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The Blair Education Bill: A Lost Opportunity in American Public Education

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Through the 1880s, Senator Henry Blair (R-NH) spearheaded an effort to erode local control of education by turning Congress into a source of funds and oversight for state-level primary and secondary schools. The Blair Bill won support from an interregional, interracial, bipartisan coalition. It passed in the Senate on three separate occasions, was endorsed by presidents, and was a frequent topic of discussion among party elites. Yet in 1890 the bill failed for the last time, and local control would go largely unchanged until the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In this article we explore the decade-long battle surrounding Blair's proposal. Our analysis focuses on this lost opportunity as a way of highlighting the coalitional and institutional dynamics that work to prevent reform in an otherwise favorable environment. In this way, we contribute to a large literature on the uneven course of American state development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is not directly addressed in America's founding documents, but it was never far from the minds of those who wrote them. Thomas Jefferson described education as "the most certain and most legitimate engine of government." "Educate and inform the whole mass of people," he argued, "enable them to see that it is in their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve it."[1] In his first message to Congress in 1790, George Washington described knowledge as the "surest basis of public happiness." "In one in which the measures of government receive their impressions so immediately from the sense of the community as in ours," he stated, "[education] is proportionately essential."[2] In the Northwest Ordinance, passed by the Confederation Congress in 1787, lawmakers declared, "religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government … schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Two years before the Northwest Ordinance, the Confederation Congress adopted a land ordinance stipulating that one-sixteenth of every western township be set aside for "the maintenance of public schools."[3] The framers of the Constitution believed that only an educated citizenry could sustain a government founded upon consent and equality.

Despite a shared belief in the link between education and self-government, the framers did not "constitutionalize" education policy. Nowhere did they specify the source and quality of educational "encouragements": how schools were to be funded, maintained, filled, and run, or who would make these choices. As a result, the location and relative power of government to provide children with an education has long been the subject of political contestation. By exploring debates over the federal government's role

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1. Jefferson quoted in Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 8.

2. George Washington, "First Annual Message to Congress," January 8, 1790, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-8-1790-first-annual-message-congress.

3. The text of the Northwest Ordinance (1787) can be found at the Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nworder.asp. The text of the 1785 land ordinance can be found in "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774–1875," *Journals of the Continental Congress* 28, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=028/lljc028.db&recNum=386&itemLink=r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DATE+17850520)::%230280388&linkText=1.

in guaranteeing Americans an education, we therefore gain important insights into the historical development of the American state.

By the late nineteenth century, primary and secondary schooling were "almost exclusively a state and local concern."[4] Individual states set out in their constitutions how they intended to provide children with a "public" education: one that was "free, open to all students of a specified age … and financed and governed by public authorities."[5] Schools were primarily funded through property taxes determined and collected by the states themselves.[6] Decisions about hiring, length of the school year, subjects taught, and building and renovations were also made by local officials. Inconsistency ruled. Per capita expenditures on schools in 1890, for example, ranged from a high of $4.29 (California) to a low of $0.44 (North Carolina).[7] Connecticut provided a 121-day "school year" for its children; in South Carolina, children attended for only fifty-one days per year. Signaling further the exclusive role played by state governments, the Department of Education was "downgraded" in 1869 to a bureau inside the Department of the Interior, making it, according to Morton Keller, "little more than a data-gathering agency."[8] The federal government purchased and made available public land for secondary and elementary schools, but not much else.[9]

Commenting on the superiority of state over federal authority in education, a report commissioned by the Hoover Administration in 1929 to study education reform proposals attributes support for local control to the conditions faced by early settlers. "The frontier was characterized by the relative isolation and necessarily self-contained nature of community life," the report's authors argued. "Hence was developed a unique and powerful habit of local responsibility and control which was so much taken as a matter of course that it was at first universally accepted as the only proper basis of federal relations to education."[10] This governing arrangement—state control, almost no federal involvement—remained in place until 1965, when Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA). As part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, the ESEA, for the first time, directed federal money to schools in districts serving children more likely to come from low-income, historically disadvantaged backgrounds.[11]

We argue that the resilience of local control needs to be explained, not simply attributed to habit or tradition. Through multiple periods during which federal power expanded in significant ways—Reconstruction (1865–1877), the Progressive Era (1900–1916), and the New Deal (1932–1952)—the federal government's role in primary and secondary education went largely unchanged.[12] In this article we examine the first sustained effort to assert federal authority over primary and secondary schools, instigated during the 1880s by Senator Henry Blair (R-NH). Blair sought enactment of legislation that would turn Congress into a reliable source of funds and oversight for the nation's schools. Like the 1965 ESEA, Blair's proposal targeted money to those

4. Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 133. Douglas Reed also makes clear that "only with Congress's passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 could one argue that a federal education policy existed." Douglas S. Reed, *Building the Federal Schoolhouse: Localism and the American Education State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

5. David Tyack and Thomas James, "State Government and American Public Education: Exploring the 'Primeval Forest,'" *History of Education Quarterly* 26 (Spring 1986): 59.

6. Tyack and James, "State Government and American Public Education," 46. For more on state-level education funding, see Albert Fishlow, "Levels of Nineteenth-Century American Investment in Education," *The Journal of Economic History* 26 (December 1966): 418–36; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1971), 58–66; Tyack and James, "State Government and American Public Education," 39–69; Lynn Dumenil, "'The Insatiable Maw of Bureaucracy': Antistatism and Education Reform in the 1920s," *The Journal of American History* 77 (September 1990): 499–524; Johann N. Neem, "Path Dependence and the Emergence of Common Schools: Ohio to 1853," *The Journal of Policy History* 28 (2016): 49–80.

7. The United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1889–1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), 14, 28.

8. Keller, *Affairs of State*, 135.

9. For example, the Morrill Act of 1862 provided "a grant to the states of 30,000 acres for each congressman … The proceeds [once the land was sold] were to be invested to supply an endowment for 'at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and mechanic arts." See John Y. Simon, "The Politics of the Morrill Act," *Agricultural History* 37 (April 1963): 108. According to Tyack and James, between 1803 and 1896 the federal government issued land grants to states totaling more than 77 million acres. See Tyack and James, "State Government and American Public Education," 57.

10. "Federal Relations to Education," Report of the National Advisory Committee on Education, Part 1: Committee Findings and Recommendations (Washington, DC: National Capital Press, 1931), 11.

11. The bill appropriated $1 billion for the purpose of improving primary and secondary schools around the country. State-by-state funding was determined by multiplying the total number of children in a given state from low-income families (at the time, those making less than $2,000 per year) by 50 percent of the state's average expenditure per student in 1960. The money itself went to state boards of education. They would then evaluate plans, offered by local school districts, setting out how they intended to provide services to target children. For more on the 1965 bill, see Eric F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 296–308; Julian Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for the Great Society* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 174–84.

12. In 1918 Congress appropriated funds to support vocational education; in 1950 it provided "impact aid" for districts disproportionately affected by a federal presence (e.g., due to military bases); and in 1958 it provided some funds to encourage science education. See Reed, *Building the Federal Schoolhouse*, 8–9.

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states most in need of federal support (more on this below). Early versions of the bill also empowered Congress to play a meaningful role in setting and enforcing standards as to how the money would be spent. Blair's efforts failed, but had he been successful, later political battles over a variety of issues related to equal access might have played out differently.[13] Furthermore, because the ESEA reflected principles central to late twentieth-century liberalism—bureaucratization and centralized administration—its implementation was judged according to "procedure and process" rather than a "focus on student or school results."[14] Delaying federal intervention until the 1960s, in other words, had consequences for how the program was implemented.

Our analysis therefore contributes to a corpus of research examining the uneven course of American state development.[15] In the United States, periods of national state expansion are not evenly distributed over all aspects of the federal government. Federal power grew at different speeds, and with different levels of opposition. For this reason, political development should not be seen as a "single interruption in political and social life." Instead, it unfolds "dynamically over time."[16] Thus, we argue that the ESEA marks the end of a political conflict initiated in the 1880s, rather than simply one more policy enactment associated with the Great Society.[17] To explain how Congress enacted the ESEA, we need to understand how and why Great Society Democrats overcame or avoided obstacles that plagued would-be education reformers like Henry Blair. Thinking historically in this way—in particular by documenting the pivotal role race and nativism played in early conflicts over education policy—makes clear why contemporary debates over education also implicate issues of social and political equality.

Where the Hoover Administration sees "habit" and "universal acceptability" as explanations for the American commitment to local control, we instead identify a group of lawmakers who, for a variety of reasons, blocked Blair's effort to bring federal power to bear in education policy.[18] To substantiate this claim, we explore the decade between 1880 and 1890, during which Congress debated Blair's proposal. We describe the coalition that pushed versions of his bill through the Senate multiple times. We show that it won endorsements from Republican presidents, and it was central to the GOP's political agenda.[19] Yet after a decade of prolonged debate, with unified control of government, the Republican-controlled Senate surprised Blair in 1890 by voting to kill his bill. Its failure signaled the end, for generations, of meaningful efforts to provide federal aid to the nation's schools. That is, the Blair Bill was not only the first bill to propose direct federal aid to state primary and secondary schools, it was the *only* bill to do so that passed the House or Senate between the 50th Congress (1887–89) and the 80th Congress (1947–49).

Due to its substantive importance, as well as the interesting political debate it generated, the Blair Bill has received some scholarly attention.[20] David

13. Frank J. Munger and Richard F. Fenno, *National Politics and Federal Aid to Education* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1962), 78.

14. Patrick McGuinn, "Education Policy from the Great Society to 1980: The Expansion and Institutionalization of the Federal Role in Schools," in *Conservatism and American Political Development*, ed. Brian J. Glenn and Steven M. Teles (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 201.

15. For example, Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Peter B. Evans, Dietric Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); William J. Novak, "The Myth of the Weak American State," *The American Historical Review* 113 (June 2008): 752–72; Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

16. David A. Bateman and Dawn Langan Teele, "A Developmental Approach to Historical Causal Inference," *Public Choice* (n. d.): 4.

17. For a general description of the historical approach to policy studies, see Paul Pierson, "The Study of Policy Development," *The Journal of Policy History* 17 (2005): 34–51.

18. Here we rely on the definition of political development set out by Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek: a "durable shift in governing authority." Blair's opponents blocked political development by organizing to bring down a bill that would have renegotiated the power relationship between state and federal government in the area of education policy. See Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 123.

19. In a 1871 *Atlantic* article, for example, Senator (and future Vice President) Henry Wilson describes the GOP's "New Departure" agenda: "[Those who would] see in the good of the whole more than a compensation for the sacrifice of selfish greed, can hardly be expected of the millions of the old or of the new made voters, exposed, as they will be, to the arts and pretensions of scheming adventurers and plotting politicians, *unless there be comprehensive and well-directed efforts towards popular education, public instruction, and domestic and social culture.* Without the school-house and the church there is but a poor showing for a successful experiment of free government on so large a scale, with a continental empire for its theatre, with open doors towards the east and west inviting immigration from beyond the Atlantic and Pacific, and with a population so heterogeneous" (emphasis added). See Henry Wilson, "The New Departure of the Republican Party," *The Atlantic* (January 1871): 114; Allen J. Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (1957): 271.

