

# Introduction

After stubbing her toe on a raised floorboard, [Erin Brokovich] began asking the kinds of questions that led to the landmark lawsuit against PG & E . . . “I began to put two and two together,” she said. “I have floors coming up. Why? The house smelled musty. Why? Could there be a water problem? And then I started thinking - water, mold, what’s going on? I’m sick.” Tests confirmed her suspicions, revealing construction flaws and high levels of several molds [Brokovich then testified in support of new legislation protecting homebuyers from buying moldy houses unawares]

“Erin Brokovich Crusades Against Mold” by Anastasia Hendrix, *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A3, 3/8/01.

## The Big Box

Now, Patty used to live with a two-way door  
In a little white house quite near us.  
But she had too much fun in school all day  
And made the grown-ups nervous.  
She talked in the library and sang in class  
Went four times to the toilet.  
She ran through the halls and wouldn’t play with dolls  
And when we pledged to the flag, she’d spoil it.

So the teachers who loved her had a meeting one day  
To try to find a cure.  
They thought and talked and thought some more  
Till finally they were sure.  
“Oh, Patty, “ they said, “you’re an awfully sweet girl  
With a lot of potential inside you.

“But you have to know how far to go  
So the grown-up world can abide you.  
Now, the rules are listed on the walls,  
So there’s no need to repeat them.  
We all agree, your parents and we,  
That you just can’t handle your freedom”

Patty sat still and, to avoid their eyes,  
She lowered her little-girl head.  
But she heard their words and she felt their eyes  
And this is what she said:  
“I fold my socks and I eat my beets  
And on Saturday morning I change my sheets . . .  
Even sparrows scream  
And rabbits hop  
And beavers chew trees when they need ‘em.  
I don’t mean to be rude: I want to be nice,  
But I’d like to hang on to my freedom.  
“I know you are smart and I know that you think  
You are doing what is best for me.

But if freedom is handled just *your* way  
Then it's not my freedom or free."

From *The Big Box* by Toni Morrison,  
Hyperion Books for Children, New York, 1999.

## ***The Argument***

Myths play important roles in every culture. One important role is to legitimize existing social, economic and political arrangements. The power of a myth resides in its ability to reflect enough of reality to be believable while also articulating enough hope to counter the reality it does not reflect. For example, the reality of social and economic inequality in the United States is made acceptable to a critical mass of citizens by the myth of social mobility. The few examples of rags to riches allows many to argue that the possibility (if rarely the reality) exists for those willing and able to seize it, if not for themselves, at least for their children.

Public education plays an important role in the maintenance of this myth for two reasons. The content of the curriculum itself emphasizes the “rags to riches” stories of able, industrious and clever individuals and promotes the economic and political system as one that is always improving — “all boats rise with the tide”. The public school is also represented as the “great equalizer”. The myth goes like this: all children go to school and those who are smart and hard working succeed. Success is manifested by “good grades” which promise well paying jobs.

The coalition of organizations pushing the New Standards Reform Movement during the last twenty years is not only attempting to reshape the public school system to reflect the new workplace dynamics but it is also attempting to modify the role education plays in supporting the myth of merit based social mobility. Specifically, the old myth reflected by the tracking system is being replaced by the new myth that all high school students can, want to and should master college entrance level requirements. Some-Can-and-Some-Can't (College v. Vocational tracks) is being replaced with Everyone-Can (High Standards for All).

This shift is in response to a crisis of legitimacy. The old myth has been losing its power. Until recently, it had been acceptable to the many to be sorted into the non-college bound tracks because the high school diploma led enough citizens to jobs with acceptable incomes. Union jobs in manufacturing allowed workers to support families above the poverty line with the hope that their children would go to school and get into the college bound track. But the restructuring of the United States economy during the last twenty years has resulted in an unprecedented polarization of wealth. The decline of union and manufacturing jobs and the expansion of the service sector has directly contributed to the growing wage disparity between high school and college graduates. It is this new reality that has made the Some-Can-and-Some-Can't myth lose its persuasive power.

Instead of addressing the polarization of wealth — the soaring compensation for business managers and sales workers while working class wages decline in inflation adjusted dollars — a new myth is being promulgated by a network of corporate funded nonprofits. The Education Trust

appears to be the lead organization in this myth-making network (see Appendix A for a more detailed description of the role of the Education Trust in creating the new myth). The success of the new Everyone-Can myth depends, however, on the success of transforming the structure of the K–12 public school system. The responsibility for taking the lead in engineering a network of organizations for this purpose was assigned to the Business Roundtable in 1989.

