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# “Good politics is good government”: The Troubling History of Mayoral Control of the Public Schools in Twentieth-Century Chicago

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This article looks at urban education through the vantage point of Chicago's mayors. It begins with Carter H. Harrison II (who served from 1897 to 1905 and again from 1911 to 1915) and ends with Richard M. Daley (1989 to the present), with most of the focus on four long-serving mayors: William Hale Thompson (1915–23 and 1927–31), Edward Kelly (1933–47), Richard J. Daley (1955–76), and Harold Washington (1983–87). Mayors exercised significant leverage in the Chicago Public Schools throughout the twentieth century, making the history of Chicago mayors' educational politics relevant to the contemporary trend in urban education to give more control to mayors in hopes that it leads to improved educational attainment and achievement. A look backward to mayoral politics in Chicago suggests that mayoral control is no panacea for urban education: mayors used strategies of patronage and professionalism to maintain political power, and this eclipsed motivations to improve the schools in an educational sense, in spite of recurrent calls for better schools from the civil rights movement, middle-class reformers, and business interests.

In 1995 Mayor Richard M. Daley gained sweeping control of public education in Chicago. Illinois Governor Jim Edgar signed a Republican-drafted bill that allowed the Democratic mayor to select a “chief executive officer” for the schools and appoint a powerful five-member board of education (Bradley 1995; Harp 1995). The 1995 Chicago School Reform Act raised the visibility of mayoral control of public education nationally as mayors in other cities also gained greater authority in school governance, most notably Boston in 1992, Detroit in 1999, Washington, DC, in 2000, and New York in 2003 (Henig and Rich 2004).<sup>1</sup> Mayor Daley's and others' new-found authority in school affairs does not mesh with a long-standing trend in the history of big city school systems, the transfer of control, since the Progressive era, from poli-

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*Mayoral Control in Chicago*

ticians to business elites and professional experts (Hogan 1985; Tyack 1974; Wrigley 1982). “In a strange reversal,” notes sociologist Katherine Neckerman, “city and state politicians have cast themselves in the same role progressive reformers claimed a century ago, seeking to purge the city schools of waste and corruption and run them according to sound business principles” (2000, 135).

Richard M. Daley, however, was not the first Chicago mayor to be cast in this role. Precedent for the 1995 legislation harkens back nearly a century, when Mayor Carter H. Harrison II appointed an education commission with William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago as well as president of the Chicago Board of Education, as chair (Kantowicz 2005; Murphy 1990). The Harper Report, which recommended a mayor-appointed board with a much-reduced membership (Educational Commission 1900; Wrigley 1982), served as the archetype for all subsequent “social efficiency” reforms, including the 1995 legislation. Harper’s appointment enabled Mayor Harrison to be linked to expert reform, much like the 1995 legislation enabled Mayor Daley to be cast as the efficient administrator bringing order to a decentralized system. The 1995 reform, then, represents not so much a break with the past as an extension of long-standing mayoral authority in the schools. If anything, a break with mayoral control occurred in 1988, when legislation removed most appointive authority from the mayor’s office and vested it in a short-lived school board nominating commission that drew the majority of its membership from elected parents and community residents.

In this article I look at urban school politics through the vantage point of Chicago’s twentieth-century mayors, asking how mayors influenced the public schools and to what ends. The assumption that guides this study follows the suggestion of political scientists Stephen Elkin and Clarence Stone that urban politics in the United States represents a duality of “popular control of governmental authority and private ownership of business activity” (Elkin 1987; Stone 1989, 9). Stone goes on to remind us, though, that this commonplace observation—the reality of democracy and capitalism in urban politics—leaves room for considerable variety. Since populations, political organizations, and economic sectors vary in their complexity, “there is no one formula for bringing institutional sectors into an arrangement for cooperation, and the whole process is imbued with uncertainty. Cooperation is always somewhat tenuous, and it is made more so as conditions change and new actors arise on the scene” (Stone 1989, 9). In the twentieth century, business interests played a

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pivotal and dynamic role in the governance of Chicago's schools, a position that has been demonstrated by Dorothy Shipps in *School Reform, Corporate Style* (2006). I concentrate on popular control through the vantage point of the mayor's office, for in the electoral efforts of local politicians who "need to put together coalitions of diverse interests," Elkin argues that "the most important of these elected officials are mayors, in terms of both the powers that they wield and the visibility of their activities" (1987, 34).

Since the 1990s advocates have pushed for mayoral control in big cities for several reasons, not the least among them being accountability: "Voters need to be able to hire and fire one person accountable to parents, teachers, and taxpayers," according to Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa (Editors 2006, 141). Others reason that the prestige and power of the mayor's office ideally position mayors to harness reform coalitions that move through the political gridlock of elected school boards to generate education policies that raise academic achievement. Whereas urban mayors "may be the only public officials with the clout and visibility needed to promote significant changes," according to Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, they "often have little or no control over their school districts" (2003, 84). Some even claim that mayoral control of the schools will generate economic development as greater numbers of middle-class parents send their children to improved public schools and as increased academic achievement translates into a more productive labor force (Kirst 2002). Mayors, according to advocates of strong mayoral control of urban education, have the potential to organize disparate social groups into citywide coalitions to effect lasting improvements in education.

Recent scholarship on the politics of urban education that utilizes a "civic capacity" framework also tacitly endorses increased mayoral authority. Civic capacity refers to a threshold of cooperation among political, economic, and civil actors necessary for school politics to rise to the level of comprehensive school reform. Scholars note that social and spatial reforms seem to come easier for leaders in some cities than others. "That they can do so," according to Jeffrey Henig and his colleagues, "in spite of centrifugal forces and limited formal powers appears attributable to their success in weaving together formal and informal sources of power" (1999, 16). While it is clear that most big cities in the postwar era, especially those located in the Midwest and the Northeast, face common economic and political challenges that militate against improved schools, such as suburbanization, deindustrialization, and declining influence at state and federal levels, there are nevertheless differences in school reform efforts that seem attributable to variations in the civic capacity of local political formations. The relative lack of significant education reform in Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, and Washington, DC, prior to the 1990s might reflect limited civic capacity, for example, whereas coalitions that vested may-

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

oral control in Boston and elsewhere since 1992 might be indicative of heightened civic capacity (Henig et al. 1999; Henig and Rich 2004). Leaving aside for now the assumption in the “civic capacity” literature that politicians, business leaders, and civic groups working together will reform the schools according to the best interests of urban students, it seems that the one leader most essential for marshaling civic capacity is the mayor.

Due to a tradition of strong mayoral control, Windy City school reformers—whether of the business, “good government,” civil rights, or grass roots varieties—all encountered Chicago’s mayors at the top of the school bureaucracy, even before the reform act of 1995. Whether mayoral control was transparent or opaque depended upon the political context and the personality of the mayor, but mayors exercised significant leverage in the public schools throughout the twentieth century, making the history of Chicago mayors’ relationship with public education a relevant topic given the contemporary trend in urban education to “give more control to mayors” in hopes that such a change would lead to improved school quality (Kirst 2002, 1). Looking backward to the school politics of Chicago mayors suggests that mayoral control is no panacea for urban education, however. Even though a central theme in the history of education literature is the shift in educational governance—from politician to professional, from amateur to expert, and from backwardness to reform—Chicago’s mayors occupied both sides of this framework. As mayoral appointees, school board members and their superintendents often reflected the patronage and electoral aims of mayoral administrations, but when it suited their purposes, mayors also embraced the language of social efficiency and school reform. Yet the strategy of patronage plus professionalism that mayors employed did not result in an education system characterized by high-quality schools.

