

1993

# Book Note: The Carrot or the Stick for School Desegregation Policy. by Christine Rossell.

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## Recommended Citation

Schumacher, Thomas J., "Book Note: The Carrot or the Stick for School Desegregation Policy. by Christine Rossell." (1993).  
*Constitutional Commentary*. 1088.  
<https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/concomm/1088>

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meanings intended by the Founders. Repetitive examples of common phraseology may not suffice to illuminate the ideas embodied in them.

*Suzanne Thorpe\**

**THE CARROT OR THE STICK FOR SCHOOL DESEGREGATION POLICY.** By Christine Rossell. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1990. Pp. xvi, 260. \$22.95 (paper).

Describing herself as a "liberal and child of the sixties," Christine Rossell disputes three decades of liberal ideology in arguing against forced busing to achieve school desegregation. Instead, in what she coins "the new civil rights alternative," Rossell contends that choice plans, when coupled with magnet program incentives, are not only the most equitable, efficient and effective means to desegregate, but are also "morally superior" to mandatory reassignment plans.

Rossell begins by discussing the evolution of school desegregation remedies following *Brown v. Board of Education*. Against this backdrop, she examines the traditional white response—noncompliance—to forced busing, and contends that magnet-voluntary plans will avoid this typical white reaction. Rossell's faith in magnet schools to achieve integration has its intellectual foundation in public choice theory. For example, she states that

[t]he primary assumption behind the implementation of a magnet school program in a segregated neighborhood school system is that parents will evaluate the educational program of the neighborhood school and that of the desegregated magnet school in rational, programmatic terms. The corollary assumption is that the additional money spent on the magnet school and its special theme will be sufficient to induce large numbers of white parents to choose the magnet schools and thus desegregate both the individual schools and the larger school system.

Rossell similarly relies on the "economic" behavior of schools themselves for the magnet-voluntary approach to work. Couched in typically Keynesian terms, she presumes that

the competition that emerges in a choice plan provides all the right incentives to both consumers and produ-

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cers. . . competition provides the incentive to produce high quality education in order to attract students. . . [and] consumers feel empowered to demand a high quality education in return for enrolling their children.

In this sense, Rossell's theory depends on perhaps an overly optimistic view of the market responsiveness of school administrators and parents to "incentives."

After laying the theoretical foundation for magnet-voluntary plans Rossell presents her empirical analysis. Her study is based on nationwide data collected from 119 school districts. In analyzing this data, Rossell makes an important distinction between "interracial exposure," defined as the proportion of students who are white in the average minority child's school, and "racial balance," which merely reflects the percentage of minority children in relation to the district wide average. Though racial balance has been the traditional measurement used by the courts, Rossell persuasively argues that it is an inadequate measurement, mainly because it ignores how many white children are coming into contact with minority children. Thus Rossell's analysis measures the success of a desegregation plan according to its resultant interracial exposure.

According to this standard, Rossell first compares the relative effectiveness of magnet-voluntary and magnet-mandatory desegregation plans in a 20-school-district sub-sample from the 119-school-district study. The detailed, though at times overly technical, analysis which follows provides the book's empirical backbone. From this sample, Rossell concludes that over time, the magnet-voluntary plans produce more interracial exposure and less white flight.

Following this comparison, Rossell next examines the nature of the magnets schools themselves. While finding that no magnet theme has a clear advantage over another, she does demonstrate that the most effective integration occurs when magnet programs are located in minority neighborhoods. In her final analysis of the data, Rossell assess national desegregation trends from the 1960s through 1984 across the whole 119-school-district sample. This section characterizes court reaction to various desegregation plans and uses the extent of past remedies as a guide to predicting future ones. She concludes that courts "cannot go wrong" by approving magnet-voluntary plans in the future.

The book closes with a generalized summary of the study, a return to the public choice argument for the magnet-voluntary approach and a set of eight specific policy recommendations to effectuate a successful voluntary plan. Rossell ultimately concludes that a magnet-voluntary plan is

the most effective plan because it produces the greatest interracial exposure. . . .the most efficient type of plan because the ratio of students assigned to students enrolled is the highest of all plans. . . .[and] is the most equitable because it empowers both black and white parents and is preferred by both races.

This book is an ambitious attempt to revolutionize "progressive" ideology in the wake of languid attempts to forcibly integrate American schools and perceived retrenchment under the Reagan-Bush Administrations. Though heavily dependant on the responsiveness of school administrators and the rationality of parents, Rossell presents an interesting and well-researched solution for school desegregation in the 1990s.

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