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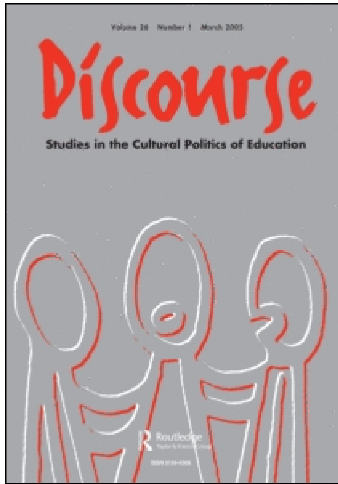

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Contesting the city: neoliberal urbanism and the cultural politics of education reform in Chicago

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Contesting the city: neoliberal urbanism and the cultural politics of education reform in Chicago

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This article examines the intertwining of neoliberal urbanism and education policy in Chicago. Drawing on critical studies in geography, urban sociology and anthropology, education policy, and critical analyses of race, the author argues that education is constitutive of material and ideological processes of neoliberal restructuring, its contestation, and the struggle for a new urban social imaginary. The paper focuses on neoliberalization of education as a social process. The data show that education policy is constitutive of racialized restructuring of urban space and managerial governance of the public sphere. While capital is a central actor, neoliberal policy also works its way into the discourses and practices of education through actions of marginalized and oppressed people working within constraints of the present situation. This suggests the need to address the (Gramscian) 'good sense' of neoliberal policy in a counter-hegemonic struggle for the city.

Keywords: neoliberalism; urban restructuring; cultural politics; race

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> ... cities (including their suburban peripheries) have become increasingly important geographical targets and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments, from place-marketing and local boosterism, enterprise zones, tax abatements, urban development corporations, and public–private partnerships to workfare policies, property redevelopment schemes, new strategies of social control, policing and surveillance, and a host of other institutional modifications within the local state apparatus. The overarching goal of such experiments is to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices.
>
> The manifestations of destructively creative neoliberalization are evident across the urban landscape: the razing of lower income neighborhoods to make way for speculative development; the extension of market rents and housing vouchers; the increased reliance by municipalities on instruments of private finance; the privatization of schools; the administration of workfare programs; the mobilization of entrepreneurial discourses emphasizing reinvestment and rejuvenation; and so forth. ('City as Lab'; Peck, Brenner, & Theodore, 2008)

Neoliberal economic and social policies that have produced the greatest concentration of wealth in the fewest hands in history are reshaping cities globally, as described by Peck, Brenner and Theodore above. This is true not only for 'global cities', command centers of the global economy (Sassen, 2006) such as New York, London, Sao Paulo, and Tokyo, but also for the new production hearths and megapolises of the Global South (Davis, 2005; Smith, 2002) and economically devastated urban centers such as post-Katrina New Orleans and Detroit (Pedroni, 2011, this issue).

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In this paper, I focus on neoliberal globalization in Chicago, a global city that is a laboratory for neoliberal urban restructuring in the USA.

Chicago has also been an incubator for neoliberal education policies, and I am specifically interested in the intertwining of these policies with the neoliberal urban agenda. In previous work I discussed the relationship of education accountability and differentiated schools to the drive to make Chicago a global city (Lipman, 2004). Here I focus on education privatization as a vehicle to further the neoliberal development of the city. Drawing on critical studies in geography, urban sociology and anthropology, education policy, and critical analyses of race, I argue first that education is constitutive of neoliberal urban restructuring and the ideology of neoliberal urbanism (see Lipman, 2011). Second, I explore the cultural politics of neoliberalism as a social process and the role of various social actors in neoliberalization of education.

Totalizing accounts of neoliberalism focus on the power of capital and the state to impose a set of political and economic arrangements on the city. But a more dynamic analysis treats neoliberalism as a social process that is materialized through the actions of multiple social actors, not only elites but also through the engagement of people in the 'grassroots'. From this perspective, neoliberalism in education is produced on the ground through the actions of teachers and parents who are recruited to or align themselves with education markets and privatization. Understanding this process involves examining the 'good sense' in these policies, how they resonate with people's lived experiences, needs and desires (Gramsci, 1971), and how their needs are articulated to the dominant agenda. It also involves examining the subject positions available to parents and teachers and students in the context of neoliberal restructuring and the circulation of neoliberal ideologies (see Apple & Oliver, 1996; Pedroni, 2007). What identities are offered to parents, teachers, students, and community members by the discourse of neoliberalism and its material constraints, given the relative weakness of social movements to articulate and mobilize an alternative, liberatory agenda for education and the city? Here I examine the production of common sense around charter schools and educational choice as an aspect of winning the consent of parents and teachers to hegemonic neoliberal urbanism.

My analysis is based on interviews, informal conversations, observations, and documents collected through six years of ethnographic research and participation in social movements. I draw on research reports and archival documents on federal housing policy, urban development, and urban education nationally and in Chicago and a variety of documentary and participant observation data collected from 2004 to 2010 in public meetings of teachers, union and education activists, parents, community organizers, youth, and relevant monthly school board meetings and official public school hearings. My data also include formal interviews with teachers, parents, and school staff and eight in-depth interviews with Latino and African-American charter school parents and a director of a teacher education program associated with charter schools. I coded the interviews, documents, and fieldnotes for themes and constructed my analysis from this coding. I also co-authored several reports on the effects of Chicago's education reforms and the intersection of education, housing and community development in the city (Fleming et al., 2009; Greenlee, Hudspeth, Lipman, Smith, & Smith, 2008; Lipman, Person, & Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, 2007), and these reports inform my discussion.

