

REVIEW ESSAY

Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and the Historiography of Urban Public Education in Pennsylvania

HISTORIANS OF PENNSYLVANIA have been interested in education since the beginning of the twentieth century. The earliest articles and books on this topic appeared long before the history of education became an established scholarly field. One explanation for this anomaly may be that the Quakers who founded Pennsylvania opened schools almost immediately. In effect, William Penn and his contemporaries enmeshed schooling in the colony's fabric. Among Penn's successors, Anthony Benezet has attracted the most attention from historians of education because he operated outside of the mainstream, teaching girls, the poor, and African Americans. But it was a non-Quaker, Benjamin Franklin, who did more than anyone else to identify Pennsylvania with the history of education. Knowledge that could be applied, he believed, was the key to opportunity, prosperity, and the common good. The commonwealth has basked in the reflected glow of this idea—as well as his work on behalf of homegrown learned institutions—ever since.¹

Benezet and Franklin did most of their educational work in and around Philadelphia. This fact should come as no surprise given the times in which they lived. For most of the colonial era, Philadelphia and its environs were synonymous with Pennsylvania. Only Chester and Lancaster rivaled it as centers of commerce; in culture and politics Philadelphia was unequalled. In fact, it was the largest, richest, and most powerful city in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. But Philadelphia's

¹Thomas Woody, *Early Quaker Education in Pennsylvania* (New York, 1920); Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York, 1915); Woody, *The Educational Views of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1931); George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia, 1937). See also John Hardin Best, ed., *Benjamin Franklin on Education* (New York, 1962); and George W. Boudreau, "'Done by a Tradesman': Franklin's Educational Proposals and the Culture of Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 69 (2002): 524–57 (hereafter cited as *PH*).

political and economic standing changed soon after that. It lost out to Washington, DC, as the seat of the federal government, and in 1812 Harrisburg replaced it as the capital of Pennsylvania. By the 1830s, New York City had become America's economic engine. Even Philadelphia's contributions to education were forgotten as reformers in Massachusetts and Rhode Island inspired and shaped the common school movement.² Philadelphia played, nonetheless, a vital role in the history of public education in Pennsylvania. The Quaker reformer Roberts Vaux led the way, persuading the state to establish and fund a system of pauper schools in the city in 1818. As historian Joseph J. McCadden first documented in 1937, Vaux's activism helped open these schools to all in the 1830s. William C. Kashatus revisited this topic many years later, arguing that Quakers shaped the tenor of Philadelphia's public schools for 150 years.³ These important studies notwithstanding, the historiography of public education in urban Pennsylvania has largely neglected the years before 1850. Concentrating on the twentieth century, it has defined the history of urban public education in political terms, exploring the ways in which reformers, educators, and politicians modified methods, managed resources, and distributed benefits. Until recently, it left the suburbs out, even though educators there modeled their public schools after those in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Over time, historians have moved race and gender ahead of social class as explanatory concepts.⁴ But they have not intertwined these variables into multifaceted arguments.

Beginning in the late 1960s, many historians began to look at the history of public education in urban America. Among others, Sam Bass

² Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York, 1983); Charles Leslie Glenn Jr., *The Myth of the Common School* (Amherst, MA, 1988).

³ Joseph J. McCadden, *Education in Pennsylvania, 1801–1835, and Its Debt to Roberts Vaux* (Philadelphia, 1937); William C. Kashatus, *A Virtuous Education: Penn's Vision for Philadelphia Schools* (Wallingford, PA, 1997). See also William W. Cutler III, "Public Education: The School District of Philadelphia," *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/public-education-the-school-district-of-philadelphia/> (hereafter cited as *EGP*).

⁴ I have chosen to focus on the historiography of public education because most historians have chosen this topic. Public education has never included nursery schools or day care. For one explanation of this omission, see Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb, *Broken Promises: How Americans Fail Their Children* (New York, 1982). For a history of preschool education in Philadelphia, see Elizabeth R. Rose, *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care, 1890–1960* (New York, 1999). The historiography of parochial schools is limited, while that of private and independent schools comprises almost entirely institutional histories. However, an overview and synthesis of both topics can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*. See Francis Ryan, "Roman Catholic Education (Primary and Secondary)," *EGP*, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/roman-catholic-education/>; and David R. Contosta and William W. Cutler III, "Private (Independent) Schools," *EGP*, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/private-independent-schools/>.

Warner Jr., Michael B. Katz, Stanley K. Schultz, Raymond A. Mohl, and Carl F. Kaestle searched the past for insights into the problems afflicting modern, urban, public schools. What they found in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia helped explain to their satisfaction the institutional inertia and poor quality that characterized these schools by the mid-twentieth century. They had never fulfilled the promise of educational opportunity for all, these historians argued, because this promise had never been genuine. The public schools in Philadelphia, Warner wrote, “were not expected to be innovators.” Instead, their goal was to provide “mass low-cost education.” According to Schultz, “those seeking a new urban discipline created as one of their most useful tools a system of public education.”⁵ In this historiography, the public schools of Philadelphia received limited attention. In *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*, Warner devoted less than a chapter to them. But he broke new ground in the field of urban history by building them into his analysis of social reform in cities, which, he argued, often undervalued public solutions to collective problems. Educational historian David B. Tyack also did not feature Philadelphia in *The One Best System*, his pioneering study of urban school bureaucratization. Instead, he made it one among several examples of cities where elite reformers modernized public education by centralizing its management, routinizing its work, and differentiating its workers, especially principals and teachers. Such bureaucratic improvements, these reformers argued, would eliminate favoritism, waste, and inefficiency. “Although the tactics and consequences of these reforms varied from city to city,” Tyack wrote, “in each case the central ideology and central strategy were similar, marking these episodes as part of a nationwide urban ‘progressive’ campaign . . . which had earlier transformed other sectors of American life and which was now reshaping urban education.”⁶

Thirty years ago, the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (*PMHB*) published a review essay on the historiography of public education in urban America. It focused on two books—one by a political scientist, the other by a historian. Philadelphia was not featured in either of them. Nor was any other city in Pennsylvania. Instead, political scientist

⁵ Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968); Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789–1860* (New York, 1973), ix; Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York, 1971); Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); Raymond A. Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783–1825* (New York, 1971).

