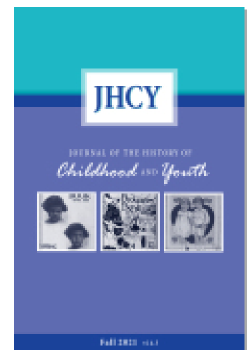
The Education Trap: Schools and the Remaking of Inequality in Boston by Cristina Viviana Groeger (review)



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with local health authorities that brought attention to this movement far beyond that city.

These spiritual healing movements contributed to broader libertarian movements, such as the National League for Medical Freedom, set up in 1910, which lobbied for individual autonomy and religious liberty overriding a child's right to receive medical attendance. The philosophies underpinning such movements, Curry argues, "proved to be a powerful, and persistent, counterargument [to medical intervention], one that lingered in the background of American life for the remainder of the twentieth century" (149). Curry's study provides important historical background to Americans' present-day unwillingness to embrace the human rights orientation of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty the United States has not ratified.

My sole criticism of the book is that, in my view, Curry spent too long on expounding eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century health and child-rearing manuals and too little on events of the twentieth century, with the early twentieth century to the present crammed into a single chapter. Within that chapter, she also strays from her central focus on the fractures between faith healers and their followers and medical science, instead discussing other inequalities in American health care. Nevertheless, this is an important study, showing the vulnerability of children when their rights are subsumed by other considerations, and it reveals lessons to be learned from history.

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The Education Trap: Schools and the Remaking of Inequality in Boston.

By Cristina Viviana Groeger.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021. 384 pp. Cloth $35.

In this stunningly compelling book, Cristina Groeger explores the paradox at the heart of American education, in which the rapid expansion of education has been coupled with a high degree of inequality. Increasing educational opportunity provided social mobility for some and preserved social advantage for others. The mechanism that produced both outcomes at the turn of the twentieth century was the emergence of educational credentials as the entry

ticket to the job market. At the same time that high schools were providing a pathway for working-class students into the lower levels of the white-collar workforce, colleges were providing middle-class students exclusive access to the upper-level positions in management and the professions. Here is how she summarizes her story:

> As a case study in which to explore the paradox of expanding access to education and persistent inequality, [this book] focuses on the city of Boston, famously home to many institutions of learning and a wealthy patrician elite. Based on the historical evidence, I argue that education became a central means of social mobility at the same moment that it became a new infrastructure for legitimizing social inequality. While providing economic opportunities to some workers, the expansion of schooling actually undercut the power of others. By obscuring the broader question of worker power in the economy, a focus on education as the primary means to remedy economic inequality became a pernicious policy trap. (2)

As she points out, until the 1880s, schools were not major sites for acquiring work skills, which were largely picked up on the job or through apprenticeship programs run by craft unions. Reformers sought to elevate the position of the laborers at the bottom of the system by creating industrial education programs in high schools. But she shows that this effort was a near total failure. The programs drew few students because they delayed entry into the workforce while producing no improvement in pay or status. The lesson she draws from this is that occupational status is less a matter of skills than of social power. Without a union, laborers lacked the power to elevate themselves, so increasing skill training was no help to their cause. Educational credentials cannot raise the level of an occupation, but they can prepare you for higher-level jobs.

This was the dynamic behind the great educational success story at the turn of the century, which was not the industrial but the commercial curriculum. This is a phenomenon that has received little historical attention, and one of the great strengths of this book is the way Groeger fleshes out this important story. The commercial course prepared students for entry into the rapidly expanding forms of clerical work in retail stores and especially in offices. In high school, students acquired skills in bookkeeping, stenography, typing, and salesmanship and then moved directly into office jobs. This created a pipeline of clerical workers for employers and produced a path for the children of laborers into occupations with better pay, working conditions, and status than their parents'. And it was a low-cost/high-return effort for schools because it required only modest investments in equipment compared to industrial education and because the skills were generic and thus widely transferrable across positions. The commercial course was the path to mobility pursued in particular by

working-class women, who had long been stuck in the factory and domestic service. The share of women wage earners in office and sales work rose from 5 percent in 1880 to 40 percent by 1930.

The downside of this success story was that by the 1930s, clerical work was coming to be defined as a pink-collar occupation, largely filled by working-class women, while the upper-level, white-collar jobs were largely populated with middle-class men. And that process of occupational segregation was the result of the other great educational success story of this period, the rise of business education in American colleges. Traditionally, young people had worked their way into business positions through on-the-job training rather than formal schooling. But in the early twentieth century, charting a path through college business programs offered advantages to both employers and employees. Companies relished the idea that recruiting college graduates shifted training costs to the student; this served as a social class filter for prospects and gave business the aura of a profession. In addition, prospective employees gained a credential that buffered them against competition from upwardly mobile high school graduates. Once again, American education was demonstrating its skill at both providing opportunity and protecting privilege.

By the 1930s, the enormous expansion of American secondary and college education had created a lot of social mobility into white-collar work but did nothing to promote social equality. Laborers became clerks and clerks became professionals, so relative positions were unchanged. The difference was that educational credentials now patrolled the border between social classes. As Groeger notes, it was not the growth of education but the growth of industrial unions in the 1930s that finally created a real redistribution of wealth and power.

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Schooling and State Formation in Early Modern Sweden.

By Bengt Sandin.

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. xxvi + 420 pp. Cloth €99.99, e-book €85.59.

Although historian of education Gunnar Richardson just a few years earlier had provocatively asked whether the history of education had been forgotten in Sweden, the mid-1980s proved to be extremely fertile years for the field. Inspired by a wide range of scholars applying critical conflict perspectives on