


Philanthropic Funding and Field Agents in the Development of Teacher Education Institutions

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The Rockefeller-founded and supported General Education Board (GEB) was the largest non-denominational, private source of funding for public schools in the United States in the early twentieth century. It was particularly unique in refusing to deny funds to schools for any racial or gender group, and so it became a major source of funding to develop and maintain schools for marginalized populations. In particular, my project investigates the support that the GEB offered to teacher education programs as part of this mission, and evaluates the relative importance of this philanthropic funding to other aspects of the process of developing and institutionalizing teacher education programs.¹

This is part of a broader research project to investigate the development of teacher education institutions in the American South from the end of the Civil War through the Great Depression. The project seeks to contribute both to the history of American higher education and to social scientific theories of the formation and development of social institutions. Existing historical scholarship highlights the importance of the development of teacher education programs (especially those called “normal schools” in this period) in the nineteenth century to contemporary social structures in the U.S. With the drastically increased need for quality instruction that accompanied the development of mass compulsory education, teaching was slowly professionalized and formalized at different rates throughout the country, and several studies support the view that this professionalization promoted increased democratic participation and opportunity.² Some work identifies groups of actors that appear to have influenced the direction of these processes, including education reform leaders, philanthropic and religious organizations, local school boards, and special interest groups, and emphasizes the important role of these groups in providing access to higher education and career opportunities to traditionally excluded groups, including women and racial minorities. Yet, scholarship has also shown that the development of these programs was tied to the so-called “feminization” of teaching and that the features of such programs varied profoundly by region and by race, further institutionalizing gender and racial disparities in education.³

The dynamics of this process are complex. A satisfying framework has not yet been developed through which to analyze and compare the relative importance of various social conditions and groups in shaping these institutions, to compare the course of these developments in different times and places, and thus also to fully explain the contemporary social position of teachers in the educational system, despite a growing literature in the social sciences addressing these problems.⁴

One of the contributions of the present project is to engage with the theory and analysis of social institutions, as it has been developed in cultural sociology and organizational analysis, in order to investigate these issues. Institutional analysis attempts to understand the development of social organizations (such as teacher education programs) by analyzing the broader social and cultural factors that influence the structure of social arrangements, and by tracing the historical processes through which organizations develop.⁵ Such analyses seek to emphasize the conditions under which particular models of organization, cultural norms or conventions, and routine patterns of behavior spread. According to this approach, historical processes lead to institutionalized structures that constrain the actions of groups involved in the further course of those processes. Institutional analysis thus provides a framework in which to pose questions about the scope of influence of specific factors at particular times and places in a broader historical development. Because such an approach focuses on the connections and influences that extend beyond any particular organization, it more adequately conceptualizes the role of novel groups of reformers, funding mechanisms, special interests, and public sentiment that existing scholarship has highlighted as worthy of study.

Previous research in the records of the General Education Board at the Rockefeller Archive Center demonstrates the central importance of the Center's records to research on public education, including research concerning opportunities for racial minorities and women.⁶ The particular topical focus of this project is on the development of teacher education programs in the post-Civil

War Southern states through analysis of archived primary documents. Such a research focus provides particularly rich data to adjudicate between different top-down mechanisms (such as centralized funding and decision-making) and bottom-up mechanisms (such as local public sentiment and organizational innovations) in shaping institutional formation, to trace the development and spread of curricula and institutional models from one organization to another, to identify the ways racial, gender, regional, and religious inequalities were implicated in structuring educational opportunities and outcomes in teacher training institutions, and to identify key social and cultural factors that promoted the institutionalization of “pedagogy” as a formalized body of professional knowledge.⁷

The present research project is ongoing, so I present illustrative examples and topics from this larger body of work in the following discussion, focusing first on the funding mechanisms and then on practices of inspection, in both cases seeking to trace how these shape the formation of teacher education institutions.

Philanthropic Funding

The General Education Board (GEB) records shed considerable light on the influence of philanthropic fundraising and oversight on the development of teacher education programs in the U.S. It should be noted, however, that the GEB was founded in 1902 and continued to build its capacity over the next decades, so such a project must be supplemented by other records in order to extend the analysis back to the earliest systematic developments of teacher education prior to and immediately after the Civil War.⁸ The GEB records contain accounting documents that provide almost a census of educational programs during the period of its operation, and because of the large contributions of the GEB, these records give a clear sense of the relative amounts of philanthropic funding to different schools. Although the predominant issue, especially in minority higher education, at the turn of the twentieth century was

the rise of “industrial” or “vocation” education and its relation to traditional “classical” or “academic” education, this focus masks the important developments taking place in the professionalization and training of teachers—who did not quite fit into either category comfortably and who seem in some ways to have benefited from both approaches.⁹ The early focus of the GEB contributions on “Southern Education” is clearly demonstrated in these records, as is the large amounts provided to found the University of Chicago and the relative amounts provided to historically black colleges and women’s colleges. However, it is in the correspondence between members of the GEB executive offices and the various applicant schools and field agents that the depth of these records emerges most clearly.