During the summer of 1989, the top CEOs in the United States sat down together and wrote the blueprint that has guided the third fundamental transformation of the K–12 public school system in the nation’s history. Popularly known as high-stakes testing, systemic reform, or the New Standards movement, the program of one of the most influential organizations in the United States, the national Business Roundtable (BRT), has been implemented by over a dozen state legislatures. The lobbying efforts of state business coalitions (organized by the BRT) are persuading every state government to consider legislation that would force the students in its public schools to take a single standardized test, the results of which would be used as the criterion to determine sanctions or rewards for the teachers and administrators in every school. The use of standardized tests is not new. What is new is the strategy of attaching “high stakes” to test scores. By penalizing low scoring schools and rewarding high scoring schools, advocates of high-stakes testing argue that parents will be able to hold teachers “accountable” to teaching every student “high standards” as defined by state content and performance standards. “Does it increase test scores?” is fast becoming the single litmus test that any teaching method, curricula or structural change must pass in order to be funded and implemented.

*On some dimensions, this transformation is nearly complete.* Virtually all states now have statewide testing systems capable of producing performance data on individual schools. Virtually all states have some form of standards to offer guidance to local schools and school systems. *On some other dimensions, the transformation is far from complete.* Perhaps a third of the states have developed, or are in the final stages of developing well-articulated systems of standards, assessments, and accountability measures that can be used to make judgments about individual schools’ performance (Richard Elmore quoted by BRT, 1999; p. 3)<sup>1</sup> [BRT’s emphasis]

As educational theory or practice, the BRT’s blueprint is seriously flawed. But as a strategy to insure corporate control of the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation, it is a clever and plausible plan. During the 1980s, the corporate CEOs of the Business Roundtable believed their dominance of the nation’s institutions were threatened by democratic movements, as did their counterparts in the 1840s and 1890s — two other periods of cultural turmoil and economic dislocation. The response in each of these time periods has been to fashion a strategy to divide and quell those who were promoting cultural diversity and social justice. Education has played a key role in each of these responses. Horace Mann’s concept of public education was of great interest to the elites in the 1840s. Social and economic dislocation, religious revivals, increased immigration, workingmen’s parties, a growing anti-slavery movement (among other challenges to the status quo)

made property owners intensely nervous about what the future generation might think and do. Again, in the 1890s, a persistent economic depression, massive immigration, the end of the “frontier”, the formation of national farmer’s and worker’s organizations (and other sources of turmoil) created a sense of crisis among the new corporate leaders. The captains of industrial America responded in a variety of ways, not the least of which was to see the public school system as a means of Americanizing the new immigrants and creating a more passive and obedient workforce.

Ignited by the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, the modern Civil Rights Movement launched one of the most significant and powerful social movements in American history. During the next twenty years, many groups were inspired to organize and demand that they be part of the decision-making processes in this country. In education, one manifestation of such organizing was the increase in the number of educators promoting student-centered, interdisciplinary, experiential, and multicultural education and an increase in the number of school boards allowing such education into the classroom. These events threatened to challenge a dominant culture and political process that was fundamentally dependent on racism.<sup>2</sup>

The cultural and political challenge to the status quo of the sixties was made more serious by the invasion of Toyota trucks and cars. By the 1970s, Japanese car manufacturers had fundamentally transformed the production process through a method called Total Quality Control or lean production. This allowed them to produce fewer expensive but much more reliable cars than Ford, Chrysler, or General Motors. Corporate-run American responded to the simultaneous cultural, political and economic challenge in many ways. Part of the response included transforming the U.S. corporate structure and assembly line according to the U.S version of Total Quality Control. This involved “downsizing” or reducing the number of mid-level managers and imposing the responsibilities of the laid off supervisors upon the assembly-line workers – a crude interpretation of the Japanese model. Fewer managers meant less money spent on salaries and benefits and more profits. Corporate CEOs also pushed for deregulation, a euphemism that meant that the public interest, as expressed through government regulators from Occupational, Safety, and Health Administration (OSHA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), or the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and especially from the Civil Rights Commission should not interfere with the “cost-saving” changes that were being put into effect.

The search for increased profits also included corporate investment in technology. The major “cost” of production has always been employee wages. As did machines during the industrial era, the new computer technology of the 1980s held out the promise of increased “efficiencies” that could further reduce the number of workers needed for production, thereby ushering in the New Economy. But the profit gained by substituting technology for workers on the factory floor would be offset by the higher salaries of computer programmers and engineers. This could be avoided if the pool of such highly skilled labor could be expanded beyond the numbers actually needed, resulting in lower salaries. Initially, this was achieved by having the U.S. Congress expand the H-1B

visa program that opened the immigration doors to foreign high-tech workers. But a more fundamental solution was needed.

