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James G. Cibulka

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# FEDERAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND THE URBAN POOR: The Declining Power of Cities

James G. Cibulka

## Introduction

Not since 1980 has a Democratic President been in the White House. During the incumbencies of two Republican Presidents, Ronald Reagan and George Bush, federal education policy shifted dramatically. Can we expect an equally sharp "corrective action" or even a new set of policies from President Bill Clinton?

This paper will focus on how changes in federal policy have affected urban school systems, and how the Clinton administration's education policies are likely to affect the fortunes of urban schools.

Few would argue that the 1980s witnessed sharp declines in the living conditions in America's central cities. Urban homelessness, violent crime, racial and ethnic conflict, and other grim scenarios fill American newspapers and television news daily. While racial inequality, poverty, and crime are not confined to cities, and reflect broader trends in American society, there is now a widely shared recognition that such problems are most concentrated in our cities and place the greatest demands on our governmental institutions. Few urban institutions illustrate the politics of decline more starkly than urban school systems, which suffer from high dropout rates, low student performance, gang activity, and numerous other indicators of educational distress. In many cases urban schools, which face far more severe demands than schools in more affluent areas, are far less equipped to address their educational tasks, suffering from inexperienced teachers, inadequate books and supplies, shortage of space, and so on.

James G. Cibulka is a Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, School of Education, 2400 East Hartland Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211. His research and writing interests are in urban education, education politics and policy and finance.

It is in this context of declining social and educational conditions in our cities that the role of the federal government should be addressed. During the last wave of federal activism from roughly 1960 to 1980, about which more will be said later, the federal government began to play a major role in aiding cities and urban school systems, principally based on the rationale that they, or the citizens residing in them, had distinct needs justifying the protection and resources of the federal government. Although this federal role was sharply diminished from 1980 onwards, with the advent of the Reagan and Bush Presidencies, that legacy was not altogether reversed. What the future of federal policy holds for urban areas, under a new President of a different political party, is therefore a key question.

In this article the focus will be primarily on the needs of urban school systems rather than cities writ large, although the systemic nature of the problem does require, it shall be argued, a comprehensive approach which reaches across such as city and school institutional boundaries. Accordingly, federal education policy will be discussed in relation to the broader domestic policy agenda of the new administration, and its overall posture toward cities.

The paper will be divided into three sections. In the first, the history of federal education policy, particularly toward cities, will be reviewed, including trends in federal revenues toward urban school systems. The legislative proposals of the Clinton administration will be examined within this historical context. In the second section, the analysis turns to the reasons for this politics of continuity, in particular the Clinton administration's policy agenda and the declining electoral strength of cities. In the third and concluding section, the paper will speak briefly to the nation's need for a comprehensive urban policy.

## Three Decades of Federal Education Policy: A Brief History

There have been two major shifts in the direction of federal education policy in the post-World War II era, which reflect broader developments in our society during these periods. These two major shifts divide into three time periods, the first extending from roughly 1945 to 1960, the second from 1960 to 1980, and the third from 1980 to the present.

### *A Marginal Federal Role: 1945-1960*

During the post-War period ending with the Eisenhower Presidency, Americans were preoccupied in foreign affairs with the emergence of a Cold War and at home, with providing the fruits of affluence to an expanding population. The role of the federal government continued to expand in many areas of American life, extending the New Deal legacy of the Roosevelt-Truman periods, despite Eisenhower's nominally Republican affiliation. However, in the area of elementary and secondary education, that federal role remained very marginal. While federal grants-in-aid to local school districts, they remained a small portion of the overall budgets of school systems. Moreover, many school districts, including urban ones, were reluctant to become too dependent on such aids; indeed, some routinely turned down federal aid because of their fear of federal control.

During the second half of the 1950s, national security concerns dominated the federal role in education. Public concern mounted that public schools were not preparing a scientifically literate population to compete with the Soviet Union, leading to the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958.

Perhaps the federal action which would have the greatest long-term impact on reshaping American education was still scarcely appreciated. The Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision would redefine race relations not only in our public schools but in all the nation's institutions.

