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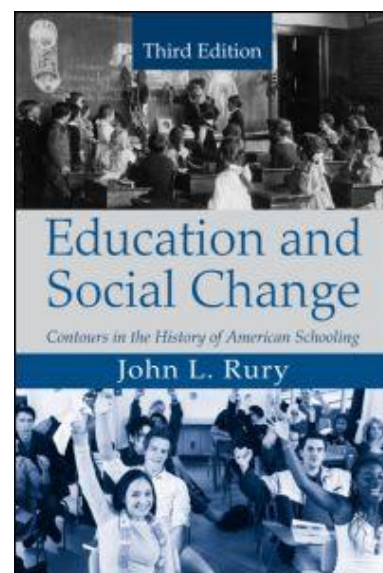
Rury, John L. (2009). *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling*. NY: Routledge.

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Reviewed by Rebecca Lish
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In his book *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling*, John L. Rury traces the evolution of American education from the Colonial period to the present. Rury does not seek to offer the reader an in-depth history of American education. Rather, he gives the reader a broad overview of how society has changed American schooling by focusing on key events and social forces such as industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Rury also makes the argument with numerous examples that education has contributed to social change in America. He uses social science concepts such as culture, and cultural, social, and human capital to explain how education in America has impacted groups differently based on ethnicity, race, class, and gender.



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In his second chapter, Rury points out that most Colonial youth were not formally educated; they were expected to work and were educated informally by their parents and in churches. Colonists became increasingly interested in acquiring wealth. At the same time, movements such as The Great Awakening made religion more “accessible and democratic” and The Enlightenment helped promote capitalistic ideals, laying the groundwork for the American Revolution (p. 34). Post-Revolution, education became a national concern in the newly established United States. Leaders saw education as necessary in building citizenship and national identity. Even women began to be educated in greater numbers because of their role in “republican motherhood” (p. 53).

In chapter three, Rury focuses on how industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century led to the creation of a state supported national system of public education. Common schools, high schools, teacher education programs, and many colleges and universities were established at this time to prepare students for work and to promote middle-class values and national identity (p.90). Unfortunately, these schools did not provide opportunities for social advancement to all groups. Rury devotes chapter four to a discussion of how schooling affected different groups through the 19th century. He begins this discussion with a description of how Irish immigrants encountered hostility and violence, causing very few Irish children to attend public schools. Irish immigrants eventually became more socially mobile, an advantage not afforded to most non-white, non-English speaking immigrants. Hispanic and Asian communities also faced hostility, and their children only had the opportunity to attend segregated, poor quality schools. Educational opportunities for women increased in the 19th century and most American schools were coeducational. Rury states that “although their social roles were circumscribed...women do seem to have realized certain benefits from their rising levels of educational attainment. This was one case where schooling does appear to have functioned as a lever of social change, even if a relatively modest one.” (p. 131).

John L. Rury is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas. He specializes in the history of American education and education policy studies. He has served as president of the History of Education Society, vice president of the American Educational Research Association, and as a senior program officer at the Spencer Foundation in Chicago.



The author traces the history of African American education in the 19th century. African American education during slavery was primarily informal. Stories were passed down through generations to preserve cultural identity. After slavery ended in the North, African Americans began to establish schools. African American communities were very committed to education, giving members social capital that empowered them politically. During the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, educational opportunities for African Americans expanded greatly in the South. However, after Reconstruction, disparities between education for blacks and whites increased (p. 115).

Early in his chapter on Colonial America, Rury discusses how early explorers and colonists displaced Native Americans to make room for the New World. Native Americans were seen as inferior, needing to be “civilized” by the colonists. By the end of the 19th century, most Native Americans had been forced to settle on reservations. A campaign was started to educate Native Americans to fit into the capitalistic American society. After the Civil War, funding for Native American schools was greatly increased. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) established boarding schools that separated Native American children from their families. Boarding school curriculum was based on moral development and vocational training. Ultimately, most boarding school students returned to the reservations because they did not feel a part of mainstream American society. Rury notes that Native American education “constitutes one of history’s clearest examples of schooling being used consciously to effect social change. Given the paternalistic and intolerant quality of the BIA schools in the 19th century, it is little wonder they did not prevail.” (p. 127). In chapter five, Rury discusses the Progressive era, 1890-1920, in the United States. During this time, the Industrial Revolution caused the economy to expand. Immigration and urban development were at their peak. According to Rury, “it is probably safe to say that there was a greater degree of social change at that point than during any other, simply because of the magnitude of economic expansion and population movement” (p. 138). The American education system needed to grow and adapt to keep up with all the

change. Rury outlines the two types of educational reformer, pedagogical progressives and administrative progressives, and he describes the differences in their approach. He questions the extent to which progressives had a lasting impact on American schooling.