The record of mayoral control prior to 1995 shows that maintaining political power eclipsed mayoral motivations to improve Chicago’s schools in an educational sense, even though educational attainment and achievement of students became increasing concerns of middle-class reformers, the civil rights movement, and business interests as the century wore on. Here I focus on three mayoralties that Clarence Stone and his colleagues (2001) would depict as employment regimes, followed by a mayoralty that Dorothy Shipps (2006) would conceptualize as an empowerment regime. I begin with a mayor best known for both his demagogic approach to school issues and his use of the Chicago Public Schools for political spoils—William Hale Thompson, who served from 1915 to 1923 and again from 1927 to 1931. Thompson controlled the schools as a populist mayor in a Republican political machine. I then move to two mayors during the quintessential machine years of the Cook County Democratic Party Organization—Edward J. Kelly (1933–47) and, especially, Richard J. Daley (1955–76), the mayor who perhaps most deftly

straddled the divide between professionalism and patronage. Kelly dealt with the schools as a Democratic machine partner, whereas Daley managed them as a Democratic machine boss. To Kelly the schools represented a new patronage network, while Daley augmented patronage with an image of disinterested, professional control. Then I turn to Harold Washington (1983–87), a mayor who made room for civil rights and grass-roots reformers in school policy debates dominated by business elites and middle-class reformers. Washington approached the schools as an anti-machine civil rights Democrat. I conclude by applying observations on the history of mayoral regimes in Chicago to the contemporary debate over mayoral control.

### William Thompson: Populism and Patronage

“Big Bill” Thompson operated as a machine politician whose school politics was largely symbolic—he used the schools to create controversies that galvanized voters and to absorb patronage once elected. He was politically active in decades when Chicago party politics was fragmented—both major political parties competed with each other and with viable third parties in their quests for electoral and patronage control of Chicago government. In the early twentieth century the Republican Party machine was headed by Fred Lundin, a Swedish American businessman who drafted Thompson to run for mayor. For a 16-year period, from 1915 to 1931, “Big Bill” Thompson used populism and patronage to stand at the top of Republican politics in Chicago, serving as mayor for 12 of those years. Thompson’s disputes over public school textbooks and the superintendency helped him craft three electoral victories, while building projects and patronage appointments in an expanding school system enabled him to reward his business and machine supporters. Thompson used symbolic politics to create an employment regime that also brought teachers into its orbit. In the schools, populism and patronage were Thompson’s calling cards, whereas deeper policies such as educational expansion and greater effectiveness remained outside of the mayor’s domain.

Mayor Thompson presented the image of a progressive reformer who cultivated the support of business leaders and also that of a populist who cultivated working-class votes. “Big Bill the Builder” garnered much of his business support through his completion of large civic projects first promoted in Daniel Burnham’s business-inspired 1909 Plan of Chicago (Bukowski 1998, 52). Indeed, the employment that the construction boom generated during the Thompson years gleaned him electoral support from across the political spectrum, while large city contracts probably prevented Chicago’s business organizations from pressing for a city manager as an alternative to mayoral control (Weinstein 1962). Throughout his mayoralty, Thompson used his rec-

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

ord of support for public works—including expanded school facilities—as a rejoinder to business groups put off by his bombastic, demagogic missteps. Moreover, Thompson’s middle- and upper-class appeal was enhanced by a shared class position with many corporate leaders, especially by his opposition to labor unions, no small matter in an era of business ascendancy (Hewitt 1922; Wendt and Kogan 1953).

Thompson’s anti-labor position reached a zenith early on in his mayoralty when he helped take down the Chicago Teachers Federation, led by political firebrand Margaret Haley. Soon after he took office, Jacob Loeb, a Harrison appointee to the board, sponsored his famous resolution forbidding teachers to affiliate with organized labor. Thompson supported Loeb’s rule vigorously. He argued: “City employees should be prohibited from organizing against the municipal government” (Bukowski 1998, 46). Through his board appointments, he elevated Loeb to president. Thompson’s sexism was evident in his attacks on teachers—he characterized the federation as controlled by “labor sluggers,” and he also took a swipe at outgoing School Superintendent Ella Flagg Young, his former teacher, when he claimed that the public schools “employed too many 75 year olds” (Bukowski 1998, 46). His efforts to reduce the power of organized teachers also embraced the language of social efficiency. He persuaded a divided city council to investigate the schools in 1916; the resulting committee published recommendations for expert business control of the schools similar to the Harper Report (City Council 1916). By 1917, one of Harper’s recommendations finally came to fruition when Illinois passed the “Otis Law,” which reduced board membership from 21 to 11. The Otis Law enhanced mayoral control in that mayoral appointment of board members continued but with new power to borrow against future tax receipts (Peterson 1985).

Thompson compensated for his business ties by attending to his populist image—throughout his political career he exploited his early experience as a western cowboy to glorify rugged individualism and, more importantly, he modified his popular persona to pursue voting blocs that shifted on the fault lines of religion, national origin, and gender. In the 1915 election, his anti-Catholicism was palpable—he accused his Democratic opponent, Mayor Harrison, of filling the schools with adherents of the pope (Wendt and Kogan 1953). Not surprisingly, the heavily Catholic Chicago Teachers Federation came out against him (Herrick 1971; Rousmaniere 2005). But Thompson also courted immigrant votes, especially Irish and German, through his opposition to U.S. entry into World War I, which gave his anti-Catholicism less sting. Once the United States declared war on Germany, Thompson distanced himself from the ensuing hostility toward German Americans even as he supported the war on patriotic grounds—it was the school board that renamed the

Bismarck School, and it was a student boycott rather than a mayoral decree that ended German-language instruction (Bukowski 1998).

Patronage remained an overriding concern of Thompson's mayoralty, however, and this too caused shifting alliances. Thompson and Loeb parted ways when the mayor used the Otis Law to stack the board with his business associates, who used their posts to enrich themselves. Members of the old school board sought refuge in the courts, and for two years Chicago had essentially two school boards vying for control, even to the extent of naming two superintendents in 1919—Charles Chadsey, the “administrative progressive” choice of the Harrison board, and Peter Mortenson, Thompson's insider selection (Counts 1928; Hazlett 1968). When Thompson “locked Chadsey out of his office by order of the city police,” Chadsey too turned to the courts (Rousmaniere 2005, 184–87). All of this proved too much for Loeb. Although Thompson had appointed him to his new board, Loeb turned on the mayor by supporting Chadsey and by using the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* to condemn Thompson and his political mentor, Fred Lundin (Loeb 1917). The 1919 mayoral election turned, in part, on a crisis over the school superintendency, which Thompson engineered. In spite of the *Tribune's* opposition, Thompson and Mortenson represented public school expansion, a 100 percent American curriculum, and progress for the Windy City. With four other mayoral candidates in the general election, Thompson cruised to victory and forced Chadsey out.

During his second term, Thompson managed a rapprochement with the grade school teachers. He already shared some common ground with Margaret Haley due to their mutual opposition to the entry of the United States into World War I. Moreover, his instincts for political survival after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the growing Catholic vote lessened his sexism and anti-Catholicism. He retaliated against hostile *Tribune* editorials by questioning the paper's sweetheart leases of board-owned real estate, Haley's defining issue (Beck 1953). Superintendent Mortenson reestablished teacher councils at most schools in 1921, a practice first proposed by Haley's Chicago Teachers Federation and instituted by Superintendent Young. Most importantly, teacher salaries rose 60 percent under the Thompson-controlled board (Bukowski 1998; Chicago Board of Education 1917). Haley even became a Thompson supporter—she opposed Mortenson's removal when reform Mayor William Dever took office in 1923, and she campaigned for Thompson in the 1927 election (Rousmaniere 2005).

The school scandal that emerged in 1922 proved Big Bill's undoing. Amid allegations that Thompson's boards had been plundering the schools since 1917, the mayor withdrew from the election the day before Grand Jury indictments of board members and top school officials as well as the patronage chief, Fred Lundin (Reid 1982). From coverage of the scandal and trial, voters



### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

learned about padded payrolls, \$133 potato peelers, boilers purchased for nearly three times the list price, School Board President Edwin Davis receiving a 50 cent cut on each ton of coal the schools burned, and building engineers kicking back cash for raises (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1922; Herrick 1971). Yet the prosecution's case was not airtight. Defense attorney Clarence Darrow obtained acquittals for all the major players, although the judge sent two building engineers to jail for refusing to testify (Counts 1928). They were members of a department highly susceptible to patronage.

