

**Beyond DEI and the Culture War: Liberal Technocracy, MAGA Authoritarianism, and
the Rentier Order in U.S. Schooling**

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Abstract

This article argues that the dominant conflict over schooling in the United States, often framed as a struggle between liberal inclusion and MAGA exclusion, conceals a deeper convergence. Liberal technocracy and MAGA authoritarianism appear opposed, yet both depoliticize education by displacing democratic struggle over power, property, and social reproduction. The article contends that liberal defenses of public schooling, DEI, expertise, and the Department of Education are inadequate when they preserve a technocratic order that has translated structural inequality into metrics, bias training, and administrative process. At the same time, MAGA's attacks on "race ideology" and "gender ideology," along with its support for vouchers, censorship, and religious privatization, are interpreted not merely as culture-war spectacle but as part of a broader political-economic project. Situating these developments within rentier capitalism, the article argues that schooling has increasingly been reorganized as an extractive infrastructure tied to property regimes, privatized platforms, and digital enclosure. Digital educational privatization, including platform-based instruction, data extraction, and AI-driven schooling, intensifies this transformation by converting students and teachers into immediate sources of value while insulating educational governance from democratic oversight. Against both liberal technocracy and MAGA hierarchy, the article calls for a democratic alternative that links redistribution to reconstruction through the decommodification of educational infrastructure, the reclamation of data and platforms as public goods, and the severing of school finance from racialized property markets.

Keywords

DEI; MAGA; rentier capitalism; digital educational privatization; educational inequality

Introduction: The False Choice in Educational Politics

The political right has launched a coordinated attack on educational institutions through defunding, privatization, censorship, parental trigger laws, teacher gags, curricular purges, union-busting, research funding cuts, and the dismantling of the Department of Education. The MAGA right simultaneously claims that schools are politicized and must be made “apolitical” while aggressively imposing far-right ideology. MAGA education politics advances white nationalism, religious fundamentalism, homophobia, xenophobia, and antifeminism under the banner of neutrality, using terms like “gender ideology” and “race ideology” to delegitimize liberal and left concerns with diversity, equity, and inclusion. It frames voucher-based privatization, religious schooling, authoritarian homeschooling, and parental consumerism as “freedom.”

Liberals respond by defending the legacy of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Department of Education, traditional public schooling, and professional expertise. Both sides accuse the other of politicizing education. This debate conceals a deeper reality: much of what liberals defend is indefensible, and much of what MAGA attacks deserves dismantling, but not for MAGA’s reasons. The crisis is not that the Right has politicized schooling. It is that liberalism has already depoliticized it, clearing the ground for authoritarian solutions compatible with contemporary rentier capitalism and its educational forms such as digital educational privatization.

This chapter makes two claims. First, resisting MAGA cannot mean restoring a liberal status quo that translated inequality into metrics, bias training, and administrative process while abandoning education as a site of democratic struggle. Defending education requires recognizing its inherently political nature and reconstructing institutions in egalitarian and democratic forms.

Second, MAGA's culture-war spectacles must be interpreted through their political economy. Leading MAGA strategists such as Rufo and Bannon openly acknowledge that focusing public attention on race, gender, and sexuality diverts scrutiny from an upwardly redistributive political agenda. (Brown, 2019; Slobodian, 2023) MAGA's hostility to democracy expresses the interests of a ruling bloc operating in an economy that accumulates profit through ownership and control rather than production. The democratization of institutions threaten this order by raising questions about redistribution, public control, and decommodification.

Once education politics is situated in this context, MAGA's de-democratization agenda no longer appears as mere cultural diversion. It emerges as a structural strategy for stabilizing a rentier order. Liberal technocracy, by denying the politics of education and translating inequality into technical problems, helps prepare the terrain for authoritarian capture.

