

CHAPTER 2

THE URBAN HISTORY OF EDUCATION

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SCHOOLING in urban settings has long drawn the attention of historians of education, especially in the United States.¹ There, the fields of history of education and urban history grew up alongside one another, if not always together. Both had existed previously but gained new energy in the 1960s in significant part because of the contemporary concern for cities, and city schools, as sites of crisis. In the United States, the social consequences of deindustrialization and metropolitan segregation became points of popular and academic concern in these years as well. Over the next two decades, urban historians dug deeper into the many and broad origins of the urban crisis, tracing a raft of federal and local policies that combined with market dynamics and social preferences to draw resources away from city centers and into white suburbs. Meanwhile city school systems, only a few decades earlier the most resourced and institutionally elaborate in the nation, served socially and economically isolated children and families while their budgets dwindled. It was in this milieu that historians of education turned increasingly to the study of schools in cities.

In other parts of the twentieth-century world, however, urban education and the writing of its history proceeded on a quite different path. The United Kingdom reached “urbanization”—meaning that the majority of its residents live in cities—in the mid-nineteenth century (fully a half-century before the United States), but U.K. scholarship showed little focus on cities until the 1990s. On other regions and in other continents, urbanization proceeded more slowly and drew less concerted attention from historians of education (at least as is visible in works published in English from the vantage point of a U.S. university). It was only in the early twenty-first century that the majority of the global population lived in cities. As of 1910, when the U.S. became urbanized and primary schooling for white people without disabilities was near universal, fully 50 percent of the world’s population lived in Brazil, Russia, India, and China, where rates of participation in schooling remained strikingly low. Only one in ten Indian children between ages five and fourteen were in school. Although significant variation existed within nations and between them, across the twentieth century city residents were relatively more likely to have access to formal educational structures than their rural counterparts. Agrarian economies disincentivized investment in

education, while increasing commercial and later industrial economies centered in cities created demand for skills that schools could help provide. By no means was educational access widespread, especially for the urban working classes, but urban economic and at times political factors enabled more investment in schooling. In China the rural-urban educational gap remains a key focus of scholars, while comparisons between rural and urban settings motivate work in Latin America as well.²

In scholarship on the developing world, much of the history of education has focused on cities by default, as the locations where, for example, elite groups created educational institutions for their children and did or did not support broader access to schooling. Yet the specific urbanism of these locations drew less attention. In previously chiefly agricultural nations that underwent both industrial urbanization and crucial phases of postcolonial and/or postdictatorship state-building, as in Latin America, questions of state-building and democratic citizenship, often examined at the national scale, predominated. In scholarship on India, for example, investigations into the processes of colonial and postcolonial education have framed educational inquiry more than has the urban per se.

Even where historians have given cities and their schools extensive examination, core matters have not yet been settled—much as U.K. historian David Reeder noted in 1977. What was urban education, he asked? How should historians think about the relationship between cities and schools? Were city schools “a mirror that reflects social tensions” stemming from other, broader forces, in the city or beyond, or “a specific set of problems,” both distinct from and “integral” to understanding the modern city?³ In the nearly four decades since Reeder characterized this historical problem, these questions remain without a firm answer—even more so when cities beyond the U.S. and U.K. come into view.

In popular usage in the U.S., “urban education” at present has an amorphous, and often obscuring, meaning. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries “urban” represented a particular combination of density, scale, and social diversity, often around an industrial economy. Today demography at times has trumped geography, with “urban” used to characterize students of color whether located in an industrial core or in a suburban or even exurban landscape. Given the tight association, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, between the terms “urban” and “crisis” in the U.S., “urban education” also has stood in for the educational consequences of economic decline and accompanying or reinforcing public disinvestment or systemic disarray. In the U.S. context, where cities did undergo a striking transformation, an emphasis on crisis may be appropriate. Yet we need to investigate the constructive as well as limiting consequences of a focus on crisis for understanding schools and cities historically.

Historians of education outside of the United States see and interpret a broader array of urban landscapes. In other parts of the developed as well as the developing world, cities located wealth and privilege, poverty and neglect, largely on a pattern that reverses the U.S. model. There, poor and newcomer communities rim the metropolitan edge, while wealth remains largely concentrated in the city center. This is the pattern of the French *banlieu*, which has more in common with the Nigerian or Brazilian dynamics of self-built slums and *favelas* than with the U.S. model of affluent suburbanization.