The lack of convictions helped set the stage for Thompson's rehabilitation. "Big Bill" asserted that the public school curriculum was dangerously pro-British, and his isolationist forays into the curriculum reached a demagogic pitch in the decade after World War I, first as mayor, then as campaigner, then as mayor again (Bukowski 1987; Zimmerman 2000). He enjoyed quoting from Washington's "Farewell Address": "What was good enough for George Washington is good enough for Bill Thompson" (Wendt and Kogan 1953, 248). He distributed copies of the Constitution and life histories of Washington and Lincoln to schoolchildren, proclaimed patriotic exercises for the schools, and extended adult Americanization programs (Bukowski 1998; *Chicago Daily Tribune* 1919). Thompson balanced his reverence for the Founding Fathers and the Great Emancipator with invitations to immigrants and Blacks to revise history texts to better reflect their ancestors' contributions to American civilization. Thompson's brand of "America first" played well in immigrant neighborhoods and corporate boardrooms alike—the former because federal immigration restrictions forced more people to assimilate and the latter because patriotism seemed a more profitable use of working-class energy than labor organizing.

But Thompson's biggest ally in his quest to recapture the mayor's office once again turned out to be a hapless school superintendent, this time Dever's appointee William McAndrew, whom Thompson lambasted mercilessly in the 1927 campaign. According to Thompson, this "puppet of King George" approved un-American textbooks that slighted patriots of Irish, German, and Polish heritage (Wendt and Kogan 1953, 234), whereas Thompson asserted he would "punch King George in the snoot" (Herrick 1971, 166). In putting "America first," the Thompson campaign pledged to appoint "a patriotic school board . . . who will rid the city of Superintendent William McAndrew, the Boss Brennan—Mayor Dever's Eastern importation, and his pro-English 'yes' men and women" (Counts 1928, 267–68). Thompson managed to turn McAndrew into a walking parody of autocratic social efficiency who attracted the ire of elementary school teachers, organized labor, and working-class parents alike (Reid 1982). Support for McAndrew eroded even as he increased spending sharply, "making resources available to teachers and pupils to an extent unprecedented in the city" (Peterson 1985, 158). Among his missteps,

the priggish superintendent abolished the teachers councils, required grade school teachers to sign in four times daily, and imposed age limits. He sought to establish platoon schools on cost-effective grounds, and he began to institute junior high schools and IQ tests (Bukowski 1998; Counts 1928; Herrick 1971).

McAndrew even handed Thompson a means to signal support to his African American constituency without antagonizing White Chicago. In 1926 the *Defender* complained about anti-Black stereotypes in a high school civics textbook written by University of Chicago Professor Howard Hill. Assistant Superintendent William Bogan favored removal of the offending passages, but it was the board of education, not McAndrew, that contacted the publisher to change the text (Bukowski 1998). Thompson had created a simple educational formula—"oust Superintendent McAndrew"—that now straddled the color line.<sup>2</sup> For their part, Mayor Dever's handlers attempted to drive a racial wedge into Thompson's Anglophobia: "Bye Bye Blackbird" was sung at 1927 campaign rallies, and a Black man dressed up like Paul Revere rode through the Loop on horseback, shouting "The British are coming!" to the lunchtime crowds (Wendt and Kogan 1953, 267). But with a slim 51 percent majority, Thompson regained the mayor's office and installed a new board, which fired McAndrew after five months of farcical hearings and elevated Bogan to the superintendency (Counts 1928).<sup>3</sup>

#### Edward Kelly: Machine Partner in Depression and War

Mayor Edward Kelly was no populist, but under his tenure the schools remained an important source of patronage. In Kelly's employment regime, custodians and other workers became fully wedded to a Democratic machine that excluded teachers. Although Kelly kept a low profile in school politics during much of his tenure, turbulence at the beginning and end of his mayoralty exposed his authority and in the end contributed to his undoing. The Depression and Thompson's inadequate response guaranteed his 1931 defeat at the hands of Bohemian-born Anton Cermak, who won in a landslide, having brought the Democratic machine, dominated largely by Irish American factions, under his authority (Gottfried 1962). Cermak, known as the "Master Public Administrator," inherited a school district in financial collapse, and he turned to business leaders for help, as they were the only group that could, in the short run, keep the public schools from shutting down completely.<sup>4</sup> Through the Sargent Committee, a business-dominated school task force that Cermak appointed, he lined up loans in exchange for drastic budget cuts. The board had already begun constricting the schools in 1931, but its Thompson-appointed majority was unwilling to cut as deeply as the financiers wanted,

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

and Cermak was assassinated before full austerity measures could be implemented (Knoth 1987).

His successor Edward Kelly, a bureaucrat with the powerful machine sponsorship of Party Chair Patrick Nash, indicated that he would follow Cermak's plan for the schools, much to the dismay of teachers and middle-class education groups who hoped the schools could survive via pay cuts, shortened school years, and attrition rather than through the massive elimination of programs and jobs (Knoth 1987).<sup>5</sup> For Kelly, however, it was more important to protect the district's credit with the banks. By May of 1933 the terms of five board members came to an end, and Kelly appointed like-minded successors who he said were "close to the people" and who moved in both business and patronage circles (Hazlett 1968, 19). James McCahey, the head of a coal company, became board president. The new board made the "economy" cuts that summer, abolishing the junior high schools, the junior college, and all adult education and vocational guidance programs. It also curtailed all other programs deemed educational "fads and frills" (Chicago Board of Education b 1933, 24). Although the board pruned the law and business departments, educational services bore the brunt of the retrenchment. Responding to protests over the cuts, Kelly used his board as a buffer: "See the school board," the mayor suggested. "If they make mistakes, they should explain their actions" (Knoth 1987, 242). Yet patronage expanded in the engineering-custodian category. In a development that began under Mayor Thompson, these expenditures grew from 9.7 percent of teachers salaries in 1927 to 18.5 percent in 1947 (Peterson 1985, 182). Teachers bore the brunt of Kelly's economy measures, but janitors were spared.

After their deepest round of budget cuts, Kelly and McCahey quickly brought the schools more fully under machine control than Thompson was ever able to do; challenges to machine control of the schools were not mounted again until the end of World War II. In the fall of 1933, police prevented public school students from leaving the buildings to protest the economy measures, but the board excused students for Kelly's "A Century of Progress" fair and his "Chicago Day" celebration. Kelly enthusiastically embraced the New Deal and used Roosevelt's coattails to maintain support in spite of the cutbacks: "Save Our Schools and Support Our President," read one petition. In an effort to better control patronage in the face of stagnant or declining tax receipts, the board began ruling on every instance of building repairs.<sup>6</sup> By the 1939 election, Kelly arranged to attend 23 "Civic Celebrations" in the public high schools, and the board loaned Kelly school employees to work full-time on his campaign. In 1936 board members installed William Johnson as superintendent; he was dogged by accusations of corruption throughout his tenure (Herrick 1971, 247).<sup>7</sup>

With Kelly's emphatic link to Roosevelt came federally funded patronage jobs in the schools. The federal programs also helped bring about a decisive

shift in African American voting patterns in Chicago, from the party of Lincoln to the party of the New Deal (Weiss 1983). Kelly worked actively to bring Black Chicago into the machine, partly through his school policies. The McCahey board built a new high school in the South Side Black Belt and remodeled another one in the mid-1930s (Homel 1984). Kelly also opposed racial segregation in the schools, and his opposition was not merely symbolic. For example, he ordered the board to reverse an edict that effectively segregated high school students in Morgan Park, and “he used his police to protect Black students and arrest hostile White demonstrators in the ensuing furor” (Hirsh 1990, 67). Organized labor joined with business interests in Kelly’s governing coalition. Following the Thompson pattern, but this time with federal dollars augmenting state and local funds, school construction represented a sizable chunk of depression-era projects. With generous patronage provisions for public school workers in the skilled trades and in the custodian ranks, organized labor increasingly supported the machine in school affairs, but during Kelly’s reign, the alliance between teachers and labor deteriorated. For example, the labor representative on Kelly’s school board voted to approve the economy measures of 1933 that threw some “some 1,400 teachers” out of work (Peterson 1985, 179).