Liberal Defenses of Indefensible Arrangements

MAGA attacks academic freedom, freedom of speech, democratic dispositions of dialogue and dissent, the authority of expert knowledge, equity programs, and universal public provision. It does so through curriculum censorship, book bans, teacher gags, parental trigger laws, research funding cuts, mass firings, voucher schemes, neo-voucher tax credits, charter expansion, and the defunding of civil-rights enforcement mechanisms within the Department of Education. MAGA frames "gender ideology" and "race ideology" as politicization while presenting the erasure of racial and gender oppression as neutrality and common sense. MAGA's rollback of affirmative action is part of the same ideological project, recasting a limited redistributive policy as "racial preference" while preserving property-based inequalities and insulating the reproduction of class hierarchy from deeper structural challenge.

Liberals rightly denounce this agenda. Yet they respond by defending arrangements that helped produce the current crisis. The dismantling of the Department of Education undermines civil-rights enforcement, but the department also presided over a technocratic system that privileged positivist metrics over both cultural politics and structural analysis. Federal research funding rewarded narrow empiricism and marginalized historical, critical, and political-economic inquiry into inequality. (Davies, 2014; Mirowski, 2013) Policymakers reframed racial injustice as test-score disparities, the “achievement gap,” rather than as a product of racialized class hierarchy. (Au, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006) Within this discourse, policymakers translate constitutive material and symbolic antagonisms into universalized epistemic norms to be enforced rather than into objects of critical analysis that could ground struggles to identify and address oppression.

This technocratic logic also structured school culture. Curriculum designers treated knowledge as neutral and universal, recast teachers as technical delivery agents, and reduced learning to the accumulation of measurable outcomes. Liberals replaced democratic judgment with management and political struggle with audit culture. Under this model, education ceased to function as a public sphere and became an infrastructure for administering and legitimating inequality.

Liberal race politics compounds this failure. DEI frameworks translate racial injustice into individual bias, representation, and inclusion while evading confrontation with power, property, and accumulation. (Brown, 2015; Fraser, 2019) This is most visible in the property-tax regime that finances U.S. public education. State governments reproduce racialized class stratification by tying school funding to segregated housing markets. Roughly 70% of school funding comes from local taxes, binding educational opportunity to intergenerational wealth and real-estate markets beyond

families' control. (Kozol, 1991; Lipman, 2011) This arrangement does not merely reflect inequality; it produces it.

By treating race as a matter of representation rather than domination embedded in political economy, liberal reform converts structural injustice into a managerial problem. It substitutes symbolic inclusion for material transformation and professional expertise for democratic struggle. MAGA did not invent the depoliticization of education. It exploits it.

Depoliticization as the Common Ground

Liberals depoliticize education by appealing to expertise, professionalism, and neutrality. Education policy reformers and curriculum developers present subject matter as disinterested knowledge produced by technical experts and delivered efficiently by trained professionals. This framing denies that schools are sites of political struggle and cultural antagonism. It also denies that knowledge emerges through conflictual social processes in which different groups possess unequal power to define meaning.

This depoliticization has concrete institutional effects. Liberals abandoned core democratic commitments when they embraced the standards and accountability movement, curriculum homogenization, and test-based reform. Under the banner of efficiency, they promoted charter schooling, teacher deskilling, and market competition. During the Obama administration, federal policymakers continued market reforms with intensive impositions of metrics while also promoting neoliberal post-race and post-ideology. They recoded inequality as a technical problem and treated poverty as an obstacle to individual performance rather than as a political condition requiring redistribution. (Apple, 2001; Au, 2016; Ball, 2003)

These policies reshaped pedagogy as well. Schools reduced learning to test preparation and behavior management. Teachers lost autonomy and were repositioned as compliance agents for

standards and content not of their making. This transformation displaced traditions of democratic education that treat teachers as socially transformative intellectuals and learning as dialogic struggle over meaning. (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988)

For MAGA, depoliticization takes a different form. MAGA imposes dogma, nationalism, hierarchy, and obedience on schooling. It asserts a single “true” perspective and rejects democratic dispositions of disagreement, debate, and dissent. By denouncing “race ideology” and “gender ideology,” MAGA launders its own political project as neutrality. It advances a program often summarized as the three F’s, “Faith, Family, and Freedom,” fusing white Christian nationalism with homophobic and transphobic campaigns and an aggressively marketized conception of economic liberty. (Brown, 2019)

MAGA uses voucher-based privatization to pursue this agenda. By shifting education from the public sphere to the private family, enabling publicly funded religious schooling, and opening public education budgets to private profiteers, MAGA replaces public democratic accountability with private market dependence. It does not depoliticize schooling. It reorganizes schooling along corporate and hierarchical lines of authority designed for maximal control and extraction.