Some scholars have responded to the diversity of the urban form globally and to the increasing dispersal of poverty, racial and class segregation, and poor infrastructure in the U.S. by gathering ever more under the label “urban.” Equating the urban with social and economic problems “not fundamentally about geography,” as do George Noblit and William Pink, may have the benefit of inclusivity and may help in the ways that the idea of “crisis”

did in U.S. scholarship: by drawing attention through a dramatic simplification. Yet it obscures as well. By removing geography—physical, social, political, and economic—from the conversation, the idea of the urban can lose its analytical power and specificity. Taking stock of the development of the history of urban education and noting promising trends that approach the varied and changing urban landscape with analytical rigor can help toward an idea of the “urban” and of “urban education” that clarifies more than it encumbers.

To consider how urban education has operated as an interpretive frame in the history of education, one route is to examine the countries with the most developed and extensive historical literature on urban education published in English: the United States and the United Kingdom. “Urban education” has operated there as a key organizing concept in approaching both social and economic histories of education, but there remain key questions about schooling that have received less attention in connection with the urban. Scholarly work on other locales comes in for discussion here, where it complements or challenges the dominant strains of thought in work on the U.S. and U.K. David Reeder’s enduring questions about what, precisely, is the history of urban education will also be engaged.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES TO THE CITY AND ITS SCHOOLS

Four key themes emerge in a survey of work on the history of urban education in English. First, even as much work on both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has emphasized urban education, cities appeared chiefly as context for the development of schooling. Urban conditions—especially deriving from industrial production—spurred demand for particular educational forms. Still, the question of how schools might have interacted with the city, or may even have contributed to the making of the city, received much less attention. Second, as apparent in comparison with accounts of the history of urban education from Europe as well as countries in Latin America and elsewhere, the U.S. historiography of urban education has overwhelmingly emphasized the industrial city, often on the Chicago School’s concentric zone model. Third, despite the strong attention to urban education in the history of education in the U.S., scholarly attention to education in urban contexts remains incomplete. Historians have devoted extensive attention to the making of educational bureaucracies, to problems of state control, and more broadly to matters of political economy, particularly in the twentieth century. By contrast, several major themes in the history of education have not been engaged fully in, or in relationship to, the city. And fourth, the idea of the city as the prime site of educational innovation has been challenged, or at least qualified, by new works that emphasize the importance of educational developments in rural settings or at national rather than local scale.

THE CITY AS CONTEXT FOR SCHOOLING

U.S. historians of education have made city settings their chief focus, particularly in works on the twentieth century. Collectively they examine the nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century city as a site for educational innovation, often out of the force of necessity. Cities were bursting at the seams with new immigrant and migrant communities, and schools appeared to be crucial mechanisms for managing urban scale, urban diversity, and the needs of an urban, industrial economy. David Tyack's 1974 *The One Best System* offered the most powerful and enduring view, locating in the urban industrial crucible the forces that crafted the dominant modes of educational practice and organization in the twentieth-century United States.

For Tyack, and for many writing after him, the story of urban innovation petered out in the decades after World War II, and the narrative of crisis took hold as the chief depiction of urban education. If urban schools had appeared more sophisticated, more resourced, more fully elaborated than their suburban or rural counterparts in the first half of the twentieth century, by the second half of the century the balance had shifted. The site of innovation became the site of crisis, and scholars often defined urban schooling as the troubled product of the crumbling city.

Although this view of American cities and schools was responsive to major shifts in urban form, it offered a largely one-dimensional view of city and school interaction. It holds that cities contain and condition schooling. Schools face social and political struggles generated by the urban (typically industrial) form. Despite their great collective value in describing how institutions function and how urban communities struggled over schooling, these works are much less likely to explore how schools may have shaped the city.

This pattern may flow in part from a view of history of urban education that is at times surprisingly disengaged from the specifics of urban forms, the built and human geography of the city. Some of the major works of the 1960s and 1970s on nineteenth-century history of education paid intricate attention—if with competing results—to the geography of small cities and the connections between geography, schooling, and class formation and hierarchy. Yet subsequent work paid more attention to broad ideas of social structure and inequality, with relatively less attention to education in connection with the spatial form of the city.

