



# Public Education--America's Civil Religion: A Social History

*Carl L. Bankston, Stephen J. Caldas*

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In this provocative volume, the authors argue that public education is a central part of American civil religion and, thus, gives us an unquestioning faith in the capacity of education to solve all of our social, economic, and political problems. The book traces the development of America's faith in public education from before the Civil War up to the present, exploring recent educational developments such as the No Child Left Behind Act. The authors discuss how this faith in education often makes it difficult for Americans to think realistically about the capacities and limitations of public schooling.

Bringing together history, politics, religion, sociology, and educational theory, this in-depth examination:

- Raises fundamental questions about what education can accomplish for the citizens of the United States.
- Points out that many supposedly opposing viewpoints on public education actually arise from the same root assumptions.
- Exposes the gaps between our pursuit of equity in schools and what we really accomplish with students.
- Looks at ways in which education can be organized to serve a diverse population.

**Carl L. Bankston III** is professor and chair in the Department of Sociology and co-director of the Asian Studies Program at Tulane University. **Stephen J. Caldas** is professor of education in the Department of Foundations, Leadership, and Policy Studies at Hofstra University.

“Carl Bankston and Stephen Caldas have written another brilliant analysis of the historical and structural framework of American schools. In their latest book, they analyze education in our civil religion. This is an extraordinarily sensible interpretation, concluding with our propensity to exaggerate the importance of education's ability to change our society. I could not agree with them more.”

—**Christine H. Rossell**, Professor of Political Science, Boston University

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