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The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession

by Dana Goldstein

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78 Highlights | 4 Notes

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 130

It is true that the majority of American teachers have academically mediocre backgrounds. Most have below-average SAT scores and graduate from nonselective colleges and universities.*1 It is also true that one large review of practices within typical American elementary school classrooms found many children—and the majority of poor children—“sitting around, watching the teacher deal with behavioral problems, and engaging in boring and rote instructional activities such as completing worksheets and spelling tests.” Another study of over a thousand urban public school classrooms found only a third of teachers conducting lessons that developed “intellectual depth” beyond rote learning.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 208

merit pay was attempted in the 1920s, early 1960s, and 1980s. It never worked to broadly motivate teachers or advance outcomes for kids.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 233

teachers are more, not less, likely than many other workers to get fired.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 255

there is little evidence that better students make better teachers.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 287

American schools are producing young adults who are less able than our counterparts in other developed nations to write coherently, read with understanding, and use numbers in day-to-day life. Even

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 293

We must focus less on how to rank and fire teachers and more on how to make day-to-day teaching an attractive, challenging job that intelligent, creative, and ambitious people will gravitate toward.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 404

Beecher was a lifelong opponent of women's suffrage; she thought politics a dirty game that would corrupt women's God-given virtue. But

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 409

"motherteacher" ideal—the notion that teaching and mothering were much the same job, done in different settings.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 442

Beecher had imagined a way for elite young women to go west, not as wives or mothers, but with a patriotic duty to their young, expanding nation—to educate the masses for democracy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 507

In 1837 Mann helped lead a Whig push to establish a state board of education to oversee local schools and require compulsory enrollment for all children. This was the flowering of the national common schools movement, a state-by-state effort to fund universal elementary education.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 524

To train teachers, Prussia established normal schools, which admitted both male and female students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, called normalites. They spent two years studying pedagogy and the subjects they would teach, and then passed a third year as an apprentice teacher in a real school. Considering

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 532

it was open only to female applicants because they would be cheaper than men for the state to employ as teachers.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 550

many ways, we are still living with the teacher training system the common schools movement created.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 584

"Education in this country will never reach its highest end," she wrote in her autobiography, "till the care of the physical, social, and moral interests shall take precedence of mere intellectual development and acquirements."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 586

Mann agreed. "The teaching of A, B, C, and the multiplication table has no quality of sacredness in it," he said in an 1839 lecture. Instead, the purpose of schooling was to lead students' "affections outward in good-will towards men, and upward in reverence to God."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 599

He considered a French-style liberal arts education irrelevant to the masses in a popular democracy, where the most important task facing any man was, as a voter, to assess the moral character of candidates for political office.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 606

This view of art and social good as in opposition to each other—with intellectual pursuits coded as somewhat decadent—contained more than a kernel of the Puritan ideology

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 639

Teaching became understood less as a career than as a philanthropic vocation or romantic calling.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 641

this left a number of important educational problems unresolved. Should schools prepare students for particular occupations, or give all children the exact same education? If teachers were expected to be the chief architects of their pupils' moral lives, what implications did this have for the role of parents—and was it reasonable to expect the influence of teachers to outweigh the influence of the family? How would common schools founded as purveyors of WASP morality deal with increasingly diverse student populations, soon not only Catholics but free blacks and immigrant Jews as well?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 656

Beecher and Mann believed morality was the end of public education,

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 656

there was little public consensus on what American common schooling should look like.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 977

Teaching here is consequently far more fatiguing than at the North.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1220

Cooper saw direct antipoverty work as part of her teaching mission.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1314

legislation would have given the school superintendent the exclusive right to hire and fire teachers for neighborhood schools, while keeping teacher salaries frozen and assigning every Chicago child to either the

vocational or academic track, which would have been segregated from one another. The bill was defeated. Teacher unionism had arrived as a potent force in American civic life.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1416

What we need in Chicago is a set of teachers who will either work in harmony with the board of education or else get on the outside and stay there. Insurrectionists are not exactly fit guides for the young.” In

