

# Chapter 1

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## Introduction

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's proudest achievement of the past 20 years is not the city's impressive new skyline or its strong, growing economy. Its proudest achievement is its fully integrated school system . . . [that] has blossomed into one of the nation's finest, recognized through the United States for quality, innovation, and, most of all, for overcoming the most difficult challenge American public education has ever faced.

—1984 editorial in the *Charlotte Observer* entitled “You Were Wrong, Mr. President,” commenting on President Reagan’s claim during a visit to Charlotte that busing was a failed social experiment.<sup>1</sup>

I believe public school desegregation was the single most important step we’ve taken in this century to help our children. Almost immediately after we integrated our schools, the Southern economy took off like a wildfire in the wind. I believe integration made the difference. Integration—and the diversity it began to nourish—became a source of economic, cultural and community strength.

—2000 statement by Hugh L. McColl Jr., CEO and chairman of the Charlotte-based Bank of America, the country’s largest consumer bank.<sup>2</sup>

It seemed a telling moment in Charlotte history, and in many ways it was. There was President Reagan on a 1984 campaign stop denouncing busing because “it takes innocent children out of the neighborhood school and makes them pawns in a social experiment that nobody wants. And we’ve found that it failed.”<sup>3</sup> But whatever reaction the president may have expected to this comment about busing, the white, otherwise cheering and

enthusiastic Charlotte audience responded with a silence that was “uncomfortable, embarrassed, almost stony.”<sup>4</sup> What more dramatic indication than this silence among Reagan partisans in Charlotte that its residents, like observers nationwide, saw its busing plan as a success and something special, worthy of great civic pride?

However, almost twenty years later, the *Observer's* rebuke of the president—excerpted in the chapter's first epigraph—commands as much attention as the crowd's silence because even a cursory familiarity with Charlotte indicates how things have changed in the subsequent eighteen years. To be sure, the city's skyline has become more impressive, featuring the tallest building between Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, the headquarters of Bank of America, the country's largest consumer bank. Several other corporate towers have also been added, including one that houses the headquarters of Wachovia, the country's fifth largest bank.<sup>5</sup> As the presence of these two banking powerhouses suggests, the local economy has continued to boom, with Charlotte becoming the country's second largest banking center, trailing only New York.

Accompanying this economic growth has been Charlotte's expanding reputation as a quintessentially prosperous and congenial Sunbelt city, a reputation exemplified by the U.S. Conference of Mayors naming Charlotte as the nation's “most livable” city of its size in 1995.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Charlotte is typically viewed as a good place for blacks, was named in 1998 by *Essence* magazine as the best city for African Americans, and ranks very high on many similar lists.<sup>7</sup>

Yet time has been much less kind to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools (CMS), especially the system's efforts to pursue desegregation. Within a year or two of Reagan's Charlotte visit, CMS began witnessing an increase in resegregation that would continue through the turn of the century. Moreover, CMS' desegregation policies became increasingly enmeshed in political and legal controversy. By the start of the twenty-first century, the same federal judiciary whose decisions had given rise to Charlotte's vaunted busing plan was now issuing rulings prohibiting CMS from pursuing the desegregation policies that a majority of school board members favored.

The contrasting trends between Charlotte's skyline and the racial balance of its schools—the first climbing upward since Reagan's campaign stop, the second dropping downward—might initially seem to belie any claim, such as that of Bank of America's CEO Hugh McColl in the second epigraph, linking economic growth to school desegregation. That claim, however, does have considerable merit, and one of this book's main goals is to specify the links between desegregation and economic growth, emphasizing that they involved the cold realities of urban politics at least as much as the warm glow of racial diversity. Those linkages can be summarized in a series of observations laced much too fully with the irony of history: school desegregation was the prod-

uct of a long struggle initiated and waged primarily by African Americans seeking their just share of the American Dream. Yet given CMS' increasing resegregation, the most lasting consequence of this struggle is not a desegregated public school system. Rather, a much more lasting consequence of school desegregation was its crucial contributions to Charlotte's development and economic boom whose many benefits black Charlotteans are still a long way from fully sharing. Moreover, the economic development facilitated by Charlotte's school desegregation accomplishments made it increasingly difficult to sustain them. Similarly, the increase in civic capacity—a term from regime theory, a perspective frequently used to study urban politics—that resulted from school desegregation did more to help Charlotte grow than to help Charlotte's school system deal with the consequences of this development. While civic capacity flowed easily *from* education to development, the difficulty in transferring it *to* education was so great that it can be likened to getting water to flow uphill. That task is not impossible, but it requires the political equivalent of a pump, in this case the kind of broad political mobilization that has largely been absent in Charlotte since the civil rights era.

The history provoking these observations is a complicated one, but its main characteristics can be summarized here: CMS gave rise to the 1971 *Swann* decision in which a unanimous Supreme Court affirmed the 1969 decision of a federal judge in Charlotte allowing busing for desegregation. Generally considered a turning point in desegregation history, the Supreme Court's decision in *Swann* quickly led to the desegregation of numerous school districts throughout the South. However, it took almost three years for CMS to adopt its busing plan. Although the perseverance and courage of black Charlotteans was the *sine qua non* of the plan's adoption, Charlotte's business elite also played an important role. While the business elite generally sat on the sidelines prior to the decision by the Supreme Court, its ruling made clear to the business elite that the best and perhaps only way to end the crisis rocking public education in Charlotte was for CMS to adopt a busing plan. Leading corporate executives thus threw their considerable weight behind, among other things, the election of school board candidates who would implement busing. Business elite support for busing was intimately related to a broader political alliance between it and many key black political leaders. During much of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, this alliance played a pivotal and frequently decisive role in local politics, helping secure the election of pro-growth mayors and the passage of the bond referenda necessary to build the roads and other infrastructure necessary to sustain economic development.

