

## **Capital's Daisy Chain: Exposing Chicago's Corporate Coalition**

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*If women, ethnic, racial, and gay/lesbian minorities were once kept outside the sacred circle of 'the people' defined by bourgeois nationalists, they now seem to be in the process of being defined outside the current dominant political culture. According to this culture, the new world of international capitalism has given every individual the opportunity to make something of oneself. When a hierarchy emerges out of this competition, the unsuccessful individual can only blame him or herself. And if this survival of the fittest is true within the United States, it is also true among the world's nations.*

—David W. Noble

*Representations, when allied with state power, not only depict the world, they can remake it.*

—Nicholas Blomley

### **Introduction**

When I first began working in public schools in the mid-1990s, right after Bill Clinton was elected president of the U.S., I could see quite clearly that schools were still structured to teach young people answers to already constructed adult questions. These questions were separated into neat, seemingly ordered disciplinary containers. No attempts were made to genuinely understand why kids were educationally differentiated by race and wealth and the classroom was considered a closed sanctuary from real-world problems. In fact, what can be remembered of Clinton's saxophone-playing '90s is the incorporation of multiculturalism into neoliberal discourses of benevolence being manufactured to justify the transfer of the social safety net into the

hands of private management. This incorporation served to absorb cultural “difference” into the developing ideological hegemony of “tolerance” for those who could not keep up with or were inherently unfit for the march of American capital toward the purportedly new era of liberal progress. With mainly the progress of capital in mind, Clinton, like past presidents before him, reached back into classical liberal philosophy and helped to further shrink the public sector and reinvigorate the notion of the corporation as a private individual. Then and now, education for the masses in the U.S. is serving its common purpose: it seeks to develop future low-wage labor through the public schools in order to service a professional elite who educate their children privately in independent schools.

It might seem incongruous, but I am not concerned about what is inside kids so much as what American [1] society is trying to *do* to their insides. If Americans were to admit that their feelings about youth are mainly tied up in false liberal conceptions of the young—as irrational, irresponsible, and unruly—and economic motives to develop them into “proper” “employable” citizens, the nation might see that the instincts of young people are incredibly sound, their insights cogent, their logic sensible, and their ideas creative. Americans might even notice that youth have a deep capacity to demonstrate compassion and integrity. Unfortunately, these qualities are only absorbed and obfuscated by an ideology of neoliberalism [2] in the U.S. that produces what I call the *contemporary education economy*—an economic method and discursive system of management, regulation, and surveillance in the built environment and education used to develop youth differentially by race and wealth into rational, compliant citizens.

This article uses the global city of Chicago as an urban exemplar of a thirty-year worldwide economic shift toward public (state) - private (corporate) partnerships. Advanced by racialized youth-development discourses in Chicago, private corporations, public education, and social housing are in alliance to transform “the problems of urban America.” This move to restore American cities to places of “safety” and “progress” is code for the modernized redevelopment of white and of color, poor and working class youth. My intention in this article is to highlight the insidious meta-narratives of American progress inherent in neoliberal youth development discourses for the purposes of marking them. I want to make it more

difficult for the language and practice of American youth development to go unseen by educators and their students. My hope in providing Chicago as a case study is to critically attend to and expose a U.S. economy of socio-political methods and spatial practices deployed transnationally to ontologically manipulate youth, aggravate their core of decency, and produce them as either owners or low-wage-earning laborers.

Just this year, Daniel, a young, white working class student from the Introduction to Social Justice course I teach made a request that each member of the class ask itself the following question which has been haunting him since he began his college career last year: *what should I be doing in my life and why should I be doing something?* In response to Daniel's initial question students' responses ranged somewhere between "working" to "being successful." Few students, when questioned further about their ideas on the purpose of the university in their lives, felt it served to further develop a found intellectual and/or creative passion they might have. Most students explained that schooling for them is directly linked to developing a certain level of employability, which would, then, lead to the inevitable life of "success." Daniel followed up his question at this point: *why is the 'some thing' we should be doing in our lives always occupational?* What Daniel hoped for was that his classmates would see that interest and passion have been severed from work in society, a fact of contemporary existence with which he is very much frustrated and yet simultaneously ambivalent. What Daniel learned is that these university students have been taught to measure their success as their predominantly white, suburban middle class parents envision it. Education is supposed to effect employability within "good" professions, mainly business; it is supposed to elicit, protect, and perpetuate valued American principles of successful autonomy and ownership. After some engaged discussion, the class began to link their perceptions to the larger, unavoidable "common sense" values of family, friends, and society, but despite this awareness they were still knowingly stuck—stuck in the ideological and physical grind of the university and stuck in majors disconnected from their as of yet undiscovered dreams. I see Daniel's questions and my students' initial responses of compliance as a result of the internal ambivalence that neoliberal culture and the contemporary education economy together arouse. As my students tell it, once or twice a week, in the one or two classes they take that engage an active critical pedagogy, they are privy to an escape from the policies and systemic cultural practices of management, regulation, and development

used by the city, the town, and the nation-state to coerce them into being the things the cultural and political economy needs them to be.

Today, young people are being developed into particular kinds of citizens who will work and play in ways that solely benefit a ruling class of adults. Along this trajectory, youth sacrifice their own innate sense of character for a world constructed to deceive and criminalize them. Inevitably, as an act of appeasement and social compliance, young people forfeit the collective for socially constructed individualist desires. As “well-developed” adults, some will design, own and manage, and others will service, rent, and comply. In which area of societal operation a person falls depends tremendously on her race and her wealth.<sup>[3]</sup> Of course, there are those few individuals, those marked “exceptions,” who will straddle, stretch and bounce back and forth between both conditions. Since ownership and autonomy are revered by the current neoliberal culture, more often than not designer-owners are white business elites and service-renters are of color and white, poor and working class. In an urban spatial and social redevelopment context, public-private partnerships operate to create this hierarchy with political and corporate muster, seemingly at the whim of everyone but the public they are ordained to support.

### **The Privatization Trend & the Commodification of Education and Space**

At the level of state-corporate coalitions, acts of spatialization interlock schools, neighborhoods, and communities so that if one site changes, so must the other; also prone to amendment are the people inside these places. The public-private coalitions managing social service and development in Chicago are paradigmatic of a historic tradition of public-private partnerships in the U.S. In Chicago, like in many locations within nation-states, we can witness the private sector crafting acts of public do-gooding out of public redevelopment motives. A cultural narrative is produced by these practices of privatization, one that supports an imagining that public services like health, education or housing are better suited, and better enacted by the presumed competence of business. Importantly, this trend is not new; it contains an essential political genealogy.

Outside of the South, Midwestern cities are statistically the most segregated in the country according to the 2000 census. The Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) district is

responsible for over 400,000 students, 85 percent of whom are Black and Latin@ and live below the national poverty line (ACT 1). Chicago has perfected systems of racial/wealth segregation in the urban context by sponsoring a partnership between public education and housing and neoliberal ideology. This partnership produces a discourse of progress through urban redevelopment. Conceptions of labor, land and money coalesce in the city to form an influential, collaborative coalition of power. The public policies Chicago has deployed since 2000 provide unequivocal evidence of the determinant force and amoral resolve of this coalition to service the needs of transnational neoliberalism. The city's public school district is set to produce the coalition's labor force under the Renaissance 2010 education policy, closing sixty "low perform[ing]" schools and replacing them with one hundred "new" ones, most to be "privately managed" ("Overview"). The Chicago Housing Authority is well into a ten-year plan of reterritorialization called a Plan for Transformation. The city will "transform" the cultural topography of Chicago's *public* real estate, or as it states, 25,000 units of its public housing for \$1.5 billion (CHA 2). The transnational corporate elite of Chicago use discursive formations of global capital to *in-source* urban redevelopment heralded as *reinvention*, *renewal*, and *reform*.

