



SCHOOLHOUSE BURNING BOOK DISCUSSION

Session 2 (March 24, 2021) -- Chapters 8-9 then 1, 10 & 11. What Are Today's Challenges to the Protection of our Public School System and to the Protection of Each Child's Fundamental Right to Education?

Tonight we will begin with some reflections from our last session, then pick up the historical discussion with the backlash to the *Brown v Board of Education* decision and move through the rediscovery of the constitutional right to education in the 70s - 90s (including Ohio's DeRolph decision). Midway we will turn attention to the current situation as Black sees it and as we are experiencing it in our communities.

Reading guide for Session 2

Chapter Eight: The Civil Rights Backlash Derek Black begins this chapter on the backlash against the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* by explaining: "*Brown* and its progeny set democracy on a second collision course with entrenched racism. The question was whether democracy might prevail this time around." (p. 179) He concludes the chapter by examining the court cases that undermined *Brown*: "In short, desegregation and the commitment to the American idea of equal educational opportunity started dying in the 1970s--in the White House, in Congress and in the courts. The deepest wounds were inflicted in *Keyes's* intent standard, *Milliken's* prohibition on metropolitan desegregation, and *Rodriguez's* rejection of a right to education." (p. 199) Consider how each of these decisions from the Warren Burger Supreme Court undermined the implementation of the *Brown* decision.

Chapter Nine: Rediscovering the Constitutional Right to Education Like the actions of the Confederate states to undo Reconstruction by underfunding schools for African American children, there was a reaction against the Civil Rights Movement dominated by the huge court cases, described in Chapter 8, which stopped desegregation and denied protection of public education as a fundamental right. In the 1970s and 1980s and into the 90s, supporters of public education filed lawsuits under their state constitutions to try to accomplish at least equal school funding. Black explains that these cases have focused on several principles, the first being that all students have a right to adequately funded schools and that the funding be equally distributed across school districts. We know, of course, about one of these cases: *DeRolph v. Ohio*.

Moving forward to today ... Introduction, Chapters 1, 10-11

In these chapters that bookend his historical survey, Black identifies what he believes are four fundamental challenges to our system of public education today (p. 226):

- the growth of privatization through both charter schools and vouchers as an expression of a narrative of freedom and individualism;
- the loss of funding to privatized vouchers and charter schools at THE EXPENSE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS;
- tax cuts after the 2010 Tea Party wave election exacerbating what was already the collapse of school funding after the Great Recession; and
- the effect of a standardized testing regime and state tax cuts for making the profession inhospitable to teachers.

Has he identified the primary challenges or are there others that concern you? How many of these challenges affect our schools in Ohio today?

Introduction and Chapter One: The Current Crisis Derek Black writes: “The assault on public education today is broader than that of the past. Past assaults were foremost about race, and although race remains part of today’s story, the primary rallying cry is against public education itself.” (p. 21) Where are today’s threats against public education coming from? How did some of this emerge during both Arne Duncan’s and Betsy DeVos’s tenures as U.S. Secretary of Education? Who are some of the wealthy entrepreneurs Black mentions who are funding the assault on government and on public education?

Chapter Ten: Through History’s Eyes and Chapter Eleven: Final Thoughts Derek Black describes our seeming rhetorical incapacity to define the purpose of public education: “Increasingly missing, if not entirely absent is any discussion of education’s purpose and values--reinforcing democracy and preparing citizens to participate in it. What they miss is that charters and vouchers, for instance, involve an entirely different set of premises about education--and for that matter an entirely different set of premises about government.” (p. 233) Perhaps that is why the cover of Black’s book depicts a broken American flag?

However, many public school parents do understand the value of public schools as an essential institutional embodiment of a democratic society. In what way might we articulate this more strongly?

Derek Black describes the Red4Ed teachers strikes that swept the country in 2018-2019: “In 2018, teachers finally reached their breaking point and started talking about strikes and walkouts. Media attention then helped educate the general public on what had happened to public education funding and the teaching profession over the past decade. In that environment, public education advocates who had long pointed out the damage privatization was doing, saw their concerns gain traction.” (pp. 244-245) What did these strikes teach America about the conditions in public schools? In the future, how can parents and advocates help teachers expose the meaning for public schools of funding shortages due to tax cuts and the diversion of funding to privatization?

Questions for Discussion for Chapters 8-9 and 1, 10-11

1. What are some of the ways the U.S Supreme Court’s decisions in *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, *Milliken v. Bradley*, and *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* continue to drive racial segregation and educational inequality across our nation’s public schools today? What are some of the ways advocates have fought back against injustice in state courts under the provisions of their state constitutions? Why have states never fully acted to protect the rights of all children?
2. Even though we have strong protection of public education in our Ohio constitution, what are some of the factors in our state that have prevented (in *DeRolph v. Ohio*, for example) the provision of adequate school funding, equitably distributed? Do you think Derek Black has identified the primary challenges or are there others that concern you? How many of these challenges affect our schools in Ohio today?

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Ground Rules for Table Discussions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● We do not have to agree -- just gain a deeper understanding of the book and one another.● Listen actively and make sure everyone has a chance to speak.● Give people patience and the benefit of the doubt.● Listen from your own experience and avoid generalizing. (“I” instead of “they,” “we,” and “you.”)
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3. Derek Black argues that school choice is unlikely to produce equitable education. He explains that promoters of school choice say that education, “is like any other commodity we might buy and should be customizable to meet the personal tastes of each individual... (T)he interests of those pulling the political and financial levers behind the scenes to expand charters and vouchers do not align with disadvantaged communities...Their goal, unlike that of minority communities, is not to ensure that each and every child, regardless of wealth, race, or religion receives an equal and adequate educational opportunity” (pp. 18-19).

What are the ways that the state is more likely to be able to protect an adequate and equitable education than the educational marketplace can and what is the role of constitutional language?

4. Although Derek Black believes the attacks today are less related to racism, he presents a series of maps (pp. 239-241) that demonstrate the correlation of privatization and school funding with racial disparities. Did these maps surprise you? What do these maps show about Ohio? What other factors do you think are most at play in our state?
5. We tend to think of the issues for our public schools in Ohio and greater Cleveland in state and local terms. What did you learn from this book about the broader context that shapes the educational challenges we have here in Ohio and our local school districts?

To Consider before Session 3

At our next session we will begin by briefly considering all that we have learned and discussed, and then we will turn to considering, and hopefully initiating, advocacy and action that we can take as individuals, organizations, and communities to strengthen the commitment to public education in Ohio (and elsewhere).

In the meantime:

Think about your reading and discussions:

- What issues affecting public education policy and funding are most striking to you now and how does this compare with your understanding before these discussions?
- How can the historical perspective you have gained help to shape new forms of advocacy for public education?