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From Accountability to Privatization and African American Exclusion

Chicago’s “Renaissance 2010”

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This article analyzes Chicago’s new Renaissance 2010 school plan to close public schools and reopen them as choice and charter schools. Grounding the analysis in participatory research methods, the authors argue that Chicago’s education accountability policies have laid the groundwork for privatization. They furthermore argue that Renaissance 2010 is part of a neoliberal corporate and financial urban agenda of gentrification, African American displacement, and the class conquest of the city by the middle and upper-middle classes. The authors conclude with a discussion of emerging resistance to the plan, suggesting that education may be a focal point of anti-neoliberal economic and social struggles.

Keywords: accountability; privatization; race; gentrification; urban development

Chicago is taking the lead across the nation in remaking urban education. No other major city has launched such an ambitious public school choice agenda.

—Andrew J. McKenna (Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, 2004)

On June 24, 2004, Mayor Daley announced a dramatic new plan to revitalize Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Called Renaissance 2010 (Ren2010), the plan calls for closing 60 to 70 public schools and opening 100 new schools, two thirds of which will be run by private organizations and staffed by teachers and school employees who will not be members of CPS unions. It is not surprising that the plan was announced at an event hosted by the
Commercial Club of Chicago (hereafter Commercial Club), an organization of the city’s top financial, corporate, and political elites. A year earlier, the club’s Civic Committee issued Left Behind, a report that called for the “creation of at least 100 public charter schools that increase parental choice and put meaningful competitive pressure on chronically failing neighborhood schools” (Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, 2004). On July 16, 2004, the mayor presided over the opening of Millennium Park, a new 24.5 acre, $500 million public-private venture to create a world-class park, sculpture garden, and performance space on Chicago’s lakeshore. Millennium Park is the crowning jewel in a refurbished downtown landscape of parks, museums, tourist attractions, upscale shops, residential spaces, and cultural venues. Seemingly unrelated, these two events capture the intersection of school policy and neoliberal urban development in the United States.

In some respects, this intersection is specific to the political economy of Chicago and its drive to be a “global city”—a command center of the global economy (Sassen, 1994, 2004). During the past 25 years, Chicago has been transformed from an industrial city to a center of corporate headquarters, financial markets, and tourism. Concentration on downtown development and gentrification has dramatically altered the urban landscape, replacing large swaths of working-class and low-income housing and public housing projects with upscale condominiums and retail and leisure spaces (Lipman, 2004). The neoliberal strategy powering Chicago’s economic development is, as we will outline below, reflective of a larger trend in urban economies. Moreover, Chicago bears watching as it has been a harbinger of national trends in education policy. Most notably, Chicago’s 1995 school reform based on high stakes testing and accountability provided a model for the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal education legislation.

Thus, in this article, we explore several interrelated themes. First, we examine Chicago as an advanced example of what we might expect as...
school districts persistently fail to meet accountability targets. We suggest that school accountability policies laid the foundation for Chicago’s new education plan. In this sense, Ren2010 may be a window on the connection between education accountability policies, such as those under NCLB, and the privatization of public education. Second, we suggest that Chicago exemplifies connections between the introduction of public school choice and the political-economic forces that are remaking U.S. cities. Specifically, we argue that Chicago’s new education plan demonstrates that education reforms focused on choice and privatization can serve the “class conquest of the city” by the middle and upper-middle classes (Smith, 2002). This analysis also points to the centrality of race in the knitting together of education policy and neoliberal urban development, as Ren2010 may serve to further the displacement and marginalization of people of color, African Americans in particular. Third, we explore the potential for such policies to provoke broad-based opposition. Ren2010 affects not only teachers and students but also school employees and whole communities. It cuts across the city’s geography and racial and ethnic differences. It has implications for union jobs, wages, and benefits, students’ educational opportunities, community governance of schools, and real estate development and gentrification. As a result, it has instigated new conversations across diverse communities and social sectors. It has sparked new alliances and begun to generate broad resistance. Although the future of this resistance is uncertain, the Chicago case suggests that education can become a focus of democratic social struggles.

Ren2010 is a shifting target. Whether it survives in its current form is less significant to our analysis than the agenda it represents and the policy direction it may foreshadow. That is why we have chosen to write about it now. We begin by outlining the Ren2010 plan and describing our theoretical position and methodology. Then we examine Ren2010’s relationship to Chicago’s education accountability policies and to NCLB. From there, we discuss the plan as a business model and its connection with the political economy and cultural politics of race in the city. Throughout, we try to capture the dialectic of a centralized policy confronted by popular resistance.

**Chicago’s Ren2010 Plan**

Ren2010 was passed by the Chicago Board of Education (CPS’s governing body appointed by the mayor) at its September 22, 2004, meeting. Although the first round of school closings associated with Ren2010 was clustered in particular neighborhoods, this is just the first stage of a design
to overhaul a large part of the school system (Bluestein, 2005). The plan, as unveiled thus far, will close at least 60 CPS schools and open 100 new schools, one third as charter schools, one third as contract schools (schools that operate much like charter schools),¹ and one third as CPS performance schools (public schools subject to Ren2010 funding and policies). All Ren2010 schools will have 5-year performance contracts with CPS, but in exchange for this increased accountability, the school district promises them greater flexibility in curriculum, instruction, and school organization (CPS, 2004d). In the Civic Committee report (Commercial Club, 2003) and in the school system’s official press releases and public statements, flexibility and innovation are linked to freedom from union contracts and elimination of elected local school councils (LSCs).² Charter and contract schools will be run by outside vendors contracted by CPS. Although required to be nonprofit, these organizations are free to contract out school management to education management organizations (EMOs), which may be for-profit (e.g., Edison Schools, Inc.).

Final selection and approval of Ren2010 schools rests with the CEO of CPS. The Commercial Club agreed to raise $50 million for the project. In exchange, it set up a fund-raising and oversight body, New Schools for Chicago (NSC), composed of leading corporate representatives and civic leaders and the Chicago Board of Education president and CPS CEO.³ Referred to in the press as a “secret cabinet,” this unelected body participates in the selection and evaluation of new schools while distributing Commercial Club funds to these schools (Cholo, 2005; Rossi, 2004b). However, NSC does not equally fund each new renaissance school. Instead, schools are required to compete for private sector funds to start up and supplement their budgets (Field, 2005).

