Chicago School Reform as History

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In October 1989, Chicago began a process of school reform that transcends the historic limits that have constrained the potential for change in urban education. Nonetheless, despite its originality, Chicago school reform resonates with most of the great themes that have shaped urban school systems and the struggles surrounding them for 150 years. Understanding Chicago school reform's place in history clarifies both its significance for theory and practice and the challenges before it. Here, I discuss the relations between Chicago school reform and history around five topics: (1) the origins of bureaucracy and the ascendance of experts and professionals; (2) educational reform as a social movement; (3) race and ethnicity, or schools as contested terrain; (4) the revitalization of the public sphere; and (5) the limits of educational reform. I then turn to the implications of these historical resonances for thinking about the dilemmas and obstacles confronting this extraordinary and exciting adventure in school reform.

Chicago school reform refers to a legislative act, a process, and a social movement. As a legislative act, it signifies the radical decentralization of the city's school system achieved through the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act (P.A. 85-1418) by the Illinois legislature on December 2, 1988. As a process, it refers to an ongoing attempt to implement both the letter and spirit of the act, that is, to change both the structure and the content of public schooling through the transformation of educational governance. As a social movement, Chicago school reform means the mobilization of communities around the cause of educational reform, the democratization of relations in school governance, and the revitalization of the public sphere. This article will use Chicago school reform in each of these three senses.

To begin, a word about Chicago school reform as legislative act. Under the Chicago School Reform Act, voters elected a Local School Council (LSC) for each of the city's nearly 600 schools. Six parents, two community members, two teachers, the principal, and, in high schools, a student as nonvoting member formed each council. Councils hire principals, now placed on four-year contracts and stripped of tenure in the system. Certification requirements for principals have been liberalized. Principals choose teachers

for their schools and fire unsatisfactory ones with less difficulty than before. Councils have broad authority over curriculum and school management, and they control a sizable amount of state money previously routed through the central bureaucracy. A decision of the Illinois Supreme Court in November 1990 declared the initial method of electing LSC members unconstitutional because it violated the principle of "one-man one-vote." As a result, the legislature developed a modified election procedure for the second set of LSC elections, in November 1991. Why the Illinois legislature passed such a radical version of school reform in 1988 and how and where it originated are fascinating and important questions that others have written about ably. They are not, however, the focus of this article, which instead attempts to situate the Chicago experience within American social history and to elucidate its implications for the present moment in educational reform.[1]

THE ORIGINS OF BUREAUCRACY AND THE ASCENDANCE OF EXPERTS AND PROFESSIONALS

Chicago school reform reinforces historic and theoretical arguments rejecting the contemporary notion that highly centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic structures are inevitable and inescapable. Whether in the public or private sphere, rigid, hierarchical bureaucracies now have few defenders. The problem has been finding alternative models, for throughout the twentieth century, social theorists have found bureaucracy uniquely appropriate to modern industrial societies. Its rule-driven division of labor, elaborate classifications, and centralized authority all have appeared inescapable prerequisites for accomplishing complicated tasks quickly, predictably, and efficiently on a large scale.

For these reasons, the architects of public school systems believed in bureaucracy, although they did not use the term. Indeed, especially in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, urban schoolmen pioneered in the creation of public bureaucracies. Faced with the task of translating common school ideals of free, universal schooling into practice in burgeoning, diverse cities, they drew on manufacturing and military analogies to erect the first urban school systems. At first they lacked a master plan, but step by step the earliest big city superintendents solved problems of classification, supervision, and coordination by age grading, differentiating levels of schooling, introducing new layers of administrators, defining criteria for employment, improving job security, building career ladders, and centralizing curricula. They justified their decisions on grounds of efficiency, economy, and expertise. They saw, in fact, no viable alternatives.[2]

Others, however, did. The history of public education in the first half of the nineteenth century reflects a struggle among alternative models of organization. I have written about these elsewhere as paternalistic voluntarism, corporate voluntarism, democratic localism, and incipient bureaucracy.[3] They differed not only in details but in their position on important dimensions of organization: scale, finance, professionalism, and control. They varied, too, on the social values or priorities on which they rested, the importance they placed on community and democracy, or efficiency and economy. In the end, bureaucracy triumphed. Bureaucracy served the aspirations and convenience of schoolmen far better than the needs of children and their families, and they defended it for more than a century as not only appropriate but inescapable. Now, by demonstrating an alternative model, which emphasizes community, democracy, and flexibility, the process of Chicago school reform is exposing the assumption that highly centralized bureaucracies are inescapable as wrong. Even within a great postindustrial city, the possible modes of organizing schools mock the constricted vision that has constrained the organization of public education within narrow, bureaucratic forms for so long.