In the minutes of the founding meetings of the GEB and in other correspondence of its official representatives, there are explicit acknowledgments of the immensity of the problem of developing national public education, and a further acknowledgment that even with the massive resources available, the GEB’s work would necessarily be non-systematic, somewhat ad hoc, and could not be used as a permanent foundation for school budgets.¹⁰ This is likely one of the reasons that the GEB typically insisted upon raising local matching funds for most of its projects—a policy developed earlier by the Peabody Education Fund and others but applied more rigorously by the GEB and other later Rockefeller philanthropies in the hope that such a requirement would urge the local citizens and governments to take permanent responsibility for their own schools. The funding policies of the GEB were continually being developed, and included considerations such as whether to fund denominational schools, racially segregated schools, coeducational or single-sex schools, summer schools for teachers, schools only at the collegiate level, and endowments or operating budgets.

The GEB was seen as part of what became known as the “Ogden Party” in African American higher education, especially by its early opponents. This appellation is

a reference to the travel exhibitions arranged by Robert G. Ogden, Sr., a retail mogul, by train through the U.S. South. John D. Rockefeller, both Jr. and Sr., were participants in some of these travels along with Andrew Carnegie, William H. Baldwin, and many other philanthropists and prominent individuals. And some of the earliest organizational meetings of the GEB were held aboard the 1902 “Ogden Special Train” as it traveled through the South, in between stops at schools and public meetings concerned with African American education. The Ogden Party trips resulted in the Conference on Education in the South, an annual meeting of philanthropists and school administrators to discuss the problems of education in the region, and the Southern Education Board, a philanthropic trust that became one of the direct models for the GEB and an early collaborator in its efforts. The GEB records document the “interlocking directorates” of philanthropic boards and concerns for education throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And the correspondence contains numerous records documenting the attitudes of white elites on minority education and on race issues more generally during this period.

Of interest to institutional analysis, the records document the mechanisms whereby philanthropic funding were able to sort schools into categories, shape the development of schools in specific directions, and direct resources toward some schools and away from others. They document the important people and organizations involved in making such decisions and provide some major indicators of the resistance and controversies faced by philanthropic organizations involved in promoting public education from religious groups, prominent citizens and politicians, and educational associations. A significant focus of institutional analysis is the diffusion of models for organizations and the logic by which they are to be structured. However, it is often easy to treat this diffusion and the resulting “isomorphism” (coming to look more and more alike) of organizations as somehow a natural process that simply happens wherever there are complex social organizations. The GEB records present an important corrective in this regard, because they document the particular mechanisms by

which these processes happen (and also when and where they do not) through real historical events.

Consider the discussions about whether a school should develop an endowment fund or rely on yearly contributions for their budgeting. In the case files of the applicant schools to the Early Southern Program of the GEB there is considerable discussion about the problems of relying on periodic contributions from donors and from governmental sources for school budgeting, including the built-in unpredictability of whether and when donations could be expected from individuals or philanthropic trusts and the inequalities and inadequacies of tax support for schools.¹¹ On a number of occasions officials from the GEB discussed their thinking about endowments. For example, General Agent Wallace Buttrick wrote to an advocate for the Voorhees Industrial School (now Voorhees College) in Denmark, SC, that he thought of some schools—such as Hampton Institute, Tuskegee Institute, and a few others—as “pillars of the temple,” and, thus, as needing endowment to ensure their “permanent place in any complete system of education,” but the majority of schools as more appropriately funded on a periodic basis.¹²

The GEB took a direct hand in reorganizing the accounting and budgeting systems of a number of these schools, beginning with Tuskegee Institute. William H. Baldwin, the President of the Long Island Rail Road Company and a founding member of the executive board of the GEB, became interested in African American higher education in the years just prior to the formation of the first 1901-02 “Ogden Party” tour when he was working with J. P. Morgan on southern railroads, and he subsequently became trustee and head of the Committee on Investment of the Endowment Fund for Tuskegee Institute. He was described in private as the “actual financial manager” of Tuskegee with effective control over its expenditures and the ability to raise money to pay its debts and ensure it would not go into debt again.¹³ He hired accountant Daniel C. Smith to periodically audit Tuskegee, and the GEB later sent this same

accountant and others around to other institutions of African American higher education to audit finances and to remodel the accounting procedures for these institutions along the same lines. These procedures were apparently partly influenced by the need to provide standardized reports to the Department of the Interior as a result of the federal charter granted to the GEB and in part to facilitate the evaluation and comparison of applicant schools in relation to one another.

