

do with decreasing economic inequality in the early twentieth century. Still, the overall impression that policymakers in the antebellum or Jim Crow eras had a better grasp on the role that schools play in society presents a more harmonious picture of the past than Shelton intends.

Overall, this is a helpfully slim volume with a strong through line that could be useful in many history of education classes, especially to offer an overview of the role of schools in broader American policy since the country's founding, while providing a more detailed account of the interplay between education and political economy since the 1960s. It shows students we could value education for more than its economic returns, and it reminds them that equal opportunity might well emerge from policies relating to trade, labor, and countercyclical government spending rather than education policy alone.

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Tamson Pietsch. *The Floating University: Experience, Empire, and the Politics of Knowledge*

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In her captivating study, *The Floating University: Experience, Empire, and the Politics of Knowledge*, Tamson Pietsch sets sail into a long-overlooked historical adventure—the Floating University of 1926. This audacious experiment, conceived by Professor James E. Lough of New York University, took five hundred students on an eight-month global voyage. With the ambition to cultivate students' ability to think in “world terms” (p. 1), the journey began in New York City and wound its way through Cuba and the Panama Canal, then toward Los Angeles and Hawaii before crossing the wide expanse of the Pacific, en route to Asia, then westward to Europe, culminating in that continent's renowned capital cities. Pietsch's meticulous attention to detail guides her readers through multifaceted cultural landscapes, painting a vivid picture of students' travel experiences and the ultimate collapse of the Floating University. In the end, her narration goes well beyond a mere chronicle of a forgotten experiment. She explores the deeper politics of knowledge and the intricate interplay between American higher education and expanding U.S. imperial power.

Pietsch situates the Floating University within the transformative context of the American higher education system during the 1920s—a period that witnessed significant evolution and adaptation in response to the advent of mass education. A pioneering initiative in an era of widespread educational experimentation, Lough's Floating University offered a dynamic blend of academic study and experiential learning. Grounded in the educational philosophy of John Dewey and

the experimental psychology of William James, it offered university credits for several months of travel, championing an alternative pedagogical model that married classroom instruction and firsthand encounters with diverse global stopovers. The Floating University's curriculum, covering seventy-three different subjects, transformed an ocean-going vessel into a mobile classroom, weaving together formal coursework, shipboard experiences, and visits to scores of international sites. Adding depth to the academic scheme, an immersive "extracurriculum" featured an array of sporting activities, performance arts, dialogues with foreign dignitaries, academic engagements at local universities, and culturally informative guided tours of port cities.

Through a comprehensive examination of the students' journals, letters, and diaries, Pietsch argues that the journey fostered a deeper understanding of the United States' evolving global role, more than the originally intended "world-mindedness." The Floating University's voyage occurred against a backdrop of expanding US power. Pietsch carefully traces the military, commercial, and cultural geographies that intersected with the ship's route, highlighting how the comforting reach of US military presence shaped the students' experiences. Their exposure to new places and peoples was conditioned not just by their academic curriculum but also by underlying trade networks and formal and informal diplomatic channels that reflected the nation's growing commercial, cultural, and geopolitical role.

In her exploration, Pietsch scrutinizes the emergence of the United States' imperial position as it unfolded over the course of the journey. She examines shipboard debates, reading materials, and lectures on subjects such as US colonization in the Philippines, comparisons with British, Dutch, and Japanese colonial rule, and racial constructions of global order. However, she also highlights instances where alternate viewpoints pierced the dominant narrative, revealing underlying apprehensions about American cultural authority and political limits. These insights emerge, for example, when students, raised on the anti-colonial narratives of their own national history, struggled to reconcile their understanding of rebellion—such as the rising communist agitation in contemporary China—with their preconceived notions. This tension is further illustrated in the students' reactions to Mussolini's Italy, where conflicting attitudes toward fascist cultural politics revealed the complexities of their own worldviews. While some students were skeptical of Mussolini's leadership, others praised Italy's economic and physical condition under his rule, as reported in the ship's student newspaper.

Yet, this ambitious educational experiment soon found itself at odds with an opposing paradigm increasingly endorsed by US universities. These institutions, keen to solidify their roles as essential to the nation's political and economic development, saw how the innovative model championed by the Floating University might challenge their claims to be the primary authority in all matters of academic knowledge production. New York University, despite being the initial sponsor of the Floating University and a leader in integrating travel experiences with academic credit before World War I, withdrew from its overseas ventures by the mid-1920s. This retreat marked a shift in American educational thought, reinforcing the idea that credit should be conferred solely for classroom instruction delivered by approved university faculty. This shift, part of a broader debate over "knowledge" versus "ideology," signified a transition toward valuing academic expertise over direct experience. Other universities, as well as the media, gradually began to align themselves with NYU's stance, embracing the

notion that unconventional educational experiences were incompatible with rigorous academic work. This alignment also reflected a recognition of the challenge posed by the Floating University's push for embodied knowledge. A new consensus advanced the narrative that Lough's voyage, initially celebrated as a revolutionary experiment in "modern" education, was ultimately a failure. In the end, the remarkable story of the Floating University became, regrettably, overshadowed and largely forgotten in academic history.

Despite the perceived failure, Pietsch leverages alumni publications to trace the career trajectories of former students. Although she falls short of persuasively arguing that the Floating University had a transformative impact on their career choices, she raises an important question for historians of education: How can one appraise the significance and legacy of a short-lived institutional experiment, particularly one that was condemned as a failure by its contemporaries?

In her introduction, Pietsch candidly acknowledges the potential risk of overemphasizing the Floating University's influence in the grand narrative of knowledge authorization. Yet, her study remains both captivating and compelling. Her analysis of this unique journey in the history of education unveils the fluid nature of knowledge acquisition and validation. It challenges readers to reevaluate their own understanding of education, politics, and international history and, in the process, to question entrenched assumptions about the sources of knowledge legitimacy. While her focus lies primarily on the pedagogical aspect of Lough's adventure, her argument might have been even more persuasive if she had expanded her discussion to bring contemporary dialogue about scientific objectivity to bear on debates over the validity of culturally embedded or embodied knowledge.

Still, her work is a valuable contribution. Skillfully interweaving elements of higher education history, the history of science, international history, and US foreign relations, *The Floating University* is a pathbreaking work that will prove indispensable for historians of American higher education in relation to the growth of American empire and the (geo)politics of knowledge.

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Keith A. Mayes. *The Unteachables: Disability Rights and the Invention of Black Special Education*

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The Unteachables: Disability Rights and the Invention of Black Special Education by Keith A. Mayes adds considerably to the discussion about the history of special education