

to my mind, preferable to the often-polemical exchanges and intensely politicized debate that passed for historical discussion in the grad seminars and conferences I attended. Indeed, I am not at all certain that the often-acrimonious exchanges in which other historians were engaged have done much to advance our understanding of the past or its potential uses today. This might be the most important lesson to learn from Forbes' memoir: historians can and should approach their craft in a different way, timely words, particularly for those of us on the left.

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**John P. Spencer, *In the Crossfire: Marcus Foster and the Troubled History of American School Reform* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).**

If Marcus Foster is remembered at all today, it is as the Oakland, CA, school superintendent who was assassinated in 1973 by crackpot revolutionaries calling themselves the Symbionese Liberation Army, who later achieved even greater notoriety by kidnapping newspaper heiress Patty Hearst. They murdered Foster because they mistakenly believed he was planning to put police officers in the city's schools.

John P. Spencer, associate professor of education at Ursinus College, finds much more worth remembering in Foster's story:

Though Marcus Foster's murder in a crossfire of bullets was indeed extreme, it is, in some ways, symbolic of a larger political and ideological crossfire over how to effectively explain and respond to the 'urban crisis' and, in particular, the persistent problems of urban schools that serve African American students (4).

Foster's relatively brief career (he was only 50 when he died) represents to Spencer a road not taken in American school reform in the 1960s and ever since, "a kind of alternative" to the confrontational narrative that runs from the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville standoff to the debates over No Child Left Behind. Spencer candidly states that he "draws on history to make an argument about school reform debates in the present" (8-9).

To his credit, Spencer does not merely paint the past as the present writ small, but displays commendable historical-mindedness. He situates Foster within what has come to be known as the "long civil rights movement," beginning well before the 1960s, and follows an interpretive trail blazed by Thomas Sugrue, Matthew Countryman, Robert Self, and others.

Born in Athens, GA, Foster grew up in South Philadelphia, the youngest of five children, whose parents separated when Marcus was very

young. His mother “exemplified a history of African American striving to excel in education”: Marcus was an outstanding student (11). He got another education in the streets, wearing a zoot suit and belonging to a gang. Spencer argues persuasively that this double-tracked upbringing served him well later. At Cheyney State Teachers College, led by Leslie Pinckney Hill, he got another injection of inspiration about the transforming power of education.

Starting out as a teacher, Foster became principal of Dunbar Elementary School in North Philadelphia in 1958. Charismatic, articulate, and tireless, he caught the eye of Ford Foundation researchers who made his school part of a pilot project in “compensatory education,” a program that was controversial from the start. Critics damned it as condescending and racist (Spencer quotes Ralph Ellison: “There is no such thing as a culturally deprived kid”) (85), but Foster saw it as, in Spencer’s words, “first and foremost a means of improving academic achievement” (90). He had “a conservative streak on issues of cultural identity” (86), Spencer says, and never abandoned his conviction that African American students would be served best by learning Standard English. As he told students years later, “You don’t have to have middle class values, but you do have to have middle class skills” (158). He would have had no use for *Ebonics*.

Foster’s effectiveness at Dunbar led to similar assignments at Catto Disciplinary School (1963-1966) and then Simon Gratz High School (1966-1969). In each one he further refined his stress on what he called “total school community,” involving parents, businessmen, and the community at large, as well as students, teachers, and administrators. At each school, improvements were both tangible (better attendance, more college admissions) and intangible (substantially higher morale). Foster was everywhere, pushing buttons and pulling levers: Spencer quotes a reporter’s description of Foster as “equally at home swapping ‘freedom handshakes’ with teenage black militants and exchanging scholarly quips with those who understand them” (137).

Foster adapted resourcefully to the cross-currents of social and cultural change created by black militancy and white reaction in the late 1960s. But while tenaciously adhering to his middle way, he paid a heavy personal price, including apparent heart and alcohol-related problems and family tensions. Still, he couldn’t resist a challenge: in 1970 he accepted Oakland’s offer to become superintendent, and in his all-too-brief tenure there continued to walk the line between liberalism and radicalism, refusing to be straitjacketed by ideology. Then, on 6 November 1973, it was all over.

Spencer, despite his “deep admiration” for his subject, hardly claims that Foster himself could have changed the course of educational history (304). Instead, his valuable and well-written (albeit repetitive) book portrays Foster as exemplifying the kind of pragmatic, multi-faceted leadership needed to bring meaningful reform to urban schools, a precursor to the approaches taken today

by leaders of the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and the Harlem Children's Zone. Today, more than ever, Spencer says, we need to realize that schools cannot improve themselves by themselves, and that teachers and administrators alone cannot guarantee equal opportunity. We need to recognize, as Foster did, the importance of the "total school community."

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**Rychetta Watkins, *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).**

Rychetta Watkins' *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities* offers a cultural history of African American and Asian American "indigenization" of anti-colonial politics from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Taking seriously the paradigm of "power," Watkins examines the politics of self-determination and self-representation among racialized groups in the U.S. as they evoked and interpreted global decolonizing movements in the aftermath of Bandung. *Black Power, Yellow Power* begins with a chapter on how African and Asian American activists interpreted Franz Fanon's writings. It then highlights the importance of the "guerilla" figure in defining the political, intellectual, and cultural subjectivities of black and Asian American activists, academics, and cultural producers. Seeking to contribute to an emerging field of Afro Asian studies, Watkins examines how African and Asian political influences and writings inspired the imagination and shaped the subjectivity of African Americans and Asian Americans. In some instances, Watkins also examines how these racialized groups politically inspired one another, although this mentorship mainly flowed from African American instructors to Asian American political pupils.

Watkins is a literary and cultural studies scholar who is interested in the historical emergence and transmission of political ideas and subjectivities. Her study raises intriguing interpretations and unearths important cross-racial and transnational connections. However, not all of the claims in the book are thoroughly developed, and the decision to focus on particular time periods, topics, sources, and writers, is not always substantiated.

For example, Watkins posits the period of the mid-to-late 1960s to the early 1980s as an era of power politics. This chronology is only briefly defined and justified. The period begins with Stokely Carmichael's use of the phrase "black power," and it ends with Elaine Brown stepping down as chair of the Black Panther Party. I appreciate Watkins' efforts to conceptualize a "long" black power political movement, but I wanted more evidence as to why this time period should be treated as a cohesive era. Aside from the publication dates of the works that Watkins is analyzing, what political developments were occurring to