Machine control of the schools suffered a setback in the period 1945–47, however. The National Education Association (NEA), upon the request of Chicago teachers and principals, released a report critical of a school board that reached far down in the public school bureaucracy to demote and transfer teachers and principals, put excessive amounts of money into plant maintenance and non-education-related services, and paid large sums to dummy corporations under board members’ control.<sup>8</sup> Soon after, the North Central Associations of Colleges and Secondary Schools, responding to the NEA investigation and pressure from Chicago’s Citizens Schools Committee and other middle-class organizations, threatened to withdraw accreditation from Chicago’s public high schools unless executive functions passed from an independent school board to the superintendent (Herrick 1971, 273). As a further rebuff, the NEA also expelled Superintendent Johnson. Kelly defended the board, threatening a lawsuit against the NEA, claiming that the allegations of corruption were nothing more than a “political conspiracy stemming from the state university.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this response might have worked during the Depression, when there were more pressing political issues than school board corruption, but in the rising economic tide of the postwar 1940s, Kelly could not defuse the scandal. The mayor soon bowed to pressure from a blue ribbon education committee he appointed, chaired by Henry Heald of the Illinois Institute of Technology, and established a school board nominating commission, which in turn slated new board members. Meanwhile, the state legislature, in 1947, created a general superintendent of education with control over business and legal departments.

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

Both developments—the nominating commission and the general superintendent—gave the appearance of public school governance detached from mayoral interference. The schools were now in the hands of an expert professional administrator who answered to a board of education composed of a cross section of business, labor, and middle-class representatives. But at the same time the machine retained control of the public schools through mayoral appointments to the nominating commission and a still-thriving network of patronage appointments in the nonteaching positions (Shipps 2004). Mayor Kelly did not stick around to preside over this merger of professional and patronage control: the machine, headed by a new party chair, Jacob Arvey, did not endorse Kelly for mayor in 1947, and so he withdrew from politics. Board President McCahey, whom Kelly refused to axe, followed the mayor into retirement.

Kelly's support for racial desegregation in the schools contributed as much to the machine's decision to dump Kelly as the hue and cry of professional educators and good government groups about corruption. An expanding post-war color line that pushed into formerly White districts triggered anti-Black violence in several neighborhoods, and this, together with Republican gains in 1946, concerned the machine leadership. Kelly had established a Commission on Human Relations in 1943, used police to break up protests by White students when Blacks sought admission to three segregated White high schools in 1945, and appointed Blacks to the board of education and to other important posts in city government (Biles 1984; Hirsch 1990). But Kelly operated within a machine that pursued a policy of racial containment coupled with limited patronage for Black aspirants rather than supporting racial desegregation. According to historian Michael Homel, educational leaders had used bureaucratic means to institute "informal" segregative policies in CPS in the 1920s and 1930s (1984, 28). Kelly's support for open housing and open access to public schools put him out of step with the rest of the party hierarchy. Nevertheless, Kelly looked to the schools principally as sources of patronage. As with the Thompson years, mayoral control did not encompass questions of educational quality or student achievement. Although the Great Migration and rising school enrollments began to challenge Chicago's color line, the Democratic machine shored it up by ousting Kelly, and mayoral equilibrium in school politics was restored.

Richard J. Daley: Machine Boss

The machine slated another Irish American for mayor in 1947, the unassuming businessman Martin Kennelly. He had participated marginally in several "good government" reform groups over the years, making him an ideal reform

candidate for a party that sought to distance itself from the school scandal (Herrick 1971). Kennelly ran on a social efficiency platform, pledging “that the schools would be operated on a non-partisan, non-political basis.”<sup>10</sup> Also in 1947, the new board brought in Herold Hunt from Kansas City to assume the post of general superintendent. Hunt received pressure from the Black community to relieve overcrowding in South Side schools on a nonsegregated basis, but the board did not support his efforts to build better race relations in the public schools (Kamin 1970).<sup>11</sup> When Hunt moved to the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1953, the board replaced him with Benjamin Willis, an outsider who had been school superintendent in Buffalo, New York, which had experienced similar racial friction in the postwar decade (Wolcott 2006). Meanwhile, an ambitious ward committeeman and county clerk, Richard J. Daley, became Democratic Party chair, and Kennelly’s reformist positions did not endear him to the new boss (Peterson 1976). Daley’s machine subordinates dumped Kennelly and slated their leader to run for mayor in the 1955 election. Once elected, Daley moved quickly to gut Kennelly’s civil service reforms and expand patronage hires throughout Chicago, including the schools.

In spite of a growing public workforce loyal to the mayor, Daley projected his power on both sides of the ward politics versus professional expertise divide. In Daley’s employment regime, a good government management style held together teachers and other patronage workers even as it contained demands from the civil rights movement. Daley was steeped in the partisan political world of rewarding friends and punishing enemies, where elections were won and lost, but he was also at home in the arcane world of budgets and planning, where corporate Chicago thrived. Referring to Kennelly during the 1955 campaign, candidate Daley told an audience of 5,000 Democratic Party workers: “My opponent says ‘I took politics out of the schools; I took politics out of this and I took politics out of that.’ I say to you: There’s nothing wrong with politics. There’s nothing wrong with good politics. Good politics is good government” (Cohen and Taylor 2000, 120).<sup>12</sup> Yet, speaking during the same campaign to the middle-class education reform group, the Citizens Schools Committee, Daley informed them that “partisan politics has no place in the school system.”<sup>13</sup>

Chicago’s business elites, always potential education reformers on fiscal and human capital grounds, soon shared Daley’s ambiguous “good politics” and “no political interference” sentiments and supported him in all of his subsequent reelections. Part of the reason for this business support was due to Daley’s highly visible downtown public works projects, an echo of Thompson. But Daley also supported construction projects in the neighborhoods—in the form of new school buildings for the baby boom generation. “Chicago needs . . . adequate school facilities,” and 153 schools should “be torn down and

*Mayoral Control in Chicago*

replaced as soon as possible,” declared candidate Daley in 1955. His enthusiastic support for school construction convinced Chicago voters to approve bond issues in the 1950s and early 1960s, and Daley liked to remind audiences that, as mayor, he appointed the board responsible for the massive school building program.<sup>14</sup> Superintendent Ben Willis achieved his Thompsonesque moniker, “Big Ben the Builder,” in no small part through Daley’s sponsorship of local and state revenue for the public schools (Wneck 1988).<sup>15</sup> Chicago’s school-building programs intersected the professionalism/patronage divide nicely: middle-class groups could laud Daley for his efficiency in addressing obvious public needs, and the selection of real estate and distribution of contracts enabled the machine to reward supporters in the Democratic Party and in the business community.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the school-building program, in education it was racial politics that became the overriding focus of Daley’s mayoralty. With the civil rights movement, education took on new significance, but here Daley chose to cast the issue of African American school access and quality as an administrative rather than a political concern. Superficially, Daley and Willis’s school-building program conformed to the machine pattern of rewarding constituencies. African American voters on the South and West Sides were decisive to Daley’s electoral victories, and, correspondingly, more new schools were built in these parts of the city in the 1950s and early 1960s than anywhere else (Rury 1999). However, the school-building program also functioned to contain African Americans in those regions of the city in that the board erected schools within the densely populated ghettos instead of locating them in border areas that were accessible to all. When coupled with the locations of Daley’s more gargantuan public works projects funded largely through the federal government—expressways, high-rise public housing, the state university—the Democratic machine moved decisively to create Chicago’s “second ghetto” (Hirsch 1983).

Daley’s 1955 campaign statement that “partisan politics has no place in such matters as student transfers, location of new schools, or school boundary lines” is particularly telling, for these were the policies upon which enforcement of the color line in public education hinged.<sup>17</sup> And on this issue Daley and Superintendent Willis spoke the same language, because, in Willis’s view, the educational leadership should be unswayed by “public opinion,” since the neighborhood school best “emphasize[d] the role of the school in community life” (Rury 1999, 126). Following the *Brown* decisions of 1954 and 1955, neither the mayor nor the board nor the superintendent took integrationist public stands for Chicago. As part of its growing assertiveness over civil rights in the schools, the Chicago chapter of the NAACP presented formal student desegregation proposals to the board in 1957 (Rich 1958).<sup>18</sup> The machine retaliated by stacking the branch membership, which voted to replace the NAACP’s activist president, Willoughby Abner, with someone more pliable (Cohen and

Taylor 2000). For his part, Willis argued that “he could not be held responsible” for segregation since his administration gathered no data on the racial composition of the schools (Anderson and Pickering 1986, 77). Daley’s social efficiency rhetoric continued in 1963 in the face of withering civil rights opposition. “There should be no interference of any kind with the policies and administration of the board of education,” Daley stated (Peterson 1976, 83). His board refused Willis’s resignation in 1963 and voted to extend his contract in 1965. The autocratic superintendent was a veritable lightning rod for both civil rights and backlash protests, and this, for a time, kept pressure off Daley.<sup>19</sup> The mayor even turned into a virtue Willis’s policy of erecting portable classrooms and placing Black students in vacant commercial buildings. “All of us can take pride that [in] Chicago . . . not a single student is on a double shift in a public school,” he boasted.<sup>20</sup>