Reluctance to think about education as a force in the making of the city also may stem in part from relationships between the fields of history of education and urban history. Situated often within colleges of education, historians of education long worked within the relatively narrow boundaries of institutional histories. They answered questions that mattered to their colleagues in education, but only sometimes located their work within related historical fields. Historians of cities and historians of city schools often participated in separate networks of knowledge production, moving in parallel but rarely in conjunction. Important shifts in scholarship in urban history in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, did not immediately find engagement by historians of education.

The terms of debate for much of U.S. urban history of education, set out in works like Tyack's *The One Best System*, predated the crucial urban historical scholarship of the 1980s by such scholars as Kenneth Jackson and Arnold Hirsch. Tyack's work was completed at a time when city growth, and city decline, appeared to be nearly inexorable processes of urban economic and social development. Works like Jackson's and Hirsch's, and later Thomas Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, emphasized the structural forces and policy choices that made the twentieth-century U.S. city, especially in its post-World War II form. This scholarship rendered the city a place that, rather than developing ecologically, was a deeply and intentionally human, political construction. There was not an immediate response to these key works by historians of education, nor was there an embrace by urban historians of matters of schooling.

In the United Kingdom, with a historiography less focused on ethnic or racial divisions but with significant concern for class formation, several lines of scholarship developed that demonstrated thinking about how schools helped shape the city. William Marsden's research led the way, examining the reciprocities between urban growth and educational change even while working within an ecological framework. Marsden understood status hierarchies in schools as reproducing and interacting with lines of class segregation in London, a process he attributed to the "ecological forces" that had shaped the residential landscape extending into and reinforced by schooling as well. Marsden's approach is evident in scholarship on England and Scotland and other European settings, as well as on Australia, that highlights the role of the school in helping to construct the urban landscape via the formation of neighborhoods, the demarcation of state institutions, or the architectural choices made in schools and educational spaces—moving toward a more interactive view of city and school.⁴

One step in moving beyond views of the city as context in the history of education in U.S. scholarship came in a 1997 survey of historical and social science work on urban education. John Rury and Jeffrey Mirel emphasized a transition between ecological views of the city and the new urban sociology that focused on the policy choices and interests that led to urban development and change. Rury and Mirel called, then, for more historical work in the latter vein, particularly work that appreciated the spatial organization of the city as, in Henri Lefebvre's terms, a landscape that was produced and not simply evolving of its own accord.⁵

Scholarship emerging over the past decade has taken up a more spatially focused view of the history of urban education. A first wave of work in the U.S. placed heavy emphasis on white Americans' reactions to efforts to end racial segregation in schools, which became another motive for suburban out-migration of white and middle-class and wealthy residents. Schools became factors in the making of the city, largely by provoking angry resistance and departure.⁶ Later works in this vein more explicitly considered how city decline and suburban growth were interconnected within education and helped indicate the value of a more metropolitan, rather than only central city, perspective on urban education. Gradually this work has moved from an emphasis on "race relations" as a social matter to appreciating how racism and white supremacy operate at the core of the political and economic terrain of schooling and the city.

Recognizing that schools work in multiple ways to define urban space, new studies of U.S. cities ranging from Hartford, Connecticut, and Flint, Michigan, to Raleigh, North Carolina, not only traced expressions of individual or group preference around schooling but also documented how actors in the metropolitan landscape, from real estate developers and philanthropists to urban planners and educators, conceptualized schools at the center of metropolitan development and helped construct race- and class-segregated neighborhoods and jurisdictions. Marta Gutman's examination of Oakland, California, shows how women shaped the built environment, including schools, to serve children.⁷ Careful attention to schools and spatial dimensions of the metropolis helps to avoid sweeping pronouncements regarding class reproduction or social control while still documenting important interactions among schooling, racism, and unequal development.

