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Settlement Patterns and the Governing Structures of Nineteenth- Century School Systems

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This paper examines the governing structures of state and local school systems as reported for 1880. Three distinctive models of governance are identified for the Northeast, the South, and the Midwest in the method of appointment or election of school officers at the state and local levels. An explanation for these patterns is presented that centers on the structural relationship between local, corporate communities and the methods of choosing education officials at the state and local levels of government. The northeastern town, the southern county, and the midwestern township are seen as historical antecedents to the specific regional pattern of school governance.

Introduction

Scholarly attention to the nineteenth-century correlation between economic changes and educational development has generated a number of questions, not the least of which has been the origins of public school systems themselves (Craig 1981). Consideration of the origins of American school systems can entrap the scholar in the difficult middle ground between historically specific state histories and the broader general trends operating across states. A number of case studies exist that provide the detailed evolutionary growth of a state's public school system (Kaestle 1973; Katz 1968; Lazerson 1971; Schultz 1973), and there are a number of more general models of the origins of popular education in the United States (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Collins

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1979; Katz 1975; Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, and Gordon 1979; Ralph and Rubinson 1980; Richardson 1980; Tyack 1974). Despite differences among case studies and among theoretical perspectives, there is a consensus that a model of public school organization that was national in scope and bureaucratic in form emerged from the material and cultural changes felt between the close of the Civil War and the turn of the century. Thus, one irony of the debates over nineteenth-century educational history is that fewer disputes have been waged over the outcome of the educational change than have been waged over the determinants contributing to that change.¹

In this essay my aim is twofold. First, I critically review the bases upon which explanations for the origins of state school systems have been proposed. I argue that theoretical perspectives on the development of public school systems have drawn considerably upon the historical accounts of major northeastern cities and states and that these accounts have often been used as the model of national educational growth. One consequence of this has been that important lines of regional divergence in the pattern of school system development have been underemphasized. In this review, I examine the late-nineteenth-century patterns of difference in the structure of governance in school systems at the state and local levels. Three distinct patterns in the appointment or election of state and local school officials are identified for the Northeast, the South, and the Midwest. To account for these regional differences in school governance, the role of historical settlement patterns is proposed as a social-geographic determinant. More general propositions, founded on the historical relationship formed between local communities and administration at various levels of government, are advanced as theoretical interpretations.

The Paradigm of School Origins: Evolution and Differentiation

The significance of the tie between the family and the church in colonial communities has been the starting point in many analyses of the development of public school systems (Axtell 1974, pp. 5–50; Kaestle 1973, pp. 18–23; Schultz 1973, pp. 3–21). The evolution of

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the state system of public education is conceived as a progressive detachment of the influence of religion over the education of the young and the transfer of socialization functions to formally recognized agents of public schooling. Although considerable historical material sustains this theoretical view, this material largely comes from the specific historical experiences of northeastern states.² The greater abundance and availability of historical-archival data on these school systems accounts, in part, for their use as prototypes of schooling in America. Yet, when one reviews the major historical and sociological works that have shared in some ways in the resurgence of American educational historiography, one is struck by the degree to which this research confines itself to the Northeast. The Boston public schools and the influential educational tradition of Massachusetts have often served as case studies (Field 1976; Kaestle 1973; Katz 1968; Schultz 1973) or have implicitly been projected as models of educational change generally (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Kaestle and Vinovskis 1978; Katz 1975; Tyack 1974).

This “northeasternization” of educational historiography initially makes very good sense; these states led most others in establishing publicly supported schooling and in enacting compulsory school attendance legislation (Richardson 1980). Yet, arguing that their leadership in these matters “diffused” into a developing national system of public schooling can be a dangerous thesis, as has been duly noted (Meyer et al. 1979, p. 595). One such danger is the projection of the economic and political experiences of northeastern states, which have largely been characterized by group conflict and political resolution, as the causes of educational structures elsewhere.

The history of the religious-based struggles over the control of common schooling is vividly portrayed in the celebrated Protestant-Catholic debates of 1841 in New York (Bidwell 1966; Ravitch 1974). The New York School Society, with its dominance sustained by Protestant denominations, was forced to recognize the numerical strength of Catholics in New York City and, consequently, to relinquish its hold over the system of common schools to the state legislature. Similarly, the effect in Massachusetts of prolonged sectarian conflict over curriculum content led to the formalization of state-committed support for public schooling. Significantly, this transfer from religious-based to state-based support “stressed the political rather than the religious benefits of an educated public” (Kaestle and Vinovskis 1978, p. 47).

The significance of the historical examples of New York and Boston lies in how religious and class divisions represented both the bases and rationale for the political resolution of a state-supported and administered public educational system. New York and Boston have been

used as prototypical models of schooling in part precisely because their development sharply illustrates a dominant trend of the late nineteenth century—namely, the rise of “juristic persons” legally empowered as corporate entities (Coleman 1974). As legally defined, corporations, labor unions, and professional associations are examples of “juristic persons,” abstract entities having many of the rights held by actual individuals. School systems are also an example of juristic persons. The formal origins of the Massachusetts and New York school systems occurred when the governance of schooling ceased to be controlled by specific groups in communities. The “loss of power” by any one group over schooling was balanced only to the degree that contending groups gained from the transfer of some measure of school control onto a centralized agency. The bureaucratization of the state school system functioned, in part, to elevate the administration of public education above intrusive and costly sectarian conflicts. The outcome of this political resolution was a particular organizational form of school governance; local, community control was juxtaposed to centralized administration. That is, a hierarchy of positions at the state level filled through political appointment was superimposed on a community system that retained democratic control through popular election of school officials (Katz 1975, p. 49; see also Kaestle and Vinovskis 1980, p. 6). The contrast between state appointment and local election is one of the salient features of the northeastern bureaucratic model.