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I begin by summarizing the constitutive role of education in neoliberal urbanism in Chicago. Then I focus on some of the actors and social processes that are furthering the neoliberalization of education. I conclude with implications for the contest for the city.

Chicago – neoliberal policy lab

Brenner and Theodore (2002) write that 'actually existing neoliberalism' involves the intervention of the state, first to destroy existing institutional arrangements, and then to create a new infrastructure for capital accumulation. Critical geographers and urban scholars argue that cities have become the policy labs for neoliberal experiments in urban entrepreneurship, marketization, and competition. Peck, Brenner, and Theodore (2008) write, 'In city after city, policy experiments have been advocated in order to unleash the latent innovative capacities of local economies, to foster a local entrepreneurial culture, and to enhance labor market flexibility, competitiveness in place-marketing schemes, and place-specific assets'. Cities are key sites for deregulation of labor and attacks on unions, privatization of public infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, parks) and institutions, cuts in spending for social welfare, new arenas for capital investment, and neoliberal state forms. In short, neoliberal governance, economics, and ideology have become the 'drivers of urban change' (Hackworth, 2007, p. 2).

As the rollback of the Keynsian welfare state and the devolution of federal responsibility for social welfare took hold in the USA in the 1980s, entrepreneurial city governments adopted policies to spur corporate growth and competition in the global economy. To make up for federal cuts, and driven by market ideology, local governments turned to property and real-estate taxes and debt financing (Hackworth, 2007; Smith, 2002; Weber, 2002). They made policy decisions based on satisfying investors and real-estate developers and growth strategies. In particular, bond rating agencies, the gate keepers of global capital markets, became a central institutional force regulating urban governments as municipal debt, in the form of municipal bonds and other securities generated through real-estate tax revenues and other taxes, are traded in the global financial markets (Hackworth, 2007; Weber, 2002). This began the process of the local state shifting from a site of negotiation of conflicts between capital and labor/social movements to regulation of the state by finance capital. The new logic of urban government is: Anything that hurts investment is 'bad' for bond ratings and thus 'bad' urban policy.

Chicago is a quintessential entrepreneurial city, exemplified by World Business Chicago (WBC). WBC is a public–private economic development corporation, chaired by Mayor Daley and funded jointly by the City of Chicago and the private sector with a Board of Directors made up of some of the region's leading business executives. Shaped by the logics of transnational capital and the ideology of the market, WBC's mission is to increase the city's competitive advantage (World Business Chicago, n.d.). These logics dictate a 'favorable business climate' strategy offering low wages, investment opportunities, well-trained service and production workers, and a pool of creative high-skilled professionals and the social amenities attractive to these professionals, including schools and housing. All this is naturalized by the depoliticized discourse of 'globalization' as a deterministic process (Wilson, 2007).

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Neoliberal urbanism is also defined by a shift from government to governance: leadership as efficient management, weak forms of democracy and public participation in civic life, decision making by public–private partnerships, and valorization of the interest of capital as synonymous with public welfare. Decisions about zoning, community economic development, public housing, schools, and transportation are made behind closed doors by appointed commissions and unelected public–private bodies, validated by performances of public participation, and justified by the need to improve the city's competitive advantage. This process clearly describes Chicago where the mayor appoints the school board, zoning commissions, local development oversight bodies, public housing authorities, and virtually every decision-making body in the city. The local state relegates public participation to contrived public hearings and appointed advisory groups (Bennett, Smith, & Wright, 2006; Lipman, 2011), and justifies policy decisions by their contribution to the city's 'revitalization' and 'good business climate'.

Neoliberal governance is also 'hypermarketized' ... [it] 'denigrates collective consumption and institutions' (Weber, 2002, p. 520). Gutting social welfare and privatizing public assets have become the new urban dogma. Under Mayor Richard M. Daley, Chicago has privatized bridges, parking meters, public parking garages, schools, hospitals, and public housing, and entered into partnerships with private developers and corporations that span real estate, schools, and development of parks and whole areas of the city. Drawing on the discourse of 'economic competitiveness', the state also supports labor restructuring (driving down the cost of labor) through deregulation, outsourcing unionized jobs, casualized and contingent labor. To deal with the contradictions produced by neoliberal policies in Chicago and nationally, the privatizing state is also a punitive state that polices and contains immigrants, homeless people, the dispossessed, and low-income communities of color, particularly youth, and their potential resistance (Mitchell, 2003; Wacquant, 2001, 2008). Chicago is notorious for its police torture scandals, gang loitering ordinance, school suspensions and expulsions of youth of color, and brutal policing of African-American and Latino communities. In short, neoliberal urbanism has set in motion new forms of state-assisted economic, social, and spatial inequality, marginality, exclusion, and punishment.

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Facilitated by municipal government, gentrification is a pivotal sector in urban economies (Hackworth, 2007; Smith, 2002), a key arena for financial speculation, and a central factor in the production of spatial inequality, displacement, homelessness, and racial containment. Reliance on property tax revenues and real-estate taxes to fund public services and to collateralize municipal bonds makes cities dependent on, and active subsidizers of, the real-estate market. In turn, municipal bonds, and other securities generated through real-estate tax revenues and other taxes, are traded in the global financial markets (see Weber, 2002).