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1436

Indeed, teaching was not like many other unionized jobs. In education, poor job performance put children’s well-being immediately at stake. Yet Haley and the Federation organized against Cooley’s teacher evaluation plan without suggesting any alternative for judging teachers’ professional merit and distinguishing good from bad performers.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1443

given the men’s many sexist assumptions about female teachers—that they should never become principals and should be paid less than male teachers—rather than collaborate in these areas, the Federation developed a stance of across-the-board animosity.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1589

relative consensus among union leaders, school reformers, and intellectuals in favor of tenure. It

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1600

In order that teachers may delight in awakening the spirits of children, they must themselves be awake. We have tried to free the teachers. Some

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1603

want to make the schools the great instrument of democracy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1642

There has grown up here a fallacy that the schools should be run to give employment to us and in case of doubt the benefit should be given us, the employees. No private school, no public service, runs on that basis. It is an absurdity.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1893

Like the Federation in Chicago, the New York union argued that students and their families should choose what courses to take, instead of being confined to a specific track,

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1966

New York's Feinberg Law, which was later upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, concerned itself solely with teachers' private political ideas, and whether those "anti-American" views were incompatible with educating the state's children.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2023

Certain educators—those who lived outside the cultural and political mainstream—were not welcome in the classroom. The irony is that from racial integration to the culturally relevant curriculum to the need for higher academic expectations for poor students of color, many of the radical teachers' ideals would become mainstream school reform priorities over the coming decades.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2083

President Johnson's enormous popularity in the wake of the Kennedy assassination, as well as his peerless legislative maneuvering, allowed him to establish an unprecedented role for the federal government in local public education.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2097

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the precursor to the Bush-era No Child Left Behind. The 1965 law, initially funded at the massive level of \$1.2 billion per year, united the Left and center around a new role for Washington as a standard setter for state education agencies and local schools.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2103

States that offered their low-income students more state-level funding would be rewarded with more money from the federal government.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2109

Those sky-high expectations placed on educators—as revolutionary foot soldiers in the War on Poverty—are still with us today.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2140

While there remains a consensus that income and educational opportunity are deeply linked, never again would a national school reform agenda be accompanied by so aggressive an antipoverty push.

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 2192

grew.

talk about suuurrroondkng issuus like heallth, nutrition, parebtall involvemennt, career planning

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2269

Only about 17 percent of American teachers are nonwhite, compared to 40 percent of American public school students.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2332

They envisioned a National Teacher Corps that would give elite young people an opportunity to enter and then transform the teaching profession,

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2335

this vision of recruiting “better people” into teaching explicitly denigrated the wisdom of those teachers already working in high-poverty schools.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2401

Corps interns were more likely than veteran teachers to believe poor students could graduate from high school, and less likely to indicate that “poor home backgrounds” prevented children from learning. Interns cited education as the most effective antipoverty tool, while veterans believed job training, a guaranteed income, and marketable skills were more valuable. The vast majority of Corps recruits did not become career teachers, but many did pursue jobs in educational administration or policy.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2498

“Pygmalion in the Classroom,” by Harvard professor Robert Rosenthal and elementary school principal Lenore Jacobson. Rosenthal and Jacobson told San Francisco public school teachers the names of several of their students who had performed well on the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition and thus were expected to “bloom” academically.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2504

clear that when teachers held low expectations, student achievement was actually hindered.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2540

Bundy report argued for abolishing the city school board and turning over teacher hiring, tenure, firing, and matters of curriculum to between thirty and sixty neighborhood community boards partly elected by parents and partly appointed by the mayor.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2552

during the urban teacher strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when unions opposed black and Hispanic community control in favor of job security for predominantly white teachers, the unions became downright villains not only to antilabor conservatives, but, for the first time, to large segments of the American Left as well.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2573

the idea of community control of urban schools originated in Queens in 1964, among white opponents of school desegregation who believed parents should band together to prevent busing. Within

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2688

bad teachers hopped from school to school, often ending up at the schools in the poorest neighborhoods with the least political clout.*4

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2775

students realized their education was being compromised by the upheaval. They had to enter school through police barricades erected to separate picketing teachers from community control activists, some of them armed Black Panthers. More police were stationed on the school's rooftop, wearing helmets and riot gear and carrying nightsticks. Helicopters buzzed overhead. "It was like someone was filming a movie or something," remembered Karima Jordon, who was in ninth grade. "You couldn't believe this was happening."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2820

collective bargaining actually allied teachers to the central administration of urban school districts—the exact constituency Margaret Haley had founded teacher unionism to counteract. Under collective bargaining, it was easier for unions to negotiate with one strong administrative body, such as a city superintendent, board of education, or mayor, than with a plethora of neighborhood school boards or principals, each with their own set of demands.

