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Jack Schneider: Welcome to *HEQ&A*, the podcast of the *History of Education Quarterly*. I'm your host, *HEQ* co-editor Jack Schneider. Every few weeks, we'll dive into recent work from the journal, asking authors how their projects challenge or extend what we know about a topic, exploring what's interesting and surprising about it, and then taking a step back to consider broader implications. In the second half of the show, we turn our sights to teaching. So, if you're an educator, make sure to stick around until the end. And now let's hear from one of our authors.

[00:00:49] **Jennifer Nations:** Uh, so my name is Jennifer Nations. I teach sociology courses at the University of San Diego as a lecturer and I'm an affiliated researcher with UC San Diego's Urban Studies and Planning department. I am also the author of the article, "How Austerity Politics Led to Tuition Charges at the University of California and City University of New York."

[00:01:13] The topic of the article is --well, the empirical question is really what happened with the University of California and City University of New York. These two places where, um, you know, big government spending, liberal politics seem to really rule the day. How is it that these two university systems --public university systems reversed decades-old no tuition policies? And the answer is complicated, of course. Any historian or a social scientist knows, but the common theme between the two of them is that there was a rise in conservative politics and understanding around what government should be doing in the lives of citizens and what was appropriate government action in both of these states, the idea being, you know, among conservatives that the universities were doing too much for too many people, and needed to be reigned in. And I really link this to a growing movement of conservatism that we saw on the federal stage, in the higher education policy space, really starting in the 1980s.

[00:02:28] There are some fantastic historians who have done a really good job of showing how deeply intertwined the relationship is between higher education and the state. So I'm thinking here of Margaret O'Mara and Christopher Loss who I cite in the article. And I take what they've done as well as some other sociologists and historians of, of higher education, and move beyond the story that takes place at the federal level, which is where a lot of the attention is focused and move it to the states.

[00:03:04] Um, you know, the way that we, that we finance and have built and have governed higher education in the United States is at the state level. This is why we have state university systems. And there's really not been enough attention, I think, to the policy and history of the policy that has happened at the state level, particularly in the area of financing. So we've great histories of specific university systems, but less attention to what was going on with voters. What were voters thinking? Were they on board with funding cuts? Did they want to see tuition go up? What were politicians doing? Were they arguing? Were they all on board with defunding higher education?

[00:03:48] We have this narrative about, you know, states once upon a time being generous to our public universities until they weren't, but we don't have a good sense for at the state level, how, how the action changed and what exactly happened, you know, besides federal defunding of science, you know, science research. Um, we don't have a really good sense for what happened. So I really fill in that gap. And then also the history of higher education in the United States is really the history of our nation. Uh, it's such a critical institution that has been used for state craft and state building. And so I'm able to show that as well and build on that idea and that literature.

[00:04:33] So in the article, I have two cases. I looked in depth at the University of California. So California state politics around higher ed and then City University of New York. So focused a little bit less on state politics in New York, but I'm more on the city politics because the city university, at one point was fully funded by the city and then was kind of a joint city-state project.

[00:04:56] And one of the things that I found really compelling and interesting to write about, and I think. It's an interesting finding or, you know, piece of the article is the role that tax payers and voters played, especially in California. I don't know that the role of voters or taxpayers in California would be surprising to anyone who's studied the period or lived through it, but they were a critical piece of the story. Because they really, you know, at least polling suggests and the popularity of governor Ronald Reagan suggests, that they were on board with his moral critique of University of California, Berkeley, and his push to defund public higher ed and to shift the burden of the cost onto students. Even though a lot of those people probably would not necessarily want to pay out of pocket for it. People were morally outraged by what was going on at Berkeley. And so it's not like Reagan was acting alone here. Um, he had some support and then of course, you know, voters continue to be such an important part of the rise of conservatism in California, because we know that in 1978 it was voters that approved Proposition 13, which was a serious, serious change to the property tax code and really decimated public K-12 funding, which eventually led to even greater declines in higher ed funding. So I think we cannot overlook the role of the voters there in California.