Part of the Chicago corporate coalition's work is to make the fictitious commodities of labor, land, and money appear to be realities by tying each to very real and necessary subsistence elements of its residents' constructed modern lives (Polanyi 76). Human activity, or "labor," becomes subdivided by worth or value and produced for sale through the development of workers in the education system. Land's natural definitional properties become extended to an idea of real property, or segments of land in addition to the air above and the ground below these land fragments as well as all structures and buildings on top of them. Therefore, within the ownership culture of the U.S. basic shelter becomes housing property, reified as realty. Realty is, then, an object for sale, which uses another fictitious commodity, money, in the form of cash or credit. Following this logic, we can see that in Chicago, human beings and nature are objectified with attached costs that are determined by the market. If these objects have a value, then they can appear to be luxuries, items that are hard to get, costly, and tied to desire yet non-essential; they can only be obtained and afforded by those of privilege, those with value, those with merit, those who are self-reliant, and those who own. Unsuccessful people become aberrations of the market and the market,

positioned as it is within a lie, is never considered deviant. This schema of deception puts a prop in the door to people's lives, particularly poor and working class people of color, and poor and working class white people. Imagined to have little reproducible value, not just in terms of human activity but also in terms of human qualities considered to be valuable, this system constructs a door that is open to the racialized rescue and development technologies of neoliberalism. In Chicago, a public-private partnership has propped the door open as well as marched through, and this cartel of folk has designed a discourse of progress to shape an urban redevelopment scheme. Together with CPS, Chicago's public housing authority is responsible for helping to transform not only Chicago's more infamous urban geographic zones the people inside those zones as well, and this they have begun to do by relocating and/or socially redeveloping the city's public housing residents of color. The members of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago serve as the predominant architects of this design, and it is they and their membership who will benefit from the services to be produced by this renovated class of folk.

The city of Chicago serves as an urban model of the shift from state-based management of the social safety net to state-based private management of the public welfare. This trend is not new. According to social policy researchers Demetra Nightingale and Nancy Pindus, "Privatization of government social services has, in fact, increased at major watershed points in the history of social policy (the Progressive era in the late 19th century, New Deal, Great Society, and Reagan years), both at times of expansion and during contraction of government services" (3). Though this development is not novel, it is important to note that the current national and global tendency to merge public development and the provision of public welfare with "large private corporations" (3) signals that nation-state governmentality is in a period of political, social and economic change; consequently, the technologies of government have also been modified. State technology is now more corporative, hence, more competitive and geared to corporate levels of efficiency. A most notable change in regards to market competition is the degree to which governments are less apt to directly provide social services, but instead now move between "open competition for all or public services, [and] government contracting for specific services" (8). Competition is now presumed and fixed, and it is a precondition for the management and care of the nation-state's citizenry.

Privatization has fused with liberal democratic notions of ownership, self-management, and self-reliance. Corporations, reified culturally and legally as private owners, are now the development prototype for individual and social autonomy. Individuals have interpellated these ideals and society appears to accept and reward with votes the private management and regulation of its social welfare and development. Governor Kathleen Sebelius, a Kansas Democrat, notes “Voters are getting more comfortable with seeing governors as C.E.O.’s of states” (Nagourney 4). In a Foucauldian sense, acts of privatization fused with philosophical notions of liberalism produce convincing and influential cultural meanings. This fusion has real social, political, and economic consequences; expressed discursively, it can represent for a society an absolute definition of individual and social purpose as well as individual and societal subject-positions (Hall 56). Using this framework, we can understand why Americans imagine themselves as exceptional, and as the assumed universal culture. This is Americans’ societal, or socio-cultural subject-position; they see the world in their own reflection and only question the mirror image if it conflicts with the imagined self. I argue that this imagined self is monocultural—it is racially white; it is based in liberal “middle class” values and norms, it is bourgeois; and, it is heteronormative—engaging in gendered male - female relations that favor a perceived notion of masculinity. The argument here concentrates on the first two, though what is said about race and wealth can certainly be situated within similar arguments about heteronormativity. All these identity differentiations work together to solidify a conception of whiteness, which I believe is immanent in the contemporary education economy.

### **The Contemporary Education Economy & Representations of Youth of Color**

The contemporary education economy has a history steeped in racially differentiated practices and economic disparities that precede and continue to shape it. This history is borne in *de jure* racial segregation and contemporary *de facto* representations in whose residue youth currently oscillate and vibrate. It is important to understand the contemporary cultural conditions produced out of this past, and how they are construed as this racialized and classed history takes form in present institutions and communities.

For youth of color, the implications of the socioeconomic hierarchy within the contemporary education economy are particularly formative. The mediated view of youth of color configures them as irrational, violent, uncaring, never as competent, capable, or courageous. Though all youth are subject to these stereotypes, cultural representations of youth are differentiated by race and class (as well as gender and sexuality) within a stereotype spectra. In addition, youth are differentiated against a good|bad cultural hierarchy by which they are judged and developed accordingly. Rich|poor and black|white are broadly and simplistically conceived as *good|bad*. Examinations of racially- and wealth-based discourse as they relate to youth helps to avoid obfuscating this dualism. Such examinations can provide opportunities to explore how these hierarchies imbricate in the lives of youth within the societies of nation-states as they try to maintain the idea of a homogenous country.

Though American culture operates within these race/wealth hierarchies, they and the negative representations of youth of color they produce are transnational. The 2005 rebellion in the banlieues outside Paris provides a recent example of the kind of racialized mediated discourse used to support the notion that poor and working class youth of color *need* developing. Sociologist Trica Keaton aptly refers to the banlieues as the “Other France”<sup>[4]</sup> to denote the dual position of its residents’ within French society. The people who live in the Other France are both French citizens and excluded other by the country that is their home. Beginning in October, hundreds of French-Arab and -sub-Saharan African youth living in the banlieues rebelled against the ideological and economic domination of French nationalism. The resistance was spawned by the death, now martyred, of two youth of color accidentally electrocuted, and a third injured while hiding in a power substation after being chased by police through the banlieue of Clichy. In 2005, youth in the Other France burned those institutions that represent liberal modernity and nationalism. They burned automobiles and buses, buildings, and an elementary school. They ignored the state of emergency put in place, and the U.S. Patriot Act-like security measures the French government recouped from its reign in Algeria fifty years before. The young men of Clichy (and by extension all dark bodies transnationally) were racially marked in a discursive flurry of multinational print, radio, and television media. “Advancing gangs of youth,” “menacing youth” (AP) “deep rooted criminality” and “Islamic extremists” (Gecker) made up just some of the anxious discourse that helped to fix a representation of



blackness. Nicolas Sarkozy, candidate for prime minister of France at the time this writing, called the youth of the banlieues “scum” and pronounced he would clean up the cités (housing projects) with a Kärcher, a high-powered industrial cleaning machine. The rhetoric describing the rebellion and the rebelling inscribed dark bodies as barbarous and put them in opposition to the imagined self of the nation-state, and thus, dark corporeality was once again negotiated to positions outside a nation.