Such statements reassured many White voters that Daley would defend the racial composition of the public schools their children attended. Viewed through the lens of the White electorate, since the neighborhood schools policy provided seats to every student, Black protest was unreasonable. The school board hired Midwesterner James Redmond to replace Willis in 1966. As superintendent in New Orleans, Redmond had kept a low profile during the school desegregation crisis of 1960, steering carefully between federal court orders and school board directives (Fairclough 1995). During his Chicago tenure, Redmond scaled back his modest desegregation plan in accordance with the wishes of the school board majority. “I guess I’m old-fashioned,” mused Daley in response to Redmond’s initial proposal. “It used to be that people wanted to see their children home for lunch” (Peterson 1976, 161). As assessed by several students of Chicago politics, Daley’s education strategy—tacit segregation and either social efficiency rhetoric or silence when pressed by civil rights activists—was shrewd for two reasons: his vocal support for racial segregation would be unpopular in Black Chicago, where Daley needed a degree of electoral support, but policies of racial integration would lose him White votes. The mayor rose to the top of a political machine in which the potential to divide into factions based on ethnicity was ever present; dignified support for neighborhood schools helped forge White Chicagoans of various ethnicities into supporters of Daley’s machine.

By the mid-1960s, however, urban protest forced Daley to display his power more openly. He was no longer able to blunt civil rights demands with appeals to efficient management. In 1965 Daley used his influence with President Johnson to reverse a decision by the U.S. Office of Education to freeze \$30 million in federal aid earmarked to Chicago under the newly passed Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Commissioner Francis Keppel cut off funds after Willis refused to supply enrollment data to federal officials following up on a complaint by Chicago’s citywide civil rights coalition (Cohen and



*Mayoral Control in Chicago*

Taylor 2000; Kleppner 1985). When the school board nominating commission overstepped Daley's bounds in 1968 by publicly recommending a new school board president and the nonreappointment of two desegregation opponents, Daley simply ignored the recommendations (Peterson 1976).

But the most legendary display of Daley's power was in his confrontation with Martin Luther King Jr. and the Chicago Freedom Movement in 1966. Since the early 1960s, a civil rights coalition of religious and civic groups had been working for better conditions in public schools on the South and West Sides and had been seeking an end to the color line in school attendance zones and transfer policies. What had begun as spontaneous local protests of overcrowded schools turned into citywide student boycotts as well as demonstrations at City Hall and in Daley's home neighborhood of Bridgeport (Anderson and Pickering 1986; Danna 2003). It was at this point that the Chicago Freedom Movement invited King to Chicago, where demonstrators greeted King's nonviolent marches into White neighborhoods with rock throwing, overturned cars, and other mayhem. Even though King and the civil rights movement relied on nonviolent marches and moral appeals, Daley wanted King out of Chicago because of the threat his movement posed to electoral support in White and Black wards. He presented King with superficial concessions while moving behind the scenes to limit protest. Daley obtained an injunction to prevent the Chicago Freedom Movement from marching, while telling King at negotiations that "we want to try to do what you say" (McKnight 1989, 130). Daley referred repeatedly to programs that the city was already undertaking: "I am not proud of the slums. No one is. We will expand our programs" (Anderson and Pickering 1986, 208). While "Daley thoroughly outfoxed King," nevertheless, from the summer of 1966 onward machine domination in the Black wards waned (Grimshaw 1987, 190).

Unlike Mayor Kelly, who excluded organized teachers, Daley found a way to bring them into machine orbit in spite of their relative imperviousness to patronage. In response to Depression-era cutbacks, most of Chicago's public school teacher organizations had consolidated into the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) in 1937. Organized labor aligned with the Democratic machine during the Depression, but it did not bring the teachers with them. This changed with Daley, in spite of his stated opposition to public sector unions. Daley forced his school board to recognize the CTU for collective bargaining beginning in 1966, over Willis's objections (Kyle and Kantowicz 1992, 30). Daley's empowerment of the CTU headed off the electoral threat that the powerful teachers union posed, with its professional membership, to large-scale patronage in other public school divisions (Shipps 2006, 62–63). Moreover, Daley's reassertion of mayoral authority over the teachers union replaced, to a degree, the machine's eroded voting strength in the South Side and West

Side wards (Grimshaw 1979). From 1969 to the end of Daley's reign, teacher strikes were a biennial occurrence, with the mayor influencing the board to settle the strikes in the CTU's favor. Rising teacher militancy of the 1960s was contained, messily, within the bounds of a political machine that Daley controlled. As one example of the machine's tenuous hold on the CTU, when the school board nominating commission advised dumping the two Daley allies in 1968, CTU President John Desmond backed the mayor, but he also led his teachers on a two-day walk-out the next year (Peterson 1976, 99).<sup>21</sup> For its part, the CTU repaired some of its racial division by acceding to the demands of Black teachers to end the practice of assigning African Americans to poorly paid long-term substitute positions (Shipps 2006).

The mid-1960s brought Daley's politics of educational growth to a close. Chicago voters no longer passed additional tax levies: this, along with declining state revenue, expensive labor settlements, and a lack of business confidence in municipal Chicago following Daley's death, emboldened financial institutions to call in their school loans. The public schools verged on default in 1979 as 48,600 employees experienced their first "payless" payday since the Depression (Kyle and Kantowicz 1992, 33). Relatedly, and despite the Daley board's efforts to stabilize racial turnover by promoting neighborhood schools, much of White Chicago abandoned the public school system anyway—the proportion of White enrollment fell from 62 percent to 19 percent over the period 1950–1980, and this occurred in the absence of any citywide transfers of students for desegregation. Black enrollment rose from 36 percent to 61 percent in the same time period (Kleppner 1985, 55).

By the 1970s, big city school systems across the United States had lost most of their middle-class enrollments to the suburbs and had become increasingly dependent on state and federal aid for their support (Kantor and Brenzel 1993; Mirel 1993). Daley was unwilling, and perhaps unable, to use his considerable power to lead school levy drives and bond issues in the 1970s, and his influence at the state level also began to erode. Given the similar predicament of other big city school systems in the postwar era, it is likely that structural changes in the national economy and the redistribution of urban and suburban power had as much to do with the changes in public education in Chicago as the machinations of Richard J. Daley. Nevertheless, he, like many other big city mayors, cast his lot with a rearguard action of maintaining racially segregated city schools rather than risking his position as mayor and machine boss. "To maintain power," as historian John Rury notes, "the . . . machine had to uphold the existing spatial distribution of status and privilege in the city. . . . In the end the mayor did not care enough to try and save the city's schools. They too were expendable if that was the price of power" (Rury 1999, 135).

### Harold Washington: Anti-machine Reformer

Harold Washington approached the schools as an anti-machine reformer who also sought to protect African American gains in school system governance and employment. Washington's mayoralty can be termed an empowerment regime in that mayoral control included groups that employment regimes had pushed to the margins. He governed during an era when corporate Chicago joined middle-class school reform organizations and civil rights leaders in calling for improvements in academic achievement and school quality. Washington was elected Chicago's first African American mayor in 1983 on an anti-machine platform—in the absence of Daley's control, divisions in the machine made it vulnerable to Washington's grassroots insurgency. His campaign united Black Chicago and was reminiscent of earlier civil rights and Black Power social movements that swept Chicago in the mid-1960s. Indeed, Washington named his 1983 campaign the "Chicago Political Freedom Movement" (Carl 2001, 328). He also generated significant support in the growing Latino wards, along with small numbers of liberal and leftist Whites. His election was racially charged and bitterly contested; nevertheless, Washington campaigned in all 50 wards to defeat Daley's son and incumbent Mayor Jane Byrne in the primary and then hung on to defeat a suddenly viable White Republican candidate, Bernard Epton, in the general election (Alkalimat and Gills 1989; Kleppner 1985). His victory promised access to City Hall for grass roots community and civil rights organizations that the machine had excluded during and immediately following the Daley years. Washington's mayoralty, however, also coincided with reduced federal aid to big cities (Kusmer 1996) as well as resistance from City Council.