Similar influences may be found in terms of the influence of philanthropic funding on the size and curricula of schools for the training of teachers, on the classification of schools in terms of the rigor and length of their programs of studies, the structure and location of public meetings and of summer school programs regarding teacher education, and the geographical distribution and consolidation of schools. All of these had lasting effects on the ways in which colleges for teachers developed, both by arranging them into a systematic hierarchy and by leading them to coalesce around a set of isomorphic models of teacher education.

School Inspections

Another major focus of this research was on the use of field agents and other school visits or inspections as a tool in philanthropic funding and in institution building. The earliest systematic inspections of higher education facilities appear to be conducted by the federal Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen's Bureau) in the immediate post-Civil War period in conjunction with the early philanthropic associations, especially the American Missionary Association.¹⁴ Later philanthropic organizations such as the Peabody Education Fund and the GEB followed this practice by hiring field agents to conduct in-person inspections of schools of interest. For the GEB, this policy was set in place fairly early in response, on the one hand, to the substantial number of applications they got, and on the other hand, to the recommendations and offers

of service of people wishing to be field agents, both in the first weeks after the announcements of the organization's formation.¹⁵

Some people were consulted informally by members of the organization about applications by schools. For example, Booker T. Washington was directly or indirectly consulted on a large number of the applications for aid from the GEB, especially in the first years of the Early Southern Program and a bit later through his control—along with H. B. Frissell of Hampton Institute—of the 1907 Jeanes donation to the GEB.¹⁶ Others including Daniel Cloyd, Wallace Buttrick, J. H. Palmer, and R. C. Bruce were hired as agents to conduct more or less formal inspections of schools on the GEB's behalf and to write standard reports for the board's consultation. This arrangement was put into place in order to provide some accountability and comparability between the many applications (and possible applications) presented for the GEB's consideration.

One of the most important and remarkable of these inspectors documented in the GEB records was W. T. B. Williams, a prominent African American educator hired to inspect Southern schools for African Americans. Williams' correspondence with the executives of the GEB reveals the whirlwind schedule of inspections that these agents undertook, often touring four or more schools a week in multiple cities for weeks on end. His correspondence, along with others, also demonstrates the many tribulations of African American field agents, in particular, with discrimination in transportation and accommodations, inability to secure materials and assistance in order to prepare their reports, and the added expectations of reporting and interpreting the conditions of disadvantaged groups effectively.¹⁷ Buttrick and other executive officers expressed their support and respect for his work. The analysis of the reports of these field agents and their impact is ongoing in my research, but there is little doubt that the judgments of these field agents had substantial influences on the funding or rejection of applications from various schools, as their judgments are frequently referred to in correspondence between executive board members. This work

must also be connected with the larger ecology of inspections by local officials, politicians, parents, and interested members of the public, both because some of these other forms of inspection were also utilized informally by the GEB and other philanthropic organizations, and because they give a more complete sense of the developing culture of supervision of school in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American education.

Conclusions

Because of the essential role teachers play in the educational process, understanding teacher education can contribute to contemporary debates regarding the informed democratic participation and opportunities for social mobility through education. An approach that examines how teacher education institutions developed can provide new insights into the social and cultural conditions of education, and a focus on the foundational period of teacher education in the American South can raise acute questions regarding the role of gender, racial, and regional divisions in structuring educational opportunities and outcomes. Institutional analysis has been utilized in previous sociological studies to examine the educational system in the US; however, there has been no substantial attempt to analyze the development of teacher education in this way or to consider its importance for understanding the development and change of educational institutions more generally. By beginning to address this shortcoming, the present study offers the opportunity not only to contribute to our understanding of the historical development of modern education, but also to make two important interventions into the burgeoning field of institutional theory.

As indicated above, this project is ongoing and is intended to be combined with a variety of other forms of documentation to develop a more complete picture of the development and context of teacher education programs. For example, the voices of ordinary teachers only infrequently appear in the GEB Records, and

earlier developments in the nineteenth century are almost completely absent from these records. Only when the particular trajectories of different schools are placed in a larger social and cultural context can we gain a more satisfying understanding of the processes by which they develop and perhaps trace some of the origins of the present social status of teachers and their roles in education.

