

1814 created a framework for locally supported common schools—under the auspices of a Republican state superintendent, not the Federalist Regents.

The final twenty pages of this history range widely and unsystematically over several decades of the “first era of school reform,” including state adoption of school laws, some initiatives in higher education, and race and gender issues. Academies are again the focus in the 1830s when the spread of common schools created a dire need for teachers. New York and Pennsylvania, among others, provided targeted subsidies to academies to educate teachers (prior to the creation of normal schools). Common schooling became universal in this “first era,” at least in the North, and so did the possibility for merit-based educational advancement, at least for White males. However, these developments are far too large a subject to treat meaningfully in such a cursory fashion.

Aristocratic Education draws upon a great deal of historical material—the bibliography is forty pages, following forty pages of endnotes. But coverage of crucial aspects of this phenomenon is entirely lacking. For a thesis based on social distinction, there is no discussion of the social structure of the early United States—an agrarian society with huge geographical differences. The elites, whose motives are systematically disparaged, are never defined. Collegiate education is another lacuna—a gap between the alleged role of academies and the attainment of social status. The colleges were not the only path to social status, but they were more proximate than academies. Further, the insistence on the aristocratic character of academies contradicts the consensus view (p. 208n85; p. 225nn108-9 and p.225n117) without presenting contrary evidence. The only acknowledgment of the curricular diversity and mixed clientele of academies is the single sentence about middling students quoted above. Any description of the internal life of academies—the nature of their education—is absent. This volume presents material on the political colorations of academies, contemporary arguments, and unsubstantiated allegations of their intended purpose, but it reveals little of their primary mission.

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L. M. Vincent. *A Theft of Privilege: Harvard and the Buried History of a Notorious Secret Society*

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In *A Theft of Privilege*, L. M. Vincent tells the tale of Benjamin Joy, a Harvard elite upper-class student, in a somewhat amused tone, which parallels the tone of the book’s subject, the notorious secret society known as the Medical Faculty Society.

The incident that starts the unraveling of this Harvard secret society happens in 1905. While unremarkable compared to previous stunts the society had waged, this particular stunt was remarkable in that one of the members was caught in the act. The period under consideration, the oft-named Gilded Age spanning from 1885 to 1910, along with the location and people involved all speak to privilege and its far-reaching tentacles within a socially stratified Harvard.

Established in 1818, the infamous Medical Faculty Society, or Med. Fac., was a Harvard secret society renowned for a long-standing tradition of pranks, stunts, vandalism, and criminal transgressions. It was founded by the president and vice-president of the Harvard Class of 1820, who were inspired by a minor prank that so amused them and their friends they decided to create a society to sustain that sense of amusement. New members were subjected to hazing and all manners of ridiculousness in keeping with the society's founding purpose. Vincent clarifies the medical terminology of the society—both in its name and custom for members to refer to themselves as 'doctors'. According to their interpretation of medicine, their society created a healthy diversion for the mind. In essence, they were teachers of recreational pursuits—pranks, stunts, and absurdity. But what started as juvenile pranks and stunts took on a more nefarious nature, and the Harvard president banned the society in 1834. It re-emerged in 1851 and persisted into the twentieth century.

On May 21, 1905, several Med. Fac. members attempted to steal a bronze plaque, created in honor of Reverend Phillips Brooks. The plaque was being housed in the Brooks House parlor on the Harvard campus until it was to be presented to the Virginia Theological Seminary on May 30, 1905. Cambridge police captured and arrested Joy, a society member, who was then held in jail for a night with a charge of breaking and entering and larceny. His bail was set at \$1500. It was certainly not the first arrest of a Med. Fac. member. William Hathaway Forbes was arrested in 1860 for stealing a bible, which was a long-standing Harvard-Yale prank. For example, the strategy entailed stealing a Harvard bible, then breaking and entering into a Yale chapel to replace their bible with the stolen Harvard bible, and finally placing the Yale bible in the Harvard chapel. This required not one but three break-ins—the first time for acquisition, the second time for transfer, and the final time for replacement. (In a previous bible-swapping incident, one of the chapels had also been vandalized and desecrated, which had prompted the president to enlist Cambridge police to serve as a deterrent to further pranks and stunts.) Forbes had injured the police officer on duty, and was subsequently charged with assault with a deadly weapon. As compensation for pain and suffering, Forbes's father, the richest man in New England at the time, compensated the injured officer with a large sum of money. In keeping with their prevailing attitudes against administration using police to enforce disciplinary actions for the institution, the students supported their fellow classmate. The faculty voted to expel Forbes, yet he received his degree from Harvard in 1872 and resumed his place as a graduating member of Harvard's Class of 1861. It is unclear as to why eleven years separated his expulsion and subsequent conferral of degree.

