SURRENDERED

WHY PROGRESSIVES ARE LOSING THE BIGGEST BATTLES IN EDUCATION

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Historicizing Common Sense

Why schooling, or why are we here in school, or education: Why and for whom and about what and how? These are questions that we should be asking with our students and about our students every day, in and out of school. Although these are questions that have swirled at the heart of struggles throughout the history of schooling, they are also questions that too often lie subdued in public debates about reform, and in the tropes about “why schooling?” that get framed as commonsensical and limit the public imagination.

I was at a conference a few years ago, headlined by a noted journalist who began his keynote casually remarking, as if uncontroversial and incontrovertible, that the primary goal of schooling should be to prepare students to be competitive in the global workforce. He then devoted the bulk of his lecture to describing how schools can do this better than they currently do, for which he received a standing ovation by the hundreds of state, district, and school leaders in the room. I looked around, stunned by the failure of these leaders to challenge the story that schooling is and should be fundamentally in the service of U.S. Capitalism.

By the time of that conference, the United States was already more than a dozen years into No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2001 George W. Bush-era reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB not only changed policy and practice by mandating the standards-and-testing regime that had been emerging since the 1980s, but also changed the narrative about “why schooling?” with a focus on college and career readiness, on preparing children for the future. By treating schools as pipelines for the workforce, it placed value on students, not in and of themselves as children in the now, but rather, as future adults—future workers.

The ideological shift here is significant, as it squarely framed schools as commodities, framed students and teachers as consumers and producers, and framed policies and practices that default to narrow notions of individual responsibility and accountability as not merely most effective,
but also most commonsensical. That is, the ideological shift was one that even more squarely positioned the very enterprise of education as being like that of any other industry, to be guided by the Neoliberal tropes that, from the 1970s onward, have implied that there is no alternative.

Neoliberalism? That now-commonsensical notion that the public sector has failed, and that the private sector can do better in education—or healthcare or the economy—were simply to allow and incentivize competition as in a free market.

Such a framing made it more likely that, as federal and state governments disinvest in schools—from reducing allocations by cutting budgets to differently allocating via privatization and vouchers—the public sector would acquiesce and even accept, perhaps because it has come to think of education less and less as a public good and more and more as a commodity that anyone can purchase if they simply work hard enough to afford it. Ironically, supporting such policies that dismantle public education can be done even while repeating the claim that schools are the bedrock of U.S. democracy, that schools provide equal educational opportunity to all, and that schools help to level the playing field and prepare everyone to succeed in life.

This is one of the central paradoxes of schooling: The stated purpose may be to redress inequities, but the function can be to maintain and even widen inequities, and not just as the result of current reforms, but from the very beginning of schooling and by design. The earliest public schools were created for the most elite, and as schools were forced to serve a more diverse population, they created alternative ways to sort, such as through segregation, tracking, disinvestment, labeling, and punishing. The stated purpose might be equity, democratization, or liberation, but the function has never reached those lofty goals—and was never meant to do so—which is why the so-called achievement gap is not necessarily a sign that schools are failing, but a sign that schools are succeeding at doing exactly what they were set up to do.

Yet this sorting role of schools is never seamless, uncontested, or entirely effective. Schools and universities are also places where, around the world and throughout history, revolutions have taken seed, because young people are gathered and supported, and the aspiration of justice is in the air, even if the reality contradicts it. Thus, the purpose-versus-function paradox is not a reason to give up on public education, for just as schools have always served to sort, they also have always served as a central battleground where different sectors struggle to define who we are and what we are to become.

This is why today Democratizing education begins with understanding this central paradox, and the opportunity to transform education is both ideological. To do this, construction of American social movements, the groundwork for the policies that makes for America.

CONSTRUCTING

American as Western

In 1967, Dr. Martin L. King Jr. A Time to Break Silence, as he spoke out connecting injustices at home and abroad.

These are revolutions—old systems of exploitation, new systems of freedom. The world must be based on a better way of life and history, the way of our predecessors. We must be able to confront the future together.
This is why today’s struggles over public education are so vital. Democratizing education demands of us that we dive more deeply into this central paradox, and resist falling victim to the all-too-common tendency of reforms to morph into the newest method of sorting. This task begins with understanding the historical roots of American schooling as an ideological project, which itself requires understanding Americanness as ideological. To do this, Part I offers several historical renderings—of the construction of Americanness, the roots of mass U.S. schooling, the impact of social movements, the surrenderings of the political Left, and the example of struggles around segregation, school choice, and vouchers—that lay the groundwork for the policy battles of Part II. We begin with a story of what makes for America.

CONSTRUCTING AMERICANNESS THROUGH OTHERING

American as Western

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence” speech that would be one of his most controversial, as he spoke out against U.S. participation in the Vietnam War by connecting injustices at home with injustices abroad:

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wombs of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. We in the West must support these revolutions. It is a sad fact that—because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice—the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch anti-revolutionaries. . . . Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. . . . We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late.

King’s call to revolt against old systems of exploitation and oppression involved connecting the dots between racism at home and racism abroad,
between poverty and racism, and between racism and militarism, deepening understanding of the interconnectedness and intersectional nature of injustices. In doing so, his call broadened solidarity with populations across the globe, including the supposed enemy in the Vietnam War that would embody a much longer legacy of servicing Western Imperialism. And that is part of what made his speech so controversial: It linked White supremacy with American Imperialism.

In his 1978 book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said presents a defining theory about Orientalism—an ideology as well as a set of practices that spans two millennia—as an ontological framing of how the West came to understand itself as the West only because and when it defined a whole other part of the world as other-than. Orientalism operates by racializing and sexualizing the Other, characterizing the whole Middle East, the whole of Asia, the whole so-called Orient as racially and sexually very different and deviant through concepts such as its exoticism, mysteriousness, dangerousness, and underdevelopment. Orientalism justified the role of western Europe in colonizing other parts of the world; if others are less than, less developed, less virtuous, then it justifies the more advanced in penetrating, conquering, dominating, and controlling, thus animating a tortured fantasy of a hypermasculinized empire and its feminized, eroticized subject.

In the United States, Orientalism has taken on new life, sometimes called U.S. Orientalism, as manifested in the stereotypes, cultural images, and media representations of Asian American bodies and attributes. These echo the narratives by Western colonizers and profiteers from centuries ago about Asia and Asians as exotic, dangerous, mysterious, unpredictable, and fundamentally different and inferior compared to White western Europeans. *Understanding race and racism, particularly as they concern Asians in the United States—and by implication, Whites in the United States—requires historicizing these stereotypes.*

As Asian immigration increased over time and Asian Americans became a larger population in the United States, new stereotypes would emerge and morph, including the Yellow Peril, the evil and dangerous aliens who prompted fears of Asian invasion and conquest. This stereotype, framed and grounded by Orientalist ideology, emerged historically to serve U.S. Imperialism, justifying exclusion laws in the late 1800s and early 1900s that barred Asian immigration, as well as the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II—both events resulting from a mix of racist rhetoric about Asian contamination of communities and families, Asian competition for jobs and market shares, and Asian unassimilability into the United States and underlying loyalty to the enemy.

The racial profiling of Muslims and hatred toward Muslims, profiling, hate crimes, and increased nationwide, in part, been Muslim but were part of the long histories of urban communities outside of urban communities. Within majority-Muslim communities, all Muslims was a message of the interest of national security.

Several similarities are apparent. Against the backdrop of the threat, violence, and denial of being Japanese Americans as incarcerated proceeded. All of these actions as Japanese Americans as further assimilate or be treated as a racial other and in need of being contained images of Japanese Americans and the Oriental are framed which serve to bolster Whiteness of what counts as American as White in literature, a foil is a character by serving as its opposite, can be illuminated in opposition through relationship: There is a contrasting con dark, here and there, past and present. Defining some people as others there can be a group of others. Creating an Ot
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The racial profiling of Japanese Americans during World War II reverberates today in the context of anti-Muslim rhetoric and discrimination. In the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001, fueled by the scapegoating of Muslims by public officials and the media, fear of and hatred toward Muslims flooded the public discourse. Hate speech, profiling, hate crimes, and other forms of discrimination and harassment increased nationwide, including toward individuals who may not have been Muslim but were perceived to be so. With no acknowledgment of the long histories of U.S.-led violence and harm around the world toward majority-Muslim countries and regions, or of the great diversity within Muslim communities, the dangerousness and un-Americanness of all Muslims was a message unquestioned and promulgated by many. Such messaging continued into 2018 when Trump issued an executive order banning immigration from several majority-Muslim countries, claiming the interest of national security, despite evidence of no such threat.

Several similarities with the incarceration of Japanese Americans are apparent. Against the government’s own evidence to the contrary, Japanese Americans were publicly made suspect. Profiling, harassment, threats, violence, and discrimination increased toward anyone suspected of being of Japanese descent, whether or not they were. Widespread incarceration proceeded, with much destruction to property and livelihood. All of these actions materially reinforced the racial Othering of Japanese Americans as fundamentally different, un-American, unable to assimilate or be trusted as American—and therefore inferior, dangerous, and in need of being contained. Indeed, threaded through all such doctored images of Japanese Americans, of Muslims, of the Yellow Peril, and of the Oriental are framings of the Other as different and dangerous, which serve to bolster White supremacy and a racist enclosing and policing of what counts as American.

