

Reviewed by *Marcia Watson*
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John L. Rury is the author of *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling*, and is a Professor of Education and History at the University of Kansas. He serves as past vice president of the American Educational Research Association and past president of the History of Education Society, and his research interests include: the historical analysis of education and its impact on society and the impact of neoliberal economic policies on education.

In the fourth edition of *Education and Social Change*, Rury provides readers with extended information on contemporary changes in education. Like previous editions of this book, Rury includes a comprehensive history of American education from the colonial era until today. Changes in the fourth issue include updated research on the following topics: discussion of cultural and human capital, greater attention to diversity issues, a distinction between post-war and neoliberal policies, and the inclusion of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) discussions. These key changes in the fourth edition, reinforce Rury’s compelling research on history’s impact on education.

*Education and Social Change* seeks to answer the following question: Do schools change society or does society change schools? In attempts to answer this question, the author provides a chronological overview of American education, starting with the colonial period and
ending in the 21st century. Each of the six chapters moves chronologically to depict the landscape of public education in the United States. Chapter 1 starts with the colonial period, and “… extends from the beginning of the 17th century to the American Revolution” (p. 23). In this chapter, the author explains the religious influences on American settlement and educational practices. As noted, many settlers escaped religious persecution in Great Britain, only to enforce Protestant beliefs in the New World. Many of these Christian fundamentalist beliefs undergirded social practices thereafter, including: slavery, gender roles, and the genocide of Native American citizens.

Chapter 2 continues the discussion and introduces the 19th century. Here, today’s modern school system is outlined alongside the emergence of factories and the Industrial Revolution. The 19th century crystalizes school’s role as a social institution, and expounds on the connection between education and social mobility for factory workers. As the chapters move chronologically, the next chapter introduces ethnicity, gender, and race, and highlights the varying educational experiences of these demographic groups. Here in Chapter 3, Rury introduces feminism’s impact on education and the attempts to equalize gender in educational attainment. In this chapter, race and gender are discussed separately, without discussing the compounding experiences of Black women or Latina women, for example. Chapter 4 explains the importance of “The Progressive Era,” including: intelligence (IQ) testing, John Dewey’s educational theories, and the expansion of America’s elite. These damaging tests permanently altered the educational trajectory for minority groups, especially African Americans. The impacts of these tests are evident in urban schools in the 21st century through tracking, school segregation, and classroom ability groupings.

Chapter 5 intersects race and education again, and discusses the Civil Rights Movement, and the overall push for equality. In this chapter, Rury highlights key court cases that permanently shaped the American education landscape, including: Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and Swan v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. This chapter, which is the last historical chapter, discusses the influence of “Reaganomics” and neoliberal educational policies. Chapter 6 further expounds on the influences of conservative economic policies and educational reform. Here, Rury provides contemporary research, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and standardized testing, to
demonstrate how each aforementioned historical time period has influenced contemporary educational issues. While the book does not discuss globalization in detail, the discussion of neoliberal policies is an excellent resource for educators interested in economics and educational reform.

Rury’s research is comprehensive, but not equally detailed for all key racial groups. The book begins with Europeans settling in North America, without a detailed account of preexisting Native American educational practices in the United States. Although Rury mentions, “… Native Americans had long practiced their own form of education,” there is not a detailed account of these educational practices (p. 124). Urban and Wagoner ‘s *American Education: A History* (2004), provides a more detailed account of Native American pre-colonial education; however, their research fails to incorporate the necessity of multiculturalism within curriculum. Seemingly, Urban and Wagoner’s research provides only surface level information regarding various cultural contributions, without embedding multiculturalism as a necessary tenant of public school curriculum.

In addition, African Americans are another demographic group that Rury researches, but lacks comprehension. James Anderson’s *Education of Blacks in the South* (1988) provides a more detailed account of Black education in the United States. Anderson’s research expands beyond Black education in the South. In fact, he researches the influences of Northern philanthropy, slavery, and reconstruction on Black education. Anderson’s *Education of Blacks in the South* should supplement Rury’s research for more detailed research regarding Black education in the United States. Although these are two critiques of Rury’s text, *Education and Social Change* is still worthwhile for all interested in the history of education.

I would recommend this book to all educators, administrators, and researchers interested in the historical influences on education and social change. This comprehensive examination of educational history considers the importance of marginalized groups in American history. African American, Asian American, Native American, and even women’s experiences are considered. *Education and Social Change* provides a historical analysis of contemporary educational issues. This book is especially important for state, local, and federal policy makers to reexamine the damages of history on
marginalized groups. With increased interests in standardized testing, such as: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Common Core State Standards, the need to revisit neoliberal economic policies in paramount. The growing needs of today’s 21st century learner involves globalization and technology, which are each discussed in Rury’s research. This forward-thinking approach is beneficial for the book’s historical content. *Education and Social Change* exposes the important historical influences that permanently changed the educational trajectory for students. It is important for all stakeholders interested in educational reform to revisit this research.

References


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Marcia J. Watson grew up in Omaha, Nebraska. She later attended Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, where she received her B.S. in Middle Grades Education. After her undergraduate studies, she worked for Atlanta Public Schools as an alternative middle school teacher. While working for Atlanta Public Schools, she received her M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. Marcia is currently an Urban Education doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her research interests include: alternative education, discipline policy, and Black education.
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