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## Renaissance 2010: the reassertion of ruling-class power through neoliberal policies in Chicago

PAULINE LIPMAN

*University of Illinois-Chicago, USA*

DAVID HURSH

*University of Rochester, USA*

**ABSTRACT** The Chicago Public Schools, along with the city of Chicago itself, serve as an exemplary case of neoliberal reorganization, as corporate and governmental 'leaders' remake Chicago into a global city meeting the needs of capitalism. As such, Chicago provides us with an example of 'actually existing neoliberalism,' in which neoliberalism's goals are contradictory and contested. The focus in this article is on Renaissance 2010, a corporate proposal to reform both the city and its schools to create schools and spaces that will attract the professionals needed in a global city. Renaissance 2010 places public schooling under the control of corporate leaders who aim to convert public schools to charter and contract schools, handing over their administration to corporations and breaking the power of unions. However, as the article shows, such reforms not only disenfranchise the poor, people of color, students, parents, and educators, but also create an economically and spatially separate city. Consequently, while neoliberalism is promoted as an efficient and neutral reform, in Chicago neoliberalism faces increasing resistance.

Undoubtedly, neoliberal political theory increasingly influences education policies. However, in this article we show that incorporating neoliberal policies into education is not nearly as uncomplicated or uncontested as sometimes described by both proponents and opponents. By focusing on Chicago as an example of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), we demonstrate that neoliberal theory differs from neoliberal practice: while neoliberalism is promoted as an efficient, politically neutral system beneficial for all, in Chicago it is creating an increasingly economically and spatially separate city. Consequently, people of color, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and progressive educators are increasingly contesting neoliberal policies.

Over the last several decades, the Commercial Club of Chicago (hereafter Commercial Club) has taken an increasingly larger role in reforming the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The Commercial Club, established in the 1800s to promote the interests of Chicago's corporate elite, has long influenced Chicago's education policies (see Wrigley, 1982; Shipps, 2006). However, with the passage of *A Nation at Risk*, a Reagan administration sponsored report castigating schools as failing to achieve high standards and contributing to the country's economic problems in 1983, the Commercial Club became central to making economic and educational policy. Its 1984 long-term strategic plan, *Make No Little Plans: jobs for metropolitan Chicago*, called for making Chicago a leading financial services center and upgrading the skills of workers (Lipman, 2003, p. 61). More recently, with Renaissance 2010, the Commercial Club began making not only policy central to reforming the schools, but also key decisions about their operation. Under Renaissance 2010, the Commercial Club gains control over Chicago's public schools through New Schools for Chicago, a board appointed by the Commercial Club and composed of leading corporate representatives and 'civic leaders' including the CPS's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chicago Board of Education President. Referred to in the press as a 'secret cabinet,' this unelected body not only participates in

the selection and evaluation of new schools, but also distributes Commercial Club funds to those schools (Rossi, November 30, 2004; Cholo, February 23, 2005).

As indicated above, Renaissance 2010 includes not only remaking the public schools but the city itself. Renaissance 2010 is part of a larger project to raze low-income African American communities, with the goal of gentrifying areas with new condominiums, luxury apartments, and retail services. Renaissance 2010 reveals the increasing ability of the corporations to reshape both the city and schools in their own interests, using neoliberal education and economic policies to recreate Chicago as a global city central to the financial, real estate, retail, and service industries (see Lipman & Haines, 2007).

In this article, therefore, we situate Chicago's Renaissance 2010 reforms in the context of the neoliberal agenda, with the aim of demonstrating the following. Neoliberalism asserts that societies function best when individuals make decisions within competitive markets rather than having governmental organizations or other agencies make decisions for them. The government that governs best is that which governs least. Consequently, current educational practices are wasteful and inefficient because curricular and pedagogical decisions are made by school boards and teacher unions rather than in response to what parents find attractive in choosing a school for their child. Furthermore, social policy should promote economic growth by eliminating restrictions on corporate investment and growth, including reducing corporate taxes and regulations, and educating citizens to be productive employees. Social institutions, such as schools, exist to promote economic growth. Lastly, providing the conditions for corporate and economic growth will result in improved economic conditions for all, therefore increasing equality (Olssen et al, 2004; Faux, 2006; Lauder et al, 2006; Hursh, in press).

However, as we will show, how neoliberalism works in practice differs from its theoretical assertions. As Harvey (2005), Ball (2003) and others have shown, 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) reflects neither in practice nor outcome what it claims to achieve in theory. Contrary to the illusion that markets regulate themselves, the conversion of education into a market system requires the intervention of the state for both the destruction of the existing institutional arrangements and political compromises and the creation of a new infrastructure. In Chicago, Renaissance 2010 has undermined democratic decision making as parents, elected Local School Councils (LSCs), and community groups have less influence on the decisions that affect their lives. Recent educational and economic reforms in Chicago demonstrate how neoliberalism is not a natural or neutral evolution of political thought but instead provides, as Harvey (2005) writes:

a benevolent mask of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration or reconstitution of naked class power, locally as well as transnationally, but most particularly in the main financial centers of global capitalism. (p. 119)

Moreover, as others have demonstrated, 'neoliberal political practice has generated pervasive market failures, new forms of social polarization, a dramatic intensification of uneven spatial development at all spatial scales' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 5). We argue that, contrary to its claims, Chicago's recent neoliberal policies promote corporate and governmental intervention into daily life, and exacerbate already shameful inequalities. Urban policies, such as Chicago's, 'mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 21), while at the same time securing order and control among low-income people of color. However, neoliberalism is not instituted without resistance, as working-class communities, particularly communities of color, struggle to resist neoliberal restructuring projects.

Therefore, in this article we begin with a brief overview of neoliberal theory, showing how it extends classical liberalism that emerged in the seventeenth century and attempts to restore some of the power of the ruling class lost during the rise of social democratic liberalism in the middle of the twentieth century. Contrary to the 'benevolent mask' in which neoliberalism is promoted as desirable, inevitable, and neutral, neoliberals aim to roll back gains in the right to social security, education, and welfare won over the last century. We then briefly describe the research methodology in Chicago where Lipman and her colleague, Nathan Haines [1], engaged in both archival research and progressive social activism. We then turn to describing and analyzing Renaissance 2010 itself, with the aim of showing how neoliberal theory differs from 'actually

existing practice,' and assert that education and economic reforms focused on choice, privatization, and the transformation of Chicago into a 'global city' lead to the 'class conquest of the city' by the middle and upper-middle classes (Smith, 2002). Moreover, because Chicago's educational reforms arise out of and parallel current school accountability policies, Renaissance 2010 provides an example of how education policies, such as those under the 2001 *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) federal education legislation, lead to the privatization of public education. However, such policies have the potential to provoke broad-based opposition. The Chicago case suggests that education may increasingly become a focus of democratic social struggles.

