

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
Departments of Educational Policy Studies and History  
Fall 2015

EPS 906/History 906  
Proseminar on the History of Education  
Topic: The History of School Reform  
1-3 Credits

Monday 2:25-5:25  
Education 151

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Office Hours:  
Education 215: Monday 9:30-11:30 & by appointment

Course Description

This is an advanced history seminar on American public school reform. Americans have repeatedly turned to the schools to address a host of social, economic, and political problems. Expectations for schools have ranged widely: to promote religious faith, advance literacy, secure social order, advance civic norms, acculturate immigrants, integrate society, teach marketable skills, and respond to the infinite range of issues related to childhood and adolescence. No generation has been satisfied with existing educational arrangements, and schools remain central to contemporary debates about the good life and the nation's future.

What accounts for this American fascination with reform through the public schools? What explains the rise, nature, and success or failure of particular school reforms? To understand this recurrent effort to change, improve, and reform the individual and society through mass education, history offers perspective and perhaps some explanation of this tendency in our society.

The core of class meetings will be discussions of assigned readings. We will first explore the rise of the popular idea that "education is power" and then begin to explore

the origins of the public school system in the nineteenth century. Some of the books offer broad views of their subject; others are more monographic in their focus. We'll try to learn as much as possible about the evolution of America's public schools and the nature of elementary and secondary education in different time periods.

### Required Books

The following paperbacks should be available at the UW Bookstore; some may also be available at used bookstores and via the Internet; and, in some cases, our library system holds copies. A copy of each book is on reserve at College library, Helen C. White.

1. Richard D. Brown, Knowledge is Power
2. John Demos, The Heathen School: A Story of Hope and Betrayal
3. Carl F. Kaestle, Pillars of the Republic
4. William J. Reese, The Origins of the American High School
5. James D. Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South
6. Herbert Kliebard, The Struggle for the American Curriculum
7. Edward J. Larson, Summer for the Gods
8. John Rury and Shirley Hill, The African American Struggle for Secondary Education
9. David Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, The Failed Promise of the American High School
10. Pamela Grundy, Learning to Win
11. Adam Nelson, The Elusive Ideal
12. David Tyack and Larry Cuban, Tinkering Toward Utopia
13. William J. Reese and John Rury, eds., Rethinking the History of American Education

### Course Outline and Assignments:

Week #1                      Introduction to the Course  
September 14

Week #2                      Brown, *Knowledge is Power* &  
September 21                      Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapter 1.

Week #3                      Demos, *Heathen School*  
September 28

Week #4  
October 5 Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic* &  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapter 2.

Week #5  
October 12 Reese, *Origins of the American High School* &  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapter 6.

\*\* *Prospectus for research paper due* \*\*

Week #6  
October 19 Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South* &  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapters 3-4.

Week #7  
October 26 Kliebard, *Struggle for the American Curriculum*  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapters 5 & 9.

Week #8  
November 2 Larson, *Summer for the Gods*

Week #9  
November 9 Angus and Mirel, *Failed Promise of the American High School*

Week #10  
November 16 Grundy, *Learning to Win*

Week #11  
November 23 RESEARCH

Week #12  
November 30 Rury and Hill, *The African American Struggle*  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapter 10.

Week #13  
December 7 Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal*  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, chapter 11.

Week #14  
December 14

Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*  
Reese and Rury, *Rethinking*, Epilogue.

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### *Laptops, Phones, and Electronic Devices*

Please remember to turn off all phones before the beginning of class. To maximize discussion, please store laptop computers, tablets, smart phones, iPads, and other screen-based, electronic devices, unless you have approval from the McBurney Disability Resource Center. (Please let me know privately if you have such approval.)

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### Student Responsibilities and Course Requirements

The formal course requirements include weekly preparation of assigned readings, class attendance and participation, and the completion of one research paper.

There are no examinations. Your final grade will be based as follows: 70% for the quality of your class participation during the semester, and 30% for the research paper.

If you miss a class, you are required to submit a three-page double spaced analysis of the assigned reading(s) for that particular class. It is due two weeks later.

Please come to see me early in the semester to discuss ideas for your research paper. You can also initiate a conversation about an idea for a project via email, before we discuss it in person. Then please submit a one page, double-spaced, typed prospectus for approval. The prospectus is due no later than *October 12* (at class). The prospectus, which will not be graded, should include your name, title of the paper, a one-paragraph description of your proposed study, and a tentative bibliography.

### Instructions for Paper

This research paper should address a major question about the history of school reform. Informed by the secondary literature, it should be based solidly on primary sources: documents and materials generated during the time period you are studying. The

list of possible topics is endless. You can explore a topic covered in our required readings or one that is unexplored in our course, related to elementary schools or high schools. You can also focus on a topic that might form a prospective chapter in a master's thesis or dissertation.

The time period covered in your paper should be restricted to the nineteenth or twentieth century. Writing a paper that explores the late twentieth century is challenging, given the paucity of reliable histories. But I am happy to chat with you about a project that is centered on that time period.

- The paper should be 15-17 double-spaced pages of text, exclusive of end notes and bibliography.
- Scholars use various style guides; historians tend to use the University of Chicago's A Manual of Style. A shortened version of the Chicago Manual appears at the back of many issues of the History of Education Quarterly. If you use a different style guide, be consistent.
- The paper is due by *Friday December 18, at noon*. Please place a hard copy either in my EPS or History department mailbox, whichever is more convenient. Please do not send the paper as an e-mail attachment.

Except for illness or other reasons recognized by the UW, extensions will not be granted either for the prospectus or the paper. In fairness to everyone, late papers will lose one grade for every day late.

Each paper will be evaluated on its scholarly strengths: the clarity of the thesis, elegance of the prose, depth of analysis, and use of sources.

### Due Dates

Prospectus for research paper, *October 12* hard copy, in class.

Final Paper: Hard copy, *Friday, December 18 by Noon*,  
either in *EPS or History department mailbox*.

No email attachments please.