[00:06:25] And then I think one of the things that's interesting, and perhaps also surprising in the New York case, is that it was the no tuition policy that was jettisoned and not the open admissions policy. So in New York City at CUNY, you know, years before my story takes place, you know, in order to appease, um, civil rights activists, as well as middle income, especially Jewish families in the city. University president and mayor had agreed to open admissions at CUNY. So essentially it became like a, an open-access institution, like a community college where anyone could get in because it had historically been very rigorous and difficult to get in. And so mostly middle income, New Yorkers had benefitted. You have this growing, um, Black and Puerto Rican population in the city that were shut out from CUNY. And so to appease all these groups, you know, not kind of take seats away from the middle class, but also to give seats for Puerto Rican and Black communities, they went to a system of open admissions and by some standards, it was a problem because you had Black and Puerto Rican students coming from, oftentimes, the worst funded high schools, they were not academically prepared.

[00:07:44] CUNY had always prided itself on its academic rigor. So it really, so in the view of some of CUNY's administration, as well as city politicians, open admissions was kind of the death knell of CUNY. And while there were conversations during the fiscal crisis of the city around what do we do to save money? What do we do to make sure CUNY isn't eating up all these resources and the debate was, do we get rid of this open admissions policy, make CUNY elite again, shut out kind of the riff-raff, in a sense, or do we start charging tuition? And there was so much opposition to charging tuition and, you know, Jerome Caramella makes this argument that the reason that CUNY went to open admissions was like I said, to appease those two different populations, right? Racial and ethnic minorities and the middle-class especially Jewish families in the city.

[00:08:41] Well, the no tuition policy was seen as doing the exact same thing, hurting both of those populations. So it's logical to think that no tuition and open admissions were both policies that would be easy to jettison in this political context, but it was actually the no tuition policy that went and not open admissions. Open admissions has remained in place.

[00:09:03] I think I referenced earlier what it is the, some of the broader implications are. And one of the really important broader implications is that the history of higher education is the history of our nation. In order to really deeply understand what was happening in politics and especially the politics of how we finance the state, um, higher education gives us a lot of insight and a lot of clues.

[00:09:29] It was one of the first things on the chopping block. When, you know, the post-war economic prosperity started to come to an end. And the reason for that of course is because public higher education had another revenue source because they could charge students tuition. But, you know, Jacob Hacker talks about the "great risk shift," this idea of really since the late sixties, government retrenching and, you know, benefits to families, benefits to individuals declining. Um, one of the consequences of that is that the risks of living in a capitalist country, capitalist economy. Those move from being shouldered by the state, into being shouldered by individuals and families. And we absolutely see that with public higher education where, you know, in places like New York City and California, and a lot of other states where tuition was very low at the public institutions institutions for a long time, those costs start to arise.

[00:10:34] And, you know, just at the same time that, um, enrollments are ballooning. And so those, these costs that were historically borne by the government are now being borne by families. And, you know, we see that reflected today. It's gotten even worse with the student loan crisis. So I think that's one of the broader implications.

[00:10:55] Another one is the public universities are also such a great example of United States, government institution-building. In the United States, we have this historical kind of fear of big government, right. And so, you know, when you think of your local public university / state university, you don't really think of it as an arm of the state. Nevertheless, as historians have shown, it has played a huge role in supporting government initiatives, even private universities have. And that is just such a, you know, kind of quintessential example of how the United States has gone about state building, doing it in ways that are less visible to the public, more palatable in some way.

[00:11:43] I think that's another one of the broader implications. And then of course, what happens when we start to get rid of that?

[00:11:52] **Jack Schneider:** The second half of the show is dedicated to thinking about teaching. We ask authors to put on their guest lecturer hats and take students into the weeds. What should they pay attention to, methodologically speaking? What else should they be reading if they want to take a deep dive into the historiography? And where are there opportunities for further research?