Some investigators have implied that this course of northeastern schools systems is the evolutionary course taken in the late nineteenth century by public education generally. Katz (1975, p. 72) described the bureaucratization of the Massachusetts school system as “the rationalization of increasingly complex administrative problems, reinforced by the nepotism and politics that afflicted school practice.” This is a succinct description fitting other northeastern states as well, yet it is not historically accurate for most states outside the region. Differences existed in the political organization of state school systems, reflecting divergent lines of development. It is here that explanations other than those based on the experiences of dominant northeastern states must be sought.

The Structure of School Governance

The shape of school governance is historically rooted in two influences, which, though consistently noted in the literature, are rarely attributed causal significance. The first is ecological. It denotes the patterns of

population settlement, the shape of ecological units wherein the predominant social functions of community living are enclosed (Warren 1963, p. 167). Differing regional patterns of original settlement, circumstances of migration, and where people settled all contributed to the varied life-styles. Such conditions imposed different constraints on the formation of communities and, in turn, on what units would achieve or be granted “corporate status”—that is, possession of political self-rule and rights to tax and to maintain the public welfare.

The second concerns government—that is, the relation of units of settlement to state and local levels of government. Below the state level, the county and township levels have been the most recognized divisions of government (Fairlie 1906; Howard 1889). The relative importance of substate levels and the character of the community units they govern form the historical backdrop to the forms of nineteenth-century school governance.

At the turn of the century, professional educators and reformers considered politics to have the primary influence on whether school officials were appointed or elected. The two procedures for choosing officials reflected a salient political contrast—whether school systems would be subordinate to government or remain independent (Tufts, 1908, p. 138). If subordinate to government, the appointment of school officers presumably would remove educational administration from the pressures of interest politics; such politics almost always meant “ward” politics and the potential for particular interests to intrude into state and local educational administration (Cubberley 1922, p. 93). In addition to political neutrality, appointment would ensure that office-holders possessed the necessary specialized knowledge to manage school systems that were increasing in both size and cultural diversity (Snedden 1915). On the other hand, retaining popular election was argued to be most consonant with democratic principles generally and to secure the broadest appeal. The motives behind those seeking to appoint school officers was at times invoked to support popular election, as it was argued that political officials could appoint favored and inexperienced people to educational posts.

Notwithstanding these political implications, the significance of the contrast should not be reduced to a political struggle only. Such an interpretation can overshadow important questions of the historical emergence of appointment or election and their relation to patterns of settlement. Moreover, a strictly political interpretation stems largely from the intensifying public debate over the management of civic institutions during the era of Progressive reform (Tyack 1974, p. 196). Consideration of the merits of appointing school officers was brought to the fore as efforts to insulate municipal governance from politics

became widespread. The respective merits of election and appointment became a volatile issue *after* 1900. In this respect, the analysis of the pattern of school governance for the end of the nineteenth century affords a view before the politicization of school administration. The sharpness of the differences in school governance emphasizes those conditions that are deeply rooted in the formation of regions. The specific interest here is how patterns of school governance evolved as expressions of settlement patterns and early community organization.

The relationship between community units and the state and local levels of government is, one may say, the organizing force of the infrastructure of school governance. Thus, to the extent that school governance exerts social control, relationships between communities and the local and state levels of government will have historical roots in original settlement patterns. As Boulding (1953) notes, as a territory expands, the distance from the center of control to the periphery grows less rapidly than the total area to be controlled. The governance by a local school authority will be affected by the ecological relations that interconnect communities.

The spatial metaphor may not only shed light on the internal structure of school governance, but also help to clarify the contrast between election and appointment as the processes of choosing school officials. The bureaucratic model of the northeastern states stresses the self-perpetuation of state-level officials through appointment. Their removal from popular election ensured their insulation from subordinate community units. Whereas appointment signified governance through delegated authority, election underscored popular access to school positions. The method of choosing school positions at the state and local levels is a measurable expression of the relationship between community units and education officials. Here we may best discern the different historical courses taken in the development of state school systems.

Evidence of Regional Diversity in School Governance

Historical data on school governing structures for the late nineteenth century are somewhat limited, yet reports by states sufficiently outline school political organization. The information reported on school administration and school officers, given in the Report of the Commission of Education for 1880 (Report 1882), is examined here. The reports on the administrative structure of each state school system specify both the structure of positions and how they were formed. Specifically, the state and local school officers are identified as either

appointed or elected. The reports on school superintendents and school boards and their manner of selection are given for the states. Information on the administration of local school affairs is primarily on the county or township level, although reports on the operation of elementary school districts are also often given.

The coding involved the determination of the *dominant* procedure of each level of government. For nearly all states, determination of elective or appointive status was unambiguous. In some cases, the state superintendent was reported as "elected by the people" yet the state board was reported as consisting of the governor and secretary of state; the state level in such instances was coded as elective. Thus, two criteria guided the coding of school governance. The first was the identification of specific school officers and their independence from general state officials. The second was the manner of election or appointment. If school officers were chosen by a vote of the state legislature, this was coded as appointive. "Elective" means direct popular access to or control over the selection of school officers was clearly indicated. If a school officer was chosen from among a limited number of educators, themselves popularly elected by communities, the level was considered elected. Moreover, if state or county board of education members were reported as appointed by a superintendent who was elected by popular vote, that was coded as elective. The determination here follows the logic that a superintendent was the dominant member of a board of education. The specific responsibilities of board members were set by superintendents. No instances exist of a board of education being elected by popular vote if the superintendent was appointed.

The pattern of elective/appointive status by political level is given in table 1. The states are organized into five geographic regions, defined according to the sharing of common social and economic patterns of settlement and growth, as established in the literature (Odum and Moore 1938). Table 1 demonstrates the very strong association between the type of school governing structure and the geographic region. These patterns reveal that the structure of school governance formed in states by the latter part of the nineteenth century did not diffuse from a northeastern center.

