

movements—#MeToo, Black Lives Matter—inspired and led by young African American women.

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David A. Gamson and Emily M. Hodge, eds. *The Shifting Landscape of the American School District: Race, Class, Geography, and the Perpetual Reform of Local Control, 1935–2015*. New York: Peter Lang, 2018. 244 pp.

In the opening of their edited volume, David Gamson and Emily Hodge observe that the American school district, a relatively unique institution in comparative context, has occupied a “curious spot” in educational thought and history (p. xiii). It has been variously celebrated and maligned, depicted as weak and powerful, and understood as an agent of change and an obstacle to it. In some senses, the essays in this collection suggest, these may all be true, since the school district is not a static or singular institution. School districts have evolved and changed over time and their role in reform has shifted and varied. In the preface and first essay sketching the longer history of the district, the editors argue that too often the school district is taken for granted as the site of schooling, without attention to how its organization and governance have operated and changed over time, including how it has enhanced or inhibited educational opportunity and school reform. This impoverishes not only our historical understanding of education but also our contemporary policy conversations.

Reaching out to both history and policy audiences, this volume offers a “prismatic set of portraits” of the American school district over the past century to offer a “fuller, multi-dimensional story” (p. xiv). Collectively, the essays in the volume demonstrate significant changes over time and across places in how school districts are governed, what they have sought to do, how they are situated within and shaped by national reforms, what role they’ve made for community engagement, how district organization has fostered inequality, and how local control has been balanced with state and federal authority. They challenge the assumption that the district is simply a holdover from the past and offer insights about how and why district-level reform efforts have succeeded or failed, drawing out the critical role played at times by fiscal resources and constraints, teachers, civic

capacity and public engagement, and the process itself, especially top-down versus bottom-up policy formation and implementation.

While collectively the essays paint a picture of district change and complexity, individual essays take very different approaches to the issues. Different readers will likely find different essays compelling based on temporal, topical, methodological, and policy interests. Three case studies stood out to me as particularly exciting contributions to history and policy. Ansley Erickson's essay, "Fairness, Commitment, and Civic Capacity: The Varied Desegregation Trajectories of Metropolitan School Districts" compares the efficacy and endurance of school desegregation in the consolidated city-suburban systems of Charlotte, Nashville, Louisville, and Raleigh, with attention to when and how the city and suburbs consolidated, the scope and planning process for busing, and the end of court supervision and results. The analysis suggests that the process of implementation, especially the degree to which local leaders built and sustained civic capacity in connection with desegregation, proved critical. The most successful cities, like Louisville, built a sustained public conversation around fairness in the process of desegregation.

Karen Benjamin's essay, "The Limits of Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up Educational Reform During the Great Depression," compares district-level, child-centered curriculum reform efforts in Houston, Wheeling (WV), and Raleigh. Ultimately, fiscal constraints caused by retrenchment and rural equalization efforts cut short endeavors in all three cities, but the different approaches to reform—namely the top-down implementation in Houston versus the democratic teacher-led reform processes in Wheeling and Raleigh—also shaped the results and efficacy.

Finally, John Rury and Sanae Akaba examine the growing inequality in the spatial distribution of social capital in Kansas City and its suburbs in "The Geo-Spatial Distribution of Educational Attainment: School Districts, Cultural Capital and Inequality in Metropolitan Kansas City, 1960-1980." Recognizing adult education levels as an important component of students' and schools' resources and social capital, they examine the spatial distribution of adult education levels in the metro area in 1960 and 1980. Both years show clear spatial inequalities in the distribution, with particularly stark concentrations of low and high education levels in Kansas City and the elite suburban Shawnee Mission School District. However, the differences between them grew greater over time, providing a different indication of social-spatial inequality than looking at school resources alone.

All three essays take a comparative approach to their subject, which helps to put the district itself sharply into focus and helps to pinpoint some of the characteristics that mattered most for policy

outcomes. Single district studies can be suggestive, but lack of comparative context makes it difficult to identify which factors mattered most in shaping different outcomes or to generalize about similarities. Rather than take the geographic scope of the district for granted, the essays also highlight, to different degrees, the implications of district boundaries themselves for school reform and educational equity.

In her terrific essay closing the volume, Judith Kafka points to the need for more of this kind of comparative analysis. In “Institutional Theory and the History of District-level School Reform: A Reintroduction,” Kafka argues that historians of education should embrace institutionalist theory to help ask and answer new questions and to write new synthetic institutional histories of schooling. She argues that David Tyack and Larry Cuban’s observations about constancy of schools as institutions and ideas about the grammar of schooling, for example, were drawn from neo-institutional theory of the 1970s and 1980s and remain influential in history of education because of their ability to offer synthetic insights. The field of institutional theory has continued to evolve beyond an emphasis on continuity, however, and historians of education should utilize it to explore variation and change. In particular, concepts like organizational fields and institutional logics can help historians of education to examine the processes of change, think more critically about what constitutes change, and explore variation across places in order to identify the structural and cultural factors that shape behavior and outcomes. This push, by several essays in the volume, to look beyond single districts and think about variation and change across places strikes me as an exciting future direction, not only for thinking about the school district but for history of education.

Like all good work, this collection of essays left me wanting more. The prismatic portrait here offers tantalizing glimpses of a range of issues and suggests exciting avenues for further research. In addition to cross-district comparisons, it suggests the value of thinking in even broader comparative fashion, namely, to put the United States in conversation with other nations. The preface notes the relative uniqueness of the district system, but it would be easier to identify, appreciate, and analyze these unique features and their significance if the American system were put into conversation with one or more national education systems that are organized and managed in very different ways. In addition, the essays hint at ways that local control as an idea and practice has shifted with changes in the district but this seems a ripe area for deeper investigation, including to problematize the presumed continuity of local control and examine the purposes this idea of the tradition of local control has served. To do this requires more analysis like that offered in Gamson and Hodge’s

opening essay, which situates the district in a longer period of time. It also requires centering how districts are embedded in larger systems and shaped by national reforms, external policymakers and experts, and state and federal policies, as some of the essays here do.

A third tantalizing area for deeper investigation may be in the role of school finance. Essays here suggest the way that school funding shapes and constrains what is possible in school reform, but school funding is also deeply tied to the organization, management, and identity of local districts. Teasing out this relationship and changes over time seems important for understanding the district and local control itself. Finally, it strikes me that the paradigmatic district in nearly all of these essays, and in much of the literature, is urban, and often a large central city district. Are we missing things by focusing most of our studies of districts on the city case? What about rural districts or the great variety of suburban districts, many of which look more like rural or small-town districts than big-city bureaucracies? This excellent collection of essays is a great first step toward addressing these and other questions, and for focusing historians and policy scholars on the need to more carefully historicize and problematize the American school district.

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Rosina Lozano. *An American Language: The History of Spanish in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018. 376 pp.

The United States has a complicated relationship with its past. One of the biggest misconceptions surrounding American history is the place of language in that past and the country's overall identity. Rosina Lozano's *An American Language* works to unpack how we both identify and situate the role of language, more specifically Spanish, in the creation of both a country and its ideals. More so, the book centers language as a tool utilized to erase people's claim to that identity and space. Language, especially for the US Southwest, became embedded within a power struggle between a nation's past and the future it hoped to claim.

Recent national debates have continued to highlight the place of language, particularly Spanish, in conversations on citizenship and