*A New Federal Activism in Education 1960–1980*

The first major shift in federal policy after World War II came with the advent of John F. Kennedy's Presidency. Kennedy campaigned on the platform of "getting America moving again." Some of this challenge was cast in pure Cold War logic, such as closing the so-called (imagined, it has since been revealed) "Missile Gap." Yet Kennedy was disturbed by Appalachian poverty, whose societal dimensions had been documented in Michael Harrington's compelling book *Poverty in America*. Racial strife also was on the rise, and Kennedy, at first reluctantly and haltingly, sought to use the power of the federal government to address problems of racial segregation. The War on Poverty is normally credited to his successor Lyndon Johnson, but its outlines were conceived and planned by the Kennedy "Brain Trust."<sup>1</sup> Head Start was also conceived in this period. Kennedy saw public education as an important tool for addressing poverty and discrimination, and in this sense set a new course for federal education policy.

President Johnson, of course, extended and operationalized that philosophy, securing successful passage of such landmark legislation as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as well as the so-called War on Poverty legislation. Because of his personal philosophy about the importance of education, it became a cornerstone of Johnson's domestic policy unmatched by any subsequent president. This new period of federal activism in public education led to a number of well-known changes in the intergovernmental arrangements among school districts, states, and the federal government. First, local school districts increasingly turned to the federal government for the burgeoning number of grants-in-aid programs, and federal revenues grew as a percentage of school budgets.

Second, Washington increasingly provided direct aid to local governments, bypassing state officials; the theory behind this effort was that states were obstacles to reform.

Third, many pieces of federal legislation were aimed at helping categories of individuals such as the educationally disadvantaged, the handicapped, and limited-English speaking pupils. Each program developed extensive—and equally important—separate regulations, bureaucratic enforcement mechanisms, and Congressional oversight committees. Compliance with federal mandates became an important preoccupation of federal policy makers, and as well as recipients of federal aid.

Third, closely related to the foregoing, federal laws evolved from grants-in-aid as subsidies to local and state governments to what has been termed "regulatory federalism."<sup>2</sup> Regulatory federalism involves use of federal commerce and spending powers, as well as the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to regulate these lower governments. Federal regulation frequently is combined with grants-in-aid, such as is the case in E.S.E.A. or P. L. 94-142. Thus, there is a "carrot" to accompany the "stick." Regulatory federalism, however, can be purely regulatory; an example is the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504).

The sweep of this sea-change in federal policy after 1960 was so enormous that it transcended the tenure of Democratic Presidents. While Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford sought to reverse the growth of federal power through a "New Federalism," much important categorical aid continued to be passed in their administrations. The reauthorized Bilingual Education Act of 1974, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) and Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P. L. 94-142) are examples. The ideology of federal activism was certainly one factor explaining this persistence. Another factor leading to institutionalization was that categorical programs served members of Congress quite as effectively for dispensing constituent favors as did the purely

pork-barrel grants-in-aid, requiring constant trouble-shooting and complaint resolution.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, with some ebb and flow and modest changes in direction from Presidential administration to administration, this period of "creative federalism" continued unabated through the Carter Presidency.<sup>4</sup>

*Federal Deregulation and Retrenchment 1980–Present*

Ronald Reagan's ascendancy to the Presidency in 1980, of course, brought the second major realignment of federal power in the post-War period. Reagan had campaigned on reducing federal power by returning responsibility to state and local governments, a theme first raised by Richard Nixon's "New Federalism." Reagan, however, took deregulation a step further by promising to eliminate or reformulate many governmental functions which he believed could be addressed through privatization of service provision and market self-regulation. In the area of education policy, this philosophy of devolution led to reduced enforcement of regulations in federal categorical programs, including those pertaining to civil rights. His administration made unsuccessful efforts to aid private schools and voucherize the federal Chapter 1 program.

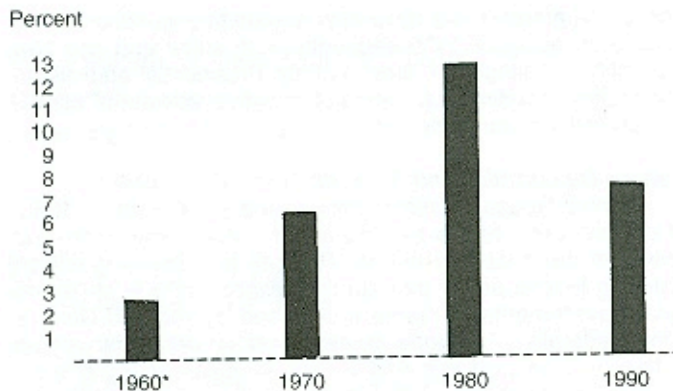
Perhaps his most notable success was to achieve eliminate and consolidate numerous categorical programs into a block grant, which came to be known as Chapter 2. This was all the more remarkable because of the poor track record of previous Presidents in instituting block grants.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, Reagan's victory was a partial one; the old Title I of E.S.E.A. politically survived this reorganization, and became Chapter 1.