During his first term, Washington approached school reform cautiously. On the one hand, the working-class parents who voted for him and community activists who supported him had high expectations for better schools. They had been closed out of school decision making by both the machine and public school professionals, and now they expected influence. On the other hand, many of the school professionals who supported Washington were African Americans. Moreover, in the early 1980s there were several conservative reform proposals to modify school governance by reducing the size of the administration or dividing the system into smaller districts. Not only were such reforms opposed by the administrators, teachers, and central office staffers who elected him but also they forced Washington into a defensive posture regarding the public schools (Carl 2001). Although Washington had made the public schools a campaign issue, he did not forcefully move to reform them during his first term.

During the 1983 campaign, Washington neither argued for desegregation (a position "20 years too late") nor made the reversal of urban school decline

a defining issue.<sup>22</sup> Like his predecessors, Washington used the social efficiency rhetoric of schools managed by professionals and insulated from partisan politics. He stressed that political interference from Mayors Daley and Byrne generated mismanagement and wreaked havoc on public school budgets. Just like Daley, however, Washington pledged to bring more money into the system, this time by fighting for an increase in the state income tax and lobbying for other state and federal revenue, since the schools had operated in the red for several years. “Our school system is not \$100 million short next year as we believed during the campaign,” stated Washington at his inauguration. “We now find that the income may be \$200 million less than the expenditures of that vast bureaucracy.”<sup>23</sup> Washington also made the board of education more representative of the Chicago population and the public school student body by appointing grass roots activists to the school board nominating commission to replace some of the corporate and civic elites.<sup>24</sup>

During Washington’s first term, there was, however, the question of the superintendency. In 1981, during Mayor Byrne’s term, the school board appointed outsider Ruth Love, from Oakland California, as Chicago’s first African American superintendent. Her board excluded most input from Black Chicago when it appointed Love, which marked the second time that Deputy Superintendent Manford Byrd Jr., the highest-ranking African American administrator in the district, had been passed over for the post. While Byrd only had tepid support in the Black community and in the Washington administration, Love backed Mayor Byrne during the 1983 election, when upward of 80 percent of African American voters cast ballots for Washington in the primary and fewer than 15 percent voted for the incumbent. This probably sealed Love’s fate: when her contract was up for renewal in 1985, Washington did not protect her from school board opponents that Byrd had lined up. In spite of Washington’s backing, though, Superintendent Byrd maintained a stronger allegiance to the school district bureaucracy than he did to the mayor. During Washington’s second term, the mayor faced a school superintendent, Byrd, whose first priority was protecting the status quo in the Chicago Public Schools rather than working in the interest of the mayor’s office (Carl 2001, 331).<sup>25</sup>

Washington’s major school reform initiatives occurred in 1986 and 1987. He created his first “Education Summit” in 1986 in response to citywide concerns over high dropout and unemployment rates of public school-educated youth. In the envisaged business-school compact, corporate Chicago would guarantee jobs to high school graduates in exchange for school district guarantees of improved academic achievement (Mayor’s Education Summit 1988).<sup>26</sup> This summit was intended, in part, as a goodwill gesture to the business community—Washington had been elected without their backing. Moreover, the abolition of the School Finance Authority, which corporate Chicago had made

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

a stipulation in the 1979 financial bailout of the schools, was one of Washington's 1983 campaign planks. He had also promised to extend city dollars beyond the loop and other gentrifying areas to neighborhoods that had been starved for city services during the machine years (Alkalimat and Gills 1989), and his efforts to redistribute city contracts, following his 1986 consolidation of power in the City Council, also made business leaders uneasy.

After a year of negotiations, however, negotiations for a business–public school compact broke down. Neither school nor business leadership was willing to compromise. The corporate umbrella group offered to hire 1,000 graduates beginning in 1988. In exchange, it wanted the district to raise achievement levels and reduce the dropout rate to the national averages.<sup>27</sup> Superintendent Byrd wanted the improvements on achievement and dropout rates to be targets rather than guarantees. Moreover, the Chicago Public Schools sought a pledge of 6,000 graduates hired yearly by Chicago corporations and wanted the business coalition to bring another \$52 million to the schools. Business leaders were “appalled” at the superintendent’s “stipulations and attempts to make the business community responsible for providing resources,” and they threatened to use their influence to force the board to meet their educational demands and time frame (Carl 2001, 333). The Washington administration, for its part, believed business leaders should help raise additional funds and viewed their offer of 1,000 jobs to graduates as insufficient. As to the school district’s response, Washington staffers believed that the school system should provide specific achievement and graduation plans, including reallocation of resources, prior to demanding so many hires from the private sector.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the CTU and the board could not agree on an austerity contract in the wake of state reductions in revenue, so the teachers embarked on a strike that lasted the first four weeks of the 1987 school year, capping a period of labor unrest in the schools that had grown since the end of Daley’s reign. The CTU had endorsed incumbent Mayor Byrne during Washington’s 1983 campaign but endorsed Washington four years later.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Daley, Washington lacked the connections with Chicago’s financial community to negotiate a quick settlement based on increased borrowing, but Washington was also unwilling to sacrifice teachers’ jobs in the face of budget woes, as Mayor Kelly had done 50 years earlier. The 1987 strike triggered manifold calls for comprehensive education reform by all the major players with a stake in the public schools—the mayor, business groups, middle-class and foundation-supported school reform advocacy groups, African American and Latino civil rights organizations, and grassroots activists (Kyle and Kantowicz 1992). For his part, as Washington brought the contract negotiation teams to his office for a settlement, he signaled support to the Black and working-class wing of his electoral coalition with sharpened criticism of the schools. “The public schools are terrible,” he said. “You may have heard that they were good in the good

old days. Don't you believe it. They were worse. They were worse for the Black and poor communities than they are today. The difference today is that the school population is ninety percent Black and poor so the whole system is disrespected the way only a few of us were disrespected before" (Untitled 1987, 5).<sup>30</sup>

Washington's strategy was to channel widespread opposition to the strike into an expanded summit. He convinced the discredited board of education and the CTU to attend as part of their agreement to end the strike. He also added middle-class school reform groups and civic notables to the business leaders already at the summit. Finally, he created a coalition of public school parents and grassroots activists from throughout the city, dubbed the Parent/Community Council, and installed them at the summit. In Washington's scheme, it was the Parent/Community Council and the business coalition that had the most votes in the summit negotiations. Washington also directed the Chicago Democratic delegation in Springfield to block the myriad solutions that legislators had in store for Chicago until the summit could draft its own bill. The mayor seemed on the way to brokering a school reform agreement among nongovernmental groups, especially between the unlikely combination of business elites and multiracial activists at the level of school and neighborhood. The reform was to feature elected councils at each Chicago school with some authority over budget and personnel (Carl 2001). Washington had been familiar with the concept of local school councils since his first citywide campaign in 1977;<sup>31</sup> the creation of this grass roots political structure in the schools could serve as a counterweight to a political machine that was teetering in 1987 but that still had one of Daley's sons waiting in the wings.

The summit unraveled almost immediately upon Washington's death in November of 1987. Instead, a business-led coalition gained the upper hand in Springfield and ensured that a School Finance Authority with expanded powers maintained ultimate budgetary power in the schools. At the school level, the 1988 Act also redistributed state aid in proportion to the poverty level of each school, with the expectation that the schools reduce the size of the central administration. The school reform legislation that passed the next year decentralized the system—it featured local school councils that gave parents and residents a formal mechanism of input in each of Chicago's public schools. It also moved toward an elective board, with the creation of a new school board nominating commission, the majority of whose members were elected from the ranks of the local school councils (Carl 1995; State of Illinois 1989). The mayor appointed an additional five members to the nominating commission and selected school board members from three-person slates created by the commission. It is unlikely that Washington would have conceded his authority to appoint school board members had he lived. More than this, however, Washington's death may have precluded the reform legislation from

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

addressing other educational issues of importance to Chicago public school students, particularly the link between urban schools and skilled labor markets and the need for greater fiscal support for classroom services. These are needs that governance reforms alone cannot address.

