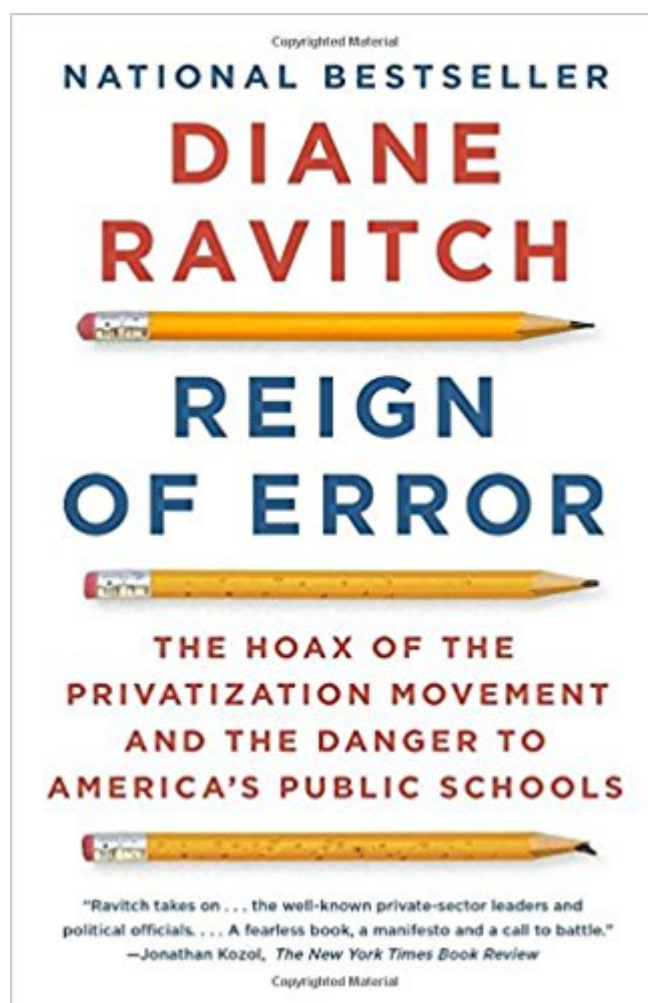


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Reign Of Error: The Hoax Of The Privatization Movement And The Danger To America's Public Schools



Synopsis

From one of the foremost authorities on education in the United States, former U.S. assistant secretary of education, an incisive, comprehensive look at today's American school system that argues against those who claim it is broken and beyond repair; an impassioned but reasoned call to stop the privatization movement that is draining students and funding from our public schools. In a chapter-by-chapter breakdown she puts forth a plan for what can be done to preserve and improve our public schools. She makes clear what is right about U.S. education, how policy makers are failing to address the root causes of educational failure, and how we can fix it.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Education scholar Ravitch follows *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010) with a well-researched and insightful critique of current efforts at public education reform. Putting the current "privatization movement" in the broader historical context of public school reform, Ravitch argues that there never was an ideal time when social inequities didn't fall hardest on poor and minority students. Instead of focusing exclusively on fixing what is considered wrong with public schools, policy makers should enact antipoverty initiatives to reduce racial and socioeconomic inequality reflected in inadequate health care and preschool learning even before children enter school, she contends. Though she concedes historic and current shortcomings, Ravitch debunks myths regarding declining high-school graduation rates and challenges the validity of standardized tests results, international test scores, and teacher

accountability measured by students' test results. Ravitch tackles hot-button issues, including charter schools, and takes particular aim at Teach for America and school reform leader Michelle Rhee, questioning the sincerity of conservative foundations backing the movement in an effort to dismantle public education. Ravitch advocates for more rigorous preschools, smaller class sizes, better teacher training, and comprehensive social services, among other initiatives, in this passionate plea to protect the nation's public schools from privatization. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The most clear-headed and influential critic of privatization is Diane Ravitch, who has earned a reputation as an independent thinker. Refusing to embrace the formulas of left and right, she attacks politically correct speech codes as intelligently as she criticizes the free-market faith in competition. She has also been willing to change her mind in public: at one time an advocate of standardized testing, she is now a skeptic. And this skepticism animates her broader critique in *Reign of Error*, a book that dispels the clouds of reform rhetoric to reveal the destructiveness of the privatization agenda.