Educational inequalities increased during the Progressive era. Schools, like society, became more differentiated. Curriculum changes in high schools and higher education institutions focused on preparing different groups of students for different roles in society. For example, shop programs were developed for young men; home economics programs were developed for young women. Young women started to fall behind in subjects like math and science. Racial disparities increased in Southern schools, especially at the secondary level. Rury notes that “even though numbers of teenagers in each race were about the same in the states of the ‘Deep South,’ White public high schools outnumbered those for African Americans by more than a 10:1 ratio.” (p. 171). In the West, most schools for Hispanic students were still segregated and inferior. Standardized tests became popular during the Progressive era. Because of language barriers, many Hispanic students could not pass these tests. Many dropped out before graduation (p. 172).

Chapter six is entitled *The Human Capital Revolution: Postwar America to the End of the 20th Century*. As the title suggests, after World War II, schools have been viewed by many to be the primary influence in economic growth. In response, schools have become less differentiated and more focused on academics. Higher education enrollments have increased significantly. In this chapter, Rury also discusses the civil rights movement and how cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Mendez v. Westminster* ended *de jure* policies of school segregation. But he points out that “white flight” out of cities and into the suburbs has caused *de facto* segregation that is more difficult to combat. Rury also notes that the geographical approach to school funding caused significant educational inequalities. The federal government has taken steps to equalize school funding levels. Programs such as Head Start have been created and legislation such as Title IX has been passed to help “offset inequalities in the social and

cultural backgrounds of different groups of students” (p. 199). Some initiatives such as affirmative action have been opposed by conservatives arguing against big government. However, there is evidence that compensatory education policies have been beneficial. Rury notes that the gap in graduation rates between white and black students is rapidly closing (p. 209).

The author discusses the rise of high schools and youth culture near the end of chapter six. He notes that there has been a students’ rights movement and cites *Tinker v. Des Moines* as a pivotal case. “Developments such as these helped to usher in a new era of uncertainty and permissiveness in the nation’s high schools.” (p. 214). To conclude the book, Rury gives a brief overview of current controversial trends in education including the standards movement and high-stakes testing, the home-schooling movement, and the privatization of schools.

Rury compiled an enormous amount of information using hundreds of references for this book. He has successfully condensed this information into a concise and enlightening overview of the relationships between education and social change in the United States. His use of case studies that represent themes in American society and education (which he calls “focal points”) was especially insightful and oftentimes entertaining. For example, Rury discusses the 1955 film *Rebel without a Cause* to depict changes in youth culture in the 20th century. In addition, I found Rury’s explanations of social science concepts such as culture and cultural, social, and human capital to be simple and easy to understand. These concepts helped tie together the themes and events discussed in the book.

The book offers a good overview of the evolution of primary, secondary, and higher education in the United States. Rury thoroughly discusses how women and African Americans have often been marginalized in the American education system. In addition, he discusses how Native American students have been exploited and documents the struggles of Hispanic and Asian students. Rury’s coverage of marginalized Native American, Hispanic, and Asian

students is lengthier than what is found in most history of education texts. He also includes some discussion of the education of students with learning disabilities in the United States, which is rare. According to the University of Kansas website, Rury is particularly interested in urban schooling. This is evident in the book. He does write a bit about rural education but is focused on urban schooling. I would like to see a lengthier discussion on rural education in the next edition.

Rury cites historian Henry Perkinson's quotation that "schooling has been an 'imperfect panacea' for curing the nation's ills, often promising changes it could not deliver" twice in the book (p. 1, p. 131). He gives examples of both positive and negative ways that he believes American education has impacted society. But some would contend the argument that education changes society (for the better or worse) gives education too much credit, distorting the truth about the capabilities and limits of education (Bankston III and Caldas, 2009).

Reference

Bankston III, C. L. & Caldas S. J. (2009). *Public Education, America's Civil Religion: A social history*. NY: Teachers College Press.

About the Reviewer

Rebecca Lish is a PhD student in the in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program in the Mary Lou Fulton Institute and Graduate School of Education at Arizona State University. She received her MEd, also in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, from the University of Utah. She has worked with Upward Bound, residential life, admissions and is currently an Undergraduate Retention Coordinator at the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering at Arizona State University. She is interested in researching ways to improve education policies and practices to increase the enrollment and retention rates of first-generation and under-represented students in higher education.



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