a collection of production facilities, companies, job roles, and pieces of infrastructure assembled across a geographic area to produce a common set of goods and services. Every industry encompasses three main layers: production, distribution, and consumption. Through these layers, industries interact with each other. Workers in a factory don't usually do distribution. Instead, logistics workers at Amazon, UPS, USPS, and FedEx bridge the gap between producer and consumer. The printing and publishing industry manufactures textbooks, encyclopedias, and other texts for the education system. The tech industry produces computers, tablets, and digital tools for schools, libraries, and museums.

Industrialization occurs when an agricultural society changes into one where a minutely crafted division of labor, huge urban populations, and the application of technology allows for mass production of goods and services. Three conditions are needed for industrialization to occur:

1. A centralized workforce practicing division of labor. Tasks must be divided into the smallest possible units. Labor is also divided along lines of gender, race, type of work (blue collar versus white collar), and geographical location.
2. Primitive accumulation. Also known as initial or background accumulation, it's an ongoing process of hoarding wealth that can be reinvested. Marx described this beginning with the "enclosing" of land that threw the peasants into the cities. Slavery and colonialism grease the wheels. The fledgling industry of Early

Modern Europe, for example, was mainly fed through imperialist looting and enslaved labor (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 2003).

3. Production must become increasingly consolidated in fewer hands. Early Modern merchants and landowners tied disparate, small to medium sized production units—like cottage industry[2]—into massive ones. Eventually, they generated enough capital and productive capacity for the emergence of large, monopolistic firms. Such firms can effectively circulate commodities on a national or international scale. By exploiting workers and driving down costs throughout this process of circulation, those who have money to invest accrue capital (Marx 1867).

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is a revolutionary anti-capitalist union. They organize workers by industry instead of their job role or craft. The union's useful system of industrial classification, based on systems used by libraries, sorts the economy into six distinct categories.

These are: agriculture and fisheries; mining and minerals; general construction; manufacture and general production; transportation and communication; and public service. Every industry falls within these broad categories. Education workers under public service. Blue collar or white collar— which loosely describes what type of work you do—has little relevance. Rather, people are sorted based on lines of production, distribution, and consumption. This way, we can lay the foundation for a worker/student run, democratic education industry.

What exactly comprises this education industry we need to organize? To figure that out, we must deduce its main *product*. It manufactures a person who has been inculcated with the knowledge, ideology, discipline, and culture that primes them to serve the whims of business owners and politicians. The education industry helps reproduce capitalism itself. Education also serves as a connecting point—a node—between different industries and social groups with varying levels of power.

Daycare workers, nannies, stay at home parents, babysitters, and education workers share the burden of carrying our society across generations. Libraries, museums, and schools are constant, essential sites of family events and social services. Schools free up millions of people for full time work. Museums help reproduce knowledge and civic traditions.

With that in mind, the education industry includes: public, charter, and private pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade schools; post-secondary institutions like colleges, universities, and trade schools; non-profits,

foundations, and government departments geared towards education research, funding, and curriculum development; corporate and government job training and lifelong learning facilities; cultural institutions like museums and libraries; and the amorphous armies of gig tutors and tutoring companies that surround the entire industry.

Education workers carry out production, such as lesson planning, exhibit construction, classroom setup, program creation, or teaching. Other times, these workers distribute products or render services. Then, there are education 'non- profits' like Great Minds, which originally created the Common Core curriculum. These institutions develop the **tools** teachers and other education workers use to shape the raw material—students—into the workers, managers, and owners of the future. They are to education what engineers are to factories.

The industrialization of education began in the 1840s. Since then, business- people have used politicians to structure education along the lines of private industry. Under the guise of 'reform,' these succeeding generations of ruling class capitalists—from factory owners to startup bros—have shaped and reshaped education. Since 1992, capitalists have peeled away huge swathes of education from the public sector entirely. The goal is the end of free public education altogether.

Pre-Industrial Education in America

Pre-industrialized education looks like the one-room schoolhouses of American legend. Or the small community schools taught by ministers in the New England colonies. Tribal communities around the globe pass down knowledge and traditions in communal, but informal ways. Preceding industrializing library systems, there were private subscription libraries for elite European men (Hillary and Abbott 2015). The first museums were the private collections of rich people, who began to selectively display them as "cabinets of curiosity" in the 1500s (Bennett 1995). Then there are the parochial schools of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries (Gross 2018). We'll examine some of these in more detail.

Dorchester, Massachusetts opened the first taxpayer funded school in 1639. Massachusetts Bay, along with most Northeastern colonies, passed compulsory attendance laws in 1642, and required parents to teach children how to read (Goldstein 2014) (Easterling 2013). But education was not an industry yet—it could not be. The earliest rumblings of industrialization were still barely felt, even in textiles.

Early school systems were scattered and local in scope. They were taught by ministers, not a dedicated teaching workforce (Goldstein, 2013). But primitive accumulation in education was underway. Spoils from the violent colonization of the Americas had been flowing for hundreds of years. Schools were built on land stolen from indigenous tribes like the Massachuset, Wampanoag, and Nauset tribes with stolen bodies.

What is now Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—wrenched from the British in the final stages of America's blood drenched birth—was called the Northwest Territory (Black 2020). These lands, inhabited by native nations like the Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi, and Shawnee, were sold off by a broke central government to white settlers for free (Black 2020).

Education was bound up in this dispossession.

In fact, "the Ordinances placed public education at the literal center of the nation's plan for geographic expansion and statehood in the territories. Every new town had to set aside one-ninth of its land and one-third of its natural resources for the financial support of public education" (Black 2020).

Land and natural resources that would need to be forcibly seized by armed settlers. In 1836, during the Trail of Tears and the expansion of slavery westward, "the nation made an enormous new financial investment in public education.

Tariffs, the collection of war debts, and the sale of federal lands generated an 'unprecedented surplus'" (Black 2020, 69) that the federal government handed to the states. Nearly all the money in the "people's inheritance" got spent on public education. Public education allowed the white elite to integrate lower class white settlers into a political-economic system that exploited them.

Regional teaching workforces had formed by the 1820s. Most schoolmasters were badly paid men with no curriculum. Education reformers of the day, like Harriet Beecher, ridiculed them as drunk, tyrannical, and abusive. Though they were likely "less cruel or stupid than frustrated. They were struggling with educational neglect…and lack of funding" (Goldstein 2014, 21). Out of this patchwork workforce would emerge a modern proletariat.

Horace Mann was a Whig politician in Massachusetts with connections to religious social liberals and "fiscally cautious northeastern business interests" (Goldstein 2014, 23). In 1837, he became secretary of the first Board of Education. Mann set up the first teacher colleges, then called normal schools, in 1840. There, teachers in training learned teaching

as a craft, with standardized practices and subject matters. He only accepted women to save money. As the Common Schools movement[11] compelled local governments across the Northeast and Midwest to build schools, the size of the teaching workforce ballooned (Gross 2018). By 1873, most of these teachers were women (Goldstein 2014).

Now that there were teachers, the question naturally arose: what would all the students learn? Teachers never had any say. Instead, "politicians and business leaders, the kind of men more concerned with educating the next generation of voters and workers than in fostering intellectuals" (Goldstein 2014, 28) held sway over education reformers like Horace Mann and Catherine Beecher. Teachers and schools were "expected to 'strengthen the moral character of children, reinvigorate the work ethic, spread civic and republican values, and along the way teach a common curriculum to ensure a literate and unified public'" (Shelton 2017, 80).

As teaching became overwhelmingly "women's work" through the mid-19th Century, teachers simultaneously experienced proletarianization. Most of the women coming into teaching at that time were white and the daughters of farmers, blue collar urban workers, or stable middle-class families. All these women had few job prospects outside teaching. These women faced patriarchal and capitalist barriers as they sought financial, and, synonymously, legal and emotional independence. Without this material basis for asserting themselves against families, people become vulnerable to abusive dynamics. Women moving into the teaching workforce had to navigate these difficulties with little support.

This represents a profound shift at a critical time. Teachers would not be professionals in the way that doctors and lawyers were (and are). They did not have the ability to self-govern and regulate like genuine professionals had (Goldstein 2014). Instead, they would be workers. American teachers had little say in school operations, pay, hours, or what they taught.

Industrialization, 1890-1930

School enrollment, along with library and museum construction, spiked after the American Civil War, peaking from 1890-1930. The number of students rose from 12.7 million to nearly 26 million. By 1920, there were over 3,500 public library branches nationwide. Immigration from the Eastern and Southern margins of Europe, combined with

unprecedented industrialization and urbanization, changed the united states.

The Western European descended middle-class protestants believed Catholic immigrants' illiteracy would hamper economic growth and degrade public morals. Protestant business leaders saw public education as a tool to assimilate them. Their hysteria grew as private parochial Catholic schools—sustained almost entirely through donations from local parish communities and outside the bounds of state regulation—sprung up like weeds. Parochial schools offered a semi-industrial alternative. One that lay between the pre-industrial education production of the past and the future industrialized models of public schooling. In the 1920s, these parochial schools accepted regulation in exchange for crucial governmental funding. Which effectively integrated them into the industrial system (Gross 2018).