### **The Rise of Neoliberalism in Theory and Actually Existing Practice**

Neoliberal theory and practices have become so embedded within economic and political decision making that neoliberal theory is rarely explicitly invoked as a rationale. Yet, the current educational emphasis on choice, competition, markets, standardized testing and accountability are based on neoliberal rationalities and could neither be conceptualized nor instituted without the rise and supremacy of neoliberal thought. Therefore, anyone interested in current educational decision making needs to understand the neoliberal principles that guide the decisions.

Not only is neoliberalism rarely discussed but, because neoliberalism can be most strongly identified with the current Bush administration or the past administrations of Reagan and Thatcher, some find the term confusing. Some assume that a 'neo' or 'new' form of liberalism should connect to and build on the past social democratic policies of Franklin Roosevelt or Lyndon Johnson. Understanding neoliberalism, therefore, requires a brief review of the history of liberalism.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, liberalism, in one form or another, has been the dominant philosophical, political, and economic theory in Western civilization. Liberalism first emerged as the philosophical and political rationale for opposing the authority of the church and monarchy. In place of obedience to the church and crown, liberal social philosophers (Locke, [1690] 1960; Hobbes, [1651] 1968) put forward the 'principles of civil rights, rights of property, a limited conception of state power and a broadly negative conception of freedom' (Olssen et al, 2004, p. 80). This classical liberalism reconceptualized the relationship between the individual and the state, aiming to free individuals from state interference and portraying individuals as rational choosers pursuing their self-interest that, as described by Adam Smith ([1776] 1976) not only 'brought economic gains to each party' but also 'to the nation as a whole' (Olssen et al, 2004, p. 88).

Under classical liberalism, developing capitalist societies industrialized and their overall wealth grew. But industrialization and wealth came at a cost: increased wealth for a few and increased poverty for many. Consequently, workers began to organize and demand better working conditions and the general public called for laws that would protect women and children from excessive labor and their families from poverty. Cities and states passed legislation regarding education, employment, health and other issues.

At the same time, economists such as John Maynard Keynes developed economic theories that provided rationales for the emerging social democratic liberalism. Moreover, any doubts that classical liberalism was inadequate for the twentieth century were shattered by the Great Depression. In response, Roosevelt implemented Keynesian economic theories, in which the state used spending, tax, and welfare policies to rebuild the country and to fund the military effort for World War II. The USA emerged from the war victorious and Keynesian economic and social democratic liberalism were to remain dominant throughout the 1970s.

However, during the period of Keynesian dominance, neoliberals condemned social democratic liberalism as 'collectivist, socialist, and economically misguided' (Levitas 1986, p. 3). In the 1940s and 1950s, Hayek (1944, 1960) and others, including Milton Friedman (1952, 1962), at the University of Chicago, attacked Keynesian policies for infringing on personal freedom. Instead, they, and later Nozick (1974), Buchanan (1975) and Becker (1976), shared a commitment to individual liberty, equated with unfettered participation in the market, and limiting the state's role in providing for social welfare.

The opportunity to promote neoliberal economic policies arose in the late 1960s when inflation increased in response to OPEC (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) forcing oil

prices higher and President Johnson's deficit spending to pay for the Vietnam War (Faux, 2006). Inflation, coupled with corporations' inability to pass rising wage costs on to consumers in the increasingly competitive and open world economy, caused corporate and banking profits to decline. Rather than raise taxes or reduce the country's dependency on oil, those in power blamed workers for demanding high wages and, consequently, the emerging neoliberals decided to squeeze workers' wages (Parenti, 1999, p. 118). As the head of the Federal Reserve Bank, Paul Volcker, stated, 'the average wage of workers has to decline' (cited in Bowles & Gintis, 1986, p. 60). Neoliberals, first under President Carter and then under Reagan, imposed the 'Volcker shock' in which high interest rates and cuts in corporate taxes brought on a recession, reducing consumer demand and increasing unemployment. The average wage for workers has not increased since 1973 (Harvey, 2005, pp. 24-26).

As noted above, neoliberalism not only changes the economic and social structure but reconceptualizes the individual by expanding on classic liberalism's faith in the individual as rational chooser within markets. Under neoliberalism the individual is no longer merely a rational optimizer but conceived as an autonomous entrepreneur responsible for his or her own self, progress, or position. Lemke (2002) describes neoliberalism as seeking

to unite a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. (p. 59)

The market becomes central within such a conception of the individual.

Every social transaction is conceptualized as entrepreneurial, to be carried out purely for personal gain. The market introduces competition as the structuring mechanism through which resources and status are allocated efficiently and fairly. The 'invisible hand' of the market is thought to be the most efficient way of sorting out which competing individuals get what. (Olssen et al, 2004, pp. 137-138)

Neoliberalism returns classic liberalism with a vengeance. Individuals are transformed into 'entrepreneurs of themselves' (Foucault, 1979) operating within a marketplace that now includes services such as education, health care, and pensions. The transformation is perhaps best characterized by a recent financial services advertisement that suggests we think of families as corporations, whose rising or falling 'value' can be assessed each day in a public market.

David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as:

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. (p. 2)

However, as the above quote implies, while neoliberalism claims to reduce state intervention into the social and economic sphere, it is often up to the state to create and regulate the markets. Furthermore, while neoliberalism claims that it will result in benefits for all, much like Adam Smith's 'invisible hand,' neoliberal policies often result in increased inequality. Thus, neoliberalism in practice means a weak state when it comes to provision of the public welfare, reduction in inequality, and regulation of corporations, but a strong state when it comes to ensuring conditions for capital accumulation and regulation of the masses of poor and working-class people (Bourdieu, 1998; Gill, 2003).

As we shall see for Chicago, the financial, corporate and political elite has used neoliberalism to implement policies that have restored their 'ruling-class power' (Harvey, 2005, p. 203) by increasing their political power and wealth. The Commercial Club, representing the corporate and political elite, has been the central force behind Renaissance 2010. Further, while Renaissance 2010

introduces markets and competition into education, it increases state intervention as the Chicago Public Schools administration intervenes in the daily activities of educators by introducing corporate models of governance with standardized testing linked to rewards and punishments. Moreover, state and corporate/finance capital have consolidated their power in a partnership that has increased economic disparity and spatial segregation. By studying Chicago as a case of 'actually existing neoliberalism,' we can see how the rhetoric of neoliberalism plays out in daily practice.