The grouping of states by region reveals three distinct models of school governance. The first, predominates in the Northeast, where the state level is appointive and the local level is elective. Departures from this are evident in only two of 11 states, where both levels are appointive. The second model, in the South, reverses the Northeast pattern; the state level is elective, and the local level is appointive. Five of the 13 southern states deviate from this pattern; Georgia and Virginia have both levels appointive, Tennessee and North Carolina follow the

TABLE 1

Method of Choosing Education Officials (Appointment or Election) at the Local and State Levels of Government in 1880

	State/Local		State/Local
Northeast:		Midwest:	
Connecticut	AE	Illinois	EE
Delaware	AE	Indiana	EE
Maine	AE	Iowa	EE
Maryland	AA	Kansas	EE
Massachusetts	AE	Michigan	EE
New Hampshire	AE	Minnesota	AE
New Jersey	AA	Missouri	EE
New York	AE	Nebraska	EE
Pennsylvania	AE	Ohio	EE
Rhode Island	AE	Wisconsin	EE
Vermont	AE		
South:		West:	
Alabama	EA	Arizona (terr.)	AE
Arkansas	EA	California	EE
Florida	EA	Colorado	EE
Georgia	AA	Dakotas (terr.)	AE
Kentucky	EA	Idaho (terr.)	EE
Louisiana	EA	Montana (terr.)	AE
Mississippi	EA	Nevada	EE
North Carolina	AE	New Mexico (terr.)	AE
South Carolina	EA	Oklahoma	. . .
Tennessee	AE	Oregon	EE
Texas	EA	Utah (terr.)	EE
Virginia	AA	Washington (terr.)	AE
West Virginia	EE	Wyoming (terr.)	AE

NOTE.—A = appointed, E = elected. The first letter in each two-letter pair refers to the state level, the second to the local level. Oklahoma is unreported because it did not become a U.S. territory until 1889.

“northeastern pattern” of appointive at the state level and elective at the local level, and West Virginia has both levels elective. The third model, in the Midwest, has both state and local levels elective. Only one state deviates from this pattern—Minnesota, which follows the northeastern model. School governance in the remaining states or territories, in the West, is evenly split between the northeastern model of appointive/elective and the midwestern model of elective/elective. Reviews of school reports for 1875, 1890, and 1905 underscore the reliability of the patterns indicated for 1880. Two southern states—

North Carolina in 1890 and Virginia in 1905—altered their governing structures to conform to the dominant pattern in the South of state-level election and local-level appointment. Kentucky changed its governing structure in 1890 to both levels elected, as did two western territories—Washington and Wyoming—in the same year.

Some of the nonconforming states may not be altogether deviant if their locations are considered. West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey are largely on the periphery of their regions, and the former three states are geographically contiguous. West Virginia borders the Midwest. That Kentucky altered its governing structure to both levels elective may exemplify a similar effect of geographic proximity to the Midwest. Georgia, Virginia, New Jersey, and Maryland are the only four states with both levels appointive. All except Georgia are geographically proximate and midway between New England and southern regional influences, perhaps accounting for their form of school governance.

This strong association between governing structure and region suggests that elements shaping the political systems of public education operated at a regional level and may have been selectively modified through experiences specific to individual states. The problem is to identify the preconditions for the emergence of a type of school governing structure. The methodological task necessarily joins two objectives: to identify the preconditions for a given school governing structure within states, and to formulate more general statements that interpret the relationship between preconditions and school governance. Thus, a note on the appropriate strategy is important.

Comparative Analysis and Genetic Explanation

Appointive or elective processes are considered to be the means through which relationships between jurisdictional levels are formed. They are ideal-typical concepts that simultaneously are historical outcomes that require explanation and the means whereby explanation is reached. The analytical strategy is necessarily implicated in “genetic” explanation, which attempts to explain “why it is that a given subject has evolved out of some earlier one” (Nagel 1961, p. 25). The task is to delimit the number of factors that are logically determined to be plausible preconditions of a historical outcome.

The method of genetic explanation is particularly suited to research conditions that are constrained by a limited number of cases or the

absence of quantitative values. Such conditions do not easily allow for traditional statistical analyses.³ Rather, as an alternative to variable-based statistical analyses, a comparative historical analysis is appropriate (Ragin and Zaret 1983). Comparative analysis is guided by a criterion of “logical consistency” that assists both the selection and validation of relevant preconditions. Thus, if a historical outcome 1 is attributed to preconditions *a* and *b*, then outcome 1 and only outcome 1 results; outcome 2 should not be observed where *a* and *b* occur as joint preconditions. To the extent that this consistency holds for a number of cases, the validity of their causal association is strengthened (Sewell 1967; Skocpol 1980, pp. 35–40).

The successful demonstration of causal associations is balanced only through the assertion of more general interpretive statements (Zaret 1980, p. 1187). Interpretive propositions attempt to predict historical combinations given adequate knowledge of specific antecedent conditions. The methodology of genetic explanation contains two inter-related segments: demonstration of specific causal relations, and their interpretation through more general concepts arranged in propositional form.

The next section investigates specific patterns of settlement as the significant historical antecedents to school governing structures. The pattern of settlement that shaped the formation of community units and their relation to the method of choosing education officials at various political levels is examined for the Northeast, South, and Midwest. The West and Southwest are not discussed for two reasons. First, their settlement was later than any of the previous three, commencing largely with the termination of the Civil War. Second, it is clear that the West does not exhibit a distinctive model of school governance but is a mixture of the northeastern and midwestern forms. The focus of the analysis here is on the antecedents to general models of school governance; it is not directed to the explanation of particular states.

Patterns of Settlement and the Organization of Common Schooling

Northeastern Settlement

The Northeast is the oldest area of settlement in the United States. The settlement of the Northeast is inseparable from the history of the New England colonies. The colonial social structure was shaped by both the transplantation of English traditions of local governance and the geographic influences that faced the original settlers.

The most evident English influence is the importance of the New England "town."⁴ Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were divided into shires, which were further divided into districts known as hundreds, which were in turn divided into townships (Fairlie 1906, p. 4). The township was fundamentally a social unit, the hundred was a judicial unit, and the shire was an administrative unit through which the political integration of townships was achieved. In early Massachusetts towns, organization and powers were originally owed to the political officials of the Massachusetts Colony. The original division of land in New England was a form of county division, equivalent to the English shire. The towns of New England underwent a natural, organic growth *after* their genesis as "cells" of the colony (Adams et al. 1892).

