

## Epilogue

The resurgence of militancy that ignited in West Virginia in 2018 spread rapidly across several other states. One week after West Virginia education workers struck, adjunct faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University struck as well, winning a twenty-five percent pay increase for adjunct instructors. Both Oklahoma and Kentucky educators struck on the same day, April 2, and by the end of the month, educators in Arizona and Colorado also struck along with bus drivers in Dekalb County, Georgia. In 2018, at least thirteen additional strikes by graduate students, contingent faculty, and non-academic employees occurred at universities across the country, more than any year prior in recent history (Herbert and Apkarian). The following year, in 2019, massive strikes by educators in Los Angeles, Oakland, Chicago, and Denver continued the Red for Ed revolt, in addition to another two-day strike in West Virginia and periodic sickouts in Kentucky.

In one way, the two years show similarities in the demands and victories made by education workers. Decades of austerity had cut public employees' pensions and benefits. Salaries for educators had become stagnant while funding for public education remained low. In 2018, West Virginia's education workers won a five percent pay increase for all public employees in the state, a freeze to any changes in their health insurance increases, and a year later, temporarily defeated a charter school bill from becoming law. Kentucky's educators managed to draw attention to the pension changes in the dreaded Sewer Bill and apply enough pressure to legally challenge, and then overturn, it. Oklahoma educators won significant wage and funding increases, even if far below their initial aims. Arizona educators won a nineteen percent pay raise for educators and laid the groundwork for the passage of a bill that increased education funding in the state by hundreds of millions of dollars two years later.

In another way, however, the strikes' differences between 2018 and 2019 were contingent upon a variety of factors. Central Appalachia's demographic characteristics and the relationship between lawmakers, union officials, and rank-and-file educators made the strikes and their aftermath in Kentucky and West Virginia quite different. West Virginia's rank-and-file formed a progressive caucus, WV United, dedicated to continued grassroots organizing, oftentimes in opposition to their state or local union leadership. The 2018 wildcat action created tensions between union leaders and the rank-and-file, contributing to WV United's commitment to independence from electoralism and old guard union leaders. Kentucky, however, was split between Black educators and their allies in Jefferson County, their unions, and the statewide organization KY 120. While many Jefferson County educators sought to push for a community-based social movement unionism, predominantly White leaders of the statewide groups sought, more often, to shut down discussions of demands and tactics they feared might alienate

the state's rural and predominantly White educators and residents. Their desire to return to a pre-Governor Bevin era meant that educator-organizers focused their energy on electing supportive political candidates rather than organizing independently of them. The relationship that became established between the state's union leaders and the new leaders of KY 120 hindered the development of an autonomous rank-and-file-led statewide caucus or organization.

In Oklahoma, the 2018 walkouts had been building in momentum since at least a year prior, stalled by hesitant state union leadership. Like most other state-level unions in each state, the OEA participated in and supported the rank-and-file-mobilized effort after it became clear walkouts were inevitable. While the threat of the strike forced the state legislature to partially concede to educators' demands, the OEA's surreptitious directive to educators to go back to work before any additional gains could be made, in collaboration with legislators and superintendents, created deep antagonisms that led many educators to leave the union. The rank-and-file statewide, predominantly online, groups tended to be led or moderated by only a few louder voices. Educators have had little recourse or movement to continue to advance their aims or halt retaliatory legislation at the state level, at least. Alternatively, learning from the experiences of previous states, Arizona educators' formation of an aspirationally democratic, rank-and-file-led statewide organization tipped the balance of power in their collaboration with their state union. The infrastructure of their organization enabled their continued efforts to increase funding for public education and inspired similar statewide organizations in other states. Even so, in the aftermath of 2018, AEU organizers contended with demobilization and tensions between electoral strategies and direct-action approaches.

## ● What the Red State Educator Organizing Can Teach Us

Throughout the book, we have aimed to illuminate the significance of and intertwinement of horizontalism and union democracy, rank-and-file power, and community-based educator organizing that is attentive to the ways in which educators' working conditions are necessarily shaped by racial, heteropatriarchal, and settler colonialist capitalism (Weiner, "Education Reforms and Capitalism"). While these latter terms may feel abstract, we have tried to show, through tracing longer histories of educator organizing and educator unions, these forces are tangible even if differently experienced in each situated place.