### **The Study: methodology**

This article is grounded in multiple data sources: archival data, participant observation, and direct engagement in 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 Lipman and her colleague, Nathan Haines, 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 May 2006, Lipman continued this work. Over two years Lipman has had ongoing conversations with parents, students, teachers, school-level administrators, community organization leaders and members, members and heads of local school councils, 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. Based on consistent involvement in these events, Lipman and Haines, and then Lipman, generated field notes and interview notes and collected documents that inform this account. Lipman has also been studying and writing about Chicago school policy for the past eight years (see Lipman & Gutstein, 2001; Lipman, 2002, 2003, 2004; Lipman & Haines, 2007) and the article is informed by that body of work. It also draws on recent policy papers and documents of civic elites and community and labor organizations, media accounts, City of Chicago housing data, and relevant CPS and Illinois School Board of Education quantitative data. In addition, Lipman and Haines have volunteered as researchers for and with community organizations opposing Renaissance 2010. Finally, Lipman has given public testimony about Chicago school policy at meetings and community forums related to Renaissance 2010 throughout the city. These forums are also a rich source of data. The analyses developed in an evolving spiral of research/action, data analysis, and writing (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) in dialogue with the participants.

### **Chicago: neoliberal politics in a global city**

Chicago's transformation can be understood in the context of its drive to be a 'global city' – a command center of the global economy (Sassen, 1994, 2004). Over the past 25 years Chicago has been transformed from an industrial hub to a corporate, financial, and tourism center. Successive city governments have concentrated public resources and local legislation to facilitate downtown development and gentrification of working-class and low-income neighborhoods, dramatically transforming the urban landscape (Lipman, 2004). The neoliberal strategy powering Chicago's economic development provides a clear example of the 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.

On June 24, 2004, Andrew J. McKenna, Chairman of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club, declared, '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' (Civic Committee Press Release, 2004). McKenna was referring to Mayor Daley's announcement of Renaissance 2010. The plan would radically transform public education in Chicago by introducing markets into education, shifting control away from elected school councils and toward the unelected Commercial Club, and substantially reducing the power of the teachers' and other school employees' unions. It is fitting that the plan was announced at an event hosted by the Commercial Club. 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, 2004).

The Chicago Board of Education (Chicago Public Schools' governing body appointed by the mayor) passed Renaissance 2010 on September 22, 2004. Although the first stage of school closings associated with Renaissance 2010 has affected particular neighborhoods, the plan is to overhaul a large part of the school system (Bluestein, 2005). The plan, as unveiled thus far, will close at least 60 Chicago public schools and open 100 new schools: one-third charter schools and one-third contract schools (both run by outside vendors contracted by CPS) and one-third CPS 'Performance Schools' (public schools subject to Renaissance 2010 funding and policies). In fact, most of the new schools so far are charter or contract schools. For example, the Chicago Public Schools website lists 13 new Renaissance 2010 schools opening in autumn 2006; 11 are charter or contract schools (<http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/new>). Renaissance 2010 schools have five-year performance contracts with CPS. In exchange for this increased accountability, the school district promises greater flexibility in curriculum, instruction, and school organization (CPS Policy Manual, 2004, Section 302.7, p. 4). In the Civic Committee report (*Left Behind*, 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]

Renaissance 2010 institutionalizes corporate control of public schools. Final selection and approval of Renaissance 2010 schools rests with the CEO of CPS. However, the Commercial Club, in exchange for agreeing to help fund the project by raising \$50 million, was granted increased power over the education system through New Schools for Chicago, an organization composed of leading corporate representatives, 'civic leaders' as well as the Chicago Board of Education President and CPS CEO. This unelected body participates in the selection and evaluation of Renaissance 2010 schools, while distributing Commercial Club funds for which the schools must compete (Field, May 5, 2005). School enrollment policy is also murky and leaves room for formal and informal selection processes.[3]

Since Renaissance 2010 was announced in June 2004, it has provoked public controversy and community resistance not seen in relation to CPS policy over the past 15 years. Central to the public discussions and media accounts are issues of educational equity, class inequalities in the city, race, gentrification, community participation, education quality, and the role of teachers' unions. CPS leaders, the mayor, and the Commercial Club contend that Renaissance 2010 will create 'options' and 'choice,' promote innovation, and raise achievement by introducing competition, reducing the power of teachers' unions, creating more efficient school governance, and opening up mixed-income schools in mixed-income communities. On the other hand, 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 (Midsouth Fact Sheet, n.d.; Chicagoans United for Education press conference, July 1, 2005).

### **From Education Accountability to Privatization**

By situating Renaissance 2010 within the history of Chicago school reform, in particular the 1988 and 1995 reforms, we can understand how it both builds upon the past and reverses recent efforts to empower parents, teachers, and other community members. It also reflects the more than century-long involvement of the corporate elite in the Chicago schools through the Commercial Club and exemplifies the increased corporate control of schooling under the neoliberal turn. Lastly, it mirrors the national and global neoliberal agenda.

The 1988 Chicago school reform both decentralized and centralized school governance. It established the LSCs, elected local school governing bodies composed primarily of parents and community members. Although known nationally as the most extensive institutionalized form of democratic community participation in local school governance, the 1988 law also centralized oversight of school finances in the corporate dominated School Finance Authority. Renaissance 2010 eliminates LSCs while further centralizing power.

Chicago's 1995 school reforms installed an education policy regime based on high-stakes accountability. Under the centralized control of the CPS administration, students and schools were

labeled and classified based on test scores, and thousands of 'failing' students were retained in their grade, prevented from graduating from eighth grade, and sent to remedial basic skills high school programs, while hundreds of schools were put on probation and a few were reconstituted altogether with new principals and teaching staffs (Lipman, 2004). At least initially, the policies appealed to a broad common sense that something must be done to address the widespread failure of the schools to educate African American, Latino, and low-income students in particular (e.g. Orfield, 1990). Persistently high drop-out rates, 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 et al, 2001).

Despite a stringent system of sanctions for failure, these educational outcomes have not changed much since the policies were established. The policies did little to rectify significant inequities in resources and opportunity to learn between selective schools and schools in affluent neighborhoods and the majority of schools serving a district that is over 90% students of color and 85% low-income. Nor did centralized mandates for improvement address underlying ideological issues, inequitable curricula, and disconnections between the curriculum and students' cultures, communities, and the strengths they bring to school – factors at the core of the failure of schools to educate low-income children of color.