⁶ Warner, *The Private City*, 111–23; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 148.

Paul Peterson and historian David Hogan cast Chicago in the leading role as they explored the contours of urban school reform between 1870 and 1940. Like Tyack, they argued that elite reformers were responsible for the modernization of urban schools, seizing control from immigrants and labor. Hogan placed a premium on socioeconomic status, explaining modernization in terms of class conflict. Peterson, on the other hand, took a more pluralistic approach, arguing that many stakeholders had to collaborate for modernization to take place.⁷ Pennsylvania might have played an important role in this debate had Hogan published his study of Philadelphia schools, work, and family life, which he and Michael B. Katz undertook in the early 1980s. They built their research on the premise that educational change emerges from class conflict. But they never completed this work, and the historiography of public education in Philadelphia went elsewhere.⁸

In Chicago, color, not class, became the paramount consideration for historians of urban education. The growth of urban school segregation despite the *Brown* decision in 1954 and the civil rights legislation of the 1960s prompted both Amanda Seligman and Kathryn Neckerman to search for an explanation. Their decision to study Chicago made sense not only because of its large black population but also because of its important place in the historiography of public education in urban America. Seligman came to the conclusion that blue-collar whites on Chicago's West Side defended their neighborhoods and their public schools against those who wanted to desegregate them. White flight, she argues, was a last resort, not the first option for white families confronted by an influx of African Americans. Neckerman attributes school segregation and the concomitant failure of the Chicago public schools to policies adopted by the board of education and the school district's administration. Both managers and policymakers took the path of least resistance when deciding about such issues as school feeder patterns, ability grouping, and remedial education. If African Americans could not be excluded, at least they could be contained.⁹

⁷ William W. Cutler III, "Class, Politics, and Urban School Reform," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 111 (1987): 237–44 (hereafter cited as *PMHB*). The two books under review were Paul E. Peterson, *The Politics of School Reform, 1870–1940* (Chicago, 1985); and David John Hogan, *School and Society in Chicago, 1880–1930* (Philadelphia, 1985).

⁸ Michael B. Katz and David Hogan, "Schools, Work, and Family Life: Social History," in *Historical Inquiry in Education: A Research Agenda*, ed. John H. Best (Washington, DC, 1983), 287.

⁹ Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago, 2005); Kathryn M. Neckerman, *Schools Betrayed: Roots of Failure in Inner-City Education* (Chicago, 2007).

In 2007 the distinguished historian Gary B. Nash assessed the state of historical writing about Philadelphia since the publication of the city's tercentennial history. In a historiographical essay published by *PMHB*, Nash argues that "a veritable meteor shower of scholarly works" had appeared in just a quarter century. This scholarship, he asserts, built upon the solid but increasingly anachronistic foundation laid by Russell F. Weigley, the editor in chief of the tercentennial history. In addition to advancing our knowledge of the city's political, economic, and military history, Weigley and his collaborators broke ground in such fields as women's, African American, and Native American history. They explored in creative ways the history of poverty and social welfare as well as the interactions among work, space, and economic activity. But by focusing on the contributions of the city's elites, it left a lot of room for others to innovate.¹⁰

Given the size and scope of the work Nash identified, it is disappointing that his essay neglects educational history almost completely. His bias toward the years before 1900 may explain this oversight, since much of what was published in the field between 1982 and 2007 focused on the twentieth century.¹¹ No comprehensive history of the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) has ever been written, but many authors have explored specific aspects of the city's recent educational history.¹² Some have built on the foundation laid in the 1970s, expanding our knowledge of public school modernization. Others have emulated Seligman and Neckerman, focusing on race and poverty. Still more have featured the relationship between public schools and their constituents. This scholarship has downplayed social class in favor of race and gender.

Some of the reasons Nash proffers for the surge in historical writing about the city could also be marshaled to explain the appearance of so much scholarship on public education. Changes in the faculty at the University

¹⁰ Gary B. Nash, "Clio's Cornucopia: The Last Quarter Century of Historical Scholarship on Philadelphia," *PMHB* 131 (2007): 247–75; Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York, 1982).

¹¹ Only two of the four books that we both have cited made education their focus: Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900–1950* (Philadelphia, 1979); and Nina de Angeli Walls, *Art, Industry, and Women's Education in Philadelphia* (Westport, CT, 2001).

¹² The Los Angeles and Detroit public schools have been the subject of books that examine their evolution over much, if not all, of their history. See Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907–1981* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1993); and Judith Rosenberg Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools* (Stanford, CA, 1992). Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805–1973* (New York, 1974) covers perhaps the longest span of time of any urban school biography.

of Pennsylvania, for example, certainly made a difference. Beginning in 1978, there was a senior scholar in the university's Department of History—Michael Katz—willing and able to supervise graduate students interested in urban public education. A new receptivity to their work by editors at regional journals and local university presses gave these young scholars added incentive. The acquisition by some local archives of manuscript and print collections bearing on the history of education in Philadelphia facilitated research. When the Historical Society of Pennsylvania acquired the papers of former mayor and school board president Richardson Dilworth, it became an important destination for historians of education. Established in 1967, the Urban Archives at Temple University assembled a critical mass of primary sources on public education.¹³ Among its most important collections in this regard are the papers of black activist Floyd Logan, school reformer Helen Oakes, and the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission.

But what about Pittsburgh? With three research universities, it has always had the institutional capacity for cutting-edge scholarship in many historical fields, including public education. And the primary sources are there. In 1969 the School District of Pittsburgh gave a trove of records to the University of Pittsburgh. Covering the years 1836 to 1962, the collection includes minute books, enrollment rosters, and attendance reports. It documents the district's history from the time it was, like Philadelphia, divided into many subdistricts. Among its treasures are the enrollment records of Pittsburgh Central High School from 1855 to 1906. A comparable collection has never existed in Philadelphia. For many years, the SDP housed some of its historical records at its headquarters on Twenty-First Street. Stored in a library devoted to curriculum theory and development, this archive mainly consisted of annual reports and published board minutes. The district's earliest records—including handwritten minute and roll books from as far back as the 1820s—lived in a warehouse on the banks of the Schuylkill River; access to them was restricted. The district never developed a relationship with a local university or the Free Library of Philadelphia for the safekeeping of its historical records. In 1978 the Philadelphia Board of Education agreed to transfer many of them to the Urban Archives at Temple but rescinded the offer when city archivist Alan Weinberg objected. Today those records are scattered, some at the district's

¹³ References to collections in the Urban Archives appear in the works of many authors cited in this essay.

headquarters on North Broad Street and some in a dead storage facility.¹⁴ Nevertheless, historians of education have often written about the district.