American as White

In literature, a foil is a character or a storyline that helps to define the protagonist by serving as its contrast or its opposite; that is, the protagonist can be illuminated in opposition to a foil. Language similarly operates through relationship: The concept of low is understandable only because there is a contrasting concept of high; same with in and out, light and dark, here and there, past and present. Same with identities and groups: Defining some people as good happens only when defining others as bad; there can be a group of we only because there are contrasting groups of them. Creating an Other—the Othering of others—must constantly
happen in order to concretize and stabilize a narrow, exclusive, temporary, contingent sense of self. National and nationalist identities are no different: Some people count as American only because a whole bunch of Others are made into the non-American, the un-American, the anti-American.

Not unlike the framing of the West vis-à-vis Orientalism, the framing of Americanness happens only because and only when we construct others as the Other, be they the Yellow Peril, the savage and uncivilized, the unassimilable alien and forever-foreigner, the deviant, the darker, the dangerous. Americanness has always been defined against these constructed Others, using tropes of indigeneity, blackness, brownness, foreignness—all to reinforce, sustain, and police the whitening of Americanness. I remember teaching as a Peace Corps volunteer at a school in a small village in Nepal, where my students asked how I could be American when I was not White; weren’t all Americans White, or supposed to be White, at least, the real ones? I remember a TV ad for a Republican White male congressional candidate in Hawai‘i decades ago that implied that it was time for our representatives to look “more American”—presumably unlike the Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, women, and people with disabilities who overwhelmingly and for decades were our senators and representatives in Washington, DC.

To frame Americanness as White is to map whiteness and all that it entails—culturally, politically, linguistically, historically, socially, religiously, biologically, whether based in reality or only presumably so—onto the identity and the body and the livelihood and the collective and the country that is “American.” Identifying American as White is to claim these markers and, perhaps more importantly, the privileges and power that come with them, even when—or particularly when—we do not understand how such seemingly beneficial privileges are actually quite dehumanizing to the very ones being privileged.

Therefore, identifying as White is best understood as never ending, iterative, and contested. In being so, the privileges of whiteness are fragile and precarious, at-risk, momentary, and situated, hence the ongoing need to guard, protect, police, and reify such identifications. That is, White privilege, White nationalism, White supremacy—these must be constantly reclaimed and policed, demanding that we constantly Other others, sometimes through violence and force, and other times more subtly and effectively through our stories, like our stories about race as meaningful social categories.

Yet race is not something that just is; rather, it is something that must constantly be remade. Race is something believed by many to be biological in basis, but it is not: Genetically, there is more diversity within race groupings than there is based determinant for a person for race? A much more instrumental construction of particular ideologies and societies racialize for a volatile and productive—question, what counts as that race is a socially constructed category of context, such as how entry, as well as when control of any given national States are a helpful exam Americans, sometimes the Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), Asian Americans, Pacific colonized subjects. This very diverse population, relationships to the United States, Native Hawaiians, Filipinos are not quite the same as.

In 1980, the Census using a large, combined 20 years later it decided that should be separated into Other Pacific Islander ex-gamated or subdivided, of States, encompassing more native languages and with groups. It is a vastly diverse of the world, each subbranch including Imperialism, war, appropriation, and displacement documented immigration.

The obscured place of undocumented immigration racialization. The Census for the country, about 50% of we in turn includes about 1 other way, the Census e
groupings than there is between groups. There is not some biologically based determinant for all that gets attributed to race. What, then, makes for race? A much more helpful and accurate way to think about race is as an instrumental construct, a way to talk about groups in order to advance particular ideologies and systems. People are not already raced; rather, societies racialize for a purpose. This is what makes the Asian-as-foil both volatile and productive—it purports a stable category even as it forces the question, what counts as Asian—and as American—in the here and now?

That race is a social construct becomes more obvious when comparing the different ways that race is defined across different national contexts, such as how White is defined differently from country to country, as well as when comparing how race categories changed over time within any given national context. People of Asian descent in the United States are a helpful example: Sometimes they have been grouped as Asian Americans, sometimes they have been grouped as Asian Americans plus Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), and still other times they have been grouped as Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, plus specifically named subgroups of colonized subjects. This is a naming that makes explicit how, within this very diverse population, there are certain groups that have unique relationships to the United States vis-à-vis colonization and Imperialism, like Native Hawaiians, Filipinx, Guamanians, and Chamorros, and thus they are not quite the same as other AAPIs.

In 1980, the Census changed how it talked about race, and it started using a large, combined category called Asian and Pacific Islander. But 20 years later it decided that, no, these are two very different groups that should be separated into an Asian category and a Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander category. These large groupings, however amalgamated or subdivided, consist of about 22 million people in the United States, encompassing more than 50 countries of heritage with over 100 native languages and with an even larger number of ethnic and cultural groups. It is a vastly diverse group that spans a large geographic portion of the world, each subgroup with unique histories of U.S. relations, including Imperialism, war, resource extraction, labor exploitation, cultural appropriation, and displacement, all impacting both documented and undocumented immigration.

The obscured place of AAPIs in debates about immigration and undocumented immigration further illustrates the instrumental nature of racialization. The Census estimates there to be 22 million AAPIs in this country, about 50% of whom were born outside of this country, which in turn includes about 14% undocumented immigrants. Calculated another way, the Census estimates there to be 11 million undocumented
immigrants in this country (some researchers estimate twice as many), 14% of whom identify as AAPI, which is about 1.6 million people. In higher education, the percentages can be much higher. For example, within the University of California system, over 40% of undocumented students are AAPI. Many of the original youth leaders who were organizing for federal legislation to protect undocumented students in the early 2000s were AAPI. Many of the immigrants being targeted, rounded up individually and in groups, and deported are AAPI. Yet, AAPIs are rarely the face of undocumented immigration—why?

Immigrants are a vastly diverse group, consisting of peoples of all races and all regions of the world, and immigration plays a large role in American folklore regarding the founding of this country and the refrain that the United States is a nation of immigrants—which is true only by ignoring the Indigenous populations who were colonized and the enslaved populations who were sold and treated as property—who can all partake in the so-called American Dream. That is, immigration was always a racialized construct: It served particular ideologies by framing in racially specific ways the generic immigrant within any narrative, be that narrative “we are a nation of immigrants” or “we must build a wall to stop illegal immigration.”

Not surprisingly, over time, the posterchild of the immigrant has changed, racializing the body in different ways, all while continually serving White supremacy. Yellow Peril relied on the image of the dangerous Asian immigrant a century ago, just as the image of the Mexican illegally crossing the U.S.–Mexico border today capitalizes on the racist stereotypes, anxieties, and hate directed toward Mexicans; also not unlike the conflation of “the Chinese” with everyone of Asian descent, Mexicans are oftentimes presumed to stand in for all Latin and South Americans. And this shift is purposeful; that is, the erasure of AAPI undocumented immigration helps to magnify Mexicanness as a foil to Americanness at a time when such a contrast is particularly potent.

**American as Bordered**

The strategic significance of racializing the undocumented as Mexican is perhaps most clear when contextualized in this moment when the American empire is in decline and when the United States is losing its standing as the lone, so-called global superpower. Throughout world history, no empire has dominated the globe for more than a few generations, and as is characteristic of an empire as it struggles to hold on to power, the United States is policing, with increasing investment and
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... estiman... twice as many), out 1.6 million people. In such higher: For example, wer 40% of undocumented... leading to targeted, rounded up AAPI. Yet, AAPIs are rarely... consisting of peoples of alle... play a large role in this country and the refrain... ans—which is true only by were colonized and the end... as property who can all... hat is, immigration was al... lary ideologies by framing in... within any narrative, be that... we must build a wall to stop... child of the immigrant has... s, all while continually serve... the image of the dangerous... age of the Mexican illeg... alizes on the racist stere... of Asian descent, Mexicans... p with the losing its... Mexico in this moment when... the United States is losing its... power. Throughout world... for more than a few gen... as it struggles to hold on a increasing investment and... demonstrativeness, certain narratives about itself. Even more than exerting military might, controlling the narrative is an incredibly effective way to control a population: Get people to think in only certain ways, and they effectively control themselves. It is why the framing of any story matters—and it is also why any questioning of those stories is dangerous, can upend the very foundations of that empire, and will be vigorously silenced.

In a moment when struggling to gain or retain power, the elite will police with increasing force the sources of possible counterstories, such as the media, science and research, the courts, the arts, and schools and universities, which are the institutions or realms whose primary social function is to inquire and explore, and therefore are precisely the institutions and realms under attack in the United States today.

One such narrative being policed with increasing violence concerns the boundaries between the Us and the Them. Such symbolic differentiation can be made most visceral and stark not at the United States’ northern border with another wealthy, predominantly White country, but at the southern border with a poorer, browner country that has long represented a more colonial relationship than one of racial kinship. At that border are staged both material and physical means of differentiation: The building of tall, thick, long walls at that and no other border, and the attacks on anyone who tries to cross that border and trouble the distinction between the Us and the Them, particularly those whose documented or undocumented status is not so easy to see.