Despite stark differences, liberal technocracy and MAGA authoritarianism converge in depoliticizing education. Both remove schooling from democratic struggle over power, resources, and social reproduction. To understand why this convergence persists, education politics must be situated within the broader political economy of rentier capitalism.

Rentier Capitalism as the Social Context

Over the last four decades, U.S. capitalism has shifted away from accumulation through production toward accumulation through ownership and control of money, land, infrastructure, digital platforms, and data. In rentier capitalism, the transnational capitalist class extracts profit by

controlling access to what others need rather than by producing goods or services themselves. As accumulation detaches from production, ownership loses legitimacy and the transnational capitalist class becomes more dependent on coercive control to preserve what now appears as arbitrary privilege. (Christophers, 2020; Robinson, 2020; Slobodian, 2023)

As William I. Robinson (2020) argues, the global crisis of accumulation has generated a turn toward what he calls the “global police state,” in which the transnational capitalist class increasingly relies on militarization, surveillance, repression, and authoritarian politics to stabilize a system that can no longer secure consent through economic inclusion or social mobility. In this context, MAGA’s nationalism does not represent a revolt against transnational capitalism but a hegemonic form through which it is politically reorganized and naturalized as common sense. What appears as a defense of national sovereignty, tradition, and cultural values functions as a camera obscura ideology: an inversion that masks transnational class domination behind the imagery of national patriotic renewal. Culture war displaces material antagonisms into symbolic conflicts over race, gender, religion, and belonging, redirecting popular resentment away from rentier extraction and toward racialized and sexualized others. MAGA thus fuses authoritarian nationalism with neoliberal privatization, mobilizing mass support for a project that deepens the power of the transnational capitalist class while presenting itself, in inverted form, as resistance to global elites. The authoritarian turn in schooling is not so much cultural diversion but a class strategy for governing a legitimacy crisis through coercion, enclosure, and ideological displacement.

For a rent-based economy, repression is not an aberration but a structural tendency. The expansion of militarized policing, mass incarceration, attacks on civil rights, and the erosion of journalism and education function as strategies for containing democratic challenge. In schooling,

this takes the form of not just police presence and prison-like environments, but booming industries in surveillance, repressive pedagogy, rigid discipline, and behaviorist affect-regulation programs that disproportionately target working-class and non-White youth.

At the same time, schooling has been reorganized as an extractive infrastructure. Longstanding industrial models that prepared students for future labor exploitation have given way to arrangements that treat students themselves as sites of immediate profit. Rather than deferring accumulation until students enter the workforce, contemporary schooling forces students to become uncompensated data producers and a direct basis for charter, voucher, and digital platform profits. Privatization schemes concentrate on working-class and racialized communities and impose rigid pedagogical models rooted in scientific management, behaviorism, and Taylorist efficiency. Schools remain among the few institutions that still bring people together on a mass scale and shape how authority, obligation, and collective life are understood. For a rentier order, this makes education both a danger and an opportunity: dangerous because democratic schooling can cultivate judgment and claims on the social surplus, and useful because schooling can be reorganized to normalize hierarchy, market dependence, and managerial authority.

Depoliticization resolves this tension by recasting education as a technical field rather than a political one. State agencies translate questions of power and inequality into questions of performance, evidence, and efficiency. Privatization carries this shift further by replacing public accountability with market and platform control. What had been a public institution oriented toward democratic formation is remade as a service infrastructure organized around access, compliance, and data extraction. Together, these changes mute democratic conflict while opening new sites for rent extraction.