Philadelphia and Pittsburgh are, of course, not the only cities in Pennsylvania to operate school districts. Chester, Harrisburg, Reading, Lancaster, and Erie come to mind, and their public schools date back to the nineteenth century. Local historians have devoted some attention to them, and James P. Wickersham had at least some of them in mind when he published the first history of education in Pennsylvania in 1886.¹⁵ But over the last fifty years, historians writing for scholarly journals and university presses have overlooked them. Perhaps this is because the limits and possibilities of public education writ large have been most apparent in big cities. That comparatively little has been published on Pittsburgh's educational history warrants its own explanation. It is probably the result of multiple factors, one of which is the orientation of the two most important urban historians to live and work there in the second half of the twentieth century: Samuel P. Hays and Roy Lubove. Hays was not much interested in schooling per se, and although what he wrote on urban reform in the Progressive Era influenced some historians of education, especially Tyack, Hays's own work on the history of Pittsburgh marginalized education.¹⁶ Lubove did the same. In his voluminous scholarship on modern Pittsburgh, he devoted himself to such topics as social welfare policy, urban planning, and real estate development.¹⁷ Had he combined the study of any one of these three topics with public education, the results could have been pathbreaking.

The historiography of school modernization in Philadelphia encompasses both the expansion of public schooling and its bureaucratization. It has never featured neo-Marxist ideas about class bias and elite domination. Instead, it has focused on the consequences of professionalization in public education, and, eventually, the role of race and gender. When

¹⁴ David A. Horowitz to Michael P. Marcuse, Apr. 25 and June 27, 1978, photocopies in the author's possession. Access to these records is sanctioned by the Pennsylvania Right to Know Law. It may be obtained through the SDP's Open Records Officer/Assistant General Counsel at 440 North Broad Street, Suite 313, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁵ James P. Wickersham, *A History of Education in Pennsylvania* (1886; repr., New York, 1969).

¹⁶ Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55 (1964): 157–69; Tyack, *The One Best System*, 128; Maurine Weiner Greenwald, "Women and Class in Pittsburgh, 1850–1920," in *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh*, ed. Samuel P. Hays (Pittsburgh, 1989), 33–68.

¹⁷ Edward K. Muller, "Lubove's Pittsburgh," *PH* 68 (2001): 336–53; Raymond A. Mohl, "Roy Lubove and American Urban History: A Review Essay on Pittsburgh's Post-Steel Era," *PH* 68 (2001): 354–62.

writing about Philadelphia, Tyack relied on the work of William H. Issel, who is best known for his article on the Reorganization Act of 1905, which led to the SDP's political and administrative centralization. Eager to weaken the city's many ward-based school boards, which they accused of corruption and patronage, reformers persuaded the state legislature to concentrate power in the hands of the city's central board of education. Less often cited are Issel's two articles on public education in the rest of Pennsylvania. The first, published in 1967, examined the role of the Pittsburgh Teachers Association in educational reform at the beginning of the twentieth century. It argued that this professional organization devoted itself to the improvement of the Pittsburgh public schools by advocating for such reforms as physical education, manual training, and medical inspections. The association, Issel maintained, also raised the status of teachers by working successfully for higher salaries and retirement savings. Issel built on this theme more than a decade later in an article about school reform and industrialization. Arguing against Michael Katz and others, Issel claimed that historians should look for the forces driving reform inside as well as outside the American educational system. They should pay more attention to the role that the professionalization of school administration played. Many administrators believed that they could stem the disorder that came with industrialization, he wrote, by "linking their ideology of social control to a successful campaign to widen their professional authority." Rather than class conflict, hubris and ambition were responsible for organizational change.¹⁸

In 1979 Richard B. Fishbane, who was then a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, published a demographic study of Philadelphia teachers in the mid-nineteenth century. Following the lead of the researchers at the Philadelphia Social History Project, he based his study on manuscript census records. Fishbane asked when and why the SDP employed more women teachers than men and if there were training requirements for them. He wanted to know if women could build a career in teaching, advancing from the lowest ranks to supervisory positions, and if so, how

¹⁸ William H. Issel, "Modernization and Philadelphia School Reform, 1882–1905," *PMHB* 94 (1970): 358–83; Issel, "Teachers and Educational Reform During the Progressive Era: A Case Study of the Pittsburgh Teachers Association," *History of Education Quarterly* 7 (1967): 220–33 (hereafter cited as *HEQ*); Issel, "Americanization, Acculturation and Social Control: School Reform Ideology in Industrial Pennsylvania, 1880–1910," *Journal of Social History* 12 (1979): 569–90.

many did. He discovered that the gender ratio in the SDP shifted dramatically from male to female between 1845 and 1865 and that by 1871 nearly all of Philadelphia's teachers (95 percent) were women. Because the district was slow to enforce any training requirements, many were young and inexperienced. Since many Americans viewed marriage as incompatible with teaching, especially at the elementary level, very few teachers remained on the job in the SDP for more than a decade.¹⁹ The feminization of public school teaching followed a similar trajectory in Pittsburgh. But modernization came unevenly there. The Pittsburgh school board instituted mandatory certification requirements in 1911 but still barred married women from teaching.²⁰ In other words, because teaching was gendered, it was more than a job but less than a profession.

According to historian Jackie Blount, the preference for single women teachers decreased in the United States after 1900 and especially after 1940. Anxieties about sexual deviance, once repressed but now expressed, made marriage for educators, both male and female, an increasingly important criterion for public school employment. Educators whose career choices raised concerns about their sexual orientation ran the risk of ugly gossip, if not worse. Men were not supposed to teach very young children any more than women were supposed to manage large school districts.²¹ These expectations most certainly affected the teaching profession in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but to what extent remains undetermined. Did married women outnumber their single counterparts sooner rather than later in urban Pennsylvania, and what role, if any, did race and social class play in shaping this development? By the 1950s, lesbians and gay men had established themselves in Philadelphia, creating a vibrant subculture that was visible to its members if not always to everyone else.²² Was this also the case in Pittsburgh, and to what degree did this sense of community affect both teachers and students? These questions merit careful attention by historians of education.