[00:12:12] **Jennifer Nations:** And one of the things students should pay attention to methodologically is if you want to get into studying the history of state finance, how much you have to start understanding about the particularities of the rules in different states, how much those matter.

[00:12:29] For example, in this article, Governor Ronald Reagan made a big impact on funding for the University of California. And why could he do that? Um, certainly because he was seen as charismatic in many, I'm not going to call him charismatic, but I think many thought of him as charismatic. Um, he definitely knew how to drum up conservative support though for his ideals.

[00:12:53] Um, so you could say that, you know, maybe he was especially candid. But the other really important piece of this is that California governors have this line item veto power. This isn't

unique to California, but it's very important to my story. And the reason it's important is because the governor sets the budget and then the legislature comes back with some revisions in the budget and then the governor can go in again and essentially take out anything you didn't like.

[00:13:21] And that's typically the end of the process, unless the legislature overrides. You know, majority, the super majority overrides the budget. It doesn't happen all that often. And it didn't happen in the case of the budgets that Reagan approved in the 1960s and 1970s, so that matters a lot. It's a structural factor. And, you know, that's the type of, you know, little detail and policy that you really have to understand.

[00:13:48] Another that I thought was really important for this piece. It was just so important for me in writing this piece to understand not just what policy leads were doing, meaning folks who are in elected state office, um, or elected city office, or who were the highest level administrators at the university system. But also what faculty were saying and what voters saw. So I stumbled on old polling data. I didn't stumble on it--I very intentionally sought out old polling data to give a glimpse for what the population was doing. I had a lot more luck finding that in California than I did in New York, but I did find some old news articles that reported some polling data for New York City. And that really, I think, corroborated and added nuance the information I gleaned from op-eds and, um, outcomes of elections and other ways that we have to kind of get at what, what voters and taxpayers are thinking.

[00:14:47] But the last thing to note methodologically speaking is how important old news articles and bulletins can be as a, as a data source. So I, I actually finished and revised this article and I added a decent amount of, um, sources to the article during the COVID-19 pandemic. And what that meant is that my typical channels for accessing primary sources were shutdown. There was no interlibrary loan. There was right there where--so the Hathi Trust had opened up, but I really struggled to get some of the information I needed.

[00:15:25] However, I was able to find University of California faculty bulletins that were published frequently and often would write, in full, the text of a speech or a debate that took place. And so I was able to get that when I couldn't get my hands on something that was in an archive, but there were other times when there wasn't another source for what was found in some of those bulletins. So they seem kind of mundane. It took a while to sort through 'em, but they're actually just available on Google. Google Books, you know, these little bulletins and newsletters were just incredibly valuable sources to get at speeches by Ronald Reagan, how the faculty felt about what was going on, what they had to say, what the, you know, Charles Hitch, the president of the university system, had to say.

[00:16:16] I think the things I really benefited from a reading were on the topic of conservative movements in New York City in particular, his work by Kenneth Phillips Fine and Alice O'Connor. They both cover, um, the fiscal crisis in New York City. Alice O'Connor especially has this fantastic piece on the rise of the Manhattan Institute, which is a conservative think tank founded right in the middle of the liberal New York City. Uh, she ties that to the fiscal crisis there. So, uh, those are great places to start for critical history of what was happening in New York City in the late 1960s through the 1970s. Catherine Olmsted on the early 20th century movement in California. That one really allowed me to route, to understand the Reagan's position where he was coming from. He was very connected with the conservatives who had come up during the New Deal and really objected to the New Deal. And Reagan in a lot of ways was taking that platform of, you know, objecting to big government and any kind of government interference in the private market and extending that into

the sixties and seventies with the important caveat that they, you know, they all objected to big government, unless it was, benefiting business interests. Of course.