This dynamic explains the strange shape of today's education politics. Liberal technocracy treats inequality as something to be managed through professionalized reform, metrics, and DEI frameworks that promise progress without challenging property and power. MAGA politics approaches the same terrain through resentment and moral discipline, recoding structural dispossession as national cultural decline. They appear opposed, yet both leave untouched the rentier foundations of schooling: property regimes, privatization strategies, and dependence on proprietary digital platforms.

State and local governments compel school participation while tying educational funding to property taxes, zoning rules, and mortgage finance systems that bind opportunity to real-estate markets beyond families' control. Austerity policies then pressure districts to outsource facilities, transportation, and instructional systems to private vendors, converting public necessity into private revenue. More recently, districts mandate proprietary digital platforms for attendance, assessment, curriculum, and behavior management, compelling students and teachers to generate data that corporations capture and monetize under long-term contracts with little public oversight or exit. (Sadowski, 2020; Selwyn, 2019; Williamson, 2017) Under these conditions, inequality is not a cultural failure or unintended side effect. It is the predictable outcome of asset-driven strategies that rely on compulsion, enclosure, and dependency to extract value from compulsory schooling.

Digital Educational Privatization as the New Form of the Rentier Order

Longstanding promises of liberal equality erode as technocratic reform fails to address racialized class inequality. As Stuart Hall (1980, 1996) argues, race is not an external add-on to political economy but a constitutive dimension of how power and social hierarchy are organized and legitimated. In this sense, inequality in schooling is not a policy failure to be corrected through

better management but a structured outcome of a hegemonic project that translates racial domination into administrative common sense. Liberal policymakers abandoned education as a public sphere in favor of infrastructure and disinterested process. Building on the standards and accountability movement, audit culture, and industrial efficiency, liberal reform opened the gates to digital platforms, data systems, and AI. Whereas standards and accountability replaced judgment with management and turned learning into test outcomes, contemporary digital platforms automate and deepen these logics, converting learning into data and presenting inequality as innovation tied to new technology. Under a guise of neutrality, platforms sort and track students while concealing the cultural politics embedded in software design and curriculum. (Benjamin, 2019) As Stuart Hall (1979, 1988) shows, hegemonic projects enter crisis when they can no longer secure consent through dominant common sense and must increasingly rely on technocratic or coercive forms of rule to stabilize inequality. (Hall, 1979, 1988) Ruha Benjamin (2019) shows how algorithmic systems do not merely reflect social bias but actively encode racial hierarchies into technical infrastructures, producing what she calls the “New Jim Code,” forms of automated governance that appear neutral while reproducing racial control. (Benjamin, 2019) In this sense, AI intensifies technocratic rule by shifting racial governance from public policy to privatized code. Digital privatization thus resolves liberal technocracy’s crisis, its failure to sustain political rule through the fiction of neutral administration, by converting depoliticized management into automated control compatible with authoritarian culture war.

Most K–12 uses of AI plug directly into preexisting platforms built on the assumptions of the standards and accountability movement. AI chatbots attach to adaptive learning systems that transmit prefab curriculum, and legacy publishers layer AI features onto their digital products. AI does not rupture technocratic schooling. It mechanizes and intensifies it, recoding political

decisions about knowledge, hierarchy, and inequality as technical progress and administrative necessity, a move that Stuart Hall would recognize as a hegemonic strategy for naturalizing domination. (Hall, 1996; Selwyn, 2023; Williamson & Eynon, 2020) What presents itself as neutral modernization becomes a political infrastructure for a more overtly authoritarian order.

This digital order converges with MAGA education politics. MAGA attacks the Department of Education as an instrument of the administrative state and defunds schools, districts, and states that refuse to eliminate DEI policies. It derides educational expertise as a liberal imposition and labels any curricular attention to inequality or historical oppression as “woke.” At the same time, MAGA expands vouchers, charters, cyber schools, and digital homeschooling. These measures do not depoliticize schooling. They restructure it along dogmatic, corporate and hierarchical lines of authority while opening public education budgets to private operators.