20. See Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill;" Daniel W. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill: The Congressional Aftermath to Reconstruction" (unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1968); Daniel W. Crofts, "The Black Response to the Blair Education Bill," *The Journal of Southern History* 37 (1971): 41–65; Thomas Adams Upchurch, *Legislating Racism: The Billion Dollar Congress and the Birth of Jim Crow* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Gordon B. McKinney, *Henry W. Blair's Campaign to Reform America: From the Civil War to the U.S. Senate* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013); David Bateman, Ira Katznelson, and John S. Lapinski, *Southern Nation: Congress and White Supremacy after Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

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Bateman, Ira Katznelson, and John Lapinski, for example, explain how the fight over the Blair Bill suggests the "possibility of an alternative South" in which Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans worked across racial, partisan, and geographic lines on issues that "struck a compromise between a fading, but still real, national concern for the condition of southern blacks, and the local autonomy that was the overarching purpose of white Democratic politics." Blair failed, they argue, because the Southern supporters he worked so hard to win over abandoned him in 1890.[21]

We support this view. The Blair Bill sought to appropriate federal money to the states to support primary and secondary schools. The bill's formula stipulated that the amount of money a given state received annually would be based on the number of "illiterates" (a census-defined group) living within its boundaries.[22] Conditioning funding on literacy levels rather than population ensured that Southern states, with high proportions of illiterate residents, would receive almost two-thirds of the money appropriated.[23] Blair's plan also obligated any recipient state with segregated schools to distribute its portion of money equally. In so doing, the bill put the federal government on record supporting separate-but-equal schooling well before *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) declared it constitutionally acceptable. In short, Blair hoped to "buy" Southern Democratic support with federal aid and a promise not to interfere with school segregation. Yet by empowering Congress to set conditions on how the money would be appropriated, and by legislating oversight mechanisms—even weak ones—the Blair Bill would have reallocated the distribution of power between states and the federal government.[24]

Yet we also expand on Bateman, Katznelson, and Lapinski's analysis of Blair's fragile coalition by exploring the behavior of northerners—both Republicans and Democrats—whose opposition played an important role in the bill's failure. Winning the support of Southern Democrats was central to Blair's strategy, but their votes alone were insufficient to ensure passage. Blair also needed the votes of those lawmakers representing non-Southern states with lower proportions of illiterate residents. The bill therefore included language explicitly prohibiting federal funds from going to support Catholic schools.[25] This provision fit a broader pattern of Republican Party hostility toward disproportionately Catholic, immigrant communities in the Northeast and Midwest.[26] The money Blair proposed to spend also fit with the Republican Party's economic commitments. By spending down the federal surplus, his bill undermined efforts by Democratic lawmakers to reduce the tariff.[27] Last, Blair wrote his bill seeking to win votes from those with some lingering commitment to the postwar civil rights agenda. Bateman, Katznelson, and Lapinski rightly argue that Blair's proposal was a "deeply ambivalent and uneven civil rights measure."[28] It endorsed segregated schools and failed to provide a clear mechanism for punishing state officials who short-changed black schools. Yet the bill did win support from black civic organizations and civil rights activists.[29]

In short, Blair's success hinged on the cooperation of a fragile coalition: tariff supporters, nativists, freedmen, and Southern Democrats. Analyzing votes in both the House and Senate, we demonstrate that such a coalition was possible, but failed to materialize under the weight of racial, economic, and regional tensions. More specifically, we show that Northern lawmakers representing constituencies with higher proportions of foreign-born residents opposed the bill.[30] Blair intentionally pitted those concerned

21. Bateman et al., *Southern Nation*, 140, 153.

22. "Illiteracy" at this moment was defined as the "inability to write." For more on how the Department of Education settled on this definition, see Gordon Canfield Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid, First Phase: A History of the Attempts to Obtain Federal Aid for the Common Schools, 1870–1890* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), 32.

23. Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill," 267.

24. The federal government would set the conditions for appropriating the money, as well as the mechanisms to ensure it was properly spent.

25. For more on Catholic opposition, see Keller, *Affairs of State*, 134–42; William A. Mitchell, "Religion and Federal Aid to Education," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 14 (Winter 1949): 113–43; John Whitney Evans, "Catholics and the Blair Education Bill," *The Catholic Historical Review* 46 (October 1960): 273–98.

26. In 1876, just eight years before he would be chosen as the GOP's presidential candidate, James G. Blaine introduced an amendment to the Constitution banning states from spending public money, or setting aside public land, for Catholic schools. Blaine's amendment passed the House in an overwhelming vote of 180–7. In the Senate it passed 28–16, failing only because it did not receive a two-thirds majority. For the vote, see *Congressional Record*, 44th Congress, 2nd Sess., August 14, 1876, 5595. For more on the increasing anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments within the Republican Party at this time, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 1–106.

27. According to Bensel, the tariff "was in no way necessary to development in economic terms, it became politically essential as the popular backbone of the Republican program." Instead, it "provided the Republican party with a political 'surplus' upon which the Republicans drew as they constructed the two other economic legs of the developmental tripod: the national market and the gold standard." See Richard Franklin Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xix.

28. Bateman et al., *Southern Nation*, 143.

29. For more information on how black citizens viewed Blair's proposal, see Crofts, "The Black Response"; Bateman et al., *Southern Nation*, 143–44.

30. In the analysis to come we treat anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiment as synonymous. This decision is defensible substantively because, as we demonstrate below, nativism was motivated by both impulses. It is defensible methodologically because the data on foreign-born citizens are more reliable than the data on the religious affiliation of American citizens.

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with the Republican Party's nativism against advocates for federal aid, many of whom saw the bill as promoting black civil rights. He positioned himself as an inheritor of the GOP's historic commitment to racial equality, yet he also bolstered the party's hostile attitude toward immigrants, especially Catholics. This tension cost Blair much-needed political support.[31] In Blair's defeat we see Southern Democrats wholly opposed to the exercise of any federal power on behalf of black citizens cooperating with Northern lawmakers who believed that they had no obligation to provide an education to freed men and women living, primarily, in the South.

Understanding why the Blair Bill failed to pass offers insights into how the nation's education system remained, until the latter half of the twentieth century, protected from federal intervention. The durability of local control is not attributable to widespread endorsement of or "universal acceptance" of state over federal responsibility. Blair and his allies challenged, and nearly brought down, this governing arrangement.[32] Our analysis makes clear how and why local control went unchanged at what David Bateman and Dawn Langan Teele call a "relevant counterfactual node," that is, a "temporally defined instance in which an outcome actually was possible but did not occur."[33]

Going into the 51st Congress, Blair had reason to be confident that his bill would pass. It had already passed the Senate three times, only to languish in the Democratically controlled House. After the 1888 elections, however, the Republicans would control the House, Senate, and presidency. Even if some Republicans opposed the bill, Blair had worked to cultivate bipartisan support. And since President Benjamin Harrison was a supporter of the bill, Blair felt confident that if he could get the bill through Congress, it would be signed into law. Local control was thus under credible assault and the political context seemed likely to ensure its demise. Yet the status quo went unchanged, and federal intervention would not occur until 1965.

Our analysis of the Blair Bill proceeds as follows. Section II describes how and why the Blair Bill made it onto the congressional agenda as often as it did. Drawing on the work of John Kingdon and Richard Valelly, we posit the 1880s as a moment when the "policy window" opened, allowing for potential reform.[34] Section III describes the Blair Bill, traces its legislative history, and sketches out the political battle it instigated. Here we also analyze roll call votes as a way to highlight the partisan rivalries that brought the bill down. Section IV concludes by articulating how our discussion of the Blair Bill debate sheds light on the Great Society's education reform bill.

2. NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE AFTERMATH OF RECONSTRUCTION

Political change, John Kingdon explains, is produced by the confluence of three different processes: problem recognition, presentation of alternatives, and political conflict.[35] When these processes collide, the result is what he describes as a "policy window." When a policy window opens, those advocating for specific proposals find themselves with an opportunity to "push their pet solutions" or "draw attention to their special problems." In short, status quo governing arrangements collapse when skilled politicians take advantage of an unsettled political environment to force action on a specific problem. Kingdon also makes clear that favorable circumstances for a policy change are not sufficient for change to occur. Skillful political entrepreneurship is also necessary. Entrepreneurs attach "solutions to problems, overcoming the constraints by redrafting proposals, and taking advantage of politically propitious events."[36]

American political development (APD) calls our attention to such entrepreneurs and highlights the formative role they play.[37] Less discussed, though

31. Sustaining the tariff was just one part of the GOP's commitment to an economic program highly favorable to large business interests. By the 1880s many corporate leaders had come to embrace an anti-immigrant perspective. Nativism was, in other words, an economic *and* social concern. For more on business attitudes toward immigration, see Morrell Heald, "Business Attitudes toward European Immigration, 1880–1900," *The Journal of Economic History* 13 (Summer 1953): 291–304.

32. In a recent analysis, Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek argue that scholars focusing their attention on the state's "programmatic interventions, are likely to downplay the historical significance of governmental arrangements that held out against reformers. This observation motivates our decision to highlight the impressive stability of "local control" in primary and secondary education. See Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Policy State: An American Predicament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

33. Bateman and Teele, "A Developmental Approach to Historical Causal Inference," 4. Capoccia and Kelemen identify counterfactual analysis as the consideration of "policy options that were available, considered, and narrowly defeated by the relevant actors." We argue that the Blair Bill fits this definition. See Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59 (April 2007): 356.

34. John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman 2003); Richard M. Valelly, "Partisan Entrepreneurship and Policy Windows: George Frisbie Hoar and the 1890 Federal Elections Bill," in *Formative Acts: American Politics in the Making*, ed. Stephen Skowronek and Matthew Glassman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 126–52.

35. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 16.

36. Ibid., 165–66.

37. For more on political entrepreneurship, see Skowronek and Glassman, *Formative Acts*; Adam Sheingate, "Political Entrepreneurship, Institutional Change, and American Political Development,"*Studies in American Political Development*17 (Fall 2003): 185–203.

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still important, are the decisions of would-be entrepreneurs who failed in otherwise favorable circumstances. Failures of this kind do not simply highlight the political and institutional constraints faced by any lawmaker pushing a reform agenda. Near misses also allow us to consider plausible paths not taken and to appreciate the contingent nature of even long-standing governing arrangements.

Senator Henry Blair (R-NH) found himself with a window of opportunity in the 1880s to durably enhance federal power at the expense of the states. Provided with the chance to reallocate authority for primary and secondary schools from the states to the federal government, Blair's entrepreneurialism can be seen in his effort to build a national coalition composed of mostly Southern freedmen, white Southern Democrats, and Northern Republicans. This coalition, he believed, could force federal action to mitigate the illiteracy problem in a way that would simultaneously allow the GOP to pursue a broader political goal: its survival in the ex-Confederacy. Blair recognized that turmoil within the Democratic Party, as well as the desire among some southerners for federal money, made possible bipartisan and interregional cooperation. He wagered that an explicit appeal to southerners would compensate for any opposition from Northern Democrats or members of his own party.

Blair's wager grew out of an important political reality: The internal dynamics of both parties were particularly unsettled once Reconstruction ended in 1877. Forced to withdraw federal troops from the South, the GOP almost immediately saw its political position weaken. Through violence, intimidation, and voter fraud, Democrats acted quickly to reestablish political supremacy. As a consequence, Republicans found themselves confronting two questions: Did it make sense to commit time and resources to Southern states, where the GOP was increasingly unpopular? And, if so, what was the best strategy for winning support there?

Republican Presidents Rutherford Hayes, James Garfield, Chester Arthur, and Benjamin Harrison put varying amounts of effort into increasing the GOP's fortunes in the South. The strategies they implemented were not identical, but they do reflect the party's well-established political commitments and practices: a lingering commitment to black equality, support for the tariff, opposition to currency reform, generous use of patronage and federal aid to incentivize support from persuadable skeptics, and, increasingly, nativism targeting immigrant populations in urban centers.[38] By 1890, however, the party's internal tensions were such that Blair's federal aid proposal met with an insurmountable level of intraparty opposition.

Democrats also faced internal tensions. As a consequence of the Panic of 1873 and the economic austerity supported by some Democratic governors, a number of splinter groups emerged to speak on behalf of those most harmed by retrenchment.[39] Self-styled "Greenbackers," "Independents," and "Readjusters" voiced internal dissatisfaction with the party's positions on monetary policy, taxation, federal aid for internal improvements, and payment of state debts incurred during the Civil War. Held together by the war and then Reconstruction, "the disaffected partners could scarcely wait until Redemption was achieved to air their grievances and fall upon the leaders of the dominant element of Redeemers."[40] Federal aid to public education—and the Blair Bill specifically—emerged as a wedge issue dividing Southern Democrats. Opinion throughout the South was mixed with some seeing education funding as a potentially vital source of aid, and others as an unconstitutional expansion of federal power.[41]

Federal education aid also led to regional divisions. The Republican Party took the lead in spearheading aid proposals, and most of them explicitly endorsed prohibitions on any appropriations for Catholic institutions. This explicit anti-Catholicism reflected a broader "nativist revival" led by the party's reformist wing. Lawmakers like Blair were hostile toward Catholics and immigrants, who, they believed, were a threat to national cohesion and a potential source of labor radicalism.[42] Irish Catholics, in particular, "whose politics were overwhelmingly Democratic, whose Negrophobia was raw and overt, and whose concentration in cities and heavy use of alcohol," argues Keller, "irritated Protestant Republican sensibilities."[43] With record levels of transatlantic immigrants settling primarily outside the South—areas of the country in which the GOP had a clear partisan

38. For a general discussion of the Republican Party's strategy vis-à-vis the South during these years, see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Vincent De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877–1897* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959); Stanley Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877–1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860–1910* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997); Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869–1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, *Republican Party Politics and the American South, 1865–1968* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

39. Nicolas Barreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10 (2011): 403–23.

40. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 76.