By blurring boundaries, the undocumented immigrant bears the brunt of such policing in the forms of caging and abuse, separation of families, surveillance and profiling, criminalization, and deportation. Such attacks had been happening throughout the United States for years, particularly in the years of the Obama administration that ramped up prosecution and deportation. But today, the attacks are most visible and most symbolic at the most visceral of racialized borders, where the current administration frames the crisis as one in which “illegals” brought such inhumane treatment upon themselves.

In the struggle to protect undocumented immigrants, counterstories have not always offered a significant departure from Imperialist ones, even those put forth by Progressives. Examples include the movement to push for passage of a federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, as well as for family-reunification provisions. The DREAM Act, as drafted but never passed during the Obama administration, would provide for two primary paths toward citizenship—one being college attainment and the other being military service—and proponents...
have argued that its passage would open and expand the paths toward inclusion and citizenship for more young people.

Undoubtedly, the framing was a pragmatic one that was more likely to get bipartisan support. However, it did so in ways that narrowly defined the good citizen (particularly by privileging military service) and that linked the collective identity of Americans with the increasingly global image of the United States as an expanding empire that used military might to subordinate others. Family-reunification legislation also broadened the available paths toward residency and citizenship, but as with the DREAM Act, it narrowed the definition of the good citizen, in this case, by defining as desirable only those in families that resembled the dominant heteropatriarchal structure.

Rhetoric from the media, politicians, and even activists built on this narrow framing of the good immigrant by narrowly basing the need for immigration reform on deservingness and legality (as in, “they deserve to immigrate here legally”), positioning DREAMers as a new model minority, as a model for all other minorities to aspire toward. Highlighting exemplars of the deserving immigrant, such stories echoed folklore that lay central to the self-identity of the United States as a meritocratic nation, especially the Horatio Alger myth that, if a young man works really hard and persists, he can pull himself out of poverty and achieve the American dream. This is a storyline that got repeated often in education circles as well, including at a fundraiser that I once attended to offer civic engagement and leadership development programs for inner-city youth, where the keynote speaker was an immigrant youth of color who echoed this exact story, effectively tugging at our heartstrings and wallets.

Yes, society should celebrate the accomplishments of youth like this keynote speaker, but significant structural barriers to youth development and academic achievement are masked when success is credited entirely to the efforts of the individual. Such a framing demands conformity: By saying that only those immigrants who play by the rules are deserving, advocates indirectly close off the possibility that immigrants who, say, protest and challenge those rules, also fit and should fit into the fabric of U.S. democracy. Protest and political activism are as much a part of the identity and the values of the United States as is fitting in and obeying.

This is also true with the narrative that good immigrants contribute to the economy—they pay taxes, they spend as consumers—and are needed for economic productivity and growth, as they often take on the jobs that other groups do not want to do. Such a framing of the contributing individual detracts from the much larger, systemic problems: A value system that demeans entire categories of work and, in turn, entire categories of workers and that is of enormous benefit to this world; U.S.-led initial interventions—that benefited and displaced people as furthered by U.S. immigration.

American citizenship is a property, and Nationalism. It is not only a matter of economic, social, educational arrangements, making any of these forms “American.”

ROOTS AND FORCES

From the late 1700s to the early 1800s, Europe developed mass slavery as one of the defining features of the Atlantic nations. However, it was not until the early 19th century that slavery was formally abolished in the United States. This abolition was a result of a complex interplay of political, economic, and social forces, including the growth of the abolitionist movement and the industrial revolution.

During the industrial revolution, the demand for labor increased as factories grew and new industries emerged. This led to an influx of immigrants from Europe, particularly from Ireland and southern Europe, who sought work in the new factories. These immigrants were often exploited by employers, who paid them low wages and worked them long hours. The struggle for workers' rights and better working conditions became a major issue during this time.

The abolition of slavery, along with the spread of democracy and the growth of the middle class, also brought about changes in the way society was organized. The rise of the working class, along with the growth of the middle class, led to new political movements and the formation of political parties. These new political forces, along with the expansion of the economy, led to major changes in the way society was organized.

Overall, the late 1800s and early 1900s were a time of great transition and change in the United States. The growth of the economy, the rise of new political movements, and the expansion of the middle class all contributed to a new way of life, and new social and economic arrangements. It was a time of great uncertainty, but also of great opportunity, as new ideas and new ways of thinking were emerging.
categories of workers and consumers; a U.S.-driven globalized economy that is of enormous benefit to only a very small percent of the people in this world; U.S.-led initiatives—economic sanctions, military and political interventions—that devastated economies, increased political instability, and displaced people around the world—all problems that are actually furthered by U.S. immigration policy.

Americaness is a project inseparable from Imperialism, White supremacy, and Nationalism. It entitles some, as it Others others. It does so through any number of its institutions, be they legal, medical, religious, economic, social, educational. And it does so by design, and from its very beginnings, making any of these projects—particularly schooling—quintessentially “American.”

ROOTS AND FORCES SHAPING EARLY U.S. SCHOOLING

From the late 1700s to the early 1900s, countries throughout western Europe developed mass schooling systems, which is sometimes described as one of the defining features of modernization; a society becomes more advanced when its people become more educated. Mass schooling systems fulfilled a political purpose in nation building, both internally and externally: Externally, a number of European countries continued to expand their empires and colonize others around the world, particularly in the global south; internally, many European countries underwent the First Industrial Revolution, from agrarian to industrial economies, around the start of the 19th century and the Second Industrial Revolution, from human labor to fueled machinery, around the start of the 20th century. During the second revolution, the building of infrastructure for mass transportation as well as of massive complexes of factories and workplaces drew migrations internally and immigration from abroad into what would become large urban cities.

Whether colonizing or urbanizing abroad or within, a similar problem arose: how to control a rapidly growing, far more diverse population than the wealthier, White, ruling elite. Hence the development of mass schooling and the exporting of such schooling forms with the purpose to socialize, as illustrated by the differentiated structure and curriculum of schools for the elite versus for the masses or the colonized, as well as the pervasiveness of Christian teachings within the formal curriculum as the basis for moral instruction. Schools were arms of the state for the express purpose of socialization, teaching students to fit into only particular, supposedly appropriate places within the economic, social, and other
hierarchies that permeated their societies. Schools were colonizing minds, and in so doing, were teaching students to control themselves.

**Common Schools**

Modeled after the systems of western Europe, the United States too developed mass schooling systems, albeit a little more slowly. Until the late 1700s in the colonies that would become the United States, academic teaching and learning, particularly of literacy and numeracy, happened only rarely by hired tutors in wealthier families or in churches for those in religious study, which meant that for most children, it was not happening at all. In the last decades of the 1700s, soon after the birth of the United States, New England saw the emergence of what would become a thriving movement of *common schools*, which were the predecessors to public schools.

Typified by the one-room schoolhouse—with, say, one or two dozen boys of mixed ages under the supervision of one teacher—common schools were public in some ways, as they were open and free to certain boys throughout a particular community, and private in some ways, often being privately funded and run, at least in part. Not surprisingly, they were quite elitist: Created by wealthy Whites, the schools served their own, meaning they primarily served children who were male, who were White, and whose families owned property. This exclusiveness of the common schools persisted for the next century, but there were exceptions: Over time more girls were “smuggled” in, and although common schools never came to integrate Black students, a handful of separate schools opened for Black children who were not enslaved.

By the mid-1800s, common schools had spread across the country, a movement often credited to the vision and leadership of Horace Mann, an educator, lawyer, and elected leader from Massachusetts, known for calling education “the great equalizer of the conditions of men,” who pushed for open, free schools with a common curriculum and structure. One thread across common schools was the curricular focus on moral instruction. The most common textbook for decades was the *McGuffey Reader*, which taught students to read by using fire-and-brimstone stories about how people will perish in hell if they did not follow the teachings of the Christian church, particularly a native Protestantism. Moral education and socialization figured centrally from early on, intertwined with and inseparable from academics, and this was the foundation on which public schooling would build.
Mass Schooling Systems

The end of the Civil War and Reconstruction coincided with the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution in the United States, and it was in this period that mass public school systems emerged. That is, in the last few decades of the 1800s through the early 1900s, public school systems (publicly funded and run) developed across the country, fueled by the Second Industrial Revolution and its concomitant growth of large cities, of infrastructure for transportation, of immigration from Europe, and soon, of the Great Migration of African Americans out of the South. Given the emergence of a much more diverse and poorer population, it is not surprising that the schools that developed in urban centers looked nothing like the schools that were developed a century earlier for the elite.

Modeled more after factories than after homes in both governance and organization, the schools were highly compartmentalized—dividing students by age, by gender, and by ability; dividing curriculum by subject and time, into the Carnegie units, which ultimately remains how schools compartmentalize curriculum today; dividing communities by race via segregated schools; and differentiating what students learned and experienced based on these divisions. For example, the curricular differentiation by gender was—well, highly gendered, particularly by tailoring subject areas, technical skills, and extracurricular activities to prepare girls for domestic work and boys for the paid workforce. Similar curricular differentiation existed by age, ability, and race as well.