¹⁹ Richard B. Fishbane, "The Shallow Boast of Cheapness': Public School Teaching as a Profession in Philadelphia, 1865–1890," *PMHB* 103 (1979): 66–84.

²⁰ Greenwald, "Women and Class in Pittsburgh," 42–43. See also Marguerite Renner, "Who Will Teach? Changing Job Opportunity and Roles for Women in the Evolution of the Pittsburgh Schools, 1830–1900" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1981).

²¹ Jackie M. Blount, "Spinsters, Bachelors, and Other Gender Transgressors in School Employment, 1850–1990," *Review of Educational Research* 70 (2000): 83–101. For more on the context of these developments, see David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820–1980* (New York, 1982), 183–201.

²² Marc Stein, *City of Brotherly and Sisterly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972* (2000; repr., Philadelphia, 2004), 3–13.

One of the most imaginative works in the historiography of school expansion and modernization argues that the bureaucratization of the SDP and the growth of public secondary education should not be understood in terms of class domination. Published in 1988, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838–1939*, by David F. Labaree, draws from sociology and economics to argue that bureaucratization was “a political intervention in a previously unregulated educational marketplace.” Admission to Central was gendered until 1983; only boys could attend. But in the mid-nineteenth century, its meritocratic emphasis on talent and ambition made it accessible to both working- and middle-class applicants. Educators in Boston had moved in this democratic direction a generation earlier, when Horace Mann and Samuel Gridley Howe persuaded those in charge of the city’s public school system to replace oral with written examinations for grade promotion and secondary school admission. According to historian William J. Reese, this attempt to standardize the assessment process “sparked a debate about the politics, meaning, and virtues of testing that has never ended.” At Central High School the issue was the value of its credential, not testing. Operating in the equivalent of an educational free enterprise system, the school’s diploma soon became so valuable to the city’s middle class that the school board was forced to regulate admission and then expand access by opening competitors. At first, the board established an entrance examination that institutionalized the merit principle and helped to standardize the grammar school curriculum. Next came a quota system that guaranteed seats in Central’s incoming class to every feeder school in the city’s public school system. In 1885 the board opened a manual training high school for boys to provide another means by which to satisfy the city’s educational aspirations. Another followed five years later, and many comprehensive high schools opened at the beginning of the twentieth century. In response, Central reformed its curriculum, replacing the practical course geared toward citizenship with a two-track system that offered either college preparation or vocational education. This, according to Labaree, was “as much a sign of class weakness as it was of class power” because it revealed “just how much the members of the middle classes had come to depend on the high school and its credentials.” Finally, the board abolished the school’s entrance examination, hoping to make it like every other high school in the city. Central did its best to remain distinctive, and the board rewarded this persistence in 1938 by making admission selective

again. But the school had been in the hands of the bureaucracy, not the marketplace, for more than three decades by then.²³

Labaree's explanation for the appearance of the city's first manual training high school differs substantially from that of Andrew Dawson, who argues that the origins of vocational education in the Philadelphia public schools can be found at one of the city's largest employers, the Baldwin Locomotive Works, and the nearby Spring Garden Institute. When Baldwin introduced piecework and wage labor in the 1870s, it undermined the apprenticeship system, paving the way for the classroom to become the locus of job training. The institute addressed the city's growing need for skilled industrial workers with a curriculum that included geometry, physics, and chemistry, as well as wood carving, painting, and mechanical drawing. It aspired to educate all Philadelphia children in the principles of manual labor, viewing them as fundamental to a liberal education. The SDP was slow to accept this idea because of its commitment to localism and patronage, but it eventually followed the institute's lead. After all, Philadelphia was a leading industrial city—the “workshop of the world,” its boosters claimed. Dawson argues that this change also had a political dimension: it assuaged the bitterness felt by the city's craftsmen, who felt dislocated and disrespected by the demise of the apprenticeship system.²⁴

Writing about how Philadelphians “got work” between 1840 and 1950, Walter Licht maintains that it was reformers more than educators or business leaders who were responsible for the introduction of vocational education into the high school curriculum. It was part of a three-pronged agenda that also included centralized management and compulsory education. “The business community in Philadelphia certainly spoke in favor of manual arts and trade training,” Licht wrote. But “few Philadelphia firms expected the schools to equip young people adequately for the kinds of industrial employment available in the city.” Commercial education in the schools was another matter altogether; it proved helpful to many white-collar businesses. But the school-to-work connection was weak in Philadelphia, Licht maintains, and if the schools

²³ David F. Labaree, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School of Philadelphia, 1838–1939* (New Haven, CT, 1988), 68, 78, 80, 82, 86–90, 162, 168–70, 172; William J. Reese, *Testing Wars in the Public Schools: A Forgotten History* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 50–53, 101.

²⁴ Andrew Dawson, “The Workshop and the Classroom: Philadelphia Engineering, the Decline of Apprenticeship, and the Rise of Industrial Training, 1878–1900” *HEQ* 39 (1999): 143–60.

had an impact on work, it was achieved by “raising the age of entrance” into the city’s labor market.²⁵

Girls and women benefitted more than boys and men from the commercial programs that some proprietary schools, parochial schools, and public high schools offered. Licht acknowledges this gender difference but does not make enough of it. In fact, the history of girls’ and women’s education in both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia remains largely unwritten. The Philadelphia High School for Girls and its partner for many years, the Philadelphia Normal School, deserve to take their rightful place in the historiography of urban public education. Such a study would build on the work of Catherine D’Ignazio and Nina de Angeli Walls. D’Ignazio examines the history of girls’ sports in the city and the suburbs in her Temple dissertation. She shows that suburban girls were much more likely than their urban counterparts to participate in interscholastic sports, especially after 1930, giving them an advantage in college admissions. De Angeli Walls sheds light on the history of vocational education for women in her history of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, known today as Moore College of Art and Design. Founded in 1848, it prepared both girls and women to be either skilled workers in education, business, and industry or sophisticated homemakers. When it acquired the authority to offer bachelor’s degrees in 1933, it passed from the realm of secondary to higher education.²⁶

Science played an important role in the modernization of public education at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many American educators believed that empirical research would lead to a theory of education. No less than their counterparts elsewhere, educators in Philadelphia embraced this view and then implemented it by developing and administering standardized tests. Concentrating on the work of superintendent Edwin C. Broome and his director of educational research, Philip A. Boyer, historian René Luis Alvarez has demonstrated that the SDP

²⁵ Walter Licht, *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840–1950* (Philadelphia, 1992), 66–67, 87, 93, 94, 96. For an account of an attempt by business leaders to teach the virtues of capitalism to public school students in Philadelphia and Reading—and labor’s response to this effort—see Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, “Business Propaganda in the Schools: Labor’s Struggle against the Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System, 1949–1954,” *HEQ* 40 (2000): 255–78.