The management of the affairs of individual New England townships was conducted by "selectmen," individuals of important social standing to whom crucial functions were entrusted. The early colonial settlements, primarily ones established prior to 1647, carried over the English tradition of local governance, notably the "principle of obligation" whereby the body of selectmen was recruited through appointment or "co-optation" (Webb and Webb 1963, p. 32). In place of community election, selectmen assumed political duties in accordance with their chosen vocations. This tradition of town governance is significant as a historical legacy of limited popular participation and as a precedent for appointment over election (Lockridge and Kreider 1966, p. 550). The practice of "co-optation" as a means of determining the governing body of early colonies was progressively made more democratic, yet governance by selectmen and the more popular governance through the town meeting always coexisted.

Both the original governance through selectmen and its gradual replacement with the town meeting can be directly tied to the conditions of settlement that shaped the colonial social structure. The early colonies were compact settlements, characterized by land proprietorship that was held in common or divided according to the will of the majority. Farmlands were separated from the central core of houses, which reinforced the compactness of habitation. This pattern of settlement was necessitated, at least initially, by the constant fear of Indians and by the difficulty of securing an adequate food supply. Moreover, because colonists valued land highly, the amount each small settlement claimed tended to be large. Consequently, settlements were separated by considerable distances, which made their interconnection weak.

Such conditions promoted religious conformity. The combination of the sectarian proscriptions of Puritanism and the isolated conditions of settlement contributed to the original communal integration of the communities. The church, in addition to serving as the ideological

center of the Puritan town, assumed an ecological significance. For instance, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, to help sustain community unity, the church was strategically located at the center of the core area of houses, and laws stipulated that no home be built more than one-half mile from the meeting house or church. The centrality of religion in school struggles of the late nineteenth century was foreshadowed by the ecological and ideological importance of the church in colonial settlements. "It was in this compact form of settlement that the church-town school spent its entire existence, and in which the civil school had its birth as well" (Updegraff 1908, p. 95).

The relation of settlers to the land and the importance of religion in securing this relation is the historical backdrop to the development of inequalities in schooling. The compactness of early settlements, necessitated by external conditions and sustained through internal religious ties, defined inhabitants of the core houses as the "unchanging body of the people" (Channing 1886, p. 30). Traditionally, townspeople repelled outsiders. This made admission to a settlement conditional upon religious conformity and/or land ownership (Adams et al. 1892, p. 202). With the increase and dispersion of population, however, people began to be received as townsmen who did not own land. The line of distinction between landowners and nonowners established a very marked and noticeable division (Bushman 1967, p. 53). These internal economic distinctions weakened the hold of the town church on the settlement and exerted a pressure toward dividing the land into the smallest social units capable of community habitation.

In addition to the effects of population increase on territorial subdivision, family inheritance practices contributed to the early decline of the homogeneous colonial settlement. Through the partitioning of family land holdings, reinforced by the unequal allotments of farm acreage by town managers, considerable economic disparities became evident by the second generation of settlers (Bumsted and Lemon 1968; Greven 1970; Powell 1963). Although the nucleated form of settlement weakened, it did not disintegrate. Rather, the inability of subsequent generations to secure parcels of land became the very force behind the generation of new towns (Greven 1965; Lockridge 1981, pp. 41–42; Trewartha 1946). In response to both population increases and economic inequalities, the discrepancy between allotment of town funds and the benefits derived from common institutions became publicly evident. The school most sharply symbolized this discrepancy. As a consequence, the schoolhouse of the center "moved" (Updegraff 1908) to the parishes on the periphery, re-created, as it were, "around a new church and school nucleus" (Trewartha 1946, p. 575). The alternating historical process of town growth and subdivision into

smaller parish units is the predecessor to the formation of the school district, a unit common throughout the Northeast by the eighteenth century.

The significance of northeastern settlement patterns to school governance lies in how school units became embedded in compact communities. The overlap between school district and elementary social units reinforced the connection between immigrant and socioeconomic groups and the control of schooling. The struggles over unequal access to and control over schooling that were to dominate the latter half of the nineteenth century have their historical roots in early settlement patterns. The educational historiography that has been based on northeastern states correctly describes the evolution of the civil school out of the church-controlled and town-centered school.

The retention of election of school officials at the local level, which united small, local areas, attests to the survival of the strong historical relation between community and school. Cook (1976, p. 148) depicts the ties between communities and the county level of government as the basis for the "provincial hierarchies": "Political elites at every level were open to new men, but a hierarchy of towns and a traditional set of officeholding families combined to give political organizations at the county level a pattern of stability to make the ability to speak for local interests a primary criterion for successful participation in provincial affairs." This "pattern of stability" at the county level had important roots in English society and was reproduced in some way by colonists familiar with the political function of shires. Breen (1975, p. 9), in a description of English society, identifies this experience as important to the strength of localism in New England: "If town and country dwellers of the early 1620s felt a sense of political loyalty to anything beyond a few local institutions, it was likely to have been more to a county community than to the English nation as a whole. Within the shires a network of interrelated gentry families usually stood between the king and his subjects."

The local democratic practices of towns were, in part, tied to the capacity of towns to maintain some control over the county level. One result of this control was a measure of political leverage against the magistrates of the Massachusetts General Court. For the colonists who emigrated to New England, the retention of popular election at the local level was similar to the local control maintained in English towns. In both New England and England we see the significance of three interacting parties: local communities, the county (or shire) level and a state (or Crown) level. The tendency to appoint state-level school officials in northeastern states and the prevalence of popular control at the town and county levels may indicate diminished popular par-

ticipation in the choosing of education officials beyond levels that integrate towns and districts.