The rapid expansion of public school systems across the country coincided with the Jim Crow era and legal segregation, so this period was also defined by the growth of an apartheid school system, in which the problem, as recognized by the Supreme Court in its 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, was not merely that students were separated, but also that the schools for Black students were unquestionably and systemically inferior and, as such, discriminatory.

This designed inferiority was manifest not only in resource allocation, but also in curriculum content. In 1933, well before Brown, Carter G. Woodson’s The Mis-Education of the Negro argued that schools were teaching Black students not just less content, but content that was ideologically problematic: Schools were teaching students to view the world through a White lens, thereby teaching Black students to fit into an inferior position within the racial hierarchy of the United States. For Woodson, the solution should not be to teach students even more of this
problematic curriculum, but rather, to teach students a fundamentally different curriculum.

This colonizing role of schooling is visible in the schools and curriculum created for other racialized groups as well, including schools in Hawai‘i in the late 1800s and early 1900s that aimed to teach native Hawaiian and Asian immigrant children to both denationalize and Americanize—that is, to disidentify with Hawai‘i and Asian countries of origin while embracing dominant American worldviews and values. The same is true of the boarding schools for Indigenous students, which were modeled after the military and led, in part, by military leaders, that proliferated throughout the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s, which aimed to “kill the Indian, save the man” by teaching students to lose the parts that society devalues—Indigenous culture, language, families, identity—in order to fit into American society, albeit at an inferior, subordinate, underserved place within.

Socialization does not aim for the same outcome for all students; rather, it teaches some that they belong at the top and others that they belong at the bottom, and teaches all that this order is the way that society should be. In so doing, schools sort. They sort via excluding some students from schools in the first place, via segregating schools, via tracking classrooms, but perhaps most insidiously—and yet most enduringly throughout history—via what they teach and to whom, the stories they tell, and the subtle ways that they silence any counterstories.

Evolution of the Teaching Profession

Even the images of who should be teaching our children reflected the sorting, assimilating purpose of schools. There were contexts in which schools wanted men to teach, especially to the older students, because men, presumably, would make for smarter, stricter teachers than women. There were contexts in which schools wanted women to teach, especially to the younger students, because as long as the primary grades were modeled after the home, the teachers could be more motherly, more in loco parentis. There were contexts in which schools wanted, for several reasons, only younger women to teach: Women were expected eventually to get married and fulfill their social obligation of being a wife and mother, so too many women in the teaching force would destabilize the home and the workplace; additional fears abounded of strong older women emasculating boys or serving as a model of deviant sexuality—spinster, lesbian—for girls, which is a fear of sexual contamination by teachers that has reverberated to the present.
Intersected with gender and sexuality was race, for the idealized image of the teacher was not just any women, but a woman who was White. This image has persisted in the overall demographics of the teaching profession for the past century, thus suggesting that the concerted efforts to diversify over the past few decades may be failing because this ideological underpinning remains intact.

- However, just as schools have always been sites of contestation, so has the role of teachers. The teaching profession, in some ways servicing the sorting function of schools, has also been arguably the most significant force to improve and democratize school systems, particularly through their long history of unions and teacher-led advocacy.

The National Education Association (NEA) formed in 1857 (as the National Teachers Association), initially as a professional association that focused on legislative and policy advocacy, but in the early-to-mid 1900s it would gradually evolve into a union of teachers and other school personnel, engaging more forcefully in collective bargaining and pushed to the Left in order to compete with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT formed in 1916, primarily by teachers in Chicago who were frustrated with the priorities of the NEA. From its origins, the AFT focused on improving the conditions for teachers, and through their advocacy and bargaining, demonstrated the impact of teachers acting collectively, and teachers' widespread desire to do so. In subsequent decades, the AFT would align with the more inclusive, Socialist, and militant industrial-union organizing of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), pushing the profession to the Left in the same way the CIO pushed labor organizing in general to the Left.

The growth of the labor movement in the late 1950s, in concert with the thrust of the Civil Rights Movement, provided fertile ground for the heyday of teacher unions. The NEA and the AFT supported teachers in over 1,000 strikes in the 1960s and early 1970s, demanding, among other things, better pay and conditions for teachers. Teacher unions would emerge as one of the leading public-sector unions seeing growth in membership and activity and, together, the NEA and AFT would account for over 70% of public school teachers being protected by collective bargaining agreements. Although initially divided or outright resistant, the two unions would eventually support school desegregation, as well as increased and targeted federal funding to address education inequities and disparities, and other core initiatives of the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty. They worked to integrate their own ranks, as when the White-dominated NEA merged with the American Teachers Association, a union serving Black schools in the South, in
1966. Together, the memberships of NEA and AFT would grow into the millions. However, from the 1980s onward, strikes became increasingly rare. The historically more militant AFT would gradually lose such a reputation, instead establishing patterns of trying to work within various reforms, as its counterpart the NEA came to be seen as a bit more of an outspoken critic of reforms. This contrast was exemplified in the different strategies that each took following the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001. But regardless of whether and how each union voiced public opinions, the collective and public action of both declined steadily, that is, until 2012.

Almost 100 years after the founding of the AFT and its Lefward push in teacher organizing, it would again be teachers in Chicago—this time, the AFT affiliate, Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), in its 2012 and 2019 strikes—who would lead another major shift in union priorities and strategy. The CTU insisted on engaging in collective bargaining “for the common good,” which would highlight the broader conditions needed for quality schools, not merely teacher compensation, as well as a return to the grassroots organizing, public consciousness raising, and collective action and striking that defined the strategies of unions from earlier in the twentieth century. Such a strategy departed from the acquiescence to austerity demands that predominated union tendencies in the decades since the Conservative movement of the 1980s, when many felt such compromises to be the most pragmatic as public sector unions faced increasing attacks and saw their legal protections weakened.

The 1980s, however, was not the first time that the attack on unions forced a retreat. That precedent was set in the 1950s, in the early years of the Cold War, when Communist-baiting pushed unions and the broader Left to surrender—a story that would happen several times in the decades since, and thus, a story worth exploring in more detail.

A Turning Point

Accompanying the long history of schooling as an instrument to socialize and sort is an equally long and vibrant history of both large and small struggles to define what should be taught in schools, and how, and to whom, and by whom, and for what purpose. But up to the mid-1900s, public schools were still primarily a state and local endeavor with little oversight at the federal level and with relatively little nationwide organizing beyond teacher unions. It would be following pivotal global and national events of the 1940s and 1950s that the struggles over public education became intertwined with—or a centerpiece of—several competing social movements.
The Cold War and the Space Race were bubbling since the end of World War II, but Russia's launch of the first outer space satellite, Sputnik I, in 1957 gave its U.S. rival a crisis in identity and in confidence, and attention at the U.S. federal level turned to the educational system, questioning whether it was falling short of serving our Imperialist ambitions, with calls for more investment in science and technology. Such a crisis also led to the expansion of the military-industrial complex—armed forces, technology, auxiliary services, and other industries that are needed for conventional war—as well as expansion of apparatuses for engaging in hybrid wars, which are any combination of military, political, economic, cultural, and other interventions with the same goal to dominate. One of the most common and effective hybrid-war apparatuses to be waged in the decades since was and is economic warfare, as through sanctions, embargoes, tariffs, and contingent loans, which were actions that not only aligned with, but also were propelled by, the U.S. corporate sector's eye toward global hegemony.

Thus, the 1950s was also a time of the growing influence of free-market economics and Neoliberal ideology, espoused and promulgated most notably by economist Milton Friedman and his students and colleagues in the economics department at the University of Chicago. Neoliberalism was an ideology that would quickly come to dominate U.S. foreign policy and policies of the major international economic bodies, as well as the internal U.S. economy and related sectors, as detailed, for example, in the writings by Friedman in 1955 on the role of the federal government in public education that helped lay the theoretical and rhetorical groundwork for school vouchers.

But it was shortly before that, and not unrelated, that the 1954 Brown decision would signal the beginning of a string of federal actions—and would constitute an even larger string of civil rights activism and Conservative backlash and Neoliberal framing—that would mark schools as preeminent sites of ideological struggle and related reforms. The groundwork for Brown began years earlier with such precedent-setting cases in lower courts as Mendez v. Westminster, in which the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 1947 that segregated schooling for Mexican Americans in California violated the 14th Amendment. Even before that, nationwide organizing and movement building had been happening for decades by organizations playing a sizable role in seeding or leading what would become the Civil Rights Movement.

It is not coincidental that the high-profile court cases on desegregation would happen from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s. These cases exemplify the framing of civil rights activism that had much to do with the
Cold War and, in particular, the Second Red Scare and McCarthyism—public accusations, demonization, and criminalization of anyone deemed on the Left, which was conflated with Communism—of the late 1940s and the 1950s.

The Civil Rights Movement originally had a broader goal. Post-World War II, the leading civil rights organizations strategized ways to present a case to the new United Nations Commission on Human Rights that charged the United States with violating the human rights of its Black citizens, as evidenced by the pervasiveness of poverty, their disenfranchisement from government, and the inferiority of their healthcare and educational provisions. But the emergence of the Cold War suppressed and silenced criticisms of the U.S. government by labeling such criticisms un-American and Communist ploys to subvert democracy. It was this fear of being dismissed and persecuted as Communist that prompted, at least in part, a retreat from broader human rights to a narrower civil rights agenda that focused on the right to be free from discrimination and treated equally in public sectors. This strategy would lead to many legislative and legal victories and a fundamental change in the role of the federal government in education, but it was a compromised strategy, and thus, a compromised stance for what would reveal itself to be a fragile Left.