Adopted in the mid-1970s, Charlotte's busing plan continued until the early 1990s, with its heyday coming during the 1977–1986 administration of Superintendent Jay Robinson. During these years, CMS maintained very high levels of racial balance, received widespread national praise, and also

claimed substantial progress in improving black academic achievement and reducing racial disparities on standardized tests. In retrospect, those claims were exaggerated, but the available evidence, though frustratingly fragmentary, continues to suggest that CMS did a relatively better job of educating black students during the heyday of the busing plan than it would do as the school district began resegregating. These accomplishments notwithstanding, many racial disparities continued during the Robinson administration. Black students were bused much more than white students. Moreover, while busing may have allowed CMS to achieve high levels of racial balance between schools, within them there was considerable racially correlated tracking, with blacks being heavily concentrated in the lower tracks. Moreover, some schools had considerably more resources than others, with the political clout of a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) heavily influencing its school's ability to get resources.

From an educational perspective, school desegregation may not have fulfilled its many promises, but politically and economically it was a huge success. Within Charlotte, it laid a basis for black-white cooperation that, among other things, helped achieve district elections on the city council and the passage of bonds for the airport expansion without which Charlotte could not have grown the way it has. On a national level, the busing plan fueled Charlotte's reputation as a city characterized by racial harmony and progressive race relations. In the intense competition for mobile capital, Charlotte benefited greatly from its image as "The City That Made It Work" rather than being just another city that, like Atlanta, was too busy to hate.

However, even as the busing plan flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, the seeds of its demise were sprouting. Although they milked Charlotte's reputation as "The City That Made It Work" for all it was worth, many business leaders pursued development policies that drastically undermined CMS' ability to pursue desegregation. Despite the national praise lavished upon the busing plan, local funding for public education was worse than that in comparable places. CMS' decisions about the locations of new schools also undermined its ability to pursue desegregation on a racially equitable basis. Although CMS' black enrollment was growing more rapidly than white enrollment, almost all new schools were built in predominantly white neighborhoods.

Moreover, the very growth facilitated by the busing plan helped undermine it. Moving to Charlotte as a result of its growth were people from all over the United States who had not lived through the desegregation battles that preceded the adoption of the busing plan and thus lacked the attachment to it that many more-established Charlotteans had. Also, many of these transplants were accustomed to suburban, predominantly white school districts and thus had especially little use for busing. Whereas in the early 1970s

proponents of desegregation were the political wheels squeaking most loudly, by the late 1980s, the most noise was coming from opponents of busing and critics of CMS. It was this clamor that now attracted the business elite's ample supply of political grease, with leading corporate executives, among many other things, lending their considerable political support to candidates who would seek alternatives to mandatory busing.

That alternative was adopted in 1992, the first year of the administration of CMS Superintendent John Murphy. The new pupil assignment plan was a magnet plan that tried to have the cake and eat it too: to maintain desegregation but placate those, especially whites, opposed to mandatory busing. The plan also sought to hitch CMS' wagon to the rising star of school choice and help increase public confidence in CMS. As important as the change in desegregation strategies was the adoption of a sweeping program of school reform including a new curriculum and standards, a numbers-driven accountability system for measuring progress in achieving specified educational outcomes, financial bonuses for personnel and schools that achieved their goals, tougher discipline standards, and site-based management. The program thus embodied much of the early 1990s conventional wisdom about the way to improve public education. Consequently, in the early 1990s, CMS attracted the same kind of national publicity for school reform that it had for desegregation a decade earlier.

Despite lavish praise in prestigious national forums, CMS' reform program faced growing problems at home. Some arose from the superintendent's abrasive management style, flirtations with other jobs, and frequent demands for pay hikes, but others were rooted in the program itself. The increased resegregation and the disparities between magnet and non-magnet schools alienated many white liberals and African Americans, thus eroding the black community's historically high support for school bonds. Moreover, the reform program was unable to overcome the many centrifugal tendencies in local politics stemming from Charlotte's growth and the increased influence of conservative Republicans in local affairs. All these political difficulties came to a head in 1995 when CMS suffered the first defeat of a major bond referendum in a generation. Moreover, school board elections resulted in a board with whose chair Superintendent Murphy had an especially strained relationship, and he resigned the day before the newly elected board took office.

Although it was not apparent at the time of Murphy's resignation, it subsequently became clear—from both the much-publicized results of North Carolina's accountability program and scholarly analysis of additional data—that the much-touted reform program could claim very little progress in boosting outcomes. Moreover, on some key measures, CMS' progress lagged that of comparable places, even though the latter lacked a high-profile reform program.

Further compounding the unfortunate history of the reform program was how the magnet plan brought about the litigation that forced CMS to abandon its pursuit of racial desegregation. Although the plan had been developed to placate largely white opposition to mandatory busing, the use of racial guidelines in magnet school admissions triggered a lawsuit from a white family. That lawsuit led to the reopening of the entire *Swann* case and a 1999 trial in which the key question was, Had CMS done enough to desegregate public education in Charlotte to be released from the court supervision required by the original litigation? In contrast to many school districts all too eager to claim that they have done all they can to achieve desegregation and should thus be released from court supervision, CMS maintained it could still do more and was thus not yet ready to be released from judicial oversight. However, after a trial lasting more than two months, a federal district court judge, who had been active in anti-busing movements while a private citizen thirty years earlier, issued a sweeping order requiring CMS to abandon its pursuit of desegregation. That ruling precipitated more than two years of turmoil and uncertainty. Legally, CMS sought to reverse the district court's order by appealing to higher courts. While initially successful, CMS ultimately failed to reverse the most important part of the district court's decision. During the two and one-half years that the case worked its way through the appeals process, CMS struggled to develop a new pupil assignment plan. Although a majority of the school board sought to preserve CMS' long-standing commitment to desegregation, it faced intense pressure from, among others, the business elite and school superintendent to minimize, if not abandon, desegregation in exchange for programs that provided extra and compensatory resources to schools with large numbers of children of color, especially those from low-income families.

