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# Public Opinion and Collective Action: The Boston School Desegregation Conflict, by D.G. Taylor

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## Book Reviews: American Politics

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sport clubs or social clubs soon sprang into being. The churches were fertile sources of such activity. The author at one point counted 18 different associations with no direct religious purpose sponsored by one church. Neighborhood taverns and shops provided daily foci for socializing and socialization. In short, a rich mosaic of associational life that provided the social and psychological support for the people to assert their autonomy and establish control over crucial aspects of their lives soon emerged. Their struggles were not, of course, uniformly successful. In particular, the attempt to establish some degree of autonomy in a central aspect—the workplace—through unionization was, on balance, a failure until the late 1930s, in part because the packers manipulated the very ethnic divisions that in other ways served to facilitate the development of community.

There is, however, a parallel thesis to the one concerning the establishment of community. That is that the creation of community simultaneously involved the creation of democracy. Indeed the book is subtitled, *The Making of a Local Democracy*. And here caution is advised. For one thing, at the conceptual level community and democracy are by no means the same thing. Some—Burke, for example—have even seen them as antithetical. Yet the author at times confounds the two. We can agree with the author that the Back of the Yard-ers sought, and in no small measure achieved, stability, predictability, and autonomy in the sense of freedom from external interference in many areas of their daily lives. But nomic, as opposed to anomic, behavior or autonomy, as opposed to dependency, can be realized quite apart from democracy. It must be shown, not assumed, that the creation of community entails the creation of democracy as well.

That demonstration is particularly necessary here. The two major institutions responsible for the development of community—church and family—are late nineteenth century, East European, and working-class. Rightly or wrongly, such structures have most often been characterized as strongly authoritarian and fundamentally antidemocratic. Second, two of the major external actors the author cites as helping to foster democracy, the unions and, somewhat later, the local Democratic party machine were not and are not internally demo-

cratic. The author says that the union, for example, extended democracy, "by organizing industrially, by company, rather than by craft." But how, one asks, does this extend local democracy? And the local political machine may have imbued the residents with the sense that "downtown" can be manipulated, but clearly it did so in the framework of a patron-client relationship rather than democracy.

Finally, one must remember that all of this takes place within a larger picture. And that larger picture is the overwhelming dependence of the community on the meatpacking industry with all the misery and degradation that entailed together with the overall failure of the workers to establish order and autonomy in this central aspect of life; failure, that is, until 1939, nearly 80 years after the community was founded and less than 20 years before the industry started to disappear from Chicago. Summing up, the book more than amply shows the emergence of a community in a setting where one would think it unlikely. It does not successfully demonstrate the emergence of local democracy in an equally unlikely setting, in part because the author assumes what needs to be shown—that community and democracy go together.

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**Public Opinion and Collective Action: The Boston School Desegregation Conflict.** By D. Garth Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. xiii, 241. \$29.00).

Reading this book brought back a lot of memories, many of them unpleasant: violence in the streets and schools of Boston; tawdry attempts by Louise Day Hicks, "Pixie" Paladino and John Kerrigan to exploit the desegregation controversy to advance their political agendas and careers; timid leadership by Mayor Kevin White, concerned about his own political skin; ineffective leadership by Cardinal Medeiros as he attempted to rally his flock, in this most Catholic of the United States' great cities, behind peaceful support of desegregation. Garth Taylor, I should hasten to add, does not attempt to exploit the sensational aspects of the Boston school-desegrega-

tion controversy. This book is a careful and skillful piece of work, written in the straightforward style suitable for reporting the results of social-science research. For anyone interested in how a city, once the cradle of liberty, nearly became its coffin, this book is most instructive.

Taylor begins with a review of racial ideology and civil-rights progress in the United States. By the time of *Brown v. Board of Education*, he concludes, U.S. citizens were prepared to jettison racially based doctrines of inferiority, social inequality, and mandatory segregation. Over the next 10 years, Taylor argues, there was widespread acceptance of the right of black students to attend desegregated public schools. In this process, the focus of debate shifted from whether mandatory segregation was wrong to whether mandatory desegregation was right. People were prepared to abandon the former but not necessarily to accept the latter. Orientations toward racial injustice came to be governed by what Taylor calls the "Doctrine of Voluntary Compliance," a belief that the wrongs of mandatory segregation are remedied best by voluntary desegregation. Taylor traces the roots of this doctrine back to Reconstruction and demonstrates how it can still operate as a powerful deterrent to mandatory desegregation.

The analysis is based mainly on five waves of survey data from a panel of 631 white adult residents of six neighborhoods in the city of Boston. The interviews were conducted over a period of approximately two years, beginning several months before Judge Arthur Garrity's order to desegregate the schools, and ending after the implementation of the first phase of the plan.

Taylor shows that opposition to busing and willingness to protest against mandatory desegregation are not merely the product of racial prejudice and intolerance. Adherence to the doctrine of voluntary compliance provided a frame of reference for citizens to view the insistence on mandatory desegregation as contrary to U.S. principles of popular consent and thus as unfair and unjust and potentially harmful in terms of safety and educational quality. Equipped with these "rationalizations" rooted in a pervasive popular belief, citizens became prime targets for collective mobilization at the hands of antibusing leaders whose own political prosperity was linked to the stridency and

duration of public protest. In telling the story of how a city with liberal and abolitionist traditions came to symbolize bitter and protracted opposition to school desegregation, Taylor shows how all the pieces of the puzzle came together: widespread belief in the unfairness and potential harm of the desegregation orders; aggressive antibusing leadership; a strong and resourceful organizational base for protest and a belief in its efficacy; limited resources for support, enfeebling the initial efforts of those charged with enforcing compliance with Judge Garrity's orders.

Although published in 1986, this book, based on research conducted in the 1970s, belongs very much to that decade. Like much research of that time period, its main focus is on white resistance to desegregation, and Taylor does an able job of relating his work to the research of that period. Perhaps in recognition of the somewhat dated quality of the work, Taylor attempts to draw some contemporary significance from the Boston case. In the final few pages of the book he notes that the federal-court desegregation orders produced significant changes for the better in the Boston public schools, improving management and curriculum, raising average daily attendance, and boosting dramatically the proportion of high-school graduates going on to post-secondary education. A few years after the disruptions that accompanied the first phase of implementation, the situation changed dramatically. Hicks, Paladino, and Kerrigan all suffered electoral defeat, the Boston school board came under the control of blacks and moderate whites, and, in 1985, the federal district court closed the case. While Taylor (reminiscent of the poet John Donne) seems to feel that the old order of mandatory segregation is dead but that the new order of a desegregated society is yet powerless to be born, an opposite conclusion can be drawn. A new order of school desegregation has indeed been born in Boston, and its benefits are being reaped by those who chose not to flee in protest but to remain in voluntary compliance.

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