By rejecting conventional bureaucratic models of organization, the implementation of Chicago school reform challenges historic processes of professionalization and the ascendance of experts. School administration, like several other professions new in the nineteenth century, emerged out of institutional practice. Lacking precedents and models, the first superintendents created their role. As enough of them appeared around the country, they began to meet regularly, form new associations, share common problems, and try to heighten their influence on local educational policy.[4] Tipping the balance of power between communities and professionals in their own favor ranked high among their concerns. Professionalism meant distancing decisions about policy and the day-to-day operation of schools from parents as well as from politicians and, even, school boards. To a remarkable degree, late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban schoolmen successfully insulated their systems from outside influence, fending off or deflecting periodic attacks, reshaping innovations to fit existing structures, and erecting immense self-protective, self-justifying machines held together by mutual self-interest.

Universities combined with the new social and behavioral sciences to abet the process of professionalization. Responding, first, to the need for massive numbers of high school teachers, universities created departments of education in the late nineteenth century; most of these became schools in the third decade of the twentieth century. Just as school systems sought autonomy from their communities, education professors wanted independence within universities. Like school systems, schools of education became increasingly insular, self-contained, self-protective worlds in minimal contact with their

university communities. Schools of education took their lead from the increasingly elaborate occupational division of labor within school systems to create programs tailored to the new specialties. Their research justified and refined methods of sorting, testing, and tracking. School systems hired their senior faculty to conduct comprehensive surveys. Tapping their networks of former students, influential faculty shaped the senior administration of school systems. The symbiotic relationship joining these university-based educational barons and practicing administrators reinforced the resistance of school systems to outside pressure and their resilient capacity to absorb innovations without change.[5]

Professionalism and expertise became (as they did in other areas of practice and social science) ideologies rooted only partly in accomplishment, serving occupational needs, and legitimated by pretensions to an "objectivity" belied by the influence of a host of contextual factors. The ability to deliver played only a minimal role in the social construction of some new professions. As a result, in education, by the late nineteenth century, outsiders had begun to criticize the size and cost of school systems as well as their failure to deliver quality education. Nonetheless, the coalition of school professionals and academic experts first formed in the nineteenth century acquired both symbolic and political power, for its growth facilitated and legitimated the divorce of school from community and the subordination of parents to professionals. Therefore, the concept and process of Chicago school reform assaults the foundations of intellectual authority in schooling as well as customary patterns of control. This is why it arouses so much resistance not only among teachers but among many university-based researchers as well.

Teachers' skepticism and caution reflect sound instincts, for they have usually played an ambiguous role in school reform. Although reformers have criticized teachers harshly, they have expected them to transform their practice — by themselves, with guidance from outsiders, or under pressure from laypersons lacking professional knowledge and skill. Reform, in fact, frequently places tremendous burdens on teachers, whose effective workload expands with no compensating increasing in authority or pay. Indeed, Lawrence Cremin wrote that progressive education failed in part because of the excessive demands it placed on teachers.[6]

Tensions between reformers and teachers or administrators are not new. School systems have proved remarkably adept at aborbing, reshaping, and denaturing innovation. When threatened with what they cannot resist, their response more often than not has been mimetic, a shadow reform of features without substance. In the late nineteenth century, to take one example, kindergartens arose outside school systems with a social reform thrust directed to young children from poor families. Their advocates intended them to operate in ways and with purposes distinct from those of public schools. When forced to incorporate kindergartens, public schools kept the

name but dropped the differences; kindergartens became preparation for grade one.[7] This history of the kindergarten is one example of how the intersection of bureaucratic structures with professional interests has insulated urban school systems from reform. Reformers have often failed to initiate major change because they have tried to alter the behavior of professionals without doing very much about the structures in which they work; or they have concentrated on structural reforms with little attention to the interests of the professionals who work within the system.