Corporate CEOs turned to educational reform as one of several means to address the economic, political and cultural challenges of the post-Cold War era (the subject of Chapters 2, 3, and 4). They did so because business leaders have always seen the educational system as both a means to “externalize” training costs as well as a means to socialize a citizenry to support the national interest (as defined by business). As the Business Roundtable developed its educational program, both the cultural/political concerns as well as the economic concerns must have been foremost in their minds given the details of the program that they came up with in 1989 and again in 1995. The plans called for a transformation of the educational system that would mirror the corporate structure of the New Economy — i.e., downsize and deregulate. To downsize the school system, systemic reform advocates argued that school boards and district administrators needed to withdraw from their policy and supervisory roles. Supervision was no longer needed because test scores would determine if teachers and principals were developing programs and strategies that would achieve the educational goals now set by the state government. Such a structural change promised to eliminate the influence of those groups that promoted the kinds of changes (e.g., ethnic studies and real problem-setting and solving skills) that empowered students to challenge the status quo during the sixties

Deregulation, as applied to school reform, has come to mean the streamlining of state rules and regulations and is often referred to as school autonomy or site-based decision-making. According to the BRT strategy, state governments would no longer decide which textbook a teacher must use, what bilingual program a district or school should adopt, whether teachers should use direct instruction or project-based learning, how much time to devote to each part of the curricula, or any other such issue. Instead, individual school sites would be responsible for deciding which methods and what resources would achieve the goals set by state content and performance standards. The BRT executives were confident that they could dictate state standards that would produce significant numbers of students who were highly skilled at completing assigned tasks while incurious as to whether such tasks served anyone’s interests other than those of the corporate leadership of the nation.

By transforming the structure of the public school system to mirror the new workplace structure, corporate CEOs expected to foster a seamless transition from school to work as well as increasing the number of “high-skilled” employees. This addressed the economic crisis prompted by Toyota’s challenge. But systemic reform is also known as the New Standards movement, and in the name of “high standards for all” and “equity and excellence,” standards advocates have directly responded to the cultural and political challenges posed by multi-culturalists, environmentalists, feminists, teachers’ unions, civil rights advocates, and all those who question the prevailing unequal distribution of privilege, power, and resources. By seizing the rhetorical high ground — “high standards for every child” — standards advocates have put opponents to high-stakes testing on the

defensive and prevented political alliances between teachers and parents. To oppose “high standards for all” is to appear to be supporting the dual tracking system that was created at the turn of the century (ironically, through the use of standardized tests). Standards advocates argue that subjecting every student to a single standardized test would force every teacher to prepare her students for college, thus eliminating the defacto racist sorting system that public schools have been. That over 85 percent of public school teachers are white, middle-class females and that the vast majority of urban public school students are poor people of color makes it problematic for teachers to oppose a reform initiative that promises to close the “achievement gap” — the persistent difference in test scores between predominantly white, middle-class students and predominantly poor students of color. The rhetoric of systemic reform successfully isolates those teachers who oppose the BRT’s attempts to overhaul the public school system. Teachers who see systemic reform as exacerbating the “achievement gap” and increasing the numbers of dropouts and push-outs are thereby politically isolated from parents whose experiences with the public school system have not been positive.

Like all parents, poor and minority parents have always wanted teachers to be more responsive to the needs and interests of their children. Teachers, however, have generally failed to develop relationships with parents that would lead to an educationally and politically powerful alliance. There are several reasons for this. The manipulation of racist ideology by the media and politicians makes the cultural divide between teachers and urban parents almost impossible to cross. This situation is made worse by the economic and politically vulnerable position of teachers. Teachers are treated like blue-collar workers but aspire to the status of white-collar professionals. In response to their treatment, teachers formed unions in the sixties. But teacher unions, like all other unions before them, have been allowed to exist only if they agree to confine their goals to wages and a narrow definition of working conditions.<sup>3</sup> It is this position that has made teachers susceptible to divide and conquer tactics.

Accepting the terms of their existence, teacher unions are powerless to advocate for specific curriculum and methodology, the very topics that would allow teachers to be more responsive to parental and student concerns. Then when teachers do campaign for better wages and working conditions, editorials and news articles portray the teachers as self-serving. This reinforces parents’ suspicions that teachers are not primarily concerned with the needs and interests of the students, suspicions already fueled by the context of racial and ethnic inequality. With little power and low status, teachers often assert that they are professionals — educational experts who know better than editorialists and parents what is best for students. This strategy to gain greater *status* has only served to undermine the *power* of teachers by further alienating parents.<sup>4</sup> The impulse to claim the status and decision-making authority that lawyers and doctors have only serves to exacerbate the hierarchal relationship that the racial divide maintains. Dialogue, partnership, or alliance building is problematic when the power dynamic is unequal.

