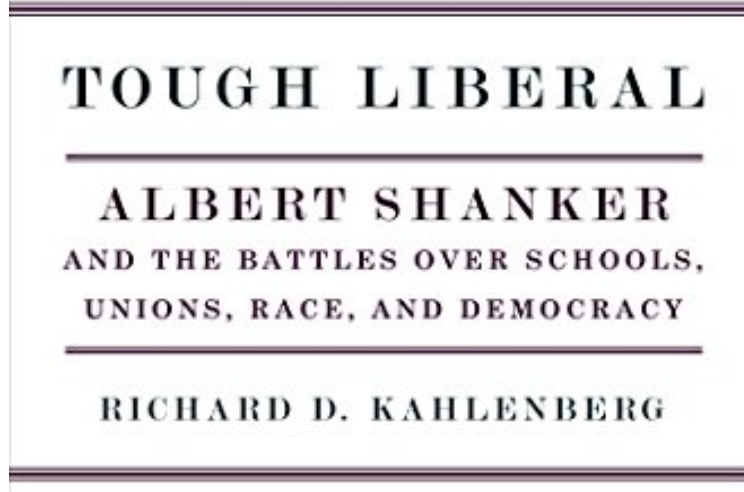


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## **Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy (Columbia Studies in Contemporary American History)**

*Richard D. Kahlenberg*

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**Richard D. Kahlenberg : Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy (Columbia Studies in Contemporary American History)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy (Columbia Studies in Contemporary American History):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book. By xGreat book. If you're interested in the state of American schools, and if you're one of those people who blame everything on teachers' unions (or you're just surrounded by those people), you MUST read this book. 11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. More Than a Bio By Quill In his film, *Sleeper*, Woody Allen immortalized Albert Shanker as the madman responsible for blowing up the world. That helped to get Shanker known outside of NY, but clearly it wasn't the real Shanker. In this highly readable and often exhilarating biography of Shanker, Richard Kahlenberg shows that while Shanker, the architect of the modern teacher union movement (and, it turns out, so much more) surely understood power and accumulated it, his only "madness" was to seek to empower the powerless and to hold this nation to the democratic ideals it espoused and he so cherished. Indeed, far from being "mad," Shanker was both intellectually and politically brilliant -- a rare combination -- an idealist with both a shrewd and compassionate understanding of human nature and a pragmatist who nonetheless stood firm on principles, a stance that sometimes incurred the enmity of allies as much as enemies. This was also a man who dealt with the high and mighty, but who in his writing and speaking could take the most complicated ideas and make them accessible to ordinary people without ever dumbing anything down. Had Kahlenberg just written a biography of this complex and far-ranging man, that probably would have been interesting enough. But Kahlenberg goes further and roots Shanker in the major political and cultural struggles over the soul of the Democratic party and the direction of this country. Regardless of one's view of those struggles and their outcomes, Kahlenberg's recounting of them cannot help but make you think of missed opportunities and "what ifs" to this day. Politics, race, education, the meaning and practice of democracy -- a heady and vitally critical brew. And Kahlenberg stirs and blends this pot well through Shanker, his meaty main ingredient. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Made me appreciate Shanker even more! By Blaine Greenfield Albert Shanker had always been one of my heroes . . . yet until I read *TOUGH LIBERAL* by Richard D. Kahlenberg, I had not known too much about him. That's no longer the case . . . in fact, this excellent biography even increased my appreciation of Shanker who once told an interviewer: \* "If I didn't have to make a living, I would have done this as a volunteer." What he did was head the American Federation of Teachers for well over 20-25 years . . . by doing so, he helped change the perception of teachers by having them recognized as professionals: \* A professional receives a liberal-arts education, then specialized training, and then must pass a rigorous exam before beginning to practice. She participates in an internship, is guided by mentors, and participates in reviewing the performance of colleagues. Once these professional responsibilities are met come the reciprocal set of rights: greater autonomy and higher compensation. In Shanker's vision, policies like a rigorous national test, peer review, and career ladders were not just defensive moves against critics of public-school teachers, they were prerequisites to the professionalization of teaching. *TOUGH LIBERAL* summarized Shanker's contributions to education in one of the finest concluding paragraphs that I've ever read: \* In one lifespan, Albert Shanker helped to create the institution of collective bargaining for teachers, giving them greater dignity and voice in how they would be treated. He then used that power to engage in a series of critical education reforms that proved instrumental in improving and preserving the institution of public education. Both accomplishments served the larger goal he cherished above all others: strengthening American democracy. His failure to convince fellow liberals to extend their support of democracy more broadly -- to racial policy, international affairs, and their views of the labor movement -- leaves open the question: what might society look like if we tried? If you want to learn about Albert Shanker and the labor movement in this country, read this book . . . it will also make a great gift for any teacher.

