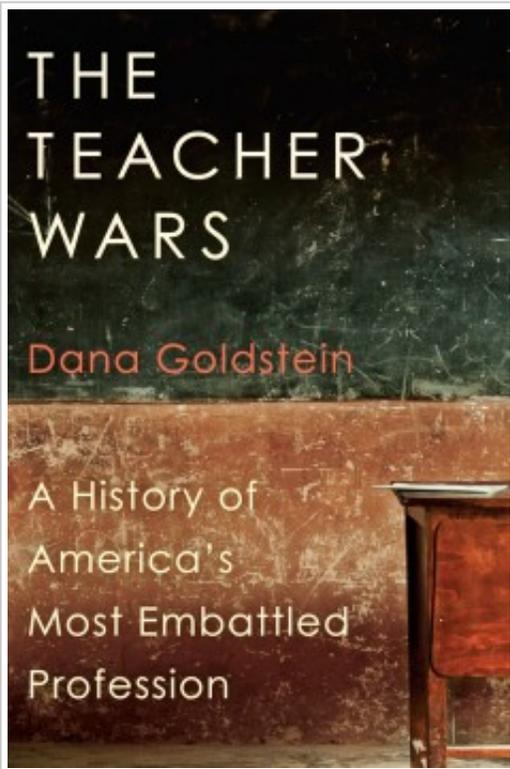


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The Teacher Wars

by Dana Goldstein

Price: \$26.95(Hardcover)

Published: September 02, 2014

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: In her groundbreaking history of 175 years of American education, Dana Goldstein finds answers in the past to the controversies that plague our public schools today.

Teaching is a wildly contentious profession in America, one attacked and admired in equal measure. In *The Teacher Wars*, a rich, lively, and unprecedented history of public school teaching, Dana Goldstein reveals that teachers have been similarly embattled for nearly two centuries. From the genteel founding of the common schools movement in the nineteenth century to the violent inner-city teacher strikes of the 1960s and '70s, from the dispatching of Northeastern women to frontier schoolhouses to the founding of Teach for America on the Princeton University campus in 1989, Goldstein shows that the same issues have continued to bedevil us: Who should teach? What should be...

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What We Say

"The Teacher Wars" is two books in one. Most of the book is a pretty lively history of teaching in the US and the cyclical panics that involve both demonizing teachers and expecting them to be superheroes who can lift entire communities out of poverty and onto the path of citizenship through inspiration and dedication and teaching (and for a price, too!). Author Dana Goldstein goes chapter by chapter through the history of public schooling. Each section's subject is rich enough for far more detailed coverage, so "The Teacher Wars" feels a little superficial. Still, the overall effect of the bulk of the book is informative, depressing and sadly amusing: again and again, we debate teaching, what to teach, who should teach, raise the idea of merit pay and of course testing testing testing as a cure-all. It's almost comical to see the purges that sweep through teaching again and again as the latest reform takes hold, from the mid-1800s to the early 1910s up to the present day. Goldstein also does a thorough, dispassionate job of laying out the various fads, how so few are based on actual solid evidence and how so many are rushed into action before they've even been thoroughly tested, much less proven themselves. From the wave of female teachers to the debates between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington (the age-old argument between a grounding in the classics versus vocational training) to unions and finally charters versus public schools, Goldstein covers it all. The book feels even more rushed in the contemporary sections when she whisks from Teach For America to numerous ideas incubating approaches on how to really fix teaching. But it's ultimately quite optimistic. Goldstein is straightforward and grounded in enough evidence to show in various ways why testing has gone out of control, why unions are not the demonic force of evil posited by some, why Teach For America has some positive insights to offer and on and on. Her recommendations avoid a "This Is THE answer" approach so typical in this debate and you're genuinely convinced by her arguments to agree and maybe even join a school board and help make it happen. Not the grand narrative teaching deserves, but absorbing on its own terms. Oh, and if you want great teachers, pay them a great salary. Now that's not so hard to understand, is it? -- Michael Giltz

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What Others Say

A New York Times Notable Book of 2014

"Ms. Goldstein's book is meticulously fair and disarmingly balanced, serving up historical commentary instead of a searing philippic ... The book skips nimbly from history to on-the-ground reporting to policy prescription, never falling on its face. If I were still teaching, I'd leave my tattered copy by the sputtering Xerox machine. I'd also recommend it to the average citizen who wants to know why Robert can't read, and Allison can't add."

—New York Times

"[A] lively account of the history of teaching ... The Teacher Wars suggests that to improve our schools, we have to help teachers do their job the way higher-achieving nations do: by providing better preservice instruction, offering newcomers more support from well-trained mentors and opening up the "black box" classroom so teachers can observe one another without fear and share ideas. Stressing accountability, with no ideas for improving teaching, Goldstein says, is 'like the hope that buying a scale will result in losing weight.' Such books may be sounding the closing bell on an era when the big ideas in school reform came from economists..."

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