This strategy of devolution had its most notable success in Reagan's first term as President, but was never reversed by his Democratic opponents in the Congress. Urban school systems were big losers in this reorganization because so many federal programs served student groups which exist in disproportionate numbers in urban public schools, such as low-income pupils, the educationally disadvantaged, limited English-speaking pupils, and because programs like E.S.A.A. had been created to address major urban problems. The combination of reduced total funding for Chapter 2, when compared with the total previous appropriations for the eliminated categorical programs, as well as its broader eligibility provisions benefiting many suburban and rural communities, shifted money away from urban school systems, those with high minority populations, and high poverty populations.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 1, the major program benefitting urban school systems because of its size and its eligibility requirements (a combination of poverty characteristics measured in a local context with proportions of educationally disadvantaged youth) suffered reduced appropriations until 1988, after which its funding recovered to approximately 1979 levels.<sup>7</sup>

The Reagan–Bush Administrations were not entirely a period of reversal for urban school systems. Due to lobbying efforts of the Council of Great City Schools and other urban allies, some programs such as the national dropout prevention program were saved in 1990.<sup>8</sup> A small number of new initiatives gained approval in Congress over administration opposition, such the federal magnet school program in 1983.

The overall deregulatory record of these years provides a mixed picture, then. This is due to the entrenched strength of regulatory federalism among constituencies, the federal and state bureaucracies, and Congress. Further, while posturing as a big deregulator, Reagan actually consolidated federal power in selective domestic policy areas consistent with his conservative philosophy. The number of federal education programs actually grew from about 150 to 220 in the Reagan–Bush years and appropriations nearly doubled in nominal dollars.

There can be less doubt about the Reagan strategy of fiscal retrenchment, particularly as it impacted on urban school systems. Figure 1 indicates the change in federal aids, as a percent of urban school system budgets, from 1960's to 1990.



**Figure 1. Federal Aids to Urban School Systems 1960–1990**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census. 1991, 1981, 1971, 1963. *Public Education Finances, 1989–90*. Series GF/90-10. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Note: Based on an analysis of the public school systems in 113 cities with populations of 150,000 or more in the 1990 Census. \*1962 data were used because of reporting problems separating federal flow-through dollars from states in the 1960 data.

In the early 1960s federal aids comprised less than 3 percent of urban school budgets. By 1970 they had climbed to between 5 and 6 percent. A decade later in 1980 federal aid to urban areas was between 13 and 14 percent. (Individual school systems varied from this average, of course. New Orleans, for instance, had come to rely on federal aids for nearly half its budget.) By 1990, a decade after the "Reagan revolution" had begun, federal aids were down to between 7 and 8 percent. This was not much above the overall average of 6 percent for school systems nationally (not shown in Figure 1.)

There was a second aspect of the realignment of federal policy in the 1980s which was of equal importance to this strategy of fiscal devolution. Institutional adequacy became an important theme of the Reagan reform period. At first Reagan haltingly and reluctantly embraced the efforts of his first Secretary of Education Terrel Bell, who created a commission to study the decline of standards in American education. However, Reagan sensed the popularity of the Commission's report *A Nation at Risk*, and in his second term the President embarked on a campaign to restore standards to the nation's schools. Bell's successor William Bennett spent much time attacking the educational establishment, arguing that reform would not require additional money. Under President Bush this emphasis on standards took a more moderate turn, leading to the President's Education Summit with the nation's governors and subsequent adoption of six national goals in 1990. A National Educational Goals Panel was created to establish and monitor standards for these goals.