Eventually the board adopted a race-neutral choice assignment plan that gave priority to students choosing to attend a school near their home. The plan went into effect in the 2002–03 school year, with the result that the previous twenty-year drift towards resegregation accelerated markedly. At this point, June 2003, it is much too early to ascertain the extent or effectiveness of the additional resources that CMS hopes to provide the increased number of schools with high concentrations of low-income children of color, but one would be extremely hard pressed to argue that CMS is the school desegregation showcase it once was.

Subsequent chapters will elaborate upon this brief summary. But for now it is worth noting that any one of the main characteristics in Charlotte history—CMS' desegregation accomplishments, a high-profile school reform program, the area's prosperity, the reported congenial atmosphere for African Americans, and a school board with a stated commitment to educational equity—would make the city and its school system an interesting place to

study. Taken together, these characteristics make Charlotte an especially intriguing case study because in toto they seem to create the potential for addressing two of the most pressing items on the country's domestic policy agenda: improving educational opportunities for African American students and alleviating the black/white disparities that constitute so prominent an aspect of the political, economic, and social landscape of the nation's cities.<sup>8</sup> Before beginning to address these issues, it is necessary, however, to explicate regime theory, the perspective that I will use to discuss and analyze the relationships among education policy, desegregation, politics, and development in Charlotte. My aim is similar to that which guides much scholarship of social and political phenomena: to use a theory, in this case, regime theory, to better understand the Charlotte experience, as well as to use this empirical material to develop and critique the theory itself.

## URBAN REGIME THEORY

Probably the most influential theoretical approach to urban politics at the start of the twenty-first century, regime theory receives its most important exposition and application in the work of Clarence Stone whom one book reviewer has called "the most influential urban politics scholar of this generation."<sup>9</sup> Stone's oeuvre is noteworthy because the careful empirical work in his seminal study of Atlanta is informed by a theoretical synthesis that brings together elements of earlier theories about power and urban politics that were often viewed as incompatible.<sup>10</sup> Equally important for this book's concerns, Stone has spearheaded efforts to apply regime theory to urban education through the multi-city, multi-investigator National Science Foundation-funded Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, the largest effort ever by U.S. political scientists to apply the insights gained from the study of urban politics to urban education. For these reasons, I draw heavily on Stone's formulation of regime theory in this book.

This formulation, on my reading, has four defining characteristics: the social production model of power, an emphasis on the political advantages that stem from control of investment capital, attention to the operation and maintenance of political coalitions, and the recognition that governance is not an issue-by-issue process.

The first of these characteristics arises from regime theory's most basic concern: to understand how the different resources that various local actors (business leaders, educators, community organizations, and so forth) bring to the task of governance can be organized to create an enduring set of arrangements (a regime) whose operation will facilitate local goals. Governance, from regime theory's viewpoint, is problematic because society—especially, perhaps,

U.S. urban society—is characterized by a loose, incohesive network of institutions in which there is “no overarching command structure or a unifying system of thought.”<sup>11</sup> This lack of cohesion has several sources. The most fundamental is the defining characteristic of capitalist parliamentary democracies: a division of labor between state and market in which there is private control of business enterprise but (in principle, at least) more public control, largely through elections, of governmental institutions. Other sources include federalism—which disperses power among the national, state, and local levels—and the weakness of other political institutions such as parties. In such a fragmented world, “the issue is how to bring about enough cooperation among disparate community elements to get things done.”<sup>12</sup>

That perspective leads to the first defining characteristic of regime theory, what Stone calls the “social production model of power.” From this perspective, the key aspect of urban political power is not how it is used by one actor to control another but how it is produced to accomplish goals. Stone does not deny the existence of what he calls “the social control model of power” (*power over*), but he argues that the social production model (*power to*) is more useful for understanding urban politics in much the same way that, say, the wave conception of light is much more useful for understanding certain physical phenomena than the particle conception.<sup>13</sup> Since the study of power has long occupied philosophers, political scientists, and sociologists, it would not be surprising for the social production model of power, as Stone enunciates it, to have antecedents, and indeed it does, most notably in the work of Talcott Parsons. Arguably the United States’ most influential sociologist in the 1950s and 1960s, Parsons also emphasized what he called the differences between positive-sum and zero-sum conceptions of power, with the former involving “the capacity to mobilize the resources of the society for the attainment of goals for which a general ‘public’ commitment has been made.” In contrast, according to Parsons, the zero-sum conception of power viewed it as being exercised by one group in society to further its own interests at the expense of another.<sup>14</sup>

Parsons elaborated these two conceptions of power in a critique of C. Wright Mills, another prominent sociologist of the 1950s, whose work, according to Parsons, exemplified the zero-sum conception of power.<sup>15</sup> Paralleling the differences in the two men’s conceptions of power were broader sociological and political differences that largely defined the poles of social science discourse in the 1950s. With its emphasis on the positive-sum conception of power, Parsons’s sociology paid relatively little attention to the conflictual and exploitative aspects of U.S. society and thus provided considerable ideological justification for the prevailing social order. Mills, however, was one of the academy’s most trenchant critics of U.S. society, with his work calling repeated attention to the many disparities in wealth, power, and privi-



lege that existed in the country. In that respect, Mills's work is generally viewed as representative of stratification or elite theory, a body of scholarship which, noting the large stratification in income, wealth, prestige, and education, argued that those (i.e., elites) who possessed such resources dominated both local and national politics.