Chicago's development is dominated by downtown mega developments and gentrification of inner-city areas and working-class neighborhoods. This has been facilitated by state subsidies to developers and other schemes to finance and support real-estate development. City government has presided over the largest project to dismantle public housing in the USA – 19,000 units. Experts estimate that less than 15% of former residents will be able to return to new 'mixed-income' developments that replace them (Wilen & Nayak, 2006). Most former tenants, mostly African-Americans, have been pushed into the private housing market in other very

low-income neighborhoods or out of the city altogether. Where high-rise public housing units and working-class apartments once stood, gentrification complexes of high-end town homes, condominiums, single-family houses, and upscale cafes, gyms, restaurants, boutiques, and parks take their place. As real-estate speculation pushes up property values and property taxes, working-class renters and home owners are squeezed out of the city. In the USA, by 2008 the number of suburban poor exceeded the poor in central cities, and during the recession beginning in 2008 poverty rates have risen faster in suburbs than cities, with Chicago a prime case (Allard & Roth, 2010). In part, this can be attributed to displacement of low-income people from the city to inner suburbs, in addition to other contested global processes that are reconstituting metro regions, i.e., growth of metro regions, restructuring and racialization of labor markets, immigration of low wage-earning immigrants directly to suburbs, and new patterns of racial containment and contestation.

It is important to note, that despite the potency of the 'global trope' – globalization as an inevitable process and global competitiveness as the only alternative (Wilson, 2007) – neoliberal urbanism is contested in Chicago as it is globally (Leitner, Peck, & Sheppard, 2007). For example, in 2008, a coalition of unions and community organizations fought for a living wage ordinance and stopped approval of a big box retail store that would drive out small businesses and pay low wages. Parents, students, and teachers have doggedly resisted neoliberal education policies, and several coalitions challenged Chicago's 2016 Olympics bid – which ultimately failed.

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Chicago's Renaissance 2010 – a new market in public education

The confirmation of Arne Duncan, the CEO of Chicago Public Schools (CPS),[1] as US Secretary of Education in 2009 signalled the national extension of Chicago's urban education agenda centered on markets and privatization. This agenda is facilitated by mayoral control of school systems, which Chicago pioneered. It is characterized by closing public schools to turn them over to private management organizations, tying competitive teacher pay to student test scores, and expanding privately run but publicly funded charter schools and 'choice' while 'steering education at a distance' through testing regimes and standards. Under Duncan, these interventions are a prerequisite to obtain new outlays of federal funding for local education at a time when cash-strapped urban school districts face severe revenue crises (US Department of Education, 2009). Although the USA has been moving in this direction since the 1980s, Chicago has elaborated and promoted a national model of the larger global project to restructure schooling for economic competitiveness and markets (e.g., Dale, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

The first stage of Chicago's market-based agenda, Renaissance 2010 (Ren2010), begun in 2004, aimed to close 60–70 public schools and open 100 new schools by 2010, two-thirds as charter or contract schools (similar to charters). Charter and contract schools are privately operated by non-profit or for-profit education management organizations, but receive public funds. In Chicago they do not have democratically elected Local School Councils (LSCs) comprised primarily of parents and community members, as public schools do. And, as in most of the USA, charter and contract schools are also non-union. They select students by lottery and are not required to accept neighborhood children. As of Spring 2010, CPS had closed,

consolidated, or phased out 59 schools and opened 92 (46 charter schools, 15 contract schools, and 31 public 'performance'[2] schools) plus six military high schools (one for every branch of the armed services). Initially proposed to close 'failing schools', Ren2010 morphed to consolidate and phase out schools with low enrolment, including successful neighborhood schools, on grounds of inefficient space utilization. CPS also launched a corporate 'turn around' strategy to fire all adults in a school, keep the students, and turn the school over to a private education manager or 'turnaround specialist'.

Ren2010 has been a nationally visible and highly contested intervention in public education. Swirling at the surface of community mobilizations, public discussions, private conversations, and media accounts are issues of educational equity, class and race inequalities in the city, gentrification, community participation, individual choice, and the role of teacher unions. The mayor and his appointed school officials contend that Ren2010 creates 'options' and 'choice', promotes innovation, and raises achievement. There are working-class, primarily Black and Latino, parents who have seen Ren2010 as an opportunity to exercise some agency in their children's education. (I examine their perspectives in later sections of the paper.) Some primarily white, affluent parents have also seized upon Ren2010 as an opportunity to expand selective enrolment and magnet schools for their children. On the other hand, organized community groups and parent organizations, the teachers union, some school reform groups, and students have waged on-going opposition. From the outset, they claimed the plan would destabilize communities and accelerate gentrification, increase student mobility and school violence, harm low-income and homeless children in particular, undermine community participation in schools, weaken unions, and privatize education (Kenwood Oakland Local School Council Alliance, n.d.; fieldnotes, Chicagoans United for Education press conference, July 1, 2004).