This federal policy shift toward improving efficiency and effectiveness in state and local efforts has a long tradition. It was advanced by Richard Nixon under the rubric of "capacity building," meant to blunt the trend toward long-term federal subsidies and socially redistributive programs. Federal aid would be targeted on a particular problem, but it would be short-term. Moreover, it was proposed as less regulatory than traditional categorical programs. While Nixon and Ford never succeeded in reversing the thrust of creative federalism created by their Democratic predecessors, the capacity-building strategy now has become a major approach in federal policy, as an adjunct to the larger goal of redeveloping the nation's economic well-being in the new international order.

The thrust of this capacity-building strategy, which emerged in Reagan's second term and was grafted on to the earlier theme of fiscal devolution, is not necessarily consistent with the former. Fiscal devolution to states and localities is decentralizing, while national goals, standards, and stronger national testing conjure up in the eyes of many the specter of increased centralization of policy initiative from Washington, not less. This same melange of decentralization and stronger central control characterized the Thatcher reforms.<sup>9</sup> Whether it represents an inherent contradiction or merely an evolution of regulatory federalism remains to be seen. The two may not be contradictory, of course, since policy at all levels of the federal system is pragmatic and represents compromise among diverse and sometimes contradictory goals and strategies.

The current rubric for capacity building is "systemic initiatives," targeted, as the title implies, at changing entire policy systems rather than particular programs. Typically the recipients of this approach have been states, which dominated discussions of reform in the 1980's. For example, the National Science Foundation (NSF) has given grants for statewide redesign of math and science. Recently, however, NSF gave planning grants to 17 cities with the largest populations of children living in poverty, to encourage improvements in science, mathematics, and technology which will bring student achievement in those school systems up to world-class standards. So far this federal-local initiative is an exception to the pattern of federal-state relationships encouraged by Republican administrations, who wished to reverse direct federal assistance which bypassed state capitals. Cities in particular had benefitted from that period of creative federalism because the states' historic hostility to urban areas.

To recap, the 1980s represented the second watershed in federal education policy in the last 50 years. This time the shift was inaugurated by Republicans rather than Democrats. It has been characterized by strategies for devolving funding and power to states and local school districts and a shift in focus from socially redistributive categorical programs to the rhetoric of capacity-building. While federal policy remains a "mixed bag," as was suggested earlier, the shift in direction was so fundamental that its importance, like that which ushered in the period of creative federalism, is likely to persist beyond changes of Presidents and political parties.

#### *The Clinton Administration's Education Initiatives*

It is impossible to characterize a Presidency on the basis of merely one year in office. Reagan's "New Federalism," for one, did not evolve fully until his second term. Still, 1993 revealed much about President Clinton's general thinking about education reform and his larger priorities as a leader. In this regard, what dominates is the theme of continuity with the past decade of federal policy rather than a radical departure from it. Insofar as urban school systems are concerned, there is little sign of a return to the halcyon days of large federal subsidies, although as shall be explained, some marginal increases in aid may occur.

The first signal of such continuity was the Administration's decision to package its initiatives to Congress under the old rubric of the Bush Administration's "Goals 2000." Secretary of Education Richard Riley, a former "reform governor" of South Carolina, finally unveiled the long-awaited package to Congress in October, 1993. Economic development continues to be the major lever driving federal education policy. Within this defining context, the Clinton administration strives to bring greater coherence to federal policy. As might be expected from a Democratic President, equality of educational opportunity has reemerged as a theme, but in much muted coloration and largely as a sub-theme to the central effort toward capacity-building of state educational policy systems. The specific mechanism proposed for

improving equity as effectiveness is increased, is "opportunity to learn" standards for each school, although the specifics of this proposal immediately became mired in controversy as to what they meant and how federal power would be used to enforce them. Clinton extended the efforts of his predecessor in attempting to codify the national education goals, establish a process of standards-setting, and authorize grants to state and local reform projects to meet the goals.

