

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

in the United States. Mayes's research is provocative and centers on the assertion that major special education categories, including *intellectual disability*, *learning disability*, and *emotional behavioral disability*, were intended "to create categorical disability definitions that would apply only to white students" (5). These designations, Mayes argues, were necessary because of the advent of compulsory education laws in the early twentieth century that pushed previously excluded populations into American schools (p. 3). From these two assertions, Mayes examines the complex relationship between race and disability as it has manifested in the history of special education. Proceeding chronologically through the twentieth century, *The Unteachables* is divided into six chapters that trace the creation of and controversies surrounding special education designations and the social dynamics they upheld.

Mayes begins his study in the early 1900s by charting connections between conceptions of "mental retardation" and eugenics. Chapter 1 traces the advent of compulsory school laws and the sudden large numbers of African American children resulting from the Great Migration. He argues, "In the early 20th century schools explicitly correlated race with intellectual disability and suggested that higher rates of retardation with the presence of Black students in primary and middle grades" (28). This higher rate of intellectual disability was used as a justification for racial segregation. Educational psychology played a particularly important role in providing this justification as it "devoted much of its energy to mental capacity, measurement, and the differentiation of people" (p. 34). Educational psychologists became the justifiers of racial segregation through special education by developing and using "psychological tests that converted underachievement into a 'handicap'" (38).

Chapters 2 and 3 move into the 1950s and 1960s to investigate the influence of educational psychologists on special education, and specifically how they positioned intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities in such a way to distinguish White underachievers from Black underachievers, catering to the prejudices of lawmakers in order to secure political support and federal funding for special education. These new categories created "better" disability designations, as compared with mental retardation, that could be utilized for White children (66-67). Postwar disability rights advocacy groups composed of middle-class White parents could also argue for specialized classes for their children without questioning the midcentury racial hierarchy (pp. 85-86). Educational psychologists, such as Samuel Kirk (98-110, 133-136), created the legal definitions of special education by lobbying Congress on behalf of these families while excluding the needs, or input, of African American communities. This collection of White stakeholders then actively defended the definitions they had created, extending the exclusion of African American students from the better disability designations as long as possible.

Chapters 4 and 5 follow special education into the 1970s and 1980s to explore the agency of African American families and civil rights activists as they contested readily apparent racial discrepancies in the designations of learning disabilities, the *educable mentally retarded* label, and emotional/behavioral disabilities. African American stakeholders contested both the application of special education principles as they were utilized in schools and the origins of those principles. The founding of the Association of Black Psychologists in 1969 provided a pool of expertise through which special education principles could be contested academically, through research, and legally, through expert testimony in court (162-72). African American students were slowly

shifted from the designation of *educable mentally retarded* to *learning disabled* during this period (176-77). Mayes focuses a considerable portion of chapter 5 on the impact of education professor Eli M. Bower on the nascent field of emotional behavioral disturbance (EBD) research. Bower's definition of EBD, that the qualifying behavior of those with the disorder was "not a matter of choice but a matter of necessity," came to be widely accepted and "created a racialized special education category based on some of the most nebulous understandings of behavior in children" (206-7). The definition of EBD proved to be a perennial issue with committees and legislators attempting to wrestle with its ambiguities. The remainder of chapter 5 investigates how these racialized perceptions were contested in the context of the civil rights movement, and how the EBD designation was applied disproportionately to African American students.

Chapter 6 frames Mayes's use of DisCrit theory throughout *The Unteachables* and explores the implications of "unteachability" on special education in the twenty-first century (247, 250-52). He contends that "special education categories have become self-evident disabilities" that "exist as things in themselves," and that they are impervious to criticism because of the body of research and scientific nomenclature surrounding them (248-49). Special education designations now exist within a "behavioral industrial complex" created by psychiatrists that entraps African American students through the demonization of their behavior by teachers and schools (257-59). This demonization is directly reflected in the disproportionate rates of suspensions and the creation of special education as a racialized arena rather than a collection of federally mandated services (266-68).

Across the six chapters, Mayes questions the origins, intentions, efficacy, and morality of special education. He finds the field lacking in each of these respects and ultimately claims that "special education [has] served more as a political battlefield than a means of rehabilitation and learning" (256). This is a controversial claim that will no doubt be contested by at least a few of the hundreds of thousands of special educators and researchers who have dedicated their careers to their students' learning and the development of the discipline. In thinking about the balance between politics and learning, it is an unfortunate omission that the voices of teachers, particularly African American teachers, are seldom referenced in *The Unteachables*. Instead, teachers are presented as an unchanging White monolith, unresponsive to the needs of minoritized communities, and openly hostile to any student who is not White and middle class (96, 155, 218, 222-23). In his history, Mayes has painted with a pretty broad brush. Indeed, reading *The Unteachables*, it is difficult to determine whether any positive change occurred within special education over the twentieth century through the efforts of teachers, or whether there were any regional distinctions in how special education was practiced. Racism and discrimination are "baked" into special education nationwide and are seemingly constant across decades and thousands of school districts (4, 37-38, 247, 252).

The absence of the teachers' perspective is matched by *The Unteachables'* interpretive emphasis on the origins of policies rather than their implementation. Mayes does an admirable job examining the origins of specific education designations and interrogating them as legal and intellectual constructs. But the book spends significantly more time in the halls of Congress than in the halls of neighborhood schools, and is more concerned with the thoughts of educational psychologists than the classrooms of


special education teachers. This top-down approach has the effect of narrating a racial binary that arrays White middle-class advocates for students with disabilities against the African American community.

Ultimately, *The Unteachables* provides a forceful counternarrative to the celebration of special education as a seminal, if flawed and inequitable, achievement in the history of K-12 schooling. Mayes has added considerably to the dialogue about special education through this work. The material and controversies examined in each of the six chapters of *The Unteachables* have the potential to inspire multiple monographs. While Mayes engages this data primarily through critical theory, other methodologies could be easily applied to the tremendous amounts of quantitative and qualitative data that special education has produced since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act became federal law almost fifty years ago. *The Unteachables* closes with a quote from Burton Blatt: “In this field we call special education, history has not served us well. We have not learned from it” (278). Until we have more research that critically interrogates the practices, policies, and theoretical underpinnings of special education, there is a distressingly small amount of written history for special educators to learn from.

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## Daniel S. Moak. *From the New Deal to the War on Schools: Race, Inequality, and the Rise of the Punitive Education State*

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Historians have become increasingly interested in how and why the United States government’s oversight of K-12 schooling has expanded from the postwar era to the present day. Most accounts view the 1980s as a turning point: when politically conservative and neoliberal policymakers abandoned educational equality (that had been symbolized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, or ESEA) and instead prioritized academic standards and school accountability. Daniel S. Moak’s book, *From the New Deal to the War on Schools: Race, Inequality, and the Rise of the Punitive Education State*, tells a markedly different story. Its central concern is to describe and explain why a “liberal incorporationist order” prizing inclusion as a means for equality of educational opportunity has consistently dominated federal education policy since the mid-twentieth century. Most significantly, Moak proposes that “market incentives and punitive education policies” (p. 15) were natural outgrowths