During the red state strikes and beyond, so many folks undertook extraordinary actions in defense of their fellow workers and the common good. Many rank-and-file educators in West Virginia, Arizona, Oklahoma, and Kentucky were able to take on significant roles in their movements because many of them had long-haul roots in social and labor movements: Rebecca Garelli's experience in the 2012 CTU Strike, Jay O'Neal's labor organizing, Stephanie Price's racial

justice work with her local union's racial and ethnic minority caucus, Kristy Self's LGBTQ+ organizing and advocacy efforts, Petia Edison's long time efforts to fight for Black youth in and beyond her union, to name just a few (also see Dyke and Muckian-Bates). Many educators were directly plugged into the work of grassroots organizing in their workplaces and within the broader community for years prior to their statewide strikes, whether in their local unions, community organizations, or in social movement organizations. The strikes in and of themselves produced notable gains, but most importantly, they provided outlets for educators to connect with one another around shared grievances and continue the work they had been doing, although this time in a more concerted and direct way. Their efforts to continue this work after the strike wave deepened and strengthened their relationships, connecting them to similarly oriented educators across the country. They began coordinating efforts to refuse to return to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, with local, national, and international communication networks in place from the previous round of walkouts.

The usefulness and challenges of digital organizing offers one important lesson from the strikes. In their study of West Virginia educators' use of social media, Crystal Howell and Caleb Schmitzer found that the secret statewide Facebook group created an important space of information-sharing, empowerment, solidarity, and connected members to the wider labor movement in important ways. However, they write, the social media group, unlike the later-developed WV United caucus, was not a formal democratic organization in and of itself. In some places, social media groups with tens or hundreds of thousands of members may have felt to many in the moment like a strong show of rank-and-file power, the power of these groups was precarious without democratic structures and relationships simultaneously in place. Administrators of the groups, as with KY 120 and JCPS teachers in Kentucky, could unilaterally remove posters who they felt were divisive for seeking demands that centered racial and social justice. In Oklahoma, most educators who organized actions and activities in their local districts found Alberto Morejon's sole-moderated TTN limited in its usefulness and Morejon prone to disapproving posts he did not like. AEU organizers reflected that their liaison and communication network across the state of Arizona were critical to the success of their organizing.

Second, in each state, the strikes came to fruition after rank-and-file educators galvanized their hesitant state unions to direct action. In the book, we've drawn on labor and educator union history to illuminate how labor law acts to manage peace between workers and management from early labor law to recent right-to-work legislation, and labor-electoral coalitions have presented challenges for rank-and-file militancy and power. Business or service unionism predominates most educator unions, and rank-and-file efforts to democratize and transform their unions have faced significant challenges (Hagopian and Green; Stark).

One major way rank-and-file educator organizations have aimed to address the intransigency of business unionism and the narrowed electoral strategy is through rank-and-file organizing. The term "organizing" pervades labor

movement writing yet it is often used in ways that tend to presume the transparency and clarity of its meaning. The truth is, it has no singular meaning in and of itself, and must be understood as a practice within the ideological context of its use. Our ideological orientation is firmly rooted within the traditions of solidarity and social movement unionisms.

Most educators know all too well the pitfalls of externally imposed standardized curriculum in the classroom. Just so, there is no standardized set of steps for organizing that educators can follow to ensure success. As in teaching and learning, organizing for rank-and-file-led union democracy and social justice is premised on the strength of relationships among organizers (and potential organizers), attention to differences in power and vulnerability in organizational structures and interpersonal practice, and the embrace of discomfort as people are challenged by one another to think and act in new ways that might challenge previously held understandings. Anyone can become an organizer (as so many did during the 2018 strikes and beyond). Yet, like teaching, organizing skills and knowledge are earned from practice, experience, and reflective study.

Maton and Stark write of the need to understand the centrality of political education for educator organizing in social justice caucuses.