The major federal program benefiting urban school systems has been the \$6.3 billion E.S.E.A. Chapter 1, accounting for 19 percent of the U.S. Department of Education's budget. For some years prior to Clinton's Presidency, the program was slated for overhaul. Significant changes were made in 1988 (P.L. 100-297). A Commission on Chapter 1 issued recommendations in 1992, including a study by the Department, and a National Assessment of Chapter 1 Independent Review Panel. The Committee on Education and Labor of the U.S. House of Representatives also undertook a study of the massive program, which was completed in Spring 1993 in time for reauthorization discussions. In this context of an emerging consensus favoring further changes in Chapter 1, the new administration proposed, among other things, greater concentration of grants on needy school districts and increased appropriation levels, both of which would benefit urban school systems. Under the first provision, 50% of Chapter 1 money would be concentrated in the poorest 25% of the nation's counties, compared with the existing concentration grant formula set at 43%. However, the proposals were stymied in Congress until 1994 when resistance developed from states which would lose funding under the new distribution formula. The administration eventually accepted a compromise, agreeing to target new Chapter 1 money more tightly, in exchange for not eliminating Chapter 2, as it had originally proposed.

The administration's fiscal 1995 proposals called for further funding increases in Chapter 1 from \$6.3 to \$7 billion. Depending on the outcomes of these proposals, some marginal increases in urban aid could be expected.

Improving the school-to-work transition is an important theme of the Clinton administration. Here Clinton's proposals have a heavily bipartisan flavor, and they borrow heavily from initiatives in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin and other nations such as Germany. Wisconsin's Republican Governor Tommy Thompson has been an active proponent of apprenticeship programs and related school-to-work initiatives. While initially proposed for all youth, these efforts have evolved to target on those who are not bound for college. Since urban school systems have large percentages of such youth, federal efforts could be helpful here. However, there appears to be little likelihood at this time of a large scale federal categorical subsidy to spur this effort forward. Indeed, the effort is likely to focus instead on retooling vocational education and Department of Labor education programs. The School to Work Opportunities Act of 1993 proposed a National skills Standards Board to support the development of occupational skills standards to guide curricula and instruction.

More broadly, inter-agency collaboration will be a major theme in the Clinton administration. In the systemic initiative focus of federal policy discussed above, the focus is on states and local school districts as initiators. By contrast, problems of inter-agency collaboration frequently have their origins in federal policies and programs. According to one analysis there are 76 major programs spread throughout the executive branch, which are in turn supervised by 9 Congressional committees and 19 subcommittees.<sup>10</sup> In other words, in seeking to coordinate federal programs, the Clinton administration faces formidable political obstacles, some of which have their origins in a jealously protective Congress. The reforms required will be difficult to achieve because they are myriad in number, of low vis-

ibility, and have a potentially negative impact on a wide number of beneficiaries, each of which heightens the political complexity and cost of reform. At the same time some changes will be relatively easy to start, such as granting of waivers for flexibility and greater interconnections among services for families and children.

Clinton is likely to be more generous with education funding than his Republican predecessors. He proposed roughly a 3 percent increase in appropriations to the Department of Education for fiscal 1995. These proposals also are likely to be reduced by Congress—in part due to Republican control of the Senate. The President's "Goals 2000" legislation, for example, quickly became mired in budgetary bickering, with the Congressional appropriations committees only willing to allocate \$105 million in grants for state and local reform projects in FY94, rather than the \$140 million the President requested. As a result the legislation was also forced to lay over until February, 1994, when it eventually passed with strong bipartisan support in the U.S. Senate. In these and other cases the new President must work within longstanding institutional constraints, such as budgetary politics which divide the executive and legislative branches as well as Democrats and Republicans.

So far, then, there is no evidence that Clinton will seek to reverse the Reagan revolution of 1980. To the aggravation of conservatives, he sounds much like them. As the next section indicates, there are several structural as well as regime-related reasons why the politics of continuity is likely to dominate the Clinton administration's budgets, particularly as it relates to urban issues and problems.

### Explaining the Politics of Continuity

Presidents are elected promising to do far more than they can accomplish. Consequently, they must establish priorities and use their limited time and power to advance those priorities. In Mr. Clinton's Presidency, while education ranks as important, it is likely to play a far less significant place on his agenda than it did when he was governor of Arkansas. One reason for this is institutional. Education is primarily a state and local concern, by Constitutional delegation and a long tradition in our federal system. Only a president with extraordinary commitment to education as a matter of personal philosophy is likely to elevate this policy concern to the top of his domestic agenda; here Lyndon Johnson proved to be the notable exception. Yet Lyndon Johnson's understanding of the federal role and the use of federal power reflected his longstanding leadership role in the U.S. Senate. Clinton, on the other hand, like Carter and Reagan before him, is a former governor, who is likely to remain sensitive to the concerns of governors for maintaining state-local autonomy. His selection of a former Governor Richard Riley of South Carolina as his Secretary of Education, symbolized this deference. In his first year as Secretary, Riley showed little sign of elevating the low status of this role in the President's Cabinet, as had William Bennett during the Reagan years.

