



# The Other School Reformers: Conservative Activism in American Education

*Adam Laats*

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## **The Other School Reformers: Conservative Activism in American Education** Adam Laats

The idea that American education has been steered by progressive values is celebrated by liberals and deplored by conservatives, but both sides accept it as fact. Adam Laats shows that this widely held belief is simply wrong. Upending the standard narrative of American education as the product of courageous progressive reformers, he calls to center stage the conservative activists who decisively shaped America's classrooms in the twentieth century. *The Other School Reformers* makes clear that, in the long march of American public education, progressive reform has more often been a beleaguered dream than an insuperable force.

Laats takes an in-depth look at four landmark school battles: the 1925 Scopes Trial, the 1939 Rugg textbook controversy, the 1950 ouster of Pasadena Public Schools Superintendent Willard Goslin, and the 1974 Kanawha County school boycott. Focused on issues ranging from evolution to the role of religion in education to the correct interpretation of American history, these four highly publicized controversies forced conservatives to articulate their vision of public schooling—a vision that would keep traditional Protestant beliefs in America's classrooms and push out subversive subjects like Darwinism, socialism, multiculturalism, and feminism. As Laats makes clear in case after case, activists such as Hiram Evans and Norma Gabler, Homer Chaillaux and Louise Padelford were fiercely committed to a view of the curriculum that inculcated love of country, reinforced traditional gender roles and family structures, allowed no alternatives to capitalism, and granted religion a central role in civic life.

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