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 2866

McCoy stated, poignantly, "Everyone else has failed. We want the right to fail for ourselves."

is this okay? where is failure on gov vs community

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2902

Newark Teachers Union had negotiated the furthest-reaching contract in the history of American public education, one that freed all classroom teachers of "nonprofessional chores" such as cafeteria duty, hall duty, and dismissal-time supervision.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3117

Nation at Risk, one of the most influential federal documents ever published.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3126

promoting the idea that schools and teachers are the primary levers for improving the nation's—and individual students'—standard of living, many accountability reformers accepted as inevitable the retrenchment of the welfare state in the realms of job creation, vocational training, housing, and child care. A Nation at Risk set the terms of a debate we are still having today.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3159

everyone from the Black Power Left to the segregationist Right believed schools were failing, state policy makers, especially Democrats who supported greater school funding, knew they would have to justify education spending in terms of tough reform and results.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3184

Teacher credentialing was “a hoax and an educational disgrace,” he concluded, blaming the misapplication of John Dewey's ideas: an overemphasis on student-centered pedagogy at the expense of subject matter training in history, literature, math, and science. As

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3196

an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves....We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3203

To improve teacher quality, the commission recommended higher base salaries, merit pay to reward effective teachers, and stricter teacher evaluation systems that made it more difficult to earn and keep tenure. Most

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3258

no teacher wants to fail,” Sommer told Fred Hechinger, the eminent education columnist at The New York Times. “If they are failing, it's because they get no supervision, no direction, no leadership.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3260

The report, quite smartly, differed from other national drives for school reform in that it focused on raising standards for all children, not just poor children. That helped it appeal to business leaders and middle-class parents,

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3340

teachers unions have had a long history of fighting attempts to institute subjective evaluation systems; at

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 3358

Reagan administration achieved its education goals by displacing the previous era's commitment to school desegregation.

for equality, tax system like sports luxury tax

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 3393

Young minority males assigned to Charlotte schools that experienced an influx of non-white students were more likely to be arrested and imprisoned than their demographically identical neighbors who remained in more integrated schools.

for white/affluent students to attend lower income school = tax break?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3418

Desegregation was never widely implemented outside the South, and where it was implemented, as in Charlotte or Montgomery County, it often succeeded in raising student achievement to a similar or greater degree than did later teacher accountability reforms. Today

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3483

states could choose their own standards and tests for kids and decide what constituted passing them, as well as what rendered a teacher highly qualified and certified.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3773

one of the best things a teacher can do for her students is to set high, individualized expectations for each one of them, regardless of a child's past performance or whether he comes to class with a label such as low-income, special education, or learning disabled.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3778

formative assessment. To avoid teaching children what they have previously learned, teachers should assess students at the beginning of the school year and at the beginning of new units, to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3880

Effective teachers can narrow, but not close, achievement and employment gaps that reflect broader income, wealth, and racial inequalities in American society. This reality

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3886

current achievement gap is driven much more by out-of-school factors than by in-school factors; differences in teacher quality account for perhaps 7 percent of the gap.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3887

But it turned out that the group of students who had been assigned to just one top value-added teacher—a teacher one standard deviation more effective than the norm—experienced small, yet observable, differences in life outcomes. These students earned, on average, 1.3 percent more per year, the difference between a salary of \$25,000 and \$25,325.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4582

reading skill is more closely tied to life outcomes than math skill

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4701

Like other research, this seems to suggest that the only way to truly learn how to manage one's own classroom is to actually do the job.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4771

Extended Learning Cultural Model,

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4777

In math, students graphed the relationship between income and social opportunity in various south L.A. neighborhoods. In social studies, they read conservative and liberal proposals for school reform

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4838

Our system is highly decentralized in terms of curriculum, organization, funding, and student demographics and needs, yet we have expected local schools to implement one-size-fits-all reform agendas imposed from above.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4869

higher teacher pay—is absolutely associated with better student outcomes. We must take this evidence seriously, because we are not paying teachers the upper-middle-class salary that would align with our sky-high expectations for their work.