Although Stone's conception of power resembles Parsons's, the importance he attaches to the stratification of resources is much more reminiscent of Mills.<sup>16</sup> Of particular importance to Stone are disparities in investment capital, the access to which, in his view, plays a unique role in local politics. However, for Stone, the key point is not that access to investment capital allows corporate executives to dominate politics by winning all political battles. Rather, he follows Charles Lindblom in emphasizing the "privileged position of business."<sup>17</sup> While that term may conjure up images of luxurious country clubs, it has much more to do with the operation of a political system, such as the United States, that is embedded in a capitalist economic system. In such cases, business control of investment capital distinguishes it from all other political actors and participants because the resources engendered by such control make corporate participation the sine qua non of effective, especially activist, governance. Little of an activist agenda can be accomplished without the business elite's cooperation because even though it "has no power of command over the community at large and can be defeated on any given issue, it is nevertheless too valuable an ally—especially for those who are oriented to change and accomplishment—to be left out of the picture."<sup>18</sup> That is why, despite recurrent outbreaks of anti-business sentiment in the politics of Atlanta, the city that Stone has studied the most closely, "the striking feature of the Atlanta experience is the inclination of those in positions of community responsibility to pull back from conflict with the business elite and seek accommodation."<sup>19</sup>

Regime theory's recognition of "the enormous political importance of privately controlled investment"<sup>20</sup> in facilitating governance is its second defining characteristic. However, despite considerable emphasis on how control of investment capital affects local politics, regime theory is sharply critical of the economic determinism characteristic of some variants of both Marxist and rational choice approaches to urban politics. Such approaches largely deny the ability of urban political leaders to improve significantly the situation of low-income residents because the generic political advantages of investment capital are typically magnified in the local context by the structure of U.S. federalism that requires local governments to compete with each other for mobile wealth, especially investment capital. The need to pursue policies—often labeled developmental ones—that will attract such wealth makes it extremely difficult, so the argument goes, for localities to adopt policies that serve economically disadvantaged groups and classes at the expense of their more

affluent counterparts.<sup>21</sup> The latter policies (typically called redistributive ones) are viewed as impeding a locality's ability to attract mobile capital by sucking up resources that could otherwise be used to attract investment.

In contrast to such theoretical claims, regime theory asserts that the consequences of developmental policies and redistributive policies are not written in stone but are affected by the characteristics of a locality's regime. "Politics matters" is a rallying cry of regime theorists who deny that the policies that localities should and do pursue are overwhelmingly determined by the structure of the U.S. federalist system and/or the logic of capitalist accumulation. Rather, urban political outcomes, are, according to regime theory, very much affected by politics, in particular the characteristics and operation of coalitions and understandings, both formal and informal.

The attention that regime theory pays to the formation, operation, and maintenance of coalitions is its third defining characteristic. This concern with coalitions suggests important similarities between it and the classical urban pluralism, exemplified by Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?*, which developed in large part as a critique of stratification theory for neglecting the process by which political bargains were struck, coalitions assembled, and decisions made. That similarity notwithstanding, regime theory's first two defining characteristics—the social production model of power and the importance of private investment—distinguish it sharply from classical urban pluralism.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, regime theory differs from classical urban pluralism in yet another way. Pluralism, according to Stone, erroneously assumes that political preferences are developed independently of the likelihood of their being realized and, consequently, that governance is an issue-by-issue process. Rather, Stone argues, preferences "evolve through experience and therefore are informed by available opportunities."<sup>23</sup> These opportunities are, in turn, shaped by the prevailing pattern of political coalitions and understandings. There are several reasons such coalitions and understandings frequently embrace a range of issues:

Once formed, a relationship of cooperation becomes something of value to be protected by all of the participants. Furthermore, because a governing coalition produces benefits it can share or withhold, being part of an established coalition confers preemptive advantages . . . Hence, there is an additional reason to preserve rather than casually discard coalition membership. . . .

[T]he unequal distribution of economic, organizational, and cultural resources has a substantial bearing on the character of actual governing coalitions, working against the kind of fluid coalition and power dispersion predicted by pluralist theory.<sup>24</sup>

The recognition that governance is not an issue-by-issue process, the fourth defining characteristic of regime theory, has important ramifications. Because governance is not an issue-by-issue process, it is possible to characterize governance arrangements—i.e., the regime—which typify a locality. One set of characterizations involves the main players in the regime. In Atlanta, for example, Stone's work calls attention to the leading role played by the coalition between the city's business elite and leaders of the African American community. Another set of characterizations involves the issues and goals around which a governing coalition is organized. Stone distinguishes among several different kinds of issues, the most relevant here being the difference between regimes whose goal is development and those whose goal is the expansion of opportunity for low-income urban residents.<sup>25</sup>

By its very nature, economic development is in the interests of a wide range of businesses (such as utilities, the daily paper, and developers) that stand to profit from this growth. Because these actors who play such a large role in local politics stand to profit from economic development, it can proceed largely by coordinating the activities and interests of institutional elites, often through the use of selective material incentives. In addition, economic development issues impose "no motivational demands on the mass public and are advanced easiest when the public is passive." For this reason, "development activities are often insulated from popular control."<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to development regimes, those devoted to the expansion of opportunity for low-income citizens are organized around a very different set of issues, for example, "enriched education and job training, improved transportation access, and enlarged opportunities for business and home ownership."<sup>27</sup> Just as the issues are different, so too are the political arrangements, with those characterizing lower-class opportunity expansion regimes being much more demanding than those characterizing development regimes. While both development and opportunity expansion require coordination among institutional elites, in the latter case such coordination cannot be achieved on a strictly voluntary basis but requires regulation and coercion.<sup>28</sup> Such regulation and coercion are "most sustainable when backed by a popular constituency."<sup>29</sup> In addition to providing the political clout necessary to sustain the regulation and coercion of institutional elites, mass mobilization is also necessary to ensure the effective functioning of the educational, health, housing, and employment programs designed to serve the poor. But such mobilization is not easily effected; lower-class constituencies lack the resources of their middle-class counterparts, and the long history of many programs that failed to meet the needs of the urban poor has contributed to cynicism and withdrawal.<sup>30</sup>