What the accountability regime did accomplish, intentionally or not, was a system of ranking school failure that established a necessary condition to identify schools to be closed under Renaissance 2010. Teachers, administrators, and community members opposed to Renaissance 2010 also argue that the accountability system created a cycle of changing central mandates and overseers of local schools that was destabilizing and demoralizing for school staff. This compounded the historical failure to invest adequate resources in low-income schools. A community leader testifying before the Board of Education summed up the connection between this recent and long-term history and the current plan to close schools: 'You can't separate the failure in these schools from what's been done to them by CPS' (School Board meeting, September 22, 2004).

Renaissance 2010 provides neither more funding for schools nor support for teachers but rather aims to improve schools by restructuring them as a private-public ventures and by introducing markets and competition, therefore ostensibly improving efficiency. As we will show, charter schools, as well as contract schools formed through Renaissance 2010, are rooted in neoliberal economic rationality. They further open schools to corporations for investment and profit; they support markets as a solution to all problems, and, in the process, undermine collective processes of democracy, such as the LSCs, by promoting democracy as individual choice.

Furthermore, charter schools and other reforms promoted under Renaissance 2010 intersect and complement national, global, and local neoliberal agendas. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the national US education accountability system implemented in 2002, provides both impetus and opportunity to implement a neoliberal education agenda in Chicago. Under NCLB, schools that persistently fail to meet ever-increasing test score benchmarks are subject to having their 'operations' turned over 'to a private company' approved by the Department of Education or restructured and reopened as a charter school (US Department of Education, 2002, p. 7). In addition, both schools and school districts that fail to meet test score benchmarks are subject to takeover by the states.[4] *Left Behind* contends that to avert state action, which would undermine Chicago's efforts to position itself as a global city, 'NCLB has made the need for choice more transparent' (2003, p. 55). Moreover, Chicago, like other districts, realizes that closing schools and reopening them as 'new' schools restarts the clock on meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements and postpones the sanctions imposed under NCLB.

Moreover, charter schools, as public-private partnerships, form an opening wedge into the public education sector as a source of direct capital accumulation without full responsibility for running a city's school system.[5] Charter schools work by 'shaving off' aspects of the education system to private providers (Robertson & Dale, 2003). Roger Dale (1989/90) notes 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, resulting in a mixed public-private system of school choice. Although some progressive community organizations, groups of parents, and teachers frustrated with public

schools have created culturally centered, innovative, and social justice oriented charter schools, the neoliberal context favors business-oriented models (Wells et al, 2005). In Illinois (where Chicago is located), as in most states, charter schools are given less per-pupil public funding than public schools, and most of them have to use part of the state funding to cover costs of facilities. These limited resources force many charter schools started by community organizations to contract out school administration to education management organization businesses or develop partnerships with business groups or corporations (Wells et al, 2005).

Charter schools, as well as contract schools formed through Renaissance 2010, are rooted in neoliberal rationality that privately run schools can provide education more efficiently, and a system of school choice will spur innovation and raise quality, including in public schools forced to compete with charters for students. These assumptions are partly grounded in the belief that the market allows rational economic individuals to make choices in their own interests. Under this logic, turning schools over to the market through choice of charter, contract, and public schools will give parents the freedom to pursue the best schools for their children. As Harvey (2005) points out, this logic assumes there are no asymmetries of power. In fact, 'Better informed and more powerful players have an advantage that can all too easily be parlayed into procuring even better information and greater relative power' (p. 68). Stephen Ball's (2003) study of school choice in Britain revealed that middle-class families used their financial resources, expertise in the market, and their social and cultural capital to secure school advantages for their children.

The evidence from choice programs elsewhere (Whitty et al, 1998; Tomlinson, 2001; Hursh, 2005) suggests that Renaissance 2010's choice provisions are unlikely to improve schools for many working-class and low-income students and students of color, though they may attract and keep middle-class residents in the city. Whether school selection mechanisms are formal or informal, they can work against working-class students of color as they advantage middle-class students (Ball, 1994). An important result of choice policies has been more social class segregation in schools as choice allows them to be more selective in choosing their pupils. In the school marketplace, some students are regarded as 'valuable commodities', while others are regarded as 'undesirable.' Tomlinson (2001) concludes that in Britain, the market system in education appears to create new disadvantages for 'ethnic minority' students and their parents that outweigh advantages. For example, in Chicago a public Montessori school created in an elementary school, which formerly served children living in a public housing project, now enrolls children of new middle-class residents of the gentrifying area while enrolling few children from the public housing development (Finkel, 2006).

### **Renaissance 2010 as Neoliberal Theory and Actual Existing Practice**

Renaissance 2010 not only promotes neoliberal education policy but also is part of a process of neoliberal restructuring of the urban economy and urban space. Not only does it establish a business climate in schools more conducive to capital by undermining unions and democratic public participation, but Renaissance 2010 also reflects the way in which 'cities have become strategically crucial geographic arenas in which a variety of neoliberal initiatives – along with closely intertwined strategies of crisis displacement and crisis management – have been articulated' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 351). According to Smith (2002), the neoliberal restructuring of cities indicates a move away from social democratic liberal urban policy to the 'class conquest of urban policy' marked by (1) state subsidies of capital and direct involvement of capital in urban decision making, (2) withdrawal of the state from social reproduction, and (3) increased social control of low-income and working-class communities. Neoliberal urbanism is characterized by new forms of public-private partnership through which the state facilitates capital accumulation and public decision making by corporate/financial interests without any public accountability. Renaissance 2010 firmly establishes the neoliberal urban agenda.

While neoliberal theory emphasizes markets and competition, resulting in reduced governmental intervention into everyday life, and increased prosperity for all, Chicago's recent policies have increased corporate and governmental intervention into daily life, and exacerbated economic, social, and spatial inequalities along lines of class, race, and ethnicity. Moreover, Chicago's neoliberal policies result in an increasingly dual city – one section taken over by the



financial and upscale real estate, retail, and tourist interests –and the other composed of the urban poor who provide the services demanded by the privileged and who are to be safely contained within their neighborhoods.

However, these policies are contested and Renaissance 2010 has become an arena in which working-class communities, particularly communities of color, struggle to resist neoliberal restructuring. Renaissance 2010, then, can be examined not only for its specific policies but also to show how neoliberal theory differs from ‘actually existing practice,’ and to demonstrate that education and economic reforms focused on choice, privatization, and the transformation of Chicago into a ‘global city’ enabled the middle and upper class ‘class conquest of the city’ (Smith, 2002).

