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Patrick J. McGuinn. *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965-2005.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006. xi + 260 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7006-1443-1.

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The "Two Achievement Gaps" and Federal Education Policy since *Brown* and Sputnik

The ratification of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 represented "two revolutions," according to Patrick J. McGuinn, author of *No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965-2005*: the Republican embrace of education policy at the federal level, which they had historically opposed in favor of local control, and the acceptance by Democrats of national testing and accountability measures, which they had rejected since first implementing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. How this once unimaginable turnabout transpired is the subject of McGuinn's meticulous account of the coming of NCLB and the accompanying paradigm shift in American education policy.

McGuinn frames his analysis by providing a useful synopsis of the only significant federal initiatives in primary and secondary education prior to 1965. Two events during the 1950s exposed the central conundrum of public education reform in the United States, namely, how to reconcile the often competing aims of equity and excellence. *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954, 1956), however ineffectual, instituted a legal remedy to the historic failure to provide access for children of color to schools of acceptable quality across the nation. Four years later, in the wake of the Soviets' launching of Sputnik, the National Defense Education Act (1958) funded states to improve math, science, and foreign-language training to keep the United States competitive in the race for superiority in arms and technology. Even so, the total sum spent on education by the federal government by 1960 (less than $1 billion) was a drop in the bucket compared to what was spent at the end of the century (more than $22 billion).

A decade after the first *Brown* decision and on the heels of the Civil Rights Act (1964), Lyndon B. Johnson initiated a new era in education reform by orchestrating the swift passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Johnson's bill, approved just three months after it was introduced into Congress, was a patchwork of compromises but funneled money to the states to aid the nation's "educationally deprived"– children whose families earned less than $2,000 a year. By erecting what McGuinn calls the "equity regime" of federal education policy, Johnson's intervention ensured the flow

of federal dollars to needy school districts for nearly four decades to redress "what was increasingly seen as an educational crisis among poor and minority children" (p. 31). Though devoted to eradicating the racial and social injustices perpetuated by appallingly inadequate schooling, federal education policymaking under ESEA, observes McGuinn, was "closed and consensual â¦ dominated by a few groups, with little public input, and bipartisan support for the limited ends and means of federal policy. As a result," he concludes, "efforts to substantially expand or reform the federal role during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were defeated" (p. 207).

In McGuinn's estimation ESEA contained two profound flaws: the first and most conspicuous was that it increased federal funding without any accountability for the performance of the schools that benefited from it. The second was that by targeting schools in the most hard-pressed districts but failing to support public schooling in general, ESEA undermined potential widespread support for a federal role in education policymaking. Collaterally, it inhibited further school reform by entrenching interest groups within the Democratic party, which in turn aroused a vituperative, intransigent response by Republicans for decades.

Between 1960 and 1985 total federal spending on education as a ratio of public school budgets grew from 8 to 16 percent and state spending climbed from 41 to 55 percent. Meanwhile, the local share of education expenditures plummeted from 51 to 31 percent. As a consequence of such redistributions and increasing federal regulation, says McGuinn, state educational agencies were regarded by the early 1980s as having been "colonized" by the federal government. ESEA, he argues, "had facilitated the centralization, bureaucratization, and judicialization of education policymakingâ¦ [effectively demonstrating] â¦ that the federal government needed to defend the worst off or most vulnerable [children] from local majorities or inequities in the larger state and local systems" (p. 39). Federal education policy was equated with inflexibility, regulation, and judicial meddling, even as student performance in all areas sank with no effort to gauge the academic progress of students receiving federal support. This, in turn, he says, "fueled the growing perception â¦ that federal education policy â¦ had become more about providing entitlements and protecting rights than about enhancing opportunity or demanding responsibility" (p. 39).

The release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) soon after Ronald Reagan took office only confirmed the popular suspicion that public schools were failing not just America's disadvantaged but all of its children in spite of growing federal support. *A Nation at Risk* concluded dramatically that America's public schools were leaving the United States dangerously weak in the face of international economic competition and Soviet military might. Its authors, commissioned by Carter's Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, asserted that while "education had been a *state* issue, the dire performance of American students had become a *national* problem" (p. 41).