As this summary of regime theory suggests, its normative concerns were initially much more implicit than explicit, with much of its early attention,

exemplified by Stone's work on Atlanta, focused on land use issues, often considered the very stuff of urban politics. The explicit focus of this work was empirical; few regime theorists were motivated by a desire to help local authorities devise more effective coalitions to develop downtown. If anything, they sought to understand why challenges to development were so often stymied or diverted. However, drawing on the understanding developed from this study of land use issues, Stone has sought to develop regime theory's insights through the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project to the more explicitly normative concern of improving urban education. A discussion of the concept of civic capacity indicates how regime theory can be applied to education policy.

### CIVIC CAPACITY AND URBAN EDUCATION

Civic capacity "refers to the mobilization of varied stakeholders in support of a communitywide cause" and involves two elements.<sup>31</sup> The first is involvement: the greater the participation of key stakeholders, the greater the civic capacity. The second is an understanding that an issue is a community problem requiring a collective response, what Stone calls "social-purpose politics."<sup>32</sup> While actors may continue to differ on some points, "ideally they are able to come together in a coalition with a shared responsibility to act on their common concern. Civic capacity, then, is presumed to be manifest in cross-sector mobilization (a coalition that encompasses multiple categories of actors) around a community issue."<sup>33</sup> That mobilization is necessary to "establish a new set of political arrangements commensurate with the policy being advocated."<sup>34</sup> These new arrangements largely come about "not by coalition *pressure* on the school system, but by coalition contributions to critical policy tasks."<sup>35</sup> In the area of education, such arrangements, Stone emphasizes, must include educators. He draws on a 1989 RAND study's analogy with the DNA double helix to emphasize that a school reform strategy must have two complementary strands: the outside one involving support by noneducators and an inside one of educators oriented toward academic performance. Leadership plays a key role in connecting the two strands; without such connection, civic capacity is minimal.<sup>36</sup> In general, the focus of these arrangements would be furthering "the goal of academic achievement for all students."<sup>37</sup> In toto these arrangements would constitute what Stone calls a performance regime, which would be organized around improving education just as a development regime is organized around improving land use values.

The merits of thinking about urban issues in terms of civic capacity become apparent by contrasting it with what is usually called social capital, a trendy staple of discussions of cures for whatever ails urban education, cities,

indeed, the entire country.<sup>38</sup> Although there is considerable debate over the full and precise meaning of social capital, its gist is generally viewed as involving “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”<sup>39</sup> Stone notes that “civic capacity can be thought of as a category of social capital,”<sup>40</sup> but he emphasizes the difference between the two concepts. Social capital calls attention to the manner in which small-scale instances of cooperation can foster reciprocity and trust, but these kinds of *interpersonal* habits do not necessarily translate into the kind of *intergroup* cooperation that is the essence of civic capacity. One consequence of the slippage between interpersonal trust and intergroup cooperation is that small-scale collaborative successes in, say, developing effective programs at several schools can rarely be reproduced throughout a city. Another consequence is that civic capacity in one area (e.g., downtown development) need not necessarily carry over into another (e.g., education).<sup>41</sup> In other words, even if bygone years witnessed much greater participation in activities such as the bowling leagues to which Robert Putnam has so famously called attention,<sup>42</sup> there was not a concomitant community ability to address social and political problems. As Stone tellingly points out, “No matter how rich our associational life was in the past, it never yielded much in the way of a community-wide capacity for problem-solving. The American city has always been ‘the private city’ in which little energy has been directed into serving the whole community and responding to its problems.”<sup>43</sup> As what Stone calls an “intergroup form of social capital,”<sup>44</sup> civic capacity thus calls attention to the importance of developing and sustaining local political arrangements that are commensurate with the changes in education policy that are being advocated.

In calling attention to the creation and sustenance of these political arrangements, Stone’s view can be distinguished from two other perspectives on the politics of education. The first is that school reform has an inevitable political aspect, and that even the most carefully researched and best financed reform initiatives will likely falter unless proponents consider certain political issues, e.g., who benefits from the status quo. Underlying this first perspective is a view of politics as an activity that is necessary but not especially lofty, as something that helps clear the underbrush so that the more worthy work of paving the school reform highway with the most educationally sound approaches can proceed. The second perspective accords a much more positive role to politics. It sees politics not just as necessary for removing obstacles but as playing a crucial role in securing the community involvement without which, a voluminous body of literature now recognizes, meaningful change in education policy and practice cannot take place. According to this second perspective, the ability, say, of a superintendent to negotiate with key players is as important as an understanding of curriculum issues. The concept of civic

capacity, as Stone explicates it, draws on the second approach but goes considerably farther by emphasizing that community involvement must be institutionalized for major changes in policy and practice to be effected and sustained. From the perspective of this third approach, it is not just that politics matters and its exercise is a lofty calling, but that its goal should be the development of pervasive and durable political arrangements, both formal and informal, conducive to education goals. Given the monotony with which commentators on the contemporary United States cite the proverb that it takes an entire village to raise a child, it is worth noting that many African villages were characterized by institutionalized and durable political arrangements. It is to the role of such arrangements in facilitating academic performance that the notion of civic capacity directs attention.<sup>45</sup> In so doing, civic capacity renders important service in efforts to change urban education. Although very useful in this regard, both the term itself and regime theory in general entail certain difficulties that must be discussed before attempting to apply regime theory to the Charlotte experience.