It is unclear who will actually attend all the new Ren2010 schools or how students will be selected. According to the CPS policy on renaissance schools (approved September 22, 2004), no more than 10% of the schools will be selective enrollment magnet schools (selection by test scores and grades). After much vocal community concern about exclusion from the new schools, the board inserted a provision that guarantees students in closed schools the right to return to the schools when they are reopened. The policy also states that the board’s “preference” is for enrollment by lottery with first preference to “community area” residents. However, in the next sentence the policy states: “The Board reserves the discretion to establish other student assignment processes, including but not limited to, establishing a school without attendance boundaries and providing for open, city-wide enrollment either by lottery or other criteria” (CPS Policy Manual, Section 302.7, pg. 9).⁴
Since Ren2010 was announced in June 2004, it has provoked public controversy and community resistance not seen in relation to CPS policy during the past 15 years. It was a major topic at almost every board of education meeting from June 2004 to spring of 2005. The controversy surrounding Ren2010 and opposition to it has been and continues to be widely reported in the local media. Despite CPS leaders’ assertion of “real and widespread community support” (CPS, 2004b), opposition mushroomed throughout the 2004-2005 school year with community hearings, forums, angry testimony, and pickets at monthly board meetings, a campout in front of the board of education building, door-to-door organizing, a student walkout, rallies, and press conferences. The opposition brought together unions, teachers, students, school reformers, community leaders and organizations, parents in African American South and West Side communities, and some Latino community activists and teachers. A plan to establish a U.S. Navy academy in a high school in one of the city’s most racially and ethnically diverse areas on the North Side also galvanized opposition from students, teachers, and community residents. This opposition continues as we write, with a citywide coalition against Ren2010 that has persuaded 40 of 50 city council members to support a nonbinding resolution for a moratorium on school closings until an independent impact study is conducted.

Swirling at the surface of public discussions, private conversations, and media accounts are issues of educational equity, class inequalities in the city, race, gentrification, democratic community participation, individual choice, and the role of teachers unions. On one side, CPS leaders, the mayor, and the Commercial Club contend that Ren2010 will create options and choice, promote innovation, and raise achievement. They argue it is time to open up the public schools to competition, reduce the power of teachers unions, and create new forms of school governance. Board President Michael Scott said, “We can’t wait to rescue these schools from an educational wasteland” (field notes, board of education meeting, September 22, 2004). Mayor Daley promotes Ren2010 as part of a plan for mixed-income communities with mixed-income schools. Defending against claims that Ren2010 is tied to real estate development and displacement of low-income African American residents, the CPS senior policy advisor for Ren2010 insisted, “It has nothing to do with gentrification” (field notes, community hearing, North Lawndale, November 15, 2004). On the other side, Ren2010 opponents claim the plan will accelerate gentrification, destabilize schools by increasing student mobility, harm low-income and homeless children in particular, eliminate community participation, weaken unions, and privatize education. They also maintain Ren2010 was devised
without community participation (Kenwood Oakland Local School Council Alliance, n.d.).

The Study: Theory and Method

The discussion, on all sides, makes it clear that Ren2010 is about the relationship of school policy to social, economic, and political processes in the city. This public discussion illustrates a central premise of our article: Any thoroughgoing analysis of urban education needs to account for its relationship with urban political economy and its relationship to global economic and political processes. For us, a starting point is an understanding of neoliberal political economy as developed in the theoretical work of Stephen Gill (2003) and David Harvey (2004), among others. By neoliberalism, we mean a set of policies that promote the primacy of the market, the fluidity of capital and labor, and individual self-interest in all spheres of economic and social life. We are interested in the intersection of urban education policy and this larger political economic dynamic. Here, we turn to the work of critical sociologists of education who theoretically and empirically examine this intersection (e.g., Apple 2001, 2003; Ball, 1994, 2003; Dale, 1989/1990; Petrovich & Wells, 2005; Robertson, 2003; Robertson & Dale, 2003; Smyth, 2001). Ren2010 involves school closing and openings, movement of students to new locations, and neighborhoods undergoing demographic, physical, and “identity” transformations—in short, spatial change that is both material and symbolic. To unpack this dimension, we find particularly helpful the work of political and cultural geographers who examine the spatial restructuring of the city as a feature of neoliberal policy (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2001; Smith, 1996, 2002). This scholarship directs our attention to the role of education in the restructuring of urban space and its class and race implications. At the core of our analysis is the assumption that policy is an expression of values arising out of specific interests and relations of power (Ball, 1994). This calls for research that illuminates the material and cultural struggles in which schooling is located and that is generative of social action (Grace, 1984).

We see race as central to the politics and cultural conflicts in the city. The centrality of race in neoliberal policy in the United States is too often neglected. (Harvey’s, 2004, influential and otherwise illuminating work is a clear example.) Following the lead of critical race theorists, we define racism as an enduring system of oppression that is deeply rooted in the economic and political structures and culture of the United States (Bell, 1992; Delgado &
Stefancic, 2001). Racism plays a pivotal role in the accumulation of capital, and it is a motivating factor in its own right, maintaining structures of racial oppression and white racial privilege. Critical theories of race in education draw attention to the role of educational policy and practice in the maintenance of these systems of power and in mounting challenges to them (Ferguson, 2001; Tate, 1997; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2005). A critical race analysis also leads us to consider whose story is told and whose voices have legitimacy and to recognize the epistemological authority of those affected by Ren2010, largely African American students, families, and communities. We see their experiential knowledge as critical to understanding the racial implications of school policies (see Delgado Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1999, Yosso et al., 2005). Thus, we have focused our research on the organizing efforts and public testimonies of African American and Latino community members, teachers, and students.

This article is a product of a hybrid research methodology: part archival research and critical policy analysis, part participant research, and part engagement in progressive social activism. We align ourselves with a tradition of activist scholarship that values participation with communities, attention to the social analysis of groups experiencing oppression, and linking research, social action, and social movements (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; see also Fine et al., 2005). From July 2004 to August 2005 we attended and participated in numerous school board meetings, public hearings, picket lines, community and school meetings, rallies, press conferences, planning sessions, coalition meetings, and forums. From August 2005 to June 2006, at the time of this writing, Lipman has continued this work. During this time, we have had ongoing conversations with parents, students, teachers, school staff, school-level administrators, community organization leaders and members, members and heads of LSCs, the director and staff of a city-wide parent organization, congressional staff, representatives of teachers and school employee unions, school reform organizations, and community-based research groups. Much of what we have learned has been gleaned from these conversations.

These conversations have produced a wealth of data on the history of the schools and LSCs and the interactions school and community people have had with CPS officials related to Ren2010. These conversations are rich with data on how people have experienced the school closings and how they believe Ren2010 will affect them and their community. We have also observed and recorded the deep knowledge about and commitment to the education of the children in the communities affected. We believe these insights are available to us because of the relationships we have developed.
through our consistent presence and principled work as allies and academic resources. This illustrates a strength of activist, engaged scholarship. The field notes and interview notes based on these ongoing conversations and our observations at public meetings form a corpus of data that deeply informs our analysis.

In addition, Lipman (2002, 2003, 2004) has been studying and writing about Chicago school policy for the past 8 years, and the article is informed by her qualitative case studies, archival data, and policy analyses that compose that work. The article also draws on Ren2010-related policy papers and documents of civic elites and community and labor organizations, media accounts, city of Chicago housing data, and CPS and Illinois School Board of Education data relevant to the topic. Lipman’s work with teachers and youth activist and community organizations in Chicago during 10 years has yielded a fund of participatory data on student and teacher experiences and meanings of school policies in various schools and communities. This is relevant background information for this article. In addition, we both have been volunteering as researchers for and with community organizations opposing Ren2010. In collaboration with geographers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Haines produced a Ren2010 information packet and policy brief and maps that show the intersection of gentrification and school closings associated with Ren2010 and the implications of the plan for students. Finally, Lipman has given public testimony about Chicago school policy at meetings and community forums related to Ren2010 throughout the city. These forums are also a rich source of data.