World War II ended in 1945, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt died in office that same year. The Liberal socio-economic policies embodied in the New Deal of the Roosevelt administration had long angered the Conservative wing of the Democratic Party. As the 1944 election approached, Roosevelt’s rapidly declining health spurred Conservatives to act in order to ensure that the even more Liberal vice president, Henry Wallace, whose positions seemed too Communist to some, was not still vice president if Roosevelt were to die in office in his fourth term. Despite the popularity of the incumbent Wallace among both the public and the delegates, Conservatives mounted a campaign that successfully turned Roosevelt against Wallace, and then maneuvered the convention to secure the votes of the delegates to put the far more moderate Harry Truman on the ballot. As expected, Roosevelt was elected to a fourth term, and then died the following year. The New Deal priorities would end, and the Democratic Party would remain squarely centrist for decades to come.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Federal Era

Prior to Brown, the federal government played a minimal role in public education, leaving it to state and local officials to oversee schools, and in so doing, allowing apartheid schooling to persist. What finally forced
the federal government to begin to enforce constitutional protections against discrimination by race was the massive uprising of the Civil Rights Movement, accompanied by legal strategists and litigators who set precedent in lower courts spanning more than a decade prior, culminating in one of the first major legal victories of the movement: The Brown v. Board of Education case, a consolidation of four separate cases in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were inherently unequal and that a segregated system violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. A year later, in 1955, the Court issued its Brown II ruling that states must proceed “at all deliberate speed” to desegregate, which was a weak and unfunded mandate that called on states to desegregate, but with no deadline, guidelines, support, or consequences, and not surprisingly, with little impact and little change resulting in schools over the next decade.

Civil rights advocacy continued, with increased attention on legislation that would compel action and change, particularly the leveraging of federal funding—that is, the threat to withhold federal funds—in order to compel compliance with nondiscrimination law. This was the precedent set by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, soon to be followed by the ESEA of 1965, which are the legislations credited with compelling forward desegregation, particularly for Black students in the South for the next quarter century. Following ESEA was a string of major laws that addressed other, intersected forms of discrimination in public schools, including the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the Education Amendments of 1972 that included Title IX on sex discrimination, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (later called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA).

Litigation continued throughout this period as well, leading to such landmark cases as the Lau v. Nichols case of 1974, in which the U.S. Supreme Court distinguished between equal treatment—in this case, teaching in English to all students—and equitable outcomes, whereby all students can understand and learn, regardless of language background. By recognizing that different students have different capacities and needs, the Court mandated that school districts accommodate English language learners lest they fail to provide equal educational opportunity, thus making explicit that discrimination can happen when schools fail to provide additional support to those who need it.

It is this period, from the mid-1950s through the 1970s, that is called the Federal Era in U.S. education because of the significant intervention by and influence of the federal government through legislation and the courts, culminating in the 1979 creation of the U.S. Department of
Education, which resulted from bringing together several smaller offices that were spread across various departments, elevating this new department to cabinet level, and quickly expanding it. The role of the federal government was both expansive and narrow: Expansive in its focus on elaborating a vision and holding states accountable for advancing that vision of public schools as embodiments of democracy, civil rights, and equity; but narrow in its focus on antidiscrimination law, and not, for example, on reparations or curriculum.

The Civil Rights Movement did not limit itself in the same way: Its gains were varied and significant, reaching far beyond its legislative and legal victories, which is not surprising, given that social movements are defined by their ability to change not merely policy and law, but also public consciousness and common sense. Leaders, strategists, organizers, and activists within the movement recognized that a society can change only when—or especially when—the dominant stories that have long colonized our minds become troubled, and when critical, skeptical, imaginative inquiries prompt us to seek counterstories and resist the assimilative demand to conform and self-control. For this reason, they also attended deeply to curriculum.

Curriculum is not merely that which the elite predetermine to be the knowledge and skills most important to pass down. More broadly, curriculum can and should be that which is not yet known, or rattles what is already known, or asks what is it that society might come to know and be, making the process of defining curriculum one that is never divorced from larger struggles over identity, knowledge, values, and ideology.

Examples of curricular initiatives outside of the public schools included the Citizenship Schools, which by the early 1960s had burgeoned across the South to teach literacy and citizenship rights to African Americans in order to foster civic engagement and democratic participation, spearheaded by Septima Clark, who oversaw the establishment of about 1,000 schools and trained about 10,000 leaders. Similar were the Freedom Schools, launched in the Freedom Summer of 1964 by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to counter the “sharecropper,” conformist education of mainstream schooling by raising critical consciousness about issues of inequities in society. The Freedom School movement started with several dozens of schools in that first summer, and then multiplied as they inspired other such alternative political education spaces in the years and decades to come, with Freedom Schools in operation even today, modeled after those from half a century ago.

Both the Citizenship Schools and the Freedom Schools drew directly on the strategies and resources of the Highlander Folk School, a center in Appalachia that train beginning with the CIO and 1940s, and continued in the 1960s. Not surprisingly, offered an education that was open to young people and private spaces, such as backrooms of businesses, to students and no pay for the vast networks of similar and outreach strategies.

The Civil Rights Movement, as with the call for multiculture curriculum that centered on color and other natural injustices in U.S. history, literature, and art, were calling for curriculums that relevant to students’ communities face, and tailo interests, and abilities.

Not surprisingly, acid standardized test scores, in between, one level, the students, and, on a much larger scale, Indigenous, and Pacific islander gap, was closing in the 21st century.

Higher education decolonizing, as with the Third World, decolonize, decentrality, and the sacredness of the land is sometimes narrow about the margins, but it includes the center—and also the critical analysis of form and acquiesce. To loudly these early interludes and internecine conflict, claiming that ethnic studies was anti-teaching separatism;
in Appalachia that trained leaders and organizers of social movements, beginning with the CIO and the organized labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s, and continuing with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Not surprisingly, both the Citizenship and Freedom Schools offered an education that blended academic instruction with political education; was open to youth and adults; convened in any number of public and private spaces, such as church basements, private lawns and garages, backrooms of businesses, and community spaces; were typically of no cost to students and no pay for teachers; and were interconnected with the vast networks of similar schools in order to share curriculum, resources, and outreach strategies.

The Civil Rights Movement also impacted public school curriculum, as with the call for multicultural education and the critique of traditional curriculum that centered and elevated whiteness, misrepresented people of color and other marginalized groups, and obscured the role of structural injustices in U.S. society, especially in and through the study of history, literature, and other forms of cultural production. Communities were calling for curriculum to be reflective of the diversity of our country, relevant to students' lives and the problems and injustices that their communities face, and tailored to elements such as their ways of knowing, interests, and abilities.

Not surprisingly, achievement by race was changing: When looking at standardized test scores, the so-called achievement gap—that is, the gap between, on one level, the aggregate test scores of White and Asian American students, and, on a much lower level, the aggregate for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander students—and especially the White–Black gap, was closing in the 2 decades from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s.

Higher education curriculum was also changing as a result of organizing, as with the Third World Liberation Front strikes and the push to decolonize, decenter whiteness, and expand ethnic studies. Ethnic studies is sometimes narrowly described as curriculum about people of color, about the margins, but its origins reveal a much broader scope of analysis to include the center—that is, not merely the honoring of diversity, but also the critical analysis of normalcy and the normative demand to conform and acquiesce. Today, battles over curriculum in public schools echo loudly these early interventions of ethnic studies in higher education, as exemplified by the recent and ongoing struggle in Tucson, Arizona, over the banning of the Mexican American Studies program, with critics claiming that ethnic studies' critique of White hegemony is akin to teaching students to be anti-American, or that its honoring of diversity is akin to teaching separatism and exclusion.
BIPARTISAN CONVERGENCE

Clearly, as major transformations unfolded in policy, curriculum, and consciousness, some were not having it. Laying the groundwork for this retreat from the gains of the Civil Rights Movement were other social movements whose ideologies of American exceptionalism, Capitalist democracy, Conservatism, militiamanism, and Neoliberalism would so compellingly frame education as to make indistinguishable the Republican agenda from the Democratic one. Several key events of the 1970s created just the right mindset for this bipartisan convergence.

Trepidation by Liberals

The Civil Rights Movement pushed not only Conservatives but also Moderates and Liberals to question fundamental assumptions about what makes for a democratic society, perhaps most starkly in the ways that the Democratic administrations in the 1960s of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were constantly facing pressure to do more to address systemic, structural racism and injustice. These administrations self-identified and were identified by others as more Liberal, more in solidarity with people of color than Republicans and even the mainstream of America. The challenge to the status quo by a large social movement was not singular to the United States at this time, for the 1960s was a time of mass uprisings and social unrest in nearly every continent of the world, including in both Imperialist and third-world countries as well as by Indigenous nations. Throughout history, there have been struggles and unrest in and from the margins, but the 1960s struggles were unusually salient because they occurred at a time when democratic, Capitalist nations wanted to frame their economic and governmental structures as more favorable to the masses than Communist ones.

