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Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union

By Clarence Taylor



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Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union By Clarence Taylor

The New York City Teachers Union shares a deep history with the American left, having participated in some of its most explosive battles. Established in 1916, the union maintained an early, unofficial partnership with the American Communist Party, winning key union positions and advocating a number of Party goals. Clarence Taylor recounts this pivotal relationship and the backlash it created, as the union threw its support behind controversial policies and rights movements. Taylor's research reaffirms the party's close ties with the union—yet it also makes clear that the organization was anything but a puppet of Communist power.

Reds at the Blackboard showcases the rise of a unique type of unionism that would later dominate the organizational efforts behind civil rights, academic freedom, and the empowerment of blacks and Latinos. Through its affiliation with the Communist Party, the union pioneered what would later become social movement unionism, solidifying ties with labor groups, black and Latino parents, and civil rights organizations to acquire greater school and community resources. It also militantly fought to improve working conditions for teachers while championing broader social concerns. For the first time, Taylor reveals the union's early growth and the somewhat illegal attempts by the Board of Education to eradicate the group. He describes how the infamous Red Squad and other undercover agents worked with the board to bring down the union and how the union and its opponents wrestled with charges of anti-Semitism.



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Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union By Clarence Taylor Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1009761 in Books
- Published on: 2013-10-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.90" h x .90" w x 5.90" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

In his study, Clarence Taylor...explores the nature and extent of the Communist influence. Relying on thorough research and presenting much detail, he finds that the Teachers Union (TU) indeed adopted policies of the Communist Party, but without abandoning the interests of the teachers they led.

(Robert D. Parmet *History News Network*)

...offers a highly readable and engaging story of the rise of [the Teacher's Union] model, as well as the ferocious onslaught against it during the McCarthy era. It is a must-read...

(*Socialist Worker.org*)

Serious students of labor should read it.

(Steve Leberstein *Working USA*)

Review

Reds at the Blackboard, Clarence Taylor's superb history of the left-led New York City Teachers' Union (1916-1964), fills a void in the historical record of teacher unionism and education in the United States, providing important background on recurring controversies of curriculum, due process, academic freedom, testing, transfers, community involvement, civil rights, and the need for more Black and Latino teachers. This meticulously researched and insightful history of an important social justice union contributes significantly to our understanding of Civil Rights and left history, and it offers important background on the rise of the United Federation of Teachers and the 1968 New York City teacher strikes and community control struggles. It is a timely contribution to the current climate of growing economic depression, persistent racial disparities, war, educational crises, charter schools, and often fractured teacher union and community relations.

(Jeffrey B. Perry, author of *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*)

No other book to date has exposed the climate of fear and surveillance that overtook public schooling in New York City in the 1950s. This book succeeds in dramatically revising the image of the Teachers Union, a union with thousands of members and great influence in the largest city in the United States. This is an important story, and Clarence Taylor succeeds in excavating the TU from political ridicule and marginalization. A powerful and important book, with considerable significance to scholars and students in the disciplines of education and history.

(Martha Biondi, Northwestern University, author of *To Stand and Fight: the Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*)

About the Author

Clarence Taylor is professor of history and black and Latino studies at Baruch College and professor of history at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He has written or edited several books, including *The Black Churches of Brooklyn* and *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools*.

Users Review

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Jorge Hinkley:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the water world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One particular activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union, you can enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still wish to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

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