Our analyses developed in an evolving spiral of research and action, data analysis, and writing (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) in dialogue with various participants in community meetings and organizations concerned about the effects of Ren2010. We participated in a dialogic process of sharing and hearing analyses of events based on our data and participants’ experiences. We brought social science theories to the analysis; they brought theory, historical perspective, and experience, and our analysis ripened in this ongoing and iterative exchange. Our writing has taken multiple forms, including policy briefs, testimonies, articles written for popular audiences, and summations shared with various social actors. Responses to this writing have also helped us revise our thinking and revisit our data. In that spirit, we shared drafts of this article with key participants and drew on their suggestions to make corrections, additions, and revisions. Hence, although we are sincerely grateful for this collaboration, the final analysis is our responsibility.
Centralized Accountability Without Resources—Laying the Groundwork for Privatization

Chicago has had an NCLB-style, high-stakes accountability system in place since 1995 and thus may be an advanced example of the relationship between NCLB and school privatization. The stage for Ren2010 was set by Chicago’s 1995 policies that established and normalized a process of labeling, sorting, and classifying schools and accordingly applying sanctions and centralized oversight (Lipman, 2004). There is plenty of evidence that, prior to 1995, many schools were failing to educate African American, Latino, and low-income students (e.g., Orfield, 1990). Moreover, this is an ongoing reality. Persistently high drop-out rates, high failure rates, and low reading and math levels are indicators of deeper inequities in what is taught, how it is taught, and who has access to what kinds of knowledge (see Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001). However, CPS responded with an accountability system that institutionalized a simplistic, one-size-fits-all practice of demarcating students, teachers, and schools into those deemed “failing” or “successful” and then meted out penalties without regard for inequities in resources, opportunities to learn, teacher’s ideologies, cultural disconnections in curriculum and instruction, social contexts of the school, or strengths children bring to the school setting.7 As Vinson and Ross (2003) argue, the construction and consumption of images of “good education” through high-stakes testing and accountability obscures the complex sociocultural and historically situated nature of actual teaching and learning, privileging how the school looks on standardized measures over what is really going on there. Nevertheless, a system of ranking and sorting was a necessary condition to identify schools to be closed under Ren2010 and to turn them over to private operators.

The 1995 reform also spawned a revolving door of programs and interventions. In the 9 years since school accountability was instituted, the central administration put hundreds of schools on probation, each with an external probation partner with its own program, directives, philosophy, and personnel who directed staff development, set curriculum, mandated instructional practices, intervened in budgetary and administrative decisions, and monitored teachers. In some schools, these mandated interventions seemed to set up more cohesive curricula and academic standards, but they had deleterious consequences for others (Lipman, 2004). In the district as a whole, there were initial gains in test scores (Rosenkranz, 2002), and the policies instigated the removal of some ineffectual teachers and principals (Lipman, 2002). However, in the low-income elementary schools serving children of
color that Lipman (2004) studied, these policies also provoked an exodus of some of the strongest teachers and encouraged a test-driven pedagogy aimed at raising scores. Since 1996, some schools have had multiple external probation partners and a stream of externally driven, changing initiatives; others have been “reconstituted” with new staff and principals or “reengineered” with new instructional programs and administrators. Central administrators replaced principals in some schools multiple times. The negative effects of a revolving door of mandated initiatives were frequently cited by parents and teachers at community forums and school board meetings in response to plans to close their schools. A community leader testifying before the board of education said, “You can’t separate the failure in these schools from what’s been done to them by CPS” (School Board meeting, September 22, 2004).

Moreover, teachers and community members argue that the schools have not been given the resources to succeed. The recent history of one school in an African American community provides an illustration. In February 2005, CPS announced it was closing the school as a failing school under Ren2010, despite community protest and the fact that children, as young as 5 years old, would have to walk more than a mile to the designated transfer school. According to teachers, in 2000 the school struggled to function without books and supplies amid the chaos of renovation work. Teachers returned to school in fall 2001 to find their stores of supplies had been destroyed. During 5 years, the school was sent a string of probation partners, and when it was finally assigned an effective principal, she or he was sent to the school on one day’s notice. In a public meeting, a teacher reported that until 2001, some students had books so old they had their parents’ names in them. When the school finally received new text books with a new curriculum, teachers received little or no professional development. From 2001 on, the school experienced a very high turnover of staff, coupled with a very high student mobility rate. The “failure” of this school and others like it cannot be disentangled from the lack of resources, staff instability, and revolving door of top-down programs or from the instability and economic disenfranchisement of families in the community. This perspective was expressed by students and teachers picketing outside Mayor Daley’s office who chanted, “We didn’t fail. The system failed us!”

Although CPS established a system of high-stakes accountability, NCLB has raised the ante on consequences of failing to meet test score benchmarks. Chicago’s failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward NCLB benchmarks and the potential for a state takeover are major themes running through the Commercial Club’s argument for school choice.
and charter schools. The Commercial Club uses the majority of its 58-page Left Behind report to demonstrate that from 1999 to 2002, CPS scores on state standardized tests were essentially flat. It argues, “NCLB has made the need for choice more transparent” (p. 55) to avert state action. From a business perspective, turning schools over to the market is a commonsense solution. Moreover, closing schools and reopening them as new schools restarts their NCLB clock, buying the district time for schools to meet NCLB requirements. This is a little noted but significant aspect of Ren2010 that might well preview a national response when districts are unable to meet NCLB targets. In this sense, Chicago’s plan confirms predictions of those who have argued that NCLB paves the way for privatization (Karp, 2002). But Ren2010 is more than an opportunity for business leaders to promote a market-driven education agenda. A state takeover of CPS would be a significant blot on the city’s efforts to attract investment and to position itself as a global city, a command center of the global economy. Moreover, the Commercial Club has consistently argued that improving education in Chicago and the metro region is a crucial component of the area’s economic competitiveness in a global economy (Commercial Club, 2002; Johnson, 1998). For the Commercial Club, a market system is the only reasonable strategy for school improvement.