### CRITICISMS OF REGIME THEORY

Many of the difficulties with regime theory and the concept of civic capacity are suggested by the unreflective acceptance of the social capital problematic that is indicated by Stone's comment that civic capacity can be thought of as a category of social capital. In asserting that linkage, Stone opens up the concept of civic capacity to the many criticisms that have been leveled at the theoretical clarity, empirical relevance, and ideological implications of the concept of social capital.<sup>46</sup> Especially pertinent here are the problems exemplified by the question, Can social capital mend what financial capital has torn? The question is especially relevant to the older cities and close-in suburbs of the North and Midwest that have been severely affected by profit-driven deindustrialization, capital flight, gentrification, and construction projects that ignore the needs of the urban poor. Given the political and economic difficulty of addressing the causes of such adverse developments, it is much easier to think and talk about dealing with their effects by, say, boosting the stock of social capital in urban areas. However, to focus on social capital is to be fog many key issues:

It is surely one of the great ironies of contemporary social thought that at the very time when the inequities of income and wealth of actually existing global capitalism are skyrocketing, there has been an explosion of both professional and lay literature that views a broad spectrum of social problems in terms of social capital. Such a view

suggests that all parties can gain access to capital, just different forms, and that appropriate “investments” in social capital will compensate for gross inequities in financial capital. But whatever social capital might be embodied in a plethora of bowling leagues, PTAs, church groups, and other neighborhood organizations is rarely sufficient to oppose successfully the sway of financial capital or even approximate the social capital (e.g., institutional affiliations and networks of powerful people) enjoyed by those with access to the most financial capital. Moreover, as the erosion of ghetto neighborhood organizations and networks by the loss of jobs indicates, the operation of financial capital constitutes the neighborhood and community organizations to which discussions of social capital typically refer much more than the operation of these organizations constitutes financial capital.<sup>47</sup>

Given the many problems with the literature on social capital as well as with the term itself, little is gained by viewing civic capacity as a category of social capital. Rather, civic capacity is sturdy enough to stand on its own two feet, especially because with its attention to intergroup cooperation, governmental actors, and the development of durable political arrangements, it (civic capacity) avoids many of the criticisms leveled at the theoretical clarity and empirical relevance of the concept of social capital.<sup>48</sup>

However, even if civic capacity is not viewed as a category of social capital, problems with it remain. One of the most important problems indicates a fundamental difficulty with regime theory and can also be illustrated by a question, Civic capacity for whose benefit? That question gets to a difficulty at the core of regime theory, the social production model of power from which the notion of civic capacity is derived. As noted earlier, the social production model views power in terms of *power to* not *power over*. In making that distinction, Stone recognizes that there is a point “at which the two kinds of power merge,”<sup>49</sup> but he minimizes the importance of such convergence. However, the relationship between the two kinds of power must be taken into account, as Anthony Giddens once noted in critiquing Parsons’ positive sum conception of power to which Stone’s social production model is closely related. Even if viewed from the Parsonian perspective, Giddens notes, “power is always exercised *over* someone.” However much it is true, Giddens continues, “that power can rest upon ‘agreement’ to cede authority which can be used for collective aims, it is also true that interests of power-holders and those subject to that power often clash.”<sup>50</sup> Although tension between such clashes and the pursuit of collective aims is fully evident in Stone’s empirical work on Atlanta, it receives insufficient attention in his subsequent theoretical discussions of civic capacity.

Perhaps the best illustration of this insufficiency is Stone's view, noted earlier, that broad mobilization of civic capacity to improve education happens "not by coalition *pressure* on the school system, but by coalition contributions to critical policy tasks."<sup>51</sup> Insofar as the statement indicates that pressure on the school system is *insufficient* to produce change, the statement can hardly be faulted and accords with much contemporary thinking about urban politics. Not only are many scholars nowadays saying that traditional zero-sum models of political protest and pressure are inadequate,<sup>52</sup> but activists are making similar statements. For example, even the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)—whose experience with community organizing for school reform is among the most comprehensive in the nation—now talks about the importance of "reweaving the social fabric" and "realigning relationships."<sup>53</sup> That language is very different from that of the IAF's founder, Saul Alinsky, a community organizer to whom confrontations such as picket lines and sit-ins were the essence of effective politics.

However, to acknowledge that pressure is frequently *insufficient* to produce major change is not to say that it is *unnecessary*. As numerous studies indicate, the education arena, like most policy arenas, is characterized by competing and conflicting interests.<sup>54</sup> Life would be easier if all of these conflicts could be resolved by strengthening identification to the larger community and the pursuit of social-purpose politics, but the extent to which such identification suffices to secure policy goals is problematic. The political tasks involved in improving urban education parallel the governance ones associated with lower-class opportunity-expansion regimes which, as noted earlier, require regulation and coercion. "Pressure" is the name usually given to key aspects of such regulation and coercion.

Moreover, the boundary between the exertion of pressure and the realignment of relationships is a porous one because today's pressure can easily become tomorrow's realigned relationship and contribution to critical policy tasks. That point is especially well illustrated by the civil rights movement. Although many of its more farsighted participants may have envisioned a world in which relations among races would be very different in a mutually beneficial manner, an appeal to a shared identity was hardly the movement's main strategy, to say nothing of its tactics. Rather, the *sine qua non* of its success was pressure by African Americans and their allies, not just on school systems but on many local, state, and national institutions. Where successful, that pressure frequently realigned relations between those institutions and African Americans in a productive way that allowed the latter to make contributions to long-standing key policy tasks, such as improving education. To note such long-term consequences is, however, very different from asserting that to contemporary participants and/or observers the civil rights movement was primarily about realigning relationships, rather than exerting pressure.