Ideas of the city (and of the rural context) have also been shaped in and by education. Preferences for urban, or for rural, spaces find expression in school practices—such as primary grades field trips—or in national debates over the appropriate space for university campuses or high school locations. Some educational practices linked school curricula to

students' experiences and understandings of their urban locales or, going further, imagined "anarchic" education practices that freed students from the physical confines of the school and learning at large in the urban context. In Argentina the nineteenth-century city was considered the bastion of civilization's positive forces and potential for the making of citizenship, in keeping with ideas of urbanity emerging in European contexts as well. Yet by the later twentieth century the city took up a negative connotation, as the site of problems of decline or barbarism.⁸

Some urban historians are also newly attentive to interactions between education and markets for labor. One strand of this work appreciates the importance of employment within education, as an at times contested resource in an urban or metropolitan economy. Another returns to some of the core questions of the 1960s revisionist debates to ask how, in metropolitan space, the school curriculum has been a mechanism for promoting economic growth through the conscious production of students as future workers.⁹

David Reeder's 1977 questions about the field of history of urban education juxtaposed two views of cities and schools: of schools as important windows into city dynamics or of schools as separate and important features of the city landscape. New work in history of urban education increasingly values both of these views while exploring a third as well: how schools can be forces in the making of the city, at once shaped by and helping to shape the urban context. Such a focus does not displace attention from such crucial matters as the impact of resources and power in politics and the economy that continue to shape cities and their schools, nor does it choose one side or the other in debates between economic drivers and political drivers in the expansion of education. Instead it encourages scholars to consider how schools have been implicated within these processes.

THE PRIMACY OF THE INDUSTRIAL CITY

Whether taken as context or viewed in interaction with schools, the paradigmatic city in most history of education research in the U.S. and the U.K. is the industrial city. History of education in the U.S. emerged in an era when a singular version of the urban form dominated both popular and scholarly imaginations. In the U.S. scholars believed the industrial city had a particular geography, as famously depicted in the concentric zone model of the Chicago School, spreading outward from a manufacturing and commercial core to residential areas of increasing privilege and wealth. Cities on this model dominated the important case study research of the 1970s through the 1990s. Thinking about the industrial city made sense for historians of education working in a materialist tradition and seeking to trace how the economic order and schooling interacted. Inculcating industrial discipline and balancing the various effects of industrial capitalism motivated many advocates of education. Similarly, industrial work offered influential paradigms for the organization of school systems.

Surveys of the developing world also cast industrialization as a key prompt to the advancement of mass schooling. Yet recent work on Norway by the scholar Ida Bull helps challenge this pattern by tracing the roots of Norway's early (eighteenth-century) shift to mass educational provision in cities not to the Industrial Revolution but to the development of a mercantile economy. This economy, and the class diversity it produced in urban spaces, generated a particularly urban embrace of mass education. The broader implication of Bull's

work—that urban economic processes that predate industrialization helped foster investment in schooling—finds reinforcement as well in research on India and China, where schooling developed earlier in coastal, mercantile cities as well as in industrializing spaces. Andy Green makes an even broader critique of the primacy of the industrial in stories of the expansion of schooling. He suggests that it was not economic pressures—industrial or otherwise—that fed the expansion of mass schooling in the U.S. and in Europe, but rather state-building processes.¹⁰

U.S. scholars have pushed beyond the industrial model in work on higher education. Margaret O’Mara has examined the efforts of higher education and municipalities together to create economic growth through scientific innovation and knowledge production. Recent studies from Cambridge to Chicago and New York draw attention to universities’ impact on the spatial organization of the city, at times furthering urban renewal projects (or at times opposing them) depending on whether projects would help create or protect favorable campus environments. Universities proved powerful actors in making the postwar city.¹¹

Recent projects that highlight the role of schooling in shaping metropolitan space have focused on cities that take on polycentric or postindustrial forms. These works have shifted to an explicitly metropolitan rather than solely urban frame of reference, understanding cities in relationship to expanding and often privileged suburbs. Yet this work has not fully interrogated schooling in the context of postindustrial urbanism. Scholarship on European contexts can offer important examples for U.S. scholars writing new histories of suburban spaces that, by the turn of the twenty-first century, faced poverty, disinvestment, and inadequate infrastructure and became home to broad racial and cultural diversity. Such spatial configurations come to the fore in a study of Madrid’s working-class suburbs in the Franco period. Targeted by the Catholic Church and state for “urbanization,” which meant spatial rationalization, class segregation, and deterrence of working-class organizing, these suburbs became a locus of church-run educational programs and hubs of working-class activism that Manuel Castells called “schools of citizenship.”¹² Whether by shifting to a metropolitan frame of reference or by examining suburban educational history, these projects consider how schooling interacts with multiple geographic and economic forms of the city.