²⁶ Catherine D’Ignazio, “The History of High School Girls’ Sport in the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia, 1890–1990” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2009); D’Ignazio, “How Did They Compete? Philadelphia High Schools Girls’ Sports, 1904–1944,” in *Philly Sports: Teams, Games, and Athletes from Rocky’s Town*, ed. Ryan A. Swanson and David K. Wiggins (Fayetteville, AR, 2016), 53–70; Walls, *Art, Industry, and Women’s Education in Philadelphia*, 97, 102–3, 106, 130.

greatly increased its use of such tests in the 1920s. Achievement tests, Broome and Boyer believed, enforced academic standards, measured student proficiencies, and facilitated vocational guidance. Their extensive use increased not only organizational efficiency but also the chance that newcomers would learn the skills and values needed to survive, if not succeed, in urban America.²⁷

For most of its history, Philadelphia has been home to many African Americans. The same is not true of Pittsburgh. Perhaps this explains at least in part why historians have devoted insufficient attention to the latter's educational history.²⁸ Even though their numbers were not large at first, blacks in Philadelphia constituted a visible and important demographic in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When the city's black population increased dramatically between 1920 and 1950, segregated neighborhoods and occupations rapidly proliferated. The combined effects of deindustrialization and suburbanization exacerbated these conditions. Good schools might have given black Philadelphians a fighting chance, but they never received equal treatment in the city's public school system. In the words of historian Harry C. Silcox, African Americans suffered from "delay and neglect" in the Philadelphia public schools from the beginning.²⁹

While serving as a high school principal in the SDP, Silcox wrote a doctoral dissertation about the schooling of African Americans in Boston and Philadelphia. In *North of Slavery*, Leon Litwack showed that Massachusetts faced the injustice of school segregation before any other northern state. Silcox took this story further, especially for Pennsylvania. He demonstrated the lengths to which black Philadelphians were forced to go to obtain a proper education for their children. This lack of support eventually convinced some black leaders, such as Octavius V. Catto and Jacob C. White Jr., that "racial solidarity and self-help" were better than integration in public education. An assassin cut Catto down in 1871, but White, who lived until 1902, resisted the discrimination he and his students encountered. Under his supervision, more than a few alumni of the Roberts Vaux

²⁷ René Luis Alvarez, "Assessing the Modern Urban School System: The Institutionalization of Standardized Testing in Philadelphia, 1925–1930," *PMHB* 128 (2014): 193–220.

²⁸ For one of the few articles that deals with this topic, see Edward T. Price Jr., "School Segregation in Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania," *PH* 43 (1976): 120–37.

²⁹ Harry C. Silcox, "Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800–1860," *PMHB* 97 (1973): 444–64.

Consolidated School helped desegregate both Central High School and the Philadelphia High School for Girls.³⁰

Raised in Philadelphia, Vincent P. Franklin made his hometown even more central to the revisionist historiography of African American education that emerged in the 1970s. In *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, he explored the role that black resolve played in the struggle against racial discrimination in the city's public school system. Fearful that they might lose their jobs, black teachers dissented when the NAACP protested rising segregation levels in the 1920s. But they got behind the Educational Equality League, founded by Floyd Logan, when it used the threat of black defection from the Republican Party to persuade the SDP to accept an African American school board member, employ more African Americans, and end segregated teacher eligibility lists. Accomplished between 1935 and 1937, these reforms anticipated the integrationist ideology that informed the civil rights movement a generation later. However, none did as much to strengthen black resolve as the rising tide of minority enrollment in the city's public schools that eventually and ironically made integration politically unattainable.³¹

Michael Katz's presence at the University of Pennsylvania led, in time, to several studies of race and education in Philadelphia. In general, these studies told the story of white resistance to school integration. Jon S. Birger, a master's student who went on to write for *Money Magazine*, studied the role of race and social class in the Philadelphia school system. He argues that 1960s desegregation never stood a chance after it became publicly identified with the city's deindustrializing economy and the rapid growth of its African American population. Threatened by the liberal agenda of school board president Richardson Dilworth and his handpicked superintendent, Mark Shedd, the city's white working class rejected reform, according to

³⁰ Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961), 149–51. For a more recent treatment of the same subject, see Daniel R. Biddle and Murray Dubin, *Tasting Freedom: Octavius V. Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America* (Philadelphia, 2010). Harry C. Silcox, "A Comparative Study in School Desegregation: The Boston and Philadelphia Experience, 1800–1881" (EdD diss., Temple University, 1971); *ibid.*; Silcox, "Philadelphia Negro Educator: Jacob C. White, Jr., 1837–1902," *PMHB* 97 (1973): 75–98; Silcox, "Nineteenth Century Philadelphia Black Militant: Octavius V. Catto (1839–1871)," *PH* 44 (1977): 52–76. Abraham Lincoln High School, where Silcox worked in the 1970s, was 98 percent white in the 1970–71 school year. Office of Research and Evaluation, School District of Philadelphia, *Enrollment: Negro and Spanish Speaking in the Philadelphia Public Schools, 1970–1971* (Philadelphia, 1971), 11.

³¹ Ronald E. Butchart, "Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education," *HEQ* 28 (1988): 333–66; Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 76–81, 125–26, 141–47.