In addition to neglecting the theoretical difficulties inherent in the concept of civic capacity, regime theory can be criticized for paying insufficient attention to another basic theoretical issue: the relationship between the dynamics of capitalism and local politics. Such criticisms basically take two forms; the first criticizes regime theory for what it does not do, the second for not effectively doing what it says it is setting out to do.

According to the first line of criticism, regime theorists content themselves with studying what takes place within localities and fail to study the relationship between the operation of the globalized capitalist system and the formation, maintenance, and change of urban regimes. As a result of insufficient attention to such issues, the purview of regime theory is viewed as a limited one that cannot get beyond what Lauria calls "middle-level abstractions."<sup>55</sup> Saying that "I plead guilty to working in the vineyard of middle-range theory," Stone basically grants the first criticism but questions its relevance.<sup>56</sup> Many interesting and useful things, he asserts, can be said about the politics of cities without rooting such comments in comprehensive theories about the way the world capitalist system operates. The reply is an effective one, if only because the widespread interest in, and respect for, Stone's work provides ample empirical support for his assertion. In fact, it is largely because regime theory rests content with middle-range theory that it has so far managed to avoid many theoretical standoffs (such as those between pluralists and stratification theorists) and still motivate many intriguing research agendas.

According to the second line of criticism, regime theory underestimates the extent to which the local corporate pursuit of profit and the accumulation of capital constrain urban politics. The second criticism is much less easily dismissed because it attacks regime theory on the very turf that it has staked out: understanding urban politics and using this understanding to improve the lot of low-income citizens. Developed by David Imbroscio in a 1998 exchange with Stone in the pages of the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, this second line of criticism asserts that such attempts will fail "absent a fundamental change in the corporate-dominated character of most current urban regimes."<sup>57</sup> Such changes are possible, Imbroscio asserts, by giving community organizations, small businesses, and local government itself much greater control over investment activity. Moreover, he continues, if regime theory took its shibboleth that politics matters more seriously, it would devote considerable attention to ways of developing effective political challenges to corporate domination. As part of developing his critique of Stone's focus on improving urban education, Imbroscio draws upon Anyon's poignant analogy that trying to change urban education without making broader changes in urban politics and economics is like trying to clean the air on one side of a screen door.<sup>58</sup>

On theoretical grounds, there are at least two replies to Imbroscio's critique, both of which Stone makes. The first is that Imbroscio's suggestions for

increasing the role of community organizations, small businesses, and local government itself in the accumulation process are too marginal and/or impractical to address the deep-rooted structural causes of inequality in contemporary urban society. The second is that while the accumulation imperative of contemporary capitalism profoundly affects urban politics, this imperative is not “determinative” because “modern society has low coherence and that the presence of multiple, loosely coupled structures is a foundation for contingency.” As a result, there are “multiple sources of system bias to be overcome, not just the mode of production.”<sup>59</sup>

Whatever the merits of Stone’s and Imbroscio’s positions, it is worth emphasizing that the claims of both men are largely theoretical. The kinds of opportunity-expansion and performance regimes of which Stone speaks are largely hypothetical, as are the community-based, petty bourgeois and local-statist ones that Imbroscio touts. There is considerable need to subject both sets of claims to what has, and is, taking place in urban politics. The extent to which opportunity-expansion and performance regimes can be built absent sweeping changes in corporate power in urban politics is a complicated question, a comprehensive answer to which hinges on empirical investigation. Also requiring empirical investigation are questions related to the realignment of relationships and the exertion of pressure in the development of civic capacity and social-purpose politics. This book addresses both sets of questions by relating them to Charlotte’s experience. Admittedly, this experience leaves crucial aspects of the questions unanswered.<sup>60</sup> However, the Charlotte story does illuminate many aspects of the complex relationships among corporate power, improving urban education, and the operation of local regimes. Before beginning this story, however, it is necessary to discuss some methodological and conceptual issues.

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

In his history of the Detroit public school system, Jeffrey Mirel offers some prefatory observations about the importance of taking a long perspective that studies the relationship between education and the social, political, and economic developments in a given place and notes:

Ideally, historians should research educational systems in different cities, each representing different economic and political contexts throughout the country. Unfortunately, efforts to achieve that ideal, even when aided by substantial grants and teams of research assistants, have fallen far short of the mark. The reasons for that failure are simple—the amount of material that is necessary to consider in studying the history of even one large urban system is enormous. . . .

For the time being, individual case studies may be the only feasible approach to longitudinal research on the history of twentieth-century urban education.<sup>61</sup>

Since Mirel made that observation, the results of the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project have been published and bear witness to the fruitfulness of research that employs an explicitly comparative framework to study the politics of urban education.<sup>62</sup> But this project was an extremely large one that drew on the efforts of over twenty scholars for the eleven cities being studied. My thinking about the politics of urban education draws heavily on the work of this project, and many of my concerns overlap its.<sup>63</sup> However, neither Charlotte nor I were part of the project, and my research questions and interview protocols differed considerably from its. Moreover, working without what Mirel calls “teams of research assistants,” I found it necessary to focus on Charlotte.<sup>64</sup> Thus, while I will occasionally make reference to the results that have emerged from the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, as well as from other studies of urban education, this book is a case study of education policy and regime politics in one city rather than a comparison of policy and politics in several cities.

However, while this book is about Charlotte, I try, when possible, to illuminate its experience by selected comparisons with other cities. In particular, while I was unable to conduct the labor-intensive interviews and archival research necessary to study politics and policy formation in any city other than Charlotte, I can draw on more readily available quantitative data about other school systems to put the Charlotte experience in perspective.<sup>65</sup> For example, as chapter 5 will indicate, it is possible to draw upon data available from North Carolina’s Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to compare academic outcomes in CMS with those of other North Carolina consolidated urban districts during the early 1990s when CMS’ ambitious school reform program was drawing national praise.

