

The possibility of maintaining flexible production in the postwar U.S. is debatable. The consequences of its abandonment are not. Dispersed parallel production led to an inflexible system that could only compete on labor costs and ensured deindustrialization. With so much sunk into this model, U.S. manufacturers resorted to half measures, like the GM-Toyota joint plant in California or Saturn in Tennessee. Yet these efforts occurred in the context of significant cuts and no trust was gained in the process. The results were devastating, particularly in the industrial heartland—something neither the Obama-era bailout nor Trump-era push for American manufacturing, however real, could reverse. As Murray and Schwartz demonstrate, flexible production is not sustainable when workers do not trust management. Lean and untrustworthy will not cut it.

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Groeger, C. V. (2021). *The Education Trap: Schools and the Remaking of Inequality in Boston*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 384 pp. \$35.00 (hardcover).

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Cristina Viviana Groeger begins her book, *The education trap: Schools and the remaking of inequality in Boston*, by quoting Horace Mann, setting up her rebuttal to Mann's famous 1848 assertion that education is the "great equalizer of the conditions of men." Mann was a pivotal figure in promoting the idea that common schools deserved significant public investment, and in the twenty-first century, the "great equalizer" ideology still pervades the American consciousness with politicians on both sides of the party line generally favoring spending on education as a solution to economic inequality. Like many scholars before her, Groeger argues that education is not a magical cure for inequality in America. Groeger's unique contribution lies in her historical data. In the early 20th century, "education became a central means of social mobility at the same moment that it became a new

infrastructure for legitimizing social inequality” (p. 2), and this paradox continues to plague America today.

Groeger uses both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the restructuring of labor markets and educational training in Boston between 1880 and 1940. Analyzing IPUMS historical census microdata and local and regional archives, Groeger unpacks how racial, ethnic, class, and gender hierarchies were inscribed into a new “school-dependent political economy” (p. 5) in Boston. One hundred and fifty years ago, education only played a marginal role in employment pathways, but Groeger’s timeframe encompasses a period of shifting paradigms at the end of the Gilded Age when the intertwined growth of the American educational system and the modern corporate economy reshaped the occupational structure.

Groeger positions the expanding educational system at the heart of the clash between employers and organized labor—a chief conflict of the early twentieth century. Education did allow intergenerational social mobility across Groeger’s timeframe (for children of immigrants, not black children), but while progressive reformers genuinely believed in the equalizing power of education, on the other side of the coin, employers also supported educational programs for immigrants as a means of “countering labor radicalism,” (p. 81) and many technical and industrial schools in Boston were closely aligned with “anti-union employer interests” (p. 108). Educational solutions to poverty “avoided the larger structural questions of economic inequality and did not threaten those with the most economic resources and political authority” (p. 60). But many Boston experiments in vocational schools failed as occupational training was predominantly ignored by low-wage workers themselves. Instead, many workers turned to labor organizing to improve their occupational situations and continued to rely on informal networks for job obtainment. Industrial unions, organized across skill level, race, and gender, became the most successful strategy for workers to gain power and influence in their occupations.

With the anti-union bent and lack of worker interest in vocational education, technical schools began to cater to students from more affluent families who aimed to become “technical instructors or enter industrial management” (p. 110), entering the supervisory ranks of industry instead of the trades themselves. Groeger asserts that the American corporate economy of the early twentieth century was only possible thanks to the immense growth of schools offering business training, and “students, parents, educators, administrators, philanthropists, politicians, and employers agreed that instruction for white-collar work was desirable” (p. 180). New private and proprietary educational institutions emerged to cater to the growing market. Reformers advocated heavily for the expansion of public education to undercut unscrupulous


proprietary schools. Existing colleges and universities began structuring educational pathways for corporate occupations in order to strengthen their control of corporate leadership. And education became “the chief public policy to address problems of work and employment” (p. 180).

Groeger’s book provides a fascinating historical lens into understanding America’s current educational/occupational structure. Groeger comes from a background in history, and her scholarly criticisms are mainly levied against economists. As a sociologist, I believe her critique could have benefited from a deeper knowledge of sociological scholarship. While Groeger regularly critiques the human capital model, an explicit discussion of cultural capital is noticeably absent. Despite mentions of particular forms of cultural capital—e.g. “flawless and perfectly accented English, tact, sociability, neatness, appropriate dress, trustworthiness, and character” (p. 7)—the terms “cultural capital” or “social capital” are never used in the book. There is a long tradition of sociological critique emphasizing the role of formal education in legitimizing and reproducing class structures (most notably, Bourdieu and Passeron; Lamont and Lareau) that might have added another layer of depth to Groeger’s critique of the human capital and credentialist models. Though she does not make the connection to cultural capital herself, for contemporary followers of the Bourdieusian tradition, Groeger’s rigorously collected data can provide useful insights into the history of the legitimation of the “great equalizer” ideology and contemporary class structure in American society.

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McKersie, R. B. (2018). *A Field in Flux: Sixty Years of Industrial Relations*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 233 pp. \$39.95 (hardcover). ISBN 1501740016.

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I consider it a great honor to have the opportunity to review Robert (Bob) McKersie’s wonderful new book, *A Field in Flux: Sixty Years of Industrial*