By 1883, the Republican Party had passed compulsory attendance laws in the fourteen Southern states. Radical Republicans required Southern states to make education a constitutional right to rejoin the Union (Gross 2018) (Black 2020).

They wanted the state to use compulsory education as a tool to construct "national growth and unity" (Gross 2018, 64). With a devastated nation to rebuild, compulsory attendance could assimilate defeated Confederates, newly freed Black Americans, and immigrants "into the greater body politic" (Gross 2018, 65).

Education, then, became part of life, an integral part of the social reproduction process of the American nation-state.

Meanwhile, library workers were "key partners" in the Americanization Movement. By mandating nighttime English language and civics classes at libraries, state legislatures thought they could transmit upper class American values to immigrants. Outside the libraries, native tongues were being banned and immigrants targeted for mob violence (Hillary and Abbot 2015)..

Philanthropy plays a key role in education industrialization. Charlotte Forten was a Black teacher who moved from New York to the South Carolina Sea Islands to teach newly freed Black children. Neither she nor her students received what they needed, so she "wrote to philanthropists in Philadelphia to send picture books for toddlers" (Goldstein 2014, 51). The Common Schools movement had tucked most education into the public sector. But anti-tax sentiment by business owners left it underfunded. Philanthropy helped the capitalist class put down private roots in education on their terms.

Andrew Carnegie was single-handedly responsible for financing the construction of nearly 3,000 public and academic libraries. Towns had to

put down ten percent themselves, and provide the land for free. This leaves communities in a position of feeling 'grateful' to a benevolent capitalist who is just boosting his public image. His actions contributed to a sense of "vocational awe" among library workers. Vocational awe includes "the...assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries…are inherently good, sacred notions, and therefore beyond critique" (Ettarh 2018). Library workers then work themselves raw with smiles on their faces.

Returning to schools, Boards of Education hired hundreds of thousands of teachers. Chicago and New York City were epicenters of this expansion. By this time, the Second Industrial Revolution had conjured the juggernaut of capital into being. Mass industry necessitated a managerial class to enforce discipline.

Chicago was the city on the hill of a "thriving reform scene, driven by innovative ideas in social sciences and progressive politics" (Goldstein 2014, 68). The University of Chicago was the nucleus of this reformist atom. The president was chosen by the mayor for the school board. He was charged with "centralizing the curriculum, pedagogy, and administrative structure of the public schools" (Goldstein 2014, 69). Men like him supported Taylorism. They pushed for technocratic management for schools and libraries, with workers and the voters excluded from curriculum policy. Of course, these academics believed they should be the ones making those decisions. Elite academics like college presidents and other administrators "forged an alliance with business leaders, who liked the idea of top-down, expert management of schools, yet deplored paying higher taxes to fund public education" (Goldstein 2014, 68). We'll call this branch of the middle class the academic-managerial class.

Private companies used their political and economic power to siphon public funds and profit off education. Chicago Public Schools had 15,000 teachers throughout the city, which made it the city's largest employer. The government and "professional elites" of the time "reorganized the Chicago public schools and, like other school districts across the nation, placed them under the control of education and business experts" (Lyons 2008, 11).

Abysmal pay—about $13,000 a year in today's dollars, and frozen in place for 20 years—left the teaching workforce of the city powerless individually.

Women elementary school teachers faced overcrowded classrooms, sexist pay schedules, and corrupt municipal political machines. During this time, "teachers were sometimes paid not in wages, but in 'warrants' promising future pay, which teachers had to cajole grocers and landlords

to accept in lieu of cash" (Goldstein 2014, 68). Most teachers in the early 20th Century were single women. They did not have husbands and fathers to fall back on.

Precarity placed teachers among the working-class majority of women. Most women don't have the freedom and access to power that bourgeois or middle- class women have. Former University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper canceled a paltry raise for teachers. He aimed to drive women out of teaching. In response to protests, Rainey said "they should be happy they earned as much as his wife's maid" (Goldstein 2014, 69). Susan B. Anthony—a teacher herself— articulated a more working-class centered feminism. Anthony specified that when spreading the word about women's rights meetings, she wanted "particular effort made to call out the teachers, seamstresses, and wage-earning women generally. It is for them, rather than for the wives and daughters of the rich, that I labor" (Goldstein 2014, 38).

Teachers' politics lined up closely with those of industrial workers, and still do (Lampson 1919) (Lyons 2008) (Thompson 2014). Unfortunately, reformers from upper class backgrounds were the ones who wielded political power in America. Their goal was an efficient factory regime for education. Political leaders routed working class children into vocational education. Corporations dodged taxes brazenly. Schools around the city fell into disrepair from chronic underfunding. After decades of tax evasion by the rich and corrupt spending gluts by CPS, the city and school system were nearly broke by 1929 (Lyons 2008).

In this context, class struggle in education escalated (Martin 1999).

Class Struggle from Below during the First Phase

Where there are workers, there is class struggle. Their stolen surplus labor allowed for private profit. Longer and harder work days followed the underfunding of schools. Workers responded to industrialization by forming unions. We will begin in 1916. That is when several teachers' union locals amalgamated into the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

While the movement began entirely in cities with at least 30,000 people, it then spread like wildfire (Cook 1921). Teacher organization was now a national movement. It sharply divided the academic-managerial class of their day. Some university presidents and professors advocated reform to undermine unions and prevent class conflict in a public-school system that served "all classes" (Cook 1921).

By 1920, the AFT counted 10,000 teachers in 180 locals, tripling

its membership and more than doubling the number of locals (Martin 1999). But membership fell to under 5,000 in 1930. Above all, "strong opposition to teacher unionism by local school boards, school administrators, some teachers, and especially the business community" was the cause. Additionally, "yellow dog"[19] contracts, the AFT "no strike" pledge, and low salaries hobbled organization (Martin 1999). The previous two decades brought victories. Lawsuits, political campaigning, and community mobilization had recovered hidden corporate tax revenue and ensured equal opportunity for all within the schools (Martin 1999). But the 1920s brought withering defeats.

Attrition rates for AFT affiliated unions was high. Small, rural branches struggled to survive staff turnover and union busting. From 1920-21 alone, the number of operating locals dropped from 180 to 122 (Cook 1921). Even so, the AFT survived by clinging to urban strongholds. A sense of professionalism also made most teachers in this era reluctant to take collective action.

The history of the NEA embodies this. For 100 years the NEA "portrayed itself as a professional organization little interested in bettering teachers' wages or attaining collective bargaining rights" (Lyons 2008). Even so, they counted 200,000 members, increasingly school teachers, by the end of the 1920s (Cain 2009). In 1954 NEA membership topped 560,000 (Dewing 1969), consistently ahead of the AFT.

Ultimately, the NEA was not controlled by its rank and file. They were overwhelmingly women K-12 teachers. Instead, "school administrators, the largely male group...clearly maintained control of the association" through 1972 (Urban 2001). The NEA had a centralized organizational structure on the national and state levels. In contrast, the AFT uses autonomous branches like the mainstream labor movement. It wasn't until the 1970s that the NEA could be called a proper union after a member upsurge drove administrators out.

Cornering the Market, 1880-1930

"Education entrepreneurs" prey on high poverty, colonized communities, as well as some poor white communities (Rooks 2017). Their common ancestors among the industrial magnates were men like John D. Rockefeller and Julius Rosenwald. They funded school construction for Black children across the South. Simultaneously, Jim Crow law and white vigilantes forced Black Americans into segregated zones.

White philanthropists who had "made their money in cotton, steel,

railroads, minerals, and financial services" (Rooks 2017, 56) were also making captive customer bases out of Black families. Compulsory attendance laws aided their efforts. To these customers—mostly workers or sharecroppers—they "proposed educational curricula and forms offered only to Blacks and the poor" (Rooks 2017, 50). Rockefeller and Rosenwald "understood how…important an educated Black population was for the future economic prospects of businesses in that region, if not in the entire country" (Rooks 2017, 50). They gathered the cheapest labor power, buildings, and land, then combined it with the coercive power of the state to build a workforce adapted to racial capitalism.

Southern legislatures used their power to divert dwindling federal money away from Black schools and towards white ones. Northern white philanthropy remained the only real school funding source for Southern Black schools. The Julius Rosenwald Building Fund sent agents around the South to collect "all they thought they had" (Rooks 2017, 49) from Black communities. This money was meant for building schools. It included a "match" from the foundation if a town raised enough starting capital. These rich whites now took advantage of Black students, teachers, and communities who had footed much of the bill. In exchange, they got some of the worst schools in the entire world. Even as their benefactors raked in cash. Yet again, white Northern industrialists grew rich on capital generated by Black labor.

Following the Money

In the 1920s, corruption was rife. Republican administrations awarded "contracts for school construction and equipment to business groups that had direct links to city politicians" (Lyons 2008, 12). Here, we have another crossover between industries: education and construction. The Board of Education leased out land it owned in downtown Chicago to the *The Chicago Tribune* and other "business friends" for dirt cheap prices (Lyons 2008, 13). Finances were atrocious. It kept the system afloat by going into ever deeper debt to banks through financial wizardry (Lyons 2008, 13). All these examples reveal the pathways money followed as it circulated through the education system and generated profits for corporate and political elites.