The rapid expansion of digital platforms and AI advances this agenda. Voucher-funded cyber charters and religious homeschooling operations rely on proprietary curriculum platforms that institutionalize authoritarian and Christian fundamentalist content. These developments are facilitated by national voucher expansion and by shifting control over education policy from the federal government to the states. Digital privatization provides the infrastructure through which MAGA’s cultural authoritarianism scales and insulates itself from democratic oversight.

At the same time, digital education completes the transformation of schooling into an extractive infrastructure. Attendance systems, assessment platforms, digital curricula, and behavior-management software compel students and teachers to generate data that businesses capture and monetize under long-term contracts with little public oversight or exit. (Means, 2018; Sadowski, 2020; Selwyn, 2019; Williamson, 2017; Zuboff, 2019) Students are no longer only prepared for future labor exploitation. Schools make them into immediate sources of value through

uncompensated data production. Digital education is not a pedagogical innovation. It is a new form of enclosure.

This logic is visible in for-profit AI schools that eliminate teachers and reorganize schooling around platform delivery and corporate culture training. These models offer two hours of automated academics paired with five hours of training in optimization, self-help, and social-media entrepreneurship. They eliminate the humanities and social sciences in favor of constant testing and behavioral management. What appears as innovation is a thorough remaking of schooling in the image of Silicon Valley management culture, stripping education of democratic and historical substance while maximizing data production and investor returns.

Race and Inequality Beyond MAGA and Liberalism

MAGA and liberal reform fail on racial inequality in opposite ways that converge in their effects. The Right denies inequality by naturalizing it, treating racialized outcomes as the product of culture, values, or individual effort while affirming hierarchy as a legitimate social order. Liberalism acknowledges inequality but contains it within a depoliticized framework of representation, bias training, and “achievement gaps,” translating domination into a problem of individual attitudes and outcomes to be managed. In both cases, inequality is either denied or administered but never confronted at its roots.

Liberalism highlights symbolic exclusion but offers cultural recognition that demands the abdication of cultural difference. It fails to link recognition to meaningful redistribution that would connect cultural transformation to material reorganization. Race appears as representation rather than as a relation of domination embedded in political economy. (Brown, 2015; Fraser, 2019)

A democratic alternative must link material reorganization to cultural transformation. This would require replacing the property-tax system of school funding and dismantling the racial

common sense that keeps it in place. It would also require reclaiming public infrastructure and educational technology as common goods rather than as racialized instruments of surveillance and extraction.

MAGA responds to inequality by promoting hierarchy. Liberalism responds by promoting technocracy. A democratic racial politics must reject both by centering collective self-rule through democratically enacted control over budgets, curricula, and technologies. Racial justice must be treated as institutional power and narrative authority, not as compliance rituals.

Structural Alternatives: Beyond Liberal Technocracy and MAGA Hierarchy

The rentier order in U.S. schooling, anchored in property-based wealth, privatized infrastructure, and platform dependence, has produced a political impasse. Liberal technocracy manages the fallout of this order without challenging its foundations, while MAGA authoritarianism attacks its most visible symbolic reforms while leaving its economic architecture intact. Both stabilize an arrangement in which inequality is not an aberration but a revenue model. (Brown, 2015; Fraser, 2019; Saltman, 2026)

If the crisis of U.S. schooling is not simply moral or cultural but institutional and economic, racial justice cannot be resolved at the level of symbolism or representation. It must be posed as a struggle over power and property: who owns educational infrastructure, who controls public resources, and who defines the purposes of schooling itself. The task is not to administer inequality more humanely but to dismantle the arrangements that produce it.

A democratic alternative must link redistribution to reconstruction, transforming institutional arrangements while dismantling the racial common sense that legitimates them. Nowhere is this clearer than in the property-tax system that finances U.S. public education. This arrangement hard-wires racial and class stratification into school funding, anchoring educational

opportunity to segregated housing markets and intergenerational wealth. (Kozol, 1991; Lipman, 2011; Rothstein, 2017) It does not merely reflect inequality; it produces it. Breaking the property-tax regime is not simply a fiscal reform. It is a political rupture with a racialized theory of deservedness that treats inequality as natural, local, and inevitable.