It is not surprising that the Commercial Club, an organization of Chicago’s most powerful corporate and financial interests, is a proponent of freeing public schools from public control and bringing them into the market. The Commercial Club’s 58-page report, *Left Behind* (2003), is an explicitly free market, anti-union, anti-democratic-control document. The report begins with data showing that scores on state standardized tests did not significantly improve from 1999 to 2002 despite major system-wide accountability reforms. It goes on to caution that the school system’s corporate leadership is not to blame: ‘[I]t 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) (Chicago has a corporate-dominated board of education appointed by the mayor). Instead, the Commercial Club contends that the problem lies with parent participation in school governance and union regulations. The failure of the school system to improve is due to ‘the constraints of the city wide teachers’ union contract’ and the inefficiency of Local School Councils (p. 51).

Echoing a long line of neoliberal critics of public education (e.g. Friedman, 1962; Chubb & Moe, 1990), *Left Behind* argues that the root cause of the problem is that public education is a ‘monopoly’ which should be broken by turning schools over to the market which can run them more efficiently and which will promote innovation: ‘Competition – which is the engine of American productivity generally – is the key to improved performance of our public schools’ (p. 55). The report’s authors note that vouchers would be the ‘preferred’ solution, but because ‘the political climate in Illinois seems hostile,’ the best plan is to fund existing charter schools and work politically to expand their number. Mayor Daley’s announcement of Renaissance 2010 reiterated the Commercial Club argument:

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 Press Releases, June 8, 2004)

In part this is a discursive move that shapes the discussion about education in the city. Progress is equated with neoliberal market solutions that offer equity through market choices and quality through competition (see also Ball, 2003). An ideological shift that promotes new thinking and new social relations is essential to the neoliberal project: ‘[I]t is not just a matter of introducing new structures and incentives but also it requires and brings about new relationships, cultures and values’ (Ball, 2001, p. xxxii).

### **Renaissance 2010 and the Ascendance of Capital in Urban Governance**

New Schools for Chicago and Mayor Daley’s advocacy for the Renaissance 2010 plan capture the institutionalized fusion of corporate and state power. Renaissance 2010 installs a powerful organized body of corporate and financial elites as direct actors in shaping public school policy and directing its implementation. The Commercial Club proposed Renaissance 2010, Mayor Daley announced it at a Commercial Club event, and the Commercial Club created New Schools for Chicago (NSC), a public–private partnership at the highest level, to direct the plan. NSC 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 (a major local corporate/banking foundation), the retired Chair of the Tribune Corporation, and top CPS officials. The Chicago Board of Education also appointed the former Vice President of Bank One and CEO of the Chicago Board of Trade as Chief Administrative Officer of CPS, a position for which he is paid one dollar a year. The

strategy to sell Renaissance 2010 (including the concept, administrative structure, 'message,' and 'communications timing') to 'stakeholders' and 'opinion makers' was developed by a leading corporate consulting firm that claims to 'provide a unique business perspective' and 'thought leadership' to CPS leaders (A.T. Kearney, 2004). A central component of this plan is a model of neoliberal organization – a 'franchised model' of less bureaucratically controlled schools run by 'venders' with a regional 'business services center' that services 'clients' (i.e. teachers and administrators) (A.T. Kearney, 2005, May 6).

Legitimizing corporate and financial actors to make crucial decisions about public education, without public accountability, is a neoliberal turn that goes beyond private operation of individual charter schools. It gives capital direct control over institutions of social reproduction financed through public funds. On a lesser scale, it parallels the takeover of New York City fiscal authority by banking and financial interests – a germinal event in the evolution of neoliberal urban governance (Harvey, 2005). The direct intervention of the Commercial Club reveals the strategic role that the city's school system plays in Chicago's neoliberal development strategy and in making Chicago a global city. *Metropolis 2020* (Johnson, 1998), the Commercial Club's proposal for Chicago Metropolitan Region development, calls for improving school systems in order to prepare 'employees who can, at the minimum, read instruction manuals, do basic math and communicate well,' and to improve the school performance of 'minorities' because of their expanded role in the area's economy (p. 6). These goals are driven by the intense global competition among metropolitan regions to attract production facilities, corporate headquarters, investment, and business services industries. But the city itself also requires schools of exceptional quality to attract high-paid professionals and managers. This is an explicit impetus for the creation of new college preparatory magnet schools in Chicago's upper-income and gentrifying areas (see Lipman, 2004).

Apple (2001) reminds us that for neoliberals, democracy is equated with the freedom to consume in the market, and the ideal of the citizen is the purchaser. 'Rather than democracy being a *political* concept, it is transformed into a wholly economic concept' through voucher and choice plans in education (p. 39, emphasis in original). This transformation masks the increased political power of capital to govern daily life. In the case of Renaissance 2010, the power of capital is legitimated ideologically by the promotion of Renaissance 2010 as a school choice plan and furthered materially through the elimination of LSCs as a form of democratic school governance. LSCs are elected community and teacher governance bodies in each school authorized to select the school principal and allocate the school's budget. Although the effectiveness and level of community participation in LSCs has been uneven, and has been eroded by greater centralized regulation through the accountability system, LSCs are nevertheless a form of institutionalized democratic participation by parents and community members in local schools (Katz, 1992; Katz et al, 1997; Bryk et al, 1998; Fung, 2004). LSCs have been under attack by school system leaders since Chicago's 1995 accountability reforms. Under Renaissance 2010, LSCs will be eliminated in the charter and contract schools, which have private boards.

The significance of LSCs lies in their relative political power in the city. In a highly centralized, corporate dominated city and aligned mayoral regime, they are one of very few democratically elected forums of democratic participation, and thus a means of grass-roots organizing that can extend beyond the schools. In that sense they are a local arena within which low-income and working class communities can contend for power around decisions that affect their daily lives. Their presidents and members, particularly on the African American South and West Sides, have taken a leading role in the resistance to Renaissance 2010. Eliminating LSCs undermines one of the few official bases of local community power in the face of the city's consolidated neoliberal agenda of downtown development, gentrification, and corporate and financial power (see Lipman, 2004). Renaissance 2010 establishes the neoliberal preference for governance by experts and elites as a politically stabilizing environment for the free workings of the market (Harvey, 2005).