41. Daniel M. Robison, *Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 73–103.

42. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 53–54, 52–67.

43. Keller, *Affairs of State*, 137.

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advantage—Republican lawmakers also recognized a growing political threat. Nativism served those Republicans not accountable to foreign-born voters. Also, with dramatically fewer foreign-born Catholics living in the South, lawmakers there faced less political pressure from constituents worried about nativist policy.[44]

Taking office in 1877, Rutherford Hayes was the first Republican president to confront the dilemma generated by the newly redeemed Southern states. Unwilling to give up on the South, Hayes believed that continued Republican success there required a dual program of patronage and internal improvements. He immediately began appointing "ex-Confederates, old-line Whigs, Douglas Democrats, and plain Democrats."[45] Overall, one-third of Hayes's Southern appointments during the first months of his administration went to Democrats.[46] In his diary, Hayes wrote that this patronage policy alone might "secure North Carolina, with a fair chance in Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas," and maybe even "Louisiana, South Carolina and Florida."[47]

Hayes combined his patronage with a program of federal aid. In his inaugural address, he acknowledged that the war had "arrested [the] material development," of the South. To rebuild, the former Confederacy needed "the considerate care of the national government within the just limits prescribed by the Constitution and wise public economy."[48] Hayes repeatedly "expressed himself in very decided terms in favor of a system of internal improvements calculated to benefit and develop the South."[49] Part and parcel of this aid program was federal funding for schools. "Liberal and permanent provision should be made for the support of free schools by the state governments," he argued, "and, if need be, supplemented by legitimate aid from national authority."[50] The GOP thus actively sought to leverage material incentives to win Southern support.

Hayes's decision to link federal aid for internal improvements turned Blair's proposal into a vehicle for Republicans to pursue policy reform and political advantage. Federal aid addressed the concerns of many in the South who recognized that state funds were insufficient relative to what the region needed. Southern poverty handicapped state school systems. Per the 1880 Census, more than 72 percent of "illiterates" living in the United States called the South home.[51] Southern state governments collectively spent less than a fifth of what non-Southern states spent on education in 1880.[52] Blair acknowledged these trends when he argued that the "nation as such abolished slavery as a legal institution; but ignorance is slavery, and no matter what is written in your constitutions and your laws slavery will continue until intelligence, the handmaid of liberty, shall have illuminated the whole land."[53]

Federal aid for the nation's primary and secondary schools played a central role in the plans of postwar reformers, both black and white. W.E.B. Dubois's analysis of Reconstruction reported that "the first great mass movement for public education at the expense of the state in the South came from Negroes."[54] These efforts showed real results. Between 1865 and 1870, the Freedman's Bureau spent more than $5 million on schools throughout the South. By July 1870, there existed 4,239 schools, which employed 9,307 teachers and educated 247,333 students.[55] One Vermont native who traveled to Mississippi and became active in the public school movement there declared education to be the "energizing agent of modern civilization." It was an "answer to the race problem in southern society" because only schooling could "enlighten the white masses" and thereby erode their anti-black prejudices.[56] Black citizens in particular viewed a commitment to education as central to their political and material advancement. According to Eric Foner, they were even willing to overcome their skepticism of segregated facilities because they believed that separate schools were better than no schools.[57] Daniel Crofts argues that the Blair's goal of providing federal aid to schools represented "the one politically promising piece of national legislation which offered something blacks wanted."[58] Black newspapers editorialized in favor of the bill, black historian George W. Williams called it "the grandest measure of our times," and in September 1883, the

44. In the middle of the 1880s, for example, the average number of foreign-born residents of southern congressional districts was approximately 1.9 percent. The average number of Catholics was 1.5 percent. In northern districts the numbers were 17 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Data were taken from Stanley B. Parsons, Michael J. Dubin, and Karen Toombs Parsons, *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Also see Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 15–18.

45. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 45–46.

46. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt*, 36.

47. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 45–46. Also see Vincent P. De Santis, "President Hayes's Southern Policy," *The Journal of Southern History* 21 (1955): 476–94.

48. Rutherford B. Hayes, "Inaugural Address," https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-5-1877-inaugural-address.

49. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 45.

50. Hayes, "Inaugural Address."

51. The South claimed 4.7 million illiterates, out of a total of 6.2 million nationwide.

52. Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill," 268; Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 28.

53. *Congressional Record*, 47th Congress, 1st Sess., June 13, 1882, 4831.

54. W. E. B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 638.

55. Ibid., 648.

56. William C. Harris, "The Creed of the Carpetbaggers: The Case of Mississippi," *The Journal of Southern History* 40 (1974): 199–224, 209.

57. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 367.

58. Crofts, "The Black Response," 44–45.

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Colored National Convention endorsed Blair's proposal.[59]

Yet for white audiences paying attention in the late nineteenth century, Blair's invocation of slavery carried a double meaning. First and most obviously, Blair was referring to the central outcome of the war: A largely illiterate population of ex-slaves now expected to play a role in civic life. Yet Republicans also frequently portrayed the Catholic Church as an institution opposed to human freedom. In a speech to Civil War veterans, for example, President Ulysses Grant endorsed federal aid to public schools. In the same speech, he condemned any appropriation for Catholic schools because, he proclaimed, they teach "superstition, ambition, and ignorance."[60] In his 1875 campaign for governor of Ohio, future president Hayes explained his plan to use debate over federal aid to public schools as a weapon to contest the influx of "Catholic foreigners." In speeches backing Hayes's gubernatorial campaign, future president James Garfield portrayed the Church as "moving the whole of its front against modern civilization." "Our fight in Ohio," he went on, "is only a small portion of the battlefield."[61] Federal aid advocates saw in public schools an opportunity to contend with what they portrayed as an "invasion" of foreigners who threatened to grow the ranks of radicals and Catholics.[62] Even participants at the annual convention of the National Education Association convention in 1888 linked public school education with the fight against nonnative residents.[63]

The plans hatched by liberal reformers, and implemented throughout the South, proved expensive. As the troops withdrew, and the nation tired of the Reconstruction project, so did the momentum for their continuation. Democratic-controlled state houses abolished boards of education, cut state and local property taxes, and "all but dismantled the education systems established during Reconstruction."[64] State funds appropriated for public education were frequently used to pay interest on state debt, so teachers frequently went without pay.[65] So dire was the threat to Southern schools, argued one reformer, that the "little that has been done [already] … far surpasses anything that the friends of education can or will do in the South for the next twenty years if they are compelled to rely upon their own resources."[66]

As Democratic state governments retrenched, factions within the party emerged to request federal money. Disaffected Democrats, in other words, supported Blair. For example, Readjusters in Virginia—a splinter faction of agrarian Democrats—fought to reopen public schools for blacks and whites alike after the legislature defunded the state's young school system.[67] They also broke with the party in calling for the "readjustment" of state war debts so that more money could be spent on the economically distressed.[68] This aspect of their agenda departed from the GOP's commitment to "fiscal conservatism"—hard money, balanced budgets, and industrial tariffs. And while Henry Blair counted himself among the party orthodoxy, he campaigned for Readjuster candidates prior to the 1882 election because of their support for public education. Blair was thus willing to set aside potential disagreement over economic policy in order to convince southerners to support the bill.

Support for public education funding from Democratic dissidents proved particularly important once President James Garfield embraced a "divide the Democrats" political strategy by promoting Southern candidates affiliated with various splinter groups. Following Garfield's assassination, President Chester Arthur continued working to "unite Republicans, Readjusters, Greenbackers, Independents, and 'Liberals'" in order to displace the Democratic state governments.[69] Secretary of the Navy William E. Chandler outlined this strategy in a letter to Senator James Blaine (R-ME). "Our straight Republican, carpet-bag, Negro governments … have been destroyed and cannot be revived," he wrote, "and without these coalitions or support from Independents we cannot carry enough southern votes to save the House from Bourbon Democratic control, and carry the next presidential fight."[70] Victory in the South—a GOP goal throughout the 1880s—required them to make common cause with local whites.

Arthur's plan to ally the GOP with Democratic dissidents is important for two reasons. First, it generated intraparty tensions. In seeking the support of free

59. Ibid., 45; McKinney, *Henry W. Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 91.

60. Edward McPherson, *A Handbook of Politics for 1876: Being a Record of Important Political Action, National and State, from July 15, 1874 to July 15, 1876* (Washington, DC: Solomons & Chapman, 1876), 155.

61. Hayes and Garfield quoted in Keller, *Affairs of State*, 141.

62. Republicans in particular accused immigrants of "crime and immorality, of corrupting municipal government, of furnishing recruits for Catholicism and socialism." See Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 39.

63. National Educational Association, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses: Session of the Year 1888, Held at San Francisco, CA* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1888), 147–49.

64. According to Eric Foner, "Texas began charging statewide fees in its schools, while Mississippi and Alabama abolished statewide school taxes, placing the entire burden of funding on local communities. Louisiana spent so little on education that it became the only state in the Union in which the percentage of native whites unable to read or write actually rose between 1880 and 1900. School enrollment in Arkansas did not regain Reconstruction levels until the 1890s." See Foner, *Reconstruction*, 589.

65. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 366.

66. Quoted in Harris, "The Creed of the Carpetbaggers," 211.

67. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 86.

68. For more on the Readjuster Party, see Brent Tarter, *A Saga of the New South: Race, Law, and Public Debt in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

69. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 81.

70. Chandler quoted in Vincent P. De Santis, "President Arthur and the Independent Movements in the South in 1882," *The Journal of Southern History* 19 (1953): 346–63, 350.

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silver and anti-debt advocates, Arthur and his supporters would force some Republicans to accept compromises to important planks of the party's pro-business agenda. Next, and most importantly, Arthur's approach failed. When he took office, Republicans controlled the White House and both chambers of Congress.[71] In the 1882 midterms, however, the GOP suffered a crushing defeat, resulting in a seventy-nine-seat disadvantage in the House and a much smaller majority in the Senate. In 1884, Democrat Grover Cleveland was elected president, and the Democrats would continue to control the House during his first administration. During these years, Republican and Independent electoral efforts in the South faltered considerably.[72] By the late 1880s many Republicans were losing faith in the prospect of an interregional coalition that included disaffected Democrats and black citizens.

Following the 1888 election—when Republican Benjamin Harrison was elected president and the GOP regained control of both chambers of Congress—Republicans acted on this skepticism when they pushed a federal elections bill, which sought to shift the power to manage House elections from the states to the federal judiciary. This effort failed when a GOP faction in the Senate—those referred to as "silver Republicans"—defected and joined with Democrats to kill the bill.[73] The GOP's western wing would also prove pivotal to the fate of Blair's proposal. In the early 1880s, however, Blair was confident that he could put together a coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats to get his bill passed. His confidence was justified by inter- and intraparty tensions that made possible this kind of unlikely political coalition.

The 1880s were a time of "insecure majorities" and, consequently, intense partisan conflict.[74] At the same time, conflict raged within each of the two major parties. Blair sought to capitalize on this moment by pushing a reform proposal, addressing a salient public problem, in a way designed specifically to win bipartisan supporters. Had he been successful, Blair may have set the stage for additional cooperation across partisan and geographic lines even as he eroded local control of education. We now turn to a discussion of the debate over the Blair Bill, which will reveal the reasons for Blair's failure.

3. THE BLAIR EDUCATION BILL

Entering the House of Representatives in 1875, Henry Blair almost immediately demonstrated interest in education policy. Even before he was the official Republican nominee, Blair wrote William E. Chandler—then a powerful GOP newspaperman in New Hampshire—to request "some data showing the present condition of the cause of education in the South and the means of showing the work accomplished there by the Republican Party among both whites and blacks."[75] Blair recognized primary and secondary education policy as ripe for reform. He also recognized that pursuing such reform offered GOP lawmakers an opportunity to build a national, bipartisan, interracial coalition.