Quantitative data is also readily available about the funding that each North Carolina county provides its public school system. Contained in the annual reports of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, this data provides detailed information on each county’s wealth, the actual funding for public education, and the extent to which the actual funding is commensurate with the county’s wealth. I will make extensive use of this data because the fiscal dependence of CMS and other North Carolina school systems upon their county commissions, discussed in chapter 2, makes local funding of public education an extremely good measure of the “mobilization of varied stakeholders in support of a community-wide cause,” i.e., of civic capacity. The Appendix discusses the methodological issues involved in using the Public School Forum’s reports.

In discussing Charlotte's success in building civic capacity, I will, as regime theory's second defining characteristic dictates, pay special attention to the actions and attitudes of the high-ranking executives of major businesses operating in Charlotte, a group that I will call the *business elite*. I am not all that happy with the term because it reflects and contributes to the unfortunate practice, all too common in contemporary political discourse, of avoiding class as a category for both understanding and changing the world.<sup>66</sup> But whatever the theoretical, empirical, and normative shortcomings of *business elite*, the term appears frequently in the literature on urban regimes and has an intuitively plausible meaning. In Charlotte, as in many other cities, local politics are especially influenced by members of the business elite whose businesses' fortunes are heavily tied to local land-use values and are thus key constituents of what Logan and Molotch call the growth machine.<sup>67</sup> Among such businesses are those that benefit from particular land-use decisions (e.g., developers and builders), as well as those who benefit from growth in general (e.g., utilities and the media). Of Charlotte's media, an especially important role has been played by the *Charlotte Observer*. Currently, Charlotte's only daily newspaper, the *Observer* exemplifies Logan and Molotch's characterization of the metropolitan newspaper as the "local business [that] takes a broad responsibility for general growth machine goals," and I will pay particular attention to its editorial stance.<sup>68</sup> Particular attention will also be paid to the activities of the top executives of Bank of America and First Union, the Charlotte-based bank that was the principal forerunner of the bank that in 2003 bears the Wachovia name.<sup>69</sup> The explosive growth of Bank of America and First Union in the 1980s and 1990s provides excellent examples of "the fortunes of some of the most crucial local actors [being] less tied to their old home base."<sup>70</sup> However, each bank has maintained a lively stake in Charlotte's growth and civic health. Moreover, the CEOs of both banks have taken a personal, frequently intense interest in many aspects of local politics, including education, even as the banks have grown dramatically. Despite their business rivalry, on civic and political matters the two CEOs have generally seen eye to eye. As Ed Crutchfield, First Union's CEO from 1984 to 2000, remarked, "On business, we do compete, but that is only true in business . . . It's exactly the opposite way in civic and political affairs."<sup>71</sup> Despite the general agreement on political matters between McColl and Crutchfield, the business elite has not always acted cohesively on educational issues, and such divisions have at times played an important role in local education politics.

## PLAN OF BOOK

This book's organization is straightforward and generally chronological. Chapter 2 provides background by discussing Charlotte's economic growth, the political battles of the 1960s, the alliance between the business elite and

black political leaders, the political fluidity in the 1990s, and the economic situation of black Charlotteans. Chapter 3 turns to education by discussing the origins and consequences of the *Swann* case, paying special attention to the 1977–1986 administration of Superintendent Jay Robinson that was the heyday of the mandatory busing plan. In addition to discussing the main characteristics of Robinson's administration, the chapter considers shortfalls in civic capacity and the extent to which the desegregation glass was half full or half empty. Chapter 4 deals with the transition years following Robinson's resignation, during which CMS witnessed increasing challenges to the busing plan, more shortfalls in civic capacity, and a range of other problems.

Chapter 5 deals with CMS' high-profile school reform program of the early 1990s. Again, the emphasis is on historical narration, with a particular focus on the operation of the reform program, the events that facilitated its implementation, and the conflicts that led to the resignation of the superintendent who was its architect. As part of that discussion, the chapter discusses battles over desegregation, the extent to which the business elite influenced education policy, and the conflicts that weakened civic capacity. With outcome data more readily available for these years than the 1980s or 1970s, chapter 5 also investigates the extent to which the reform program accomplished its ambitious goals, as well as the reasons for the lack of accomplishment.

Chapter 6 begins the book's discussion of more recent events by considering the increasing pressure upon CMS to abandon its commitment to desegregation. Among other things, that pressure led to the creation of a citizen task force whose efforts and their relation to civic capacity the chapter examines. More importantly, the opposition to CMS' desegregation efforts led to the reactivation of the *Swann* case, and the chapter discusses both the political context of the renewed litigation and its key legal aspects.

Chapter 7 considers the turbulent aftermath of the federal district court's ruling that CMS could no longer pursue desegregation goals. That aftermath included CMS' decision to appeal the court's ruling, pivotal school board elections, intensified battles over pupil assignment, and conflict over school funding. In discussing these issues, the chapter focuses on the extent to which black Charlotteans, especially those on the school board, were willing to follow the course of Atlanta and many other communities in forsaking desegregation in exchange for extra resources for largely segregated schools.

The conclusion, chapter 8, brings together the themes that emerged in the earlier ones. As part of summing up the history of desegregation in Charlotte, the chapter argues that desegregation benefited black children and also enhanced civic capacity. However, the civic capacity resulting from Charlotte's desegregation accomplishments, the chapter emphatically argues, did more to help Charlotte grow than to benefit African Americans or to strengthen public education. Based on this discussion of the asymmetric transfer

of civic capacity, the chapter also considers the extent to which education can be improved for black children absent the regulation and coercion of institutional elites that, as this Introduction has noted, is a hallmark of opportunity expansion regimes. The chapter also discusses ways of developing civic capacity despite intense conflict over CMS' continued commitment to desegregation, and it ends with some brief comments about the Stone-Imbroscio debate.