Reagan had vowed to eliminate the federal role in education, abolish the Department of Education, expand school choice, support school vouchers and offer tuition-tax credits for private schooling. While none of his initiatives succeeded, he did succeed in drawing attention to the downward spiral of the nation's public schools and drew the battle lines between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats on the federal role in education until the end of the century. As education gained prominence in the national political arena, liberal Democrats and teachers unions in particular (which were the single largest campaign contributors to the Democratic Party) strenuously objected to school choice initiatives and accountability measures. The Republicans, similarly, were captive to religious and states' rights advocates, the donor base of the party which had for decades staunchly opposed federal influence on education, teachers unions, spending hikes, and the existence of the U.S. Department of Education.

George H.W. Bush continued Reagan's assault on teachers unions as an impediment to the improvement of public education. Like Reagan, he endorsed vouchers as a form of relief for children in impoverished school districts and brought increased attention to education as a national issue. Unlike Reagan and the Republican Right, however, Bush envisioned a federal role for school reform and just as important, he began a national conversation about standards and accountability. Yet as education rose on the national electoral agenda, because Republicans were viewed increasingly as a drag on necessary education reform rather than as a creative force for change, Bush paid politically.

Enter Bill Clinton, who ran as a political outsider–a "New Democrat"–who advocated more spending for public education, more federal responsibility for school reform as well as accountability measures. In effect, says McGuinn, he "triangulated" liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. By insisting on a "new policy regime built on using the federal government to promote

school improvement and increased student achievement through choice, standards, assessments, accountability, and additional spending," he was able to attract the growing moderate and independent vote to defeat Bush in 1992 (p. 128). By 1996, as education became a top issue in the presidential election, the Republicans and Clinton's challenger, Bob Dole, were seen not merely as critics of the Democrats' education policies but generally as "anti-education."

The result, McGuinn shows, was a defeat that the Republican Party leadership would not soon forget. Post-election analysis demonstrated that the "gender gap" had decisively served Clinton's bid for reelection and that the women's vote had turned on education: 52 percent of women voters indicated that education was "extremely important" to them. To retake the presidency in the next election the Republicans would have to close that gap. To do so the Republican leadership concluded that it would have to change its image with female voters. In the words of Texas Governor George W. Bush, the party must begin to "put a compassionate face on a conservative philosophy â¦ the message to women â¦ is that we care about people." Clinton, Bush surmised, "stole the education issue and it affected the women's vote" (p. 129).

Two years after his reelection Clinton called for a reduction of class sizes by the hiring of 100,000 new teachers, new school construction, the funding of after-school programs in America's inner cities, and an end to "social promotion" (the promotion of students from grade to grade regardless of subject mastery). Throughout his presidency he wrestled with his party's liberal wing to try to impose national educational standards, testing, and accountability measures, all of which faltered. But significantly, at the end of his second term he concluded that "education investment without accountability can be a real waste of money," and that "accountability without investment can be a real waste of effort." His efforts to establish accountability measures were a notable failure at the national level but not at the state level, according to McGuinn, which, he points out, "helped build momentum for these reforms among educational reformers and the public at large" (p. 145).

By the time of the 2000 presidential election education assumed center stage as "the most important problem facing [the] â¦ country today" (p. 149). The parties had converged on the role of the federal government in education, and according to House Education Committee staffer Alex Nock, accountability measures were no longer contested, as " 'standards-based reform had been around at the national level for 7-8 years and at the state level for well over a decade' " (p. 145). After Bush's slim victory in the presidential election, one in which the two parties' education platforms were "remarkably similar," says McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, though not a *fait accompli*, enjoyed broad public support that ultimately ensured its passage. The result was a "new policy regime." Whereas the old one was premised exclusively on the need to promote equity and access for disadvantaged students, the new "accountability regime," in McGuinn's view, is "centered on the â¦ goal of improving education for all students â¦ and to do so by reducing federal influence over process and inputs while replacing it with increased accountability for school performance" (p. 194).