Southern States

During the nineteenth century it was commonplace to cite the educational backwardness of public education in the South. Explanations for the slow development tended to place major responsibility on cultural resistance stemming from the Civil War (“the Lost Cause”) and Reconstruction (Rose 1905, p. 362). To be sure, these events were instrumental in retarding the growth of schooling (Knight 1969). Nonetheless, more detailed historical treatments of schooling in the South, while recognizing points of difference with other regions, underscore the South’s basic similarity to conditions elsewhere (Knight 1914, 1922). In so doing, attention is directed to factors that measurably influenced the development of schooling.

One such influence was population dispersion. The predominant feature of early settlement in the South was plantation agriculture based on a slave economy and the paucity of compact settlements in the form of towns or cities. Although the myth of the Old South as entirely nonurban has been put to rest (see Curry 1974, pp. 46–49; Ernst and Merrens 1973), the impact of early population settlement on the growth of autonomous, commercial towns is the relevant point here. Southern settlement was dominated by tracts of land owned by a plantation-based elite (Eaton 1949, p. 56; Moore 1966, p. 117) juxtaposed to a large number of small farm owners on isolated farmsteads. In contrast to the Northeast, where open-field, nucleated settlement contributed to the emergence of towns as the basic corporate unit, the county was the primary unit in the South. Below the county level, concerted social interaction was infrequent outside the family or plantation; in southern states “the county was perhaps the smallest district where there was a sufficient number of persons with political power to make possible any collective public activity” (Fairlie 1906, p. 192).

Population dispersion did not permit a process of territorial subdivision, which was the case in New England (Weeks 1898, p. 1407). The counties in southern states were, however, divided into districts for purposes of local government. Such magisterial, electoral, or educational districts differed from the towns of New England in two important ways. First, a single district did not conduct all local government functions. Rather, a given district performed a particular governmental function. As a consequence, the boundaries of districts “were neither coterminous nor inclusive in area, but may overlap each

other” (Fairlie and Kneier 1930, p. 469). Because of this, districts could not develop the internal cohesion seen in the parishes within New England towns. Second, these county districts were not corporate entities. They did not possess powers defining them as autonomous units relative to the county or state (Van Wyck 1882). The county court or board of commissioners was the dominant authority, which could influence the social activities of smaller settlements. Thus, the county was the primary social unit. Its territorial size necessitated politically subordinate yet arbitrary subdivisions. These subdivisions, however, could attain social or political autonomy only under favorable population or economic circumstances.

A dispersed pattern of settlement directly affected the genesis of transportation patterns within and across counties. Key to these patterns was the structure of social relations within counties. As the smallest organized and enduring social unit, the county was the only culturally meaningful unit capable of uniting the plantation-owning elite and the many small peasant farmers. The economic gap between these two strata did not promote community interaction (Bemis 1893, p. 13). Moreover, the weakness of the commercial middle class inhibited the growth of independent towns or cities, which might challenge the dominance of the plantation elite. While divergent economic and cultural interests divided farmers and plantation owners, they were nonetheless united through the strategic location of the county courthouse. A courthouse-centered system served the political interests of the elite, for such a system connected the dispersed farm population to the courthouse by a number of roads which radiated outward. (Newton 1974, p. 343). The lack of corporate standing of any settlement lower than the county, even where original settlers brought the heritage of the New England town (Bemis 1893), is a feature of local governance adaptive to the geographic and population constraints of southern states.

County road and highway systems often joined, creating a broad transportation system that linked counties to the state capital. Roads cutting across county boundaries often resulted from neighboring counties that joined their populations to form districts. Thus, school districts were often not confined within a single county. The historical design of roads and highways is rooted in the early population settlement across expansive territories (Vance 1968, pp. 450–51). The isolation of small communities and the weak intercommunity communication fostered political centralization, but also fostered democratic participation of counties in the formation of state government.

The pattern of dispersed settlement, the prevalence of isolated farmsteads, and the paucity of commercial towns left their marks on

public schooling and its governance and are evident at the end of the nineteenth century. Given the absence of corporate communities below the county level, there was little autonomous schooling to be governed below this political level. The crucial nexus was between counties and the state; the system of common schooling emanated from the state level. The appointment of circuit superintendents, often to counties with which they had few or no personal ties, ensured a neutral governance over the only basic corporate units in the state. School governance in southern states was similar to the structure of governance in ancient China (Weber 1951, pp. 47–50). There, as in most southern states, the task of governance necessarily focused on two persistent concerns: the political implications of deep social divisions, and the need to create territorial cohesion. The appointment of county school officers in the South, like the appointment of district magistrates in China (see Watt 1972), was an attempt to create territorial integration.

Beyond the constraint of expansive territory, the structure of administrative governance in ancient China was shaped by a “three-cornered struggle” involving the central government, the appointed provincial magistrates, and local interests dominated by extended kinship groups (see Bendix 1962, p. 113). Much as in the Northeast, the structure of three interrelated parties is the important background to educational governance. Although the comparison to China is speculative here, it does help to reveal that, in contrast to China, southern states lacked the solidarity of local kinship groups who could countervail against initiatives from a central, state authority. In the South, solidarity existed at the level of county elites. Here, prestige was conferred on an educated and therefore respected member of the county by appointing him to be a county superintendent. These county-level elites, similar to provincial magistrates in China, were integrated through their loyalty to the state level.

Midwestern States

The settlement of the Northwest Territory most certainly involved the migration of groups from the Northeast and South, as well as from Europe directly. Yet, the formation of a distinct midwestern pattern of settlement cannot be sufficiently explained by migration flows alone. Compared with states in the Northeast and South, those in the Midwest were latecomers to statehood. Thus this large central territory was settled under conditions not found in either New England or the South. Differences in the timing and process of settlement contributed to a unique pattern of local government. The mode of

school governance developed directly from the midwestern model of local government.