By and large, reforms have failed to dent the skeletons of urban public school systems. Some historians argue that those skeletons had been erected by the late nineteenth century; others would date them a couple of decades later. The disagreement centers mainly on whether the differentiation of schooling in the early twentieth century represents an extension of organizational principles, an elaboration of a preexisting model, or something novel. Although I take the former position, the disagreement does not weaken the general point: The structures of school systems are old, enduring, and resilient, and reform movements have failed to change their basic features. For the most part, to change the metaphor, reforms have shifted around the furniture of education without moving walls or rebuilding the structures that contained it. The implementation of Chicago school reform is the first major assault on the walls and the first major reform to pay simultaneous attention to both the structure and the profession of education. That is one reason why it is of such historic significance, and why the task it faces is so difficult.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

One of the sources nurturing Chicago school reform is the set of loosely interrelated urban social movements of the last three decades. These include not only the civil rights movement and the community action component of the War on Poverty but local "antigrowth" coalitions and neighborhood mobilizations around a variety of issues. Each of these movements has generated an indigenous leadership that has facilitated the coalescence of a new urban politics that has scored local successes across the country, what Harry Boyte calls a "new citizens' movement."[8]

Antigrowth protests have attacked the "growth coalitions" that sponsored urban redevelopment by replacing neighborhoods with office towers, expressways, and convention centers. At the same time, locally based, issue-specific, extra-party mobilizations of citizens have tried to stop an expressway, reclaim abandoned housing, end redlining by a bank, expand and reallocate services, improve the environment, extend citizen participation, and advance the cause of racial justice. Like most social movements, these local mobilizations have served as agencies of adult education, for participation has demanded that members learn not only the tactics of social change

but the substance of issues. By democratizing information, they have liberated citizens from dependence on official sources and incubated the leadership of the new urban politics.[9]

Despite the variety of their goals, these local movements transcend conventional party politics. They reveal a distrust of both large corporations and government bureaucracies and reflect a protest against remote organizations that swallow their dollars and structure their choices, but deny them a voice. They express frustration, even rage, over the inability of ordinary citizens to influence the decisions that shape their lives. They call into question the authority of experts and the legitimacy of institutions.

Four features of social movements require special comment. Three are historical, one more recent. First, in the United States major social change has not originated with established political parties and institutions. The abolitionist movement, temperance, civil rights, the women's movement—all began outside conventional political channels and defied conventional political labels. Political parties adopted some of their demands when they became opportune. Government became the vehicle for their translation into policy, but it did not incubate or nurture them.

Second, successful social movements have forged broad coalitions, often among unlikely partners. Coalitions, of course, have more leverage: They control more votes; they can mobilize diverse voices; and they legitimate what otherwise might be thought of as "special interests." David Rothman, for one, has documented the coalition of "conscience and convenience" that initiated reforms in the treatment of the mentally ill, criminals, and juvenile offenders during the Progressive era; in the same years a coalition of employers, insurance companies, labor unions, academic experts, and reformers built the first step in America's welfare state: workmen's compensation. One could write the history of the civil rights movement or the women's movement from a similar perspective. Coalitions, however, remain fragile, often short-lived, and their splintering wounds the movements that they have sustained (a point to which I shall return).[10]

Third is the difficulty of sustaining the zeal with which social movements begin. Usually movements follow a trajectory that Max Weber has described as the routinization of charisma; Ernst Troeltsch has called the transition from sect to church; and others have labeled the transformation of cause into function. Whatever the label, the underlying dynamic is the same: the replacement of the white-hot energy with which mobilizations begin by organization and routine and the consequent translation of original purpose into institutional maintenance.[11]

Fourth, recent social movements have called on a new body of alternative experts. Whether they are protesting the environmental impact of an expressway, the dangers of a nuclear power plant, or the impact of urban renewal on affordable housing, activists require data. They need it not only to

argue for alternatives but, as well, to challenge the experts supporting the agencies and institutions they oppose. Alternative experts based in advocacy groups, new institutes, and universities now provide them with sophisticated support. At first, reliance on experts seems to contradict the demystification of professionalism and "objectivity" and the emphasis on grass-roots citizen participation and control at the core of urban social movements. The point, though, is more subtle, for recent social movements are helping to redefine the meaning and role of professionals and expert knowledge rather than to simply reproduce conventional relationships between knowledge and action. This redefinition, however, remains experimental, inchoate, still lacking clear formulations and models.[12]