Commodities—goods placed on the market to sell for a profit—circulate endlessly. There are two types of circulation:

1. Commodity-money-commodity (C-M-C). C-M-C is what

normal people do. We sell our time and physical energy in exchange for money, which we use to buy other commodities that we then use.

2. Money-commodity-money (M-C-M). M-C-M, on the other hand, means a person is holding onto the commodity until it is the right time to sell it. A capitalist exchanges money for a house. Not to live in, but to sell or rent for a higher value than what they acquired it for—to generate profit. Capital is the original value plus a change in value, which is added by exploited workers. Capitalists endlessly repeat this process, accumulating capital off the backs of billions of workers (Marx 1867).

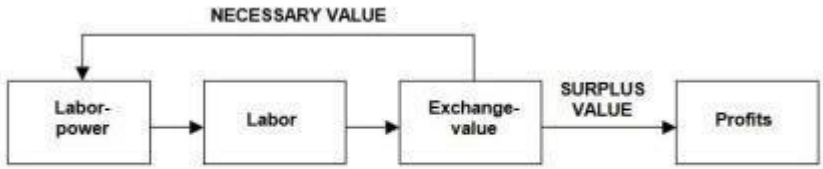


Figure 1: Necessary value and surplus value

Education itself has become a commodity that can be speculated on.

Equipment, workers, land, and buildings comprise the initial investment of money. Construction workers build the school, library, and museum production sites.

Education workers refine the raw materials that move down the graded assembly line: the students, until they are ready to enter the job market. Everyone must then refine *themselves* to match up to the competition, or fail and die. Women are doubly exploited. Mothers perform reproductive labor for society. Their children were extracted as raw materials. Working class women teachers were then exploited to refine them.

Industries such as education, defense, and healthcare feature vast sums of public money flowing through them. This is great for private capitalists. Initial investment money comes from the public, and the product is ready-to-go at eighteen (or younger). Lucrative building contracts, access to public land for cheap, and overlooked corporate tax evasion have a cost, one paid by education workers and students. Profit is unpaid wages. By reducing their expenses and soaking up public tax funds on the backs of education workers, the money returns to capitalists at a greater value. It absorbs new value from labor.

The only opposition corporate elites faced was from nascent teachers' unions like the Chicago Teachers Federation and “lady labor slugger” Margaret Haley, who were barred from striking by their own AFT union

leadership.

Then the Great Depression hit. The allotted resources for public education evaporated overnight. In response, the Citizens' Committee on Public Expenditures (CCPE) formed in 1932, counting in its ranks the city's "leading bankers, merchants, and industrialists" (Lyons 2008, 30-31). Their top priority was cutting education costs, so they usurped control of public schooling from the government. Their efforts halted education industrialization in Chicago for over twenty years.

Meanwhile, other public sector workers continued to receive job and salary protections—thanks to the spoils system[20] of the city—and corporations still dodged taxes. Teachers went unpaid for months (Lyons 2008). Teachers basically paid for these cuts with their labor

Phase Two, 1954-1975

Realignment and Recovery

When the Great Depression slammed the brakes on the world economy in 1929, it halted decades of industrialization in the schools of the American Empire. From 1890 to 1930, the education systems of the country had expanded rapidly.

Student enrollment, workforce size, the number of facilities, and investment from public and private sources all grew. Economic catastrophe brought this to a halt.

Funding, workforce size, and building construction stagnated or shrank (Koning 2015) (NCES 2008). School systems struggled to stay afloat. World War II revived the economy, but only so the government could direct every spare resource towards the war, leaving little left over. Enrollments leveled off at around 25 million. The max attendance percentages at around 84 percent. Number of teachers at 900,000.

By 1950, the sun had come out, the flood waters had receded, and the conditions for unprecedented growth in education were just right. Especially as the government itself restructured and expanded along the lines of industry.

The Industrialization of the State

Social strife at home in the 1930s and global warfare abroad

transformed the American Empire's national state apparatus into an industrial enterprise. Prior to 1930-1945, the American nation-state had a narrow role in shaping state and local policy. Especially in education, where the federal government delegated almost all responsibilities to state and local governments (Scribner 2015).

Gilded Age Industrialist robber barons used the federal government for its "police power."[21] It was not for a source of money for reinvestment and transformation into profit (Gross 2018). State power was a wedge to pry open opportunities for profit from the education system. All that changed by the end of the 1950s with the industrialization of the state—the public sector—itself.

The New Deal and World War II required the US to mobilize unprecedented amounts of resources. Until 1930, the federal government usually spent around 3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This trend held true in all the history from 1797 to 1930, with three exceptions. All for wars, of course.[22] During peace-time, most of that three percent went to the military. Or interest payments on debt. The New Deal and WWII "expanded the role of the state dramatically" (Shelton 2017, 3). Government spending has consistently increased ever since then (Barro 2012).

One angle of background accumulation was the gradual buildup of the state's police power, regulatory infrastructure, and competence with managing its human capital stock.[23] At the end of World War II, the US had a state apparatus that could intervene in the social fabric of its host society on a genetic level.

The "massive expansion of state services dramatically increased the number of public employees" (Shelton 2017, 4). They produced the goods and services offered by the state to the population at large. The boss was the state itself.

Taxpayers/voters became a sort of hive-mind public boss that could exercise power at the ballot box and the mob. We will discuss them in detail later. Funding and personnel for police and other internal security forces, like the FBI, "grew precipitously after 1965 and then never dipped, sucking up ever-larger slices of municipal budgets" (Soss & Weaver 2017, 570).

Education in the Post-War Era

As the dust and rubble of the war was cleared away, "education had

become even more fundamental for Americans in procuring opportunity as the U.S. economy transitioned toward more highly skilled, white-collar employment" (Shelton 2017, 14). Meeting the demands of their own war machine for labor required an industrialized public sector to produce the workforce. By 1960, there were over two million teachers in the empire to help meet this demand.

Rising student enrollment required ramping up production methods.

Percentage of children who completed high school shot up from 67% in 1947 to around 90% by 1975. There it plateaued. In higher-education, the magnitude of the change was even greater. The percentage of 18- and 19-year-olds seeking education services tripled (US Census Bureau). These trends continue through the early twenties age range.

These enrollment levels brought billions in direct investments. One's employers didn't have to pay for. By 1976, state governments in America poured $70 billion into the education industry every year—compared with less than $6 billion in 1950. Through political connections, capitalists could manipulate this fire-hose of funding to be spent in ways that would best line their pockets. Education thus became further commodified in the Post-War period to meet the needs of the military-industrial complex as they pursued their Cold War crusade. Those who resisted had the prison and the graveyard awaiting them.

Race, Segregation, and the Education Industry

Black Americans fled racist violence and poverty in the South and migrated to major city centers in the North during the Great Migration. They found no promised land. "Realtors, banks, and white residents combined" to consign Black Americans to ghettos and underfunded, overcrowded, chaotic school systems almost impossible to escape (Lyons 2008, 134). There, their children were "refined" on an assembly line into their roles in capitalist society. Black American enrollment "climbed from 74,000 in 1950 to 250,000 in 1963, or from 21% to 47% of the total" students in Chicago schools, for example (Lyons 2008, 136). White workers—occupying a privileged position as enforcers of a white supremacist order—would "refine" these children.

White teachers in Northern and Midwestern cities had a complicated relationship with the Black and Puerto Rican communities they taught. On paper, teachers' unions had been staunch allies of the Civil Rights Movement for decades. Two years before *Brown v. Board of Education*, AFT members voted to expel any local that refused to racially integrate its

membership (Easterling 2013). On the other hand, teachers had incendiary conflicts with Black communities in these cities from 1968-1973 (Shelton 2017).

Such conflagrations took place during the Strike Wave Era. It was a wider period of class struggle within public education spanning 1960-1981. Teachers achieved some dignity and professionalism at their jobs through militant, illegal strikes (Shelton 2017). “Other public sector unions expanded in the 1960s, but none saw as much militancy as teachers’ unions”. An article in *Times* from 1963 compared teachers’ militant strike actions to those of dockworkers. AFT membership rose from 59,000 to 205,000 from 1960-1970. Militant struggle is the best way to convince workers to join. Even the NEA, after launching strikes, saw membership rise by 700,000 between 1960-1970 (Lyons 2008).

From 1960-1968, teachers solidified collective bargaining agreements.

These contracts often more than doubled their salaries. They also ended many of the indignities they’d collectively endured for decades. Previously, principals acted like feudal lords. They could force teachers to stay long after the working day had ended, assign random duties at will, and withhold paychecks. They now had their authority circumscribed (Shelton 2017).

By and large, the public supported them, too. Hundreds of thousands of teachers participated in strikes or other work stoppages (Covington 1971).

Teachers’ unions built incredible power. They became “junior partners” of school boards in administering many urban school systems by 1970 (Shelton 2017). This put them in a compromising position.