Most important, settlement of the Midwest was conducted in a relatively planned, rather than an “organic,” fashion. That is, settlement was shaped by congressional legislation in advance of migration. The Ordinance of 1785 gave the emerging states an enormous, inalienable education fund through the legislative designation of a portion of land for school purposes only. The settlement of the Midwest, proceeding from 1800 to about 1860 through the steady migration of people from the Northeast and South, involved the division of territory into six-mile-square townships, which were further divided into one-mile-square (640-acre) lots numbered 1 through 36 (Pattison 1964). The sixteenth lot or “section” (near the township center) was specifically reserved for schools, and an adjoining section, number 22, was to be reserved for the church. The final Ordinance of 1787 amended the 1785 legislation to abolish the section for religion.

These six-mile-square divisions of the public domain, which were given the New England name of “townships,” were corporate units and became the primary units of local government. Thus, this pattern of settlement altered the northeastern pattern. “As New England township life grew up around the church, so western localism finds its nucleus in the school system” (Shaw 1883, p. 10). That the township system antedated the settlement of the Midwest affected what became the core institution of settlement. This difference in settlement patterns partially explains why a theoretical framework that emphasizes the struggle to remove schooling from the hold of religious sectarianism does not fit the historical experiences of most midwestern states.

The adoption of the township system, in most cases, resulted from the consensus of all counties forming a midwestern state. In some states, northeastern and southern migration produced an opposition between the New England “town” model and the southern “county” model. Although this opposition attests to the importance of cultural diffusion, nearly all midwestern states adhered to the mandated township system; when counties were established by predominantly southern migrants, they nonetheless adopted the township organization with its popular election of government officers (Bemis 1883). Indeed, adoption of the township system resulted, in part, from the migrants’ familiarity with the school district of the New England states; the township system “was a western protest against the wasteful district system of the east” (Boone 1906, p. 147). The inequalities engendered by the northeastern district model, reinforced by the control of socially independent areas over schooling, were minimized by the artificial nature of school location. The potential for particular group dominance

of schooling was cut off in advance by the geographic balance between school "section" and civil township. The common school system was embedded in each township in an orderly and common fashion, producing a system described as "theoretically symmetrical, [which] contributed to the theory that the system is the common school system of the state and not of localities" (Bowman 1903, p. 89; see also Kiehle 1903, pp. 18–21). Congressional territorial division and specific regional economic conditions eventually helped to accommodate both north-eastern and southern migrants to the midwestern township pattern of governance. The northeasterners may have designated the schoolhouse as the "nucleus" of the settlement; the southerners reinforced the conception of schooling as the source of collective identity.

The educational provisions of the Ordinance of 1787 and the economic conditions of the region also favored a democratic cooperation not observed in the Northeast or South. The settlement pattern promoted an internal economy oriented toward pure capitalism and an external dependency on export to distant markets. Settlement in these central states did not simply aim to establish homesteads and a traditional agrarian society. Unlike the New England pattern, settlement was not in compact towns but "in the isolated farmstead, set in the middle of a large, consolidated holding, with no common lands and very little fragmentation" (Parker 1975, p. 9). Open-field agriculture, a basis for inherited inequality, never began in these states; instead there was a pattern of free farms rooted in a family organization. The system of family farms on parcels of land ranging between 80 and 160 acres did not create direct competition among families but cooperative competition to generate a surplus destined for northeastern and southern markets (Curti 1959, pp. 115, 205). Commerce with the Eastern Seaboard became considerable. The link to external markets sustained the commitment to maximizing the potential yield of the land. The peculiar association between an orderly pattern of land settlement and economic ties to outside markets enlarged the occupational diversity beyond direct agricultural labor. This did not immediately give way to northeastern patterns of ethnic and class divisions or the southern pattern of castes. Rather, it established labor opportunities for new migrants. Although families were to a degree private in their economic pursuits, from early on there was a public and associational commitment to the political affairs and social functions of township life, and thus to a common schooling.

Whereas in the Northeast we encounter a history of conflict between groups over schooling, a common education in midwestern states was more generally respected. The structure of townships and their interconnection lay at the root of this respect and reinforced popular

control over school governance. A township that did not set up a school, employ a teacher, and ensure some minimal attendance level would relinquish its share of revenue to other townships (Burns 1905, pp. 55–56). This “involuntary contribution” elevated township benefits over the gains of particular groups. This is not to say that conflicts over schooling were absent in the Midwest; there was considerable ethnic and religious sectarianism, with the structure and conduct of public schooling at the center (see Jensen 1971, pp. 122–53). The conflicts over schooling that characterized midwestern politics stemmed, in part, from the strong overlap between ethnic or religious groups and particular townships. Nonetheless, I propose here that, precisely because of the township structure and interconnection, the pursuit of private interests necessarily took more “separatist” directions, heightening the demarcation between the public and parochial educational systems, reflecting persistent ethnic or religious loyalties. The record of group conflicts in the Northeast stems from private interests gaining access to and some control over the educational system. By contrast, the township structure of midwestern states inhibited the penetration of the public educational system to a greater extent and set a different historical precedent.

Summary

Let us summarize the evidence on regional settlement patterns and their corresponding social and political formations. For the Northeast, the original open-field, nucleated settlements and patterns of primogeniture inheritance were sufficient antecedents to the rise of towns. These towns were politically autonomous and characterized by marked internal inequalities. For the South, early settlement in isolated farmsteads dispersed across large territorial areas was associated with sharp divisions of race and inherited privilege. Such conditions fostered neither the spread of autonomous towns nor a commercial class capable of challenging the political dominance of a land-based elite.⁵ For the Midwest, individual farmsteads set in an orderly manner with townships nonetheless interconnected through common social and political activities. While the ties of economic dependence to northeastern markets promoted the diversity of economic development, settlement in regular townships militated against economic inequalities growing into major political divisions. Moore (1966, p. 115) states, “By 1860, the United States had developed three quite different forms of society in different parts of the country: the cotton-growing South; the West, a land of free farmers; and the rapidly industrializing Northeast.”⁶ Although

this is a description of regional differences on the eve of the Civil War, those tendencies continued through the close of the nineteenth century.