McGuinn is a political scientist by training, if not wholly by temperament. He is ardent in his belief that history's long perspective offers a vantage point on change that ordinarily eludes model-building theorists of American political culture. In *No Child Left Behind* he gives us a detailed and unusually compelling account of school reform discourse over the last fifty years. His second chapter offers what he calls an "integrative" solution to political science approaches that currently divide scholars of American politics into schools that explain how policy becomes vulnerable, or remains resistant, to change at any given time. The "stasis school" emphasizes the difficulty of change once a policy regime is established. It contains interest groups that work with politicians to maintain the status quo–a task made easier by the "generally inattentive nature of the American public" (p. 13). The "dynamic school" of policy change, on the other hand, puts greater stock in the sensitivity of elected officials to their constituencies. "Electoral competition ensures that existing policy approaches will be frequently challenged and that political leaders will seek public support for the creation of new policies or the reform of existing ones" (p. 15). McGuinn offers a third way: "one that synthesizes the insights of both the stasis and dynamic approaches and incorporates the institutional insights of political science with the ideational and group focus of sociology and the longer temporal reach of historians" (p. 15). Whether he succeeds at this I leave to policymakers and political scientists.

Does it succeed as history? Yes and, partly, no. It is essential reading both as a summary of school reform over the last half century and as a blow-by-blow narrative of the politics of education policy at the national level since 1965. His research is rich in survey data, and his interpretations are greatly amplified by the use of in-

terviews with key political figures and behind-the-scenes players from the Reagan administration forward. In the end he concludes that because interest groups dictated the agendas of the Democrats and Republicans during the "equity regime," education policy was change-resistant for decades even while federal funding increased. But interest-group influence could only be sustained so long as education "had low public visibility â¦ and when it played only a minor role in national politics" (p. 208). By 2000 an era of party parity coincided with the dawning conviction that America's public schools were "broken." In moments of heightened public concern, as in the case of the crisis in public schooling, he theorizes, interest groups have relatively less influence over policymaking as elected officials "became more interested in how the issue would help (or harm) them with voters than they are with satisfying the demands of their allied interest groups" (p. 207).

While this political "convergence" over education policy as McGuinn describes it, holds appeal for historians of school reform, more interesting to this historian is how Americans came to the realization that their public schools were "broken." As he notes when he quotes historian Carl Kaestle, schools have always had their critics, but sweeping reforms have only succeeded in the wake of a crisis of confidence when a consensus emerged that change was necessary (p. 21). And Americans were fast becoming aware that secondary schooling was the weak link in the American public school system as early as the 1950s.

A number of causes, some distal and others proximate, resulted in popular disillusionment with public secondary schooling during the latter half of the twentieth century. Recall, first, that until *Brown v. the Board of Education* schooling for African Americans (and Mexican Americans) didn't even enter into the consciousness of anyone who thought about the quality of American education. Absorbing students of color into the public school system after decades of neglect was a major challenge at all levels of education. High school as a mass institution, moreover, had only been realized two decades earlier, so the problems of "warehousing" indifferent students, social promotion, vocational training, and attempts to engage students in extracurricular activities were relatively unfamiliar to educators by the time the National Defense Education Act placed renewed stress on pedagogical "excellence" in areas of technical competence. And until about 1960 young males could still find steady, rewarding employment in industrial occupations that afforded a decent living over their lifetimes. After World War Two even as it was becoming desirable to have a high school diploma to work one's way up the occupational ladder in many realms of manual labor, by the 1960s the industrial sector of the U.S. economy was in severe decline. Until World War Two education was as much a "public good" as a "private good": by expanding higher education the G.I. Bill unleashed a credentials race that only intensified the focus on secondary schooling as preparation for entry into college and the promise of the stability and prestige of salaried employment. Thereafter, the relevance of individual grade attainment to upward social mobility was a critical factor in the scrutiny applied to the "performance" of America's schools. The traditional functions of public schools as moral educators and as molders of future citizens retreated in direct proportion to the expanding place of education as a platform for individual upward mobility.

Sputnik marked the moment when universal education throughout much of the world would mean increased economic competition for the United States after the brief respite of postwar prosperity. Later, the end of the Cold War, in its turn, brought globalization and more prosperity. But with the "peace dividend" came further comparisons between the performance of children in the United States in math and science with their peers across the globe and more worries about the long-term implications of inferior public school performance. (That the entry of the "baby boom echo" into America's schools coincided with the spike in the electorate's concern about the state of public schooling in 1990 is no accident; see fig. 10.1). In short, McGuinn has offered an invaluable book, but it is only one-half of the picture of the history of education policy. The other half resides in the reasons for Americans' ongoing confrontations with the shortcomings of a "system" of popular schooling that has been anything but systematic in its purpose and organization until its cracks were first exposed by *Brown* and Sputnik.

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