Many white educators were (and are) racist. Black activist parents felt that white teachers and white controlled school systems did not care about, or hated, their children. From 1968-1973, some striking teachers’ demanded reinstatement of corporal punishment for “unruly” students—usually poor Black children (Shelton 2017). That alone was enough to alienate many Black parents and Black educators. Craft union strategies in the US, infected with racism and an organizing model fragmented by job role and skill, inflamed the problem.

For some, the solution was community control of neighborhood schools.

There were attempts to implement this. Most funded and supported by philanthropic foundations of the rich. The way they eroded teachers' due process rights and working conditions enraged unionists (Goldstein 2014). Bitter and often violent strike actions by teachers followed. Fighting each other weakened both communities, exposing them to the predations

of the rich (Shelton 2017). Cities with already majority Black teacher workforces and populations, like Washington DC, avoided these conflicts in the first place (Easterling 2013). Some union locals reformed in response. After serious reform, the CTU regained substantial support from Black communities by the early 1970s (Lyons 2008).

But overall, white teachers were unwilling to compromise with Black community members. They wanted mostly women education workers to resume "additional (unpaid) care labor" (Shelton 2017, 70). Teachers' recent memories of these assignments from before the beginning of the Strike Wave Era "loomed large in many teachers' decision to join the union" while many "teachers remembered class sizes of up to forty" in Newark, New Jersey (Shelton 2017, 67).

Ultimately, in most of these strikes, it was the school boards and mayors who were to blame. Their unwillingness to negotiate set the stage for conflict between Black parents and white teachers. These are tried and true union busting tactics. "Almost half of the city's teaching force crossed the picket lines, as many of the city's black teachers allied" with the Black public of the city (Shelton 2017, 71). Black Power activists worked with Amiri Baraka to break picket lines.

White teachers allied with local racist vigilante: Tony Imperiale (Goldstein 2014) (Shelton 2017).

It's hard to see these white teachers allying with someone who sought "help from supporters of George Wallace" (Shelton 2017, 71) for the sake of members' personal economic interests as anything except collaboration with middle-class fascist formations. White teachers betrayed the Black freedom struggle. They used white hostility to integration for their own benefit. This came around to bite them in the ass. Teachers secured higher salaries and a near-professional status, but lost community support. It is especially ironic, because many of the woes teachers experienced during the unsolved urban fiscal crises of the 1970s were a direct result of white flight to the suburbs (Shelton 2017). These white suburbanites denounced teachers and turned American politics towards market reforms (Shelton 2017).

White Americans had accessed the benefits of a strong, stable economy fueled by militarist largesse and imperialist violence. A well-regulated labor market had offered them access to educational and economic opportunities for over 25 years. Teachers had (limited) access to the prosperous mainstream economy.

Meanwhile, white capitalists permanently shut millions of Black Americans out of employment (Desilver 2013) (Shelton 2017). They had

been cut out of most New Deal program benefits from the beginning.

Young Black people, experiencing constant racism and discrimination in school, often dropped out (Goldstein 2014). That left working low-wage jobs or joining spreading street gangs. Background accumulation is an ongoing process. Further dispossession of colonized people is a necessary byproduct of an industrializing education system.

White workers were complicit. Teachers and their unions were no exception.

The CTU closed ranks with Mayor Daley to receive better salaries and benefits, allowing him to outflank the city's Civil Rights and Black Power movements (Lyons 2008). In the South, a cohort of white teachers taught in private (but publicly funded) segregation academies as integration orders began (Black 2020) (Rooks 2017). This is part of a historical tendency in the US where whites of all social classes unite to suppress revolution among colonized Americans. This is the essence of fascism.

Raucous fights between teachers and urban school boards were commonplace. They dominated the news and the political conversations everyday people were having. These strikes caused wide swathes of Americans—from urban Black people to unionized white workers in the suburbs to elite liberal technocrats—to lose faith in the New Deal Coalition management of cities and workforces (Shelton 2017). People began to rethink previous political assumptions. In this chaos and confusion, the corporate sector succeeded in pushing deregulation and privatization in education.

Petty Tyrants: The Public Boss Class

First, big business interests and politicians needed local allies to be their boots on the ground against organized labor. They tapped into the seething rage of Americans with historical privilege and power in primarily rural and suburban areas. We will refer to them as the public boss class. More common names include the "voters," "taxpayers," and "citizens." That usually means (white) landowning farmers, small industrialists, small business owners, petty landlords, and suburban homeowners (Scribner 2015) (Shelton 2017). Nixon called them the Silent Majority.

Vigilantism has always played a major role in American 'justice.' White mob violence against Black Americans, indigenous peoples,

immigrants, and workers of all backgrounds is a prominent theme in US history. Frequently, these mobs have targeted teachers suspected of being communist. There was a specter haunting the teaching workforce, of course. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was a strong current of radicalism among many teachers. Locals in Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and Newark voted communists into leadership. These communist locals exemplified and sharpened the best instincts of teachers' unions through their connections to social movements (Toloudis 2019) (Taylor 2013).

Most teachers in these locals were not communists. Even so, the rank-and- file continually voted them into leadership for their reputations as strong, principled union militants. The AFL had to strong-arm the AFT to expel communist locals in 1941 to prevent them from spreading. Class collaborationist union leaders across the labor movement did the same (Taylor 2013).

The Industrialization of Rural Education

Congress responded to the USSR's launch of Sputnik with the National Defense Education Act of 1957 (Goldstein 2014). Several hundred million dollars was set aside for training the top achieving students for careers in science, math, and technology. The logic of national security enticed executives of defense companies and politicians to invest heavily in education to ensure supremacy over the USSR. A mass of federal funds flowed into the education industry for the first time.

Lyndon B. Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 then further centralized the education industry on a national scale. It provided a large, consistent stream of federal funds for local and state public school systems (Goldstein 2014). Access to this money comes with conditions that vary depending on who holds power. The federal government married the police power to the power of the purse.

This fundamentally transformed education policy and created a truly national education industry. Education's trajectory paralleled the late 19th Century emergence of a national American marketplace and regulatory framework with the Second Industrial Revolution. LBJ's government helped push industrialization outside the city school districts, past the suburban towns, and deep into the countryside. The public boss class reacted strongly.

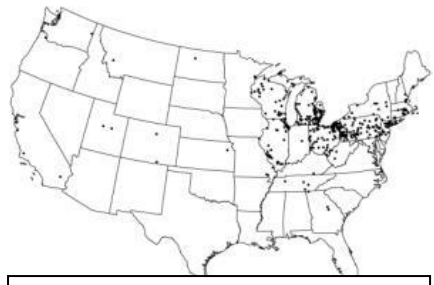
Outside urban centers, industrialization never took hold in schools and libraries. Up through the 1950s, one-room schoolhouses were the

main providers of education in the countryside (Scribner 2015). They operated under direct local governmental authority, a tradition of "voter control" that residents fiercely protected against "urban-type schools" (Scribner 2015, 537). There were few centralized education production facilities in the countryside from the Northeast to California. Each school only had one teacher. And "through the early 1900s teaching remained a part-time job suited to transients or young women biding their time until marriage" (Scribner 2015, 536).

Libraries in the West and rural South rarely had more than one librarian each. Any other workers were community volunteers. Collections were usually outdated, so library workers had to update them with few resources (Hillary and Abbot 2015). Funding came almost entirely from local property taxes. That kept education production highly localized in scale. Tax paying landowners were notoriously stingy (Scribner 2015).

Oversight of education at the state level grew starting in the 1910s. "Coalitions of education associations, corporate foundations, and social welfare reformers" lobbied "legislatures to increase thresholds for school funding and teacher preparation" (Scribner 2015, 533). One-room schoolhouses began to close and consolidate. The resistance of rural communities slowed this process.

After World War II state legislatures and courts raised curriculum requirements and qualifications. They tied state-level funding to consolidation in some way. Wisconsin passed a law in 1959 "essentially outlawing the one-room schoolhouse" by requiring that all districts operate a high school to access state money (Scribner 2015, 537) (Goldstein 2014). From 200,000 one-school districts in 1915, 1,200 existed by the 1970s. The number of school districts in Wisconsin collapsed from over 5,000 to less than 600 (Scribner 2015). Local tax revenues covered over 65% of American education spending in 1945. That dropped to less than 50% by 1975 (Scribner 2015). Capital was now circulating across a much wider geographic space.



Strikes of 200 teachers or fewer

School consolidation, along with the corresponding rise in property taxes and number of unionizing teachers, activated the public boss class. They viewed themselves as the only productive members of society (Shelton 2017). Their dispersed communities allied when "residents tapped

into the stream of antiunion literature propagated by conservative business interests like the John Birch Society" (Scribner 2015, 538). Teachers were cast as outsiders and special interest groups (Schirmer 2016). Taxpayers maligned unions as anti-democratic bodies that reduced voter control of schools. Rebellious union teachers had to be "cowed" to stay in line at the ballot box. And—more ominously—through vigilantism. The 1974 Hortonville teacher strike—when "taxpayers" enlisted unemployed young men to violently target strikers—is one of many examples.