The BRT promotes its educational agenda by promising “high standards for all” and “equity and excellence.” These slogans are perfectly calibrated to drive a wedge between teachers and

parents, undermining any real opposition to systemic reform. Part of the success of this divide and conquer tactic relies on maintaining a mutual ignorance by each racial ethnic group of the others. This has been created and maintained in large part by segregated housing, health care, and education. The growth of ethnic studies and desegregated schooling in the sixties began to break down the barriers of prejudice dividing various groups from one another. Tactics, such as the assault on affirmative action, however, have reversed this movement. The BRT's strategies have contributed to this reversal. While "high standards for all" responds to the critique that the public school system does not provide educational opportunity for everyone, "equity and excellence" has been used to justify the resegregation of the nation's school system (the subject of Chapter 5).

By controlling state standards, the BRT has seized the high ground of one of the many battlefields in the nation's "culture wars" — course content. State history standards, for example, emphasize the success of existing U.S. institutions at resolving conflicts and problems in society and point to a future in which all boats will rise with the tide of globalization. Reading standards emphasize the requirement that students accept the literary interpretations of the test makers rather than develop their own critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, by reducing the curriculum to a "test-prep" course of study, students are subjected to superficial coverage of content as they are drilled in reading and math skills. State adopted, commercial curricula such *Open Court* and *Success For All* remove decision-making from teachers, further preventing educators from responding to the needs and interests of the students. In Chapter 8, I argue that the removal of curricula decisions from the district and school site has had the effect of eliminating literature and history of identity courses as well as community participation in providing crucial health and social services to the members of the Mission High school community in San Francisco, California.

In 1989, the Business Roundtable developed a national K–12 educational reform initiative. Since 1989, the BRT has taken the lead in developing consensus among corporate business leaders on a specific educational agenda and fostering a network of government, private, and nonprofit organizations to systematically impose its agenda on the public schools. The success of their efforts makes this the third major, business-led educational reform movement in U.S. history. The purpose of the reform has been to transform the public school system to mirror the structure of the New Economy workplace as well as to contribute to the consolidation of corporate hegemony over American political and cultural life. The BRT educational agenda achieves these goals by eliminating debate over the goals of education through the elimination of community participation in the development of educational policy. This has been achieved by removing educational policy formation from local school boards and putting such decision-making in the hands of the state government. The success of this fundamentally anti-democratic reform strategy has depended upon rhetoric that divides and quells opposition, justifies the resegregation of public schools, and co-opts those who don't know what the real purpose of such reforms are.

The BRT believes that there are nine "essential components" of systemic reform (BRT, 1995). By 2001, they have succeeded in implementing three of them — state content standards,

state-mandated tests, and sanctions/rewards — in over a dozen states (see Appendix I). They are now working on component number four — transforming pre- and in-service teacher training so that teachers are socialized to support the first three components. This is known as “professional development.” Further success, however, depends upon the degree to which they can manage the backlash that has emerged. While the leadership of the two major teacher unions — the American Federation of Labor and the National Education Association — has expressed their full support of systemic reform, the rank and file remain troubled by the disconnect between their own experience of how students learn and the BRT’s educational theory. In addition, many parents, poor and rich alike, have expressed serious doubts about the validity of using one test score to define the educational achievement of their children as well as critique the shallowness of a curriculum that is orientated towards a standardized test. This opposition, for reasons I have explained above, has yet to form a political movement that is capable of countering the powerful lobbying that the nation’s CEOs can bring to bear on state and local political leaders. Until such opposition emerges, the development of school policy will continue to be a fundamentally anti-democratic process and promote anti-democratic goals. It is my hope that this study can provide some perspective that will contribute to the development of effective opposition.

### ***A Note about the Structure of the Argument***

In Chapter 1, I outline a brief history of the role that the economic and political elites of this country have played in the formation of educational policy and how school boards are central to that story. The last section of Chapter 1 describes the shift in educational policy from local school boards to state governments. This created the situation that allowed the national BRT, through its state BRT organizations, to direct the shape of modern educational reform. In Chapter 2, I argue that the BRT’s educational goals are to promote curricula and pedagogy intended to increase the number of high-skilled task completers through the writing of state standards and enforcement of those standards by mandatory state tests. To eliminate any debate over the wisdom of such an agenda, the BRT has created a network of organizations to support its state BRT lobbying efforts. In Chapter 3, I show how this network has successfully co-opted teachers, parents, and educational researchers. Those in these groups have been recruited, through pressure and misinformation, to support and develop the means by which to achieve the BRT’s goals. The effects of the BRT’s network of educational organizations and efforts at co-optation can be seen in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I looked at four cities — Houston, Charlotte-Mecklenberg, Pittsburgh, and Boston — and describe how the state BRT organizations interact with the state government to influence each school district’s policy. In Chapter 5, I revisit these cities and also look at St. Louis to show how systemic reform, by eliminating public debate over educational goals, has allowed for the resegregation of the public schools.

