Book Review

Edith M. Ziegler. *Schools in the Landscape: Localism, Cultural Tradition, and the Development of Alabama's Public Education System, 1865–1915.* Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 232 pp. Cloth $41.50.

Public education was slow to develop in the nineteenth-century American South, and as the self-proclaimed "Heart of Dixie," Alabama has seemed even more troubled than most southern states in creating and funding a suitable system of public education. Australian historian Edith M. Ziegler offers a glimpse of Alabama education in the first fifty years following the conclusion of the American Civil War.

Ziegler is most successful when she focuses on the actual operations of education at the schoolhouse and classroom levels. She captures the tenuous nature of schooling in postbellum Alabama when she describes "the hand-crafted, improvisational nature of the rural schoolhouses" that dotted the landscape. She describes the exterior of the structures, noting the "rudimentary" nature of construction, including in many places a lack of windows and even floorboards (p. 62). One-room and one-teacher schools often seated students in rows by grade and gender; Ziegler adeptly uses the physical structure of the school as an opportunity to explore the methods of teaching by recitations as much as the involvement of local parents and communities in providing for education in the region. Her exploration of the books used in the schools provides an opportunity to explore some cultural and political issues, including the push for books sympathetic to a southern view of the history of the Civil War and the struggle over whether or not to select texts at the local or state level. Many schools doubled as churches, with Ziegler noting the generally harmonious relations between religion and education in the state. While true for nineteenth-century and rural Alabama, this religious peace would be strained in areas of larger Catholic population such as the coastal city of Mobile or rapidly industrializing Birmingham; and Ziegler misses an important opportunity to explore these issues.

Ziegler dedicates a chapter to "Teachers and Teaching" in the schools, describing the difficult yet critical position held by teachers. The approach in this chapter, as in several others, to span the entire period of the study on a theme promises to better explain the role of teachers but suffers from a lack of sufficient attention to the drastic changes in society and politics in the half-century following the war and their influence on educational conditions. Still, Ziegler can explore topics such as the source of teachers—initially something of a local welfare

appointment made regardless of the potential teacher's ability—and their training through normal schools and teacher institutes. She makes great use of sources such as county superintendent reports to show how teachers interacted with students and parents and to describe the conditions well beyond the schoolhouse. Because state funds were restricted to paying teacher salaries, and even then for only a limited amount of time, teachers were left to raise subscriptions and support to extend the school year. Ziegler points out how this generally disagreeable situation could in fact help the teacher to better understand the students' life and to better convince parents of the importance of education and the teacher's suitability for the task. Further, she argues that town meetings became opportunities to promote the importance of education even as the school supporters had to beg their neighbors for financial support of the operations so that public schools were woven "into the conscious concern of the whole community—not just parents" (p. 87).

Perhaps appropriate in keeping with the state she profiles, Ziegler's text segregates African-American schools into a separate chapter and makes only a few references to black students and teachers elsewhere in the book. Black education in Alabama has garnered much previous scholarly attention, and Ziegler does a good job of incorporating much of that work into her study. Post-Civil War Alabama was a poor state that was reluctant to spend much on education. Indeed, when the racism of the political majority dictated that education had to be segregated, it meant the state would attempt to fund two sets of schools on funds clearly inadequate for even one. Ziegler teases readers with a statistic from 1875 showing that black teachers in public schools were actually paid more than their white counterparts (p. 131), but cites only to the contemporary superintendent's report without any exploration of the situation. Whether or not this was a statistical error, the situation was increasingly anomalous as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth began.

Changes to the school laws in 1891 proved crippling to black schools as they allowed local communities to appropriate school funds as they wished; with voting restrictions removing all but a handful of black ballots, racial disparities in school funding soon grew exponentially, so that by 1912 black-majority Lowndes County spent $33.40 on white schoolchildren for every $1.00 on a black student (p. 133). Ziegler's work is again strong when she is able to show the local effects of this intolerable situation, explaining how black parents, teachers, and higher education leaders still managed to provide far better education than the white guardians of the state treasury would support. Still, Ziegler misses some opportunities to explore the worlds of these black teachers and students by largely limiting their coverage to this single chapter. Some attention to the work of Adam Fairclough's *A Class of Their Own* (2007)

on black teachers or Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow* (1996) on Jeannes teachers and black women progressives as postdisfranchisement ambassadors to the white community may have helped to broaden her approach to the place of African-American education in Alabama.

Ziegler's close attention to the local experience of education is generally successful, but it comes at the cost of minimizing attention to state politics that were quite often consumed with issues that affected education. The most glaring slight in this regard is the scant attention she gives to the campaigns to limit child labor and how those campaigns connected to schools. Braxton Bragg Comer, the so-called education governor of Alabama (1907–11), is mentioned only briefly in one paragraph (p. 115) without attention to his complicated record of speaking in support of public schools but opposing child labor laws that would help drive more young children out of the factories and into the schools. Antichild labor campaigner Edgar Gardner Murphy likewise makes only a brief appearance in Ziegler's book, signaling her slight of how closely intertwined the issues of state and national politics were with school reforms.

Another glaring omission is Julia Tutwiler, who is mentioned only in a brief aside as the "long-time president of the Livingston Normal School for Women" (p. 150); readers get no sense of her lifetime of contributions to state and national education reforms for both boys and girls, including service as president of the elementary education section of the National Education Association and her work to establish uniform certification standards for teachers in Alabama. Ziegler concludes her study in 1915, chosen perhaps as the end of a fifty-year window but also appropriate as a year that saw several important schools bills passed in the legislature. The implementation of these bills, and their effects on the schools, is unfortunately left to the work of other scholars.

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