[00:17:45] Um, and then I mentioned them earlier, but Christopher Loss and Margaret O'Mara both do a really excellent job unearthing the many, many links between higher education, our broader kind of science and research industries, and the state. Beth Berman is a sociologist who does similar work.

[00:18:04] And then there's some historical sociologists who write about it, uh, public finance that I think are really important to the story as well. Like Isaac Martin, who has read about written about Proposition 13 in particular, but has also written about conservative social movements. Um, and then Monica Prisaad, she wrote an entire book about President Ronald Reagan and tax cuts, um, that he oversaw, you know, in the 1980s. I think those are some of the readings-- just look at the footnotes in the article. There's so many wonderful people who are, I was able to build on in writing.

[00:18:42] I think there are a lot of opportunities for further research on the topic. I mean, one is just looking at other states, like I said, you know, the politics of higher education finance--the drama is all at the state level. That's where the drama is. And that's where you also get the early policies and policy changes. So I would say, you know, looking at similar stories to what I have written and other states. I picked California and New York because it seems like if the ideal of free public higher education would work anywhere, it would be there. And I wouldn't start with the liberal state like Massachusetts, because they never financed their public higher education institutions at the level that California and New York have. Oh, California and New York, especially with CUNY embarked on this grand experiment of fully financing these universities and building these massive institutions.

[00:19:37] But that said, places like Texas and Florida, Washington, Wisconsin, Minnesota. I mean, these are some states that similarly funded marvelous institutions. Sometimes through the same means. These were all, not all, not in all of those states, but in many of those states, they were all initially financed through property taxes, just like K-12 education. And we don't have comparative histories on what has happened in those states. So I would say that's definitely an area for further research. The comparative angle, I think, is really important. Like I said, we've got John Douglas, who has written a fantastic history of University of California, but it's, uh, he doesn't do a whole lot of comparative work in that book. And then a lot of the other histories we have take are kind of a level of abstraction up at the federal level. So comparative work at the state level, I think is wide open.

[00:20:35] Another one that I came across in my work and decided to never really touch in what I've written and am writing on this topic is the history of student loans at the state level. Um, there's a lot of action at the state level on student loans. I think too, the one that I am including some of in my book, but I feel like not nearly enough, because I think it requires a book of its own or at least a lot of articles is the racial politics and history of all of this. There's, there's just a lot left to be done about how the politics of financing public higher education were affected by the civil rights movement and then by affirmative action. So Laura Hamilton and Kelly Nielsen, two sociologists, they have a book out about this and it provides a very recent history of two of the UC campuses. I just think there's a lot more to be done.

[00:21:34] And you know, I'm not talking about kind of like a history of civil rights in the states as, as affiliated with the universities, there's some good work on that. I mean specifically, what is the, what is the racial element and what are the kind of, I guess, racialized and potentially racially discriminatory, um, motivations behind some of what's happened. There are people who've put out

the argument that there are worse, there is some racially motivated reasons for the defunding of public higher education that have to do with this, you know, moving into the seventies and eighties and nineties, we have more and more and more people of color enrolling, but I haven't ever read something that showed me exactly how that happened. And I would, I would love to read that because I think it's a critical piece, but I just think we haven't done the work yet, or you at least I haven't read it. Maybe somebody has-- I just haven't read it.

[00:22:29] **Jack Schneider:** Check out *History of Education Quarterly* online. The journal is published by Cambridge University Press and it's carried by most academic libraries. You should also be sure to follow *HEQ* Twitter handle: @histedquarterly, which regularly sends out free read-only versions of articles, and the show's Twitter handle @HEQandA. And don't forget, subscribe to the show so you don't miss forthcoming episodes. We're available on iTunes, Stitcher, and wherever you get your podcasts. HEQ&A is produced at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Our producer is Jennifer Berkshire and our theme music is by Ryan Shaw. I'm Jack Schneider. Thanks for joining us.