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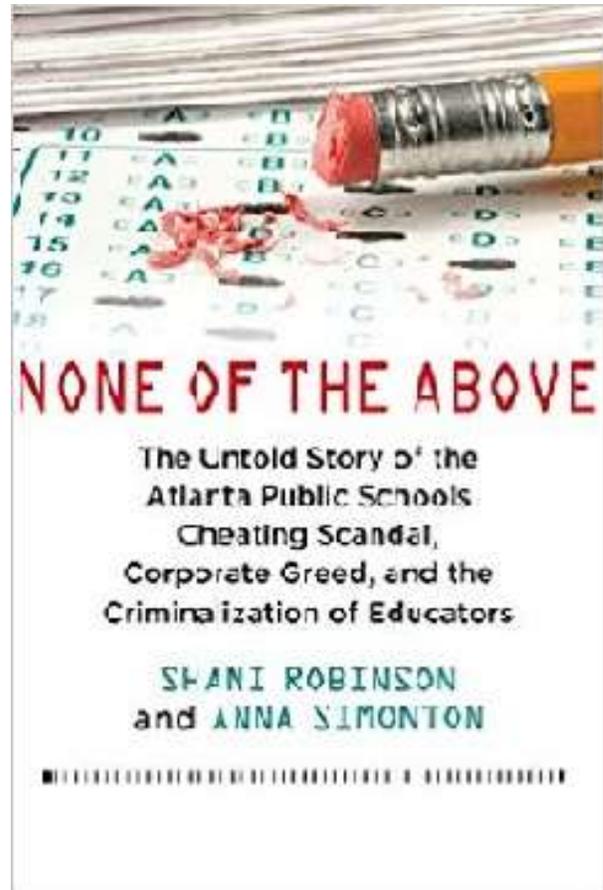
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I just finished reading a compelling book about the famed Atlanta Cheating Scandal. It is titled *None of the Above: The Untold Story of the Atlanta Public Schools Cheating Scandal, Corporate Greed, and the Criminalization of Educators*. I found it hard to put down.

It was written by Shani Robinson, one of the teachers convicted in 2015 of racketeering, for changing her students' answers on a state test, and journalist Anna Simonton. It is Shani's story, and with Anna's help, it is a very good read.

Shani was a Teach for America teacher who taught first graders at Dunbar Elementary School in Atlanta. She was one of dozens of teachers and administrators accused of cheating to raise her students' test scores. Being arrested, charged, threatened, tried, and convicted was an ordeal, which she describes in detail. Throughout this ordeal, she maintained her innocence. She very credibly insists that she never changed her students' test answers. Her student scores were not counted towards the school's "AYP" and had no bearing on the school's rating because first



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grade scores were not part of the No Child Left Behind dragnet.

She never received a bonus or any other monetary reward. Yet she and other educators were accused and convicted on a racketeering charge (the federal RICO statute that was designed to snare members of the Mafia and other organized criminals). She did not conspire with anyone, she writes, and to this day she insists upon her innocence.

What is especially shocking is her account of the “justice” system. At every step along the way, she and the others who were accused were offered the opportunity to get out of the charges if only they agreed to plead guilty. They got off scot free if they were willing to accuse others. Repeatedly she was told that she had a choice: If you stick with your plea of innocence, you face 20 years in prison; if you confess your criminal behavior, you will get probation, community service, and a nominal fine. Those who were convicted lost their job, their reputations, their careers, and in some cases, their freedom.

Others whom Shani trusted confessed to crimes they had not committed. She insisted upon her innocence and refused to lie to win her freedom. She cannot help comparing the longest trial in Georgia’s history with the cheating scandal in Washington, D.C., where no one was charged and there was no trial or punishment, nor even a credible investigation.

Somehow the whole procedure sounds like a story from the old Soviet Union, but this is American “justice” as practiced in Georgia.

What makes the story even more interesting is the way she connects her personal dilemma with the history of racism and injustice in Georgia and with the manipulation of politics by corporate interests. She notes again and again that the media created a feeding frenzy because of allegations that educators cheated, but were

not interested at all in reporting how corporate interests shifted or stole hundreds of millions of dollars from the schools for real estate development or gentrification.

She describes Atlanta’s history as the first city to build public housing, which became home to many thousands of black families, and the first city to tear down all of its public housing, ostensibly to woo middle class families back to the city (and to push out poor black families).

She became disenchanted with Teach for America as she saw its recruits—funded by out-of-state billionaires and trained by TFA’s Leadership for Educational Equity—organize a takeover of the Atlanta school board so as to make way for corporate education reform, especially charter schools.

She details the efforts of for-profit Charter Schools USA to open a charter in Atlanta, and the determination of the black community to keep them out. Hypocrisy?

She writes: “I tried to keep my cool as I came to terms with the fact that some very bad things had happened in my school district, worked to remain self-assured that my name would be cleared, and attempted to quell my outrage at the naked hypocrisy of some of the public figures who scrambled to condemn educators for ‘cheating the children.’ There were so many ways that children, particularly black children, were being cheated out of a decent life. During the decade that some APS staff members were tampering with tests, most teachers were doing the best they could with few resources for contending with kids who suffered generational trauma stemming from urban renewal, racialized violence, the drug epidemic, mass incarceration, and the obliteration of public housing. Meanwhile, real estate moguls and financiers were finagling ways to line their pockets with the education dollars that should have been going to the classroom.”

The most memorable line in the trial was uttered by the utterly reprehensible Judge Baxter, who said that the cheating scandal was “the sickest thing to ever happen in this town.” Shani wonders if he never gave any thought to slavery, Jim Crow, and the many other attacks on blacks as equally “sick.”

Shani Robinson’s appeal has not yet been heard. She may yet be sent to prison. Her book is a persuasive argument that some of the worst criminals in Atlanta were never tried for their crimes against the children of Atlanta.

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## About the Reviewer

**Diane Ravitch** is a Research Professor of Education at New York University and a historian of education. She is the Founder and President of the Network for Public Education (NPE). From 1991 to 1993, she was Assistant Secretary of Education and Counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander in the administration of President George H.W. Bush. She was responsible for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. As Assistant Secretary, she led the federal effort to promote the creation of voluntary state and national academic standards.

She is the author of *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (2014), *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (2010), as well as many other widely read works.

She was elected to membership in the National Academy of Education (1979); the Society of American Historians (1984); the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1985); and as the Eleanor Roosevelt Fellow of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences (2002). In 2010, the National Education Association selected her as its “Friend of Education” for the year. She has been awarded an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, by the following institutions: Williams College; Reed College; Amherst College; the State University of New York; Ramapo College; St. Joseph’s College of New York; Siena College; Middlebury College Language Schools; and Union College.

She is currently the most influential voice on the state of public education in America. Her blog, [dianeravitch.net](http://dianeravitch.net), has received more than 30 million hits.

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