The results largely confirm their predictions. Across African-American communities, schools have been closed for low achievement even when lower-performing schools in other neighborhoods were not. In one African-American community, there is not one public high school remaining – all have been replaced with charter schools. In Latino communities experiencing gentrification, CPS closed schools for low enrolment, despite counter evidence (Fleming et al., 2009; Greenlee et al., 2008) and replaced several with selective schools championed by affluent parents that most neighborhood children cannot attend. The student mobility and danger produced by closing schools and transferring students out of their neighborhoods have led to spikes in violence, including student deaths (Karp, 2009; Lipman, Person, & Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, 2007). Some African-American students were transferred to as many as four schools in three years as one school after another was closed, and receiving schools were destabilized by the influx of dislocated students. Moreover, the plan has not benefited most students in closed schools who have been shuffled from one low-performing school to another (Gwynne & de la Torre, 2009). Because most of the closed schools have been in African-American communities where there are heaviest concentrations of African-American educators, these teachers have been particularly affected. According to the Caucus of Rank and File Educators, more than 2000 African-American teachers and over 100 principals and administrators lost their jobs (Schmidt, 2009).

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Neoliberalism reframes democracy as the freedom to consume in the market, and Renaissance 2010 reinforces the democratic deficits that characterize neoliberal governance. They replace public schools with privately run and non-union charter schools and undermine elected LSCs. In a highly centralized, corporate-dominated city and mayoral regime, LSCs are one of few democratic bodies with decision-making power. In a school system that is 91% students of color and 84% low income, LSCs are a space where working-class communities of color might contend for power. By redistributing power to parents and community representatives, LSCs also 'asserted the capacity of ordinary citizens to reach intelligent decisions about educational policy' (Katz, 1992, p. 62). In this sense, when they are at their best, LSCs play an important pedagogical role. They develop collective capacities of people to engage in democratic debate and decision making about policies affecting their communities. By undermining local governing councils, Ren2010 enforces the neoliberal preference for governance by appointed experts and elites as a politically stabilizing environment to implement market mechanisms (Harvey, 2005).

Beyond the stratifying impact on students and schools, Chicago's school policies contribute to the production of political, economic, and spatial inequalities, marginalization, and exclusion in the city. In the following sections I elaborate this point and examine social processes, actors, and ideologies that animate this process.

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Education and restructuring urban space

Education and housing policies are historically intertwined in the racialized spatialization of inequality in the USA. Residential segregation has been a principle source of racially segregated schooling, and schools have long been a primary selling point to market housing in specific neighborhoods. In Chicago, policies to close neighborhood schools in low-income communities contribute to displacement of current residents, and policies to replace them with schools that target middle-class families support the gentrification of these areas. When Ren2010 was unveiled in 2004, the Chicago Metropolitan Planning Council made explicit the connection between education and the redevelopment of former public housing sites as mixed-income developments:

> Looking ahead, a number of issues should be addressed as Renaissance 2010 unfolds, including how to coordinate the development timelines of mixed-income communities with the openings and closings of schools nearby, how to establish ongoing communication mechanisms to report on the status and progress of Renaissance 2010 to all of the stakeholders involved in the process, and how to market these new schools to parents considering moving into the new mixed-income communities. (CHA Plan for Transformation, 2004)

Neighborhood schools are particularly important anchors in communities with persistently high unemployment, lack of programs for children and adults, and overall disinvestment. The Ren2010 policy of closing schools and displacing children and their teachers undermines community stability, particularly as the current economic crisis further destabilizes working-class and low-income families. If neighborhood schools bind people to a neighborhood undergoing change, closing them is a powerful lever to nudge people out:

> When a family sees the neighbourhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighbourhood, when the stores they patronise are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less liveable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe. Its actuality is only a matter of time. Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather than wait for the inevitable; nonetheless they are displaced. (Marcuse quoted in Slater, 2009, pp. 303–304)

Some African-American and Latino areas of Chicago that have been disinvested in for decades are now valuable real estate. These huge tracts of the city are now potential sites for reinvestment and gentrification, or are already largely transformed into middle-class and upper middle-class housing and retail zones. Mapping school closings demonstrates that they have been concentrated in areas experiencing intense gentrification or beginning to be gentrified (Greenlee et al., 2008; Lipman & Haines, 2007). By failing to provide necessary resources[3] and then closing neighborhood schools, Ren2010 facilitates displacement and dispersal of the low-income African-American and Latino families who live there. In turn, replacing their schools with prestigious selective enrolment schools, magnet schools, and attractive charter schools increases the neighborhood's appeal to new middle- and upper middle-class homebuyers.

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This is so for schools closed both for 'failure' and for low enrolment. Underutilization of school buildings is not simply a 'natural' process of demographic shifts. Declining school enrolments are socially produced in the nexus of capital accumulation and the cultural politics of race and class in specific places, as are dismantling of public housing and decline of small businesses in disinvested neighborhoods. The loss of affordable housing is the result of capital accumulation strategies that are lubricated by the state's support for private real-estate development, e.g., policies to raze public housing and Tax Increment Financing zones that subsidize developers.[4] As low-income working-class families are pushed out or priced out of gentrifying neighborhoods, their schools lose enrolment (Fleming et al., 2009; Greenlee et al., 2008). School underutilization then is a product of housing policies that force working-class people out of their neighborhoods, and, in turn, underutilization furnishes a rationale to close schools which further pushes people out and clears space for new selective schools favored by gentrifiers. Gentrification is a pivotal sector in the city's economy, and this process powerfully illustrates the intertwining of housing and education policies in the neoliberal restructuring of the city.