Birger, preferring bad schools to integrated ones. Anne E. Phillips offers a somewhat different explanation in her doctoral dissertation. She attributes the failure of desegregation efforts to school board recalcitrance, as well as the limits of federal law and the opposition of some white neighborhoods and their political leaders to busing. Their arguments parallel those made for Chicago by Amanda Seligman and Kathryn Neckerman. Taking yet another position, René Luis Alvarez blames the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, arguing that its support for desegregation was secondary to its members' rights and ultimately its own power in the city. "Like its trade union associates," Alvarez claims, the union "advocated racial equality . . . only if it did not threaten the seniority and security of its membership."³²

Shedd's appointment would not have been possible without the political transformation of the biggest city in Pennsylvania. Once reliably Republican, Philadelphia gradually turned Democratic during the Great Depression and after World War II. So, too, did Pittsburgh, but Democrats in Philadelphia made school reform a higher priority than their Steel City counterparts. In 1965 they saw to the adoption of a new home rule charter, which reduced the size of the school board from fifteen to nine, and flirted with the idea of building new schools in clusters (otherwise known as educational parks) to induce school desegregation. Busing to existing schools was, of course, out of the question, as the city's mayor in the 1970s, former police commissioner Frank Rizzo, made clear, but a suit against the SDP filed by the Human Relations Commission in 1963 kept the segregation issue alive well into the 1980s. By then, the African American population of the SDP was so large that Constance Clayton, the first woman and the first African American to be the district's superintendent, tried to solve it by implementing voluntary desegregation measures.³³

Race had played a significant role in the decisions the SDP made about when and where to build new schools in the 1950s and '60s. School construction had all but come to a halt over the preceding twenty years, and the district sorely needed many new buildings. According to Michael

³² Jon S. Birger, "Race, Reaction, and Reform: The Three Rs of Philadelphia School Politics, 1965–1971," *PMHB* 120 (1996): 163–216; Anne E. Phillips, "A History of the Struggle for School Desegregation in Philadelphia, 1955–1967" *PH* 72 (2005): 49–76; René Luis Alvarez, "'There's No Such Things as an Unqualified Teacher': Unionization and Integration in the Philadelphia Public Schools," *The Historian* 65 (2003): 838–65.

³³ Kenneth J. Heineman, "A Tale of Two Cities: Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and the Elusive Quest for a New Deal Majority in the Keystone State," *PMHB* 132 (2008): 311–40; Cutler, "Public Education: The School District of Philadelphia"; Cody Dodge Ewert, "Educational Reform," *EGP*, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/educational-reform/>.

Clapper, the SDP built no new schools between 1939 and 1948. The construction program that the district initiated after that concentrated on the city's expanding black and white neighborhoods. But it also mirrored the segregated housing patterns that were confining African Americans to the same neighborhoods in West and North Philadelphia that whites had fled. A similar construction pattern had characterized the SDP's response to population growth at the end of the nineteenth century. It had concentrated then on prosperous neighborhoods such as Germantown and Frankford. Between 1945 and 1976, Clapper's research shows, the SDP built mostly in areas that were already segregated, making future attempts to integrate its schools both impolitic and expensive.³⁴

Clapper's argument runs counter to the oft-cited belief that urban school segregation resulted from forces that were beyond the control of policy-makers. White flight, it holds, was not just or even an individual response to demographic change multiplied many times over. Like Clapper, Ansley T. Erickson has shown in her study of metropolitan Nashville that school segregation often resulted from conscious decisions made by public officials and private developers. By binding housing and schooling together, they greatly increased the odds that Nashville and its public schools would be segregated. Educators reinforced this pattern by shaping the curriculum to track minority students into compensatory and vocational education. Thus, even in school districts like Nashville's that integrated by busing, the races could be separated.³⁵

Beginning in 2006, the historiography of race and education began to focus on what blacks, not whites, did. The first scholar to take this tack for Philadelphia was Matthew J. Countryman, whose book on the Black Power and civil rights movements in the city includes a chapter on public education. By this account, Dilworth and Shedd tried to substitute decentralization for desegregation when it became apparent to them and some black leaders that the city's racialized politics and large minority population precluded integration. In a school district that had become majority black, desegregation proposals only increased existing tensions. Even educational parks that would enroll students from many

³⁴ Michael Clapper, "School Design, Site Selection, and the Political Geography of Race in Postwar Philadelphia," *Journal of Planning History* 5 (2006): 244, 248, 250, 258–59; William W. Cutler III, "A Preliminary Look at the Schoolhouse: The Philadelphia Story, 1870–1920," *Urban Education* 8 (1974): 391.

³⁵ Ansley T. Erickson, *Making the Unequal Metropolis: School Desegregation and Its Limits* (Chicago, 2016), esp. chap. 4.

different neighborhoods turned out to be a polarizing proposition. Dave Richardson, Cecil B. Moore, and other black leaders formulated a new reform agenda. They demanded black studies and community control, making desegregation secondary to the political goals and cultural needs of African American parents and children. But they could not achieve these objectives. “Like the Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy,” Countryman notes, “the Philadelphia school crises of 1967–68 can be viewed as an example of excessive black demands and poorly conceived liberal policies pushing white working-class Democrats into the arms of conservative politicians.”³⁶

Expanding on Countryman’s work, Matthew Delmont has demonstrated in multiple publications how black integrationists like Ruth Wright Hayre and Floyd Logan laid the groundwork in the 1950s for what would come in the next decade. As principal of the William Penn High School for Girls, Hayre insisted that education would not be wasted on low-income, minority students. Many educators, including James Bryant Conant, saw cultural deprivation, not aptitude, there, but Hayre insisted that her students had great potential. She encouraged some to attend college, urged others to take full advantage of the vocational curriculum at William Penn, and exposed all to Philadelphia’s cultural inheritance. She worked with Floyd Logan, another integrationist. A clerk for the Internal Revenue Service, Logan never had to contend with the gender bias that Hayre and her students faced in the SDP. But he knew racism and discrimination firsthand, and he worked against them in public education for more than four decades. In 1947 he endorsed the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission’s call for a public college in the city that would be free for low-income and minority students. A public relations campaign against school segregation that he launched after the *Brown* decision set the stage for the protests that Moore and the NAACP waged against segregation at Girard College, a private high school for boys, and in the SDP. Delmont