In addition, there are a number of regime-related reasons why other policy areas and considerations are likely to play a more important role than education. For one thing, Clinton was elected as a so-called "new Democrat" in the centrist mold he helped create through the Democratic Leadership Council. This group has sought to dispel the label Republicans successfully thrust upon earlier Democratic candidates for President such as Michael Dukakis that they are nothing more than "big taxers and spenders" with far-out "liberal" agendas. Accordingly, Clinton campaigned on getting the federal budget deficit under control as one element in restoring economic health to the country and reducing tax burdens on the middle-class. In his first term at least, Clinton must demonstrate that he has ended the economic recession he inherited upon his election in

1992. The scope of this problem is so enormous that it has placed a significant brake upon any new federal spending, despite the president's willingness to advocate a tax increase in 1993.

Part of the centrist strategy of the new President was a self-conscious effort to distance himself from appearing to be beholden to traditional Democratic constituencies such as labor unions and blacks. The strategy of "economic development" which is at the heart of the New Democratic Coalition's planning is one which willingly sacrifices allegiance to the priorities and programmatic benefits which are important to these groups. This is likely to reduce attention to cities, despite a modest package of aids to benefit Los Angeles and Chicago after the April, 1992 riots and the promise of more federal disaster relief to Los Angeles after the January, 1994 earthquake.

The President also made it clear during his first term of office that health care would dominate his agenda. This is partly a personal commitment of his and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Equally important though, the President appeared to be convinced as more than a matter of rhetoric that the economy cannot be restored to good health without health-care reform.

Of course, such reform would contain numerous provisions affecting services to school children. (The omnibus crime bill working its way through Congress also contained indirect benefits for schools.)

If health-care reform is accomplished, the President's announced second priority is welfare reform. At the end of 1993 the administration was seeking ways of slowing down this initiative in Congress, even as they appeared to be fully committed to it. The President recognized, after a painful year of political missteps and miscalculations, that his power to effect change by moving his proposals through Congress was limited at any one point in time. Yet the pressure on him to elevate welfare reform to a higher priority was so strong that he devoted considerable attention to it in his State of the Union address in January, 1994. Significantly, while the President spoke passionately about children in that same address, education reform was not a prominent theme.

The President's slow progress in winning Congressional approval of his education proposals in his first year as President reflected, if not his recognition of the institutional limits on his leadership, then the reality of them. He was preoccupied in 1993 with other more important matters such as the deficit reduction package and the North American Free Trade Agreement. To win these victories, he had to campaign and cajole and offer political rewards. As a result, his education proposals languished in Congress. Despite a last minute push the Department of Education could not free up its "Goals 2000" bill for consideration by the Senate. In the House the reauthorization package remained delayed in the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education because of the administration's inability to resolve questions such as the Chapter 1 targeting formula, Chapter 2, magnet schools, the authorization of new programs, and other matters. Presidential leadership was not available to untie these knotty issues. While this apparent void can be explained partly as a function of the new President's inability to set clear priorities, it also reflects the limits inherent in any President's power in this period of "the Institutional Presidency."

To be sure, the President could point to some modest achievements in the area of education. The appropriations process for FY94 was completed in the Fall, 1993 with small nominal dollar increases for Chapter 1 (3.5 percent), concentration grants (2.7 percent), math and science education (2 percent), immigrant education (32.3 percent), bilingual education (2.5 percent) and others. However, some programs

important to urban school systems, among others, such as magnet schools, dropout prevention and vocational education, were frozen at FY93 levels. Chapter 2 block grants were cut by 15.2 percent, signaling a possible shift back toward categorical programs, and drug-free schools were cut by 18.6 percent. In short, spending increases, as well as cuts, were largely at the margins. Even FY95 proposals for somewhat greater increases in many Department of Education programs should be viewed with this fact in mind.