Discourses of youth development such as the ones produced by French government officials and the international media are discursively productive economic methods to produce developed adults. The discourse seeks to control, manage, and regulate youth so that they can be properly developed into rational normative subjects who will service, rent and comply, and leave undisturbed the imagined selves of nation-states. The development of youth encompasses a system of socio-political and socioeconomic interactions and functions at the level of the self, family, community, city, and nation-state. This contemporary education economy involves a process of organization and management of education (primary to tertiary), built environment, and mediated representation. As the state attempts to maintain a homogeneous nation, its social practices and public policies become more and more racialized. The state highlights particularity in order to justify the criminalization of people of color as it synchronously moves quickly to dull difference by incorporation or nullification. Racialization is an important device of the nation-state. Economies of race function to surveil the particular, regulate it, and defuse it. Chicago is a site in which we can see the U.S. achieving this sort of cultural management. Using a discourse of development bolstered by ideas of transformation and “renaissance,” the city is engaged in a practice common to neoliberal programs where the contemporary education economy works through education and housing to subsume, nullify, and neutralize all particularity.

### **Labor, Land and Money in the “Global City”**

By almost all definitions, Chicago is a global city. A major source of “producer services” (Sassen 36) with a geographically mobile professional class of old and new global elites, Chicago is an urban space in which labor, land and money work contiguously and conterminously. During Chicago’s purported economic boom in the 1990s, the differential between median incomes for Blacks and whites was nearly

\$58,000 (Mendell and Little 1). Yet neoliberal discourse occludes this differential and transforms it into opportunity for reformation and progress. Leaders in major cities throughout the U.S. who are looking to “revitalize” their cities see Chicago as a model. Cities like Denver, Colorado, Nashville, Tennessee and New York City are all engaged in or hoping to replicate the “success” of Chicago’s coalition between labor, land and money. The hope is to reproduce the city’s education – housing/public - private partnership as a fix for the class/race achievement and housing gap.

Labor, land and money are grounded in an object-for-sale conception. Each arm of the triad is seen as an individual market, but neither at its source is in fact innately produced for sale. This is why the three appear in isomorphic relationship to the philosophies and practices of free trade and global capitalism. Individually, labor, land and money have their own ancestry, linked perhaps intrinsically by nature, but it is through the market’s universalizing, rational lens that the three become a coalition—escaping a more ontological question of their being and existence into a mutated, supposedly perfect collective free market. Labor, land and money, like single-celled bacteria, coalesce and collect, join together as almost hyper-natural beings allegedly better equipped to (re)produce and advance the neoliberal program. One of the micropractices of neoliberalism in an urban context is that the program utilizes a marketized triumvirate to continue its own ideological and economic reproduction, in this case, within and through Chicago’s public schools and public housing authority. Seen in this way, an unfortunate Darwinian rationale comes into view through claims of market organicism. Unsuccessful people become aberrations of the market, and the market is never interpreted as an aberration of itself.

One operative of the neoliberal program is the coalescence of labor, land and money into a perfected collective market being. Financiers and entrepreneurs exist within each of these elements of industry, discursively promoting the coalition as commodity and as market, and ensuring the free market’s flexibility and longevity. Consequently, financiers and entrepreneurs are allowed to produce liberally and unfettered. Working contiguously and conterminously, the micropractices of neoliberalism exact the reproduction of a presumably developed neoliberal citizen devoid of ethnos (Saldaña-Portillo 7). Public schools are part of the state’s effort to “create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (Harvey *Brief History* 2). The

coalition of labor, land and money extends an invisible hand into the city and concomitantly perpetuates the objectives of neoliberalism. One of these aims (or performance targets) of this business coalition is to transform the supposedly urban underdeveloped “premodern ethnos” (Saldaña-Portillo 7) subject into a neoliberal citizen who is ready to serve as the labor arm of the service industry of Chicago’s geographically mobile professional class.

### **Labor and the Production of Neoliberal Boosters**

Chicago Public Schools is the main purveyor of public education for young people who are of color, poor and working class; it is the adjudged manufacturer of labor in the city, at least in the opinion of business. The ways in which Chicago is reconfiguring its investment in public education advances across the familiar reproductive terrain of school as ideological state apparatus. However, expunging the public, the institution of school now actively crosses into the economic topography of land and money. The coalition of labor, land and money in Chicago is responsible for the design, management, and economic benefits produced by the public education policy Renaissance 2010 and it is a coalition producing tenacious global sequels. Education scholar Pauline Lipman argues that Chicago serves as a “glocality” where “the dialectics of the global situation [in economics and social relations] unfold in local contexts” (Lipman “Educational” 325). I contend that amalgamated, the coalition becomes a persuasive monolith galvanizing the local (Chicago’s public education system) in service of the more global neoliberal project of private interests and corporate expedience.

Several leaders of the Fortune Global 500 are leading the charge of Renaissance 2010 by privately managing some of the city’s schools. Consequently, public schools in Chicago are the site in which a hidden curriculum of neoliberal ideology is reproduced with unjust local and global socioeconomic consequences. Within the embrace of Fortune neoliberal leaders, CPS has become a corporate firm; an entity both the CPS chief executive officer, Arne Duncan, and the city’s mayor, Richard M. Daley, deem is in the “business of education.”<sup>[5]</sup> Indeed, there is an attempt in Chicago to obscure the socioeconomic and political objectives of Renaissance 2010 by employing a discourse of *progress, reform, transformation, revitalization, rescue* and *change*. The leaders of labor, land and money unite in Chicago to execute a

neoliberal project where schools are the sites in which future workers are produced as (neo)liberal citizens; neighborhoods are gentrified to house this citizen-base and the professional elite who will manage them; and multinational corporations play the “location game” (Harvey *Social* 74), self-reflexively in-sourcing redevelopment.

Chicago's education system is essentially privatized. Both opportunity and renewal serve as alibis for the privatization of the public's education. Chicago's public policy permits multinational corporations to use the poor in Chicago's schools as one large labor pool into which they dive to fish out high-income cultural and producer services. A.T. Kearney[6], the transnational firm that provides pro bono consulting to CPS for the design and mediated implementation of Renaissance 2010, rationalizes Chicago's actions by justifying its vision of future progress: “Both CHA [Chicago Housing Authority] and CPS leaders envision a vibrant mixed-income neighborhood in which schools are an anchor in the community, providing activities and services that benefit everyone” (4). Part of the neoliberal project in urban spaces is to produce the need for high-income services for the coming and later subsistence of high-income gentrification. This is true not just in redeveloped Chicago neighborhoods, but in any gentrified neighborhood in the U.S.: special coffees only available on-the-go at Starbucks, special combination dog-walking-house-cleaning agencies, and restaurants specializing in ethnic *mélanges* where the elite and white can experience subaltern tastes without ever leaving the safety and reserve of their constructed communities. It makes sense that part of the program would be to ensure the production of a class of people who will provide these individualized services at a low-wage for those with developed needs. Supported globally by the Education Services sector of the GATS (General Agreement on Trades in Services) and the World Trade Organization's Council for Trade in Services, education is “normally regarded as a ‘public *consumption*’ item” (emphasis mine) and “exists as a ‘private consumption’ with a price determined freely by the providing institutions” (WTO). The key to understanding the overall intentions of the coalition of labor, land and money is in the use of the words *consumption* and *price*. The purpose of a neoliberal brand of education is to produce the consumptive citizen at a psychic price. Black and Latin@ poor and working class youth in Chicago's public education system will have to sacrifice self for neoliberal society.