The same logic applies to educational infrastructure and technology. Platforms, data systems, and digital curricula have been folded into a privatized and extractive architecture that disproportionately targets poor and racialized schools. (Sadowski, 2020; Saltman, 2026; Selwyn, 2019; Williamson, 2017) These systems convert compulsory school activity into proprietary assets while channeling public funds into predictable revenue streams. Reclaiming them as shared public goods under democratic oversight is not a technical matter of procurement. It is a reassertion of collective ownership over the means of education itself.

Redistribution cannot be reduced to income transfers or targeted grants. It must include the decommodification of educational infrastructure, the socialization of data, and the dismantling of fiscal arrangements that tether public schooling to racialized property markets. Without such reconstruction, recognition politics remains a symbolic overlay on an unchanged system of extraction.

MAGA resolves inequality through hierarchy. It naturalizes domination by recoding stratification as the rightful outcome of tradition, authority, and merit. Liberalism resolves inequality through technocracy. It treats injustice as a problem of management to be optimized through metrics, audits, and expert administration. In both cases, democracy is displaced, either by open authoritarianism or by technocratic containment.

A democratic racial politics must reject both by centering collective self-rule. This means relocating authority over budgets, curricula, and technologies from insulated bureaucracies and

private contractors back into publicly accountable institutions. Racial justice is not a matter of compliance rituals or symbolic acknowledgments. It is a struggle over institutional power and narrative authority: who defines the purposes of education, who sets the terms of evaluation, and who owns the infrastructures through which learning now takes place.

MAGA organizes politics through exclusion. It constructs a racialized “people” by defining who does not belong. Liberalism organizes politics through inclusion without rupture, expanding representation while leaving intact the economic and institutional structures that generate dispossession. Both fragment struggle by severing identity from material relations of power.

An alternative must move from difference to solidarity without erasing difference. This does not mean subordinating racial justice to class politics or collapsing culture into economics. It means recognizing that contemporary exploitation is organized across linked systems of labor, housing, and digital infrastructure. Students, teachers, tenants, and platform users are increasingly enmeshed in the same asset economy that extracts value from their activity while denying them control over the conditions of their lives. (Harvey, 2005; Saltman, 2026; Slobodian, 2023)

Building solidarity on this basis reframes racial justice as a collective struggle over shared structures rather than a competition over symbolic recognition. It links school funding to housing policy, digital surveillance to labor precarity, and educational privatization to the broader enclosure of public goods. This solidarity-based politics does not dissolve racial difference into class reductionism. It situates difference within a common antagonism toward a rentier order that governs through fragmentation, scarcity, and technocratic containment.

Structural alternatives shift from managing inequality to contesting its foundations, from administering diversity to democratizing power, and from symbolic inclusion to material transformation. Against both MAGA authoritarianism and liberal technocracy, radically

democratic alternatives reassert education as a site of democratic struggle over the organization of social life itself.

A democratic break with the rentier order would require federalizing school finance to sever education from racialized property markets; treating educational data and platforms as public infrastructure governed through democratic oversight rather than corporate contracts; and reasserting public authority over curriculum, procurement, and assessment against venture-backed enclosure. These moves reclaim education as a collectively governed social good rather than an asset class for extraction. These alternatives clarify what is at stake in the struggle between liberal technocracy and MAGA authoritarianism: not merely competing cultural visions, but rival strategies for stabilizing a rentier order that has hollowed out democratic governance. The choice is not between inclusion and exclusion, expertise and hierarchy, or diversity and tradition. It is between administering inequality and contesting its foundations.