While indeed different regional societies, a theoretical interpretation of their varying forms of school governance requires that we move above the potential stumbling block of individual experiences. For this, we return to the distinction made at the outset between corporate units and the various political levels.

A Theoretical Interpretation: Education and the Integration of Communities

The impact of settlement patterns on school-governing structures centers on two variables: the unit of settlement and the state and local levels of government. The unit of settlement is the territory that encompasses the basic economic and social activities of a community. There are three relatively regionally distinct units: the northeastern town, the southern county, and the midwestern township. These units differed in the scope of their territory; the northeastern town was the most compact; the southern county was the most expansive; and the midwestern township was the most exactly specified. Despite the differences in territorial size and definition, each unit represented the "community" as defined in classical human ecology. Each unit held the status of a corporate entity, which meant, in part, that such vital community responsibilities as the maintenance of roads, fences, and boundaries, the supervision of the poor, and local taxation were within their jurisdiction (Howard 1889). To these community functions was added educating the young, thereby establishing a set of community duties that exerted an independent pressure toward a "common" schooling.

While the conduct of school affairs was controlled by the corporate unit, the governance of common schooling was shaped by the structural relationship between such units and the various levels of government. In this respect, the three regional areas differed significantly. In the Northeast, the corporate units were subordinate to the county government. Although the New England towns enjoyed considerable autonomy, they were nonetheless subject to the supervisory authority of the county court (Howard 1889, p. 333). While the former were invested with corporate powers, the latter remained crucial to the collective integration of the towns. In the Midwest, the township was simultaneously a corporate unit and a level of government, the result of planned settlement. This overlap created the unique structural balance in the Midwest between communities and government. The affairs of schooling were neither controlled by particular groups nor subject to

conflicting subcounty authority. In the South, the county was the essential corporate unit as well as the lowest political level. Yet, in contrast to the Midwest, this relationship was formed through natural settlement and reinforced by a dispersed population over an expansive territory.

Despite these specific historical experiences, a general theoretical interpretation may be proposed, grounded in a succinct hypothesis: *The election of education officials will tend to be exercised at the political level immediately above corporate units.* Although electoral participation in selecting school officials transfers school governance to an authority outside of communities, it simultaneously binds communities to a broader network, a broader constituency.⁷ In the absence of this constituency, communities remain in geographic isolation. This exercise of election has effects similar to rules of reciprocity in kinship structures, which, as Levi-Strauss noted (1969, p. 69), “substitutes a social relationship for spatial juxtaposition.” In the Northeast, the county or township was the level of government immediately above the towns, that level at which their spatial juxtaposition was overcome. In the South, the counties, as corporate units, could achieve a social integration only at the state level. For the midwestern states, corporate units and government, being not only coterminous but equal in scale, reduced conflict and contributed to the overall integration of townships. Election of education officials at both the county and state levels was essentially equivalent.

By extension of the hypothesis, we may propose that *appointment will tend to be exercised at government levels toward which corporate units are indifferent.* For northeastern towns, electoral participation at the state level was not as crucial to their integration as was participation at the county level. In this light, we may more clearly understand why the bureaucratization in northeastern states of educational systems at the state level, including the appointment of school officers, could be effectively ignored by towns; such indifference did not essentially alter their hold over the school district. In the South, political appointment of county school officers was legitimized by the popular election of the state superintendent. The absence of viable corporate units below the county level minimized the chances of a popular disaffection and removed the need for a “political resolution” of conflicts among independent communities over schooling.

We may go further. In the Northeast, the appointment of state-level school officers and the codification of educational policy contributed to the “predictability” of governance over local school affairs. Indifference toward appointment at the state level varied from state to state, depending on how much control towns had at the county level, control that could be used as leverage against arbitrary or excessive exercise

of state authority. Similar to the localism of English towns as a defense against the rise of absolutism of the Crown, electoral control of the county level gave New England towns a stature that allowed a political neutrality toward state authority. Crozier (1964, p. 189) captured the tendency toward bureaucratic centralization: "The power to make decisions and to interpret and complete the rules, as well as the power to change the rules or to institute new ones, will tend to grow farther and farther away from the field where those rules will be carried out." The attention given to this centralization and remove from local communities in several recent accounts (e.g., Katz 1975; Tyack 1974) obscures the historical role of communities relative to the various political levels, which allowed state bureaucratization to proceed while at the same time setting conditions on its exercise of political power. The centralization of educational supervision may have supplanted voluntary controls of instruction with impersonal rules, yet it also resolved the political integration of communities and state government.

Conclusions

This paper critiques the hitherto common practice of generalizing nationwide the northeastern bureaucratic model of school governance. Although it supports the interpretation that this bureaucratic model was the outcome of a political resolution, the evidence of several distinctly different regions requires that the ecological factor be considered along with the political as contributing to the *specific form* of school governance.

The influence of settlement patterns on school governance becomes evident when the relationship is understood between units of settlement and the method of choosing education officials at various levels of government. This analysis has identified three regionally distinct units of settlement—the northeastern town, the southern county, and the midwestern township—and shown how each is causally associated with a specific form of school governance—that is, whether school officers at various levels of state government are elected or appointed. It is hypothesized that school officials will be elected at the political level immediately above the region's elementary corporate unit, while school officials will be appointed at levels toward which those corporate units are indifferent.

The state-level patterns of school governance have certainly changed since the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, this analysis suggests that such changes may follow specific developmental paths. As the character of corporate units changes, and as the relationship between

these units and the various political levels changes, change may be anticipated in the organization of school governance.

