DOI: 10.51845.39.1.26

The Teacher's Union Makes the Argument—and Loses

by Glenn Ricketts

Why Fascists Fear Teachers: Public Education and the Future of Democracy, Randi Weingarten, Thesis, 2025, pp. 245, $15.00 hardcover.

K12 education has been in the news frequently for some time and the news usually isn't good. Last September, for example, the National Association for Educational Progress (NAEP) reported yet another significant drop in students' overall reading, math, and science scores, reflecting an overall decline of ten points since NAEP began measuring outcomes in 1992. No doubt the prolonged student absence of 2019-2020 due to the COVID pandemic was influential, but since outcomes had begun to crater long before that event, some observers wondered whether other factors, such as curriculum and instruction may have carried significant weight. Teachers and their unions have also been in the news recently for other reasons, not obviously concerned with school reading outcomes. As I noted recently in these pages, ("Enlightened Citizens: Educating for a Republic," Fall, 2025) the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) persuaded former governor Phil Murphy's administration to adopt watered down standards for the state's teacher certification requirements. And in February of this year, the California Teachers Association coordinated a series of crippling strikes across the state, beginning with San Francisco's heavily indebted public school system.

Into the fray steps American Federation of Teachers Union president Randi Weingarten whose book, *Why Fascists Hate Teachers*, purports to speak for K-12 teachers who, as the book's title suggests, are under serious assault from "fascists and right-wing extremists." This was not an easy book to review because, except for its physical appearance, it is not really a book at all. It is, rather, a pamphlet, an ideological tract, a broadside, a tirade, a pep talk for the troops. What Weingarten has written is not an argument or detailed defense of

the state of teacher performance in public schools, but 183 pages of unargued assertions: Teachers are the bulwark of defending democracy, they provide vital education and equal opportunity for all students, especially poorer ones, and they impart the "critical thinking" skills which form students into discerning and informed citizens. That noble mission, however, is now seriously threatened by "fascists" and "far-right extremists"—terms that appear on nearly every page—which might well impress the reader as parody or satire, but the author appears to be deadly serious. Utilizing a common if by now shopworn trope of the left, Weingarten opens her book with a reference to Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, who realized that education was the biggest threat to the type of mind control that they sought to impose in their New World Order. They thus turned immediately to controlling the public schools, curriculum and, above all, teachers in the countries they successively conquered. And as with Hitler, so also with Benito Mussolni, Franciso Franco, Augusto Pinochet and ... and Donald Trump (but, naturally, not Stalin or Mao Tse Tung):

> Authoritarians actively attack truth, knowledge, and critical thinking because an uninformed public is easier to control. Degrading public education and critical thinking skills may only prime more Americans to not recognize disinformation and misinformation and take authoritarians like Trump at their word.

In present-day America, however, the "far-right extremists" include the Heritage Foundation, Moms for Liberty, the Manhattan Institute, especially its ultra-right wing fellow Chris Rufo, most of red state America, home schoolers, charter schools, etc., etc. And so, to maximize teachers' effectiveness in fighting fascism and the "extreme right," in protecting democracy, promoting equal opportunity for every student and shielding them from the "fascist, extreme right," they need strong unions to secure them decent pay and to guarantee their freedom to teach. In addition, Weingarten asserts that teachers are most often underpaid (with an average salary of $80,000 per annum in San Franciso, where teachers recently when out on strike) and school districts are perennially underfunded. She makes no mention of the high rates of absenteeism among students, especially in inner-city schools, the intimidating gang violence that often plagues such schools, or the poor academic preparation of their teachers noted long ago by the eminent educational sociologist, James Coleman. Nor does she refer to the landmark 1966 Coleman Report, the massive statistical survey which confounded the educational establishment's entrenched expectation that large funding disparities existed between racially segregated schools, and hence accounted for the wide gaps in academic performance between them. Family circumstances, Coleman concluded, was the decisive factor. Weingarten, by contrast, continues to insist that beefed-up funding and higher salaries for teachers—denied by the usual suspects, "right-

wing extremists"—would enable inner city school children "to realize their dreams."

Weingarten's unreconstructed confidence in the efficacy of school spending seems to fly in the face of recent data out of New York, where slightly more than $36,000 is spent annually per pupil, but where eighth grade NAEP reading scores come in at 31 percent proficiency with 26 percent proficiency in math. Meanwhile, Massachusetts's $23,000 annual per pupil spending gets them 40 percent reading proficiency and 37 percent math proficiency.[1]

But even if New York's budgetary model goes national, what will these better compensated teachers in their adequately funded schools teach? If current practice holds, large doses of woke ideology would color any instruction in science, math, and reading. It's important, according to the AFT Blog, October 21, 2021, that students each receive a Student Introduction Card that will indicate their "preferred pronouns:"

> This strategy is similar to models seen across the country that allow for students to self-identify at the start of the year. Gender pronouns, while not always stagnant throughout the year, can be equally important to a student's identity as the pronunciation of names, language of origin, race, or nationality.

Another urgent AFT priority seems to be support for "LGBTQIA+" students, which includes bypassing parents or concealing such "support" from them:

> Years ago, I quit assuming that my students' parents were necessarily the people raising them, and I decided to go with "family" or "cheerleaders" or "supporters." It has made a world of difference for the people whose non-traditional family structures were always left out. I believe that asking for pronouns is going to do the same thing.[2]

And that's really all there is to say about Weingarten's book, although the reader is left wondering who her target audience might be. Ironically, *Why Fascists Fear Teachers* is well worth reading for anyone who wishes to know what's wrong with American K-12 education. Just not in the way the author intended.

Glenn M. Ricketts *is professor of political science at Raritan Valley Community College, North Branch, NJ 08876, and public affairs director of the National Association of Scholars; ricketts@nas.org. He was the founding president of the NAS New Jersey state affiliate, and served for twenty years on the NAS board of directors. Ricketts last appeared in these pages with "Enlightened Citizens: Educating for a Republic," a review of Jeffrey Sikkenga's and David Davenport's* A Republic, If We Can Teach It: Fixing America's Civic Education Crisis *(Fall 2025).*

1. Jennifer Weber, "New York Leads in School Spending—But Not Student Achievement," *City Journal*, Feb. 3, 2026.
2. Amber Chandler, "Supporting My LGBTQUIA+ Students," *AFT Voices*, June 22, 2022.