### Conclusion

Mayoral authority to appoint members of the board of education over the course of the twentieth century makes the Windy City something of a laboratory of mayoral control. While Chicago mayors could not directly install school superintendents until 1995, their school boards made appointments that were in consonance with mayoral interests. Each of the mayors had a hand in selecting school superintendents, and even though Daley did not appoint Superintendent Willis himself, this holdover from the Kennelly regime retained his position because his neighborhood school policies were in accord with Daley's objectives. When Daley's death and civil service reforms unglued the Democratic machine in the 1970s and 1980s and a reform mayor encouraged grass-roots community groups and middle-class school reformers to step into the breach vacated by a discredited school administration and teachers union, the school system moved toward decentralized control (Bennett 1989). By 1995, however, mayoral control of the public schools was reconsolidated at the behest of the state legislature through the rekindling of the historically cozy relationship between the mayor's office and corporate Chicago (Shipps 2006).

The record of mayoral politics in Chicago's public schooling prior to the 1995 Chicago School Reform Act does not bode well for mayoral control as a strategy that will improve urban schools across the board. Rather, the evidence presented here shows four mayors using the schools to put together coalitions that met their own political interests; with one possible exception, these political interests did not necessarily coincide with higher-quality urban schools. All of the mayors embraced educational positions that were as much about marshaling votes and winning the support of corporate Chicago as they were about improving the schools. As leaders of political machines, the first three mayors also used the schools as important patronage sites. While the political interests of the fourth mayor, Washington, coincided with the educational aspirations of public school parents, the majority of whom were Black and Latino and working class, his educational policies lacked staying power—without the machine, he depended on personal appeal for his mass mobilizations of voters, and business elites remained aloof to his administration and to the social movement that elected him.

William Thompson used the populist rhetoric of an inclusive curriculum

to shore up electoral support while using his school boards as sites of patronage that rewarded his machine functionaries and business backers. The tempest he created in his critique of the curriculum enabled “Big Bill” to attract White Catholic votes even as he maintained Black support for the party of Lincoln and excluded organized labor from his governing coalition. Educational access to secondary education grew at a fast clip in the 1920s, with some of the increase due to the policies of the superintendent hired by reform Mayor Dever’s board, William McAndrew (Peterson 1985). Whereas teacher salaries increased through the 1920s, patronage was rampant and the improved standard of living of teachers was as much an electoral consideration as an educational one. The growth of secondary education in Chicago after World War I had many causes, but leadership from the mayor’s office was not one of them. Patronage and populism were the keys to Thompson’s education policies, not improved educational access and quality. Edward Kelly’s machine exploited the schools much like Thompson did, as a rich site of patronage for a political machine centered on White Catholic Chicago. The civic nationalism of the New Deal supplanted Thompson’s demagogic rhetoric of America First and drew Black Chicago to his electoral coalition (Weiss 1983). Whereas Thompson rewarded both teachers and custodians, Kelly sacrificed teachers in the belt-tightening of the Great Depression and separated them from organized labor. But what started out as a boon to Black students—a mayor who exchanged tangible benefits for Black votes, couched within the civic nationalism of the New Deal—ended with a reassertion of racial nationalism in the local Democratic Party as the patronage scandals of the late 1940s put Kelly and his school board president into retirement.<sup>32</sup>

In light of the Thompson and Kelly records, it was more difficult for subsequent mayors to flagrantly exploit the schools. It forced them to emphasize professionalism and reform as well as patronage and spoils, but under the guidance of Mayor Richard J. Daley, professionalism went no deeper than an electoral strategy to maintain power. As machine boss, Daley combined the characteristics of the expert disinterested manager with those of the political chieftain. Encapsulated in “The City That Works” slogan, machine control in the Windy City shed much of its inefficient image under Daley even as patronage hires and contracts flourished in the burgeoning postwar economy. Daley was also the leader of the backlash against Black political power in education in the 1950s and 1960s. Declining support in the Black wards was offset, in part, by winning over organized teachers to the machine through his granting of collective bargaining rights. Electorally, Daley’s return to a hands-off position regarding the schools seemed to pay off in the 1970s: as more of White Chicago abandoned the public schools, White voters did not punish Daley for the perceived decline in public education. Although Daley discovered that education was of vital importance to the civil rights movement,



### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

he fought a rearguard action instead of acceding to demands for greater access and better quality in the schools. Washington approached the schools as a reformer who represented a Black constituency devoid of political machine or big business support. Washington's relationship with the public schools was tentative initially due to a class divide in his electoral coalition between working-class parents of public school students and middle-class educators who worked in the public system. But a management/labor crisis in the schools, together with a crescendo of demands for better quality in an educational sense from business, middle-class reformers, and the grass roots, propelled Washington to lead school reform efforts, making him the first mayor since Harrison to make school improvement a conspicuous part of his agenda. The current mayor, Richard M. Daley, has continued this reform trend with the authority that the legislature vested in him.

Read one way, this narrative could be understood as a "Whig" history of mayoral control, with the blatant patronage and corruption of Thompson and Kelly giving way to the hybrid professional/patronage control of Daley and the reform control of Washington.<sup>33</sup> The 1995 Chicago School Reform Act and Richard M. Daley's management of a school reform regime is the culmination of this rosy tale of progress. There is danger in viewing contemporary mayoral regimes as perfections of past mayoral politics marked by populism, patronage, and self-interest, but observers of contemporary urban politics sometimes make this leap. For example, it has been asserted recently that greater mayoral control is beneficial because contemporary mayors are on the cutting edge of a "New Political Culture" in which rational improvements of city services trump narrower political considerations (Wong 2006, 172). Over the past decade some urban regimes have been characterized by enlightened and rational management that transcends party politics according to this outlook. The integrated governance that mayoral control fosters, according to Kenneth Wong and his colleagues, "can lead to improvements in student achievement and management efficiency" (Wong et al. 2007, 198). Historical evidence from Chicago shows that there is good reason to question this progressive view of mayoral control.

A look at Chicago's mayors shows that political interests in education fractured along the lines of race, class, and culture in the twentieth century. Mayors considered cultural differences of religion, language, and immigrant status in their electoral strategies: Thompson courted the immigrant vote, Kelly and Daley managed ethnic differences in their overwhelmingly Catholic political base, and Washington wooed Latinos to his electoral and educational coalition centered in the African American wards. Under Thompson, Kelly, and Daley, working-class and middle-class Whites with machine affiliations, along with business leadership, had better access to the decision-making pathways of the school district, with Blacks benefiting less from their ties to the same political

machines. Under Washington, working-class and middle-class Blacks and Latinos had new access to an emerging education agenda that they supported, with Whites and business groups having less power to control the agenda.

To a certain degree, this article reinforces a perspective on the politics of education that has been popularized by Kenneth Meier and his colleagues over the years, in which they stress that school policies reflect the political interests of those that control the schools. Meier cautions that representation includes both the symbolic and the substantive, as appointed boards that are “highly representative in terms of race and ethnicity” might not “share values with the constituents they represent.” School districts meet the demands of social groups—access, policy, curriculum, instruction—in relation to the political power that those groups wield, translated as representation on school boards and in the administrative and teaching ranks. “To the extent that mayoral control limits or cuts off one or more avenues of access to either the agenda or policy makers,” according to Meier, “some groups are likely to benefit from the process and others harmed” (Meier 2004, 225).<sup>34</sup> Following Meier’s linkage of political power to educational policy, then, school reformers working to improve the educational experiences and achievement of minority and working-class youth—the majority of students in urban school systems—would do well to align themselves to political movements that elect mayors with the same interests, rather than looking to increased mayoral control as a stand-alone solution. In other words, which mayor is in office may matter more for the majority of students than changing the governance structure to give the mayor’s office more power in school affairs. However, mayoral objectives comprise more than school reform, and electorates consider more than the condition of the schools when casting votes for mayors. Thompson shrugged off school scandals in his return to the mayor’s office. Neither austerity measures during the Depression nor deteriorating conditions for students in the 1960s and 1970s changed the electoral outcome for Kelly and Daley. Consolidation of power on the city council was the focus of Washington’s first term, not school reform. Symbolic and substantive representation through the mayor’s office does not necessarily translate into better schools.