After serving two House terms, Blair was elected to the Senate in 1879. In his first term, Blair was made chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor. Soon thereafter he introduced S. 151—"to aid in the establishment and temporary support of common schools."[76] This bill proposed $105 million in federal appropriations distributed over ten years, allocated in proportion to the number of "illiterates" more than ten years old living in a given state. This provision guaranteed that approximately 75 percent of all money appropriated would go to Southern states because illiteracy rates there were dramatically higher than in the North.[77] The bill also mandated that recipient states appropriate funds equal to those provided by the federal government. In its first year, the federal government would spend a total of $15 million; for each subsequent year, the total amount appropriated would decrease by $1 million. Blair structured the bill in this way to preempt arguments that he sought a federal takeover of the nation's schools. He claimed that the allocation formula would allow states to use federal funding as a way to jump-start self-sustaining public education systems. Permanent federal intervention would not therefore be necessary.[78] To ensure that the funds would be spent wisely, the bill created a federal supervisor for each state who was empowered to

71. In the House, they held an advantage of twenty-three seats. In the Senate they retained majority status thanks to the support of William Mahone (a Readjuster from Virginia) and the vice president's tie-breaking vote.

72. See De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question*; Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt*.

73. For more on the fight over the federal elections bill, see Valelly, "Partisan Entrepreneurship and Policy Windows." For more on the silver Republicans, see Fred Wellborn, "The Influence of the Silver-Republican Senators, 1889–1891," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 14 (March 1928): 462–80.

74. Frances Lee, *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016). See also Frances Lee, "Patronage, Logrolls, and 'Polarization': Congressional Parties of the Gilded Age, 1876–1896," *Studies in American Political Development* 30 (2016): 116–27.

75. Blair quoted in McKinney, *Henry W. Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 54.

76. *Congressional Record*, 47th Congress, 1st Sess., December 6, 1881, 21.

77. Crofts, "The Black Response," 42. According to data included in the 1880 census, eight of the eleven states of the Confederacy had illiteracy rates over 40 percent. Among freedmen specifically, the illiteracy rate topped 75 percent. For more, see "Support of Common Schools," House Report No. 495, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., 1–5.

78. *Congressional Record*, 47th Congress, 1st Sess., December 20, 1881, 226–28.

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recommend a rescission of funds as punishment for fraud or misuse.

In an important concession to Southern members, S. 151 "demanded literal adherence to the idea of 'separate but equal.'"[79] In particular it stipulated, "nothing herein shall deprive children of different races, living in the same community but attending separate schools, from receiving the benefits of this act, the same as though the attendance therein were without distinction of race."[80] This provision, however, guaranteed that the only way white children would receive federal funds would be for states to ensure that schools serving black children received an equal proportion of total funds spent. If states did not provide equal allocation to black schools, they would have to forego federal support.

In a three-hour speech advocating for his bill, Blair marshaled mountains of census data to illustrate "actual condition of popular education in this country." He revealed how little Southern states in particular were doing to educate their children. Republican government would only survive if the public could read and write, he claimed. Universal education was one part of a strategy for ending the last "part of the [Civil] War" against the "forces of ignorance."[81] Providing federal funds to elementary and secondary schools was an important way in which the government worked to preserve itself.[82] Accordingly, Blair argued, the opportunity for learning to do both must "be provided at the public charge."[83] Many Southern Democrats endorsed this view. Senator Lucius Lamar (D-MS), for example, declared his support for S. 151 because "no state could stand secure but on the ground of right, virtue, knowledge, and truth."[84]

Congress took no action on Blair's proposal prior to adjournment in August 1882. Between August and December, when Congress reconvened for a lame-duck session, President Arthur, the American Social Science Association, and the National Education Assembly endorsed S. 151.[85] The Interstate Education Alliance—a coalition of white, Southern educators—also called on Congress to enact the proposal. Teachers' associations, associations of state superintendents, and other local civic organizations operating throughout the South also mobilized to push for the bill.[86] Finally, as Table 1 illustrates, Congress received 272 petitions calling for the Blair Bill's enactment between 1881 and 1883.[87]

Responding to these demonstrations of support, Blair moved quickly to procure a special order that would bring his bill up for debate. Here he ran into the first instance of Republican opposition. Senator John Logan (R-IL) had authored his own education proposal, which he did not want to set aside. Where the Blair Bill sought to fund education through general revenue, Logan's bill aimed to raise funds through a new tax on whiskey.[88] More importantly, Logan also opposed appropriating money in proportion to state illiteracy rates. Speaking on the floor, he argued "that the proposition to distribute this money according to illiteracy is a proposition to ask a certain number of states to pay taxes to educate others. I do not think the country is in favor of any such proposition."[89] The sectional basis of Logan's opposition would consistently handicap Blair's efforts. Logan reflected a view held by some within the GOP that the federal government owed nothing to black citizens beyond emancipation. From Logan's perspective, residents of Illinois had no obligation to support the education of black southerners only recently freed from hundreds of years of slavery. Republican infighting thus led the Senate to table both education bills until the next Congress met.[90]

When the 48th Congress (1883–85) convened in December 1883, Blair immediately reintroduced his bill.[91] By this time, the political environment had shifted considerably. While the Republicans controlled the presidency and had a two-vote majority in the Senate, the Democrats now controlled the House.[92] The new political context convinced Blair that his policy and political goals could not be achieved without the support of Southern members. This largely explains the substantive differences between S. 151 and the newly introduced bill, S. 398. Highly suspicious of federal intervention into state functions, Southern Democrats opposed the federal supervisors created by Blair's initial bill. In an August 1883 speech before the National Education Assembly, Blair made known his willingness to instead allow for state administration of funds.[93] As we discuss

79. Crofts, "The Black Response," 43.

80. *Congressional Record*, 47th Congress, 1st Sess., June 13, 1882, 4833.

81. Ibid., 4831.

82. Ibid., 4820–33.

83. Ibid., 4824.

84. "Education in the South," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1884, 1.

85. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 91.

86. There is also evidence that these sorts of advocacy groups had a noticeable impact on state and local elections in North Carolina and Tennessee. See Dan M. Robison, "Governor Robert L. Taylor and the Blair Educational Bill in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 2 (October 1931): 28–49; Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "North Carolina and Federal Aid to Education: Public Reaction to the Blair Bill, 1881–1890," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 40 (October 1963): 465–88.

87. Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid, First Phase*, 95.

88. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 55.

89. *Congressional Record*, 47th Congress, 2nd Sess., January 9, 1883, 1015.

90. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 55.

91. *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., December 5, 1883, 36.

92. In the 47th House, the GOP held a 151–128 majority; now they were at a significant minority (117–196).

93. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 92.

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Table 1. Number of Petitions Supporting the Blair Bill by Region, 1881–1891

	47th Congress (1881–83)	48th Congress (1883–85)	49th Congress (1885–87)	50th Congress (1887–89)	51st Congress (1889–91)
South	225	132	154	109	39
Northeast	33	11	168	226	42
Middle West	9	5	129	146	12
Far West	5	3	14	34	2
Total	272	151	465	515	95

Source. Adapted from Gordon Canfield Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid, First Phase: A History of the Attempts to Obtain Federal Aid for the Common Schools, 1870–1890* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), 95.

below, the effort to weaken this provision led to intra-party conflict among Republicans.

Blair also worked to maintain Southern support by once again protecting funding for states with segregated schools. Despite being a concession to Southern whites, this provision did not disqualify the bill in the eyes of many black citizens. An April 1884 story in the *Washington Post*, for example, describes a "largely attended mass meeting" organized by the Union Bethel Historical and Literary Association to support the Blair Bill. Frederick Douglass and other notable black public intellectuals were among those at the meeting.[94] Douglass would continue speaking on behalf of the bill until it failed for the final time in 1890.[95] Black teachers' associations in some Southern states also pressed elected officials to support the bill.[96] While Daniel Crofts makes clear that black civic organizations and leaders were not uniformly supportive of Blair, he does find that many believed federal education funding to be a "ray of hope."[97] In this way, the Blair Bill served as a political vehicle for Republicans to continue cultivating the support of black voters in the South.

Debate on Blair's new proposal began in March 1884. Once again, he began with a long floor speech built upon a foundation of education statistics culled from the 1880 Census. To meet the nation's educational need, S. 398 proposed to distribute $105 million over ten years. In addition, the bill called for funds to be allocated to states based on the illiteracy rate, required states to match one-third of federal funds appropriated over the first five years after enactment and dollar-for-dollar during the last five years, and allowed states—rather than a federal authority—to oversee the expenditures.[98]

Blair spent a significant amount of time defending the separate-but-equal provision. He argued that separate but equal was acceptable as long as it was enforced. "The distribution shall be made in such a way as to equalize the money that goes to each child per capita throughout the state … to produce an equalization of school privileges throughout the state," Blair claimed, "I do not think that anything could be more just."[99] Blair was left to put his faith in state-level officials throughout the South who would be responsible for distributing the money Congress appropriated.

Senate consideration of Blair's proposal ran through March and into April 1884. Over the course of these four weeks, Blair again confronted opposition from fellow Republicans—mostly from the West. For example, John Ingalls (R-KS) questioned the view that "we are under any obligation to educate the blacks of the South."[100] Similarly, Joseph Dolph (R-OR) argued that states outside the South had no obligation to provide funds to educate the poor white citizens or poor black citizens of the former Confederacy.[101] This internal resistance to the bill demonstrates in early form the Silver-Republican bloc whose influence would peak in the 1890s.[102] Contemporaneous observers also noted the regional bases of GOP opposition. A March 1884 article in the *Washington Post,* for example, argued that should the bill fail, Republican "sectional conspirators" would be to blame.[103]

Democrats, on the other hand, tended to object for "constitutional" reasons. The 1884 Democratic Party Platform, for example, declared the party "opposed

94. "The Blair Educational Bill: A Mass Meeting Held by Colored Citizens to Urge Its Passage," *Washington Post*, April 16, 1884, 1.

95. "Douglass to His Race: A Notable Address Delivered by the Colored Statesman," *Washington Post*, October 22, 1890, 7.

96. Gatewood Jr., "North Carolina and Federal Aid to Education," 474.

97. Crofts, "The Black Response," 51.

98. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 93.

99. *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., April 7, 1884, 2715.

100. Ingalls quoted in Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 64.

101. *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., March 26, 1884, 2285.

102. Wellborn, "The Influence of the Silver-Republican Senators," 462–80.

103. "Why the Blair Bill Is Opposed," *Washington Post*, March 26, 1884.

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to all propositions which, upon any pretext, would convert the general government into a machine for collecting taxes to be distributed among the states or the citizens thereof."[104] Contemporaneous news accounts attributed this provision to those who opposed the Blair Bill.[105] As we discuss more below, Democratic opposition also came from those who saw federal expenditures for education as a way to sabotage efforts to reduce the tariff.

To agree on a compromise, Senate Republicans met as a caucus and established a nine-member committee charged with developing a consensus approach to federal aid.[106] This committee produced a revised measure that appropriated $77 million over eight years, stipulated that states would not receive more money from the federal government than they spent on education at the state or local level, required that black and white schools receive equal funding, and mandated that states submit annual reports to the federal government detailing how they spent the money they received.[107]

In early April 1884 the Senate considered important provisions to the newly revised bill. One such provision, offered by Senator Benjamin Harrison (R-IN), addressed Blair's willingness to trust that Southern members would distribute money equally between schools for black children and those for white children. Harrison's amendment empowered the secretary of the interior to "hear and examine any complaints of misappropriations or unjust discrimination in the use of funds."[108] The amendment also required the secretary to present the findings of his investigation to Congress before any additional money would be spent in the state under suspicion. In this way, Harrison addressed a concern raised by some Republicans that the bill did not provide enough federal oversight. Harrison's amendment passed 24–22, in a near party-line vote (see Table 2).[109] Southern Democrats' united opposition demonstrated their continued resistance to the exercise of federal power for the purpose of ensuring equal treatment of black citizens.