Chapter 1 informs the analysis of the BRT-led reforms as described in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Similarly, Chapters 6 and 7 provide context that makes Chapter 8, the story of Mission High School, more understandable. To explain what the community reformers at Mission High School were up against, I explain the history of contemporary educational reform in the state of California in Chapter 6. This chapter builds upon the information of the previous five chapters. In Chapter 7, I explain how state reform interacted with the city's educational and political history from 1983–2001. The relationship between re-segregation and the BRT agenda not only provides insight into the goals of systemic reform as seen in five major U.S. cities (Chapter 5), but provides a way to understand how the history of desegregation in San Francisco was co-opted by the district's administration as a means by which to undermine the democratic process (Chapters 7 and 8). In Chapter 8, I tell the story of educational reform at Mission High School, San Francisco, from 1985 to 1997. This story is a case study of the failure of democratic reform when community reformers act in isolation without the understanding of the forces ranged against them and without the support of a larger social movement supporting their cause.

### ***A Note on Method***

This project originated out my interest in school reform and democracy. As I began researching the factors allowing for grassroots school change, I came to two conclusions. One is that changes initiated at the school site have been ephemeral. The second conclusion is that if any systemic change were to be made by members of a school's community, it would have to be approved and supported by the local school board. This led me to investigate who or what influences schools board decisions and how. It is from this investigation that my present argument has emerged.

In my research, I have drawn upon the methodology of three disciplines — sociology, history, and philosophy. Looking at organizations as dynamic systems and establishing criteria for “units of observation” is a function of sociological analysis. But such study does not always “supply explanations — only the historical imagination can do that” (Sewell, 1967; p. 217). Historians assume that human behavior is not merely guided by present systems but is causally tied to a historical continuum and dictates that a narrative story be told. Historical methods rely heavily on interpretation and interpolation of data since the written and oral records of the past, even the most immediate past, are always incomplete however abundant they are. The purpose of this research and important features of the criteria used to determine the methodology are largely the result of philosophical inquiry. These dimensions of the research arise out of deeply held and rationally argued beliefs about what the purpose and aims of education should be, as well as how those purposes and aims can and ought to be determined.

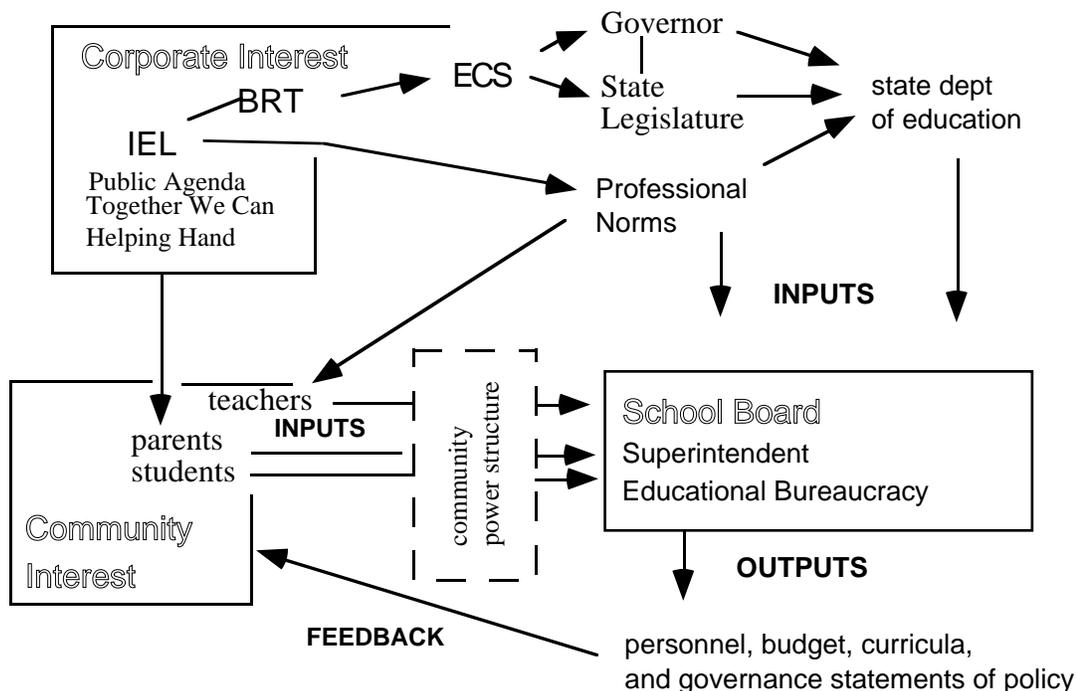
### **Sociology**

I have drawn from both David Easton's (1965) and Frederick Wirt's (1975) models in developing a framework that guided my research and analysis of the role of school boards in the determination of