Most in the public boss class either do not have school-age children. Or redirect their children to private, parochial, or suburban public schools to avoid racial or class integration. These were conscious choices. Thousands of letters to newspapers throughout the 1970s threatened to join their counterparts streaming to the suburbs. These were direct responses to teachers' strikes, which had raised property taxes (Shelton 2017). The public boss class "opened up a space in which commentators began to imagine alternatives to the public school system" (Shelton 2017, 185) (Costello 2006).

The newspaper industry helped mobilize the public boss class. Newspapers, fighting their own battles with unionizing workers, maligned striking teachers (Shelton 2017). They published endless op-eds and letters smearing teachers. They galvanized the public boss class with its coverage of Prop 13 in California. Prop 13 amended the state constitution to permanently cap property taxes. Their virulence sharpened after 1973 when teachers launched strikes from St. Louis to Philadelphia to New York. Teachers took it too far by demanding more control over curriculum and other higher level school decisions (Shelton 2017).

Phase Three, 1992-today

The Transition Years, 1976-1992

After 1976, crisis set in as stagflation ravaged working people and cratered city budgets (Shelton 2017). Enrollment stopped growing. Reagan then imposed harsh cuts on social services and gutted business regulations (Gershon 2017). He redirected this money into the military-industrial complex (Husbands 1985).

Decades of Cold War ideology had taken deep hold in the American psyche. Which gave Reagan a mandate to remilitarize the

empire after Vietnam.

Since the 1930s, the US had built up its ability to regulate the economy, engineer the social body, and serve the public at large—in unequal ways, of course—but those days were over. Reagan and his allies believed "government is the problem". The only legitimate use for the state was bludgeoning workers into line. That and plundering the world. His regime swept away the last cobwebs of the New Deal state. He declared war against unions by firing the PATCO strikers (Houlihan 2021). And after more than two decades of whites' "massive resistance" against the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power, all political will for any progressive social action by the state collapsed.

As people stopped believing in the American nation-state's ability to positively shape society, the state and the capitalist class activated "their right to arbitrarily choose new favorites and revise [their] obligations" (Riva 2022, 11). The elite of the corporate world openly discussed how to worsen workers' conditions (Wong 2021).

Economic realignment was underway. Reagan, Thatcher, and other right- wing reactionaries opened space for Neoliberal capital to infect the host's social body (Boyd 1987). Public education was one of the targets (Givan 2014). Finance capitalists on Wall Street and in boardrooms across the empire "formulated an all- out assault." They "found an ally in a Reagan administration focused on privatizing education as a means of breaking the grip of big unions and clearing the way for corporate profits" (Rooks 2017, 131). Their motivation was "the potential for financial gain tied to the education of Black children" (Rooks 2017, 131).

Fascism never ends with just one scapegoat. Another can always be conjured, because "the nation and state are two separate and unrelated things, and in exile the alchemy of a hyphen comes undone" (Riva 2022, 8). Pressure for charter schools and vouchers increased—the legacy of segregation academies (Black 2020). By the early 1990s, private sector unions were weak. Teachers' unions were weakening.

By the 1990s, the Neoliberal urge to transform everything into a market had picked up serious momentum in both parties. Now, a new generation of investors could industrialize tech, logistics, and education. These structural changes devastated the working classes of America—and the world. Wages stagnated in 1980. Corporate profits soared (Cohen 2018). They solved the profitability crisis[34] of the 1970s by driving down labor costs—everywhere they could (Moseley 2013) (Nordhaus et al. 1974). Weak unions failed to stop them.

The capitalists no longer wanted to relegate education to the

public sector after the strike debacles of the 1970s. They tested the legal waters throughout the 1980s to accomplish their goals. One campaign was to institute merit pay based on principal administered evaluations. It was always a reform pushed by business elites (Goldstein 2014). The first voucher law was passed in 1984 (Rooks 2017). Primrose Academies brought franchised pre-schools and daycares onto the scene in 1988.

Financialization and deregulation encouraged capitalists to redirect investment from real production and towards abstract financial speculation as corporations cut labor and operations costs. Tech, service, education, and logistics industrialized while factories closed. Career stability disappeared and workers needed to constantly (re)seek educational services to survive. Education that private companies controlled a greater share of with each passing year.

Capital can never stop moving, so education became a lightning rod for investment. The state facilitated this. Governments serve as enforcers of their donors, and this was no exception. As they dismantled the New Deal state's infrastructure, "liberals and conservatives both worked to promote deregulatory initiatives spanning vast sectors of public policy" (Cohen 2017). Then they handed it off to the pentagon and finance capitalists on Wall Street.

Reagan commissioned the A Nation at Risk report. The report claimed that American public education was in deep trouble. It was bullshit (Tucker 2018).

Only one teacher was on the panel that wrote the report—the rest were corporate executives and administrators. His voice was sidelined. He denounced A Nation at Risk as soon as it came out (Rooks 2017). Truthfulness wasn't the point, though. Manufactured moral panic that undercut attempts to increase federal education funding was (Rooks 2017) (Boyd 1987). It was as if an apex predator shook the bushes and waited for their prey to flee in fright—right into their jaws.

Milton Friedman and other libertarian intellectuals filled the rhetorical vacuum. Friedman's text "The Role of Government in Education," is still incredibly influential in the education reform scene (Haupt III 2022) (Rooks 2017) (Philanthropy Magazine 2013). It laid out a model of publicly funded, but privately administered, education. Education was to be totally based on parental choice (Friedman 1955). He advocated for the effective abolition of all government-run schools (Rooks 2017).

A "policy entrepreneur" named Ted Kolderie brewed up charter schools in the early 1970s and 1980s. As part of the Citizens League of Minnesota, along with the Minnesota Business Partnership, he was

"critical in advancing school deregulation in the state" (Cohen 2017). And "when the League spoke, the legislature listened" (Cohen 2017). Kolderie and his allies in the Public Service Options (PSO) committee called for "school choice" and breaking the public sector "monopoly" on education (Cohen 2017). Instead, "universities, corporations, public school districts, [and] nonprofits would compete in an marketplace managing K-12 schools" (Cohen 2017).

His vision was soon to be a reality.

By 1987, Reagan retreated from federal intervention in education. He successfully gambled that *A Nation at Risk* would spur a "wave of reforms" by dozens of states that could "have taken 30 years to enact through regular education channels" (Boyd 1987). His regime used the "bully pulpit" to transform "the semantics and agenda of American educational policy". Doing so "with very little more than effective use of rhetoric and symbols, and their ability to command attention from the media" (Boyd 1987). States debuted standardized performance thresholds. Fear of foreign economic and geopolitical competition from Japan and the USSR was widespread. Researchers at the time documented a:

> 180-degree shift…away from the…federal policy in the 1970's: from equity to excellence; from needs and access to ability and selectivity; from regulations and enforcement to deregulation; from the common school to parental choice and institutional competition; and from social and welfare concerns to economic and productivity concerns (Boyd 1987).

Privatization wove all these threads together to reshape education along industrial lines. Teachers' unions beat back many Reagan era education reforms. But their strength failed in the 1990s (Boyd 1987).

Open Market, Open Season: Privatization

Comprehensive legislative education reform strongly favoring private corporate interests came in 1991. That year, the nation's first charter school law passed in Minnesota. A bipartisan frenzy of support erupted. Democrats were eager to sign on board in the age of no alternative.[39] While framing themselves as aligned with social and economic justice causes, "the real power in the charter coalition was what might be termed the 'technocratic centrists': business leaders, moderate Republicans, and DLC [Democratic Leadership Council] members" (Cohen 2017).

As of 2019—3.4 million students were enrolled in charter schools.

Only five states lacked laws authorizing charter school markets (NCES 2022). A total of twelve million American students have attended a charter school since 1992 (White 2022). Enrollment growth has accelerated: 1.4 million more students attend a charter school compared to 2017.

Around eight percent of current American students are enrolled in public charter schools. That might seem small, but focus on several American cities and the picture changes. Charter school students are the majority in cities like New Orleans, Kansas City, Detroit, and Washington D.C. Cities with majority Black and Latinx populations (Rooks 2017).

This is the future.

A primary source from education entrepreneurs

Although education is a huge part of the U.S. economy, until recently it wasn't much of a business… But as the millennium dawns, the private sector is poised to play a much larger role… fueled by an explosion in the money available to education start-ups.

Business Week
Education Industry Outlook
January 10, 2000

In 1992, total private investment in education was $64 million. By 2001, it was four billion (Fromm & Kern 2000). A 2000 taxonomy of private investment opportunities, written by top executives of an education startup and published in *The Journal of School Choice,* is worth looking at. Their goal was to "to stimulate readers' interest in the education industry and, by doing so, to attract new investment capital that will fuel the continued transformation of the industry" (Fromm & Kern 2000, 38). They track how average yearly private investment in education rocketed upwards by 64% per year (Fromm & Kern 2000, 40).