In every way, Chicago school reform fits the model of an urban social movement. It holds the bureaucratic, centralized structure of schooling partly accountable for educational failure; attacks the authority of school professionals and the school district's experts; redistributes power to parents and community representatives; and asserts the capacity of ordinary citizens to reach intelligent decisions about educational policy. A broad coalition outside conventional politics (business leaders together with parent and community groups and representatives of minority organizations) formulated a demand for radical school reform and seized a moment of widespread disgust following a teachers' strike to persuade the legislature to meet its demands. The coalition made its case with the help of alternative experts who provided authoritative data on educational failure and technical assistance in drafting new legislation. In the process, school reform has become a historic experiment in adult education, as its roughly six thousand Local School Council members confront, and often master, issues of management, finance, and educational policy.

Special circumstances in Chicago facilitated the success of the school reform movement. These included both the election (and, ironically, the subsequent death) of Harold Washington, a committed, charismatic mayor, himself outside the main political machine, who first assembled an education "summit"; a rich legacy of community organizing facilitated especially by the late Saul Alinsky; and an enlightened, active philanthropic community led by foundations organized into the Donors Forum. In the first year of school reform, the base of support broadened to include at least rhetorical commitment from virtually every major constituency in the city. To its supporters, school reform became a cause that they sustained with energy, dedication, and long, unpaid hours of work. In the process, they built a social movement across the lines of race and class that usually divide the populations of this and other cities.[13]

RACE AND ETHNICITY: SCHOOLS AS "CONTESTED TERRAIN"

The politics of Chicago school reform as both process and movement remains partly a politics of race. There, as in other cities, ethnic and racial

groups always have viewed schools as "contested terrain" in their competition for resources, rewards, and recognition. Alone among major institutions, schools, as Ira Katznelson explains, unite the otherwise bifurcated politics of neighborhood and work place that have characterized America's "city trenches" since the mid-nineteenth century. For Katznelson, the politics of neighborhood, channeled through political machines, has focused on issues of ethnicity, race, and territoriality; the politics of work, expressed through trade unions, has concerned jobs, income, and other matters related to class. The split between them has prevented the formation of a political movement based on class, or a labor party, as in other Western industrial democracies. Only schools transcend the bifurcated politics of America's cities because they link concerns of home and neighborhood with those of class. For this reason, they stand as outposts fought over in the ongoing wars for survival and dominance among competing ethnic and racial groups in America's cities.[14]

In Chicago as elsewhere, recent demographic history and the redefinition of urban space have heightened struggles over the contested terrain of schooling. Population movement constitutes the first force: the great post–World War II migration of African-Americans into Chicago, the more recent arrival of Latinos, and the exodus of whites. By shifting the political as well as the demographic balance in the city, these migratory patterns have changed the rules of the contest, the major issues at stake, and the identity of the players. Within the city, a new social ecology has emerged: vast areas of concentrated poverty and transitional zones where African-Americans and either whites or Latinos struggle for dominance. In these transitional areas the racial struggles around schooling assume their most intense and visible form.[15]

But racial struggles permeate almost all educational politics, often in ironic ways. Desegregation, of course, fueled modern racial politics. In the South, desegregating schools sometimes precipitated the loss of jobs for black educators, a theme, albeit played out differently, in Chicago school reform as well. In Chicago, the school district resisted desegregation for years, defying the law with one tactic or another. At the same time, the city government resisted building public housing until it could assure its racial segregation. These fierce, bitter battles around racial issues culminated in the 1983 election of Harold Washington, the city's first African-American mayor, who inherited a city where each year white flight (the public school system now has about 15 percent white students) left racial integration increasingly moot. The city's new demography combined with affirmative action to put African-Americans in the school district's administration. In fact, in the 1970s and 1980s, the school system facilitated upward mobility among the city's African-Americans. It was their misfortune, however, to inherit an educationally bankrupt school district at the moment of school reform. When reformers attacked the school bureaucracy, they assaulted African-Americans; when in

its first year school reform eliminated about 500 central office jobs, most of those cut were black. For this reason, at first organizations representing middle-class African-Americans remained distant from, if not hostile to, school reform. They argued that reformers had excluded them from negotiations with the state legislature. Some contended it was no coincidence that reformers launched an attack on the central administration only when its color had changed to black.[16]