It was thus in 1974 that the Trilateral Commission, a product of the Cold War that brought together three democratized regions—Japan, western European countries, and the United States (whose team included individuals who would go on to serve in the Democratic administration of President Carter later that decade)—issued a report that argued that this global phenomenon of civil unrest was the result of “too much democracy,” too much of a sense among the masses that they should have the same as the elite, and further, that such discontent was the result of mass schooling’s failure to serve its central purpose of socialization.

From this perspective, the curricular transformations of the Civil Rights Movement exemplified how consciousness raising threatens the social order, which, yes, was also why some Liberals in the midst of the Cold War and the failings of public education in context, it would nonetheless their stance peculiarly open to reframing of education.

Backlash by Conservatives

The Civil Rights Movement’s collective action, strategies to form both public consciousness, and what it would mean for a country of the Civil Rights Movement to have a very different vision of what could society look such that the goal would strengthen the civic impulse.

Toward this end, the take over the White House actually began more quickly than various groups coalescing into a common enemy. The purpose regarding race, social class, and gender brought about by the Conservative feminist movement, and the enemy, at least early on, and supported these movements in organizing was the 1971 Chamber of Commerce’s an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court to bring this common enemy and attack on the so-called American economy, and on America to organize.

In response to the particularly philanthropists, the Philanthropy Roundtable for Conservative they would develop int


Historicizing Common Sense

social order, which, yes, was precisely the goal by the movement, but was also why some Liberal Democrats wanted to retreat, particularly in the midst of the Cold War. Although this stance of Liberals to decry the failings of public education was shaped at the time by that political context, it would nonetheless reverberate for decades to come, making their stance peculiarly open to aligning with the burgeoning Conservative reframing of education.

Backlash by Conservatives

The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated how long-term planning, collective action, strategic framing, and mass mobilizing can indeed transform both public consciousness and policy. Some critics wondered what it would mean for a countermovement not merely to retreat from the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, but, more proactively, to build toward a very different vision of what U.S. society could look like. In particular, what could society look like by flipping the script on who should rule, such that the goal would no longer be to empower the masses, but to strengthen the civic impact of the corporate elite?

Toward this end, the Conservative revolution that would come to take over the White House in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan actually began more quietly a decade earlier, in the early 1970s, with various groups coalescing for a common purpose and against a common enemy. The purpose was to challenge the legal and cultural changes regarding race, social class, gender, and other social markers that were brought about by the Civil Right Movement, the War on Poverty, the feminist movement, and other movements in the 1950s and 1960s; and the enemy, at least early on, was the “Liberal establishment” that steered and supported these movements. What galvanized and guided the early organizing was the 1971 Powell Manifesto, a memo internal to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce written by Lewis Powell, who soon after became an Associate Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. The memo articulated this common enemy and purpose in its description of a concerted Liberal attack on the so-called American free enterprise system, the U.S. political economy, and on American democracy itself, and the resulting need to organize.

In response to the Powell Manifesto, a group of Conservatives, particularly philanthropists with family-business fortunes, formed in 1971 the Philanthropy Roundtable that would strategize how to use their wealth for Conservative movement building. In the decades to follow, they would develop interconnected funding priorities or strategies to
advance public policy agendas that were pro-business and anti-social welfare, seeding what would become an expansive network of think tanks, advocacy organizations, lobbyists, media institutions, and educational entities that worked synergistically to change law and common sense. A year later, in 1972, the Republican Study Committee would form as the heart of Conservative strategizing within Congress.

The year 1972 also saw the formation of the Business Roundtable that would bring together 300 of the top CEOs in the United States with the goal of shaping economic and social policy to support profits for individual corporations, as well as global dominance by the broader U.S. sector. Public education is the primary pipeline of workers, and unsurprisingly, the Business Roundtable soon targeted educational policy. In 1989, it released a report, *Essential Components of a Successful Educational System*, offering “essential principles” that would shape how to think of educational improvement in terms of narrow, rigid articulations of standards and accountability, bolstering and guiding the high-stakes testing regime that was already shaping educational reform. The Business Roundtable helped to frame the crisis of public schools in terms of student achievement, launching a national obsession with “closing the achievement gap” that would shape the agendas of even Left-leaning organizations like the teachers unions for the next quarter century and, in so doing, mask systemic and structural injustices by framing the problem and solution in terms of individual performance and accountability.

By the 1980s, the expansion and transformation of traditional curriculum via multicultural education and ethnic studies that happened in the 1960s and 1970s would be countered by the call for a national curriculum, the “back to basics” movement, the standards-and-testing movement, and the focus on “closing the achievement gap.” Such initiatives demanded a retreat from multicultural education, a narrowing and standardizing of curriculum, and a return to the framings of what students should learn and how they should be taught that animated the national imaginary of a golden era now lost, a time when things used to be better, not derailed and thwarted by desegregation and civil rights—and, for that matter, by women’s liberation, queer liberation, antiwar organizing, and the War on Poverty.

Not surprisingly, this curricular retreat happened in the same decade when the retreat from *Brown* was in full effect—that is, when many of the court orders that mandated desegregation programs across the country were being allowed or even pushed to expire. By the end of the 1980s, public schools entered a period of resegregation, returning to the use of residence as the basis for school assignment and, as a result, given the trend for neighborhood not merely as segregate even more so today.

The 1980s was also a Department of Education of Republicans, but would Conservative framings a report, *A Nation at Risk*, in the midst of the Cold War competition, and contributed to an education to raising standards; based through testing; at decisionmaking, while curriculum, while deprioritizing school systems and effective industries and 이런.

This Conservative friction would frame the debate on cutting the United States in the United States. This was sponsored by one of the Top. Importantly, this is not merely from the top toward a particular weakness, as embodied in the Next.

By the 1980s, both policy initiatives that piloted to drive system improvements education. This so-called political, certain structures as fiscal austerity, privative ability that incentivized decentralization that of the contradictions that subsidizing some as others enjoy under the same team and
business and anti-social wellbeing network of think tanks, institutions, and educational enclaves and common sense. A year ago, many of these would form as the heart of the Business Roundtable that runs the United States with the open support profits for individual workers, and unsurprisingly, national policy. In 1989, it seemed. How to think of educational articulations of standards in high-stakes testing regime. The Business Roundtable in terms of student achievement closing the achievement gap. "Eating organizations like the and, in so doing, mask systemic problem and solution in reality."

Historicizing Common Sense

The trend for neighborhoods to increasingly segregate, schools have become not merely as segregated as they were pre-Brown, but in some places, even more so today.

The 1980s was also immediately after the formation of the new federal Department of Education in 1979, which had been opposed by Republicans, but would offer a platform and resources to push forward Conservative framings and initiatives. The Reagan Administration's 1983 report, A Nation at Risk, fueled the rhetoric of national insecurity in the midst of the Cold War, a weakening economy in the midst of global competition, and growing inequity and unrest. Such concerns were attributed to an educational system that was failing and pointed to the need to raising standards; holding schools and educators more accountable, and through testing; attaching higher stakes to test scores; centralizing decision making, while disenfranchising communities; standardizing curriculum, while deprofessionalizing teachers; and, of course, restructuring school systems and accountability systems to be modeled after more effective industries and sectors—in particular, the free-market economy.

This Conservative framing of the problem and solution would so compellingly frame the debate on public schooling that both Republicans and Democrats would push forward policies and initiatives in the decades to come that took the United States even more deeply toward such a vision with each new iteration, from Clinton's Goals 2000 to Bush's No Child Left Behind—which was sponsored by one of the most Liberal Democrats in Congress, Senator Ted Kennedy, and parts of which were drafted in the final years of the Clinton administration by Democratic appointees and staff—to Obama's Race to the Top. Importantly, the effectiveness of this Conservative framing resulted not merely from the retreat from civil rights, but also from the parallel move toward a particular way of thinking about system improvement and fairness, as embodied in Neoliberalism and free-market economics.

By the 1980s, both Republicans and Democrats were supporting policy initiatives that placed great faith in the market and competition to drive system improvement, whether that system was the economy or education. This so-called Washington Consensus privileged, at least rhetorically, certain structures or conditions as necessary for success—such as fiscal austerity, privatization, market liberalization, individual accountability that incentivized entrepreneurialism, and system deregulation and decentralization that dis incentivized market controls—while obscuring the contradictions that coexisted. Such contradictions include grossly subsidizing some as others face austerity, or the over-regulation of some as others enjoy under- or deregulation, or punishing some while others on the same team and bearing more responsibility get bailed out, all of
which exemplify how the commonsensical frames of best or necessary practices insidiously obscure the intentionally disparate impact that these reforms were designed to have on the elite versus the masses.

Another Retreat of the Left

This bipartisan convergence was cemented in 1991 with the widely trumpeted triumph of Capitalist democracy over Communism. The 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the 1989 occupation and massacre in Tiananmen Square, and especially the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union displayed for all the world to see the giants of the Communist Bloc in disarray, just as the two Capitalist powers were reaching the height of their Conservative revolutions—that is, as the United States and United Kingdom neared a decade of the Reagan–Thatcher era. The end of the Cold War sparked several profound global changes.