• "Jackson Lear, *Commonweal* "No matter what side of the debate the reader is on, Ms. Ravitch provides a thought-provoking look at some of the major challenges facing public education today."

• "Pittsburgh Post-Gazette "Those who have grown increasingly alarmed at seeing public education bartered off piece by piece, and seeing schools and teachers thrown into a state of siege, will be grateful for this *cri de Coeur* "a fearless book, a manifesto, and a cry to battle."

• "Jonathan Kozol, *New York Times Book Review* "Ravitch's critique of the corporate reformers' manufactured agenda, along with the truly progressive alternatives she offers, shows us a way to begin the long haul toward improving democracy's classrooms."

• "Joseph Featherstone, *The Nation* "Diane Ravitch [is] arguably our leading historian of primary and secondary education."

• "Andrew Delbanco, *The New York Review of Books* "Ravitch has emerged as the most consistent and searching critic of the contemporary education-reform movement."

• "Walter Russell Mead, *Foreign Affairs* "No education or social issues library should be without this book."

• "Diane C. Donovan, *California Bookwatch* "The best word I can come up with to describe the Ravitch of today is muckraking " reform-minded journalism that aims to expose misconduct and conspiracy. [We need public figures like Ravitch to highlight perilous trends (and illuminate promising trends). . . . *Reign of Error* is a must-read book."

• "Sam Chaltain, *Education Week* "[Ravitch] presents real solutions, not only to improve our public schools, but also to improve the lives of the children who walk their halls."

• "Darcie Chimarusti, *NewsWorks* "[Ravitch] is a devastating social critic who is well aware of the

current political environment. Ravitch is able to skewer this agenda so efficiently because she's seen it all before. . . . Ravitch's candor stands in stark contrast to the bromides of the corporate reformers, who have pretty much left any attempts at integration out of their schemes. •

• "NEA.org (National Education Association) Read this book and keep it somewhere within arm's length for the next decade or so. •

• "Jose Vilson, Educator, writer, activist Diane Ravitch has emerged as an iconic figure on America's political landscape. What Daniel Ellsberg was to the Vietnam War, Ravitch has become to the battle raging over public education a truth-teller with the knowledge that comes from decades on the inside of the education reform movement. •

• "Anthony Cody, Education Week Teacher Reign of Error is a must-read; brilliant concise and elegant in dissecting and countering the corporate reform myths. . . . You will never find a more succinct and compelling book than Reign of Error, with a crystal clear analysis of the way in which our schools are being driven into the ground by the Billionaire Boys club of Gates, Broad, Walton, Murdoch, and Bloomberg, and other ideologues and opportunists eager to join in. We must win this battle for the soul of our education system before it's too late."

• "NYC Public School Parent Diane Ravitch is America's foremost educational historian. In each chapter Ravitch provides detailed, clear explanations of the relevant data. . . . She is a thorough and careful scholar. As important as her previous book was, Ravitch has outdone that with this magnum opus. This book is by far her finest work, and something which everyone truly concerned about education should read. •

• "Daily Kos I advise all public school teachers to read Ravitch's book. Her experience makes her writing rich. Reformers do not like her because she exposes them. . . . Her critics attack her personally because they cannot dent the substance that is Ravitch's Reign of Error. She has pulled their reformer pants down in public. There they stand, red-faced and embarrassed. Ravitch is fighting for us. Buy the book. •

• "The Huffington Post I knew a lot about what happened to black public schools in Mississippi, but had concerns about how to go about building a better system. After reading Reign of Error I now know exactly how to proceed. Mississippi is indeed the exception that the whole world believes it to be. I promised God that if I kept living I would spend the rest of my life moving Mississippi blacks from the bottom to the top. Thanks to Diane Ravitch I now know what has to be done. •