The first contemporary racial struggles over the contested terrain of schooling focused on access: eliminating both legal and de facto segregation and quetioning testing and tracking practices that seemed to discriminate against minority children. In the 1960s, power also emerged as a major issue, with attacks on educational bureaucracy, calls for parent and community control, and experiments in decentralization. With the retreat from the spirit of the Great Society and the misuse of the example of New York City to discredit it, community control, unlike desegregation, almost vanished as an issue. Only recently has it reappeared with the surging interest in school-based management and educational restructuring, of which Chicago forms the most dramatic example.

Early in the century, debates about African-American education also included curriculum and purpose. The disagreement over industrial education between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Dubois defined the two ends of a spectrum dividing African-American educators throughout the country. With the dissipation of the issue, the struggles around segregation and control overwhelmed the question of content. Recently, however, calls for "diversity" and an African-centered curriculum have refocused debate on the content of schooling. The reasons are various: the virtual disappearance of desegregation as an issue, the decline of white control over schooling, a search for ways to build pride and self-esteem in African-American children, a belief that conventional curricula rest on a constricted, inaccurate view of history and culture, and, of course, the rise of a national movement championing multiculturalism and diversity.[17]

The debate over an African-centered curriculum adds to the issues fueling the racial politics of school reform in Chicago. Although a racial politics did not emerge with school reform, in the last few years it has assumed a new shape. The terrain remains contested, but the landmarks, rules, and, even, the identity of the contestants are not so clear. In its racial politics the process of Chicago school reform also stands on the edge of history.[18]

THE REVITALIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

As both a legislative achievement and a process of educational improvement, Chicago school reform stands as the major alternative to the assimilation of schooling to a market model. If it fails, the advocates of "choice" across public

and private schools will inherit the field. The momentum of recent history works against Chicago school reform because of the degradation of the public sphere that taints public education along with government and other aspects of civic life.

"Public" has shifted its meaning throughout American history, and relations between public and private have remained protean, their boundaries always contested and renegotiated. In early modern England and Colonial America, public referred to education carried on in a school instead of at home with a tutor. In the early nineteenth century, it signified schools open to a broad section of the population and either free or inexpensive. Here, the major example was the New York Public School Society, which was a voluntary association that provided schooling for the city's children with money from the state. In these early years, public often was equated with "pauper," because only the poorest children in cities received free education.[19]

To create common schools that embraced all classes, the first generation of school reformers worked to break the equation of public with pauper. Their remarkable success resulted not only in a new public institution but in a new definition of public as combining both the finance and the control of schools. Institutions founded, controlled, and administered by voluntary associations no longer could claim public status, even when they received most, or all, of their funding from government sources. This definition of public has persisted. It has succeeded so completely that we accept it as natural, as the only meaning consonant with American political culture when it is, instead, a product created to suit a set of historical circumstances.

The new antebellum definition of public reflected optimism about the possibilities of democracy, pride in government, and a robust civic culture. In the same years, as state and local governments assumed new social responsibilities, they built new institutions for the sick, mentally ill, poor, delinquent, and criminal. The monumental architecture of these institutions (even, often, poorhouses) attested to the civic pride and optimism about the capacity of government they embodied. The high proportion of eligible voters who cast their ballots in local elections signified an active political culture and a belief that government mattered. The parades and processions that marked every holiday and notable event testified to a collective civic life acted "in public."[20]

By the early twentieth century, observers wrote about city government as the conspicuous failure of American democracy. Electoral participation had declined. City governments preoccupied with order had channeled popular festivities into bland, controlled rituals. Reformers viewed major institutions—penitentiaries, mental hospitals, reformatories, poorhouses—as warehouses incapable of effecting rehabilitation. Welfare reformers feared the incompetence and corruption of government would undermine any form of public relief. Only public schools and hospitals retained their hold on public

esteem. Advances in medical science and the reorganization of medical practice improved the public standing of hospitals.[21] Despite a barrage of criticism, public schools could claim unique advantages: They drew in children across class boundaries; they appeared to deliver the credentials increasingly necessary for economic mobility; and they offered a relatively cheap and nonredistributive way to ameliorate crime and poverty and to acculturate immigrants to America.