Political education activities are integrated throughout the work of many unions and grassroots organizations (e.g., Bocking, 2020; Foley, 1999; Riley, 2021; Taylor, 2001). Such activities have been found to serve a range of purposes, including: attracting and retaining members (e.g., Foley, 1999), fostering new and deepened connections among people and ideas (e.g., Chovanec, 2009; Maton, 2016a; Riley, 2021), strengthening the reflexive organizing capabilities of learners (e.g., Freire, 2004), and contributing to the design of more resilient and responsive activist organizations (e.g., Chovanec, 2009; Maton, 2018; Stark, 2019; Tarlau, 2014). As such, political education is fundamental to the daily operations and longevity of grassroots movements pushing for social and economic change. (3)

In their study of social justice caucuses across the US, Maton and Stark created a typology of political education that is useful for making visible the work of developing and sustaining strong rank-and-file organizations:

We find that political education takes five main forms in teachers' grassroots social justice caucuses—structured, situational, mobilized, relational and networked forms. *Structured political education* involves participation in intentionally-designed and -created activities with an explicit agenda of political education. *Situational political education* is comprised of contextually-situated personal, organizational or institutional experiences of policies that tend to reap negative emotional responses among educators. Such experiences are not intended by policymakers to be educational, and yet facilitate political education. *Mobilized political education* refers to the ways in which political learning

occurs through involvement in explicit political action, such as a strike or rally. *Relational political education* positions relationships as the central component in supporting the growth of a particular political viewpoint. Finally, *networked political education* involves personal or organizational participation in formal networks, alliances and/or partnerships that support political education. (11)

Maton and Stark's typology is useful in that it makes visible the sites of learning and relationship-building necessary for growing democratic participation in educator movements. In our interviews, educators recounted how much they learned by spending time on picket lines and at rallies with their co-workers making sense of the issues, witnessing the power of the rank-and-file as bus drivers and school cooks refused to cross the line and aided in shutting down hesitant districts. Importantly, educators shifted from feelings of isolation to solidarity as they came to better understand the systemic nature of public education disinvestment. During the strikes, mobilized political education became widespread and fueled educators' actions. In quieter times, other forms of political education become ever more important (Niesz).

As in our state contexts under study, tensions between union democracy and social justice among a teaching force that is predominantly White and women is common and necessary to learn from. In Stark's study of the UCORE network, which emerged in the years after the 2012 CORE-led strike in Chicago, she notes tensions in organizing that arise between union democratization and racial and social justice. These tensions largely emerged between predominantly White educators and educators of color, and among teaching and support staff (which tend to have more diverse class and racial compositions than certified teachers) who held quite different understandings and analyses of justice issues and their intersections (138). In instances where caucuses have won leadership in their larger unions, tensions between democracy, broader union support, and racial and social justice issues can come more prominently to the fore. Stark provides two key examples:

[D]uring an extraordinarily intersectional one-day strike led by the Chicago Teachers Union, the Fight for \$15, and leaders from the Black Lives Matter movement in 2016, CTU leaders in the CORE caucus faced a backlash after an invited speaker from the Black liberation organization Assata's Daughters ended an invited speech with chants against the police (field notes, April 1, 2016). While the strike was overwhelmingly supported by members, caucus and union leaders needed to negotiate whether to publicly affirm their community partner or the officers she condemned. These tensions can also emerge in bargaining, as organizers determine whether to set their bargaining model and demands based on the democratic input of members or in alignment with the priorities of organizers. In Seattle's SEE caucus, for example, organizers debated whether pursuing a democratic Bargaining for the Common Good model would support or undermine the caucus's work for racial

justice, given the disproportionately white demographics of the teaching staff and broader city. (138-39)

Similarly, Asselin notes the ways in which racial and criminal justice issues can create, in her words, “fault lines” among social justice caucus members (184). While caucus members in MORE and WE found consensus in taking stances around issues of economic justice and immigrant justice, issues surrounding police and police unions had been far more contentious. Some members sought to avoid taking stronger stances of solidarity against police brutality because they believed they would lose members and power, and others held pro-police stances and felt the caucuses’ discussion and engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement was distracting them from the “real” educational issues their caucus should focus on.

Asselin found, however, that many organizers felt “union democracy” and “social justice” did not need to be dichotomized, and, in practice, MORE and WE found pedagogical opportunities within these tensions to develop caucus members’ collective analyses of the “real” issues—that are always-already raced, classed, and gendered. As one caucus organizer, Sonia, describes:

I think one example is talking about hiring and firing practices in our contract . . . specifically looking at populations of teachers of color, which have gone down in the last 10–20 years . . . And then a lot of that was attached to school closures in the last 10 years and that even though technically if the school closes those teachers aren’t necessarily fired, they go back to the pool, it still forces many people into retirement. It encourages people to look elsewhere and then those kind of closures targeted more veteran teachers of color that are among the most valuable educators in our district and they are lost . . . On the surface many people go, “Oh, it’s just school closures, it’s about managing your resources, it’s about funding,” and people don’t automatically look at it through a racial justice lens or a social justice lens. And that our work seeks to put it through that lens and encourage people to think about it in that way. (197)

As Asselin writes, “In response to crises, MORE and WE have attempted to solve the extension dilemma by adapting their internal structures and creating spaces where they can organize in the tensions that allow for the both/and [union democracy and racial justice] rather than either/or” (24).

