

of the many ways the young defined pleasure and fun, including conservatives who preferred sports and fraternities rather than wearing bell-bottom jeans or trying LSD. And in addition to more social history, *The Lost Promise* could have explored what happened in professional schools. Protests in colleges of education? MBA programs? Medical schools? Law schools beyond Yale? (Laura Kalman's excellent 2006 *Yale Law School and the Sixties* described substantial dissent over race, governance, teaching methods, and courses.)

A full defense of Schrecker's title would also take more space. The post-World War II "promise"—higher education deserves to expand rapidly because it offers upward mobility at a reasonable cost—faded quickly after the 1960s, she claims. To make the case that higher education faltered—and to connect that decline with the late 1960s—would take several chapters. As she acknowledged during a Roosevelt House panel discussion on December 17, 2021, "the real title of the book is *A Political History of American Higher Education during the Long 1960s*." Her epilogue is too brief to clinch the case that public confidence and policy support plunged, permanently, as a result of a few stormy years.

Whatever the need to say more, Schrecker packs a great deal of important information in this well-written book. Instructors of survey courses will find it essential preparation for their week on the 1960s—this book will jog the memory and fill gaps. For graduate seminars, faculty could assign *The Lost Promise* along with John Thelin's shorter but broader *Going to College in the Sixties* (2018) and, for a case study, Donald Alexander Downs's *Cornell '69* (2014). Rather than quarrel about which one is best, the instructor can remind the seminar that one legacy of the 1960s is greater tolerance.

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## Cristina Viviana Groeger. *The Education Trap: Schools and the Remaking Inequality in Boston*

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*The Education Trap* addresses familiar questions that historians of education have been asking for a long time. How has educational access affected economic and social equality? And, specifically, how have educational institutions provided social mobility for women, African Americans, White ethnic immigrants, and working-class people? Given the enduring presence of these questions in the field, you might doubt that the

author of this book would add anything new to this old-age debate. I did too, but I was utterly wrong.

Cristina Viviana Groeger is forceful in her argument, narrative style, and theoretical analysis. *The Education Trap* focuses on Boston as the archetypal US city where educational institutions have been affirmed as social equalizers. Massachusetts and Boston—collectively—are celebrated backdrops for major educational developments. The first public school in the United States, for example, was founded in Boston (1635), and Massachusetts was the first state in the union to pass a compulsory school attendance law (1852). Moreover, the Boston area was the epicenter of the common school movement, where figures like Horace Mann upheld universal public education as a social equalizer and where universities like Harvard College and MIT became global trailblazers. Boston, along with the greater northeastern region, has deep roots in the history of education.

Groeger challenges these claims to fame—what she reframes as the “education trap”—and the depiction of cities like Boston, with their well-organized and long-established educational institutions, as fountainheads of educational equality. Groeger provides a broad history of the city’s political and education culture and then turns her attention to a pivotal period (the mid-1800s to 1940s) when educational access increased in the city. She argues that this period was when a new “school-dependent political economy” emerged and when educational institutions—ranging from early childhood to professional schools—became one of the main players that remade inequality, not dismantled it. *The Education Trap* makes it clear that the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of educational institutions did not dramatically alter the local social structure.

Groeger analyzes Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data throughout the book to show how the city’s employment structure remained unchanged even after access to educational institutions increased. This quantitative analysis is one of the major strengths of *The Education Trap*. It is a methodological intervention that gives us new historical insight on the relationship between race, class, and gender. The IPUMS data supports her central claim. It shows how the growth of educational institutions had little impact on economic mobility. Yes, there were more schools built over the years, and, yes, it is undeniable that more students enrolled in them. However, the data makes it clear that educational access to Boston’s diverse array of educational institutions was in no way followed by greater social or economic mobility for marginalized groups.

As more educational institutions were founded in the city, schools took on different economic and social roles. Some schools, Groeger argues, became “much more effective as tools for concentrating wealth than redistributing it” (p. 15). Black children, as Groeger found, attended schools at higher rates than White children. IPUMS data shows that 40 percent of Black children in Boston attended school in 1880, while the attendance rate for other groups was approximately 15 percent for White, Ireland-born children and about 30 percent for White, Massachusetts-born children. Although this gap persisted until 1940, the economic payback of attaining a formal education was restricted to Whites, who were channeled into high-paying and more politically influential jobs. As Groeger argues, “even with enhanced opportunities for public

education, discrimination in the labor market pushed certain groups into low-wage work” (p. 90). Schools did not become the great social equalizers, nor were they ever.

The principal argument in the book is that Boston’s economic inequality did not begin when educational institutions became part of everyday life in the city. Social inequality was so entrenched in Boston’s political economy that schools had no fighting chance to undo it. Groeger does not argue that schools were determined to defy the city’s unequal economic structure. Instead, Boston’s educational institutions normalized inequality by channeling women and African Americans into low-paying and service-oriented jobs. Some schools, Groeger shows, became informal job placement offices—what she calls “employment bureaus”—by collaborating with companies that profited from existing economic inequalities. These partnerships—between schools and employers—remade inequality by regulating who could secure certain types of jobs. The advent of schools introduced a new phase of inequality.

What is unquestionable in the book is that the availability and diversity of educational institutions exacerbated income inequality since they mainly attended to the financial gains made when more students enrolled. That is, schools profited by matriculating more students. Groeger’s argument is sharp. Schools and universities were not in the business of providing social and economic mobility to marginalized social groups. Doing so would have meant that they were vanguards of social change and dissenters fighting to dismantle Boston’s corporate economy. Educational institutions were conformist, however, and produced a labor force that was suitable for the city’s local economy.

Groeger makes a conceptual intervention that is compelling and worth restating. She argues that a major source of misunderstanding in histories of education is that they characterize liberal and vocational education as contradictory models. Both of these models, she argues, had similar effects on the economy. Although institutions did compete for students and embraced distinct educational ideals, they all alleged to be serving the public good. In fact, Boston’s range of educational models—however defined—hastened the growth of the city’s corporate economy. Boston’s economic inequality was durable because the mixed educational models cloaked how they reproduced inequality. A vocational model, unaccompanied by other educational paradigms, would not have made capitalism grow nor sustained Boston’s unequal economic structure. Vocational, commercial, and professional schools—and grammar schools and colleges—all had specific roles in supporting economic inequality. The availability and surface level diversity of educational institutions restrained any meaningful plans to alter the city’s economic structure.

The most consistent and thorough answer to Groeger’s central questions is that educational institutions have not provided social and economic mobility, nor are they likely able to do so by themselves. She shows how the Bostonian working class challenged capitalist interests but were overwhelmed by the power of schools and the elite. The closing of the income inequality gap will not come from the efforts of schools or educators like us, but instead rests in implementing radical economic policies and by supporting labor movements that have no investment in sustaining corporate economies. *The Education Trap* is about Boston, but the implications of Groeger’s critique of this city’s educational history are far-reaching. It is a persuasive account of Boston’s economic, social, and political institutions and call to action for

anyone interested in upending income inequality. *The Education Trap* is a necessary read for anyone who thinks that educational institutions are gateways to social and economic mobility. If you believe city schools have been cradles of social justice, be ready to be challenged.

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