But the neoliberal program, based in an ideology of organicism, must actualize institutional ways to produce citizens who will be service providers and caretakers of its project, who will participate in its consumerism, and who will perpetuate it by private and public implementation. Neoliberalism needs consumer boosters. Fundamentally, the program is about individualism and the sociopolitical rights extended by private property; yet neoliberalism needs the individuals that form a possible public collective as well as the public's institutions to fully engage its commodities. How best does neoliberalism produce such an individual in Chicago? What does it use as its main operative? And there are several other questions with answers all containing CPS as part of a triadic centrifugal force aiding in the altering and thus privatization of state (public) intervention. Being that neoliberalism upholds a belief in an Enlightenment, Smithian understanding of individualism, how best can the program produce Chicagoans who believe, value and continue to conceive of a socioeconomic and political ideology that protects the rights of a globalized employing class? How best can neoliberalism produce the kind of citizen who will agree in a Kantian conception of negative liberty? Of course, this negative freedom, in its rejection of state intervention, directly implies a tolerance and an acceptance of inequalities engendered by the market. So, how can neoliberalism produce such a Chicagoan, a citizen of the international free market who will endure and accept, as putative truth, her or his own inequality?

The school is the hegemonic site at which the dominant socioeconomic ideology of neoliberal principles and practices are replicated. The state, in its weakened position as merely broker and corporate sentinel, acts to support this ideological regime of neoliberalism through the institution of public education. Historically, the purpose of public education and the governing policies under which it is regulated is to ensure the replication of the dominant socioeconomic market ideology. Closing schools and replacing them with institutions whose pedagogy will be guided by the influence of private corporate management serves only an elite few. And this is Renaissance 2010's intention. Today in Chicago, Renaissance 2010 seeks to use the school as a tool in a more globalized effort to inculcate and reproduce the ideology of neoliberalism within the future labor industry. CPS's client base has been replaced. In the exchange of schools for profit, Renaissance 2010, as public education policy, has bartered away its moral and social responsibility to the overwhelmingly brown,

underserved and under-resourced students that populate its halls for the coalition of power as political patron.

### **Narrative of Progress: A Corporative Discourse of Development**

Joining the wave of non-educator urban district leaders across the nation, and one year after Mayor Daley took over Chicago's public schools and Housing Authority, Paul Vallas, a former city budget director, was appointed chief executive officer of CPS by the mayor. Vallas held this position from 1995-2001. The Chicago school board, handpicked by Mayor Daley, was to Vallas a lot of biddable souls: "It's like a corporate board where the board supports the CEO, but it also has a kind of military characteristic. My best management training was in the military" (Hurwitz). Vallas called up a corporate educational regiment in personnel, structure, and curriculum standardization that emboldened a discourse of development. The 1990s were a time during which the income differential between Black and white Chicagoans was extremely wide, but business proclaimed (because corporations experienced) an economic boom. During this period the groundwork was laid for Renaissance 2010 and the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) redevelopment plan. Almost a decade later, CPS maintains an established corporate structure—chief executive and financial officers, a market reform education policy—and a plan for transformation of public education literally akin to the CHA's plan for public housing. Renaissance 2010 works in partnership with the CHA's Plan for Transformation by purportedly providing an educational "renaissance" in the neighborhoods in which culturally transformative mixed-income housing is planned. Hence, Renaissance 2010 assists in actualizing the coalition's mission by helping to make the surrounding physical, cultural and political geography better suited to the aesthetic, cultural and practical needs of modern liberalism.

Within this overarching mission of change is another significant element working concomitantly: Renaissance 2010 impels the city—through the school site—to develop future generations of neoliberal citizens in the bodies of poor and working class Black and Latin@ youth. Though advocates of Renaissance 2010 argue that private management allows for innovation unfettered by state intervention, absent from the policy's model for restructuring are opportunities for innovation that are non-corporate in structure and curricula. The corporate model of education has been

sold to Chicago as “good business” so anything else is considered “lagging.” As long as a corporate policy of neoliberalism leads the charge of education, narrow will be the avenue for youth to become critically literate and one day reject the very society for which they are being developed. As youth in schools follow the charge led by global elites, their innate curiosity and creativity are redirected into a liberal citizenship based on self-interest, virulent competition, and opportunism.

The corporate discourse Renaissance 2010 deploys follows a development narrative that promotes neoliberal market-wave reform. In the passage below, I have underscored expressions that signal this discourse in the gloating opening of A.T. Kearney’s “Executive Agenda First Quarter 2005”:

The fifth grader with an overflowing backpack on Chicago’s south side could be tomorrow’s next great doctor, writer or CEO. The odds depend on a solid education—a luxury many inner-city kids lack. A.T. Kearney contributed private-sector lessons that have helped good businesses become great to assist in transforming lagging school districts into models of educational excellence. (A.T. Kearney 47)

Interesting in the Executive Agenda’s introduction is the presumption that school as public institution is without a social and cultural history. This creates a socio-historical gap in our cultural memory inside which can be materialized a reified imagining that schools, and the districts that manage them, are and always have been business corporations. The premise that the very process of public education is a commercial industry trapped inside a bad business model is made prudent for public and private imaginations. Within A.T. Kearney’s discursive tactics we can see a reliance on the original developmental purpose of American schooling, which was to prepare a U.S. citizenry who would support the philosophies of progress and national jingoism. Students were trained inside schools to uphold and do battle over American-designed tenets of individualism, private enterprise, and expansionism. These were the first U.S. town schools. During the industrial period, public schools for the poor and working class became the sites in which young people could be taught in ways that would model the factories in which they were to inevitably work. The spatialization of school began here—all desks in a row to manage and corral; school bells to teach work by the clock; and rote memorization of personally irrelevant information to ensure compliance with iterative tasks on the factory line. A.T.

Kearney taps into an old notion of schooling as the space in which to teach consumptive and competitive practices to those who lack or are “lagging” in such skills. School is the site in which the skills that the free market necessitates are developed. Without referring specifically to the public who make up Chicago's public schools (Black and Latin@ students, their families and teachers), implied in the racialized and corporative discourse of the Executive Agenda is that this public is dysfunctional, and has heretofore been poorly managed. There is an allusion in the Agenda to a historic liberal romanticism of market rescue—where “private-sector lessons” are proposed as educational reclamation for “lagging” school districts and their communities. The process of transformation is regarded as sanctified, even pious, and as a righteous act to save a lost people as of yet unaware of the benefits of private-sector prowess.