educational policy. Easton’s framework helped Johnson (1988) argue that the school board is the “focal point of educational governance. As a *conversion system*, [the school board] is the recognized institution through which policy decisions regarding education at the local level are made” (Johnson, 1988; p. 11). The environment (cultural influences, temporal demands/considerations) influences the form and nature of board decisions (outputs). “Stress from the social environment generates inputs of demand and support for the conversion process” (p. 13). Feedback (outputs) are attempts to reduce the stress. “A system that fails to reduce stress will collapse” (p. 14). Wirt’s model (1975) of school politics specifies the environmental influences of Easton’s model (particularly identifying the “community power structure” as a filter for the communication of “core constituency of needs”). Instead of a conversion system, however, Wirt makes the board a “lens focusing the often disparate calls for the redistribution of resources” (p. 202).

**Figure 1 – Influences on School Board Decisions**

IEL = Institute for Educational Leadership  
 ECS = Education Commission of the States



In the model I developed (see Figure 1), I have adopted some of the basic assumptions of both Wirt's and Easton's models. The historical record and the research literature seems to justify placing school boards at the center of conflict between the business-led reforms of statewide testing and traditional community concerns of teachers, parents, and students who oppose an educational policy which seeks to confine K–12 education as a mere “pipeline” for the work force. School boards throughout their history have occupied a position between business and community concerns. During the last twenty years, more specifically, school boards have had to negotiate between the state government demands of “high standards” and community concerns that such demands are being imposed unfairly and are, perhaps, unwarranted.

In defining the relationships among corporations, government (from federal to local), and community-based organizations, I developed the “general notion” (Stinchcombe, 1978; p. 4) that school boards are intersections of conflict between corporate and community interests. In order to identify what those conflicts have been, I read newspaper accounts of school events and controversies in San Francisco from 1980 to 2001 that called for school board action or comment. I used such accounts “as tracer[s]” of community and corporate interests. Sewell (1990; p. 528) uses “well recorded violent events . . . as a kind of tracer for collective action and loyalties in general.” Paige (1975; pp. 86-92) used newspaper accounts of “overt acts” to develop a typology of “events” which, in turn, became his “units of observation” — social movements — to be associated with his “unit of analysis —” the agricultural export sector. Walton and Ragin (1990) used journalistic accounts of austerity protests both as a means of hypothesis generating and as a means of generating criteria that defined the dependent variable of the study. In order to qualify as an event, or variable, I was looking for “overt acts” that were conflicts between groups representing “core constituent interests” (Wirt, 1975; Wirt & Kirst, 1982).

In this paper, I am arguing that there are fundamental conflicts between community and corporate educational goals that often collide at the school board level. I fully define who the corporate elite are and what the corporate educational agenda is in Chapter 2. Defining “community” is not quite as easy or clear. Logan and Molotch (1987) provide a useful way to distinguish between the interests of neighborhood residents and corporate capitalists. In their conceptual framework, Logan and Molotch argue that interests, or “values”, emanate primarily from location that “establishes a special collective interest among individuals” (p. 19). Neighbors share common experiences of public services, natural as well as man-made disasters (e.g., floods as well as placements of toxic dumps). These kinds of experiences, shaped by what happens inside as well as outside a neighborhood, create common experiences out of which shared interests or values arise. While corporate capitalists may own land or businesses in a neighborhood, they don't live there. So, while their material interests may lie with the condition or fate of a neighborhood, their emotional or psychological interests do not.

The material use of a place cannot be separated from psychological use; the daily round that makes physical survival possible takes on emotional meanings through that very capacity to

fulfill life's crucial goals. The material and psychic rewards thus combine to create a feeling of "community". Most of residents' striving as members of community organizations or just as responsible neighbors represents an effort to preserve and enhance their networks of sustenance (p. 20).

Logan and Molotch make such assertions about the nature of residents' attachment to place based on a rich research tradition. They admit, however, that little is known about the corporate culture, "corporation's attachments to place," or how corporate decisions come into conflict with community-based efforts to "preserve and enhance their networks of sustenance." Nonetheless, the authors feel confident enough to make three general observations about how corporate capitalists differ from residents in their relationship or attachment to place.

First . . . the satisfaction that capitalists derive from place is less diffuse. Their paramount interest is the profitability of their operations; concerns with place turn heavily on how well land and buildings serve that overarching goal. Second, capitalists, at least compared to residents, have greater opportunity to move to another place should conditions in one place cease to be appropriate. Free of at least some of the constraints holding residents, such as sentimental ties to family and access to schools and jobs, corporations can exit more easily . . . Finally, capitalists' use of place is less fragile than that of residents. Capital can adapt to changes such as noise, odor, and ethnic succession, whereas the effect of such change on residents is more immediate and more serious (Logan and Molotch, 1987; p. 22).