A Business Model for Education

The Commercial Club (2003) argues that school reform has not worked, largely because “the constraints of the city wide teachers’ union contract” (p. 13) are a barrier to improved teacher quality and LSCs make the system “unmanageable” (p. 51). According to the Commercial Club, “It is essential to keep in mind that this failure [of CPS schools] is not attributable to the current CEO of the system or its board” (p. 21). Instead, the report argues, the problem is that public education is a “monopoly.” It goes on to argue for a market-driven system: “Competition—which is the engine of American productivity generally—is the key to improved performance of our public schools” (p. 55). It concludes that vouchers are the “preferred” solution, but because “the political climate in Illinois seems hostile,” the best way to provide school choice is to fund existing charter schools and “to work politically to expand the number of such schools in the future. Chicago should have at least 100 charter schools located predominantly in inner-city neighborhoods” (p. 55). The first CPS head of Ren2010 was Greg Richmond, who was the director of CPS’s Charter Schools Office.
from 1996 to 2003. Richmond is now full-time president of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Mayor Daley’s announcement of Ren2010 echoed the Commercial Club’s business framework:

This model will generate competition and allow for innovation. It will bring in outside partners who want to get into the business of education. It offers the opportunity to break the mold. It gives parents more options and will shake up the system. (CPS, 2004a)

The charter school issue is complex. There are those, such as the Commercial Club in its 2003 Left Behind report, who advocate for charter schools because of they have a pro-market and pro-privatization orientation. Concurrently, though, charter schools have been supported by some progressive educators and education reformers as a means of creating schools that are more responsive to marginalized cultures and communities. Some educators have made use of the greater flexibility and autonomy of charter schools to develop culturally centered curricula, social justice–oriented schools, and schools administered semiautomously by their communities (Wells, Scott, Lopez, & Holme, 2005). A recent book edited by progressive, procharter school educators Rofes and Stulberg (2005) describes a number of such charter schools. They point to examples such as ethnocentric charter schools in Hawaii, semiautonomous Native American schools and Afro-centric curricula to argue that charter schools can open up the possibilities for more democratically developed and administered public schools that respond to the often marginalized needs, interests, and values of minority students and communities. For instance, in Chicago and other cities, there are charter schools focused on Afro-centric curricula and values. In response to the miseducation of African American children, these schools emphasize self-determination and the power of African American communities and educators to shape education for African American students.

Although we recognize certain democratic and community-engaging potentials in charter school reform, to fully analyze the charter school reform movement, we argue one must consider the larger neoliberal context in which it is situated. Within the charter school reform market philosophy rests the notion that private entities can more efficiently administer public institutions when forced to compete with other private entities. Thus, here in the state of Illinois, as with most state charter school laws, charter schools receive less per-pupil public funding than regular public schools, plus most of them must use a portion of that funding to cover facility costs. Wells et al. (2005) point out that limited public resources force many charter schools to contract out school administration to EMOs or create funding partnerships.
with business groups or corporations. They further note that although charter schools are given greater development and administrative autonomy, they must still meet the evaluation measures of high-stakes standardized tests, based on standardized curriculum content.

Although it is true, then, that charter schools offer greater flexibility in initial development, the climate in which they must survive is one of high-stakes standardized tests and competition for limited resources (Wells et al., 2005). These market measures built into the charter school reform movement create a context in which certain types of charter schools have a greater possibility of success than others. Charter schools that adhere to the underlying market philosophy, trim budgets to reduce operating expenses (e.g., lower teacher wages, limited services to special education students, or fewer extracurricular options), and contract out services to EMOs, while pursuing educational programs that focus on student success on standardized tests, are likely to succeed in the charter school reform environment. Meanwhile, those that use charter school reform to develop and administer schools around notions of community participation, democracy, and nontraditional and nondominant forms of valued knowledge must fight a fierce counter stream of overarching neoliberal policy. Just as an example, in Chicago, the fastest growing charter school force is the Chicago Charter School Foundation (CCSF), which now oversees nine charter school campuses across the city. The CCSF develops and oversees market-modeled charter schools that are operated by EMOs (Edison Schools, Inc., American Quality Schools Corp., and Civitas Schools, LLC). The CCSF schools center on traditional curricula based on dominantly valued forms of knowledge, such as the CORE Knowledge Curriculum (see CCSF).

Charter schools, and contract schools, formed through Ren2010, transfer public funds to private organizations and have the potential to directly enrich for-profit EMOs such as Edison Schools, Inc. Besides the one CCSF school, in November 2004, Edison submitted proposals for five contract schools and one charter school in the first round of Ren2010 proposals (personal communication, Chicago Teachers Union research staff, June 7, 2005; Rossi, 2004a). Charter and contract schools are a form of public-private partnership that opens up public education as a source of direct capital accumulation. This process works by “shaving off” aspects of the education system to private providers (Robertson & Dale, 2003) and making their employees nonunion. Roger Dale (1989/1990) points out that “before education can be brought into the marketplace and made subject to consumer choice; a range of possible alternatives has to be created” (p. 9). This function is served by the creation of charter and contract schools that offer choice.
In addition to privatization, Ren2010 reduces opportunities for democratic governance. Despite CPS leaders’ statements that they are neutral about how the new schools will be governed (CPS, 2004c), Ren2010 limits community participation in school governance by eliminating LSCs in two thirds of the schools. LSCs, established by Chicago’s 1988 school reform, are elected governing bodies composed of a majority parents and community members. Although their effectiveness and level of community participation is uneven and has been eroded by greater centralized regulation through the accountability system, LSCs have been watched nationally for their potential to institutionalize democratic local governance and parent and community participation in school decision making (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; Fung, 2004; Katz, 1992; Katz, Fine, & Simon, 1997). Under Ren2010, LSCs will be eliminated in all charter schools (IL School Code 105 5/27A-5) and many contract and performance schools. They are replaced by transition advisory councils (TACs), appointed by the CPS CEO, to oversee the selection and start-up phase for new renaissance schools for the first 2 years (CPS Policy Manual, sec. 302.7, p. 3). Unlike LSCs, which are composed of community members and make important school level decisions, TACs are only advisory, and their members may live anywhere in Chicago. For example, members of a TAC in Englewood, a low-income, African American community on the city’s South Side, could live in Chicago’s elite “Gold Coast.” Once operational, contract and performance schools would have to make a request to the board to establish an elected LSC (CPS Policy Manual, sec. 302.7, p. 3).

The importance of LSCs extends beyond school governance. They are one of the very few democratically elected official forums for grassroots participation in the city (Fung, 2004). Their presidents and members, particularly on the African American South and West Sides, have been in the lead of the current battle against Ren2010. The elimination of LSCs would undermine one of the few official bases of local community power in the face of the city’s consolidated corporate and political agenda of downtown development, gentrification, and corporate and financial power (see Lipman, 2004).

Ren2010 will also weaken unions. The teachers and school employees of a charter or contract school are directly employed by the contract or charter organization or, when applicable, by the subcontracted EMO and, thus, are not covered by CPS collective bargaining agreements. Like charter schools elsewhere in the United States and in Canada and technical colleges in Britain, Ren2010 charter and contract schools will bypass union contracts by setting up public-private partnerships and other new institutional relationships (Robertson & Dale, 2003). As Susan Robertson (2003)
points out, one of the means the state has used to overcome opposition to neoliberal policy has been through fragmentation of existing territory, for example, through the introduction of charter schools in Canada and the United States: “A key characteristic of these initiatives is that they challenge the nature of teachers’ existing contracts with the state through generating a new space for social activity thus enabling the state to bypass the existing institutionalized relationships” (p. 12).