Market societies attribute to corporations the qualities, rights, and protections of private individuals (Blomley 6). Foundationally, CPS and the CHA are public institutions that appear to model private-sector business practices, but they are not solely performing as corporations. In effect, CPS and the CHA function wholly as private corporations and as such they have acquired “a privileged moral position,” which allows them to stand as the “suitable authority” (Goldberg 53) best fit to develop, manage, surveil, discipline, and regulate public property and the public itself. It is important to note that only one segment of the public gets developed and managed, and it is not the portion imputed with the rights and protections of private property holders. Ascribed the power of the private, CPS and the CHA narrate a romantic story of progress, which make the privatization of these public institutions appear to be a necessary function of recovery, i.e., a re-development of the public. The development policies of CPS and the CHA are justified by discourses of development juxtaposed against discourses of underdevelopment, and this oppositional binary makes private management appear not just prudent, but like an act of corporate rescue deserving of the position of rational authority.

Below I have collocated underdevelopment–development discourse: on the left, a selection from a Renaissance Schools Fund brochure designed to raise \$50 million in the private sector for the implementation of Renaissance 2010; and on the right, the



copy used by A.T. Kearney in its Executive Agenda to describe the “operations” function of Renaissance 2010.

<p><b>“The Renaissance Schools Fund” Brochure</b></p> <p>The Renaissance Schools Fund will fund school team applicants with a record of performance [and] entrepreneurial spirit [. . .]</p> <p>Renaissance attracts entrepreneur educators because of the freedom that these new schools provide.</p> <p>(Renaissance 6)</p>	<p><b>A.T. Kearney “Executive Agenda” for Chicago Public Education</b></p> <p>Executives know how to use strategic tools to improve efficiency and cut costs. In a multinational firm, for example, combining and standardizing back-office administrative functions such as five accounting departments into one ‘shared services’ center is a typical strategy for improving service and cutting costs. Transfer this approach to public schools, and the results can be just as meaningful.</p>
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(A.T. Kearney 50)

The discourses are complementary; their textual juxtaposition underscores the isomorphic structure of Chicago education reform as well as an underlying neoclassical theory of growth. Business entrepreneurialism is associated with individual and market freedom, choice and opportunity. We can see here an implied claim that state intervention in the supposed market of public education (in effect, the production center of labor) has been the cause of the education system’s underdevelopment. The text of the brochure, with its emphasis on failure, degeneration and exodus, corroborates A.T. Kearney’s affirmation that transformation of the condition of public schools will require executive know-how. Thus, schools need business to finance the restorative effort if schools are to return to their ostensibly natural state as a market enterprise. The Renaissance Schools Fund brochure actively seeks this investment from business. The expectation is that with private capital will come corporate expertise in *cutting costs, improving service, and standardizing* education.

By portraying Chicago's schools as a potential labor market afflicted by government control and inefficiency, the Mayor of Chicago has authorized the participation of those who can "properly" assist Chicago's school district which is lagging behind American progress. In the Renaissance Schools Fund brochure, Mayor Daley states that the schools have entered "a new stage [of redevelopment]—one in which all of us have a larger role to play—not just as supporters, financial contributors or volunteers—but as active participants" (11). Business and the free market are presented here as both prophylactics and curatives, "protect[ing] and improv[ing] those parts of the local environment on which employers depend: sound and effective local government services . . . strong education and training systems . . . and reasonable local tax and regulatory structures" (Civic Committee). Mayor Daley relies on the social haphazardness of the invisible hand. He imagines Chicago business as having a natural right to reconfigure public space and institutions in order to benefit the growth, prosperity, and inalienability of private, transnational business. Like frontiersmen of the democracy before him, it is as though Daley is weeding an untended garden, a landscape he imagines has fallen into the wayward hands of a people whose economic and political rights he, in reality, has severely and purposely neglected.

In the Renaissance Schools Fund brochure and A.T. Kearney's Executive Agenda we see the discursive union of a neoliberal coalition of public schools and global elites. CPS's public partner in the coalition, the public housing authority, plays its part, too. The Chicago Housing Authority conjures images of now livable (re)developed land, and thereby supports an ideology of space necessary to actualize massive and racialized displacement from the city into the suburbs. Deregulated capital is the "third leg" (Olszewski and Carlos Sadovi 1) of this public-private coalition; it rides in on white horses like the succor of an imagined incapable system produced by an underdeveloped lot of brown people.

### **The Reflexivity of Capital's Beneficent Daisy Chain**

The Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago is a not-for-profit organization of corporate leaders responding through business to what it claims is "a gradual erosion of [ . . . ] economic vitality" in Chicago (Civic Committee). The notion of erosion for business creates opportunity for global elites. The perception

produces the fear of capital lost in that way necessitating a recovery, a rescue, and a transformation by business. The Civic Committee is responsible for the design of Renaissance 2010, and in 2004-2005, the academic year in which the policy was set in motion, the Committee's member list read like a Who's Who of Fortune 500 and Global 500 past and present. In addition, the Civic Committee created an affiliate in 2004, the Renaissance Schools Fund (formerly known as New Schools for Chicago), which is responsible for raising \$50 million in private money to fund Renaissance 2010 schools. The multiple layers of public-private affiliation in the Civic Committee illustrate the ways in which global capital is insinuated into the local bunting through socioeconomic gaps produced by a deregulated capitalist national economy. Some donors solicited by the Renaissance Schools Fund will partner with schools directly rather than use the Fund as a conduit for their contributions. Direct partnerships with Renaissance 2010 schools allow business a greater say over how funds are spent, how schools are managed, marketed, and inevitably, what kids will know and be able to do as future workers.

Members of the Renaissance Schools Fund board, Civic Committee members, and Renaissance 2010 school partners overlap and they engage in unwritten yet obvious corporate reciprocity. The Civic Committee's membership is led by the president and CEO of Exelon Corporation (\$923 million in company profits after taxes) (Fortune 2006), John Rowe (2002 corporate bonus: \$1,550,000) (USA Today), who serves as the Committee's chair. Other members include Edward M. Liddy, the chairman, president and CEO of The Allstate Corporation (\$1,765 million in profits) (Fortune 2006). Allstate has partnered with American Quality Schools, a Chicago-based corporation, the Westside Ministers Coalition, and the Austin African-American Business Networking Association to open a Renaissance 2010 high school: Austin Business and Entrepreneurship Academy (Dean). Civic Committee member and chairman and CEO of Abbott Laboratories<sup>[7]</sup> (\$3,235.9 million in profits) (Fortune 2005), Miles D. White (2002 corporate bonus: \$1,250,000) (USA Today), was quoted in an Abbott press release as saying, "Abbott is pleased to provide this grant [\$1 million] in support of the students who will ensure the future growth of the industry in this region" (Abbott). Noting the transnational reach of Abbott, White went on to note, "While our business is global, education is a local issue and we recognize the need to invest in communities where our employees, retirees and their families live

and work.” Also members of the Civic Committee are the Governor of Illinois and presidents of Northwestern University and University of Chicago. Notably, the state’s public university, University of Illinois, is absent from the Committee’s roster. The chair of Global Hyatt (who recently acquired “the \$300 million-a-year, 143-hotel AmeriSuites chain”) (Weber), a member of the infamous, feuding Chicago-based Pritzker family, Thomas J. Pritzker, is also on the Civic Committee roster. “The family’s hotel, industrial, finance, and real estate empire, [is] said to be worth more than \$15 billion” (Gimbel). Since Civic Committee members have committed to shifting the terrain of public education, it is interesting to note that the Pritzker children have attended Chicago’s Francis W. Parker School, and independent school whose junior kindergarten annual tuition is \$16,524 and whose high school annual tuition is \$21,172—it appears that Civic Committee members pay for independence and privacy.