Urban regeneration and the cultural politics of race

Appropriation of urban space through gentrification, closing public institutions (schools, hospitals, public housing) and state seizure of land through eminent domain is a cultural as well material process that is produced through discourses of obsolescence, pathology, and rejuvenation. Obsolescence is constructed as a naturalized process with the market as a neutral arbiter of value to determine what is obsolete and should be dismantled. Yet, the value of buildings or whole neighborhoods is actually discursively produced, with the state strategically declaring some areas 'blighted' as a precondition for their seizure under eminent domain and

for state-assisted private real-estate redevelopment and gentrification. For example, Weber (2002, p. 526) notes that even though buildings in the African-American South Side of Chicago were not as old as in other areas of the city, the city more frequently categorized them as unfit or substandard. In turn, the dispersal of thousands of public housing families and working-class residents from their homes and schools is legitimated as 'change' and 'regeneration' (see Wilson, 2007). This is a class project that is also deeply racialized and enabled by white supremacist history and ideology.

In the change/regeneration discourse there is no alternative to market-driven restructuring of schools, housing, neighborhoods, and downtowns and dispersal of low-income people. As Ren2010 rolled out, Chicago's School Board president (himself a developer) characterized oppositional parents and community members as people 'who don't want change'. In contrast, willingness to make 'tough choices' and enact 'dramatic' change is the mantra justifying closing schools and turning them over to private operators or remaking them as boutique specialty schools neighborhood children are generally unable to attend. Bringing this discourse to the national stage, Secretary of Education Duncan called for 'radical new thinking ... ideas that are controversial and hard and tough ... the political courage to challenge the status quo' (US Department of Education, 2009). In the face of decades of disinvestment and an historically constituted 'education debt' (Ladson-Billings, 2006), neoliberal policies become the only option to 'fix' urban schools and 'change' serves as a discourse of containment, stifling debate and claiming sole authority to speak for 'progress'. Invoking the epistemic authority of the neoliberal version of reality as the only alternative denies that disinvested communities actually 'long for change' (as a community resident put it) that will improve housing, schools, streets, job prospects, and living conditions – for them in their communities.

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The neoliberal project has been legitimated through neoconservative discourses that frame race, class, and gender in cultural terms (Duggan, 2003), in this case creating a narrative of race, poverty, and social pathology. In Chicago and elsewhere, the cycle of neglect, racial containment, and redevelopment of central cities where African-Americans and Latinos live has been justified by the discourse of the 'ghetto' as dangerous and pathological and by stigmatizing the identities of those who live there (e.g., Moynihan, 1965; Wilson, 2007). Haymes (1995) argues that the gentrification of African-American communities is facilitated by an urban mythology 'that has identified Blacks with disorder and danger in the city' (p. x). In the White cultural imagination the 'ghetto' is a space of pathology and lawlessness. Applauding the impending demolition of the Robert Taylor Public Housing complex and its replacement with a monumental, privately developed–publicly subsidized, real-estate project, *Chicago Tribune* writers offered a narrative of the regeneration of the area: 'It's focus is shifting from cleaning out bad elements to bringing in good ones' (Grossman and Leroux, 2006, p. 12). In this view, a population that has become largely expendable in the restructured labor force and 'dangerous' to a global city image of white middle-class stability and sanitized cultural diversity must be expelled or contained (Smith, 1996; Wilson, 2007). The regeneration discourse masks the nexus of racialized public policy and investment decisions that produced deindustrialization, disinvestment, unemployment, and degradation of public health, the built environment, and education in communities of color over the past 50 years. The discourse of 'failing' schools in low-income communities of color is constitutive of

framing 'bad neighborhoods' in need of cleansing. Closing schools to re-open them with new identities in turn enables the 'renaissance' of the area for new middle-class home buyers.

At the same time that displacement is highly racialized, in the post-Civil Rights, 'post-racial' era, racism has been rearticulated to a discourse of culture. Strains of this discourse run through justifications for closing schools under Ren2010. At a February 2005 press conference announcing the closing of a high school in a very low-income African-American community, the CEO of CPS explained that the school had to be closed because it exhibited a 'culture of failure'. The representation of black urban space as pathological is yoked to the supposedly regenerative and disciplining effects of the market. According to this racialized neoliberal logic, while public housing and public schools breed dysfunction and failure, private management, the market, and public–private partnerships foster entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, choice, and discipline. The 'concepts "public" and "private" now act as racialized metaphors, the private is equated with being "good" and "white" and the public with being "bad" and "black"' (Haymes, 1995, p. 20). This frame denies the real complexity, historicity, and role of African-American communities as spaces of intellectual and cultural production and as bases of political and cultural resistance and collective support in the face of racist terror and discrimination (Fullilove, 2005; Haymes, 1995). Here the logics of capital and race converge to provide ideological fodder for the dismantling of public housing and closing of schools in Black communities.

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For privileged consumers of gentrified areas and newly branded selective schools, this ideological and material process is intertwined with what George Lipsitz calls a racialized social warrant for competitive consumerism and private appropriation and the racialization of space. A social warrant is a 'collectively sanctioned understanding of obligations and entitlements' that authorizes new ways of knowing and being and transforms what is permitted and forbidden (Lipsitz, 2006a):

> [A] social warrant of competitive consumer citizenship encourages well off communities to hoard their advantages, to seek to have their tax base used to fund only themselves and their interests, and to displace the costs of remedying complex social problems onto less powerful and less wealthy populations. (Lipsitz, 2006b, p. 455)

It justifies the entitlement of affluent and white parents to the assets of working-class and low-income people of color – their houses, neighborhoods, and schools.