In many social justice caucuses, educators have engaged in radical learning communities (i.e., book study groups), to develop these lenses and engage tensions as opportunities (Maton; Morrison; Riley). For example, in her participatory study of an activist inquiry group composed of WE members, Maton describes how educators shifted and transformed their understanding of school reform in Philadelphia from a relatively colorblind economic analysis of neoliberalism to one that centered structural racism. For members who undertook this shift in “problem framing,” it created more strategic clarity for their ongoing efforts to build strong relationships with existing community and social movement organizations.



As our “red” states demonstrate, issues of race are not unique to major urban areas. For example, race was not *not* an issue in predominantly White West Virginia. Rather, the state’s longer history of colonization, slavery, White-only property ownership laws, and out-migration for survival shaped the intensification of poverty for the state’s fewer Black persisters. Multi-racial worker organizing shaped the state’s earliest and most violent labor battles (see Chapter Two). In the more diverse Oklahoma (like many places), rank-and-file educators are predominantly White because desegregation policies pushed out so many Black teachers, despite the efforts of the state’s Black educator association to fight for wage parity and their right to teach. In Arizona and Oklahoma, public education disinvestment and privatization schemes from conservative lawmakers seek to redistribute resources away from the majority-racial minority public education system, doubling down on segregation.

In every state, patriarchal outrage spewed from legislators at predominantly women striking educators. In Kentucky, Governor Bevin accused educators of leaving children vulnerable to sexual assault while they struck (Stracqualursi), and in Oklahoma, educators were accused of acting like teenagers who wanted a new car. Militant educators became infantilized, cast as misbehaving, and accused of enabling deviance. Militant educators challenged the devaluation of care work through, in many instances, caring practices of relational organizing.

Some educators may understand that gender is a salient factor shaping their dismal working conditions (Russom). In their study of the social justice caucus, WE, in Philadelphia, Brown and Stern write that analyses that engage the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexualization are necessary in new educator movements yet often siloed or understood as in-tension rather than mutually constitutive, and more so among White educators. While educator organizers in their study often drew on feminist traditions of organizing without naming them as such, e.g., horizontalism, distributed leadership, understanding dissent as productive rather than inefficient, consensus-based decision-making, they tended to frame their political orientations toward union democracy and anti-racism. Brown and Stern argue White supremacy and heteropatriarchy are inextricably intertwined with and make possible neoliberal and neoconservative market-based school reform movements. They write, “Making the gendered analysis more audible and a central part of public and organizing discourse might create a connective tissue that links together movements by illuminating and legitimating the forces that create precarity among diverse, but often overlapping, communities” (192).

## ● Beyond 2019: The Pandemic and Continued Organizing Efforts

We write still in the midst of the pandemic. There is certainly much more to learn and understand from this tumultuous era of educator organizing. Yet, we think there might be some preliminary insights to glean. The lessons learned

from the strike wave in each state directly impacted crucial organizing efforts to keep schools shut down during COVID-19 until adequate public health safety measures could be implemented. In West Virginia, WV United had the opportunity to test out their solidarity unionist model during the early days of the pandemic. In the beginning of 2020, the caucus put forth a slate of candidates for leadership positions in WVEA. Jay O'Neal ran for president of the union, Nicole McCormick for vice president, and three other educators ran for open positions on the state executive board. It was the first contested election for WVEA president since Dale Lee took office in 2008 and one of the few times in recent memory when the union experienced serious contention for executive positions.

The caucus slate faced significant challenges. WVEA uses a delegate system for statewide offices, meaning that delegates are allocated based on local membership. Not every local sends its full list of delegates to the annual delegate assembly, in part because of low membership participation. The first and most pressing challenge the caucus faced was finding contacts in each of the fifty-five counties who would support their insurgent campaign. The skills O'Neal, McCormick, and others learned from striking helped immeasurably in this endeavor.

