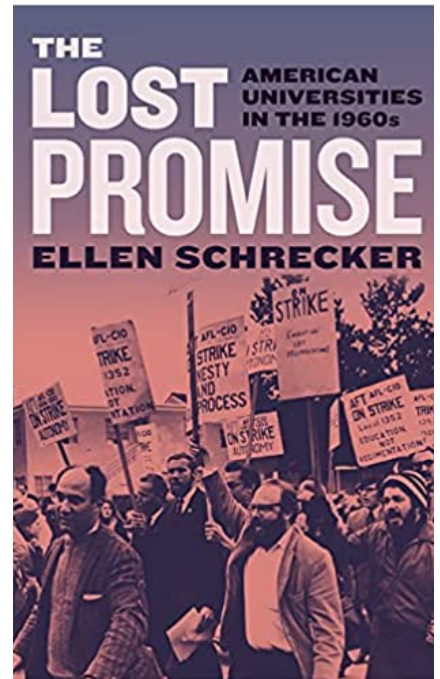


**Ellen Schrecker, the doyen of the political history of higher education, has produced another masterpiece.**

— Robin D. G. Kelley, University of California, Los Angeles

## Historian Ellen Schrecker Traces the Collapse of an Educational Golden Age

Los Angeles, CA (DATE) - Universities are the wellspring of America's national discourse, giving shape to new ideas in politics, social organizing, philosophy, and culture. But these vital places of exchange and innovation are haunted by the failures of the same institutions that house them. Programs are underfunded. Systemic inequality undermines opportunities schools promise to their students. Many graduates are offered little in the way of career prospects, but incur mountains of debt. It can be difficult to remember that there was a moment where things looked different— where a community of idealists gathered to change the world, dreaming of an expansive education system that would liberate our country on a massive scale. What brought this halcyon moment in American education, and what ultimately destroyed it?



In *The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s* (December 17, 2021, The University of Chicago Press) historian Ellen Schrecker turns to a not-so-distant past where academia flourished in prestige and economic abundance, enjoying near-universal approval from the public. The first shift in the narrative? Political turmoil in the 1960s, which sparked radical action across the nation. This era of distrust in the liberal order aligned perfectly with the rapid expansion of universities across the country, causing culture wars to catch fire. Protests to demand racial equality and end the Vietnam war inspired a strong backlash among conservatives, who demonized higher education. By the mid-1970s, the golden age of American academia was in decline. Schrecker investigates these critical periods with her attentive eye trained on the volatile, complicated dynamics that degraded the university from all sides. "There is no coherent narrative, no single story that traces how one thing led to another," Schrecker writes. "Everything seemed to be happening at once." This thoroughly researched, multilayered account of the chaos leaves no stone unturned, describing the complex roles played by both professors and students.

Schrecker has taught at Harvard, Princeton, New York University, the New School for Social Research, and Columbia as well as Yeshiva University, where she is a professor emerita of American history. She has received the Frederick Ewen Academic Freedom Fellowship at the Tamiment Library at NYU and is widely known for her work in the history of McCarthyism and the cultural politics of the 1960s. Dubbed "the doyen of the political history of higher education" by UCLA professor Robin D. G. Kelley, her latest work adds a unique examination of the turbulent 1960s to her work as a historian of the 20th century. "*The Lost Promise* debunks the popular image of the 1960s university as one of unremitting student rebellion, wild-eyed tenured radicals, and cowering administrators," Kelly writes. "The truth is more complicated and far more interesting."

Today American schools face a new crisis of disunity and economic instability, accelerated by the rise of COVID-19. As students, educators, and policymakers alike look towards an uncertain future, it is clear that we stand at a crossroads for education in our country. Will the university reemerge as the center of American life, or fall even further from grace? *The Lost Promise* is a timely reminder of academia's democratic ideals, the internal power struggles that can undermine a collective mission, and the hostile cultural conflicts that threaten to dissolve our most deeply held American dreams.