Insinuating managerialism into the public sphere

The shift to managerialism in education is part of the larger shift from government to governance that characterizes the neoliberal state. The model of 'more and better management' (Clarke & Newman, 1997) as a solution to urban problems has defined the leadership and administration of Chicago Public Schools. Moreover, the high-profile elaboration of managerialism in school governance has further valorized the managerial state form in general.

This shift in education has been accomplished, in part, by centralization of power in the state, demonstrating that the neoliberal state is not a weakened state but rather a redirected state. In 1995 the Illinois State Legislature gave the mayor of Chicago

control of Chicago Public Schools including authority to appoint the Board of Education and top administrative officials. Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed a Board of corporate CEOs, bankers, and developers and a succession of managers from city administration to run the school district (Daleys' Budget Director, Paul Valas; his Chief of Staff, Arne Duncan; his appointed head of Chicago Transit Authority, Ron Huberman). This marked a move from educators to managers at the helm of the city's public education system. Over the course of 15 years this administration has entrenched a regime of markets and top-down accountability modeled on business, and efficiency-driven performance-based 'public management' (Clark & Newman, 1997). Its latest iteration is accountability of teachers and staff at all levels to a 'performance management matrix' and evaluation of teachers based on 'value-added', e.g. student test scores. Chicago is a national model for mayoral control (Wong, 2009) as the lever to push through neoliberal restructuring of school districts.

The deployment of the discourse of public management and markets in the most extensive public institution in the city naturalizes the neoliberal managerial state form, as a technology of power, in the city generally. Ren2010 whittles away democratic possibilities of elected LSCs while charter schools are controlled by private boards, and the school district is run by mangers. Parents are positioned as consumers in an educational marketplace rather than citizens of the city who deserve a quality, relevant education in their neighborhood. They are 'empowered' as self-interested school shoppers rather than participants in collective debates and struggles for appropriate and equitable educations. Schooling is about productivity on test scores and preparation for global economic competitiveness, not cultivation of personal and social development. Schools are to be run like businesses, teachers treated as employees, education as a product, and leadership as efficient management. Based on my extensive research and interaction with teachers, administrators, and students in Chicago Public Schools, it would be hard to overstate the ideological force of this discourse in the production of neoliberal subjectivities (Ball, 2003; Lipman, 2004). Managerialism has seeped into the fabric of schools at all levels and is legitimated in public discussion of education.

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Direct intervention of corporate actors

In June 2003, the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, an organization of the most powerful corporate, financial, and civic elites in the city, issued a report, *Left Behind*, calling for education markets as the key to improving schools. The report proposed closing 'failing schools' and opening at least 100 charter schools to increase 'parental choice' and put 'competitive pressure' on chronically failing neighborhood schools. Bemoaning slow progress in raising test scores, the report echoed neoliberal theorist Milton Friedman (1962) arguing that school improvement is stymied because public schools are 'a monopoly'. The Club's solution was to inject competition through the market, to promote 'flexibility' by curbing union contracts, and to dilute LSCs. This report was the blueprint for Renaissance 2010 which Mayor Daley announced a year later at a Commercial Club event. Still dissatisfied in 2009, the Club issued a follow-up report, *Still Left Behind*, calling for expanding the education market (Commercial Club of Chicago, 2009).

Beyond framing the education agenda, the Club is directly engaged in its promotion and execution. The Club created the Renaissance Schools Fund (RSF) to co-lead Ren2010 with CPS. The RSF raised $50 million for Ren2010 new school planning, and with CPS staff, the RSF selects new Ren2010 school operators and recruits and trains them, develops strategies for new schools, builds public awareness and demand for choice, and supports accountability and performance reporting of new schools.[5] The RSF is comprised of leading corporate and banking CEOs and top CPS officials.[6] The Chief Operating Officer of the RSF noted that the RSF is 'engaged at a detailed level' and has a 'close working relationship with CPS' (fieldnotes, RSF Symposium, May 6, 2008). Through *differential* funding the RSF is also able to promote specific charter school models (fieldnotes, May 5, 2005). In May 2008, the RSF hosted a gala symposium at a downtown corporate headquarters to tout Ren2010 to corporate sponsors, charter school operators, and the press and promote the agenda nationally. (The symposium was attended by representatives from 14 cities.) The RSF also funds Parents for School Choice, an organization of mainly African-American parents that promotes Ren2010 and choice.

In short, Ren2010 is a public–private partnership at the highest level. Capital is stepping in to shape and oversee the implementation of a neoliberal education agenda in collaboration with the local state, reflecting a larger pattern of direct intervention by capital in the neoliberalization of the city. Since the 1980s, the Commercial Club has interceded directly to reshape public schools, housing and transportation policy to retool the city and metro region for global economic competitiveness (Johnson, 1998). In particular, the Club stresses the strategic importance of schools to the city's competitive advantage in the context of globalization, e.g., education for workforce preparation and selective public schools to attract and retain high-paid professionals (Lipman, 2004). (In fact, many public school students are being prepared for neither. Their schools are little more than spaces of racial regulation and containment, or worse, pathways to prison or the military; Lipman, 2003.) In its 2009 report advocating more extensive school markets, the Club notes that education has been a 'consistent focus of its Civic Committee from 1988 through Renaissance 2010' (Commercial Club of Chicago, 2009, p. 1).

