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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Access, Inclusion, and Power

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Who should have access to education, what should that education look like, and how should change be executed? Such questions are particularly salient as this issue goes to press. In the US, leaders at the federal level have advanced a vision that would reduce access to higher education, particularly for historically marginalized groups. At the same time, the White House has advocated for privatizing the K-12 education system in the names of free market economics and so-called parental rights. In response, those opposed to these changes have decried an overreaching federal government motivated by ideology and partisan rancor.

Little historical training is needed to recall similarly ambitious reform efforts that unfolded during Barack Obama's presidency. During his administration, top-down changes came in the form of new rules, regulations, and guidance. These included changes to the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, particularly with respect to how states reported student performance and ranked teacher preparation programs. The Obama administration also sought to expand transgender protections through Title IX and to curtail abuses in the for-profit college sector through the Gainful Employment Rule. All these changes, unveiled with great fanfare and promise, are now in the dustbin of US history. The Trump administration and allied congressional leaders rescinded or overturned them all.

Changes enacted during the Biden administration are likely to have a short shelf life as well. Biden's response to the first Trump presidency marked a swing back toward expanding transgender and LGBTQ+ protections, regulating career and technical education, and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. None of these efforts survived the first few weeks of the second Trump administration, and more Biden-era changes are anticipated to fall during the rest of Trump's second term.

These dizzying back-and-forth swings at the federal level are a sign of the times. They signal an increasingly divided public consumed by fire-eating political rhetoric. And the ultimate impact is systemic instability around basic questions. What kind of education do we collectively support? Who is included in that "we"? How is change best pursued?

This issue sheds light on how these questions have been answered at different times in US history. The four feature articles track a variety of efforts—institutional, local, state, and federal—to address the needs of students and communities across the US. They also remind us of the need to remain curious about the origin of educational change and its legacy in our understanding of past and present.

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In "Need-Based Aid, Racial Proportionality, and the College Work-Study Program of the National Youth Administration, 1934-1943," Scott Gelber examines the first federal need-based financial aid program in the United States. As he finds, the NYA likely paved the way for the better-known GI Bill, which incorporated elements of the older program. But while the GI Bill framed financial support for returning veterans as a kind of repayment for their service, the NYA, as first and foremost a project of economic justice, was strictly need-based. Gelber is also careful to note that the NYA distributed aid in a far more racially proportionate manner than did the GI Bill. Inasmuch as that is the case, the program appears to have done more to expand access to and interest in higher education than most Americans recognize.

In "Black Associationalism and the Counterpublic Sphere: Civic Organizations in the History of African American Education," Christine Woyshner looks at the largely unexplored history of Black civic voluntary organizations. Rather than being on the margins of education for African Americans, these associations played an important role in supplementing, supporting, and funding formal schooling. In what Woyshner deems "counterpublic" spaces, voluntary groups worked together to make schooling more equitable for Black youth and adults. Stressing the importance of investigating informal spaces, her essay also offers a roadmap for future study.

In the third feature article in this issue, Jon Hale details the emergence of school choice as a policy phenomenon in the American South. In "New South Governors and the Evolution of School Choice, 1980-1996," Hale looks particularly at the leadership at the state level in addressing anxieties about racial desegregation and economic inequality. Extolling the virtues of the free market and orienting the public away from the project of redistribution, Southern governors adopted "education reform" as a cornerstone strategy for creating a "New South."

The final feature article in this issue, "'On the Same Footing as Gentlemen': Inroads into Coeducational Medical Training at the Cleveland Medical College in the 1850s," reaches further back in history. Recounting what she frames as a "window of opportunity" for coeducation at a time when medical training was inaccessible to women, Snejana Slantcheva-Durst shows how a unique confluence of factors—including rising prospects for women's access to higher education—inspired this development. The female graduates of the Cleveland Medical College joined a pioneer generation of women physicians who chipped away at medicine's glass ceiling.

This issue also includes a forum on gender and the history of education. Organized by *HEQ* contributing editor Kim Tolley, it includes an introduction by Lucy E. Bailey and four essays on the topic by established and emerging scholars: Michael S. Hevel and Timothy Reese Cain, ArCasia James-Gallaway, Jane Martin and Judith Harford, and Stella Meng Wang. Expanding on the latent theme that runs across this issue's feature articles—about access, inclusion, and power—the forum raises important questions for historians of education around the world.

Finally, and as always, the issue concludes with several outstanding book reviews.

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