CITIZENSHIP, CULTURE, RELIGION, AND LEARNING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Urban sites have remained the chief location for examining the political economy of education in the U.S and the U.K. Yet cities have been less deeply examined with a focus on other crucial aspects of education: its relationship to citizenship, culture, and religion, as well as in nonschool or noninstitutional settings.

As many historians in locations around the world have demonstrated, citizenship—and particularly the making of citizens for new and developing republics—was a major motivation for the mass expansion of public education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although in some settings cities were thought to encourage traits of citizenship, urban industrial poverty and the anonymity of life in diverse and dense cities often seemed threats

to the shaping of a citizenry. In twentieth-century China, associations among education, urbanism, and elitism proved an impediment in the expansion of education beyond the city. Many historians approached urban spaces as sites of particular demands and challenges for schooling but have been less likely to consider how schools, the specific urban context, and ideas of citizenship at times constructed one another together.

Work on highly local democratic governance of schooling in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates both the potential of and the turn away from this attention to urban space and citizenship. Ira Katznelson's 1982 *City Trenches*, focused on community politics more broadly but with engagement with education-specific struggles, consciously locates ideas of citizenship in the relationship between working-class identity formation and the geography of the city. Subsequent work on decentralized school governance emphasizes racial and ethnic fissures while attending much less to the spatial form.¹³

A few examples of recent scholarship in the U.S. context show engagement with education, citizenship, and the particular urban context. Historians long treated African American residents in northern U.S. cities in the early nineteenth century as if they existed outside of larger narratives of growing educational provision linked to citizenship. As Hilary Moss has shown, however, debates over education were deeply implicated in contests over the boundaries of citizenship. If schooling was important for the ways it produced citizens—a status denied black residents—then exclusion from citizenship and exclusion from schooling reinforced one another. Moss's attention to differing urban cases helps point out city particularities—like Baltimore's demand for skilled black labor—that helped broaden opportunities for schooling. Moss also observes that the particular shape of dense urban economies, as in Baltimore, created multiple avenues, beyond schooling, by which black residents could gain education. These modes of education could not themselves produce citizenship, but they helped establish even stronger claims for both learning and political status. In the 1930s and 1940s, New York City educator Leonard Covello's Benjamin Franklin High School engaged students in community research projects that helped galvanize local support and official commitment to new housing construction in the area. Covello's work was influenced by the broader movement for "community schools" in the early twentieth century, motivated at once by John Dewey's ideas of schooling and citizenship and a desire to intentionally make schools sites of community bonds.¹⁴

Another indicator of the value of considering citizenship and education together with city space comes in histories of black activism in the urban U.S. As Donna Murch shows in her study of Black Panther activism in Oakland, California, urban community colleges functioned not only as formal educational institutions but also as hubs of activist energy enacting new visions of citizenship. Porous boundaries between the campus and activist networks in the broader community helped sustain an organizing base for the Black Panthers. Although often framed as studies of activism rather than under the broader rubric of citizenship, other examples of student organizing are similarly evocative of how students use urban spaces to achieve their civic goals. The richness of these examples should prompt historians to consider more fully how education and new visions of citizenship were articulated and realized in urban contexts.¹⁵

Many important works in the history of education in the U.S. place schools at the center of conflict over culture and religion—sparked by or manifest in debates over what languages students and teachers speak, what textbooks they use with what portrayal of what culture, or what lessons about ideology, morality, or religion schools offer, implicitly or

explicitly. This is a rich strain of history of education, but it is one in which the urban is relatively less represented or more often understood as context rather than as a subject of inquiry and particular interaction with schooling. Recent work on schooling and the concept of race and struggles over bilingual education, for example, engage some of the nation's largest school systems but often leave unanswered the question of how the stories they tell might be different because of the particular political, social, and economic configurations of the city. New work on culture and religion offers more nuanced views than earlier interpretations that saw elites imposing economic, political, and cultural conformity on working-class and immigrant communities. Yet despite this, recent works tend to retain a relatively static view of the city as backdrop. Immigrant communities arrive in the U.S. and become "Americanized" via schooling; extra-institutional modes of education, like the foreign-language press, aid in the process of acculturation, as Jeffrey Mirel shows. Similarly, an exploration into colonial education as a venue for cultural and linguistic negotiation examines an urban colony, Hong Kong, but does not query the place of the urban in the story. How the city works in this process and how, perchance, that process helped shape the city get less attention in this body of work.¹⁶

Pathbreaking works in U.S. urban history offer lines of inquiry that educational historians have not yet tapped but may prove valuable in exploring more interactive views among urban space, citizenship, and culture. George Chauncey's *Gay New York* links cultural history to highly specific attention to the urban landscape, including in the spaces, interactions, and relationships it enables for queer people.¹⁷ What would a history of education be that follows Chauncey's careful attention to the urban form and its interactions with the making of sexuality and culture?