Just as high-stakes accountability systems facilitate a shift in educational discourse to equate test scores with learning and standardization with equity, so too charter and contract schools introduce “choice” and “competition” as a proxy for equity. Although these schools would (at least initially) compose a small percentage of CPS under Ren2010, they are strategic in facilitating a change in the way we think about public education. Dale (1989/1990) describes the process of introducing choice in one part of the British education system to “facilitate a shift from collectivism to individualism, from a view that a common school is desirable to one that encourages parents/consumers to shop around and maximize their children’s opportunities of enjoying an ‘uncommon’ education” (pp. 12-13), a shift from universalism to selectivity, from egalitarianism to hierarchy. So too the Ren2010 initiative reframes public schooling in the language and solutions of the market—charter schools will offer “competitive alternatives” and “a competitive spur” (Commercial Club of Chicago, 2003, p. 13). Ren2010 will “generate competition and allow for innovation. . . . It gives parents more options” (CPS, 2004a). Progress is equated with neoliberal market solutions that offer equity through market choices and quality through competition (see also Ball, 2003). This discourse shapes the discussion of public education and defines the range of possible actions. In this framework, public participation is defined by school officials as submitting a proposal to start a new school or joining an appointed TAC.

A Corporate Agenda for the City

Although charter and contract schools are potentially lucrative investments for EMOs and a means of weakening unions, we want to argue that Ren2010 indirectly promotes capital accumulation in the city on a far grander scale. Ren2010 is privatization writ large—a corporate agenda for the city. We suggest that Ren2010 can be understood as part of a larger process that Neil Smith (2002) calls “the class conquest of the city”—reconstituting the city for the middle and upper-middle classes as a space of upscale housing,
shopping, restaurants, cultural venues and streetscapes. From this perspective, school choice is a plan to appeal to the middle class. It is part of an urban remake that began 25 years ago and has accelerated during the past decade. In previous publications, Lipman (2002, 2003, 2004) has written about the role of Chicago’s 1995 school reform in this process. We suggest Ren2010 is the latest, and boldest, step in this state-corporate agenda.

With Ren2010, the leading role of corporate and political elites in determining public school policy has become quite explicit. Ren2010 was proposed by the Commercial Club, Mayor Daley announced it at a Commercial Club event, and corporate and financial leaders pledged $50 million for its implementation. NSC, composed of top CPS and corporate and financial leaders, is a partnership between the state and corporate interests. (It includes the chairs of McDonald’s Corporation and Northern Trust Bank, a partner in a leading corporate law firm, the CEO of Chicago Community Trust, which is a major corporate banking foundation, the retired chair of the Tribune Corporation, and top CPS officials.) A CPS staff member described this group to us as the “real decision makers” at CPS headquarters (personal communication, October 18, 2004). CPS also created a new top leadership position for district financial affairs, Chief Administrative Officer, and appointed the former VP of Bank One and CEO of the Chicago Board of Trade. And CPS contracted with A.T. Kearney, a leading corporate consulting firm, to develop the strategy to sell the plan to various stakeholders and opinion makers. A.T. Kearney’s Mid-South Community Planning Process was outlined to CPS leaders in May 2004 and included the Ren2010 school transformation concept, administrative structure, message, and communications timing. The consulting firm’s explicitly corporate mission promises to “provide a unique business perspective” and “thought leadership” to CPS leaders (A.T. Kearney, 2004), “bringing practical business tactics into play” in line with “the most effective corporate transformations” (A.T. Kearney, 2005). This legitimated authority of corporate and financial actors to make crucial decisions about public education, without public accountability, introduces corporate control that extends beyond private management of charter and contract schools.

Frustration with the failure to consult with communities and school workers and to invite their authentic participation is a central theme in the rallies, community forums, press conferences, school board testimony, and information disseminated to the public by those opposed to Ren2010. In spring 2004, CPS leaders announced schools would be closed with only 2 weeks’ notice. LSCs in the African American Midsouth area found out from local newspaper accounts that 20 of the 22 schools in their area would be
closed. The plan to turn part of Senn High School on the city’s North Side into a U.S. Naval Academy was announced to the community as a “done deal” and then officially authorized by the board of education despite weeks of student and teacher rallies, petitions, a student walkout, a demonstration at the board, and public outcry in the community.

The direct intervention of corporate actors reveals the strategic role that the city’s school system plays in making Chicago a global city. In Metropolis 2020 (Johnson, 1998), the Commercial Club’s agenda for the Chicago metro region set two goals for the metro region’s school systems: (a) prepare “ever-more-skilled employees who can, at the minimum, read instruction manuals, do basic math and communicate well” and (b) improve the performance of “minorities” because “for the economy to prosper, these students must be prepared” (p. 6). These goals should be understood in the context of global competition among metropolitan regions to attract production facilities, corporate headquarters, investment, and business services industries. Global cities concentrate high-paid professionals and managers and low-wage service and production workers (Sassen, 1994). To attract professional workers and to gentrify neighborhoods, they offer selective academically elite public schools. They also need schools to prepare an appropriately educated low-wage workforce. This is the context for Chicago’s 1995 accountability policies coupled with new college preparatory magnet schools in upper-income and gentrifying areas (Lipman, 2004).

School Policy and Gentrification—The Class Conquest of the City

Ren2010 significantly expands the connection between schools and gentrification. The Midsouth area is a clear example. This area on Chicago’s South Side, encompassing the historic African American Bronzeville community, was the initial target of Ren2010 and the center of contention. In a plan known as the Midsouth Plan, leaked to the community in May 2004 and published in the Chicago Tribune in July (Dell’Angela & Washburn, 2004), 20 of 22 schools in this area were to be closed under Ren2010. Taking an offensive, the community exposed the plan to the media (Dell’Angela, 2004). A community hearing in Bronzeville on July 15, 2004, called on 2 days’ notice after CPS leaders were pressured by the community, drew hundreds of parents, teachers, students, and community residents who lined up at the microphone for 4 hours to voice near unanimous opposition to a blueprint for closing their schools and eliminating LSCs
(Kenwood Oakland Local School Council Alliance, n.d.). The Board withdrew the Midsouth Plan in December after community organizations and unions held repeated protests at the Board of Education Headquarters, press conferences, and community hearings.

At the July hearing, community members insisted that the Midsouth Plan was designed to further the gentrification of their community. Their claim was grounded in the fact that the Midsouth is experiencing some of the most intense gentrification in the city, as reflected in two indicators: rate of increase in housing prices and rate of house sales. For example, Michaels Development Corporation (n.d.; whose development projects are partially financed with public money in cities across the United States) has a $600 million investment in Legends South, a complex of more than 2,300 houses and apartments on a 2-mile stretch of land where the Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens public housing complex stood in the Midsouth. Michaels is just one of the investors in the area’s gentrification.

Gentrification is also beginning in Englewood, another low-income, African American community where several schools are being closed under Ren2010 and where there is a new $150 million development to build 550 new homes costing $165,000 to $365,000 (Olivo, 2004). After decades of disinvestment, the city is making a $250 million investment in the area to build a new police station and library, a $150 million community college campus, and a $22 million shopping district. Meanwhile, residents are being pushed out by increases in property taxes of up to 80%. There has been a 41% increase in house foreclosures in Englewood in the past 10 years.