Finally, the analysis of school governance suggests that the historical relation between community units and state and local levels of government may structure the organizational context within which educational issues are formed and contested. As Stinchcombe (1965) notes, a sizable presence of various social groups is an important precondition to the maintenance of formal and informal organizations. In addition, Blau (1977) proposes that a greater degree of inequality within communities than among them is conducive to the formation of links across communities. For the Northeast, the town set early preconditions for the continued influence of particular ethnic and socioeconomic groups over public schooling. Nonetheless, an increasing interdependence of towns would facilitate the degree to which the state administrative level could reach into the affairs of local communities and shape educational policy and practice. For the South, the sparsely populated community level has helped to foster state centralization. Yet the weakness of community interconnections means, in part, that local patterns, school segregation particularly, may go unaffected by state-level initiatives. Moreover, both the frequency and success of such initiatives are weakened by the presence of county-level elites. For the Midwest, the township may have served to lessen the influence of particular ethnic and socioeconomic groups by creating a more balanced division of powers in state school systems.

Notes

1. One example of “irony” as meant here may be found in Ravitch’s critique of “radical revisionists” (1978) and a subsequent response by Katz (1979). While Ravitch critiques several scholars termed “revisionist,” the fact that most addressed how nineteenth-century schooling centralized bureaucratically is not explicitly denied. Ravitch accepts the spread of the “bureaucratic factory model” (Ravitch 1978, p. 55), yet more favor is given to a pragmatic account of its origins (Troen 1975) than one that stressed the crystallization of certain class values (Katz 1968). The importance of such debates is not at issue. Rather, the possibility that alternative organizational paths were evident for the late nineteenth century can be obscured if a *single* model is generalized across states.

2. Kaestle (1978), in a critique of the “functionalist” model of educational change, noted that its use was pervasive among social historians, “whether they like it or not.” Kaestle quite justifiably turns to the resistance of parents to the common school as evidence of the overgeneralization of the functionalist model. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to this discussion that, while his title speaks to nineteenth-century America, his examples are drawn from Massachusetts.

3. It is not implied that statistical analysis of educational characteristics across states is not possible. Surely it is. The focus here is on typical patterns, not quantitative values. Therefore, explanation of the regional patterns of election or appointment of school officers is not sought in tests of statistical association with other measures of school systems but in the demonstration of a logical consistency to historical conditions out of which these patterns emerged. To suspend a statistical analysis of these patterns does not, again, imply that they emerged in isolation from other characteristics of school system governance that are amenable to statistical test. If the observed patterns were not simply the result of diffusion, they should indeed be expected to co-vary with structural features of state educational systems. One such feature directly relevant to school governance is the proportions of school funding derived from the local and state levels. Such data are reported by Grubb and Michelson (1974, p. 26) for five-year intervals from 1890 to 1930. The proportion of school revenues derived from state and federal levels varies for the three regions examined here. For 1890, the mean percentage for the southern states was 56.6 percent; for the northeastern states it was 21.9 percent; and for the midwestern states it was 17.2 percent. An analysis of variance for these three regions is strongly significant, with group differences accounting for 57 percent of the variance in school funding (η^2). Further analysis, however, reveals that the Northeast and Midwest are not statistically different; all the variance is explained by partitioning two groups, combining the Northeast and Midwest in contrast to the South. While these findings do not establish a relationship between funding and patterns of election or appointment, the direction of the means does suggest a link between popular election and funding at that level. Specifically, popular election of school officials at local levels may lessen the degree of state participation in the funding of schooling, leaving the generation of revenues to local communities or counties. The southern states, unable to sustain local communities below the county level, could build school systems only through direct funding from the state. The patterns of school governance, having historical roots in regional settlement patterns, may thus affect the level of funding and in turn the locus of control over schooling.

4. The debate over the actual origins of the New England town was a lively one (Adams 1882; see also Eisenstadt 1956, pp. 14–20). Despite this controversy, it is clear that the term “town” as used in New England can be traced to Anglo-Saxon terminology, although it is not a direct replica of English towns. The use of the English terms “shire,” “hundred,” and “township” is evidence of this heritage.

5. Although these are useful as summary descriptions of regional influences, they fail to apply strictly for states at or near the edge of regions. New Jersey is an example of an exception to the northeastern model, as Wacker (1975, p. 221) explains: “New Jersey lay between two areas of contrasting settlement on the Atlantic Seaboard. New England was generally characterized by nucleated villages within relatively large grants of land known as ‘towns.’ On the other hand, from Pennsylvania south the more general pattern was dispersion of residences rather than agglomeration. New Jersey experienced both forms of settlement.” How this mixture of settlement patterns contributed to educational appointment at both the state and local levels is not clear. The presence of this pattern in states contiguous to New Jersey suggests a beginning point for explanation.

6. The various regional patterns of settlement and their social and political effects in the United States bear a striking similarity to the three regional

commodity systems identified as antecedents to state formation in Western Europe (Hechter and Brustein 1980). The feudal, sedentary pastoral, and petty systems are similar to those outlined for the Northeast, South, and Midwest, respectively. The feudal system, most conducive to state formation, was characterized by open-field, nucleated settlement, nonalodial property rights, the presence of towns, and the influence of significant political divisions in the form of a rigid and hierarchical class structure. The sedentary pastoral system, most resistant to state formation, was characterized by isolated and sparse settlement in hamlets, the scarcity of towns, and the predominance of kinship-based political organization. The petty commodity form, intermediate to the feudal and sedentary pastoral, was characterized by settlement in square fields, a greater diversity of crops, and export-oriented agriculture. In this system, the individual peasant holds, freely bought and sold, contributed to unequal wealth, yet the "domination of the countryside by the towns" (Hechler and Brustein 1980, p. 1071) blurred class distinctions and weakened potential political divisions. The strong similarities between these regional commodity systems in Europe and the regional patterns of settlement in the United States lends some additional support to the link proposed here between regional settlement patterns and the type of political organization of schooling.

7. This parallels what Durkheim (1956, p. 69) described as the function of education. In a discussion of the many "special educations" resulting from the diversity of occupations, castes, or localities, he noted "that they are not sufficient unto themselves; everywhere that one observes them, they vary from one another only beyond a certain point, up to which they are not differentiated. They all rest on a common base." This common base derives from the requirement that private and local affairs be subordinated to a broader collective integration. In similar terms a system of school governance cannot be sustained merely on the weight of communities' proximity to one another.

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