The collapse of the Soviet Union would remove Communism as the central foil for Capitalism, thus creating a vacuum ideologically in place of the image against which Capitalist democracies had defined themselves post–World War II. Seeing itself as an uncontested global superpower, the United States would soon create a new foil, a vague enemy of U.S. Capitalism, broadly defined as anyone who threatened American democracy and self-interest, a global terror that would justify the unprecedented expansion of the military–industrial complex for a war that demanded ongoing Imperialist intervention worldwide against an enemy that was neither definable nor containable—that is, a war that would, by definition, be global and without end.

This Neoconservative equating of global security with the interests of the corporate elite broadened the scope of U.S. democracy to include Imperialist expansion without regard to other nations' boundaries or relationships to the United States—thus justifying our intervention anywhere, even within the borders of our allies—at the same time that it severely narrowed the identity of U.S. democracy by framing any critique of the U.S. economy as antipatriotic and a sign of loyalty to the Communism already defeated. In an era when the mainstream Left—the Democratic Party, labor unions, civil rights organizations—was already becoming more centrist, the fall of Communism prompted much of the Far Left to surrender or go underground, such as Communists, Socialist Democrats, Anarchists, and others who historically figured centrally in leading, organizing, envisioning, and otherwise building the Leftist social movements of the 20th century.

Parallel to the 1940s, Communist-baiting and new forms of blacklist ing once again put the Left in retreat. It is difficult to imagine what labor organizing and union built in the mid-1900s without Communist help, or without Marxism itself as with the Civil Rights Movement, the queer movement. But post-1991, as the labor movement did, the Democratic Party did, too did the Democratic Party, who have since led from the left and Neoliberal than any other of Neoliberalism.

Reign of Neoliberalism

That Conservatives and Liberals alike have default to Neoliberal assumptions that pervasive Neoliberalism has a built-in understanding its origins.

Post–World War II, as capital flows to global financial institutions, and as its own treasury to the states, thrusted free-market principles by leveraging funds. Beginning in the 1940s, and again, as countries fell into local financial institutions with implementing fiscal austerity that would transform their market. Rhetorically, such whom?

Such conditions were propitious for such conditions were propel, too Socialist. No, such opportunities to profit even wealthier as the Reaganomics concept of subsidizing the top was the bottom. The masses, was apropos even States, as well as with the financial crisis in 2009, or the Trump-era wealthiest in 2017, such r
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organizing and union building would have looked like in the early and
mid-1900s without Communists doing as much of the organizing as they
did, or without Marxism shaping much of the analysis and strategy, just
as with the Civil Rights Movement, Black radicalism, the feminist move-
ment, the queer movement, the War on Poverty, and the antiwar move-
ment. But post-1991, as the Republican Party became more Conservative,
so too did the Democratic Party, and not surprisingly, those Democrats
who have since led from the White House would be notably more centrist
and Neoliberal than any other Democratic administration since the dawn
of Neoliberalism.

Reign of Neoliberalism

That Conservatives and Liberals clash on policy specifics even as both
default to Neoliberal assumptions reveals just how commonsensical and
pervasive Neoliberalism has become, making it vitally important to un-
derstand its origins.

Post–World War II, as the United States gained dominance in the
global financial institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund),
and as its own treasury itself became a major global player, the United
States thrusted free-market economics into international policy, partic-
ularly by leveraging funds to push for Neoliberal reforms worldwide.
Beginning in the 1940s, but mainly in the 1950s and 1960s, time and
again, as countries fell into economic turmoil and sought help, the glo-
bal financial institutions withheld support unless these countries agreed
to implementing fiscal austerity, deregulation, and the other conditions
that would transform their economies to look more and more like a free
market. Rhetorically, such reforms would improve the economy, but for
whom?

Such conditions were never about democratizing systems or redis-
btributing income and resources with an eye toward equity—and in fact,
such conditions were precisely in opposition to these goals that sounded
too Socialist. No, such conditions were designed to increase and differenti-
tiate opportunities to profit, which by definition meant that some would
get even wealthier as others would get even poorer. The Conservative
Reaganomics concept in the 1980s of trickle down economics, in which
subsidizing the top would somehow lead to wealth trickling down to
the masses, was apropos even here. And, like in the 1980s in the United
States, as well as with the multitrillion dollar Obama-era bank bailout
in 2009, or the Trump-era tax cuts at an unprecedented level for the
wealthiest in 2017, such rhetoric was completely disconnected from the
reality. Time after time, the free-market reforms led to greater wealth gaps and disparities—that is, to even greater numbers in poverty and greater amounts of concentrated wealth for the elite than before.

This imperative to marketize was applied not only to economic policy, but to other sectors as well, including educational reform, particularly in Latin American countries in the 1970s when the global financial institutions began to make financial loans contingent on the deregulation and privatization of public schools, purporting that such marketizing and competition will drive effort, innovation, and improvement. But predictably, what began as some of the highest literacy rates in the world would quickly nosedive at the same time that achievement gaps and educational inequities expanded, exactly in line with the expansion of wealth gaps in those countries. This should not be surprising; in a competition, there cannot help but be winners and losers, and while the rhetoric might promise that wealth will trickle down, the reality is that the subsidizing of the top only enables the top to continue winning.

As if all of this was not bad enough, what often followed was the U.S. corporate sector profiteering off of the devastation that it helped to bring about in other countries through what journalist and author Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism” in her 2007 book, *Shock Doctrine. The cycle of exacerbating inequity through marketization and then profiteering off of the resulting disaster—which then leads to even more inequity and even more profiteering—increases both the dominance of one side and the subservience of the other, and thus, is fundamentally an Imperialist project, and is so by design.*

Similarly, within the United States, Neoliberalism was shaping not only economic policy, but educational policy as well, and this strategic cycle of crisis–marketize–profiteer would emerge as one of the most effective and enduring frames to reinscribe dominance–subservience and to counter the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, starting with one of its earliest and most significant gains: desegregation.

**The Case of School Choice and Vouchers**

Post-*Brown*, it would not take long for opponents of desegregation to find a policy proposal that would make mandatory desegregation programs sound unnecessary by offering a seemingly more organic alternative: school choice. Students and their parents of all racial backgrounds will want to get into the best schools, making the marketization of and competition for schools a more natural means of desegregating, or so the rhetoric went. In reality, school choice programs do not desegregate schools, but quite the segregation—which is now as a means to desegregate, desegregate, and instead.

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How so? Typically, on where they live, som choice basically broader public schools, thus all several options. A perce the student to their scha nies for which students.

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schools, but quite the opposite—they have proven to exacerbate racial
seggregation—which is not surprising because the rhetoric of school choice
as a means to desegregate belies the reality that it was never designed to
desegregate, and instead, was proffered precisely to avoid desegregating.

The commonsensical-sounding rhetoric that marketization can offer
a solution to racial injustice shows just how seductive Neoliberalism can
be as it masks the White supremacy that underlies the intent. After all,
school choice was not only about keeping racialized groups separate; it
was also about keeping wealthy Whites at the top, and sustaining or even
expanding their political, social, and economic advantage. The battle to
desegregate, as with so much of the Civil Rights Movement, was about
toppling White supremacy, not just getting along with neighbors, and
this helps us to understand why the central policy lever to undo desegre-
gation, since the very beginning, aimed not merely to have more choice
among the publics. No, the main lever was always to divert public funds to
the privates, which is where the school vouchers system comes into play, framing the educational sector as an even larger marketplace, con-
isting of public schools plus private schools, but with the singular, insidious
goal of further concentrating wealth at the top.

How so? Typically, students are assigned to a public school based
on where they live, sometimes called the school assignment area. School
choice basically broadens this area to encompass more students and more
public schools, thus allowing students and their parents to choose from
several options. A percentage of the per-pupil spending allocation follows
the student to their school of choice, thus treating schools like commodi-
ties for which students and their families shop.

Once reframed as a commodity, the logic behind school choice begs
the question of why can’t the funding follow students to private and reli-
gious schools as well, especially if the premise of choice is that the market
will drive improvement—and, for that matter, will drive integration—
whereby the bigger the market, the better the outcome. This expanded
option may be in particular demand by the elite, who may not want to
subsidize the education of the masses or who may not want their own
children to attend schooling for and alongside the masses. School vouch-
ers allows students to use public funds to pay for private schooling; more
recent versions, sometimes called neo-vouchers, offer more indirect
forms of subsidy or relief, such as tax credits for private schooling, which
similarly deplete tax revenue that would otherwise be allocated to public
schools.

Calls for choice, and more pointedly, vouchers, effectively reframe school
funding from a social investment and a public good to a private investment
and an individual commodity, a reframing credited largely to the work in the 1950s of Friedman and his students and colleagues. The rhetoric behind vouchers is that competition drives improvement, and that, as long as an industry operates like a monopoly, it is more likely to be complacent, whereas a marketplace with multiple competitors forces each one to constantly assess, innovate, and try ever harder than their peers if they are going to improve, outperform, and succeed.