Due in no small part to the building of the WVPEU Facebook page, the caucus was able to quickly find at least one sympathetic WVEA member in most counties. From there, the caucus slate went to task, returning to their organizing roots of holding one-on-one conversations with members, asking about their concerns, what they would like to see their unions do in the near future, and how they could continue fighting for a fix to PEIA. Candidates knew from the events that led to the 2018 wildcat strike that there was at least some residual resentment to the old guard's tactics.

On the two-year anniversary of the strike, the caucus held a large gathering in Charleston with former assistant secretary of education turned public education advocate and educational historian, Diane Ravitch. The event was a watershed moment for the caucus just ahead of a heated election. Ravitch's support for many of their overall goals—uniting both AFT-WV and WVEA into one union, spending less time on lobbying and more time on grassroots organizing, emphasizing a social justice agenda in union work—was central to explaining to membership that the so-called radical goals the caucus had formulated were indeed achievable and reasonable.

However, COVID-19 hampered many of the caucus' plans for getting out their message. O'Neal, who had scheduled tours across the state to meet with WVEA members, had to cancel those events in favor of a digital organizing strategy. Educators already swamped with the new reality of teaching during a global pandemic, with tools they were unfamiliar with, and in an ever-changing environment, forced many to prioritize their own personal well-being.

For their part, Lee and his slate of candidates emphasized the message of “steady leadership in unsteady times.” Lee and his supporters claimed that it had been the elected leaders of WVEA who weathered the storm of the 2018 strike



successfully, and only this group of candidates could chart a path forward amid pandemic-related uncertainties. Convention had also been moved from the in-person, politicking-heavy setting to a one-day, online event. This, again, put the caucus on the defensive, relying on supporters and fellow WVEA members to convey their platform to other locals in advance.

When the votes were tallied, the progressive slate of candidates garnered an impressive forty percent of the vote. Not enough to win but enough for the caucus to make their mark. The defeat was a bittersweet moment for WV United. On the one hand, it was hard to reconcile the energy and passion of rank-and-file members in 2018 with the results in 2020. Indeed, the wildcat strike was a referendum on conservative leadership and evidenced a desire for change. Organize 2020, the North Carolina Education Association's rank-and-file caucus, won their election for union president only a few short years after forming their caucus. And, unlike the work of CORE in Chicago, West Virginia's rank-and-file education workers took the reverse course of action—engage in militant organizing, go on strike, and then work to take over union leadership.

Electoral emphasis in Kentucky fared no better in 2020 than it did in 2018. Republicans achieved a nearly five percentage point increase in proportion of votes in the House of Representatives races between the two years, from 59.59 percent in 2018 to 64.46 percent in 2020. Similarly, Kentucky Republicans went from having a 61–39 majority in the state House of Representatives in 2018 to a 75–25 majority in 2020. The hated Governor Bevin had narrowly lost re-election in 2019 by 0.4 percent (KY State Board of Elections). This was perhaps the most impressive victory between the years outlined here. During the lead-up to the election, KY 120 once again flooded their social media pages with state endorsements, information about how to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic, and reminded viewers of their success in ousting Governor Bevin one year prior. Much of the information their social media page shared came directly from recently elected Lt. Governor Jacqueline Coleman's (D) or Governor Beshear's (D) pages, solidifying the ties, however informal, between KY 120's politics and those of the highest-ranking elected officials in Kentucky.

Despite these connections with the governor's office, Kentucky school districts were no safer when they returned from summer break than when they shut down earlier that year. District superintendents could determine whether to reopen in-person or remain virtual as students returned to classes in September. It wasn't until Governor Beshear's executive order on November 23, 2020, that all public and private middle and high schools were forced to remain remote or virtual until at least January 4, 2021. Likewise in West Virginia, Governor Justice allowed schools to reopen for in-person instruction in September if counties met a convoluted and changing requirement on his much-derided color-coded infection tracking system. No official executive order closed schools for in-person instruction as they shifted into the next calendar year.

In Oklahoma, Republican governor and ardent Trump supporter, Kevin Stitt was elected in 2018 after former governor Mary Fallin's handling of the education

walkouts decimated her public image. Since he began office, Stitt has maintained vocal support for state control of local education, vouchers for religious and private education, and the privatization of public education. He made national news for his disapproval of mask mandates and, during the initial deadly surge of COVID-19 infections, encouragement of residents to dine in at restaurants and “support local business” (S. Murphy). While some independent organizing took place among educators, vocal conservative and predominantly White parents engaged in public protest, brought lawsuits against local school boards to force their full re-opening, and shamed educators at school board meetings for their selfishness for asking for basic public health precautions.