In one way, however, there is still good reason to support the view that contemporary mayors have greater motivation than earlier ones to care about the quality of the public schools and to improve the academic achievement of their students. At the risk of overstatement, this article also shows Chicago mayors moving from using the schools as sites for building electoral constituencies and distributing political spoils to viewing them as a bulwark of the city economy. Mayors did not need social scientists to explain to them the linkage between educational attainment and socioeconomic status that grew across the twentieth century as secondary and university education expanded. Thompson benefited from rising high school enrollments, Daley played an

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

active role in bringing a University of Illinois campus to Chicago, and Washington folded business desires for better academic achievement into his school reform coalition. The postindustrial economy—with its declining emphasis on manufacturing and increasing emphasis on the service sector, with information technology at the cutting edge—has generated an occupational structure in which the academic skills that educational credentials represent take on heightened importance (Bills 2004). And with increasing globalization, in which cities such as Chicago serve as command and control centers that link international capital, manufacturing, and services together, political and business leaders necessarily take increased interest in preparing a highly educated urban workforce that is attractive to global employers (Carnoy and Rhoten 2002; Lipman 2004). But even with the human capital question in play, the postindustrial economy generates unskilled jobs along with highly analytical ones. Viewed this way, urban education systems need not raise all boats.

As far back as the 1899 Harper commission, Chicago mayors controlled the schools as both efficient managers and astute politicians. But, more importantly, Chicago's mayors did not or could not reduce the inequalities of race and class that shaped the educational experiences of public school students. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, there are strong indications that Richard M. Daley's resurgent mayoral activism in the schools since 1995 has done little to reverse educational inequalities in Chicago either—gaps between public schools with middle-class and working-class clienteles may have widened, and proposals of working-class and minority parents for better schools have been sidelined (Lipman 2004; Shipps 2006).<sup>35</sup> While it may be the case that mayors, to a greater degree than other leaders, must be on board to make citywide school improvements possible, there is little indication from twentieth-century Chicago, a bastion of mayoral control in public education, that stronger mayoral authority is the key to improving the schooling experienced by the majority of urban students.

### Notes

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1. Some big cities bucked this trend. For example, in Baltimore the state reduced mayoral authority.

2. "Inaugural Address of William Hale Thompson," April 18, 1927, in *Inaugural Addresses of the Mayors of Chicago, 1840–1999*, Municipal Reference Collection, Harold Washington Library (Chicago Public Library), Chicago (hereafter HWL).

3. To be sure, threatening Superintendent McAndrew and King George were not the only reasons Thompson won. Charles Merriam, the University of Chicago political scientist who was a member of the school board and a mayoral candidate himself in the 1919 election, notes that Dever made the mistake of enforcing "the dry law,"

whereas Thompson favored a Chicago “wetter than the Atlantic Ocean” (Merriam 1929, 190).

4. Indeed, one board member sought “to close each and every public school in the City of Chicago immediately” (Chicago Board of Education 1933a, 1243).

5. Teachers poster, Citizens Schools Committee, July 1933–September 1933, scrapbook 2, Citizens Schools Committee Papers, Chicago Historical Society, 1601 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL (hereafter CHS). The Citizens School Committee was a teacher-led civic group organized in response to depression-era cutbacks.

6. Citizens Save Our Schools Committee flyers, scrapbook 2, July 1933–September 1933, Citizens Schools Committee papers, CHS.

7. See also *Chicago Daily News*, April 21, 1938, in scrapbook 8 of Citizens Schools Committee Papers, CHS.

8. Report of Executive Secretary to the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Citizens Schools Committee, February 14, 1946; National Education Association, “Certain Personnel Practices in the Chicago Public Schools,” 1945. Both in Citizens Schools Committee Papers, box 5, folder 5, CHS. See also the address by Donald Washane, “The NEA Report in the Light of Recent Developments,” February 14, 1946, Citizens Schools Committee Papers, box 5, folder 6, CHS.

9. Letter from John Lapp to Advisory Board of the Citizens Schools Committee, December 3, 1946, Citizens Schools Committee Papers, box 6, folder 1, CHS.

10. Martin Kennelly speech to 1955 Citizens School Committee Annual Meeting, March 16, 1955, Citizens School Committee Papers, box 13, folder 5, CHS.

11. Timuel Black interview with author, Chicago, January 13, 2000. Black was an education and labor activist and a chronicler of South Side Chicago politics and culture. He also helped lead Harold Washington’s mayoral campaigns.

12. “Good government is good politics” was a ubiquitous banner at Daley’s 1950s and 1960s campaign rallies.

13. Richard J. Daley, “Address to Citizens’ Schools Committee Meeting, Eleventh Street Theater,” March 16, 1955, Citizens’ Schools Committee Papers, box 13, folder 5, CHS.

14. Richard J. Daley, “Address to Citizens’ Schools Committee; Inaugural Address of Richard J. Daley,” April 21, 1959, *Inaugural Addresses of the Mayors of Chicago, 1840–1999*, Municipal Reference Collection, HWL.

15. Willis carefully followed the directives of the board. Of course, on election days, a majority of voters remembered who the real “builder” was.

16. It should be noted that, by all accounts, Daley himself did not benefit financially from the huge construction projects that he organized. According to Mary Herrick, for example, there “was not one rumor of scandal” in the Chicago Public Schools building program that Willis directed (Herrick 1971, 309).

17. Richard J. Daley, “Address to Citizens’ Schools Committee Meeting,” March 16, 1955, Municipal Reference Collection, HWL.

18. Contrast this to the milder strategy of 1954, reminiscent of the Thompson days, when the local branch complained of school textbooks “which contain hardly an integrated scene” (NAACP Chicago Branch testimony at Chicago Public Schools Budget hearing, December 28, 1954, Citizens Schools Committee Papers, box 13, folder 3, CHS).

19. For treatments of the desegregation controversy in the 1960s, see Anderson and Pickering 1986; Biles 1995; Cohen and Taylor 2000; Kleppner 1985; Peterson 1976; and Rury 1999.

20. “Inaugural Address of Richard J. Daley, April 17, 1963,” *Inaugural Addresses of the Mayors of Chicago, 1840–1999*, Municipal Reference Collection, HWL.

### *Mayoral Control in Chicago*

21. Chicago Teachers Union, "171 Years of Teaching in Chicago," mimeographed, n.d., 18, in author's possession.
22. "The Washington Papers," 1980, 57, State Senatorial Records, box 12, folder 13; "Background Information for Working Paper on Education," 1982, 1–12, Mayoral Campaign Records, box 42. Both are in Harold Washington Papers, HWL.
23. "Inaugural Address of Harold Washington," April 29, 1983, *Inaugural Addresses of the Mayors of Chicago, 1840–1999*, Municipal Reference Collection, HWL.
24. Citizen Nominating Committee for Board of Education, "Report for 1987 Nominating Round," 4, Education Subseries, box 30, folder 2, Harold Washington Papers, HWL.
25. Timuel Black interview with author, Chicago, January 13, 2000.
26. Hal Baron interview with author, Chicago, January 13, 2000. Baron served as Washington's policy advisor.
27. "Chicago Partnership for Educational Progress Proposal to Chicago Board of Education/Chicago Public Schools, July 9, 1987, Education Subseries, box 30, folder 19, Harold Washington Papers, HWL.
28. Chicago Public Schools, "Proposed revisions to Proposal by Chicago Partnership for Educational Progress," July 17, 1987, Education Subseries, box 30, folder 19; and undated draft of Chicago's preliminary response to Board of Education and Chicago Partnership, Education Subseries, box 30, folder 19, both in Harold Washington Papers, HWL.
29. Robert Healey telephone interview with author, January 3, 2000. Healey served as CTU President from 1972 to 1984, before moving to president of the Chicago Federation of Labor.
30. The quote is from a community magazine, *Keep Strong*, published by The Heart of Uptown Coalition, which supported Washington and was active in White and Hispanic neighborhoods on the North Side.
31. Harold Washington, "A Program to Get Chicago's People Working," 1977, and "Program for a Working City," 1977, both in State Senate Records, box 11, folder 3, Harold Washington Papers, HWL.
32. On the tension between racial and civic nationalisms in the twentieth century, see Gerstle (2001).
33. Herbert Butterfield stated in 1931 that Whig interpretations "emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and . . . produce a story which is the ratification, if not the glorification, of the present" (Novick 1988, 13).
34. See also Meier and Stewart 1991; and Meier, Stewart, and England 1989.
35. But this is contested. See also Wong 2007.

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*Mayoral Control in Chicago*

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