Yes, competition sometimes does lead people to try harder, and yes, schools have much room for improvement, particularly the schools for the masses. But the reality is that marketizing education, like marketizing economies, was never meant to improve the situation for the masses, and when implemented, has not succeeded at doing so. From the free-market economic reforms foisted upon struggling countries that would open up opportunities for profit out of disaster to the choice and voucher initiatives offered as means to avoid desegregation and to consolidate wealth, Neoliberal initiatives function to dismantle the public sector, to privatize as a way to fuel corporate profits, and thus, to turn the haves into have-mores.

To this point, Friedman did not argue that vouchers would improve public education, since he was not a proponent of making the public school system more robust. Rather, he argued that vouchers were a means to an end, and that end being the privatization of public education: Where the public sector has failed to serve particular social and political interests, the private sector should be incentivized and empowered to remake the system accordingly. For Friedman, the problem was not a disinvestment in public education; the problem was public education itself, an incredibly expensive domestic enterprise that reeked of Socialism. Vouchers can be the lever that breaks up that monopoly by funneling public funds to the private schools, and while it is true that many who attend private schools are not wealthy and White, it is also true that, far and away, those who take advantage of vouchers to send children to private and religious schools tend to be wealthier Whites.

Yes, Even an Obama-Trump Convergence

When then-candidate Trump was campaigning for president in 2016, he said very little about education, except that he wanted to spend $20 billion to expand school choice, which at the time was about 30% of the federal education budget—not additional funds to be added, simply reallocated by cutting from other programs. Although his subsequent budgets never followed through on this proposal, and although he instead proposed every year to cut the overall budget, he was consistent in calling
for more allocations toward the expansion of school choice, including for voucher and neo-voucher initiatives.

His first move was to nominate billionaire Betsy DeVos, a leader of school choice expansion in Michigan, to be his Secretary of Education, who was confirmed only after an historic split vote in the Senate that required the vice president to break the tie. She was confirmed in the face of a groundswell of opposition, including from over 1 million petition signatories raising concern about her lack of qualifications and her problematic track record, as well as by critics who were otherwise proponents of school choice, but who agreed that the reforms that she spearheaded in Detroit actually weakened the public school system and exacerbated inequities, particularly in the most struggling of schools.

DeVos had not taught or worked in public schools, or been a parent of public school children, or earned experience or expertise as a leader, scholar, or teacher educator in public school districts; nor was she even a supporter of candidate Trump, but to advance Trump’s call to deregulate and privatize, she would be ideal. Through her family foundation—funded by the Amway fortune—and through her personal role on boards for such advocacy organizations as Jeb Bush’s Foundation for Excellence in Education, she had effectively leveraged her wealth to shape policy, including the expansion of school choice and voucher programs, alongside the deregulation of charter schools, and even the expansion of the Common Core State Standards, which had been derided by Trump, but which had figured centrally in the proliferation of high-stakes testing and profiteering by the testing industry. The research had long been clear: None of these initiatives would strengthen public education overall, and instead, had already proven to indirectly or even directly exacerbate inequities—and yet these so-called reforms had been variously embraced and rejected by members of both major political parties.

In particular, the call for increased school choice, particularly in the form of expansion and deregulation of charter schools, was a hallmark of the Obama administration, including the allocation of increased federal funding for such purposes. In fact, the Obama-era reforms aligned squarely with a number of elements of the corporate agenda for public education, best exemplified in his secretary of education Arne Duncan’s School Turnaround and Reform.

In the early 2000s, when Duncan was CEO of Chicago Public Schools, the Commercial Club of Chicago, a roundtable of business leaders, issued a report, Left Behind, that called for the marketizing of public schools and expansion of test-and-punish policies, and that laid the blueprint for what would, the following year, become Renaissance 2010,
Duncan’s signature initiative to turn around failing schools. The reforms exacerbated inequities and fractured already struggling communities, but would soon be expanded nationwide in such initiatives as Race to the Top after Duncan sailed through confirmation in a Democratic-controlled Senate to be Obama’s first Secretary of Education. His confirmation and priorities are clear signs that corporate-driven, marketizing reforms were and are not unique to Trump and DeVos, or to Republicans; this was and is a bipartisan problem.

Toward the end of Obama’s second term in 2015, just before Duncan stepped down as secretary, the Nation’s Report Card showed a decline in student test scores from recent years. The Council of Great City Schools issued a report documenting the extent to which students nationwide were being over-tested, not only in the number of tests, but also in the time spent on testing and test prep, with no evidence that all of the time, attention, and resources spent on testing led to any significant gains in learning or achievement. None of this was surprising: research was clear even before No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top that a testing regime would do little to improve education, and, sure enough, the result was the expanding of funding and profits for the testing industry and a narrowing of curriculum, particularly in the highest-needs schools that already showed low test scores.

Such reports cemented the consensus among Republicans and Democrats that the Obama/Duncan administration had overreached its authority and over-tested our country’s schools and students with failed results. Congress seized on the timing of the long-overdue reauthorization of ESEA, as of 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), to advance what was long a Conservative and Republican goal: namely, to significantly weaken the federal role in education. One of the major changes in the ESSA reauthorization is a shifting of decisionmaking authority from the federal government to the states, a move that backpedals from the original reason for much of what happened in the federal era of the 1950s–1970s: to empower the federal government to push states to comply with civil rights nondiscrimination law and policy. Legislators claimed that ESSA moved away from over-testing, but such a claim was misleading: ESSA may have given states more leeway in determining the specifics, but it continued to call for annual testing and for making high-stakes decisions based on student growth, measured as gains in test scores, including evaluations of teachers and teacher preparation programs, despite the critique by researchers and test makers themselves that such use of “value-added modeling” had proven to be neither valid nor reliable for such decision-making. Over-testing, and misusing test results, continued unabated.

One of the most profound needs to know in order to help but to be part of scientific inquiry cannot be an answer to the question of educational policy and reform. In order or not students are learning and are effective and should be turned around. Testing does not answer the questions on designed to direct decision making. The science of teaching is of truths and more a tool for the certain worldviews, including eugenics. Science, like any social science, cannot help but to be part of scientific inquiry cannot be the uses of science have always been.

High-stakes testing and accountability are educational effective and capacity and, hence, ensuring performance and development has become so common as to align, failing to connect to the goals of educational convergence around the marketing of schools that is the marketing of teachers certification to the market era focus on formula grant to the Top on competitive applicants to detail how such a large amount of money is spent.

Historicizing reforms rattle the ideologies and sometimes might have though. There are better alternatives.
and failing schools. The reforms, intended to transform struggling communities, but one set of initiatives as Race to the Top in a Democratic-controlled state, have met with mixed success. His confirmation and the rapidity of reforms were welcomed by Democrats, but this was and remained controversial, as the doubts about their effectiveness persisted.

In 2015, just before Duncan's departure, the Council of Great City Schools issued a report showing a decline in the number of tests in use, but also in the evidence that all of the time, and money spent on standardized tests, was actually raising student achievement. Research was clear that a Top-down approach, where testing determines policy, did not lead to significant gains in student achievement. The result was a shift in the testing industry and a renewed focus on the highest-needs schools that were not benefiting from the reforms.

Among Republicans and Democrats alike, there was a growing belief that more was needed to improve educational outcomes. This led to the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (ESSA), which sought to advance what was seen as a long-overdue reauthorization of the act. The goal was to significantly increase the accountability and the power of local and state education agencies to determine the specifics, but it was clear that making high-stakes decisions based on test scores, including evaluating teachers, was not reliable for such high-stakes decisions, and continued unabated.

Historicizing Reforms and Connecting the Dots

One of the most prominent of commonsensical ideas that still drives educational policy and reforms today is that test scores reveal all that is needed to know in order to make high-stakes decisions, from whether or not students are learning and should graduate to whether teachers are effective and should receive merit pay to whether schools should be turned around. Testing does reveal some things, like how a student answers the questions on the test, but the tests being used were never designed to direct decisionmaking in these other arenas, and with good reason: The science of testing, like all of science, is less a neutral arbiter of truths and more a tool that will always be already implicated in certain worldviews, including standardized testing, which has origins in eugenics. Science, like any knowledge production, like all of education, cannot help but to be partial; the content and processes and frameworks of scientific inquiry cannot help but to have cultural biases; and therefore, the uses of science have always been and should always be contested.

High-stakes testing animates and embodies the neoliberal imperative that educational effectiveness and success reflect individual responsibility and capacity and, hence, that educational improvement results from measuring performance and holding people accountable. Because neoliberalism has become so commonsensical, so has the neoliberal demand to test and punish, which is why both Republicans and Democrats, Conservatives and Liberals, seem to buy into that narrative and promote policies that align, failing to connect the dots of how such policies support schools to sort even more effectively. The same can be said about the bipartisan convergence around other market-based reform initiatives; from the marketizing of schools through choice, vouchers, and charter schools to the marketizing of teacher preparation via alternative, fast-track routes to certification to the marketizing of funding by moving from the federal-era focus on formula grants that targeted high needs to the focus in Race to the Top on competitive grants, which fueled privatization by requiring applicants to detail how they were going to outsource in order to spend such a large amount of money in such a short period of time.

Historicizing reforms and connecting the dots help to illuminate and rattle the ideologies and narratives that have effectively framed even what some might have thought to be the Liberal or Progressive alternatives. There are better alternatives; people just need to know where to look.