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Neoliberalization on the ground – offering them an oar

While corporate and state actors in some sense *impose* the neoliberal agenda on the city 'from above', it takes hold and is materialized through the decisions and actions of teachers and parents on the ground. If neoliberals have succeeded in appropriating the discourse of change, in part, this is because the power to act as a consumer has resonance in the face of the intransigence of an exclusionary and inequitable public education system (Pedroni, 2007) – and because no other avenues appear viable. Critical scholars have extensively documented the racism, inequity, bureaucratic intransigence, reproduction of social inequality, and reactionary ideologies that have pervaded public education in the USA historically (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2004; Irvine, 1991; Kozol, 1992). Scholars have also documented the intersection of these inequities and broader urban, national, and global policies (Anyon, 2005; Lipman, 2004). It is no accident that Chicago's charter schools are concentrated in very low-income African-American and Latino communities where public schools have been

historically under-resourced and which bear the scars of years of public and private disinvestment and racism. Like the failure to maintain decent public housing and other urban infrastructure, this is a strategy of disinvestment in public goods that furthers privatization, and, as I have argued above, the spatial restructuring of the city.

While charter schools are part of the neoliberal agenda, they also resonate with some parents desperate for a decent education for their children and in an environment of school choice. The first New Schools Expo (exhibition primarily of charter school vendors) in 2008 was held in a Ren2010 school and attended by about 700 parents and students. The 2009 and 2010 Expos were in the United Airlines Club at Soldier Field (where the Chicago Bears football team plays) and attended by over 4000. In part the growing interest in charters is because Black and Latino students have been pushed into the charter school market as their neighborhood schools have been closed under Ren2010. Funded by the RSF, the Expo has the earmark of the Commercial Club's promotion of school choice. But the cultural politics of the Expo are more complex. The Parents for School Choice website, albeit funded by the RSF, presents a compelling case for opting out of neighborhood public schools: 'Only 45% of Chicago Public School students graduate from high school, and only 3 of every 100 African-American and Latino males in Chicago Public Schools earn a college degree'.[7] Concerns with school safety, lack of academic and social support for young black men, and lack of individual attention to students run through the group's materials. With the state's persistent disregard for the claims of working-class parents, especially people of color, the 'good sense' of the market speaks to real issues even if privatization is counter to people's long-term interests (Apple & Oliver, 1996).

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Oppressed and exploited people act in conditions not of our own making. People may choose to pragmatically engage charters in the absence of collective mobilizations and viable alternatives. Interviews with charter school parents (Lipman, 2011) are filled with frustration, grasping for viable alternatives, and savvily working the system. As Ms. Williams, a charter school parent put it, parents 'are drowning in the middle of the sea'. If 'someone rows up in a boat and offers them an oar' [charter school], they're going to take it 'because it's better than nothing'. Most parents we interviewed had persistently investigated school options, sometimes transferring their children several times between public and charter schools. One mother, Ms. Hernandezz, worked her way into a charter school by pestering the principal and demonstrating she would be an involved parent. For her, a new charter school in her community was a way to have some some agency in her children's education that was denied by her unresponsive public school (see Pedroni, 2007). Public school administrators tried to dissuade her, but she did research on school district regulations: 'I told them that I was the mom and I had the choice to enroll them at whatever school I wanted'.

Parents voiced a common litany of frustrations with neighborhood public schools: lack of individual attention to students' academic needs, lack of communication and responsiveness to parents, paucity of resources and programs, large class sizes, incompetent or uncaring teachers, too much focus on test prep, low graduation rates, and especially for Latinos we interviewed, lack of safety. They did not proclaim ideological allegiance to school markets or privatization. Their choice of a charter school was tactical, pragmatic. Ms. King, a charter school parent who

participated in lobbying state legislators to raise the state cap on charter schools, claimed that 'divisive' charter school debates do not take into account that parents feel like they 'need better options' and 'just want to do what's best for their child'. In fact, most parents voiced support for public schools in general, and African-American parents spoke nostalgically of their own public school experiences. But they rejected the diminished education served up by schools obsessed with high-stakes tests; they aspired to a more holistic educational experience, and were fed up with their inability to effect change for their children.

What parents wanted is entirely possible within public education, but the strategy for achieving it is bounded by the neoliberal discourse of markets and individual choice and grounded in the frustration of consistently trying and failing to get change in their public schools. Markets extend the identity of 'empowered' consumer to everyone. In reality, the USA has a long history of school choice for a privileged few through selective public schools, elite private schools, and a parallel system of parochial schools for working- and middle-class students who can afford them. An applicant to a charter school enters the realm of the privileged with the proffered opportunity to select and be selected, to exercise choice versus the great mass who are undifferentiated recipients of what the state doles out. This association of charter schools with private, magnet, and selective schools echoes through parent interviews. For example, Ms. King: 'It's almost like a private school but it's not'. Moreover, because every charter school advertises its specialness, the charter school market seems to generalize the opportunity to attend a school of distinction. There is a powerful good sense in this logic given the deeply stratified and inequitable system of public education in the USA and the ability of the wealthy and privileged to opt out.