³⁶ Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 2005), 236–37, 249, 255–56. For an article about an early attempt by black leaders to attack school segregation in the Philadelphia suburbs, see David Canton, “A Dress Rehearsal for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: Raymond Pace Alexander and the Berwyn, Pennsylvania, School Desegregation Case, 1932–1935,” *PH* 75 (2008): 260–84. In the 1960s, Pittsburgh’s school superintendent, Sidney Marland, led an effort to build educational parks to deal with his district’s school segregation problems. But the NAACP opposed his Great High Schools plan for distracting attention from desegregation, and it was abandoned when Marland left in 1968. See also Ansley T. Erickson, “Desegregation’s Architects: Education Parks and the Spatial Ideology of Schooling,” *HEQ* 56 (2016): 574–76. Not surprisingly, Pittsburgh’s role in this article is relatively small, especially by comparison to New York City’s. Philadelphia receives no mention.

calls some of Philadelphia's most prominent leaders of that era, including the television personality Dick Clark, hypocrites. They defended the status quo, characterizing it as innocent, so that they could "avoid integration without publicly supporting segregation." Like Countryman, Delmont also argues that Logan's goals were unrealistic because he "underestimated the extent of entrenched white resistance."³⁷

Erika Kitzmiller has added another dimension to the story told by Countryman and Delmont. Her essay on Nellie Rathbone Bright in this issue of *PMHB* shows how one determined black educator transformed a Germantown elementary school into a force for racial uplift and social justice in the community. Like Hayre, she refused to accept the idea that black children could not benefit from a rigorous academic curriculum. But she also used her position as the principal of the Hill Elementary School in Germantown to promote more recreational opportunities and better housing for African Americans.

Marcus Foster ranks with Ruth Wright Hayre and Superintendent Clayton as one of the most respected educators in recent Philadelphia history. As told by historian John P. Spencer, his story exemplifies the tension between school-based reform and a more comprehensive approach to the problem of educational inequality. Foster served as the principal of three schools in the SDP, including Simon Gratz High School, one of the most troubled in the district. An advocate for realistic reform, he tried to chart a middle course between "the extremes of demanding too little and expecting too much of the schools as agents of equal opportunity." At Dunbar Elementary School he instituted a "compensatory education" program that became a model for the Ford Foundation's Great Cities School Improvement Program and the educational policies of the Lyndon Johnson administration. Like Hayre and Bright, Foster tried to overcome cultural deprivation by maximizing school resources and raising both teacher expectations and student aspirations. The challenges he faced at the Catto Disciplinary School taught him to appreciate the challenges of urban public education. The complex lives of his students, both at home and at school, pointed to the need for a broad-based approach to educating them.³⁸

³⁷ Matthew Delmont, "The Plight of the 'Able Student': Ruth Wright Hayre and the Struggle for Equality in Philadelphia's Black High Schools, 1955–1965," *HEQ* 50 (2010): 204–30; Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (Berkeley, CA, 2012), 97–99, 101–2, 105–7, 122–23, 125; Delmont, "Working Toward a Working-Class College: The Long Campaign to Build a Community College in Philadelphia," *HEQ* 54 (2014): 439.

³⁸ John P. Spencer, *In the Crossfire: Marcus Foster and the Troubled History of American School Reform* (Philadelphia, 2012), 10–11, 17, 55–57, 67, 70–71, 97–104, 133–34.

When Foster became the principal at Simon Gratz in 1966, the school was struggling. Its reputation for disorderly students and low reading levels was so insidious that some parents and community leaders called for reforms across the entire school system. Even black educators in the SDP were vulnerable to criticism. Foster responded by asking everyone to take responsibility for student achievement, linking it to the empowerment of the next generation. But it was his decision to side with his students and their parents in a dispute with some white neighbors and the board of education over the expansion of the school's footprint into the surrounding neighborhood that made him famous. He knew just how much the black community in the area wanted more classrooms and a new gymnasium. His support for these improvements resonated with those who favored Black Power and put him on course for much bigger things. In 1969 he became the Associate Superintendent for Community Affairs in the Shedd administration and, less than two years later, the superintendent of schools in Oakland, California. There his career and his life came to a sudden and tragic end when he was assassinated by members of the Symbionese Liberation Army for "crimes against children."³⁹

North Philadelphia and Germantown were not the only places where educators, parents, and citizens tried to defend their public schools from the effects of racism. As Abigail Perkiss has demonstrated, activists in West Mount Airy organized to keep their middle-class neighborhood and its public schools from becoming segregated. They promoted West Mount Airy as the perfect compromise between Center City and the suburbs—convenient, urbane, and liberal. For more than twenty years they succeeded in attracting and keeping both black and white residents, but their efforts to prevent local public schools from becoming predominantly black failed as many white families regretfully determined that the SDP was incapable of meeting the needs of their children. Overcrowded and underfunded elementary schools did not help, but neighborhood high schools with bad reputations forced their hand. When their children reached seventh or eighth grade, they opted out, enrolling their children in private schools or moving to the suburbs.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., 135–38, 146, 158, 159–67, 220–21.

⁴⁰ Abigail Perkiss, *Making Good Neighbors: Civil Rights, Liberalism, and Integration in Postwar Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), 59, 92–93, 99, 105–6, 112–13. For a study of a high school in north-west Philadelphia, see Erika M. Kitzmiller, "The Roots of Educational Inequality: Germantown High School, 1907–2011" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2012).

The neighborhood activists in West Mount Airy were not alone; as my work has revealed, they had many peers and predecessors. Florence Cohen, for example, was a committed integrationist with the Ogontz Area Neighbors Association; she made public education a priority in the 1960s. Gladys “Happy” Fernandez helped found the Parents Union for the Public Schools (PUPS) an advocacy group that took on the SDP and the teachers’ union. Her work with PUPS led to a distinguished career in politics and higher education. But it was Helen Oakes who became the most visible and probably the most influential citizen activist in the city. She cut her teeth with the West Philadelphia Schools Committee, which worked in the 1960s to prevent the total segregation of the public schools. When it ceased to exist in 1971, Oakes set out on her own, publishing a monthly newsletter on public education in Philadelphia for seventeen years (1972–89). It led to her appointment to the Philadelphia board of education, but her expertise turned out to be a mixed blessing there. As a woman, a newcomer, and now an insider, she was expected to be a team player.⁴¹