The same is true of North Lawndale, another Ren2010 site, described in the real estate sections of local newspapers as a “hot” area, where Royal Imperial Group is building a 1,200-unit residential development (Almada, 2005). There is also a 300-unit residential development with houses selling for $250,000 to $600,000, a new shopping center, and a $47 million film center. As public housing projects are torn down and new condominiums and luxury town houses rise up, the city and the real estate developers are literally wiping clean any traces of the community that lived there. Closing the schools and then reopening them as new schools is a key aspect of signifying to middle-class gentrifiers that the area will be literally reborn. In this sense, it is part of what Smith (2002) terms “the class conquest of the city.”

The new Midsouth is being rebuilt on the ashes of disinvestment, deindustrialization, and decline of public housing during the past 25 years. The instability and disempowerment that are being visited on the schools replicate what the community as a whole has experienced. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, as stable working-class families became low income and
unemployed, parts of the Midsouth became home to one of the highest concentrations of poverty in the United States (Bennet, 2006; Venkatesh, Celimli, Miller, Murphy, & Turner, 2004). Massive high-rise public housing projects gradually became concrete warehouses for low-income African Americans who were largely marginalized in the city’s restructured economy (Demissie, 2006). During the same period, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) failed to maintain the buildings to the point of being uninhabitable, justifying their demolition (Popkin, Cunningham, & Woodley, 2003). Under the CHA Plan for Transformation (CHA, 2000), demolition of 19,000 units of public housing in Chicago is almost completed, with new developments promised to be “mixed-income” housing. The buildings in the Midsouth are mostly leveled, and the land on which they stood—near to Lake Michigan, the north-south subway line, the expressway, the University of Chicago, and the Illinois Institute of Technology and just 10 minutes from downtown—is an enormously valuable commodity.

Meanwhile, the displacement of thousands of public housing families has torn apart the community’s social fabric and bred devastating uncertainty. When Lipman studied schools in the area from 1999 to 2001 as public housing was beginning to be dismantled, she found that parents did not know where they were relocating to or when. As they received their vacate notices, some families were forced to divide up children among relatives in the scramble for a place to live. Parents described themselves as being “deported,” and teachers said the anxiety saturating children’s lives was palpable in their schools. One cannot separate the progress of schools in this area from this reality.

Race is clearly central here. Chicago exemplifies the connection between the current state of Black education and a racial structure that continues to perpetuate social inequality and injustice against people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Tate, 1997; Yosso et al., 2005). In Chicago, African American students compose the majority of CPS enrollment and have historically had the lowest test scores, were more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to be retained under CPS accountability policies, and of the 147 elementary schools put on probation from 1996 to 2001, 75% were African American (Bryk, 2003). Like other major U.S. cities, it is a truism to state that problems in schools in low-income African American sections of Chicago are intertwined with the lack of jobs, lack of decent affordable housing, decayed physical infrastructure, and a history of racial segregation and lack of necessary resources (Aony, 2005; Orfield, 1990; Rivlin, 1992). As recently as fall 2004, CPS closed 8 out of 23 Child-Parent Centers located in low-income neighborhoods, mostly on the African American South and West Sides. The centers were nationally recognized as the “gold standard”
of early childhood programs (Stanfield, 2002). The elimination of this program found to have long-term beneficial effects and recommended for national replication in a federally funded longitudinal study is a further example of disinvestment in these communities. Rather than putting substantial new resources into schools serving low-income communities of color, in the past 4 years CPS built three new state-of-the-art selective magnet high schools serving gentrified and gentrifying areas at a cost of between $33 million and $50 million each. Meanwhile, low-scoring African American and Latino schools have had more external regulation and control (Lipman, 2003). In nearly every board of education meeting Lipman observed between August 2004 and February 2006, parents and teachers came to testify about decrepit conditions in their schools. They came to appeal for a working boiler, a new roof to replace one that is collapsing, an elevator to transport disabled students currently carried up stairs by school staff, windows that open, more classrooms, science labs, a cafeteria, books, and so on.

Just as disinvestment produces decline in public housing and leads to calls for its demolition, disinvestment in schools serving African American and Latino children becomes an argument for closing them. Then accountability measures provide the tools to demarcate the schools to be closed. At the same time, a racialized discourse of failure, probation, and lack of effort constructs African American and Latino schools and communities as deficient. This was made explicit when the CEO of CPS defended the closing of Englewood High School by declaring the school exhibited “a culture of failure.”

As residents of the Midsouth and now Englewood see omnipresent signs of gentrification, they contend the new schools are not designed for them. Midsouth community members picketing outside the board of education chanted, “We’re not blind. Just follow the dollar sign.” In February 2005, at a meeting in a church in Englewood, every speaker who confronted the CPS official sent out to respond to the community denounced the history of disinvestment in the schools and community and the gentrification and removal of low-income African Americans that is driving Ren2010. A community member said, “We’re being pushed out of the city under the guise of school reform.” A consistent theme in community members’ testimony is that closing schools is concretely and symbolically linked to the destruction of their communities. Englewood High School is the community’s signature school. The meeting was filled with its former students. One of them said, “When you destroy a community’s school, you destroy a community.” This refrain was repeated in community meetings we attended around the city. On the West Side, a resident of North Lawndale called Ren2010 “an act of war on the community.” The significance of this analysis is illuminated by looking at global economic and political forces shaping the city.
Education Policy and Gentrification as Neoliberal Urban Strategy

Smith (2002) argues that gentrification has now become a central force in urban economic development across the globe. In the post–World War II period, gentrification played a marginal role in urban economies. However, in the neoliberal context, gentrification has become “a central motive force of urban economic expansion, a pivotal sector in the new urban economies” (Smith, 2002, p. 447). Gentrification transforms whole city landscapes. It includes gentrification complexes of consumption, recreation, culture, parks, schools, and housing. Gentrification as urban strategy is facilitated and managed by a fusion of state and corporate power wielded through public-private partnerships and policies that use public funds for private development (see Smith, 2002). The state uses its policing and administrative power to enact zoning ordinances that favor developers, raze public housing to open up new opportunities for speculative investment, step up policing of low-income people of color, and build new police stations, libraries, schools, and parks in areas being gentrified. NSC and Mayor Daley’s leadership in the Ren2010 plan embody this institutionalized fusion of corporate and state power. It is in this light that good schools and options within the public school system can be understood. They are important in the global competition to attract investors to potential sites of gentrification and to subsequently market gentrified and gentrifying areas to new middle-class residents (see Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2002).

Although cast as a positive strategy for urban decay and the achievement of social stability, critical urbanists argue that gentrification is a means for the middle and upper-middle classes to claim political, economic, and cultural control of the city (e.g., Smith, 1996, 2002). Only public housing residents who can meet requirements (work 30 hours a week, be drug free, pass housekeeping checks and credit checks, be lease compliant, and have no felonies) can be relocated to new mixed-income developments (CHA Plan for Transformation). In mixed-income housing in Chicago on the site of the former Cabrini Green housing project, for instance, former housing project residents are few in number, carefully selected, and subject to a separate set of rules (McRoberts, 1998). Though the CHA has promised to provide sufficient “new or rehabbed public housing” by 2009 for “every resident and family member who was lease compliant as of 10/1/99” (CHA Plan for Transformation), as of June 2005, after the demolition of 1,324 family units at Cabrini Green, only 465 newly constructed units have been
promised as public housing (Coalition to Protect Public Housing, 2005). Sudhir Venkatesh and his colleagues (2004), who have been tracking the experiences of the residents of demolished public housing, have found they have primarily relocated to racially segregated high-poverty areas. Despite promises of new or refurbished replacement housing, Venkatsh et al. estimate that only about 20% of former residents will be able to return to their old neighborhoods. The class nature of this process is, as Smith (2002) points out, obscured by the language of “mixed-income communities” and “regeneration”—or, in Chicago’s case, “renaissance.”