Yet, the aggregate result of redefining democracy as consumer choice is to further atomize and disempower people. Charter schools are another arena for capital accumulation facilitated by the cycle of racialized disinvestment, devaluation, and reinvestment in urban areas (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). They are part of the neoliberal restructuring of cities as nearly all aspects of urban life are commodified, and public goods are appropriated for private profit in the neoliberal remix of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2003). In Chicago, the dramatic expansion of charter schools is promoted by a high-level public–private partnership (Renaissance 2010) between the mayor and powerful corporate and financial interests (Commerical Club of Chicago) who are authorized to make decisions – without public oversight – about the education of the city's over 400,000 school children, 92% of whom are children of color and 85% are classified as low-income. This commodification of social life represents not only a capital accumulation strategy but a social imaginary of a market-driven city in which 'citizens' are differentially rewarded competitive consumers whose success depends on their entrepreneurship and individual effort. In this sense, charter schools are part of the re-norming and revaluing of urban social relations and subjectivities. However, marketization of education is materialized on the ground through the actions of parents and teachers (who choose to teach in charter schools; Lipman, 2011) and embedded in the historical failures and exclusions of public education, as are the marketization of public housing and other public services. Looked at this way, neoliberalism is a *process* that works its way into the discourses and practices of the city through the actions of not just elites, but also marginalized and oppressed people acting within the constraints and limitations of the present situation.

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Conclusion

The struggle over education is part of the contest for the city and in relation to struggles for housing, living wage jobs, public transit, access to public space, and against police abuse and race and class exclusion. Chicago illustrates that education is intertwined with the neoliberalization of cities. This is manifested by its role in displacement of people of color and gentrification of their communities and its contribution to racialized discourses of pathology that legitimate racial exclusion and expropriation of their communities for capital accumulation. Education policy also instantiates and promotes managerial state discourses and practices and the privatization of public institutions. This is accomplished through a multiplicity of social actors – capital in alliance with the state but also parents seizing on charter schools as an answer to the failings of their public schools. Against a background of disinvested and disrespectful public schools and relatively weak progressive social movements, the market seemingly offers a space for agency. For some parents, the subject position of 'empowered consumer' is preferable to that of 'public school parent' supplicant to intransigent and inequitable schools (Pedroni, 2007).

The discourse of education markets, managerialism, and choice is part of a larger neoliberal ideological current that circulates in the city. However, it is not determined with how neoliberal discourses will be taken up; they are read in different ways. While some parents choose charter schools and actively organize for them, others see them as a threat to public education and democratic control and vehicles to gentrify their communities, and they mobilize to challenge privatization (Lipman & Haines, 2007). There are also initiatives on the ground to create alternatives. This energy is materialized in several social justice high schools in the city, robust practices of critical and culturally relevant pedagogy, the examples of a hunger strike by Mexican parents that won a state-of-the-art high school in their community and a recent successful 43-day building occupation by Mexican parents to win a library and community center for their school. There is a burgeoning education for liberation movement among youth, teachers, and cultural workers in the city. These interconnected projects embody seeds of re-visioned public education that is liberatory and democratic. Importantly, what they want is fundamentally similar to the charter school parents we interviewed.

In periods when ruling classes consolidate a hegemonic social bloc and reshape common sense around its program (as has been the case with neoliberalism over the past 25 years), and progressive movements are relatively weak, oppressed people may tactically ally with elements of the dominant agenda (Pedroni, 2007). In the case of Ren2010 and charter schools, the decision of working-class parents of color to act as 'empowered consumers' is historically contingent, grounded in the disinvestment and racism and exclusion of public education in their communities and the relative weakness of progressive social movements. This is quite different from the entitlement exercised by privileged parents to use Ren2010 to agitate for more selective schools for their children. This points to the provisional nature of hegemony and the potential for counter-hegemonic movements organized around a liberatory agenda that is grounded in people's needs and aspirations. But winning the battle of common sense against a neoliberal social imaginary of possessive individualism, competition, and consumption will require forging a new social imaginary of a truly inclusive and democratic urban commons (Fraser, 1997; Pedroni, 2009). Part of that

is redefining what we mean by *public* education, who participates in shaping it, and what kind of society it previsions.

Notes

1. Arne Duncan was CEO of Chicago Public Schools from 2001 to 2008 when he was appointed US Secretary of Education by newly elected President Obama. Under Duncan Chicago embarked on an ambitious program of marketization of public education.
2. Performance schools are Renaissance 2010 public schools with a five-year renewable performance contract with CPS.
3. My fieldnotes include accounts of CPS withdrawing support staff, teachers, and resources from struggling schools which were later closed for failure.
4. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a development tool. The city declares an area 'blighted' and property tax revenues for schools, libraries, parks and other public works are frozen for 23 years with all growth in revenues put into a fund to support development.
5. See http://www.rsfchicago.org/About.html
6. The RSF is headed by the Chairs of McDonald's Corporation and Northern Trust Bank, a partner in a leading corporate law firm, the CEO of Chicago Community Trust (a major local corporate/banking foundation), the retired Chair of the Tribune Corporation, and top CPS officials.
7. See http://www.parentsforschoolchoice.org/

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