In Woody Allen's 1973 film, *Sleeper*, a character wakes up in the future to learn that civilization was destroyed when "a man by the name of Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead." Shanker was condemned by many when he shut down the New York City school system in the bitter strikes of 1967 and 1968, and he was denounced for stirring up animosity between black parents and Jewish teachers. Later, however, he built alliances with blacks, and at the time of his death in 1997, such figures as Bill Clinton celebrated Shanker for being an educational reformer, a champion of equality, and a promoter of democracy abroad. Shanker lived the lives of several men bound into one. In his early years, he was the "George Washington of the teaching profession," helping to found modern teacher unionism. During the 1980s, as head of the American Federation of Teachers, he became the nation's leading education reformer. Shanker supported initiatives for high education standards and accountability, teacher-led charter schools, and a system of "peer review" to weed out inadequate teachers. Throughout his life, Shanker also fought for "tough liberalism," an ideology favoring public education and trade unions but also colorblind policies and a robust anticommunism; all of which, Shanker believed, were vital to a commitment to democracy. Although he had a coherent worldview, Shanker was a complex individual. He began his career as a pacifist but evolved into a leading defense and foreign policy hawk. He was an intellectual and a populist; a gifted speaker who failed at small talk; a liberal whose biggest enemies were often on the left; a talented writer who had to pay to have his ideas published; and a gruff unionist who enjoyed shopping and detested sports. Richard D. Kahlenberg's biography is the first to offer a complete narrative of one of the most important voices in public education and American politics in the last half century. At a time when liberals are accused of not knowing what they stand for, *Tough Liberal* illuminates an engaging figure who suggested an alternative liberal path.

From Publishers Weekly  
Century Foundation senior fellow Kahlenberg, who has written previously about the public school wars (*All Together Now*), paints a gripping portrait of the iconoclastic and often contradictory teacher's union leader Albert Shanker (1928–1997). Born to working-class Russian-Jewish parents on New York's Lower East Side, Shanker worked on a doctorate in philosophy at Columbia by night while teaching by day in East Harlem. During the late '50s he was involved in organizing New York City's United Federation of Teachers, becoming its president in 1964. In 1974 he also became president of the national American Federation of Teachers. In this perceptive biography, Kahlenberg shows that the firebrand union militant who led illegal strikes that closed New York City's public schools in 1967 and 1968 was at the same time a forward-looking educational reformer who, despite pronounced liberal credentials, pushed initiatives that are today associated mostly with conservative educational agendas. Among Shanker's passions were lofty standards, teacher accountability and charter schools. Kahlenberg applauds all this, along with Shanker's fervent anticommunism and his many efforts—regardless of the black-Jewish antagonism the school strikes engendered—to reach out to people of color. The reader comes away admiring a man who navigated troubled times deftly and left behind a record of great accomplishment. (Sept.)

Copyright © 2010; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. This book is a must-read for those interested in educational or labor history. (Historian) A thoroughly researched and engaging biography. (Arch Puddington *The Wall Street Journal*) [A] fascinating biography. (Sol Stern *City Journal*) At once exquisitely complex and grandly contextual. (Martin Peretz *The New Republic*) A well-drawn portrait. (Scott McLemee *Newsday*) Judicious and engaging. (Fred Siegel *Weekly Standard*) [A] timely new biography. (Sara Mosle *Slate*) An engaging book, and essential reading for anyone interested in the history of Cold War liberalism and its complicated legacy. (Scott McLemee *Inside Higher Ed*) An excellent new biography. (Jal Mehta *American Prospect*) A must read for unionists, educators, politicians and democracy internationalists trying to make sense of the persistent failings of U.S. education. (Eugenia Kemble *Democrat*) A spirited and readable biography. (Adam Fairclough *Washington Post*) Named one of the *American School Board Journal's* must-reads of the year. (*American School Board Journal*) [This book] is an important contribution to the history of American education reform. (Nathan Glazer *Education Next*) An important new biography. (*The Politico*) A must-read for those interested in educational or labor history. (Historian)

About the Author  
Richard D. Kahlenberg is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and the author of *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice*; *The Remedy: Class, Race, and Affirmative Action*; and *Broken Contract: A Memoir of Harvard Law School*.