One tactic by which capitalists are able to determine the "changes" that affect neighborhood's "access to schools" (which includes the nature of what happens in a school) is to pit neighborhoods against each other while claiming that the corporate "overarching goal" represents the "public interest" (a goal never acknowledged as making profit but as "creating jobs"). Neighborhood concerns are belittled and de-legitimized as parochial, narrow, partisan, and self-interested. The degree to which housing patterns are ethnically segregated and the degree to which race and class correlate is the degree to which de-legitimizing tactics are couched in racial terms. This will be explored in Chapters 5, 7 and 8.

Originally, I had wanted to choose conflicts involving the school boards in both San Francisco and Oakland, California. I had intended to use the conflicts as case studies through which insight could be gained as to what factors allowed for or prevented community influence in the formation of educational policy. Using File-maker Pro, I began to create a database of news items of school controversies in Oakland and San Francisco from 1980 to 2000, coded for 32 issues.<sup>5</sup> During the process of recording and coding 740 news items, I was also exploring the organizations linked to the BRT's web page as well as mentioned in the organization's research reports. As I began to realize that the BRT was virtually dictating state educational policy, I came across a momentous school board conflict in San Francisco that seemed to involve "core constituent interests." Because of the wealth of information available regarding this conflict, I dropped my idea of comparative case studies and focused on exploring why the superintendent, supported by a majority of the school board, insisted upon the removal of an extremely popular administration team from Mission High School. This is the subject of Chapter 8.

## History

The questions that have guided my research and analysis have arisen from my reading of the past as much as my reading of current research on educational reform. Furthermore, I believe that the past influences and thus explains the present in the same way that geological formations affect the direction and depths that water flows. So, in chapter 1, I have used secondary historical sources to create a chronological narrative of the development of school boards as educational policy institutions.<sup>6</sup> Throughout American history, economic and political elites have attempted to control the socialization process of future generations through the agency of local school boards. School boards, however, were not always compliant. This suggests one reason why current debate over educational reform includes arguments critical of the practices if not the existence of local school boards. Embedded in the historical narrative is the results of educational research that offers explanations as to why some groups have greater influence over determining the goals of schooling than others. The history and research reveal that the success of systemic educational reform during two transformational periods (the 1840s and 1890s) depended heavily on the resources that business and property elites were able to bring to bear on the political process. Such a perspective allows one to appreciate better why reforms initiated at the school site have rarely become systemic, while top-down, business led reform has achieved fundamental changes in the educational system.

Tyack and Cuban (1967) have observed that educational reforms, in practice, rarely resemble the original plans. They attribute this to a “layering” effect. Reforms are always imposed on an existing system which itself is a layer of past reforms. The past reforms always interact with the new reforms by altering them. I am using the historical narrative in Chapter 1 to argue that if one takes several steps back from this “layering” theory of educational change, one can begin to see fundamental structures within which educational reformers operate that shape and limit the scope of their reforms. That powerful business and property elites are responsible for the creation of such structures is important to understand if reformers ever want to transcend them.

The purpose of providing the historical context of Chapter 1 is to provide support for my argument that current calls for systemic reform emanate from the current economic elites in this country and, if the historical record is a basis for prediction, will succeed in fundamentally altering the structure of public education. The description and analysis of the implementation of the BRT’s national agenda would be less understandable without it being placed in the context of long-term business-led educational reform. Similarly, the description and analysis of how modern systemic reform actually works to eliminate community participation in setting educational goals and programs at the school site (with all of its economic and political effects) would be less understandable and less persuasive if not put in the context of district and state educational history. The story of Mission High School in San Francisco (Chapter 8) is preceded by the history of state educational reform from 1980 to the present (Chapter 6) and how the state’s history interacted with the develop-

ment of San Francisco Unified District educational policy during the same time period (Chapter 7).

## Philosophy

The purpose of this research comes out of my deeply held belief that neither I nor any other person has the right to determine what the educational aims of a school district should be. Instead, I believe that all persons in the district need to have a voice in the determining of such aims. There should be a decision-making process that does not allow the most powerful always to dictate educational aims. This means a process that is not about winning but achieving a decision without the suppressing of alternative views. This means that meeting the “needs of the workplace” and developing “democratic dispositions” need not be mutually exclusive educational goals. Nor does the view adopted here support the liberal, elitist argument that certain groups like segregationists, creationists, or fundamentalist Christians should never be allowed at the decision-making table. Such arguments for exclusion are ironic. Elitism creates reaction to it. Often that reaction is allowed no other outlet than movements such as creationism or segregation. Elitists then hold up these groups as “bogeymen” to prevent a movement towards a decision-making process in which elites (liberal or otherwise) no longer can control the agenda or frame the debate. This is a mechanism very similar to although more subtle than conservatives’ use of redbaiting to stifle debates over economic justice.