Renaissance 2010 also institutionalizes neoliberal economic and social relations within the city's public sector, weakening labor in favor of capital. The logic of the market favors cost cutting by reducing labor costs and limiting educational services. Charters that reduce operating expenses (through, for example, lower wages for teachers and other school employees, limited services to special education and bilingual education students, fewer extracurricular options, less experienced teachers) increase their profits. And those schools that focus on high-stakes standardized tests are

more likely to succeed in the current policy context. Because charter school employees do not have union protections, they are subject to the same labor abuses, system of favoritism and cronyism, and lack of job security as non-union workers in other sectors. For example, at one Renaissance 2010 charter school, teachers negotiate their salaries individually, are not allowed to leave the building during the school day, and have no job security from year to year. The weakening of teachers' and other school employees' unions is significant for trade unions in general. The Chicago Teachers Union, with more than 37,000 members, is one of the largest unions in the city. As Susan Robertson points out, charter schools have been one of the means the state has used to overcome opposition to neoliberal policy by breaking up existing unionized sectors (Robertson, 2003).

### **Renaissance 2010 and Gentrification – the class conquest of urban space**

Over the past 25 years, gentrification has moved from a marginal sector of urban economies to a pivotal strategy of urban development (Smith, 2002). Gentrification in the neoliberal context merges local, national, and transnational capital to create gentrification complexes of upscale housing, retail outlets, cultural attractions, streetscapes, and recreation and parks. It 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). Lubricated by local government policies that favor and subsidize developers, gentrification 'serves up the central and inner-city real estate markets as burgeoning sectors of productive capital investment' (Smith, 2002, p. 446). It is fundamentally about reconstituting urban space for the middle and upper-middle class consumers who are also a critical labor force at the center of global city functions (business services, advertising houses, legal firms, and so on) (Sassen, 2004).

A central theme in community meetings organized to protest Renaissance 2010 is that the plan is linked to the displacement of low-income African Americans and gentrification of their communities. In fact, the evidence suggests that Renaissance 2010 significantly extends the connection between education policy and gentrification that was apparent with the creation of six new selective magnet high schools begun in 1999 (Lipman, 2004). The schools that are being closed under Renaissance 2010 are almost entirely in African American communities experiencing gentrification. We turn, therefore, to examining the relationship between Renaissance 2010, school closings, and gentrification by looking at two Chicago communities: Englewood and the Midsouth.

In February 2005, CPS announced it was closing two elementary schools and the main high school in Englewood, an African American community on Chicago's South Side. Englewood is one of the most economically devastated areas of the city without even a grocery store. Yet Englewood is located near the expressway and public transportation and is described in local newspapers Real Estate sections as the next 'hot' neighborhood. A city Housing Department official noted, 'There is a growing interest in Englewood these days' (Almacá, 2005, p. 1, 16A). Without any new housing in the area in years, Englewood, a community with a median household income of \$18,955, is now the site of a new \$150 million development to build 550 new single family homes costing \$165,000-\$365,000 and a second development of 185 houses. A \$250 million city investment includes a new police station and library, \$150 million community college campus, and \$22 million shopping district. At the same time, longtime residents are being driven out by up to 80% increases in property taxes and a 41% increase in house foreclosures in the past 10 years.

The Midsouth was the initial focus of Renaissance 2010 in 2004. In July 2004, the Midsouth Plan to close 20 of the 22 schools in this area was leaked to the press. Immediately people in the community mobilized to fight it. In November 2004, after months of demonstrations, angry testimonies at School Board meetings, and community hearings, the Board bowed to community pressure and withdrew the plan, choosing instead to move much more cautiously in the Midsouth while planning school closings in other areas. Midsouth community members charged that the Midsouth Plan was designed to push them out of their neighborhood in order to further gentrification. In fact the plan would have forced children to transfer to schools out of the community, another incentive to leave the community on top of the destruction of public housing, skyrocketing property taxes, and a severe lack of affordable housing. Looking more closely at the Midsouth illuminates the connection between school policy, gentrification, and neoliberal urbanism.

Gentrification of the Midsouth and Englewood can be understood by looking at economic and political forces shaping the city – specifically, the spatial dynamics of capitalism and the cultural politics of race. Writing on space as a constituent element of capitalism, David Harvey (2001) argues that capital attempts to resolve structural crises through the ‘spatial fix’ – the creative destruction and reconstruction of investment in the built environment. ‘The inner contradictions of capitalism are expressed through the restless formation and re-formation of geographical landscapes’ (p. 333). This process underlies gentrification (see Smith, 1996), and the Midsouth and Englewood provide clear examples. Hit hard by deindustrialization in the 1980s and into the 1990s, stable working-class African American families became low-income and unemployed, and both communities had some of the highest concentrations of poverty in the USA (Venkatesh et al, 2004; Bennett, 2006). During this period, landlords failed to maintain rental properties, allowing them to decline in value, and the state, through the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), followed suit. The CHA failed to maintain public housing complexes, such as 28 high rise buildings containing 4321 public housing units in the Midsouth, to the point of rendering many of them uninhabitable, thus justifying their demolition (Popkin et al, 2003). Under the Chicago Housing Authority Plan for Transformation (2000), demolition of 19,000 units of public housing in Chicago is almost completed. The land on which they stood, devalued through disinvestment, is now a source of lucrative reinvestment. In the case of the Midsouth, that land is near to Lake Michigan, major expressways, public transportation, two public universities, and 10 minutes from downtown Chicago. It is not surprising that the Midsouth is a focus of some of the most intense gentrification in the city (see Lipman & Haines, 2007).

Gentrification, as a pivotal strategy of capital accumulation in urban centers, is facilitated by the local state that provides public funds, tax abatements, and publicly financed infrastructure for development, amounting to a transfer of wealth to the capitalist class. Gentrification significantly depends on public funding. Mega developments in the Midsouth are examples. For instance, Michaels Development Company (a private development consortium with large projects in a number of US cities) has a \$600 million investment in Legends South, a complex of over 2300 houses and apartments on a two-mile stretch of land where the Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens public housing complexes stood (Michaels). Its market advantage accrues from public subsidies. Some 77% of the financing for this privately owned development comes from public sources – federal, state, and city dollars (Michaels). The developers also got the land free through a 99-year lease from the Chicago Housing Authority, and they received a \$4.5 million tax increment financing subsidy (Handley, 2004, p. 3A) from the city. Michaels is just one of the mega investors in the Midsouth.