Not surprisingly, amongst the Civic Committee’s membership is the managing partner of the Midwest division of A.T. Kearney. The chair of the Renaissance Schools Fund board, Donald G. Lubin, who “advises” Allstate (Sonnenschein), ranks among one of the Committee’s most active members. Lubin is senior director of McDonald’s Corporation (\$2,278.5 million in 2005 profits) and a partner in the Sonnenschein, Nath and Rosenthal law firm.<sup>[8]</sup> Sonnenschein designed and now privately operates a Renaissance 2010 elementary school, Legacy Charter School, through a separate not-for-profit corporation. Other corporate imbrications involve the Sara Lee Corporation’s (\$719,000 million in 2005 profits) (Fortune 2005) Brenda C. Barnes, the company’s president and CEO. Barnes is a member of the Civic Committee, and Sara Lee’s senior vice president, general counsel and secretary, Roderick Palmore, has a seat on the board of Legacy Charter School.

Guarding the territory of prime labor, land and money interests in Chicago, the Civic Committee has collaborated with local government, the city’s public education system, and public realty to benefit private interests. Business, in this case, works individually and liberally, anterior and superior to collective spaces of particularity as well as external to sociopolitical institutions. The Civic Committee and CPS oppose the very idea of an organized collective. R. Eden Martin, president of the Civic Committee, wrote in a private memo to CPS chief executive officer Arne Duncan “the

school unions will not like the creation of a significant number of new schools that operate outside the union agreement—but operating outside the agreement is a key element of this strategy” (Dillon B7). Importantly, community-based organizations like the Chicagoland Coalition Opposed to Militarization of Youth, Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, Chicagoans United for Education actively advocate for the education rights of students and their families in schools set for closing, and the Chicago Teachers’ Union has been actively contesting the notion of private management of the city’s schools. But, the Chicago coalition remains firm in its opposition to these groups by justifying the market’s rescue of public school and housing.

The micropractices of neoliberalism are performed at the level of the firm through Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 education policy. The school district reinterprets public education’s value by establishing a conglomerate of schools that not only reproduce neoliberal ideology but also instantiate and embody the neoliberal market itself. Using a “narrative of liberation” (Saldaña-Portillo, 4) authored by A.T. Kearney, the city has tied the life course of young people of color to the hegemonic development needs of a neoliberal-designed globalization. The sixty schools to be closed and replaced by Renaissance 2010 are all in predominantly poor, underserved Black neighborhoods. By manipulating the cultural geography of poor and working class Black and Latin@ youth (through the corporeal and spatialized brown body), a regiment of low-wage labor is produced to accommodate the high-income service needs of high-income gentrification and multinational capital.

As CPS and the Civic Committee *transform* and *revitalize* schools in Black neighborhoods, the Chicago Housing Authority’s (CHA) “Plan for Transformation” works parallel to or in conjunction with Renaissance 2010 by “redeveloping” 25,000 social housing units into mixed-income communities. The ten-year plan is backed by \$1.5-billion from the federal government, “but the magic comes from the billions more that follows from private investors—investors in the market-rate and affordable housing units and retail establishments, the backbone of new neighborhoods” (Barrett 11). Not surprisingly, the “magic” is supplied by many of the global elite of the Civic Committee and its Renaissance Schools Fund donors. The chain of capital imbrications is long and very much interconnected. CPS, as a (seemingly) public yet

very private corporate influenced firm, is producing and deploying methods of subliminal racialized ideology. Almost Willie Hortonesque, Chicago's discursive regime reconditions the public's imaginings about how and what kind of labor should be produced and for whom; it personifies the market as redeemer, deliverer, and benefactor, and configures space so that liberal ideas of ownership and who and what belongs on the land are trussed.

### **Land and Body: Public Parts, Private Possessions**

Bronzeville protesters picketing outside the Board of Education chanted, 'We're not blind. Just follow the dollar sign.' In Englewood, an African-American neighborhood on the south side, two schools are slated for closing. At a February 2005 meeting on Renaissance 2010 held in Englewood, parents, students, and teachers described the history of disinvestment in their schools and community and argued that Renaissance 2010 is driving gentrification and removal of low-income African Americans. 'We're being pushed out of the city under the guise of school reform,' one speaker said. (Lipman "We're not Blind")

Lipman elaborates Renaissance 2010's element of spatialization by identifying the plan's roots in a joint gentrification - district education project begun seven years ago by CHA, CPS, and the local business community. Individually, each sector is known as infamous, often characterized as the worst of its kind in the nation. This notorious cartel represents the three crucial limbs of industry—land, money, and labor—and they have mobilized a critical ideological state apparatus: the public institution of schools. Terry Mazany, chief operating officer of one of the city's largest foundations, the Chicago Community Trust, and board member of the Renaissance Schools Fund, refers to schools as the "third leg" of development. The purpose of the third leg in Chicago is to [re]produce an economic tendency and social convention within future low-wage labor of color. One of the objectives is to displace the ethnos within the body in order to produce a colonized liberal citizen.<sup>[9]</sup> If Renaissance 2010 schools do their job correctly, Blacks and Latin@s will be transformed and subsumed into free market propriety. The particularity of the subject now left behind,<sup>[10]</sup> the neoliberal citizen is disposed to enact and perpetuate neoliberal macropractices, but at the local level. The transformed and now good liberal citizen will flip the proverbial burger at McDonald's for the attendant low-wage, or she will also serve in the

military to protect the private interests of high-income elites; he will become a pseudo entrepreneur and stock the inventory in a neighborhood specialty grocery store and hence, the neoliberal way will be sustained and perpetuated.

Relying on historical, Trumanesque tropes of development and underdevelopment, the CHA discursively deploys progress in an attempt to remake the ghettos of Chicago into the image of the liberal market. The stated objective of the CHA's Plan for Transformation is to "reinvent" social housing for poor Blacks and Latin@s into mixed income communities. The CHA has even incorporated its acronym into the word *change* in its logo. Expectedly, the CHA's "From CHAos to CHAnge" public relations campaign demonstrates the multiple scales at which the micropractices of neoliberalism operate within social housing policy discourse. Initiated in 2004, the same year as Renaissance 2010 officially commenced, the PR campaign was authored by the global advertising firm Leo Burnett Worldwide, the chair of which who is also a member of the Civic Committee is yet another link in corporate coalition's daisy chain. After just a bit of investigation, Chicago's example of corporate, neoliberal interconnections are not only unremarkable but an embarrassment, or at least should be. Yet, the firms of the Civic Committee continue on in their unabashed local and global linkages riding on a coerced fallacy of ownership, and the notion that these public-private market alliances are rational, immanent, and the corporation's proper place.