These matters converge also in the enduring challenge for historians of getting beyond schooling as the sole site of education. Many historians acknowledge that the history of education is much broader than the history of schooling. However, schools have consumed the vast majority of scholarly energy. Historians of African American education, telling stories about learning in communities often formally denied or excluded from educational institutions available to white people, have provided more attention to education in other institutions (like churches and clubs) and outside of institutions (in homes and apprenticeships), yet few have followed Lawrence Cremin's 1988 call to attend carefully to the full range of spaces where education occurs. This absence is particularly significant for urban history of education, given that the density of urban space, as well as the institutions that such density entails, make cities ripe locales for an investigation of learning beyond schooling. Hints of what might be found if this field were to be fully explored appear in works in other fields, as when historians of the civil rights movements notice the pedagogical practice of organizers like Ella Baker working in Depression-era Harlem or scholars of the narcotics trade notice how youth gangs disciplined one another against drug use in the 1950s cities.¹⁸

In a 1992 essay Barbara Finkelstein encourages scholars to think about how the city *is* an educational entity. Finkelstein identifies a range of topics, from understandings of children to the nature of community, that could better be understood if scholars shifted from considering education (or, more narrowly, schooling) *in* the city to considering how cities themselves educate. This perspective is more likely to be engaged when scholars trace the creation and the potential of the city rather than prioritize crisis and failure. Attention to the city as an educative force is on view in work on twentieth-century Colombian cities, where the city is not only a site of learning, but the making of the city—the modernization process—served to educate.¹⁹

Labeling cities places of crisis makes it easier to perceive problematic developments and harder to notice patterns of constructive organizing, human productivity, or accomplishment. The negative cast of the idea of crisis, part of the deficit model that has inflected U.S. urban scholarship especially on black communities, obscures instances of great creative innovation in urban spaces. The emergence of global hip hop from some of the poorest and most institutionally neglected neighborhoods in the United States is a prime example. Similarly, the deficit model makes it harder to perceive the multiple, even if struggling institutional and noninstitutional contexts in which people, however embattled in the face of ongoing political and economic struggles for survival, manifest a rich admixture of hope and skill, knowledge and power.

CITIES, SCHOOLS, AND THE STATE

The primacy of the urban in U.S. history of education has been especially visible in relationship to questions of institution-building, developing educational bureaucracy, and, in the process, the development of new kinds of state capacity. Tyack's view of the U.S. urban "one best system" exemplifies the dynamic, in which the urban proved the point of creation for models of bureaucracy, governance, and state capacity that later expanded across rural and suburban systems.

Even as cities received relatively less attention as standard-bearers in cases outside the U.S., new forms of state capacity developed out of urban schooling in other Western nations. Kevin Brehony's inquiry into efforts to structure children's play in Victorian England shows that privately initiated reform efforts quickly opened the way for expanded state functions. Also in the U.K., school practices in the early twentieth century such as the making of report cards and educational records about families pioneered governmental practices of surveillance not only in schooling but for the state more generally. Urban school systems have appeared less dominant in cases of highly nationalized education, such as that in France. The French system was long thought to operate with much more power at the central, national level. Yet work focused squarely on the place of cities in French educational development shows that beneath claims to centralization (and the national-state capacity it might seem to have implied) a more haphazard, varied, and privately administered configuration of schooling continued well into the twentieth century. This work shows that the emphasis on centralized French state-run education was overstated, veiling a long history of "local action and diversity" of educational offerings, particularly at the secondary level. This French pattern aligns with scholarship on developing nations in the early and mid-twentieth century as well.²⁰

