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Editorial

Production for this special issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* took place in the midst of local, statewide, and national debates about education. Just this summer, the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers agreed to a new contract, even as funding for this deal remains uncertain. In the meantime, Governor Tom Wolf has spent much of his tenure embroiled in budget fights with the state legislature, in part over funding for education. Pennsylvania currently ranks forty-fifth in the nation in funding public schools, posing challenges especially for low-income and majority-minority school districts.[1]

Financial woes have also threatened the state's longstanding tradition of linking education to racial justice. Pennsylvania boasts the nation's oldest historically black university, Cheyney University. Cheyney helped train such luminaries as West Chester–born civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, who played a key role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington. Despite its central role in these historic struggles, Cheyney risked losing its accreditation earlier this year due to outstanding debts. The state university system has conditionally agreed to forgive these loans, but Cheyney's long-term future remains uncertain.[2]

[1] "How Will City Pay for Deal?" June 21, 2017, *Philadelphia Inquirer*.
[2] Susan Snyder, "State Throws Cheyney University $30 Million Lifeline," Aug. 22, 2017, *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

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2017 has also seen Pennsylvania at the center of national debates about education. Earlier this year, Senator Patrick J. Toomey was a key swing vote in the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as secretary of education. Controversy over DeVos's appointment focused on such issues as the role of religion in education, firearms on school campuses, the teaching of science, the proliferation of charter schools, and protections guaranteed by Title IX and for LGBTQ students. For weeks, Toomey's offices were so flooded with phone calls that constituents could not even leave voicemails. The fierce battle for Toomey's vote evidences both Pennsylvania's divided electorate and the state's national significance.

As these examples suggest, debates about education take place within a nexus of local, statewide, and national concerns, a fact of which contributors to this issue are very much aware. Ranging in topic from elementary school to postsecondary education, their articles deftly navigate between and among these registers, exploring such themes as the purpose of education, its relationship to citizenship, and its role in movements for civil rights. Guest editors William W. Cutler III and Jonathan Zimmerman, without whom this issue would not have been possible, deserve much of the credit for the variety of topics represented and the high quality of the articles in which they appear. At a time when 45 percent of Americans believe that higher education is bad for the nation, these topics seem particularly worthy of study.[3]

Christina Larocco
Editor

[3] Pew Research Center, "Sharp Partisan Divisions in Views of National Institutions," July 10, 2017, http://www.people-press.org/2017/07/10/sharp-partisan-divisions-in-views-of-national-institutions/.

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