For a President elected by such a slim plurality as Mr. Clinton in a three-way race, the larger considerations of Presidential reelection must remain paramount. Hence controlling the federal deficit and winning one or two major victories such as health care and welfare reform are likely to be the President's major priorities. All these forces speak to the politics of continuity.

#### *The Declining Electoral Power of Cities*

Cities no longer have the electoral strength they did for many decades. While they remain about one-third of the total U.S. population (a constant since 1950), their rate of growth in the 1980s was less than half that of suburbs. Many Northeastern cities continue to lose population. Consequently, by 1988 nearly 60 percent of the population in metropolitan areas lived outside central cities.<sup>11</sup> Despite the continued legality of gerrymandering under the revision of the Voting Rights Act, members of the House of Representatives represent increasingly large (on average 570,000 constituents) and diverse electoral districts. So far the inclusion of suburban areas in formerly urban districts appears to have benefitted suburbs more than central cities. For U.S. Senators and Presidents urban areas likewise carry less political weight than formerly.

Counterbalancing this population decline is a trend toward increasing numbers of African-Americans and Hispanics in Congress, many from urban areas. For example, the Congressional Black Caucus was outspoken in its criticism of the President's withdrawal of his nominee for Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. While the President may need this group for key Congressional votes, such as health care reform, their impact on national domestic policy remains disjointed.

From a purely political point of view, the President's posture as a centrist requires that he avoid too close an identification with racial minorities, which may explain his cool relationship with the Rev. Jesse Jackson. The pressures on the President from the right, and from public opinion generally, cause him to emphasize welfare reform, a subject fraught with racial overtones. In the week following the President's discussion of this topic in his January, 1994 State of the Union address, it became clear that the administration had little idea of how it would implement its guarantee of a job for all former welfare recipients, and the nation's governors warned him that the promise of jobs should be decoupled from welfare reform. While it is perhaps too much to ask that all such details will have been thought out even before the administration had advanced a legislative proposal, after a year in office it remained quite unclear how the Clinton administration would achieve the broad promise of welfare reform. Indeed, such lack of clarity only reinforces the impression that welfare reform is mainly about reassuring the dominantly white middle-class, not helping the urban and other poor.

In the face of declining electoral strength in cities, they do not play a major role in the Clinton administration's domestic agenda. The administration's "empowerment zones" is a reworking of the "enterprise zone" concept of Reagan and Bush, which never got off the ground, but not a significant departure from several decades of unsuccessful federal policy.<sup>12</sup> While

the \$3.5 billion appropriation over five years is considerable, Clinton is seeking to slash other urban-oriented programs such as public housing. Thus, there is little evidence that cities will receive any greater attention than urban school systems in the Clinton administration.

### Conclusion

All the early signs of the Clinton administration's first year in office suggest that urban schools are unlikely to recapture the political ground they lost during the 1980s, despite significant evidence that their needs are increasing. The temptation for this President will be to treat the fortunes of city pupils and urban residents largely indirectly. Thus, it can be argued that improvements in Chapter 1, better school-to-work programs, systemic initiatives, and so on, ultimately will benefit urban pupils and their schools. Similarly, health care reform and welfare reform, should they pass, can be held out by the President as policy responses which will benefit urban residents as well. Whether this is true, or only mistaken optimism, or, indeed, whether it is cynical, symbolic politics is a matter upon which there is likely to be much disagreement.

It is very clear, however, that the Clinton administration, like its immediate predecessors, does not see the need for a comprehensive urban policy. Within the field of public education, there has been almost no discernible attention given to this task. The concept of "empowerment zones" in the municipal arena is so obviously flawed in its narrow and rehashed conception that it is barely credible as a national urban policy.

There are straightforward political explanations for why such a policy has not emerged, and why it is not contemplated. The development of such a policy would require that we address very complicated questions such as the changing nature of cities as economic, social, and cultural entities. Race and poverty, and the controversy their discussion generates, are important features of this problem. A national urban policy would have to recognize the diversity within the nation's cities, and thus would require flexible policy responses.

Ironically, there is much attention given at the present to "reinventing government" and even a Vice-Presidential Commission devoted to this end. Yet the cancer at the core of the nation's life—the declining quality of life in our central cities—is assiduously avoided. Until the nation's conscience is reclaimed to address this problem, urban education is unlikely to be reinvigorated by the federal education policies of the Clinton administration.

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