Nonetheless, as the functions of state and local government expanded throughout the first several decades of the twentieth century, they managed to stave off further erosion of their legitimacy and support. American cities retained a public sphere that — if it excited few and annoyed many — at least appeared capable of reform. Civic groups that wanted to improve cities tried to reform public practices and institutions, not to replace them with private alternatives.

Exactly when support for the public sphere began to erode is unclear, although the 1960s probably marks the turning point. But its effects are unmistakable. One institution after another has lost its hold on public confidence. To many people, civic government appears hopeless. As a result, reformers increasingly seek answers to civic problems in a market model that contracts the functions of government to the private sector. In education, the civil rights movement helped expose the contradictions between the democratic promise of public schooling and its segregated, tracked, unequal reality. Middle-class movement to suburbs robbed public schools of strong supporters and weakened their tax base. Increased poverty confronted city schools with heightened problems. Bureaucratic structures hampered their response to their new context. In the early twentieth century, one young woman had no difficulty controlling classes of fifty or seventy students in city schools, which were remarkable for their order. By the 1970s, students and teachers feared violence in classrooms and hallways, and armed guards patrolled their corridors. Critics complained that urban schools at best functioned as custodial warehouses, keeping youngsters off the streets, but teaching them very little. In many cities, almost all parents who could afford the expense sent their children to private or parochial schools. As a result, in education, public returned to its early nineteenth century equation with pauper.

Along with other urban institutions, public schools had lost the legitimacy that had sustained their hold on public esteem and the public purse. Urban Americans now lived with a degraded public sphere that they increasingly rejected. Many, reading recent history as showing public schools impervious to reform, looked longingly, and with rose-tinted glasses, at private and parochial schools, and they defined reform as giving parents tax dollars to send their children to whatever schools they chose.

School reformers in Chicago share the prevailing criticisms of public schools and the conclusion that earlier reforms by and large failed. They, too, see the school bureaucracy as impervious to change and advocate radical restructuring. However, they reject public-private choice as the direction. Their commitment to the interconnections among community, democracy, and education leads them away from market models. They believe public-private choice will increase inequalities; they fear that any model of choice, introduced prematurely, will undermine the efforts of local communities to improve their schools. They seek the revitalization of the public sphere, not its abandonment.[22]

The stakes are very high. Public schools are only one of the inner-city institutions that have failed, collapsed, or withdrawn. In many areas, only churches still command respect. The result not only denudes inner cities of the services they require; it gnaws away at the conditions that sustain a viable public life and the possibility of community, encourages the privatization of personal life, and reinforces an anomic individualism. Nothing remains between individuals and a consumer culture to which they have increasingly little access through legitimate means. Without a revitalized public sphere, the degradation of institutions and communities will continue, and no policies directed to the reform of family, work, or welfare will reverse the devastation in America's inner cities.

THE LIMITS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM: SCHOOLS AS SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS?

As a process, Chicago school reform unfolds within an arena defined by three shifting boundaries. Demography and space comprise two of them. The third is the city's restructured economy. Like other major cities, Chicago has lost much of its manufacturing base. In its emergent form, Chicago is a post-industrial city with an economy rooted in finance, real estate, education, health care, and other services. The shift has profound implications for education.

It helps explain, for instance, the involvement of the business community in school reform. Part of its interest derives from familiar concerns about the availability of a skilled work force now and in the next century. But the business community's sympathy for school reform also reflects the reorganization of contemporary corporations. Sooner than educators, business leaders realized the drawbacks of excessive centralization and bureaucracy. Many have drawn on a new organizational literature that emphasizes flexibility and participation to reform their firms. For them, school reformers' assault on bureaucracy and centralization resonates with their experience conducting business in a postindustrial world.[23]

Business leaders probably always have had their own organizational models in mind when they thought about schooling, and throughout American history they have participated actively in educational reform. Indeed, attempts to recast schooling have occurred during each major economic restructuring in American history. Urban school systems emerged first in the mid-nineteenth century during the transition to industrial capitalism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the great wave of Progressive-era reform accompanied the growth of giant national corporations and changes in manufacturing organization and technology. In each instance, advocates argued for educational reforms necessitated, they said, by unprecedented developments and opportunities.