Conclusion: Defending Education by Reclaiming Its Politics

The struggle over education today is falsely framed as a battle between liberal inclusion and MAGA exclusion, between expertise and hierarchy, between diversity and tradition. This opposition conceals a deeper convergence. Liberal technocracy and MAGA authoritarianism do not represent rival futures for democratic education. They represent competing strategies for stabilizing a rentier order that has hollowed out democratic governance and reorganized schooling as an extractive infrastructure. The real choice is not between liberalism and the Right. It is between administering inequality and contesting its foundations.

MAGA's attacks on DEI, academic freedom, and public education are not aberrations from contemporary capitalism but one expression of it. In an economy organized around ownership, enclosure, and passive income, democratic institutions pose a structural threat. Public deliberation

raises questions about redistribution, public control, and decommodification – questions that contain the possibility of being galvanized into collective action. Education becomes both a danger and an opportunity for a rent-based order seeking stabilization. MAGA responds through repression, hierarchy, and moral discipline, laundering domination as tradition and inequality as deservedness.

Liberal technocracy responds differently but no less destructively to the same crisis. It translates political conflicts into technical problems, recoding inequality as performance gaps, bias training, and procedural fairness. By substituting metrics for power and management for democracy, it depoliticizes schooling and insulates the institutional foundations of inequality from contestation. This depoliticization has not protected public education from privatization or authoritarianism. It has prepared the ground for both. The quiet collapse of the Trump-backed legal challenge to federal DEI guidance while this chapter was being completed should not be read as a democratic reversal, but as a revealing instance of liberal governance managing authoritarian pressure through tactical retreat while leaving the underlying structures of inequality and privatization untouched.

Digital educational privatization marks the institutional form of this rentier order. Platforms, data systems, and AI are not neutral tools layered onto an intact public system. They are the mechanisms through which schooling is reorganized into an extractive infrastructure. Attendance software, digital curricula, adaptive learning systems, and behavior platforms compel students and teachers to generate data that firms capture and monetize under long-term contracts beyond meaningful public oversight. Students are no longer only prepared for future labor exploitation. Schools make them into immediate sources of value through uncompensated data production. What appears as innovation is a new mode of enclosure.

This digital order converges with MAGA's education politics rather than contradicting it. Voucher-funded cyber charters, religious homeschooling operations, and AI-only schools rely on proprietary platforms that embed authoritarian content while stripping education of democratic and historical substance. Here, de-democratization takes the form not only of overt repression but of infrastructural redesign: replacing public authority with digital platform control and treating students as both labor inputs and revenue streams.

Race sits at the center of this order. MAGA denies racial inequality as injustice by naturalizing it. Liberalism acknowledges inequality but contains it within a depoliticized framework of representation, bias training, and achievement gaps. In both cases, inequality is either denied or administered but never confronted at its roots. Nowhere is this clearer than in the property-tax system that finances U.S. public education, which hard-wires racial and class stratification into school funding while treating this arrangement as natural and inevitable.

Defending education cannot mean restoring a liberal status quo that helped make authoritarian capture possible. Nor can it mean retreating into a nostalgic vision of public schooling that ignores its own history of technocratic depoliticization. What is required is a democratic break with the rentier order itself. Such a break begins by refusing the false choice between liberal technocracy and MAGA hierarchy. It requires linking redistribution to reconstruction, transforming institutional arrangements while dismantling the racial common sense that legitimates them. It means severing education from racialized property markets, reclaiming data and platforms as public infrastructure, and reasserting public authority over curriculum, procurement, and assessment against venture-backed enclosure.

What is at stake in the struggle over education today is not merely a dispute over curriculum or identity politics. It is a struggle over whether schooling will remain a space where inequality

can be contested or become an infrastructure designed to manage it. The defense of education and the defense of democracy cannot be separated because they now confront the same adversary: a rentier order that governs through enclosure, fragmentation, and depoliticized administration. To insist on the politics of education is not to inject ideology into a neutral institution. It is to name the ideology that already governs it and to refuse the fiction that schooling can be insulated from struggles over power, property, and social reproduction. The task is to reclaim education as a central site of democratic struggle over the future of social life itself.

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