The CHA declares, "the era of decaying, isolated housing developments is over. We're building a new future where public housing residents live in the same neighborhoods *as people of all income levels*. It's a future of new opportunity and restored hope" (emphasis theirs) (CHA "Hilliard"). In the context of the CHA's declarations, public housing residents, code for poor Black tenants, are put in contrast and opposition to persons of "all income levels," which is code for white private citizens. Citizens have ownership rights, freedom of movement and exchange, all which determine their seemingly immanent value and merit. Tenants are in need of improvement and can benefit from close but guarded proximity to citizens. The CHA's Plan for Transformation is set to "improve the appearance, quality and culture of public housing in Chicago" (CHA "Summary"). Transforming the culture of public housing communities is key. Making room for the new urban resident, the CHA's

“relocation process” manages the movement of former public housing tenants out of areas to be redeveloped into temporary or permanent “replacement housing” (CHA “Summary”). Those tenants who are able to navigate the strict structures of access back into what will be the same but gentrified, “mixed-income” housing will be surveilled and disciplined through drug testing, credit checks, and requirements for employment. Federally sanctioned self-sufficiency requirements support the CHA’s discursive regime, and they legitimate educational practices within CPS that work to produce compliant citizens. In essence, Chicago’s corporate coalition requires that public housing tenants of color leave behind their particularity or be spatially displaced and culturally dispossessed.

The CHA’s Plan for Transformation has been approved by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development three years before Renaissance 2010’s implementation. As the Plan and Renaissance 2010 combine to target predominantly poor Black neighborhoods, conditions like occupancy and lease compliance rules act to relegate poor Black Chicagoans to spaces outside the urban redevelopment zone. “Developed” capitalist economies need developed liberal subjects-as-citizens, and Renaissance 2010’s goal is to produce just that. Postcolonial scholar Josie Saldaña-Portillo argues that theories of human agency within revolutionary movements have followed a “mode of progressive movement” quite closely in line with models of subjectivity and developmentalism (6). Renaissance 2010 considers itself to be a revolutionary movement to promote the agency of neoliberals—perhaps not in the same way as the movement of guerillas across the Sierra Maestra in Cuba in ’59, but certainly a liberal progressive movement across the terrain of the city to Chicago’s Civic Committee members. Saldaña-Portillo notes how these modes of progressive movement correspond to essential paradigms of development, which are in intricate association with revolutionary discourse. Importantly, she contends that discourses of development and revolution are always dependent upon colonial constructions of gender and race in their embellished applied philosophies of change. Societies of “underdeveloped” nations are to move through developmental stages progressing from a premodern stage of particularity into a modern stage of assumed heteronormative universality. Similar to developmental psychologist Jean Piaget’s theory of child cognitive development, societies of underdeveloped nations are to evolve like children along this narrative to a point at which the particularities of



gender and/or race are no longer needed, and are, in fact, neutralized, and left behind (Saldaña-Portillo 66). Development in Chicago is positioned as social revolution, or in the language of its promoters, as *renaissance*.

We can use Saldaña-Portillo's thinking as a frame within which to argue that Chicago's policy rationale engages a discourse rooted in corporate techniques of advertising, one that purports school and community failure and juxtaposes it against the language of an irresistible renaissance (a literal rebirth) which leaves behind self-imposed devastation and destruction. The discursive practices of the political triad (mayor, CPS, multinational business) designing and implementing Renaissance 2010 subliminally fault poor Black and Latin@ communities with the problems of under-resourced schools, and in so doing pit brown communities against city and nation. The language surrounding public housing and education is redacted in a dialect of chaos, danger and failure: the Robert Taylor public housing project is a "national symbol of social assistance gone awry" that "cast[s] a dark shadow" over streets "scarred by gangs, racism and poverty" (A.T. Kearney 3); the public schools, predominated by Blacks and Latina@s, need "an overhaul," their infrastructure is "crumbling," and their premodern subjects test in the "bottom half" of Illinois schools (A.T. Kearney 4). The discursive objective is to get "buy in"—a phrase I myself have heard Duncan (CPS CEO) and CPS officials use on numerous occasions—to the idea of a seeming redemption for the sins of those lacking the appropriate sensibility and technical, low-wage skills to engage the self-regulating market appropriately. The dialect of failure positions business as redeemer and rescuer, the only entity able to properly develop new "vibrant" neighborhoods and "high quality" schools where "knowing exactly who your customers are and how best to meet their needs is an ongoing study for business" (A.T. Kearney 5). Hence, the underlying goal of Renaissance 2010 and the CHA's Plan for Transformation is to imagine that the market will solve an urban "blight" in effect created by a neoliberal de-emphasis, or rejection of the social responsibility of the state to intervene in the ill socioeconomic effects of the capitalist economy. Ultimately, the belief is that capital in Chicago will rescue capital's failure, a failure blamed on the subjects it created.

## **Subverting the Coalition**

The fundamental goal of Renaissance 2010 is to turn around Chicago's most troubled elementary and high schools by creating 100 new schools in neighborhoods across the city over the next six years, providing new educational options to underserved communities and relieving school overcrowding in communities experiencing rapid growth. (Daley)

Absent from Mayor Daley's initial elaboration of Renaissance 2010 is its genesis in a collaboration between CPS and the CHA's Plan for Transformation whereby "community revitalization and school development" are linked (Olszewski, Carlos Sadovi 1). Instead, Daley poses the policy as a socioeconomic ameliorative reversal. Renaissance 2010 preempts the federal disciplining and regulation Chicago might have faced under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act signed into law in 2002. NCLB is restricted to Title 1 schools (those schools educating students living below the poverty index) that are in need of federal funds. The act empowers states to design and implement methods and measurements to ensure what is called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of schools toward the goal of 100 percent math and reading proficiency (based on state standards) by the 2013-14 academic year. NCLB requires intense categorization and classification using AYP and other methods, hierarchization of schools that are under-resourced to begin with, and the systematic ordering of young, mainly brown bodies. In discussing the 18<sup>th</sup>-century establishment of a "hierarchy of humankind" using the "principle of gradation," David Theo Goldberg describes the kind of methodical rationalized system that is similar to the intention and implementation NCLB:

Once objectified, these bodies could be analyzed, categorized, classified, and ordered with the cold gaze of scientific distance. This reduction of human subjects to abstract bodies had the implication of enabling their subjection to the cold scientific stare and economic exploitation [of the ruling class]. The principle of gradation also carried a moral implication: Higher beings were extended greater worth than lower ones. (Goldberg 50)

NCLB allows students that consistently fail to make AYP to transfer to a private, charter, or *better* school of their choice. The policy perfectly inculcates the public to a market oriented mentality of performance, individualism, and free market options.

It appears on the face of NCLB that the state has stepped into the arena of public education to save schools by regulating it, but, in fact, the state has actually stepped out and cleared the way for the market. NCLB, as a technique of power, creates an open space for the free market on the ideological grounds of the school. Public school districts across the nation, already bundled in a free market capitalist economy, may choose which academic or social maneuver will most quickly move their students toward the final stage of development: neoliberal citizenship. In its private-public pursuits, Chicago has made a blatant choice of global capital over people. NCLB works as a federal justification to build formidable national private-public coalitions while using a racialized discourse to rationalize and promote it.

Bill and Melinda Gates, one of the largest financial beneficiaries of neoliberal practices,[\[11\]](#) established a foundation that recently committed up to \$25 million to school reform efforts in Chicago like Renaissance 2010. As the policy was coming into being, the foundation's executive director for education, Tom Vander Ark, declared, "they've called it re-engineering, reconstitution, restructuring. They would change a few things, but not surprisingly, it's never worked very well. What this new plan offers schools is a complete break with the past" (Dillon B7). In the global city of Chicago, a triumvirate of multinational power has coalesced to ensure community dispossession, neoliberal subject development and private sector evasion of the public collective. What it will take to subvert this coalition is to continue exposing its micropractices and to push education back into the realm of the public.