A key part of the question of state capacity in and through education is the matter of social welfare provision. Historians in the U.S. have asked how schools figure within various forms of social welfare support. U.S. historians of education have recognized the tendency in U.S. social policy since World War II to use education as a substitute for more robust social service provision. The "educationalization" of social problems as David Labaree has titled it, makes schooling or training a shaky substitute for more active intervention into the economy, such as job creation, minimum wage supports, and similar measures.²¹ "Educationalization" is by no means limited to urban contexts, but it gained particular

support from post–World War II U.S. political opposition to social welfare that reflected the racialization of urban poverty in particular. Many Americans held a view of poverty as the product of cultural or individual failing rather than structural circumstances, and therefore one subject to remedies through education. New work on the place of education in relationship to the broader landscape of social welfare provision developing in the early twentieth century identifies cities and their schools as contributing to the making of the “civic welfare state,” with schooling complementing rather than displacing commitments to social welfare.²²

Although this line of investigation continues to develop, other work emerging in the past decade in the U.S. context raises questions about an urban-centric view of education and state formation. Without denying that urban school districts were sites of innovation and bureaucratic elaboration, new scholarship points toward other modes of state-formation at work in rural and state-level governance and in the administration of new policies operating at the national scale. Nancy Beadie documents how rural and small-town settings linked the building of education and the transition to the capitalist marketplace. Tracy Steffes examines state-level efforts to remedy deficiencies in rural schools in the early twentieth century and identifies modes of expansion in state power over education apart from those under way concurrently in cities. Where elite control and managerial authority ruled in the city context, negotiation and incentives for cooperation with state agendas characterized the rural and state dynamic. Looking at the presence of education programs during and after World War II, Christopher Loss sees a strengthened role for the federal state in education through its direct interaction with citizens as soldiers and then students. Loss and Steffes clarify that as education helped further new state capacities, it did so at scales of governance beyond the city alone. Neither popular support for education as a state function nor the negotiation of state power was of necessity urban. In this regard U.S. historiography becomes more aligned with scholarship on European nations, and Latin America as well, that have long emphasized citizenship and the state over urban innovation, or with China, where questions of state capacity find investigation around the development of education in rural settings more than the urban.²³ This new work does not simply point attention away from cities but offers historians the chance to revisit with increasing clarity the question of what is distinct about education in urban spatial, political, economic, and social contexts.

CONCLUSION

When, in 1977, Reeder helped inaugurate the field of history of urban education and critique its early growth, he rightly noted key ambiguities in the basic shape of the field. What constituted urban education? How did historians understand the relationship between schools and cities—in terms of their historical findings and of the historiographic approaches they took? In the decades of robust work that followed—centered heavily, but not exclusively, in the most urbanized countries, like the U.S. and the U.K.—much of this ambiguity continued. Many historians located their investigations in cities but at times seemed to take the city, and its importance for education beyond urban contexts, for granted. They could do so in part because of the power of the idea of urban crisis, first in the U.S. and later in the U.K. and beyond. Who would need to justify studying the most troubled, the most uncertain

spaces in the educational landscape? Yet while the idea of crisis could motivate more investigation, it could not on its own define the field sufficiently. Nor could it ensure that all of the important questions to ask about education in cities have been asked. Important questions about citizenship and culture remained much less fully interrogated as educational problems in urban space.

Since the 1970s, historical scholarship has moved from taking cities as context to beginning to conceptualize schools and cities in interaction with one another. In some cases, this work identifies ways that schools have helped define the urban landscape. In others, it continues to detail and examine the complex demands on and conditions faced by schools working in urban settings. The strongest of this work pays careful attention to the spatial organization of the city. Similar attention to the spatial organization of education and its consequences for political economy, for culture, and for citizenship has been at times applied to areas outside of the historic urban core, either through a metropolitan frame of reference or with a particular focus on suburban or exurban development. This work, rather than being subject to lumping under a generalizing idea of “the urban” because of the presence of diversity, segregation, or poverty, can instead offer useful comparative perspectives on how education has operated and has taken on particular meanings and has had particular impacts in various geographical forms. More specificity, rather than less, is helpful at this time of widely diverse urban forms and demographics. Specificity remains crucial as exciting new work in urban history takes up transnational frames of reference, from the global movement of segregationist practices and logics to the cross-border construction of cities themselves.

With specificity about the urban form can come an even firmer sense of how much the story of urban educational history matters for broader views of history of education. If we can answer how urban space matters for education, and how education matters for urban space, then we can identify more clearly, as Reeder suggested we do, what is “the particular set of problems” that is urban schooling.

NOTES

1. The author thanks Viola Huang for her research assistance.
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