The evidence suggests that Ren2010’s choice provision is unlikely to improve schools for working-class and low-income students and students of color, though it may attract and keep middle-class residents in the city, clearly a necessity for city leaders. Despite widespread gentrification in Chicago and in spite of the modest population increase of the 1990s, a recent study by Metropolis 2020 (a subentity of the CCC) and Loyola University, discussed in a Chicago Tribune editorial, found a persistent net income loss in Chicago’s Cook County for each of the past 4 years (“Editorial: The Chicago Area’s Income Gap,” 2004). Reports such as this reflect poorly on the mayor’s office and the CCC as they try to portray Chicago as a competitive environment for business in today’s global economy. As highlighted by the Tribune editorial, the business community faults the public school system for any decline in Chicago’s global city status. This rationale is apparent in the Ren2010 plan and the specific neighborhoods most affected by it.

On one hand, the discourse of failure and “cleaning out” and “rebuilding” is rooted in demonization of the low-income African Americans to be displaced. The Midsouth is a valuable piece of land, and its development and gentrification is facilitated by its construction in the White cultural imagination as a space of danger and lawlessness. A population that has become expendable in the restructured labor force and “dangerous” in the city’s global city image of middle-class stability, sanitized cultural diversity, and upscale living must be removed and/or contained (Parenti, 1999; Smith, 1996). Ren2010 facilitates the dispersal of low-income African Americans through gentrification. On the other hand, the new Midsouth is being marketed as a racial heritage site to African American professionals, who make up a portion of the initial wave of middle-class buyers (Boyd, 2000). As cities directly compete in the global economy for markets and investment, their competitive advantage rests on their ability to market themselves as unique and authentic (Harvey, 2001). Developers are branding new multimillion-dollar housing complexes with names such as
Legends South and Jazz on the Boulevard, appropriating Bronzeville’s history as a center of African American cultural production to market real estate.

**Conclusion: Whose City?**

Education reforms that blur the distinction between public and private establish the indirect political power of nonstate actors who “perform political functions under no effective political control” (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, quoted in Dale & Robertson, 2004, p. 153). The privatization of schools and the replacement of LSCs with nonelected bodies eliminates democratic participation in decisions that govern public institutions paid for by public funds. NSC, beyond its role in the selection of new school operators and school evaluations, has the authority, through its financial partnership with Ren2010, to choose which Ren2010 schools will receive funds from corporate donors and foundations. This helps guarantee the success of schools approved by the corporate sector while it could disadvantage more community-driven new schools. For example, the Commercial Club’s NSC has fully funded Legacy Charter School, run by the law firm Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal, in which Don Lubin, chairman of the board of NSC, is a partner. The firm made a cash contribution of $1 million for the planning and operation of Legacy, which hired twice as many teachers as needed in its first year, creating a student-teacher ratio of 12 to 1. On the other hand, Uplift School for Social Justice, a Ren2010 CPS performance school begun by community activists and teachers, has received no additional funding from NSC. In place of the potentially “thick democracy” of LSCs (Gandin & Apple, 2003), new unelected corporate governing bodies command veto power over teachers, families, and communities. By eliminating LSCs, Ren2010 removes one of the few substantive institutionalized means of democratic participation in the political life of the city. It becomes “the agent of the remercantilisation of interactions among the people” (Santos in Dale & Robertson, 2004, p. 154).

Thus, the contest over school governance is essentially a struggle around how competence to participate in democratic public life is defined. 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 governance and control of their lives and their communities (cf. Gandin & Apple, 2003). By redistributing power to parents and community representatives, LSCs “asserted the capacity of ordinary citizens to reach intelligent
decisions about educational policy” (Katz, 1992, p. 62). When LSCs were first authorized, critics argued that parents and community members would not have the skills or education to participate effectively in school decisions (Hess, 1991). In practice, the road was rocky for some as parents grappled with curriculum and school organization, school budgets, the arcane regulations of state and local bureaucracies, and effective decision-making processes. Yet over time, some LSCs became authentic forms of community participation in important school decisions (Katz et al., 1997), and their leaders are significant community actors. Bypassing the community and eliminating LSCs is therefore about redefining civic competence and concentrating the authority to participate in civic governance in the hands of professional elites.

In the many community meetings we have attended, a consistent refrain is that low-income communities of color have had no say in decisions that deeply affect them. Their voices have been ignored in relation to circumstances about which they have privileged knowledge. This sentiment was summed up by a MidSouth community leader in his testimony before the Board of Education, August 24, 2004:

This process would not be happening in Lincoln Park [a wealthy area of the city]. There has to be some humility from this body. To say we’re against change is insulting. The issues we are bringing up are factual because we’re experiencing it. The people sitting around here don’t have to deal with these issues. . . . We’ve raised these kids. We understand them. We have their respect.

This is a contest about who has the right to speak and act. There is an official discourse of containment that frames community opposition to Ren2010 and grassroots proposals as blocking “progress.” At a school board meeting in August 2004, President Michael Scott admonished critics of Ren2010 (parent activists and LSC chairs) to “stop criticizing” and “be part of your community.” He also warned those “who don’t want change” that “life is not a dress rehearsal” (field notes, August 25, 2004). At another board meeting, a state representative supporting Ren2010 chided critics for being “afraid of every little tiny little change” (field notes, September 22, 2004).

School choice also threatens to exacerbate educational inequalities by advantaging middle-class consumers. Ren2010 follows on the heels of new highly selective magnet high schools and elite International Baccalaureate programs in high schools (Lipman, 2002, 2004). These schools have imprinted choice and selectivity in the school system, yet nearly all studies of school choice and education marketization internationally indicate that
they exacerbate educational inequalities, leaving low-income children and children of color in the worst schools (see Ball, 2003; Wells et al., 2005, Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998).

The Chicago case illustrates that because neoliberal education policies are about more than schools, they may create a basis for broad resistance to multiple aspects of neoliberal policy: privatization, attacks on unions, and restriction of democratic civic participation. Community organizations, parents, LSCs and LSC federations, the teachers union, other school employee unions, students, progressive teacher organizations, and community and education reform groups have been drawn together in opposition to Ren2010. There is a nascent effort to build alliances across race, ethnicity, immigrant status, social class, and geographic boundaries. For one of the most racially segregated and turf-demarcated cities in the United States, these fledgling alliances are quite significant. This is a process that continues to unfold as we write.