Advocates of educational reform, however, pressed for more than an appropriate fit between schooling and new forms of economic organization. They also asserted the unique capacity of schools to solve the great social problems occasioned by the recurrent transformations of America: crime, poverty, unassimilated immigrants, weakened families, unreliable workers. In the process, they oversold the potential of schooling. One result has been recurrent rounds of attack by critics and rebuttals by educators faced with the repeated need to justify failure.[24]

Like its predecessors, as a process of change, Chicago school reform promises a great deal. But it exists in the context of deindustrialization, racism, and concentrated poverty now compounded by fiscal crisis. It confronts urban schools that have resisted fundamental change for decades. Even with the most enlightened leadership and all the best breaks, by themselves schools cannot dent the poverty, crime, and racial isolation that disfigure major American cities. In fact, unrealistic expectations for schools can retard the amelioration of social problems, as has happened throughout America's past, by obscuring the difficult redistributive issues that underlie them. What American school reform has lacked throughout its history, and Chicago has yet to offer, is a set of appropriate and realistic expectations, an ambitious but prudent sense of the outer limits of educational change.

IMPLICATIONS OF HISTORY

No policy recommendations flow automatically from this attempt to situate Chicago school reform as legislation, process, and movement within American social history. Instead, what I can offer for each of the topics around which this discussion has been organized is a set of questions and cautions that flow from this attempt to view Chicago school reform as history.

First, the origins of bureaucracy and the emergence of expertise: Urban school bureaucracies have absorbed most previous reforms, undercutting their original purposes and transforming them to fit existing structures. How can Chicago school reformers avoid this mimetic pattern of reform? Past

school reform has failed, too, because it has placed excessive and unrealistic demands on teachers. Can Chicago school reform as process discover a responsible and equitable way to energize, and often reeducate, teachers? Professionalism and expertise frequently have served as ideologies to advance the career interests of school personnel and distance them from the parents and communities they have served. Still, few would deny the importance of experience, the relevance of advanced knowledge and skills, and the importance of some research. How can school reform negotiate a balance between the appropriate exercise of expertise and democratic control?

Second, education as a social movement: The coalitions that sponsor major reforms reflect divergent interests, and for that reason they almost always have remained fragile, splintering eventually along their fault lines, with major influence resting with the most powerful partners. What can hold together the cross-class, multiracial constituency that sponsored the legislation creating Chicago school reform and what will be the consequences if it splinters? Social movements that start in a blaze of passion almost always lose their zeal. As they become routine, they dissipate not only their energy but their purpose. Can Chicago school reform as a movement defy the conventional sociology of social movements by finding ways to retain its energy and passion? As a social movement, Chicago school reform has drawn on a set of alternative experts whose assistance proved essential but whose ongoing role remains unclear. Can it define a role for its alternative experts that links knowledge to social action without sacrificing the distinctive contributions of either?

Third, schools as contested terrain: American urban schools always have served as contested terrain in racial and ethnic politics. Schools constitute one forum in which participants in a diverse polity confront their differences and negotiate their aspirations. But racial contests also have ripped communities and schools apart. Can Chicago school reformers find constructive ways to mediate the tensions among the city's racial and ethnic groups and help them realize their goals? The implementation of Chicago school reform blocked one road to African-American mobility by cutting jobs in the central administration. Whatever its gains for children and parents, it represents a setback for one segment of the city's African-American middle class. Can school reformers find a way to balance demands for equity and mobility with a redistribution of power to local schools and the communities they serve?

Fourth, the revitalization of the public sphere: Chicago school reform represents the major alternative to private-public choice as a plan for restructuring urban schools. It inherits the legacy of failed educational reforms. It confronts the momentum of privatization. It is surrounded by failed urban institutions and a degraded public sphere. Can its advocates make a convincing intellectual case for rebuilding the public sphere? Can they stave off the forces of choice long enough to improve their local schools? Can they create a sphere for democracy that resists the market?[25]

Fifth, the limits of educational reform: The rhetoric of Chicago school reform sometimes slips into the language of unrealistic expectations that in earlier periods has undercut educational reform and retarded effective solutions to social problems. Can Chicago school reformers develop appropriate and realistic expectations for the city's schools? Although school reform by itself cannot solve Chicago's great problems, no big city in American history has mobilized a comparable social movement around educational reform. With its roots reaching deep into the interstices of the city's ethnic and racial composition, can school reform become a catalyst for an even more ambitious social movement that directly addresses the city's poverty, joblessness, and continued legacy of racism?[26]

These are some of the challenges that emerge from appreciating Chicago's daring, exciting, and unprecedented adventure in school reform as history.