By the time Helen Oakes came along, many women had served on the Philadelphia school board. In fact, they were so entrenched by 1975 that one, Mrs. Dolores Oberholtzer, was elected vice president. But it was a circuitous path to that destination. In 1915 Mary Van Meter Grice allowed the Equal Franchise League of Philadelphia to recommend her for appointment to the Philadelphia board of education. Active in the Home and School League, Grice was known for her support of Progressive reforms. Had she been selected, she would have been the first woman ever to serve on the board. But that honor went instead to the wife of a local college professor. Asked about her appointment in 1920, Anna S. Lingelbach declined to respond, “saying she wanted to confer with her husband first.”⁴² Men often took such deference for granted, and male dominance on the board has persisted. Although two women have served as superintendent—Clayton (1982–93) and Arlene Ackerman (2008–11)—no woman ever presided over the school board, and only one, Marjorie Neff, did so over its successor, the School Reform Commission.⁴³ The interplay among gender, race, and social class in Philadelphia school

⁴¹ “William W. Cutler III, “Outside In and Inside Out: Civic Activism, Helen Oakes, and the Philadelphia Public Schools, 1960–1989,” *PMHB* 137 (2013): 301–24; Cutler, *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago, 2000), 190–92.

⁴² Cutler, *Parents and Schools*, 76, 78, 82.

⁴³ A former teacher and principal in the SDP, Neff assumed the chair in May 2015, taking over from her colleague Bill Green III, the son of the former mayor.

politics deserves more attention than it has received from historians of education.

Over the last two decades, many reformers have favored some form of privatization in public education. For-profit vendors of educational services entered the marketplace, promising to make public education more efficient and effective. When Pennsylvania legalized charter schools in 1997, many families opted for them. The cost to the SDP has been substantial, most notably in declining enrollments and increased per pupil expenses. Historians have yet to explore these developments, but some social scientists have studied them. One study of Philadelphia and Chester concluded that school privatization is more likely to be implemented in small cities with big enrollments of minority students. Impoverished and politically isolated, the Chester Unified School District hoped to prevent the proliferation of charters by inviting the Edison Corporation to run most of its schools. The SDP, on the other hand, limited private vendors like Edison to a modest role by marshalling its political assets against them. Another study examined the “diverse provider model” of educational management that was implemented in Philadelphia after the state took control of the SDP in 2001. Written by a trio of sociologists, this study concludes that the SDP never relinquished control of the city’s public schools. Its decision to hire seven outside providers—three for-profit companies, two non-profits, and two universities—blurred the lines between public and private education. But the SDP retained “a strong central role,” overseeing the private providers that managed low-performing schools and the district’s own Office of Restructured Schools.⁴⁴

Anyone interested in the history of education in Pennsylvania should visit the website of the *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*. A large and ambitious online resource, its education portfolio includes more than a dozen articles dealing with such topics as parochial schools, independent schools, and the public schools of Philadelphia. Almost all take a regional perspective, examining their subject matter in not only southeastern Pennsylvania but also southern New Jersey and northern Delaware. Most cover familiar ground, but some explore new territory. The essays on

⁴⁴ Robert Maranto, “A Tale of Two Cities: School Privatization in Philadelphia and Chester,” *American Journal of Education* 111 (2005): 151–90; Eva Gold, Jolley Bruce Christman, and Benjamin Herold, “Blurring the Boundaries: A Case Study of Private Sector Involvement in Philadelphia Public Schools,” *American Journal of Education* 113 (2007): 181–212. See also Camika Royal and Simone Gibson, “They Schools: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy under Siege,” *Teachers College Record* 119 (2017), <http://www.tcrecord.org/library>, ID No. 21719.

high school sports and public education in the suburbs break ground on two important topics. Mentored by colleges, both public and private high schools made competitive athletic programs central to their educational mission in the first half of the twentieth century. The formation in 1913 of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association opened the door to the state regulation of high school athletics, but in Philadelphia championship competition between public and Catholic high schools dominated the sports scene for more than four decades (1938–79). At the same time, many rural public schools became suburban—that is, more modern—by consolidating for efficiency and bureaucratizing for uniformity. They hired superintendents and opened high schools. Beginning in the 1960s, however, suburban educators shied away from comparisons with their urban counterparts because this meant acknowledging their own difficulties with such problems as school crime and segregation.⁴⁵

Public education in urban America faces an uncertain future in 2017. Many city school districts are not just struggling—they are in danger of collapse. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Pennsylvania. Public investment in both the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia public schools has fallen so far so fast that it is not impossible to imagine a time when these two public educational systems will cease to exist. Politicians know that Pennsylvanians no longer have the level of confidence in public education that once led them to take it for granted. In 1970 the state adopted legislation that gave public employees, including teachers, the right to bargain collectively and even strike under limited circumstances. Political leaders believed that government had the power to manage conflict and solve problems, and nowhere was this confidence stronger than in public education. But according to historian Jon Shelton, the teacher strikes that paralyzed both the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh public school systems over the next decade helped to discredit such liberal thinking.⁴⁶ By the 1990s, neoliberals were openly questioning the value of public education. The rise of the Tea Party and the election of President Donald Trump could

⁴⁵ Catherine D'Ignazio, "High School Sports," *EGP*, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/high-school-sports/>; William W. Cutler III and D'Ignazio, "Public Education: Suburbs," *EGP*, <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/public-education-suburbs/>.

⁴⁶ Jon K. Shelton, "Against the Public: The Pittsburgh Teachers Strike of 1975–1976 and the Crisis of the Labor-Liberal Coalition," *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 10 (2013): 55–75. See also Shelton "Against the Public: Teacher Strikes and the Decline of Liberalism, 1960–1981" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2013); and Shelton, *Teacher Strike! Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Urbana, IL, 2017).

increase their momentum. But as the historiography reviewed in this essay demonstrates, the roots of such thinking go deep. They reach down to the misplaced faith of so many in the efficacy of school modernization and to the powerful consequences of depression, deindustrialization, and demographic change in Pennsylvania. Of course, the history covered here is not just about decline and failure. It also tells of growth, expansion, and even empowerment, especially by minorities and women. Which of these will historians feature in twenty-five years if they write about public education in urban Pennsylvania again? That, of course, remains to be seen.

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