Maintaining the support of this fragile coalition also led the GOP to adopt an amendment authored by Senator John Sherman (R-OH). The Sherman amendment explicitly prohibited Congress from spending any money on "sectarian" schools. While Sherman proclaimed his intentions were simply to keep government from "propagat[ing] any faith," it was clear to contemporaneous observers that he was actually targeting Catholics.[110] Significant opposition to Sherman's amendment, as well as the overall bill, appeared in widely distributed Catholic periodicals. The *Catholic World*, for example, warned its readers that the "Protestant orientation of the common school offered serious danger to Catholics."[111] Sherman's amendment passed 32–18. But unlike the vote on the Harrison amendment, there were intraparty divisions. As Table 2 indicates, the GOP supported the Sherman amendment by a wide margin (20–3), while the Democrats were split (11–15).[112]

To further illustrate those factors influencing votes for and against Sherman's amendment, we examine this roll call in a multivariate regression model. Here we are primarily interested in the extent to which nativist sentiment motivated members to support Sherman's amendment. The dependent variable is a "Pro-Sherman Vote," denoted as 1 if the senator voted for the Sherman amendment and 0 otherwise. Our independent variable of interest is the percentage of foreign-born citizens living in a given senator's state.[113] We expect that senators representing states with higher levels of foreign-born residents would be less likely to support the Sherman amendment (all else equal) due to concerns about angering a politically active subset of their voters.[114] To control for other factors that might influence a senator's vote, we include measures of each senator's ideology, as measured by first- and second-dimension DW-NOMINATE scores. Traditionally, the first NOMINATE dimension is seen as distinguishing members based on their attitudes toward government intervention into the economy. A more "liberal" member (negative on the NOMINATE scale) would support intervention, while a more "conservative" member

104. The platform can be read at the American Presidency Project, "1884 Democratic Party Platform," http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29583.

105. "The National Campaign: Effect of the Failure of the Blair School Bill on the Democrats," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* August 24, 1884, 3.

106. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 67; "Republican Senatorial Caucus," *Washington Post*, April 1, 1884, 1.

107. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 95.

108. *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., April 7, 1884, 2716.

109. Ibid., 2719.

110. Sherman's defense of this amendment can be found in ibid., 2692.

111. Evans, "Catholics and the Blair Education Bill," 279.

112. The three Republican opponents were Angus Cameron (R-WI), Shelby Collum (R-IL), and James Wilson (R-IA), each of whom came from the party's western wing.

113. These data were compiled from Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts*.

114. While senators were not yet directly elected, we have reason to believe that state legislators responsible for choosing senators would be less likely to support those responsible for angering the political machines catering to immigrant voters. Note that at this moment in history, urban machines serving the interest of immigrant voters were themselves a subject of heated debate. For this reason, each member's NOMINATE score should be informed by his attitude toward the federal government's treatment of foreign-born citizens. In other words, our measure of foreign-born citizens tests for the impact of this category of voter above and beyond how their presence already influences a given member's revealed preferences.

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Table 2. Senate Votes on Harrison and Sherman Amendments, 48th Congress

	Harrison Amendment		Sherman Amendment	
Party	Yea	Nay	Yea	Nay
Northern Democrat	0	6	4	4
Southern Democrat	0	15	7	11
Republican	23	1	20	3
Readjuster	1	0	1	0
Total	24	22	32	18

Source. *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., April 7, 1884, 2719; April 7, 1884, 2093.

(positive on the NOMINATE scale) would oppose it.[115] Note that in the late nineteenth century, positive scores register support for the GOP's economic agenda (pro-tariff, hard money), while negative scores register opposition to that program.[116] The second NOMINATE dimension sometimes picks up additional cleavages over time; however, in the 49th Congress, no additional cleavage is apparent.[117] Nevertheless, for completeness, we include it. To measure partisanship, we include dummy variables for Southern and Northern Democrats (with Republican thus representing the excluded category).[118] Finally, we control for the illiteracy rate in a given state, as lawmakers from states with more "illiterates" stood to gain in purely monetary terms from Blair's proposal.

The results, as reported in Table 3, provide some confirming evidence for our claim about the influence of nativism. In Model 2, we find a negative and significant relationship between support for Sherman's amendment and the proportion of foreign-born residents.[119] This relationship fits with John Higham's claim that the reformist wing of the GOP held deeply anti-immigrant attitudes.[120] There is also a strong relationship between a senator's party and his first-dimension NOMINATE score and his support for the Sherman amendment. In the former case, Democrats were significantly less supportive than Republicans. In the latter case, as a given senator's support for the GOP's economic program increases, so does the likelihood he will support Sherman's effort to prohibit state expenditures on Catholic schools.

Following a series of votes on narrower aspects of the bill, the Senate passed S. 398 on April 7, 1884. As the first column of Table 4 illustrates, Republicans and Southern Democrats supported the bill by wide margins, while Northern Democrats (those outside the eleven states of the former Confederacy) opposed it.[121] Despite the lopsided Republican vote, GOP support was weaker than the numbers suggest. Eleven Republicans—including many of the bill's most outspoken opponents—recognized the political liabilities incurred by voting against the measure and chose to absent themselves instead of voting "no."[122] The support provided by Southern Democrats would also prove weaker than the vote suggests. As sectional tensions increased during the latter half of the decade, it would be harder for Blair to keep this part of the coalition in line.

Senate passage was just the first step for Blair and his supporters. Next, they needed to get a similar bill through the House, where the Democrats were in control. The chief obstacle proved to be House Speaker John C. Carlisle (D-KY). Styling himself as a Democrat in the mold of Andrew Jackson, Carlisle was dead-set against GOP tariff policy. One contemporaneous account favorable to Carlisle described his motivation as "support for the rights of people against monopolists of all kind."[123] In the mid-1880s tariff reform—which meant the reduction of tariff rates—was central to the Democratic Party's agenda,

115. DW-NOMINATE scores measure "revealed ideology"—or central tendencies—and are based on a multidimensional (psychometric) unfolding technique applied to the universe of roll-call votes in a given Congress. See Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a basic primer on NOMINATE, see Phil Everson, Rick Valelly, Arjun Viswanath, and Jim Wiseman, "NOMINATE and American Political Development: A Primer," *Studies in American Political Development* 30 (2016): 97–115.

116. More specifically, the mean and median DW-NOMINATE score for House Republicans in the 49th Congress are 0.38 and 0.391. For Democrats the mean and median are −0.365 and −0.357. These data are available at Voteview.com.

117. Poole and Rosenthal, *Congress*, 50.

118. Because NOMINATE scores and party are so highly correlated, we estimate models that include these variables separately.

119. In Model 4, we also find a negative relationship, but the coefficient is not significant at conventional levels.

120. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 40.

121. *Congressional Record*, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., April 7, 1884, 2724.

122. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 71.

123. James Barnes, *John G. Carlisle: Financial Statesman* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1931), 72.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X20000085

Table 3. Senate Vote on Sherman Amendment, 48th Congress

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DW-NOMINATE 1	0.544***	0.67***		
	(0.16)	(0.24)		
DW-NOMINATE 2	−0.28	−0.22		
	(0.19)	(0.19)		
Southern Democrat			−0.51***	−1.14***
			(0.13)	(0.45)
Northern Democrat			−0.31**	−0.51***
			(0.17)	(0.19)
Percent Illiterate		0.005		0.010
		(0.005)		(0.011)
Percent Foreign Born		−0.016*		−0.014
		(0.009)		(0.009)
Constant	0.64***	0.94***	0.87***	1.09***
	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.22)
N	50	50	49	49
F test	10.27***	6.07***	7.06***	4.83***
R^2	0.30	0.35	0.23	0.31

Notes. Coefficients are linear probability estimates, with standard errors in parentheses; *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

putting the House majority at odds with Blair and his supporters. Carlisle's biographer makes clear that he believed "no greater danger threatened the States than the possibility that the surplus [which was created by the GOP's high tariff rates] would be used for purposes which would take from them their right to determine their individual and local affairs."[124] Once implemented this is precisely what the Blair Bill would do.

As speaker, Carlisle leveraged his institutional power to prevent the House from taking up the Blair Bill prior to adjournment in early fall 1884.[125] This delay would prove particularly important because in November 1884, Democrat Grover Cleveland defeated Republican James G. Blaine in the presidential election. As a consequence, Gordon McKinney argues, "many Republicans who felt comfortable with a Republican president overseeing the Southern Democrats' administration of the program were much less enthusiastic about having a Democratic administration in charge."[126]

The 48th Congress took no additional action on Blair's proposal, so he reintroduced the bill in early January 1886, near the start of the 49th Congress (1885–87). Public support for the measure was still high, as measured by the number of petitions received (see Table 1), a threefold increase over the prior Congress. Before debate began on the bill (S. 194), which was identical to the one passed in 1884, Blair wrote President Cleveland in an attempt to win his support. "Should the bill become law," Blair argued, "that administration which should carry its provisions into execution would become illustrious in the annals of America and of mankind."[127] Blair also worked hard to convince skeptical Republicans that the Democratic president could be trusted to administer the program. While Cleveland chose not to take a stand on S. 194, Senate Republicans again voted overwhelmingly in support (see Table 4).[128]

Here again, however, the vote tally obscures GOP skepticism toward Blair's proposal. Echoing many of the objections heard in 1884, Senator Ingalls (R-KS) inveighed against the bill because of its lopsided distribution of funds to Southern states. He then introduced an amendment mandating that the federal government distribute aid based on the number of school-age children living in a state, not the number of illiterates. If adopted, this amendment would have significantly reduced the money committed to

124. Ibid., 137.
125. Ibid., 110–12, 152–53.
126. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 97.
127. Blair quoted in Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 106.
128. *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., March 5, 1886, 2105.

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Table 4. Final-Passage Votes in the Senate on the Blair Bill, 48th–51st Congresses

	48th Congress (S. 398)		49th Congress (S. 194)		50th Congress (S. 371)		51st Congress (S. 185)	
Party	Yea	Nay	Yea	Nay	Yea	Nay	Yea	Nay
Northern Democrat	2	4	4	3	2	11	1	12
Southern Democrat	11	5	12	3	14	6	7	8
Northern Republican	19	2	18	5	22	12	23	17
Southern Republican	1	0	2	0	1	0	–	–
Total	33	11	36	11	39	29	31	37

Notes. "South" here refers to the eleven ex-Confederate states. This differs slightly from the definition by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) for this time period, which also categorizes Kentucky as a Southern state.
Source. Congressional Record, 48th Congress, 1st Sess., April 7, 1884, 2724; 49th Congress, 1st Sess., March 5, 1886, 2105; 50th Congress, 1st Sess., February 15, 1888, 1223; 51st Congress, 1st Sess., March 20, 1890, 2436.

Table 5. Senate Votes on Ingalls and Hale Amendments, 49th Congress

	Ingalls Amendment		Hale Amendment	
Party	Yea	Nay	Yea	Nay
Northern Democrat	1	3	0	4
Southern Democrat	5	10	0	16
Republican	12	9	14	17
Total	18	22	14	37

Source. Congressional Record, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., February 17, 1886, 1561; March 5, 1886, 2102.

the South, thereby putting at risk the Democratic portion of Blair's coalition.[129] Ingalls's amendment lost, 18–24. As Table 5 makes clear, however, it split the GOP, with twelve of twenty-one Republicans voting in favor.[130] This indicates again the precariousness of Blair's coalition, as a majority of Republicans supported an amendment that would have likely killed the bill.

The next Republican challenge came from Senator Eugene Hale (R-ME), whose amendment sought to change the bill's appropriation formula by stipulating that funding would be based on the "proportion that the illiteracy of white and colored persons … had to each other."[131] If adopted, this amendment would have required states with the same number of white and black school-age children, but with two times as many illiterate black children, to spend twice as much money on black schools. "Because it threatened such a drastic reduction of possible federal aid for white public schools in the South," Crofts explains, "the [Hale] amendment made the bill unpalatable" to many Southern senators.[132] As expected, Hale's amendment lost, 14–37, as all Southern Democrats opposed this change. But, perhaps ominously, it again split the GOP (14–17).[133]

Despite the failure of both amendments, the GOP support that they received suggests that a significant number of Republican senators were looking for a politically acceptable way to undermine Blair's proposal. Many appeared to be voting for any provision with the potential to turn Southern members against the bill. And, overall, much of the support for these amendments came from the party's western/midwestern wing.

After passing the Senate, the Blair Bill once again ran into the intractable opposition of Speaker Carlisle. In the 49th Congress, Carlisle used the Education Committee, which he had packed with anti-tariff Democrats, as the vehicle for blocking House consideration of the proposal. The committee

129. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 113.
130. *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., February 17, 1886, 1561.
131. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 113.
132. Crofts argues that this amendment was authored by Senator William Allison (R-IA). After consulting the *Congressional Record*, however, we found that Hale was the amendment's actual sponsor. See Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 114–116; *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., March 5, 1886, 2102.
133. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 119; *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 2nd Sess., March 5, 1886, 2102.