Thus, public schools have come to exemplify the city’s central contradictions: growth and real estate development (framed as improvement and progress) for some and increasing inequality and exclusion for others; the power of a few to make decisions affecting large sectors of social life, loss of democratic participation for many others. In short, one could argue the contest over school policy is essentially over who will live in the city, who will benefit from its growth and development, and who will get to participate in fundamental decisions affecting economic and social life.

Concluding Comments: Limitations and Future Research

Although we find the perspectives of those who oppose Ren2010 to be powerful and the social science explanations of neoliberal urbanism illuminating, we also see limitations in our analysis that call for further research and theorizing. First, our analysis does not account for the messiness of the policy process within the context of dominant structures and ideologies—contention at multiple levels, the power of residual and emergent ideologies to resist and modify dominant agendas, and the ad hockery that is part of actual policy making (Ball, 1994). Second, a frequent question we have encountered as we present this research to academic and community audiences is the degree of intentionality in Ren2010. Is it a grand conspiracy? Or is it the result of larger neoliberal processes (respatialization of economic activity to cities, loss of local funds through federal devolution
policies) and ideologies of the market and the TINA thesis (there is no alternative to neoliberalism)? We suggest it is both. But there needs to be more investigation and theorizing of the relationship of structure and agency at all levels. To what extent is Ren2010 explained by the intentionality of the Commercial Club and the local state officials (e.g., mayor’s office), and to what extent is Ren2010 a product of the confluence of neoliberal interests and ideologies (e.g., real estate development, concerns about workforce and bond ratings, belief in charter schools to effect school improvement for low-income students of color, frustration at the failure of public schools in Chicago)? Third, we draw on the perspectives of that part of the public that is organized against Ren2010, but there are parents whose children attend persistently troubled and low-achieving schools and are urgently seeking solutions and believe Ren2010 may provide them. It is important to understand their perspectives because this gets to the heart of the “good sense” in Ren2010 in a Gramscian sense (Gramsci, 1971)—those aspects of dominant policy that resonate with the lived experiences of the people affected. We do not write off supporters as simply wrong headed or duped. We should be ever mindful that many urban schools and school systems are profoundly failing children of color, particularly low-income children, and people are urgently seeking solutions and options. The transformation of urban schools is urgent. This research can help illuminate an education policy agenda that speaks to the deep concerns of members of the community to transform their schools in the interests of their children and the community as a whole. Our research so far has demonstrated that at the heart of that agenda is the full participation of those affected.

Notes

1. Illinois state law limits the number of charter schools that can be created in Chicago. Contract schools are a way to get around this; they function similar to charter schools but, by contracting directly with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), avoid the state limitations. In addition, some charter schools create multiple schools as “annexes,” another means of bypassing state limits.

2. See, for example, CPS (2004d).

3. New Schools for Chicago’s (NSC) board chairman is Don Lubin, partner at a major law firm sponsoring the Renaissance 2010 (Ren2010) Legacy Charter School. NSC’s executive director is Phyllis Lockett, previously executive director of the Financial Research and Advisory Committee, a subcommittee of the Civic Committee. Other NSC members are: Andrew McKenna, chairman MacDonald’s Corporation; William Osborn, chairman, Northern Trust Bank; John Madigan, retired chair of the Tribune Company; Terry Mazany, CEO, Chicago Community Trust; Michael Scott, president, Chicago Board of Education; Arne Duncan, CEO, CPS (see Kelleher, 2005).
4. According to A.T. Kearney’s First Quarter 2005 Executive Agenda, the plan for renaissance schools in the Midsouth (called the Mid-South Community Plan), developed between December 2003 and May 2004, involved a change in the way community residents enrolled in schools:

Children will no longer be assigned to a school based on where they live. Instead, the region will be divided into expanded attendance areas, each of which will include three to five high-quality community schools within reasonable walking or commuting distance. (Bluestein, 2005, p. 49)

5. Between July 2004 and September 2005, we attended and/or participated in 5 monthly school board meetings and 4 CPS public hearings, 4 rallies and pickets, 2 press conferences, 16 community organization and teacher meetings and forums, 9 coalition meetings, 10 planning meetings, and 4 congressional task force meetings. We also had regular conversations with teachers and community organizations throughout this period. From September 2005 to June 2006, Lipman participated in monthly coalition meetings and numerous community hearings and discussions with community organization members, teachers, parents, and other local school staff.

6. Janet Smith and Martha Goss, University of Illinois at Chicago, Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement.

7. The irrationality of these categorizations was exemplified when Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) results reported in spring 2004 converted some Chicago schools from “models” that students were scrambling to get into to “failing schools” that students could transfer out of—all by one tenth of a percentage point on the school’s test scores (Cholo & Little, 2003).

8. Under No Child Left Behind, schools that do not make annual yearly progress (AYP) for 5 years are subject to state takeover.

9. Local school councils (LSCs) have the power to hire principals and approve the school’s discretionary budget and school improvement plan.

10. If contract and performance schools choose the designations “alternative schools” or “small schools” (categories that provide flexibility in relation to some CPS mandates), they must not be governed by LSCs for the first 2 years of operation. After 2 years, the school may request of the board to have an LSC. If it does not, the policy stipulations state simply that “the majority of the members of any [alternative or small school] governing body shall reside in the district” (CPS Policy Manual, Section 302.7, p. 3, italics added). Ren2010 charter schools, after 1 year in operation, are run by an unelected board of directors.

11. The plan was presented to CPS leaders in their fourth planning session on May 6, 2004, and was acquired by community organizations in the Midsouth. The language and structure are borrowed directly from the corporate world. A central component is a “franchised model” of less-bureaucratically-controlled schools run by “venders” with a regional “business services center” (in place of the current area instructional officer), which services “clients” (in place of teachers and administrators), A.T. Kearney, 2004.

12. This number of closings was later retracted by CPS, probably in response to the strength of the community’s opposition.

13. “Legends South—Formerly Robert Taylor will consist of “794 public housing, 666 affordable and 434 market-rate rental units in addition to 494 affordable homeownership units” (Michaels Development Corporation, n.d.). The original Robert Taylor Homes consisted of 2 miles of high-rise buildings—28 in all, containing 4,321 public housing units
(Michaels Development Corporation, n.d.). Thus, Legends South will provide public housing for just 18.3% of the former residents. Based on an estimate of 2,700 residents (Venkatesh, Celimli, Miller, Murphy, & Turner, 2004), more than 2,200 will not have housing in Legends. “Affordable” is for families earning between 80% and 120% of Chicago’s median annual income, or from $36,000 to $54,000.

14. The centers provided 2 years of preschool and 1 year of kindergarten and focused on early literacy skills. They werestaffed by teachers with a bachelor’s degree and special certification in early childhood education. They also had extra staff to work with parents and the community and included substantive parent participation. They were replaced by state-funded prekindergarten or Head Start programs staffed by teachers with 2 years of college and without parent and community support staff (see Community Renewal Society, 2004).

15. The Chicago Longitudinal Study began studying the Child-Parent Centers and following the progress of children who attended the centers in 1986 (see http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/index.htmlx).

16. The progress and challenges of LSCs since the 1988 reform have been chronicled in The Catalyst, a local publication that has followed school reform in Chicago since the 1988 reform.

References


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