John Dewey (1944) presented a vision of what a truly participatory democratic decision-making process would look like and its probable effects. Dewey argued that if there existed a “free play back and forth among the members of the social group” which included “an equable (sic) opportunity to receive and to take from others” then there would be a “diversity of stimulation.”

Diversity of stimulation means novelty, and novelty means challenge to thought. The more activity is restricted to a few definite lines – as it is when there are rigid class lines preventing adequate interplay of experiences – the more action tends to become routine on the part of the class at a disadvantage, and capricious, aimless, and explosive on the part of the class having the materially fortunate position. Plato defined a slave as one who accepts from another the purposes which control his conduct. This condition obtains even where there is no slavery in the legal sense. (p. 85)

Without an “equable” give and take within and between groups in a society, there can only be a narrow range of interests that are shared among all the members of that society. For Dewey, the harm would be the same as that wrecked upon society by warlords and “criminal bands.” In a criminal band . . . the ties which consciously hold the members together are few in number, reducible almost to a common interest in plunder; and they are of such a nature as to isolate the group from other groups with respect to give and take of the values of life . . . [O]n the other hand, [in] the kind of family life which illustrates the standard, we find that *there are material, intellectual, aesthetic interests in which all participate and that the progress of one member has worth for the experience of other members* [my emphasis] . . . [T]he family is not an isolated whole, but enters intimately into relationships with . . . other modes of association. (p. 83)

The less equable the give and take is, the fewer interests are shared between governed and

governors. The fewer shared interests a society has, the more rulers rely on the appeal to fear as a motivator. Dewey believed that despotically governed states well illustrated one end of this continuum in that they completely isolate the “capacity for fear”.

In evoking dread and hope of specific tangible reward – say comfort and ease – *many other capacities are left untouched* [my emphasis]. Or rather, they are affected, but in such a way as to pervert them. Instead of operating on their own account they are reduced to mere servants of attaining pleasure and avoiding pain. (p. 84)

Many groups in our society are shut out of the decision-making process. Their voices are not represented on the op-ed pages of newspapers, their concerns and stories are misrepresented on the evening news, and their vote is not cast since no candidate represents them. It is not surprising that those whose needs and fears are publicly ridiculed turn to increasingly “extreme” forms of self-expression or engage in activities and groups whose leaders, for their own personal gain, can easily manipulate followers whose “capacities” have been “left untouched.” On the other hand, if we did have a political and educational system that truly allowed for “free play back and forth” of ideas, then it seems more than likely that the social interests of individuals would have a better chance of prevailing over antisocial motivations than they do at present. This study is an attempt to demonstrate how corporate business successfully bars other groups from the decision-making process. It arises from my belief that the aims or purposes of a society (and the institutions which socialize its members towards those aims) should be derived from a “free play back and forth among members of the social group” so that no one group tyrannizes, exploits, or impoverishes another.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I for the name of each state’s business coalition responsible for pursuing the BRT agenda, the date of its founding, and the report of its progress to the BRT as of 1999.

<sup>2</sup> I would think that anyone who reads Edmund Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom*, D. Massey’s and N. Denton’s *American Apartheid* or Glenn Loury’s *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* would have a difficult time arguing with either John Ogbu (poor African Americans “are at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy, the ones held out as examples to other minorities of what will happen if they don’t shape up” (1995; p. 284)) or Anthony Walton (“even as whites, Hispanics, and Asians come together in the new American melting pot, blacks, as the saying goes, remain the pot” (Harpers, August, 2002; p. 69)). Recent history is replete with examples of race used as a divide and conquer tool. Two more generally well known: George H. W. Bush used “Willie Horton” to defeat Michael Dukakis and Jesse Helms used a pair of white hands to defeat Harvey Gant. I will argue in this study that the rhetoric of the Business Roundtable’s education reform program is consistent with these examples.

<sup>3</sup> This can be readily seen by comparing the history of the Knights of Labor and the International Workers of the World with that of the American Federation of Labor. For those who wish to explore this issue in depth, I recommend starting with Philip Foner’s seven volume *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York, International Publishers, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> The distinction between status and power is important in understanding why the BRT has been so successful in creating a network of organizations supporting its agenda. It is precisely because most people cannot distinguish power from status that they are easily co-opted – accepting privilege and foregoing real power.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B for a copy of one record from the database.

<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 1, I relied heavily on Joel Spring’s 1986 history, *The American School: 1642–1985*, since this book is an impressive and comprehensive historiography of educational history. I recommend this book as a starting point for those interested in becoming more familiar with the history of American public education.