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Table 6. House Votes on Miller and Willis Motions, 49th Congress

	To refer H.R. 7266 to the Education Committee (Miller)		To refer H.R. 7266 to the Labor Committee (Willis)	
Party	Yea	Nay	Yea	Nay
Northern Democrat	61	10	4	63
Southern Democrat	21	56	55	21
Republican	33	67	79	27
Ind. Democrat	1	0	0	1
Total	116	133	138	112

Source. *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., March 29, 1886, 2881; March 29, 1886, 2882.

median on the first NOMINATE dimension for this Congress is negative (−0.201).[134] This supports the view that, broadly speaking, the economic commitments of committee members made it a hostile venue for the federal aid bill.[135] And, indeed, once the committee had the bill, it voted to postpone any action on the measure.[136]

With federal aid languishing once again, Blair's counterpart in the House, Rep. Albert Willis (D-KY), put together a bipartisan coalition of members to goad the House into action. On March 29, 1886, Willis introduced a federal aid bill identical to the one that had passed in the Senate (H.R. 7266).[137] He then sought to have this version referred to the Labor Committee, a less staunchly anti-tariff committee, which he felt would deal with it more favorably. And while the Labor Committee median on the first NOMINATE dimension for this Congress was also negative (−0.141), it appeared more amenable to the GOP's economic agenda than the Education Committee.[138]

The House took two separate roll call votes on Willis's strategy (see Table 6). The first, spearheaded by James Miller (D-TX) was to force H.R. 7266 back to the Education Committee. That vote failed, 116–133. The House then voted to approve Willis's motion, 138–112, with a majority of Southern Democrats and a majority of Republicans opposing nearly all Northern Democrats. Because it was designed to ensure a final vote on the Blair Bill in the House, the Willis motion should be seen as a "test vote" to measure overall House support.[139]

We examine the roll call on the Willis motion in a multivariate model to see how ideology, party, potential distributive benefits based on illiteracy rates, and district demographics—percent foreign born, specifically—influenced members' votes. The results, which appear in Table 7, show the contours of the House coalition that Blair would need to rely upon. We find that support for the GOP's economic agenda significantly predicts support for the Willis motion. As a given member of the House becomes more conservative on the first NOMINATE dimension, his support for the Willis motion increases. State-level illiteracy rates are also a reliable predictor of member support, suggesting that House members were sensitive to the distributional benefits offered by the bill.

Moving now to an examination of support within the parties, we run models for Democrats and Republicans individually. Table 8 reports the results by party. Democrats who are more conservative on the first NOMINATE dimension—those who are more "pro-tariff"—were significantly more likely to vote for the Willis motion (Model 2). In other words, Blair's bipartisan support hinged on those Democrats who were, on average, less opposed to the GOP's economic program. State-level illiteracy rates are also significant, meaning that Democratic Party support was driven by the distributional gains offered by Blair's proposal.

Among Republicans, we find that those members from districts with higher proportions of foreign-born residents were significantly less likely to support

134. The members of the House Education Committee, with their first-dimension NOMINATE scores, were James F. Miller (D-TX): −0.575; Allen D. Candler (D-GA): −0.521; Albert S. Willis (D-KY): −0.435; James N. Burnes (D-MO): −0.379; David Wyatt Aiken (D-SC): −0.308; William C. Maybury (D-MI): −0.249; Peter P. Mahoney (D-NY): −0.201; Beriah Wilkins (D-OH); Horace B. Strait (R-MN): 0.29; James O'Donnell (R-MI): 0.338; Jacob M. Campbell (R-PA): 0.346; William Whiting (R-MA): 0.361; and Isaac H. Taylor (R-OH): 0.446.

135. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 123.

136. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 121.

137. *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., March 29, 1886, 2881.

138. The members of the House Labor Committee, with their first-dimension NOMINATE scores, were John W. Daniel (D-VA): −0.457; William H. Crain (D-TX): −0.35; Timothy E. Tarsney (D-MI): −0.256; Frank Lawler (D-IL): −0.234; Martin A. Foran (D-OH): −0.191; John J. O'Neill (D-MO): −0.165; Henry B. Lovering (D-MA): −0.141; James B. Weaver (IA): −0.078; Darwin R. James (R-NY): 0.332; Martin A. Haynes (R-NH): 0.346; E. H. Funston (R-KS): 0.378; James Buchanan (R-NJ): 0.416; and Franklin Bound (R-PA): 0.475.

139. Crofts, "The South and the Blair Bill," 275.

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Table 7. House Vote on Willis Motion, 49th Congress

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DW-NOMINATE 1	0.26***	0.79***		
	(0.07)	(0.06)		
DW-NOMINATE 2	−0.16**	−0.05		
	(0.06)	(0.05)		
Southern Democrat			−0.01	−0.53***
			(0.06)	(0.11)
Northern Democrat			−0.65***	−0.67***
			(0.06)	(0.05)
Percent Illiterate		0.019***		0.014***
		(0.002)		(0.003)
Percent Foreign Born		−0.004		−0.003
		(0.003)		(0.0039)
Constant	0.57***	0.28***	0.75***	0.676***
	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.07)
N	250	250	249	249
F test	10.78***	43.12***	67.05***	44.85***
R^2	0.08	0.41	0.35	0.43

Notes. Coefficients are linear probability estimates, with standard errors in parentheses; *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

Table 8. House Vote on Willis Motion by Party, 49th Congress

	Democrats		Republicans	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
DW-NOMINATE 1	−1.43***	0.67**	0.12	0.20
	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.35)	(0.36)
DW-NOMINATE 2	−0.18**	0.10	−0.27***	−0.28***
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Percent Illiterate		0.024***		0.002
		(0.003)		(0.005)
Percent Foreign Born		−0.001		−0.009*
		(0.004)		(0.005)
Constant	−0.21*	0.07	0.70***	0.80***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.16)	(0.21)
N	143	143	106	106
F test	19.70***	47.14***	5.01***	3.93***
R^2	0.22	0.58	0.09	0.13

Notes. Coefficients are linear probability estimates, with standard errors in parentheses; *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

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Willis's motion and therefore less likely to support the underlying bill. GOP House members, like their Senate counterparts, seem to reflect the party's nativist tendencies. State-level illiteracy rates, however, are unrelated to a given member's vote. We also see that the second-dimension NOMINATE score is highly predictive of opposition to the bill, thereby suggesting that those with more conservative views on currency issues (bimetallism)—which defined the second NOMINATE dimension in the House from the Civil War through the realignment of the 1890s—were less likely to support the Willis motion.[140]

These results demonstrate that a bipartisan, interregional coalition supportive of Blair's approach did exist in the House. Moderate Republicans joined with Democrats from states with high illiteracy rates to push the Blair proposal.

Unfortunately for Willis and his supporters, the change in venues did not bring about the desired results. The Labor Committee instead replaced the provisions allocating funding based on the number of illiterates living in a state with language guaranteeing all states an equal amount of federal aid.[141] This change was unpalatable to Blair's Southern coalition. Proponents of the substitute amendment understood this and used it as a mechanism to sink the bill. Indeed, one of the amendment's cosponsors, Rep. William Crain (D-TX), characterized the proposal as an "unholy offspring of an ill-assorted alliance between the bleak hills and chilly atmosphere of New Hampshire and the blue-grass fields and sunny clime of Kentucky."[142] In the end, House leadership refused to allow a vote on any legislation with language identical to the Blair Bill, so federal aid once again died.

At the beginning of the 50th Congress (1887–89), Blair reintroduced his bill (now S. 371). He had reason to be optimistic about its fate. Public support, as measured by petitions sent to Congress, remained high (see Table 1). In addition, the Democratic Party's advantage in the House had also shrunk to fifteen seats, 167–152. Crofts attributes a portion of those losses to opposition to the Blair Bill, further testifying to its popularity.[143] When the Senate opened debate in January 1888, Blair immediately worked to capitalize on what he saw as broad public support by presenting it as an electoral issue. The impending presidential election provided him with an "opportunity to go directly to the people to secure backing for the bill."[144] Accordingly, the Republican Party Platform provided explicit support for the bill. "The State or Nation, or both combined," Republicans argued, "should support free institutions of learning sufficient to afford every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education."[145] In addition, Benjamin Harrison—the GOP presidential nominee in 1888—had supported the Blair Bill while serving in the Senate.[146]

When the bill came up for debate in the Senate, Blair's opponents took their usual positions. Some Democrats opposed the measure because they did not believe in education for black citizens. Senator John Morgan (D-AL), for example, claimed that state-sponsored schooling for black children would keep them "out of the cotton fields, where their labor was needed."[147] More important than these explicitly racist arguments, however, was an increasingly bipartisan sentiment that federal aid would do more harm than good. A *New York Times* editorial in February 1888, for example, stated that "one of the most precious rights of a State is that character for stability and self-control which comes of the necessity of taking care of its own interests."[148]

As he had in the past, Blair overcame all of the bill's opponents. As the third column of Table 4 illustrates, however, the number of Republican senators opposing the bill grew significantly (from five to twelve) in just two years. In an editorial published immediately following Senate passage, the *New York Times* offered one explanation for the growing Republican opposition: "The fact is that [Blair's proposal] has little support in public opinion of the country."[149] Absent reliable polling data, any assessment of public opinion is guesswork. Yet the Senate vote provides some evidence of an increasing willingness on the part of Blair's copartisans to publicly oppose federal education aid.

Blair and his supporters would be stymied yet again in the House, as the bill was sent to the Education Committee, now chaired by Rep. Crain, where it languished. But Blair's coalition found some reason for optimism after the 1888 election, as GOP victories resulted in unified Republican control of government for the first time since 1875.[150] Blair took this as a sign that his bill's time had finally come. According to Gordon McKinney, he attributed Republican electoral successes to support for his bill.[151]

Yet because the Blair Bill relied so much on the support of Southern Democrats, the Republican

140. See Poole and Rosenthal, *Congress*, 48.

141. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 126.

142. *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 1st Sess., April 1, 1886, 3011.

143. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill, 132.

144. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 124.

145. The Republican Party's 1888 Platform can be read at the American Presidency Project, "Republican Platform of 1888," http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29627.

146. Harrison voted yea on the final-passage vote in the 48th Congress, but only offered a "paired yea" in the 49th Congress.

147. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 159.

148. "Education and State Rights," *New York Times*, February 15, 1888, 4.

149. "Editorial," *New York Times*, February 19, 1888, 4.

150. Control of the Senate was divided during the 47th Congress (1881–1883).

151. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 124, 125.

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landslide generated a new political problem. Perhaps aiming to capitalize on his party's political advantage, President Harrison used his inaugural address to call for "further safeguards" to ensure the legitimacy of national elections. Here he was suggesting strengthened federal powers over the electoral process, a policy change wholly unpalatable to Southern Democrats. By 1889–90, racial violence had increased, and according to Albion Tourgee—a long-time advocate for black rights in the South—the year 1890 represented "the most dangerous epoch [for blacks] since 1860."[152] As a consequence, Southern Democrats proved more skeptical of all Republican-initiated federal programs.[153]

Debate on Blair's proposal (now S. 185) began for the final time on February 5, 1890. By this point, the arguments for and against the bill were so well known that few members lingered in the chamber to hear Blair once again make his case. More to the point, Blair's long-windedness was frustrating fellow senators. According to one contemporaneous account, "when Mr. Blair began his speech there was a general exodus of senators on both sides of the chamber, and of the eighty-two senators, only five remained while Blair was talking. The press gallery also vacated."[154] An editorial in the *New York Times* characterized Blair as a "bore" and argued that his continued advocacy on behalf of the bill simply allowed him to "relieve his own mind."[155] By mid-March, fellow Republican Preston Plumb (KS) was arguing that Blair's effort to "keep this bill here, all the time, week after week, and month after month, in such a way as to disarrange all the business of the Senate, is not fair."[156]

What distinguishes this iteration of the debate from those preceding it was, according to Blair, the fact that "several leading Republicans who had always supported the bill … would do so no longer."[157] This pattern started with President Harrison who, in his first annual message as president, chose not to provide an endorsement. Only three years earlier, Harrison had implored the Senate to pass the Blair Bill so that "an increasing body of Southern men" would be taught to show a more "kindly disposition toward the elevation of the colored man." In early 1889, however, Harrison expressed dissatisfaction with the bill's plan to appropriate money over eight years. "One Congress cannot bind a succeeding one," he now argued.[158] Moreover, when Republicans called for a final vote on the measure in March 1890, President Harrison did not explicitly call on Senate Republicans to vote for it.[159]

Opposition to Blair's proposal among Senate Republicans demonstrates how the party's eroding commitment to black civil rights contributed to the durability of local control. John Coit Spooner (R-WI), an influential Republican who had voted for the Blair Bill in the 49th Congress, provided the most thorough defense of those party members who came to oppose federal aid. Spooner began by "deny[ing] that the Republican Party is committed to the bill." Downplaying the GOP's clear role in pushing Blair's proposal, Spooner pointed to its bipartisan support as evidence for his claim that it "can hardly with justice be said to be a party measure."[160] Its failure, he implied, could not be attributed solely to Republican defections. Moreover, he used the bill's bipartisan, interregional appeal as a reason for opposing it.