Harvard at this time was socially stratified, consisting of the aristocratic, middle, and laboring classes. To belong to the upper social set at Harvard, students had to attend the right kind of preparatory school, live in one of the luxurious private

dormitories, and belong to an exclusive college club, none of which was achieved without substantial family wealth and connections. Benjamin Joy, the protagonist in this particular story, met all these criteria.

The author gives abundant back-story about the administrators at the time and their struggle to deal with the incident. The dean devised a complex strategy with multiple players, including Joy, to reach an agreement to disband the Med. Fac. One of the terms of the agreement was for the Med. Fac. to submit their records and return any stolen property. After the local newspapers announced the agreement, a power struggle erupted between the students, faculty, alumni, and the administration that played out in the press. There were many issues at play, the most important of course was the inequity between students and the underlying privilege of the wealthier ones. Those who opposed the dean's agreement argued that the attempted theft was a crime, and that a less privileged student would not have received the same treatment.

After Joy was released from jail, Harvard had to determine whether he would be dismissed or expelled from the college. This appeared before the faculty for a vote, and they decided to turn the case over to the administration, which consisted of the president, dean of faculty, and dean of Harvard College. According to the policy and procedures of the time, this meant that dismissal and expulsion was no longer a threat for Joy. On June 5, 1905 the Harvard Corporation, consisting of the president and fellows of the college, appointed assistant dean, Edgar Wells. Interestingly, Wells was the only administrator and faculty person in the college who once was a Med. Fac. Member and had been a member of the social set when he was a student. Vincent implies that this appointment was more than a coincidence based on timing and association. The two main remaining issues were how to deal with Joy and the disbandment of the Med. Fac. For disbandment to occur, current Med. Fac. undergraduates and Med. Fac. alumni needed to be in complete consensus, which was prevented by several factors, mostly due to alumni members. One was the fact that the society was a secret organization, which meant that the former and current members were not publicly known. People speculated about who were members, but could not confirm their hunches. The dean and the assistant dean worked to secure signatures from former Med. Fac. members to disband the group, but the thorny issue was the society's meticulous maintenance of its records over the years. As one can imagine, prominent members of society would not want an account of their youthful misdeeds to be in the hands of just anyone. This was yet another instance of privilege and power asserting themselves.

The final verdict in the civil case against Joy was "no bill." The civil charges against him were dropped, which left the case of Joy in the hands of Harvard administrators. Before Harvard administrators made their decision, Joy voluntarily resigned from Harvard in an undated letter addressed to the Dean, and the Med. Fac. did not turn over anything—no records and no previously stolen artifacts. Two years after the incident, Benjamin Joy received his Harvard degree. This was no small feat for the players supporting him, which begs the question whether this would have happened had he been from a different Harvard social set. Many years after the incident, the remaining Med. Fac. alumni decided to distribute the records and artifacts, but were sidetracked by World War I. Finally, in 1937 the Med. Fac. records and


remaining property were turned over to a Harvard history professor with the stipulation that the records would remain sealed until 2000.

The author succeeds in writing an entertaining and interesting story regarding a higher education piece of history easily presented for public consumption and scholarship alike. The narrative is meticulously researched, documented, and well written. The author describes a rich history of privilege at one of America's oldest institutions of higher education. The book is enjoyable to read and provides a comprehensive account about the making and breaking of a centuries-old secret society, and it provides historical perspective regarding the role of power and prestige in elite higher education in the US.

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Leanne Kang. *Dismantled: The Breakup of an Urban School System, Detroit, 1980–2016*

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Leanne Kang, a former doctoral student of Jeffrey Mirel, positions her new book *Dismantled: The Breakup of an Urban School System, Detroit, 1980–2016* as the sequel to his *Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907–1981* (1993) because it examines what happened to Detroit Public Schools (DPS) after 1980. She argues a “market regime,” composed of state legislators, philanthropists, and educational foundations, coalesced to upend school board governance in the city to establish a new era of governance that relied on the market, rather than locally elected leaders. Using previous scholarly research, newspaper reporting, and various documents from government agencies and conservative think tanks, Kang makes a compelling case for how state and private actors outside Detroit “dismantled” DPS and established a market system of education that some have labeled the “Wild West” of school reform.

In the two chapters following the introduction, Kang describes the fault lines fashioned in Detroit's school board regime during the Progressive Era and the board's “decline” in the late 1980s. She provides a brief overview of the establishment of professionalized school boards in the early twentieth century and how this more hierarchical system, indifferent and hostile to Black Detroiters, deepened inequality. Kang sees Black Detroiters' efforts to desegregate the city's schools and secure community control as efforts to upend school board governance. The political backlash to these efforts, the swelling of Detroit's suburbs, and the Supreme Court's preservation of the urban-suburban divide in its *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) ruling imperiled DPS's