Mayor Daley and CPS officials argue that redevelopment will revitalize the area as a ‘mixed-income’ community with ‘mixed-income’ schools. Although described as mixed-income housing, much of the redevelopment on public housing land will be beyond the reach of working-class and low-income families. Legends South, a ‘mixed-income’ development, will provide public housing for just 18.3% of the former Robert Taylor residents (Venkatesh et al, 2004). As Neil Smith (2002) points out:

‘Social balance’ sounds like a good thing – who could be against social balance? – until one examines the neighborhoods targeted for ‘regeneration,’ whereupon it becomes clear that the strategy involves a major colonization by the middle and upper middle classes. (p. 445)

There are winners and losers. With condominiums and townhouses in the Midsouth ranging from \$175,000 for a one bedroom apartment to \$500,000 homes, transformation of public schools in the area is crucial to attract middle-class buyers.

The Midsouth Plan was a school choice plan designed to appeal to the middle class. Students would no longer be assigned to a school based on where they lived. Instead, the region was to be divided into ‘expanded attendance areas,’ each of which would include three to five ‘innovative’ school choices within walking or commuting distance (Bluestein, 2005, p. 49). Over 90% of the students who currently attend Midsouth schools are from low-income, African American families. However, the Midsouth Plan stated the schools would serve one-third middle-income, one-third moderate-income and one-third low-income students, and there was no guarantee that community residents would be able to attend specific schools. A Midsouth community organization said

pointedly, 'What happens to the other two-thirds low-income students? DISPLACEMENT' (Midsouth, n.d.).

As residents of Englewood and the Midsouth see signs of gentrification all around them, they contend the new Renaissance 2010 schools are not designed for them. In February 2005, at a meeting in a church in Englewood, community residents denounced the history of disinvestment in their schools and community and the gentrification and removal of low-income African Americans that is rampant in the Midsouth and now beginning in Englewood. One community member summarized the sentiment of the meeting: 'They're pushing us out of the community under the guise of school reform.' In community meetings and rallies in 2004 and 2005, community members took pains to argue that there were links between gentrification and Renaissance 2010. Two years into the plan, that argument has become common in the analyses of the Chicago Teachers Union, other school employee unions, community organizations, and school reform groups. This collective common sense is grounded in the rapid pace and geographical extension of gentrification, lack of affordable housing in the city, and movement of low-income African Americans to inner-ring south suburbs of Chicago (Minding the Gap, 2003). From 1980 to 2000, the number of concentrated low-income tracts declined in the city (due to gentrification) while they increased in the suburbs (*Regional Realities*, 2001, p.35).

### **Racialization of Neoliberal Policy**

Chicago exemplifies the centrality of race in the neoliberal urban agenda. The justifications underpinning the withdrawal of the state from social reproduction and the intensification of social control are highly racialized. Neoliberal calls for individual responsibility and social discipline reference the putative social pathologies of African Americans that must be corrected or contained by social policy (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). The representation of gentrification as benevolent rests on depicting the city as an 'urban frontier' and areas to be gentrified as needing to be 'tamed' (Smith, 1996). Specifically, the path to gentrifying African American communities is paved by their construction in media and public discourse as spaces of social pathology that must be cleaned out and reconstructed through the infusion of middle-class role models. Neglected for decades, the neighborhoods and schools are then identified as the problem to be fixed through the presumed authority of the (White) middle class (Bennett, 1998). A recent *Chicago Tribune* magazine article on the 'rebirthing' of the Midsouth reiterates this theme: 'As drug trafficking, street crimes, and other negatives have ebbed in the community, its focus has shifted from cleaning out bad elements to bringing in beneficial ones' (Grossman & Leroux, 2006). This discourse is rooted in historically persistent white supremacist urban mythology 'that has identified Blacks with disorder and danger in the city' (Haymes, 1995, p. 4). This association is repeated in the discourse about Black urban schools that are defined as 'failing,' on 'probation,' and characterized by lack of student and teacher effort (Lipman, 2004). This was made explicit when the CEO of CPS defended the closing of Englewood High School by declaring that the school, 100% African American, exhibited 'a culture of failure.'

Just as disinvestment produced decline in public housing and led to calls for its demolition, disinvestment in schools serving African American and Latino children has become an argument for closing them. At the same time, the accountability system has provided the tools to demarcate the schools to be closed. Like other major US cities, it is a truism that problems in schools in low-income African American sections of Chicago are intertwined with the lack of jobs, decent affordable housing, and decayed physical infrastructure, and in a history of racial segregation and lack of necessary resources (Orfield, 1990; Rivlin, 1992; Anyon, 2005). In Chicago, African American students comprise the majority of CPS enrollment and historically have 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). On the one hand, CPS has failed to invest the substantial resources and make the fundamental curricular, pedagogical, and structural changes that would be necessary to redress the sedimented inequities and injustices that plague public schools serving African Americans. Indeed, Lipman's field notes from school board meetings record consistent and urgent appeals by African American and Latino parents for repairs of school buildings and replacement of

outdated textbooks and science labs. Instead, CPS has subjected schools in these communities to more external regulation and control (Lipman, 2004).

Before communities can become new sites of capital accumulation, they have to be devalued, prepared for development, and reimagined as places of value. Their 'regeneration' is only possible through dispersing the people who live there, erasing the identities they have constructed for their communities, and replacing them with new, sanitized images. Thus, the Robert Taylor Homes public housing development becomes Legends South. Similarly, schools are closed and reopened with new identities. The neoliberal urban economic logic intersects with the racial logic of white supremacy to fuel real estate development and retaking the city for the mostly White middle class. In the restructured economy, many African Americans have become an expendable labor force. In Chicago's global city image of middle-class stability, upscale leisure and cultural venues, and affluent housing and retail complexes, they are a presence to be excluded or contained (Smith, 1996; Parenti, 1999).

Stephen Gill (2003) argues that the present social conjuncture is defined by neoliberalism *and* resistance to it. Despite claims to economic growth and individual freedom induced through the market, the reality of neoliberalism is increased inequality, social immiseration, and the suppression of democracy.

The disjuncture between the ideology of self-regulating markets and the everyday reality of persistent economic stagnation – intensifying inequality, destructive interplace competition, and generalized social insecurity – has been particularly blatant in precisely those political-economic contexts in which neoliberal doctrines have been imposed most extensively.

(Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 352)

As capital increasingly privatizes the public sphere, coerces communities into cooperating, and undermines the democratic process, possibilities for resistance arise. This dialectic unfolds at multiple scales and in specific contexts, including education. It is the possibilities for resistance to which we now turn and conclude.