After disclaiming responsibility for the bill's failure, Spooner went on to make an explicitly sectional argument to defend himself and other Republican opponents. Citing "leading newspapers in the South" that had editorialized against Blair, as well as the growing Southern economy, Spooner claimed that southerners no longer wanted or needed federal aid. He held that Southern state governments could now fund their own schools, and he was no longer willing to ask "farmers of the west and northwest" to contribute to the education of black and white residents of the South.[161] Similar claims were made by Senators Preston Plumb (R-KS), Gilbert Pierce (R-ND), John Sherman (R-OH), and Eugene Hale (R-ME).[162] Prioritizing their concern for white farmers in the West, the GOP knowingly abandoned one of the last remaining policy reforms aimed at advancing civil rights and shoring up the party's Southern wing.

Republicans also used the murder of a deputy U.S. marshal in Florida to further justify the party's turn against federal aid to the South. Protesting that the Blair Bill did not do enough to ensure that the appropriated money would be spent in accordance with the principle of separate but equal, Republicans like Spooner and Sherman claimed that the bill conceded too much to the South.[163] The GOP, in other words, was willing to deny black southerners aid it had promised for nearly a decade as a way of punishing the region's white majority. The Republican coalition supporting the measure collapsed under the weight of GOP opposition because some argued that the bill did too much—proposing too much spending

152. Tourgee quoted in Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 235.

153. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 181.

154. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 127.

155. "Senator Blair's Speech," *New York Times*, February 21, 1890, 4.

156. *Congressional Record*, 51st Congress, 1st Sess., March 12, 1890, 2149.

157. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 129.

158. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 198.

159. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 129.

160. *Congressional Record*, 51st Congress, 1st Sess., March 3, 1890, 1865.

161. Ibid., 1868–73.

162. *Congressional Record*, 51st Congress, 1st Sess., March 5, 1890, 1938, 1999, 2199, 2384.

163. Ibid., 2200.

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Table 9. Republican Votes in the Senate on the Blair Bill, 48th–51st Congresses

STATE	NAME	48	49	50	51	STATE	NAME	48	49	50	51
California	Miller, J. F.	N	NV	–	–	Nevada	Jones, J. P.	NV	N	N	N
California	Stanford, L.	–	pY	Y	Y	Nevada	Stewart, W.	–	–	Y	Y
Colorado	Bowen, T. M.	NV	Y	Y	–	New Hampshire	Blair, H. W.	Y	Y	Y	N
Colorado	Hill, N. P.	NV	–	–	–	New Hampshire	Pike, A. F.	Y	pY	–	–
Colorado	Teller, H.	–	Y	Y	Y	New Hampshire	Chandler, W.	–	–	Y	Y
Colorado	Wolcott, E.	–	–	–	N	New Jersey	Sewell, W. J.	NV	pN	–	–
Connecticut	Hawley, J. R.	N	pN	N	N	New York	Lapham, E. G.	pY	–	–	–
Connecticut	Platt, O. H.	Y	NV	Y	Y	New York	Miller, W.	Y	Y	.	.
Delaware	Higgins, A.	–	–	–	Y	New York	Evarts, W.	–	Y	Y	Y
Illinois	Cullom, S. M.	Y	Y	Y	Y	New York	Hiscock, F.	–	–	N	N
Illinois	Logan, J. A.	Y	Y	–	–	North Dakota	Casey, L. R.	–	–	–	NV
Illinois	Farwell, C.	–	–	N	N	North Dakota	Pierce, G. A.	–	–	–	N
Indiana	Harrison, B.	Y	pY	–	–	Ohio	Sherman, J.	NV	NV	NV	N
Iowa	Allison, W. B.	pY	NV	Y	Y	Oregon	Dolph, J. N.	Y	Y	Y	Y
Iowa	Wilson, J. F.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Oregon	Mitchell, J.	–	Y	Y	Y
Kansas	Ingalls, J. J.	pN	N	N	N	Pennsylvania	Cameron, J. D.	NV	NV	Y	NV
Kansas	Plumb, P. B.	pN	N	N	N	Pennsylvania	Mitchell, J.	pY	pY	–	–
Maine	Frye, W. P.	Y	N	N	N	Pennsylvania	Quay, M. S.	–	–	Y	NV
Maine	HALE, E.	pN	N	N	N	Rhode Island	Aldrich, N. W.	NV	NV	N	N
Massachusetts	Dawes, H. L.	Y	pY	Y	Y	Rhode Island	Anthony, H. B.	NV	–	–	–
Massachusetts	Hoar, G. F.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Rhode Island	Chace, J.	–	pN	pN	.
Michigan	Conger, O. D.	Y	Y	–	–	Rhode Island	Dixon, N. F.	–	–	–	N
Michigan	Palmer, T. W.	pY	Y	Y	–	South Dakota	Moody, G. C.	–	–	–	Y
Michigan	Stockbridge, F.	–	–	Y	Y	South Dakota	Pettigrew, R.	–	–	–	Y
Michigan	McMillan, J.	–	–	–	Y	Vermont	Edmunds, G. F.	Y	pY	pY	Y
Minnesota	McMillan, S.	Y	pY	–	–	Vermont	Morrill, J. S.	Y	Y	Y	Y
Minnesota	Sabin, D. M.	pN	NV	N	–	Virginia	Mahone, W.	NV	Y	–	–
Minnesota	Davis, C. K.	–	–	N	N	Virginia	Riddleberger, H.	Y	Y	Y	–
Minnesota	Washburn, W.	–	–	–	pN	Washington	Allen, J. B.	–	–	–	Y
Nebraska	Manderson, C.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Washington	Squire, W. C.	–	–	–	Y
Nebraska	Van Wyck, C.	NV	Y	–	–	Wisconsin	Cameron, A.	Y	–	–	–
Nebraska	Paddock, A.	–	–	pY	pY	Wisconsin	Sawyer, P.	Y	Y	Y	N
						Wisconsin	Spooner, J.	–	Y	N	N

Notes. Codes for votes are as follows: Y = yea; N = nay; pY = paired yea; pN = paired nay; NV = not voting; and – = not a member. Yellow indicates a shift in support for the Blair bill by the same person. Orange indicates a shift in support for the Blair bill due to replacement (of one senator for another).

and binding the federal government to fund years into the future—and because it did not do enough—as oversight mechanisms were too weak. Coalitional tension of this kind therefore helped to shore up local control of education.

In an interview published in the *New York Mail and Press*, Blair recounted his dawning awareness that a significant number of Republicans had turned against the measure. "If an early vote was taken," Blair recalled, "the bill would be defeated by about a ten or twelve [vote] majority." In response, he "adopted the tactics of getting time." From February 17 to 20, Blair mounted a one-man "reverse filibuster" on behalf of his bill. Over those four days, he begged Republicans to honor their obligations to the freedmen and their families. "You can reconstruct the South," Blair argued, "in no other way than by beginning with the children."[164]

After nearly two months of debate on the measure, Blair agreed to bring his bill to a vote. Newspaper accounts published on March 20, 1890, predicted a close result, but according to Daniel Crofts and Gordon McKinney, Blair was confident that he had

164. Blair interview quoted in Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 199–201.

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Table 10. Democratic Votes in the Senate on the Blair Bill, 48th–51st Congresses

STATE	NAME	48	49	50	51	STATE	NAME	48	49	50	51
Alabama	Morgan, J. T.	N	pN	N	N	Mississippi	George, J. Z.	Y	Y	Y	Y
Alabama	Pugh, J. L.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Mississippi	Lamar, L. Q. C.	pY	–	–	–
Arkansas	Garland, A. H.	Y	–	–	–	Mississippi	Walthall, E.	–	Y	Y	N
Arkansas	Walker, J. D.	pY	–	–	–	Missouri	Cockrell, F.	NV	N	pN	N
Arkansas	Berry, J. H.	–	Y	Y	N	Missouri	Vest, G. G.	pN	pN	N	N
Arkansas	Jones, J. K.	–	Y	Y	N	Nevada	Fair, J. G.	NV	NV	–	–
California	Farley, J. T.	pN	–	–	–	New Jersey	McPherson, J.	pN	NV	pN	pN
California	Hearst, G.	–	–	Y	Y	New Jersey	Blodgett, R.	–	–	N	N
Delaware	Bayard, T. F.	N	–	–	–	North Carolina	Ransom, M. W.	Y	Y	Y	NV
Delaware	Saulsbury, E.	N	pN	N	–	North Carolina	Vance, Z. B.	pY	Y	Y	pY
Delaware	Gray, G.	–	N	N	N	Ohio	Pendleton, G.	N	–	–	–
Florida	Call, W.	Y	Y	Y	pY	Ohio	Payne, H. B.	–	Y	Y	N
Florida	Jones, C. W.	Y	NV	–	–	Oregon	Slater, J. H.	pN	–	–	–
Florida	Pasco, S.	–	–	Y	Y	South Carolina	Butler, M. C.	N	pN	N	NV
Georgia	Brown, J. E.	Y	pY	Y	NV	South Carolina	Hampton, W.	Y	pY	Y	Y
Georgia	Colquitt, A.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Tennessee	Harris, I. G.	N	N	N	N
Indiana	Voorhees, D.	pY	Y	N	N	Tennessee	Jackson, H. E.	Y	Y	–	–
Indiana	Turpie, D.	–	–	N	N	Tennessee	Bate, W. B.	–	–	N	N
Kentucky	Beck, J. B.	pN	NV	N	pN	Texas	Coke, R.	N	N	N	N
Kentucky	Williams, J.	Y	–	–	–	Texas	Maxey, S. B.	N	N	–	–
Kentucky	Blackburn, J.	–	Y	N	N	Texas	Reagan, J.	–	–	N	N
Louisiana	Gibson, R. L.	pY	Y	pY	pY	Virginia	Daniel, J.	–	–	Y	Y
Louisiana	Jonas, B. F.	Y	–	–	–	Virginia	Barbour, J.	–	–	–	Y
Louisiana	Eustis, J.	–	Y	Y	pN	West Virginia	Camden, J. N.	pY	NV	–	–
Maryland	Gorman, A. P.	NV	pN	pN	N	West Virginia	Kenna, J. E.	Y	Y	N	N
Maryland	Groome, J. B.	N	–	–	–	West Virginia	Faulkner, C. J.	–	–	N	N
Maryland	Wilson, E.	–	N	N	N						

Notes. Codes for votes are as follows: Y = yea, N = nay, pY = paired yea, pN = paired nay, NV = not voting, and – = not a member. Yellow indicates a shift in support for the Blair bill by the same person. Orange indicates a shift in support for the Blair bill due to replacement (of one senator for another).

the necessary support to ensure its enactment.[165] He miscalculated. "Sometime during the night," Blair recalled in an interview, Senators Henry Payne (D-OH) and John Sherman (R-OH) both decided to reverse positions and oppose the measure. Sherman's reversal in particular surprised Blair.[166] But Sherman was not alone. The final vote tally shows a significant number of defections, as slightly more than 40 percent of Republicans cast votes to kill federal education aid (see the fourth column of Table 4). They were joined by a bare majority of Southern Democrats and all but one Northern Democrat.

To better understand the dynamics of the voting on the Blair Bill, we drill down and examine the individual vote choices of Republicans and Democrats in the Senate—including "pairing"—on the four final-passage votes between the 48th and 51st Congresses.[167] Our goal is to identify when changes occurred, and whether they were due to sitting senators switching their vote (conversion) or new senators casting a different vote (replacement). On the Republican side (Table 9), support remained strong between the 48th and 49th Congresses, as only one senator (William Frye, RI) switched from yea to nay. Between the 49th and 50th Congresses, only one GOP senator (John Spooner, WI) again switched; however, two new GOP senators—Charles Farwell (IL) and Frank Hiscock (NY)—voted nay in the 50th Congress after replacing Republicans John Logan (IL) and Warner Miller (NY), who had voted yea in the 49th Congress. Three of the other four GOP nay votes in the 50th

165. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 203; McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 128–29.

166. Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 208–10.

167. A "pair" occurs when two members on opposite sides of a bill agree to be absent when it comes to a vote so that their absence has no effect on its outcome. Pairing allows an absent member to have recorded (in the *Congressional Record*) how he would have voted had he been present.

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Congress came from senators who were present but did not vote in the 49th Congress: John Hawley (WI); Dwight Sabin, (MN), and Nelson Aldrich (RI).[168] Between the 50th and 51st Congresses, two Republican senators switched their votes from yea to nay: Philetus Sawyer (WI) and Henry Blair (RI). Blair switched from yea to nay because he saw that his proposal was about to lose, and by switching before the final tabulation was announced, he put himself in a position to call for reconsideration. Edward Wolcott (CO) also voted nay, after replacing Thomas Bowen (CO), who had voted yea in the previous Congress. Finally, John Sherman (OH) cast a vote, after sitting out the previous three. He had voiced support for the bill, but ultimately chose instead to vote nay.[169]

On the Democratic side (Table 10), some significant switches occurred between the 49th and 50th Congresses: Daniel Voorhees (IN), Joseph Blackburn (KY), and John Kenna (WV) all switched from yea to nay, while William Bate (TN) voted nay after replacing Howell Jackson (TN), who voted yea in the previous Congress. Here we see clear erosion of Southern support for the Blair Bill. Between the 50th and 51st Congresses, three Southern Democrats, perhaps fearing that Republicans would go back on some of their states' rights promises regarding administration of the new education program—switched from yea to nay: James Berry (AR), James Jones (AR), and Edward Walthall (MS). And four other Southern Democrats who voted yea in the 50th Congress chose to pair off or not vote at all: Wilkinson Call (FL), James Eustis (LA), Matt Ransom (NC), and Zeb Vance (NC). Henry Payne (OH) also switched from yea to nay.

Historians have not reached a consensus on why Republicans turned against the Blair Bill. McKinney suggests that Republicans from the Midwest believed economic issues to be more of a priority than the education bill, while Crofts suggests that sectional tensions generated a belief among Republicans that the Blair Bill was too conciliatory.[170] Blair himself frequently relied on nativist appeals to explain Congress's repeated failures to enact his legislation. Speaking on the floor of the Senate in 1888, he recalled being shown "the letter of a Jesuit priest, in which he begged a member of Congress to oppose this bill and to kill it, saying that they had organized all over the country for its destruction, that they had succeeded in the committee of the House, and … if they had only known it early enough they could have prevented its passage through the Senate." Continuing, Blair warned of a "Jesuit organization which has set out to control this country … they have come to our shores and they are among us today, and they understand that they are to secure the control of the continent by destroying the public school system of America."[171] Repeating this charge three years later, Blair contrasted "the Jesuits who have undertaken the overthrown of the public school system of this country," with "the twenty-five millions of people who inhabit the Southern States." Unlike "the people of the North," southerners "are Protestants and liberals and are free from the vast influx of immigration which has overflowed and transformed Northern states, in whose school systems the Jesuit has now much power."[172]

Blair's conspiracy theories notwithstanding, Table 1 does show that enthusiasm for his federal education bill—marked by the number of petitions sent to Congress on behalf of the legislation—declined significantly between the 50th and 51st Congresses.[173] Perhaps reflecting this decline in support, GOP opposition played a pivotal role in the bill's defeat. If the same number of Republicans who had voted for the bill in 1888 had done so again in 1890, the Blair Bill would have made it through the Senate. Of course, the bill had passed the Senate on three prior occasions, so there was no guarantee that Senate passage portended enactment. Yet with a Republican president and a GOP majority in the House, this appeared to be Blair's best chance for success. By 1890, however, Senate Republicans looked askance at the Blair Bill. The party instead set its sights on economic reforms and, for a brief time, a new federal elections bill.[174]

168. The remaining GOP nay vote in the 50th Congress came from Cushman Davis (MN), a first-term senator; in the previous Congress, his predecessor—Samuel McMillan—offered a "paired yea."

169. Blair lost on the roll call in the 51st Congress despite benefitting from the significant support (four yea votes against only one nay vote) of Republicans from three new states: North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington. These states were brought into the Union by an ambitious Republican Party, which saw the unified party control of government as a unique (and strategic) opportunity. See Charles Stewart III and Barry R. Weingast, "Stacking the Senate, Changing the Nation: Republican Rotten Boroughs, Statehood Politics, and American Political Development," *Studies in American Political Development* 6 (1992): 223–71.

170. McKinney, *Henry Blair's Campaign to Reform America*, 126; Crofts, "The Blair Bill and the Elections Bill," 209.

171. *Congressional Record*, 50th Congress, 1st Sess., February 15, 1888, 1218.

172. *Congressional Record*, 51st Congress, 1st Sess., February, 20, 1891, 1546.

173. Gordon Canfield Lee attributes the reduction in petitions to "those who, in the late 1880s, were arguing that Southern self-help had begun to solve the educational problem and therefore federal funds were no longer needed. There is evidence here to indicate that the desire on the part of Southerners for federal assistance had noticeably decreased by 1890." See Gordon Canfield Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid, First Phase: A History of the Attempts to Obtain Federal Aid for the Common Schools, 1870–1890* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), 96.

174. Despite balking on the Blair Bill in the 51st Congress, the Republicans did enact education legislation in the form of the second Morrill Act, which applied specifically to the ex-Confederate states. (The first Morrill Act was adopted in 1862.) The

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Table 11. Final-Passage Votes in the Senate on the Blair Bill, 48th–51st Congresses

Congress	48th Congress		49th Congress		50th Congress		51st Congress	
DW-NOMINATE 1	0.78***		0.42***		0.55***		0.60***	
	(0.16)		(0.15)		(0.14)		(0.15)	
DW-NOMINATE 2	0.12		−0.03		0.34		0.42*	
	(0.35)		(0.29)		(0.30)		(0.25)	
Southern Democrat		−0.80**		−0.49*		−0.19		−0.61
		(0.32)		(0.28)		(0.34)		(0.44)
Northern Democrat		−0.83***		−0.29		−0.57***		−0.61***
		(0.22)		(0.209)		(0.18)		(0.19)
Percent Illiterate	0.012**	0.010	0.016***	0.017**	0.017***	0.005	0.016***	0.014
	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.012)
Percent Foreign Born	−0.015	−0.011	0.005	0.007	−0.001	−0.002	−0.0027	−0.0001
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0009)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.69***	1.04***	0.42**	0.53**	0.31*	0.65	0.23	0.49**
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.20)
N	44	44	47	47	68	68	68	68
F test	5.90***	3.82***	2.59**	1.55	4.29***	3.43**	4.63***	3.08**
R^2	0.38	0.28	0.20	0.13	0.21	0.18	0.23	0.16

Notes. Coefficients are linear probability estimates, with standard errors in parentheses; *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.

Before concluding, we present regression results (Table 11) examining the final-passage votes on the Blair Bill in the Senate in the 48th, 49th, 50th, and 51st Congresses. Across each Congress we find that economic conservatism consistently predicts support for the Blair Bill. We also find reliable support from members representing states with higher illiteracy levels. If we replace ideology with party, we find that the most reliable supporters of the Blair Bill were Republicans. (Although by the 50th Congress, increasing GOP defections had made Southern Democrats—all else equal—as likely to support the bill as Republicans.) Importantly, in none of these models is the proportion of foreign-born residents in a state a significant predictor. This finding is mitigated by the fact that nativism explains vote choice on amendment votes (as we discuss above) and that immigrants tended to congregate inside specific congressional districts, thereby diluting their statewide influence.

4. CONCLUSION

Senator Henry Blair's proposal to provide federal aid to state primary and secondary schools was the most significant threat to local control of education from Reconstruction until the Great Society. Recognizing that illiteracy was a pressing social problem in need of a solution, and that the political environment of the 1880s made significant political reform possible, Blair sought to become a political entrepreneur. He worked to craft a bipartisan, interracial, interregional coalition of supporters who, he hoped, would help force his bill through a closely divided Congress. The ingredients necessary for successful reform were available to Blair, yet he simply could not master the racial, regional, and ethnic tensions existing both within and between the two parties. Blair *almost* spearheaded a truly landmark political reform effort. By exploring his failure, we argue, scholars of APD gain insights into the uneven course of national state development.

In short, "local control" proved to be a useful rallying cry for Blair's opponents. His bill incentivized the cooperation of Northern and Southern Democrats who, at times in the 1880s, seemed to be growing apart. It also made appealing defections from some Republicans who, after considering the bill, were motivated to abandon black citizens. Appeals to the status quo allowed Southern Democrats to take a stand against any future effort to turn federal appropriations into a vehicle for influencing how state schools dealt with black students. Furthermore, Southern elites recognized that as long as schools were wholly reliant on the state funding, they retained the power to entirely defund those serving black children. Protecting the status quo also allowed some Republicans to mask opposition to the bill motivated by economic interests as a commitment to racial integration. It also fit the agenda of Northern lawmakers who rightly feared the Republican Party's nativist wing. Finally, it allowed those seeking tariff reductions to accuse Blair and his supporters of simply looking for ways to obscure their commitment to protectionism.[175]

The conditions prevailing when Congress finally did break down the policy regime protecting local control—through enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965—represent a stark contrast with those faced by Henry Blair. Congress began debate on the ESEA during the 89th Congress (1965–67), when Democrats held unified control of government and supermajorities in both the House and the Senate. Democrats, not Republicans, were now pushing federal aid, and they were doing so at a time when they were at a significant political advantage. Interparty compromises would not be needed. Furthermore, President Lyndon Johnson viewed the ESEA as a critical component of the Great Society domestic agenda.[176] As we discuss above, Henry Blair only occasionally found an ally in the White House. His bill was often used opportunistically as one component of a party-building strategy, but was never an integral part of a policy agenda pushed by the president himself.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act also facilitated enactment of the ESEA by nullifying concerns over school segregation. As Julian Zelizer notes, once the federal government committed itself to ending segregation, there no longer existed any reason for Southern members "not to climb on the federal gravy train for their schools, just as they had done for their military bases, dams, and highways."[177] The 1964 Act, in other words, defused the kind of intraparty conflict that brought down the Blair Bill, even as the overwhelming Democratic majorities in the House and Senate counteracted the interparty balancing that so often befuddled Henry Blair. The Democrats in the 1960s were further aided by the fact that they were not forced to "build eleven brand-new political parties all at once in the former confederate states."[178] For them, the ESEA was an effort to deliver on

Morrill Act of 1890 was aimed at higher (university) education, however, rather than the common schools. To receive federal aid, a state would need to show that race (color) was not a criterion for college admission, else a separate land-grant institution for persons of color would need to be established. The Morrill Act of 1890 eventually led to the creation of a number of "historically black colleges"—the so-called 1890 Institutions—throughout the South. The Morrill Act of 1890 passed, in large part, because both Democrats and Republicans would benefit from the additional federal aid and (importantly) leaders of both parties made sure there were no roll-call votes on the measure.

175. Keller, *Affairs of State*, 195.

176. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, 299. See also Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, 174–78.

177. Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, 177.

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behalf of a biracial coalition that already existed. For Blair, federal education funding was an effort to construct such a coalition. As we have shown, the complications that resulted from his effort to construct an interracial, intersectional, bipartisan alliance all served to aid those defending local control.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, Henry Blair's proposal to provide federal aid to state primary and secondary schools is deeply problematic. It was a defense of separate but equal, and its supporters were outspoken nativists. Yet it was one of the last efforts from the Republican Party to act on behalf of Southern freedmen. In that sense, it is also illuminating. By the late 1880s the radical wing of the GOP was in sharp decline, and its historic foundation in ethnic nationalism was reemerging. Much of the energy driving the radical policy changes had dissipated, the public had grown tired of debates over civil rights policy, and the party's turn westward dampened the political power of freedmen in the South. "The defeat of the Blair bill," argues Thomas Adams Upchurch, "marked a tragic turning point in both African American history and the history of education in America."[179] For this reason, its failure provides a clear indication of the political forces that helped bring the "first civil rights era" to a close.

178. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions*, 227.

179. Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 64.

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