

Unshackled: Education for Freedom, Student Achievement, and Personal Emancipation

Greg Wiggan, Lakia Scott, Marcia Watson
and Richard Reynolds

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements | v |
| Introduction | ix |
| Chapter 1: The World Under Siege and the Railroad to Freedom: Unshackled | 1 |
| Chapter 2: Global and Local Resistance; Memories of the Motherland-Africa, Unshackled | 19 |
| Chapter 3: Journey to Freedom: From Miseducation and Colonization to Liberation | 37 |
| Chapter 4: To be Unshackled: The Rise and Fall of Tucson, Arizona's Ethnic Studies Program | 59 |
| Chapter 5: Nontraditional Models of Success: The Charter School Option | 71 |
| Chapter 6: Unshackled: School Reform and the Way Forward | 85 |
| References | 91 |
| About the Author | 101 |
| Index | 103 |

Exploring education as an instrument of social mobility and group liberation in historical and current contexts, the authors raise urgent questions about the promise of school choice that merit the attention of scholars, activist educators and parents. Lucid recommendations for anti-violence curricula for liberation and education policy reform follow this highly original investigation of how education can reverse the socio-psychological effects of domination in schools.

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Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair for Urban Teaching,
Learning and Leadership, Georgia State University

INTRODUCTION

Taking inspiration from the work of Harriet Tubman and Queen Nanny the Maroon of Jamaica, this book explores the historical and contemporary role that education has – and can continually play as an instrument of personal and group liberation. In chapters one and two, we discuss the early formations of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the enslavement of native populations, and the subsequent development of the Underground Railroad and Maroon societies in the Caribbean and Americas as systems of liberation. However, in the Emancipation period, many former-slaves were forced into post-slavery sharecropping, which was just as exploitative as slavery and colonialism, so education was viewed as a necessary component of their liberation, to be totally unshackled. After the physical aspect of slavery was eliminated, a more advanced psychological system of control was developed to ensure that the oppressed remained in servitude.

In chapter three, illuminating the theme of freedom and liberation, we investigate the development and maintenance of racial, gendered and class stratification, while explaining our personal paths to freedom as a context for a broader discussion on using education as a mechanism for dismantling the effects of colonization, miseducation, and social-psychological domination in schools and society. As contemporary examples of the struggle for access to education and liberation, in chapter four we present an in depth analysis of the Tucson Unified School District in Arizona, and the controversy surrounding its ethnic studies program as an example of one of the contested sites of curriculum development and student liberation. Additionally, in chapter five, although we do not endorse the charter school movement as such, we discuss high achieving charter schools as an alternative model of education, which may help to provide a systematic way of unshackling institutional barriers and oppression. Finally, chapter six concludes with implications regarding the treaties on education for freedom as a school reform and public policy topic. Ultimately, this book acknowledges that today the road to freedom is still one we must all travel as: miseducation, school failure, school dropout, unemployment/underemployment, poverty, neighborhood violence, incarceration, and a growing prison industrial complex are all reminders of the work that still must be accomplished. Like those who sacrificed their lives to gain freedom and an education, today, with these lingering effects of institutionalized systems of domination, education must continue to be an instrument of social mobility and liberation, if indeed, we are to make schools and society more humane and inclusive towards those who are still waiting to be unshackled.