They referenced several op-eds, studies, and conferences that discussed educational investments. One refrain present in every piece is something like 'education hasn't been much of a business, until now.' The capitalist class was becoming conscious of the role they played in education, and conspiring to take it further. Fromm and Kern included school related real estate, public investments, personnel and labor costs, and public capitalization. They forecasted strong growth for the already gargantuan $740 billion industry. Only healthcare made up a bigger chunk of GDP. One hundred billion of that was already in the for-profit market (Fromm & Kern 2000, 38). Thirty-five states had charter laws, and

While the for-profit education business has been evolving for several years, with the establishment of Chris Whittle's Edison Schools and the University of Phoenix's college for working adults, the transformation is now occurring on a far larger scale.

The New York Times
front-page article, "Investors See Room for Profit in the Demand for Education"
November 4, 1999

over 1,400 charter schools were built. Higher education and job training saw similar growth.

The simultaneous industrialization of the high-tech sector of the economy created greater pressure to profit off education. Since the 1970s, state and federal laws had mandated data collection. By 1992, troves of data on student achievement and demographics had accumulated (Goldstein 2014). Computing technology enabled companies to collect information, analyze it, and eventually sell it as a commodity. There's even a booming sub-sector called Ed Tech.

Rapid technological evolution heralded perpetually rising educational requirements for workers. Fromm and Kern say "resources of the new, knowledge- based economy are brainpower and the ability to acquire, deliver and process information effectively" (41). Their words had another meaning: keep up or die.

High school and college degrees get workers less with each passing year. Without a high school diploma, forget it.

Public capitalization is the highest form of capital circulation. Reaching the stock market signifies that you can convert sweat and blood into stock share prices. By 1998, 71 education companies were on the stock market. Fromm and Kern cited predictions that in 2000 alone over 35 companies would follow.

Data and Dollar Signs: No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind is the 2001 version of the ESEA, originally passed in 1965. Its 2001 update synthesized education reform currents around 'school accountability.' Meaning high stakes standardized testing from a young age.

Politicians, media pundits, and corporate 'reformers' pressed that a quality education was the "civil rights issue of the day" (Goldstein 2014) (Rooks 2017). They were obsessed with testing. And whenever someone questioned the efficacy and intent of the law, wealthy and connected supporters accused them of not believing that poor students can learn (Goldstein 2014).

At the 2008 DNC convention, then-mayor of Washington D.C., Adrian Fenty, said:

> The American Federation of Teachers, which I don't think does anything for the people of the District of Columbia, is weighing in against [a law to weaken teacher job security in exchange for a

> fraction of them getting merit bonuses]…Ten years ago when I talked about school choice, I was literally tarred and feathered. I was literally brought into a broom closet by a union and told I would never win office if I kept talking about charters" (Goldstein 2014, 211).

Fenty's comments reveal his disdain for working people and a penchant for hyperbole. He writes off the demands of District teachers as an arrogant attempt at "weighing in" on a topic better left for the 'experts' to handle. His claim that teachers' unions are useless to the community draws back to 1970s era editorial letters denouncing teachers as unproductive leeches (Shelton 2017). Corporate reformers routinely brand teachers as selfish and anti-progress. They can get away with all sorts of nasty, violent rhetoric towards teachers—like when Chris Christie fantasized about punching unionized teachers publicly—because a patriarchal society lets them.

State government power proved crucial in opening public education to rampant privatization in the age of NCLB. Specifically: governors, both Republican and Democratic. Pennsylvania's governor took over Philadelphia public schools in 2001 (Rooks 2017). Headed up by businessman James Nevels in the School Reform Commission, they completely mismanaged the city's schools. By 2006, Nevels reported an even higher deficit, $73 million, than had existed before the takeover. Even as Nevels turned 45 struggling public schools over to the Edison charter company, he blew $107 million on charter school funding (Philadelphia City Paper 2013). A similar story has played out in Detroit since the Great Recession (Albert Shanker Institute 2017).

This is a union busting tactic. All of this is. Vouchers, charter schools, standardized testing, and teacher evaluation schemes were all created with two purposes in mind: destroy the teachers' unions and privatize education. The end goal was "dismantling tax-supported public education in urban areas" (Rooks 2017, 131). Teachers' unions—for as long as they've existed—have fought for a robust, fully funded public education system. One that provides a range of academic opportunities for all (Black 2020) (Shelton 2017) (Goldstein 2014) (Lyons 2008). They also are a stronghold of feminist power. They are one of the few true bastions of democracy left in this empire, however imperfect. To destroy public education, you must smash the teachers' unions, or go around them by creating non-union charters (Goldstein, 2014).

No Child Left Behind inflamed the problem. Teachers' unions, most of which hadn't struck since the early 1980s, mustered a weak response to

the fascist assault on their memberships (Koppich 2005).

The School to Prison Pipeline

Students who fail to conform to the standards of the production process are labeled as defective products and plucked off the conveyor belt as fast as possible. Many are dropped into the school to prison pipeline. Police in schools have become normalized and accepted since the 1990s.

The Justice Department kicked off the process with its "Cops in Schools" program that brought thousands of police officers into schools around the country. Now, there are well over 50,000 of these pigs, known as "School Resource Officers" (SROs), in our schools (Vitale 2017). They serve as the arms perched over the assembly line—ready to strike and redirect students into the prison system.

The myth of so-called "superpredators" in the 1990s justified this turn. Republican and Democrat politicians alike parroted this racist nonsense. It was cooked up by conservative "criminologists" and so-called "researchers" like the frauds who came up with the widely discredited Broken Windows Theory. They believed that criminality was inherent in *certain* people, and couldn't be reformed. Logically, what followed for them was locking criminals—and alleged criminals- to-be—up as early and for as long as possible (Vitale 2017).

The industry's obsessive turn towards testing and privatization are directly responsible. Researchers have thoroughly debunked the argument that SROs make schools safer. In fact, they make them more dangerous, and rarely prevent shootings (Vitale 2017). They are there to enforce an otherwise intolerable factory regime in the schools.

Teaching to the test sucks the joy out of teaching and learning, causing students to misbehave. Administrators then construct harsh disciplinary systems. Teachers are already overwhelmed. If they want to keep their jobs, they must keep test scores up. That gives them an incentive to get low performing students out of their classrooms (Vitale 2017) (Nathan 2013). Schools "increasingly turn over more and more school discipline" to SROs. They are "finding it easier just to have a police officer come in and remove and arrest a student" than address the root of the student's behavior (Vitale 2017, 155).

Standing to benefit are "for-profit companies with close ties to…Republican leaders" that provide "fingerprint scanners, metal detectors, and cameras" to schools (Vitale 2017, 149). There's even a

National Association of School Resource Officers. Its "annual convention is a panoply of military contractors trying to sell schools new security systems, train officers in paramilitary techniques," and paint students as constant threats (Vitale 2017, 161).

Deskilling of Teachers after NCLB

High stakes testing allowed government officials to close schools and reopen them as charters. It also gave everyone from administrators, curriculum developers, and writers of state standards an incentive to narrow schooling to the tested subjects. "This is the origin story of teaching to the test" (Goldstein 2014). The law mandated standardized testing regimens in all 50 states and DC for grades 3-8. Schools would be sanctioned through budget cuts—or even closed and reopened as charter schools. Most of the fallout rained down on poor districts.

Testing companies took advantage of this. Educational Testing Service (ETS) has become a de-facto monopoly over standardized testing. If you want to go to college, become a teacher, go to grad school, or go to K-12 public schools, you must take their exams. Graduate students are even pulled in as "guinea pigs" for ETS to test new questions without pay (Americans for Testing Reform 2011).

The law ushered forth all sorts of "perverse incentives" (Goldstein 2014, 187). Schools that didn't measure up "would be publicly declared failing, and could lose Title I funding or get taken over by their states" (Goldstein 2014, 185). State takeovers always prove disastrous for students (Lynch 2017). State government appointed guardians of school systems frequently force teachers to sacrifice to help balance city budgets (Shelton 2017). The Philadelphia School Reform Commission (SRC) "unilaterally canceled teachers' contracts, ordering them to pay more of their health insurance premiums in order to close the budget gap" (Shelton 2017, 196). That is just one of countless examples since the municipal budget crises of the 1970s.

By 2005, a national teacher survey revealed that "60 percent identified 'testing demands/teaching to the test' as the single biggest hindrance to public education" (Goldstein 2014, 188). Research discovered "65 percent of all districts, and 75 percent of those with at least one school in danger of 'failing,'" slashed their social studies and science instructional time (Goldstein 2014, 187).

Districts cooked their books on dropout rates, test score increases, and teacher retention (Goldstein 2014) (Rooks 2017) (Nathan 2013). One

superintendent raised test scores by kicking out all the academically struggling kids in his district. He earned himself $56,000 in bonuses (Nathan 2013).

School districts adopted "teacher proof" scripted lessons from Success for All. These lessons "provide prescriptive day-to-day, even minute-to-minute schedules for teachers to follow" (Goldstein 2014, 186). Kati Haycock—along with organizations like The Education Trust—expounded a "teacher accountability agenda" throughout the 1990s. One that derided urban teachers as incompetent, lazy, and uncaring (Goldstein 2014, 184). Teacher pay stagnated in 1996 (Allegretto 2022). That is no coincidence. Deskilling is a feature of industrialization. If workers are nearly indistinguishable from machines, you can justify paying them like shit.