¹ On the overall history and importance of the General Education Board, see Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board, a Foundation Established by John D. Rockefeller* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); Kenneth Rose, "Introduction" In *The General Education Board Archives. Series I: Appropriations. Subseries 1: The Early Southern Programs: Guide to the Scholarly Resources Microfilm Edition* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc. in cooperation with the Rockefeller Archive Center of the Rockefeller University, 1994).

² Willard S. Elbree, *The American Teacher: Evolution of a Profession in a Democracy* (New York: Prager, 1970); Jurgen Herbst, *And Sadly Teach: Teacher Education and Professionalization in American Culture* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Paul H. Mattingly, *The Classless Profession: American Schoolmen in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

³ Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); John Rury, "Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History," in *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*, edited by Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989); Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, *Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Sarah E. Montgomery, "Why Men Left: Reconsidering the Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century," *American Educational History Journal*, 36 (2009), 219-236; Edgar W. Knight, *A Documentary History of Education in the South before 1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1949); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Robert Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴ See especially, Heinz-Dieter Meyer and Brian Rowan, editors, *The New Institutionalism in Education* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

⁵ On institutional analysis and theory, see Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, editors, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); John W. Meyer, "The Effects of Education as an Institution," *American Journal of Sociology*, 83 (1977), 55-77; Elisabeth Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Marion Fourcade, *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁶ See especially, Sarah Thuesen, “The General Education Board and the Racial Leadership of Black Education in the South, 1920-1960” (Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2001); Jonna Perrillo, “Teacher Research and the Rockefellers.” (Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2012); Elizabeth Lundeen, “The General Education Board’s Involvement in Higher Education of African Americans: The Case of North Carolina College for Negroes, 1909-1930.” (Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2014).

⁷ A focus on the development of institutions for the teaching of teachers also provides an avenue to connect institutional theory with my previous work examining the social processes through which modern systems of knowledge have developed, Daniel R. Huebner, *Becoming Mead: The Social Process of Academic Knowledge*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). I also draw from methods developed in that study. Because people utilize various documents in their everyday lives to structure and articulate their conduct in relation to one another, I treat documents not only as records that leave a durable account of historical actions, but also as an intrinsic part of those actions themselves. Practically, this means focusing both on the ways that documents, such as personal correspondence or organizational records, reveal changing patterns of social connections between people and the ways that the positions taken in such documents represent meaningful claims or actions that have consequences for the course of social processes. This approach orients analysis in a way that allows historical documents to serve as empirical evidence to answer theoretically informed questions about the paths and mechanisms that lead to the formation of social institutions.

⁸ Such additional documents may be found in the records of other early philanthropic foundations, such as the American Missionary Association, the Peabody Education Fund, and the records of various early teacher education schools.

⁹ On this point, see for example, Thelma D. Perry, *History of the American Teachers Association* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1975).

¹⁰ These concerns are reflected throughout the records, but one area where they are very visible is in the minutes for the early organizational meetings of the General Education Board, “General Education Board Minutes 1902-1906, Box 23, Series 3, General Education Board Records, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY (Hereafter GEB Records).

¹¹ See for example the correspondence of Booker T. Washington to the members of the GEB in Folder 25, Box 3, Series 1, GEB Records.

¹² Letter from Wallace Buttrick to Ellen Collins, September 16 1904, Folder 1110, Box 112, Series 1, GEB Records. Similar issues arise in the correspondence regarding Atlanta University, Hampton Institute, Spelman Seminary, the Women’s College of Alabama, and others.

¹³ Untitled autograph notes by Frederick Gates, undated (c. 1900), Folder 258, Box 38, Record Group III2G Educational Interests, Office of the Mssrs. Rockefeller Records, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

¹⁴ Barry A. Crouch, “Black Education in Civil War and Reconstruction Louisiana: George T. Ruby, the Army, and the Freedmen’s Bureau,” *Louisiana History*, 38 (1997), 287–308.

¹⁵ Minutes for meetings of April 2 and May 14, 1902, “General Education Board Minutes 1902-1906,” Box 23, Series 3, GEB Records.

¹⁶ On this point, the various files of applicant schools through the Southern Education Program in Series 1 of the GEB Records contain many examples. See also, Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁷ See correspondence of W. T. B. Williams with Wallace Buttrick and others in Folder 1898, Box 200, Series 1.2, GEB Records. Because of Williams' excellent reputation and high profile among those interested in African American higher education, he was repeatedly offered jobs as principal or superintendent of various African American schools, which he drew to the GEB's attention in this correspondence. He also served as field agent for the John F. Slater Fund.