Nationally and globally, so many public institutions have succumbed almost completely to the idea of liberal subjectivity; many have shunned the collective and embraced liberalism's conception of the presumed inalienable rights of private owners and ostensibly incontrovertible individualism. Trying to comprehend and then expose the multiple scales at which labor, land and money operate together in Chicago has actually not been as difficult as expected. Although the trail is convoluted, the usual neoliberal attempts to mystify the process of liberal subject development, racialized acts of spatialization, and speculation were not, in this case, obfuscated by the

discourse; in fact, they were very much highlighted. Neoliberalism in the city is prideful and plain. Its discourse, too, is clear and deliberate. It is unabashed, believing in an assumed right of ownership of both space and the lives of poor and working class people, particularly those of color.

I have tried in this article to follow a trail of connected layers, dollars, and influences that constitute the hegemonic breadth of neoliberalism. I have attempted in this process of exposition a somewhat “activist-oriented research” as advocated by Pauline Lipman; something I call applied cultural work, something I believe is essential for academics, and for the university as presumably public institution. Blurring the “borders between activism and ethnography,” activist-oriented research positions itself as an *active* scholarship alongside community organizations (Lipman “Educational Ethnography” 325). This methodology is one potentially viable action scholars can make in response to social injustices produced by neoliberalism. To rely on an old adage of radicalism: the personal for me as educator and activist is in isotonic relationship with the political. I once had a very deep investment in Chicago education. I was a school leader there at the height of the Renaissance 2010 juggernaut.

Beginning in November 2003, I worked collaboratively with a formidable group of seven mothers and their families, whom I called Las Madres. Las Madres are from La Villita (Little Village), a Mexican community on the Southwest side of Chicago. Out of La Villita's previous neighborhood struggles, including a 19-day hunger strike in 2001 by eleven women and six men, came my school, City as Classroom School (City). And so, this article is probably more specifically retroactive activist oriented research. Much of the impetus for it came from my applied cultural work with Las Madres. We can see this writing as a background narration for the struggle against the city in which Las Madres and I engaged to open City.

The following is the mission statement I wrote for the school: “Representing the knowledge, ability and imagination of urban youth, City As Classroom School's mission is to build generations of public intellectuals motivated by their own interests and creativity, using the city of Chicago as their classroom.” This was a mission in which Chicago was uninterested. Active public intellectuals of color were exactly what Chicago did not want. The contemporary education economy cannot withstand

an influx of questioning, socially responsible youth actively and intelligently advocating for equity, access, voice and justice. In spite of being directly exposed to the private, infamous machinations of Chicago politics, I still believe in social reconstruction as a critical pedagogical goal practiced in educative spaces. And, I am not and will not say here that a social reconstructionist educational system cannot be imagined and then built despite the advancement of traditional liberal concerns for a reflexive kind of justice emphasizing liberalism's own economic growth. But Chicago is powerful, and the corporate coalition is firmly set. So, it is imperative that academics engage in applied cultural work that continues to support the actions of public collectives by exposing the corporate coalition inherent in many urban public policies globally. Perhaps, then, we can continue to help bring down the walls of these global "citadels of domination" (Blomley 5).

This was a tale of one city—Chicago, a global exemplar of the contemporary education economy. As radical academics of education and social theory, we can design curricula that unmask other public-private nexuses as coalitions of global elites, not the beneficent, equitable "partnerships" they are touted to be. We can design curricula that subvert new subjectivities created under the conditions of globalization. We can continue to write scholarly articles, reports, and books that expose the coalition, but we can also write ones that speak directly to the public, that share our research, our commitment, and stories of community-driven change both locally and globally. And we can empower our constituents by example—our students and the communities from which they come—to continue resisting loudly and boldly on the streets they must continue to claim. Under the micropractices of neoliberalism, where a condition has been created to make us *feel* like our schools will be shut down [\[12\]](#) and our neighborhoods gentrified, we have nothing to lose. So why not engage in applied cultural work? Why not resist?

## Notes

[\[1\]](#) "American" as used here specifies a geographic and cultural area of the Global North, also known as the United States, on which I focus in this article, and more specifically it refers to the concept of "America."

[2] In using the popular term “neoliberalism” I am referring to a development over the last three decades (Harvey *A Brief History* 48) of liberal-based, U.S. micro-practices in education, in cultural landscaping, and social redevelopment that imagine, regulate, discipline, and exact the reproduction of a presumably “developed,” neoliberal citizen devoid of all particularity or difference from the “universal national” (Noble 94). I consider American neoliberalism to be a hyper-modern political and socioeconomic philosophy, a mode of operation relying on beliefs in the primary importance of the individual and self-reliance, notions of ownership, and the inalienable rights of private property.

[3] The term “wealth” is not used interchangeably with class. Here, wealth refers to the idea of financial condition rather than a person's social/economic status. Thus, wealth refers to actual and imagined resources and goods with worth in terms of use or trade.

[4] The phrase the “Other France” was taken from a lecture given by Trica Keaton titled, “Black American Paris and the Other France: Social Race and the Politics of Migration,” which was held at the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Resource Center on 20 April 2007.

[5] This quotation is taken from CPS's announcement of Renaissance 2010 on 24 June 2004. No longer available on-line at CPS, a summary (with quotes) of the announcement may be accessed at *School Planning & Management* <<http://www.peterli.com/archive/spm/711.shtm>>.

[6] A.T. Kearney is a “global management consulting firm.” Using “[a] team of knowledgeable people who produce extraordinary results . . . Our mission is clear and unequivocal: to help the world's leading corporations gain and sustain competitive advantage, and achieve profound, tangible results . . .” (emphasis theirs). Accessed 6 May 2006 <<http://www.atkearney.com/main.taf?p=1>>.

[7] Abbott Laboratories is “a global, broad-based health care company devoted to the discovery, development, manufacture and marketing of pharmaceuticals and medical products, including nutritionals, devices and diagnostics. The company employs 60,000 people and markets its products in more than 130 countries.” Abbott

Laboratories website. Accessed 9 May 2006

<[http://www.abbott.com/global/url/content/en\\_US/10:10/general\\_content/General\\_Content\\_00004.htm](http://www.abbott.com/global/url/content/en_US/10:10/general_content/General_Content_00004.htm)>.

[8] Sonnenschein, Nath and Rosenthal LLP. “Sonnenschein, with more than 700 attorneys and other professionals in nine U.S. cities and a global reach, serves the legal needs of many of the world’s largest and best-known businesses, nonprofits and individuals.” Sonnenschein website home page. Accessed 9 May 2006

<<http://www.sonnenschein.com/>>.

[9] The idea of displacing, or “leaving behind” the ethnos is derived from Saldaña-Portillo, 7.

[10] Ibid.

[11] In addition to Bill and Melinda Gates’s other assets, the stock Bill Gates holds in Microsoft is valued at \$22.65 billion. See the 2006 Fortune 500 list.

[12] The idea of demonstrating agency because of the ways in which the “micropractices of neoliberalism” produce a condition where it feels as if everything is shutting down is derived from Mathew.

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