NCLB caused many of these changes, but its passage also rode on the effects of 1990s market reforms. Clinton campaigned on education reform, signing the Improving America's Schools Act and Goals 2000. These laws set the agenda in education and created enforcement mechanisms. Usually through market schemes and privatization. Over one thousand schools had adopted Success for All by 1999 (Viadero 1999). But NCLB did collapse the foundations of the transformative gains unionized teachers had made in the Strike Wave Era.

The rich kids are coming for our jobs! Teach for America

Teach for America (TFA) undermined the professionalism teachers had won less than 20 years before by creating "alternative" staffing pipelines into teaching. Wendy Kopp founded TFA in 1989. She was not a teacher. She was an Ivy League graduate (Goldstein 2014). At a 1988 conference, she and other students soon to ascend the corporate ladder saw news about the teacher shortages of their time.

They wondered if they were the solution to the crisis.

There was just one problem: these college kids soon to fill suits and board rooms weren't education majors. And—in their eyes—you couldn't get ahead with an education degree (Goldstein 2014). None wanted to permanently diverge from their luxurious futures.

TFA brought elite students into education with the promise of enhanced resumes (Goldstein 2014). Only the top fifteen percent of top college graduates are accepted. They then send these rich kids into poor school districts for two years with five weeks of training. There was never any intention to entice people to stay in education (Goldstein 2014). Most

step back into their lucrative career paths in politics, law, and economics. Those who stayed became administrators and education policy writers. Some spawned their own education corporations like the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) (Goldstein 2014).

Kopp was a businesswoman at heart. She excelled at securing funding from corporate donors and philanthropic foundations. Unfortunately, she applied these lessons to education. Merck, Chrysler, Morgan Stanley, Hertz, Carnegie, Kellogg, and other corporate foundations signed on early (Goldstein 2014). By 1990 she'd raised almost $2 million. Revenues shot up soon after.

Teach for America destabilized the teaching workforce. It revealed teaching as a lower career path (Goldstein 2014). For elite students, teaching was just a stepping stone—earning some social justice points along the way, as perks. Their actions helped reopen the teaching workforce to the American impulse to punish, punish, punish. Job security won through intense and militant union action vanished. For each fellow, school districts and charters paid TFA thousands (Goldstein 2014) (Cohen 2015). Meanwhile, Kopp and other entrepreneurs built powerful lobbying arms to ensure education policy was made by the rich, for the rich. By 2013, public school teachers were twice as likely to be fired compared to private sector employees. They were ten times more likely to be fired than federal government workers (Goldstein 2014).

In the Aftermath of 2008, 2009-today

The lobbying arms of education industrialists convened an "unholy alliance of liberals and conservatives to push for 'flexibility'" and freedom "in curriculum, teacher salaries, and hiring and firing-in the name of measurable student achievement" (Givan 2014, 70). In other words: freedom for the exploiter, and tyranny for the toiler. Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II had already created a poisoned environment based on high stakes, standardized testing. But the carnage of the Great Recession enabled truly bipartisan offensives against organized teachers. Organized labor serves as an essential storehouse of workers' intellectual and revolutionary culture. It must be exterminated for fascism to achieve its objectives. With private sector unions essentially destroyed by the time the Great Recession hit, public sector unions were alone.

Calls for crushing the teachers' unions became ubiquitous after the most devastating economic panic since the 1930s. The right wing had been

at it: “In the last several election cycles, it has become de rigueur for right-wing candidates to express their anger at teachers and their unions, blaming them for any and all ills of public education, and characterizing them as resistant to change” (Givan 2014). Now they became truly vicious. Scott Walker’s Act 10 legislation gutted teachers’ pensions to balance the state’s budget. Crisis justified harsh, damaging austerity (Shanker Institute 2017).

Democrats now got in on the feeding frenzy. Boldly “‘taking on’ teachers' unions has become a popular activity for a number of prominent Democrats” (Givan 2014, 70) such as Rahm Emmanuel, Arne Duncan, Michelle Rhee, Cory Booker, and Adrian Fenty (Givan 2014, 72). Their assaults didn’t stop with rhetoric.

Obama further loosened restraints on private business in education with the Race to the Top funding program. The money came with conditions. Districts and states had to “recalibrate their education policies around such things as charter schools and teacher accountability programs” (Shelton 2017, 196). It intensified the Bush Dynasty’s testing regimens, curriculum narrowing, and school closures (Rooks 2017).

Teachers were singled out. In the years since NCLB, intellectual engineers at universities, foundations, and research facilities devised ways to correlate standardized testing data to individual teacher—rather than school or district— performance (Goldstein 2014). Teachers could now be disciplined and fired according to ‘objective’ criteria. Objective criteria which varied from state to state and district to district (Goldstein 2014).

Administrations implemented invasive observation methods and effectiveness scores. If you fail to rate “effective” at many schools, especially charter schools, you’re gone (Rooks 2017). Teachers have nothing to do with the formulation of these assessments. Groups like the National Comprehensive Center work with education agencies at different administrative levels. That includes testing companies like Educational Testing Service (ETS), education non- profits like Learning Point, and elite universities like Vanderbilt to design them.

Financialization and Monopolization

Charter school companies have been in a prolonged period of expansion in scale since 2008. Continued access to venture capital and foundation funding has combined with Obama’s deregulation and privatization. Education companies are popping up like weeds using billions of taxpayer dollars (Scheuric, Elfriech, and Scott 2008).

The Mind Trust, a Charter Management Organization (CMO) founded in Indianapolis in 2006, has been spawning companies in its own image since 2011. They have founded over 36 CMOs. Starting in 2012, they hollowed out Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) by running and lavishly funding "candidates for the school board, with all of their candidates winning". "IPS now completely operates in terms of the Mind Trust agenda to destroy traditional schools, charterize the district, and eliminate the teachers' union" (Scheuric, Elfriech, and Scott 2008).

With Indianapolis saturated, some of these charters sought new markets. Phalen Leadership Academies (PLA) offers a telling example. Its CEO sought out new markets in Detroit, Michigan, Texas, Alabama, and Washington D.C. Places that already have thriving charter sectors and complicit local governments (Jason 2017) (Graham 2018) (Collins 2022). It's an updated version of imperialism and colonialism with a new frontier in the urban centers. Their "support for gentrification to attract young white folks to the city" directly displaces and destroys Black American communities (Scheuric, Elfriech, and Scott 2008, 2).

Industrialized education is spreading internationally, too. Wendy Kopp is exporting TFA as quasi-franchises (Goldstein 2014). Online learning is going global. K12 is expanding into the Global South, for example (Albert Shanker Institute 2017) (K12 2010). At the same time, education workers around the world are facing escalating repression (PM Press 2012). Internal settler colonialism progresses without end, as gentrification and seizures of indigenous land intensify.

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) returned a lot of education authority to state and local governments. Even so, consolidation of private businesses connected to Wall Street have brought us towards a state of monopoly in education. Ironic considering the anti-monopoly rhetoric of those like Kolderie.

All factors of an industrialized part of the economy are now present. By the end of the last decade, there were over three million public school teachers, almost 300,000 charter school teachers, and over 500,000 private school teachers. That's not to mention paraeducators, food service workers, interventionists, and custodial staff. Over six million workers total (Loeb 2016). There were over 360,000 library workers and over 700,000 museum workers (Melon Foundation 2017). Just under five million work in post-secondary education. Tutors add another million to the total (Organisciak 2019). There are around 200,000 curriculum developers. Less than 1,000 education policy analyst jobs exist (BLS 2022) (Roberts 2019) (BLS 2022). There's a little under a million administrators (Department for Professional

Employees 2019). That's an industry comprising at least 15 million workers and managers. The scale of raw material is vast, too: over 80 million students.

K12 makes annual profits of over $849 million as of 2017—it's likely over a billion now. Over $100 million of that profit comes from their failing virtual schools (Rooks 2017). A leader at KIPP schools in DC killed himself after embezzling $2.2 million to buy himself cars, property, and other expensive things (Ravitch 2022). Good riddance. Ominously, higher education has been identified at the Davos Conferences as the third most potentially profitable sector in the global economy (Albert Shanker Institute 2017). Overall, the education industry is worth $1.4 trillion domestically and $5.6 trillion globally (Zion Market Research 2022).

Trump and the Remobilization of the Public Boss Class

Donald Trump needs no introduction. One of his henchmen is Betsy Devos, who he appointed as Secretary of the Department of Education. Devos is rightly detested. She called public education a "dead end" in a 2015 speech at the SXSWedu conference (Strauss 2016). Devos described education "as an 'industry'", rhetoric that was "in line with the corporate education reformers— including those in the Obama administration—who believe public schools should be viewed as businesses with competition from the outside" (Strauss 2016). Her words are worth quoting in fuller form:

> It's a battle of Industrial Age versus the Digital Age. It's the Model T versus the Tesla. It's old factory model versus the new Internet model. It's the Luddites versus the future. We must open up the education industry—and let's not kid ourselves that it isn't an industry—we must open it up to entrepreneurs and innovators…
>
> We are the beneficiaries of start-ups, ventures, and innovation in every other area of life, but we don't have that in education because it's a closed system, a closed industry, a closed market. It's a monopoly, a dead end. And the best and brightest innovators and risk- takers steer way clear of it. As long as education remains a closed system, we will never see the education equivalents of Google, Facebook, Amazon, PayPal, Wikipedia, or Uber. We won't see any real innovation that benefits more than a handful of students.