### Resistance

The consequences of Renaissance 2010 go far beyond education. They extend to the survival of African American communities, union jobs, wages and benefits; the quality of teachers' work and students' educational experiences; democratic community participation in local schools; affordable housing and who can live in Chicago. As a result, Renaissance 2010 has provoked the beginnings of a broad-based resistance that includes teacher and other school employee unions, local school councils, a city-wide parent organization, community organizations, school reformers, progressive teacher organizations, and advocates for homeless families. These social sectors have come together in a sometimes tenuous, but nonetheless significant coalition that has succeeded in making Renaissance 2010 a persistently contentious public issue. The resistance made Renaissance 2010 a major topic at almost every Board of Education meeting during the 2004-05 school year, and it is regularly covered in the local press. Despite CPS leaders' assertion of 'real and widespread community support' (CPS press release, September 9, 2004), opposition mushroomed throughout the 2004-05 school year with community hearings, forums, angry testimony and pickets at monthly Board meetings, a camp-out in front of the Board of Education building, door-to-door organizing, a student walkout, rallies and press conferences. In the summer of 2005 school employee and teachers' unions, a progressive teachers' organization, school reform groups, community organizations, a city-wide parent organization, and local school council federations formed a city-wide coalition.

This opposition has won partial victories, blocked some school closings, and has put public school officials and the mayor on the defensive as they are forced to try to explain and justify the plan to communities and in the press. What is instructive about this resistance is that it has forged new alliances across communities and social sectors that had not been working together. Although incipient, and tenuous, these alliances bridge racial and ethnic differences, geographic distances, unions and communities, professionals and grass-roots activists. They are spawned by the sweeping political and economic agenda underlying Renaissance 2010.

While the resistance specifically focuses on school closings, privatization, gentrification, and attacks on unions, running through it all is outrage at the dismissal of any meaningful participation by the communities and people affected by these policies. This is a consistent refrain in public meetings, public statements, and in Lipman's interviews and ongoing conversations with the various social actors affected. Renaissance 2010 was developed by public officials and corporate elites behind closed doors, with a plan to sell it to the public devised by a corporate consulting firm. There was no consultation with the community before deciding to close 20 of 22 schools in the Midsouth, schools in Englewood, and other low-income communities. In fact, teachers, principals, and community members sometimes found out that their school was closing through the newspaper. Over two years, there has been a consistent pattern of top-down decision making with no community consultation. CPS officials have devised, revised, and imposed each phase of Renaissance 2010 without consulting teachers, principals, school employees, families and communities of color about decisions that affect their lives and about which they have privileged knowledge (see, for example, Midsouth Fact Sheet). This blatant disregard and disrespect is perceived as racist and dictatorial.

However framed by those lined up against Renaissance 2010, the contest is fundamentally political. It is about the suppression of democracy. Education reforms that blur the distinction between public and private interests establish the indirect political power of non-state actors who 'perform political functions under no effective political control' (Boaventura de Sousa Santos quoted in Dale & Robertson, 2004, p. 153). In other words, the neoliberal project promises individual freedom and choice. In practice, the impoverishment and suffering it produces necessitate the constriction of democracy, and when necessary, increased surveillance, policing, and force (Wacquant, 2001; Gill, 2003; Harvey, 2005). The Renaissance 2010 case reveals the face of coercive neoliberalism operating through the authoritarian state and a discourse of containment that delegitimizes democratic participation in school decision making. School officials denounce opponents of Renaissance 2010 as irresponsible complainers 'who don't want change' (Field notes, CPS School Board Meeting, August 25, 2004; September 22, 2004). While powerful state and corporate actors concentrate political power through Renaissance 2010, they negate the right of ordinary members of the public, particularly communities of color, to speak.

On a structural level, the privatization of schools and the replacement of LSCs with non-elected bodies eliminate democratic participation in decisions that govern public and publicly funded institutions. At their best, LSCs have been both a training ground and platform for local democracy – a context that has developed the capacities of community members and parents to participate in democratic governance. Some LSC members have emerged as significant community actors outside of schools. Without overstating the case, LSCs represent the potential for a 'thick democracy' of direct community participation in decision making that directly counters the neoliberal model of governance (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). Negating the legitimacy of the community to speak on school issues and eliminating LSCs is therefore part of a process of redefining civic competence in order to concentrate the authority to make civic decisions in the hands of financial and professional elites.

As we write this article, the coalition opposing Renaissance 2010 has succeeded in pushing 43 of the 50 city councilpersons to support a resolution for a moratorium on further school closings until an independent study can be conducted on the multiple impacts on students and schools. Although the future of this opposition movement and the outcome of Renaissance 2010 are uncertain, the resistance provides an example that education may become a focus of anti-neoliberal democratic social struggles. The resistance to Renaissance 2010 explicitly challenges the authority of corporate and financial interests to make decisions about public life.

## Notes

- [1] Lipman & Haines collaborated on research on Renaissance 2010 from September 2004 through August 2005 (see Lipman & Haines, 2007). Much of the research discussed in this article is based on their collaboration.

- [2] See, for example, CPS press release, September 22, 2004.
- [3] Although, according to CPS policy (approved September 22, 2004), no more than 10% of the schools are to be selective enrollment magnet schools (selection by test scores and grades) and students are supposed to have the right to return to their old schools when they are reopened, the Board also reserved the right to establish other student assignment processes (CPS Policy Manual, Section 302.7, p. 9).
- [4] Under NCLB, schools that do not make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for five years are subject to state takeover.
- [5] See K. Saltman's (2005) *The Edison Schools: corporate schooling and the assault on public education*.

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**PAULINE LIPMAN** is Professor of Policy Studies and Director of the Collaborative for Equity and Justice in Education in the College of Education, University of Illinois-Chicago. Her research focuses on race and class inequality in schools, globalization and neoliberal urban development, and the political economy and cultural politics of race in urban education. *Correspondence:* Pauline Lipman, University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607, USA ([plipman@uic.edu](mailto:plipman@uic.edu)).

**DAVID HURSH** is an Associate Professor at the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the University of Rochester. His research and political activity focuses on the politics of high-stakes testing and accountability in education, neoliberalism, and globalization. Some of his recent publications appeared in the journals: *Educational Researcher*, the *British Educational Research Journal*, the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, and *Policy Futures in Education*. *Correspondence:* David Hursh, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627, USA ([dhursh@warner.rochester.edu](mailto:dhursh@warner.rochester.edu)).