• "James Meredith, author of Three Years in Mississippi Diane Ravitch is the Martin Luther King and Joan of Arc of American education, a fearless crusader for every American child, parent and teacher. In Reign of Error, she reveals the shocking lack of evidence behind many of the radical experiments being forced on our public school children and families by tragically misguided politicians and non-educators. Most important, she lays out a vision of evidence-based, authentic education

reforms that hold great promise for America to lead and inspire the world again. Every American parent, teacher and citizen interested in our future should read this book. What *Silent Spring* and *The Fate of the Earth* did for the environmental and antinuclear movements, this book should do for the cause of improving America's public schools." • "William Doyle, author of *A Soldier's Dream* • Diane Ravitch's must read book makes a compelling case for the essential purpose of public education. She debunks the myths of its failures • "and of the market reformers' successes • "and points to real doable investments that will make public education the gateway to the American dream for all our children. • "Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers • Diane Ravitch's *Reign of Error* takes the myths surrounding public education head on and provides her readers with logic and reasoning sorely missing from the current debate. • Diane is a fierce warrior against the so-called reformers whose ideology exacerbates the problems of poverty and inequity. • *Reign of Error* takes on each of the common myths and blows them up with the reformers' own holy grail • "DATA!! Data that disputes the miracle schools, the effects of poverty and myth of the dropout factors. Ravitch also takes on the Billionaire Boys Club with swipes at their handmaidens of destruction, including Michelle Rhee, Joel Klein, and Wendy Kopp, and the book provides the solutions that will change the trajectory away from so-called destructive innovation towards equitable, high quality education for all children. • "Karen GJ Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union • "American educational reformers have fashioned a narrative that has become so pervasive that it has effectively silenced alternative accounts. • In this courageous book Diane Ravitch persuasively • challenges both the narrative's presentation and analysis of data and its underlying value system. • "Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education Harvard Graduate School of Education •

What qualities do parents want to see in their children's schools? Well, Diane Ravitch, a professor at NYU and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, sensibly observes that most parents want their neighborhood schools to offer an educational experience not unlike those available at America's elite schools, such as Sidwell Friends, where the Obama Girls are students, or Andover, where George Bush was a cheerleader. And what's so special about these elite schools? Small class sizes, rich curriculums, experienced and accomplished teachers, and a rich ecosystem of support that helps to manage problems when students lose focus or fall behind. So how does Ravitch's commonsensical observation apply to troubled public schools, where students frequently suffer the many burdens of poverty and the limited horizons associated with racial segregation? Well, society should find a way so that these public schools offer

the same rich educational environment as elite schools, only more so. In *REIGN OF ERROR: THE HOAX OF THE PRIVITIZATION MOVEMENT AND THE DANGER TO AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS*, Ravitch reviews what today's self-appointed reformists are doing to change public education (chapters 1-20) and the modifications in our approach to public school systems that sheer commonsense says will make a difference (chapters 21-33). In dealing with the so-called educational reformers, such as Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, Ravitch points out such facts as:

- o The core supporters of charter schools, school choice through vouchers, and virtual schools are often Libertarians who, as a matter of principle, oppose public services of all kinds, including the public management of education.
- o Deep-pocket foundations, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, support these so-called reformers, who have solutions for closing the achievement gaps between white and black and wealthy and poor students. These include:
 - "We want a great teacher in every classroom. Class size doesn't matter. Teachers should be paid more if their students get higher scores and should be fired if they don't get higher scores. Teachers should have their seniority and tenure stripped from them. Bad teachers cause the achievement gap. Teachers' unions don't care about the students. Replacing teachers with online instruction not only works but cuts costs."
 - Observes Ravitch: "This is a seductive message because it offers hope that someone knows how to fix difficult problems."
 - In general, the test results of students at charter schools are no better than those at public schools after the test results of charters are adjusted to eliminate distortions caused by lottery enrollment mechanisms, short enrollment windows, a paucity of special needs students, and a culture of culling of students who are behavior problems. And test results at voucher and virtual schools actually tend to even worse.
 - The big educational initiatives of the last two Presidential administrations "Bush's "No Child Left Behind" and Obama's "Race to the Top" enforce a regimen known as "testing, accountability, and choice. Educational measures that this regimen foster include: diversion of school resources and class time to prepare for standardized testing; merit pay; and unrealistic accountability standards which can be used to rate and close schools (NCLB) and rate and terminate teachers (RttT). Observes Ravitch: "All of these ideas were highly contested; not one has a strong body of evidence or research to support it or to justify the imposition of so many different and untested changes at the same time."
 - So what alternatives does Ravitch propose? Her final 12 chapters have such titles as: "The Early Years Count", "The Essentials of Good Education", "Class Size Matters", "Measure Knowledge and Skills with Care", and "Strengthen the

Profession. See? Commonsense. Ravitch gets the last word, which is an excerpt from her chapter entitled "The Toxic Mix." "For every 'miracle' school celebrated by the media, there are scores of 'dumpster schools' where the low-performing students are unceremoniously hidden away. This is not school reform. It is social neglect. It is a purposeful abandonment of public responsibility to address deep-seated problems that only public policy can overcome. Highly recommended.

A very interesting insight into the privatization of the public school system, as well as the political factors swaying it. Surprisingly engaging, I got through it pretty quick. Ravitch makes some eye-opening statements and revelations. As with ANY reading, however, consider that there are two sides to every story, and this book leans heavily to one side. As a proponent of the public school and someone who is skeptical of privatization and the overall reform agenda, I encourage you to explore other perspectives as well. Well written, and her claims and counterclaims are often validated with evidence. A staple read if you're into the changing education system!

This book is for all educators, in particular, Arne Duncan, current education secretary. Ravitch gives a masterful, thoroughly documented presentation of how the standardized testing movement only serves testing companies and tutorial services companies and have all but destroyed and undermined our nations public schools. When Barack Obama became president, it was expected by many educators that he would nullify the untenable No Child Left Behind law, referred to by educators as No Child Left Untested. Instead the president and education secretary managed to make it even worse, with the Race to the Top. Competition for limited resources does not place them where they are needed to level the playing field for the most disadvantaged students. I would like to challenge Secretary Duncan and President Obama to read this book and give serious thought to Ravitch's arguments before continuing to jeopardize, undermine, and sap any remaining vitality left in our nations public schools.

Diane Ravitch provides excellent criticisms of the privatization of American schools. She emphasizes that urban school problems are largely due to concentrated poverty and racial segregation and that wide spread privatization of public would make the situation worse for many children. Ravitch recommends more comprehensive reforms like providing good prenatal care for all pregnant women and high quality pre-school education for all children. She also calls for small class size, banning for-profit charter schools, cooperation between charter schools and other public

schools and providing the social and medical services poor children need to do well in school. She says education would benefit from less reliance on standardized testing, ensuring that all teachers, principals and school superintendents are professional educators, control of schools through elected school boards, and reduction of class and racial segregation and poverty.

Diane Ravitch is the Superman I have been waiting for (perhaps I should say Superwoman). Every single person in the education field should read "Reign of Error." No administrator or teacher should be hired until they read this book. It lays out cleanly and clearly why our education policies from the 1980s forward have left our students underserved. It also explains the downward spiral that our policies of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have created in our education system. Rather than rely on blind faith and continue to jump over the cliff, we should instead use logic, reason, and actual, proven results to form our method of educating our youth. Ravitch outlines quite clearly all that we should do to reform education. We should act immediately. Ms. Ravitch has my vote for Superintendent of Schools, has my support to become the next Education Department Secretary, and has my thanks for tirelessly working to correct the mistakes caused by educational privatization, online "education," and modern forms of charters that are misleading and abusive towards public schools.

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