The dynamics that emerged and intensified between many rank-and-file educators and OEA continued, as the union initially hesitated to come out as a forceful voice for safe working conditions, opting for a more conciliatory tone. Later, OEA took a stronger rhetorical stance in press conferences yet did not put forward any clear demands for school safety, opting to serve more as an information hub and legal resource for educators. Mirroring the language of the State Board of Education and state leaders, OEA engaged language that highlighted the necessity to make decisions at the local level. While not the same, “local control” rhetoric had been a go-to for Stitt to justify his refusal to make a statewide mask mandate during the height of the pandemic.

In Arizona, AEU led the fight for safe re-openings, engaging similar but more robust and further reaching escalating efforts, including social media campaigns and motorcade demonstrations. By December, rank-and-file educators in Gilbert and Chandler had organized sickouts for January 2021 (while their union locals distanced themselves publicly from organizers and refused to endorse the actions (Hernandez)). As Garelli described in our interview, before the walkouts, educators she talked to about their shared poor working conditions felt resigned to their lack of power. Now, educators in suburban districts felt empowered to organize work stoppages to protest for health and safety.

## ● When We Fight, We Win

As many writers and thinkers have illuminated, the crises many of us are experiencing in the pandemic are not solely, or perhaps mostly, the result of the virus, but rather the absence of social policy to mitigate transmission and protect the health and economic well-being of all people, especially those most vulnerable. If any moment calls for educators to engage the intellectual traditions and practices of solidarity and social movement unionisms, it is certainly now. The 2018 and 2019 strikes had widespread public support. In the pandemic, parents’ feelings toward reopening were much more starkly divided along race and class lines (Halloran et al.), and educators’ calls to “refuse to return” until schools were safe(r) was more controversial than “more education funding now!”

Much research and writing has documented the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on mothers and women, as they manage caregiving and

waged work, even as they make up most frontline workers (Rabinowitz and Rabinowitz). Many have also accused educators and unions for shirking their responsibility to do what is best for the children, framing their resistance to unsafe working conditions as an unwillingness to work (Strunk). In many, especially working-class predominantly Black, school districts, pre-pandemic building safety has *already* been an ongoing fight, made much worse by the pandemic. For example, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers in coalition with community-based justice organizations had long been fighting for their district to address issues of asbestos and other environmental hazards, which have been linked to student and teacher illness, even death (Ruderman and Graham).

As we have aimed to illuminate in the four preceding chapters, simply having a militant presence in the workplace is insufficient to develop the capacity for massive labor actions. And, while strikes are the most important tool, they do not on their own necessarily portend sustainable movements or big wins for labor. The role of politicians, regardless of their politics, play little role in this either. Rather, from the perspective of our study and related literature, the most successful education labor movements undertake the ongoing work of connecting social movement demands to labor demands, deepening analyses of how gender, race, class, and settler colonialism shape education work and unions, and building radically democratic rank-and-file organizations that practice a healthy wariness of recuperation by business unionism or electoralism. Easier said than done!

We end by acknowledging and honoring the collective labor involved in realizing this book. From the many educators who shared their stories with us to the many education union, labor, and social movement thinkers—in K–12 and higher education, in and with social justice caucuses, in university labor organizing, and the Industrial Workers of the World—who have informed our study. Even so, readers should understand our story of the spring 2018 strikes is by no means definitive but one retelling. So many more educators' stories—educators who organized and continue to organize in their local places—are not included on these pages. No doubt their experiences would further deepen how we understand the significance, challenges, and possibilities of the educator movements that have taken shape in these so-called “red” states.

In her memoir, historian and Okie Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz writes that, in Oklahoma, “red” historically signifies much more than just right-leaning. “Red” conjures a painful and submerged history of Oklahoma’s thriving communist and socialist past, the violence of Indigenous forced migration and genocide, and, for her, the red soil of Canadian County in which her mixed heritage family labored in poverty as tenant farmers during the Dust Bowl era. The strikes and the wider Red for Ed movement suggests the struggle for political hegemony and historical consciousness in these states are active, contingent, and ongoing.