Look closely at this passage. Fossilized traces of the PSO,

Friedman, and men like William Rainey Harper are visible in every utterance. The audience, with many self-proclaimed Democrats among them, received her speech enthusiastically.

Her and Trump's material effects on state and local education policy were limited. Congress shot down her attempts to spend hundreds of millions of public money on private religious schools and voucher programs (Turner 2020). But like Reagan, their maneuvers at the bully pulpit were highly effective (Black 2020).

Rule changes under the ESSA only slightly relaxed the punitive elements of NCLB anyways (Stratford 2016). Devos wielded that remaining power to privatize. The president of the AFT pointed out that the "Education Department still 'insists on punishing schools that do not test at least 95 percent of students.

Punishing schools when students [or their parents] opt out of testing is a throwback to No Child Left Behind'" (Stratford 2016). She overturned the Obama era rules protecting transgender students. On top of that, she rewrote Title IX to shelter students enacting patriarchal violence such as sexual assault from accountability (Turner 2020). Under Devos, the Education Department also screwed student loan borrowers over when she "did the administrative equivalent of throwing sand in the gears of Borrower Defense" (Turner 2020).

Despite everyone from Reagan to Trump to Devos raising the alarm about bureaucratic red tape, they sure as hell facilitated the growth of the academic- managerial class. From 2013 to 2019, the number of administrators grew 26 percent. Even as staff shortages in schools and libraries grew more acute (DPE AFL-CIO 2019) (Black 2020). It's not about educational quality or equity or accountability, but control over the production process—especially our labor and time.

Devos, Trump, and many economists crafted bunk science to convince the public that schools were safe from Covid-19 (Cartus and Feldman 2022) (Green 2020). Education workers and the communities we serve were then forced into unsafe buildings. Or fought intense battles to secure and maintain safer virtual instruction (Brady 2022). Once again, education workers faced a showdown with the public boss class—which reared its ugly twin heads: white, rural, small-time capitalists and urban liberal professionals. These heads have more in common than either would like to admit (Blake 2020) (Cartus and Feldman 2022). Most education workers are now back in-person even as workplace hazards multiply.

Devos's impact on commodifying education stretches back decades. She and her husband transformed Michigan into a new frontier for

privatizing education.

She and her husband "worked to pass Michigan's first charter-school bill, in 1993." It "opened the door in their state for public money to be funneled to quasi- independent educational institutions" that were nearly unregulated (Mead 2016). Over two-thirds of Michigan charter school companies are for profit (Mead 2016). Devos lobbied to privatize education through corporate reform organizations (Mead 2016). Dick Devos, her husband, is an educational entrepreneur himself, with his own charter high school (Philanthropy Magazine 2013).

Betsy DeVos also "has a long history of backing virtual schools, including founding and funding groups that have supported the expansion of online education" while "Dick…was an investor in K12, a large network of more than 70 online schools" (Barnum 2016). Every legitimate researcher concludes that virtual charter schools produce "dismal" academic results (Barnum 2015) (Barnum 2016) (Rooks 2017) (Molnar et. al 2021) (Ravitch 2014). By 2016, one of its founders, Michael Milken, had a net worth of $2.5 billion. The money is mostly from public education contracts that fund his ventures with taxpayer money (Rooks 2017).

Florida is another frontier in industrialized education. Jeb Bush has spent the last thirty years pushing for virtual charter schools using dark money (Adcock et. al 2022) (Mencimer 2011). Bush is president of the Foundation for Excellence in Education (FEE), and former governor of Florida. He loosened regulations and diverted public funds to privately run virtual charters like Academica and K12. Which "undercuts public employees, their unions, and the Democratic base. In the guise of a technocratic policy initiative, it delivers a…big windfall for Bush's corporate backers" (Mencimer 2011) (Rooks 2017).

Democratic politicians in Ohio, Indiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and beyond have worked closely with Bush to promote virtual charters (Adcock et. al 2022) (Mencimer 2016) (Ravitch 2014) (Ravitch 2019) (Rooks 2017). Bush even wrote an article for the Bezos Rag (The Washington Post). It pushed virtual charter schools. He attacks teachers' unions less than two paragraphs in (Bush 2020).

Enrollment at virtual charters grew during the pandemic as parents desperate to keep their kids safe fell prey to their lure. Even before, "more than 330,000 students attended virtual schools in 2019-20, roughly 60 percent of them at for- profits" (Yoder 2021). Virtual charter executives have even been placing ads on children's TV channels, leaving out any

information about their total lack of academic rigor (Yoder 2021).

A war on public education and organized workers in the industry is coming from all sides. Conservative assaults on LGBTQIA+ educators and students are coming through mob actions at school board meetings and public libraries.

Republican dominated state legislatures are churning out bills banning “Critical Race Theory” and teaching about the existence of trans people. They're a fascistic response to grassroots progressive and revolutionary organizing by educators and students. White affluent progressives in the cities continue resistance to policies that would desegregate their cities’ schools (Blake 2020).

The point is to leverage abusive tactics to corrode already shaky job security.

If you could get your license revoked because a parent reports you for teaching “Critical Race Theory” or some other bullshit, you might shut your mouth. You’ll probably then keep your mouth shut about other things, too. Exile to the swelling homeless camps or prisons can come much more easily than many imagine.

All the while, the education system of the united states is falling apart.

Nearly everyone has started to notice. Educators are at their breaking points as they are subjected to violence daily. As the more privileged educators leave, those left behind face economic insecurity, dangerous conditions, and heightening exploitation. The industry is adapting to a high turnover model. Meaning the rest of us are doing the jobs of two, three, or even more people for pay that hasn’t changed in years.

Conclusions

Hidden in plain sight within the heavy book of American education history is the story of how education industrialized. For example, the heavy involvement of local, state, and (at times) federal governments to structure and regulate the education marketplace. This is a feature of capitalist economies. Governments of capitalist societies have always intervened to erect the parameters businesses operate in (Gross 2018). Public investment is key to incubating their ventures.

Ideas, inventions, and other innovations are developed by the public sector, then auctioned off to private bidders. Just like how land stolen from the indigenous nations of the Northwest Territory was sold off to white settlers.

Public education is unique for how long it has held out as a public good (at least in name) against privatization. For that, we have the efforts of organized teachers and tens of millions of ordinary Americans (Blanc 2020). For a century and a half, they have fought passionately to protect education as a fundamental right (Black 2020) (Lyons 2008) (Mead 2016) (Mencimer 2011). Ultimately, all these struggles illustrate the growing role class power has in shaping curriculum, staff discipline, and student population. Counter-intuitively, the location of education in the public sector played a central role in its industrialization. Capitalists could bring the coercive power of the state directly to bear on workers, students, and their communities. All while placing the burden of cost on the public.

Teachers at underfunded schools then had to work harder and longer for less pay. All the while, administrators craft the architecture of our exploitation—enforcing the application of standardized tests, one-size-fits-all curriculum, arbitrary evaluations, and horrendous working conditions. Our students, especially those from poor or colonized backgrounds, are silo-ed into schools where they and the staff have few, or no, other options. The isolation of these communities enabled the capitalist class and their cronies in the government to generate capital from public education, reshaping it along the lines of industrial management and production.

If we care about our students, communities, and ourselves, then we must take up that same struggle. Public education is one of the few institutions in American society and history that has, however imperfectly, afforded opportunity to all. Proletarians in this country a century and a half ago were mostly illiterate. Today, the vast majority have, at the least, a high school education. We have access to skills and new ways of thinking our ancestors did not. Let's use them to not just save public education—but to transcend it.

We need truly public institutions. State ownership is superior to private ownership, but social ownership should be our goal. Schools, libraries, and museums should be controlled by the workers who operate them, in collaboration with the communities they serve. Our administrators and managers exist solely to abuse us until we accept our exploitation. We have nothing in common and we do not need them.

Find works cited page and contacts by using the QR code on the back cover.

Who are the Angry Education Workers?

This is a project to gather a community of revolutionary education workers who want a new society, and who want to actually do something to make it happen. We want to build contacts between education workers around the world. The goal is to become a platform for educators of all backgrounds and job roles to share worker-centered inquiries (of any artistic medium) into the education industry under capitalism. We can then workshop and boost each others' work. Doing this, we can help each other figure out how to intervene effectively to build worker power in our local contexts and make education a truly public good.

Whether you're interested in joining the project, or just submitting something you want to get out there, get in touch! All levels of involvement are welcome. Burnout culture is bullshit.

We are more than happy to publish materials anonymously or under pseudonyms.

If you are a union, political collective, mutual aid network, etc., and want versions of any of our pieces adapted specifically for use by your group, please reach out!

angryeducationworkers@gmail.com