Notes

1   For excellent discussions of the history of the legislation and the early experience of the reform, see G. Alfred Hess, Jr., *School Restructuring, Chicago Style* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1991); Mary O'Connell, *School Reform Chicago Style: How Citizens Organized to Change Public Policy*, a special issue of *The Neighborhood Works*, Spring 1991; and David Moberg, "Can Democracy Save Chicago's Schools?" *The American Prospect* 8 (Winter 1992): 98–108. For ongoing information about Chicago school reform see *Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform*, ed. Linda Lenz (a publication of the Community Renewal Society, 332 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60604).

2   This interpretation of the origins of bureaucracy and of alternative models of organization (see the next paragraph) is based on my analysis in Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

3   Ibid., pp. 24–57.

4   On the history of educational administration as a field, see David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

5   Michael B. Katz, "From Theory to Survey in Graduate Schools of Education," *Journal of Higher Education* 37 (June 1966): 325–34; and Arthur G. Powell, *The Uncertain Profession: Harvard and the Search for Educational Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

6   Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 348–49.

7   Marvin Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban Public School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870–1915* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

8   Harry Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).

9   For an extended theoretical discussion of urban grass-roots social movements, see Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

10   David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980); and Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900–1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

11   An example of this process in the field of social work is described in Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880–1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

12   On the relations between social science experts and public policy, a work I have found especially useful is Charles E. Lindblom and David K. Cohen, *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); in Chicago the major "alternative expert" advocacy organization supporting school reform is Designs for Change (Donald R. Moore, executive director, 220 South State Street, Suite 1910, Chicago, IL 60604). Hess discusses Designs' role in *School Restructuring*, as do several of the individuals interviewed for O'Connell, *School Reform*.

13   Paul Kleppner, *Chicago Divided: The Making of a Black Mayor* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985); Robert A. Slayton, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Gregory D. Squires et al., *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 127–51; and Hess, *School Restructuring*, pp. 120–21, 168.

14   The phrase "contested terrain" is from Richard C. Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); and idem and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

15   Squires et al., *Chicago*, pp. 23–126; and Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

16   Paul E. Peterson, *School Politics Chicago Style* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Kleppner, *Chicago Divided*, pp. 32–63.

17   In Chicago, the movement for an African-centered curriculum is led by the Center for Inner City Studies of Northeastern University.

18   The standard analysis of educational politics in Chicago in the preschool reform era is Peterson, *School Politics*; for historical background on the politics of educational reform, see Paul E. Peterson, *The Politics of School Reform, 1870–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

19   I have discussed this at greater length in *Reconstructing American Education*; on the New York Public School Society, see Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System, New York City, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

20   On the architecture of nineteenth-century municipal institutions, see Eric Monkkonen, "Nineteenth Century Institutions Dealing with the Urban Underclass," in *The "Underclass" Debate and the Transformation of Urban America*, ed. Michael B. Katz (forthcoming); on parades and processions, see Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

21   Charles Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

22   "Thinking about the V-Word," unsigned editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 1991, p. 26; Diana Nelson, "School Reform as Superior to Vouchers," *Chicago Tribune*, June 3, 1991, p. 14; and G. Alfred Hess, Jr., "Too Much Democracy or Too Little?" address to The Legal Forum at the University of Chicago Law School, October 27, 1990.

23   Hess, *School Restructuring*, pp. 117–18.

24   Henry J. Perkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education, 1865–1965* (New York: Random House, 1968).

25   The intellectual basis for restricting the market to its appropriate sphere is articulated with force and clarity by Michael Walzer in *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

26   For an assessment of Chicago school reform after its first two years, see G. Alfred Hess, Jr., "School Restructuring Chicago Style: A Midway Report" (Paper delivered at American Anthropological Association meeting, November 22, 1991).