Bad Teacher: What Race to the Top Learned From the "race to the bottom"

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Abstract

In 2009, the Obama Administration created a $4.3 billion dollar grant competition for states called Race to the Top (RttT). The money, earmarked from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, was to be distributed by the Department of Education to states who were making efforts to adhere to precirculated reforms supported by Secretary Duncan, such as lifting caps on charter schools, tying teacher evaluations to test scores, and opening alternative teacher certification markets. These reforms, so the administration said, were to help the "crisis" or "failure" in public education. Critics, on the other hand, have argued that these types of reforms facilitate the neoliberal mantras of deregulation and privatization, which pose a serious threat to communitarian and democratic ideals. States that did what they were told got money, while those who didn't support the reforms were left to fend for themselves. In this paper, the author explores RttT as a type of structural adjustment policy like those supported and implemented by international financial institutions over the past 40 years. Structural adjustment policies, critical geographers argue, were pivotal in what they call the "race to the bottom"—the ways neoliberal economic policies adversely affected poor countries, laborers, and the environment. The bottom here refers to how low, in terms of repealing labor and environmental protections, countries were willing to go in exchange for foreign capital. The author argues that, however dissimilar the two policies might seem at first, both share a common ideology, language, and economic objective.

Keywords: Education Policy, Neoliberalism, Race to the Top, Charter Schools, Teachers Unions, Structural Adjustment Policies

Suicidal

To start: two tragic, and seemingly disparate, scenes.

1) Over the past 16 years, more than a quarter of a million Indian farmers have committed suicide. The Center For Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ; 2011)

at NYU reports that in 2009 alone, "17,638 farmers committed suicide—that's one farmer every 30 minutes" (1).[1] The last decade of the 20th century saw the Indian state implementing structural adjustments to their economic policies as recommended by two of the three largest international financial institutions (IFIs), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[2] Initiated in 1991, the IFI-sponsored debt relief programs were to "help" the country, "alleviate its balance-of-payments difficulties, reduce the fiscal deficit and relieve inflationary pressures" (Chossudovsky 1997, 126). The neoliberal structural adjustment policies (SAPs) that the state agreed to demanded cutting state-supported agricultural subsidies and access to rural credit and encouraging farmers to begin growing export-ready cash crops like cotton.[3] IFIs pushed for countries to switch to exporting cash crops as, with a devalued currency (as demanded by IFIs), cash crops, like cotton, were attractive to the volatile global market and could spur short-term income while promoting "efficiency" domestically by creating competition between farmers. However, as more Indian farmers switched to cotton production, the global market became saturated and prices plummeted.

Indian farmers went into huge amounts of debt trying to compete with American farmers, who could sell their cotton for artificially low prices due to state subsidies. Indian farmers were persuaded to start growing Bt cotton, a genetically modified seed, which was supposed to release a toxin that kills pests that can infect a cotton crop. It was thought that built in pesticide would save on production costs and yield higher outputs (e.g., CHRGJ 2011). For multiple reasons, the seeds were much more expensive to grow and the cost-to-yield ratio trapped these farmers in a vicious cycle of endemic debt and poverty. Monsanto and other multinationals, meanwhile, have made huge profits selling their seeds and pesticides yearly to the farmers. In the end, over a quarter of a million farmers have taken their lives, not able to find a way out of debt. Many are reported to have killed themselves by "consuming the very pesticide that they went into debt to purchase" (Goodman & Gonzales 2011). The suicides are only part of the tragedy as families are left behind to deal with the burden of the debt and, as reported by the Institute for Science in Society (2010), soil that is depleted of organisms necessary for healthy crop production. The latter of these damages, future inability to cultivate land as a result of colonial-like profiteering on the "developing"[4] world or the Global South, is what Rob Nixon (2011) calls *slow violence*.

2) In late September of 2010, Rigoberto Ruelas, a fifth-grade teacher at Miramonte Elementary, was found dead 100 feet below a bridge in the Big Tujunga Canyon area of Angeles National Forest (Zavis & Barboza 2010). Mr. Ruelas taught in an "impoverished [and] gang ridden" area and was described by his peers as a "caring" teacher who would "tutor them [the students] on weekends and after school, visit their homes, [and] encourage them to aim high and go to college" (Zavis & Barboza 2010). A former student, Mayra Vega, who stayed in touch with Ruelas after leaving his class six years prior, said that, "He just told me two weeks ago that he was proud of me for applying to college. He would always help you, even if you weren't his student. He always made me feel good about myself, like when he told me to go ahead and wear my glasses at graduation. Thanks to him, I stopped confusing my b's and d's" (Knopp 2010).

   Though impossible to directly assume causality, Ruelas' suicide took place just over a month after the *Los Angeles Times* released what they called a database on "individual teacher effectiveness" (Felch, Song, Smith 2010). Using a "value-added model" (VAM), the newspaper, with help from the RAND Corporation's Richard Buddin (Briggs & Domingue 2011), created a database to show how the roughly 6,000 teachers in the district ranked.[5] By controlling for a few variables, the idea is that by using a VAM you can tell how effective a teacher is by tracking their students' improvement over a period of time. An increase is attributed to how "effective" a teacher is, as the discourse around education equates being an "effective" teacher to having high student test scores (e.g., Biesta 2010; Compton and Weiner 2008; Kumashiro 2012a; among many others). Though researchers have consistently found that standardized tests tell more about social factors such as poverty, parental education, and access to healthcare than anything about the school or teacher (e.g., Rothstein 2004), the corporate-oiled machinery driving education policy today puts an unrealistic emphasis on what a single teacher does to a single student, as if the relationship exists in a vacuum. Despite an overwhelming amount of research critiquing the use of VAM to rate teachers (e.g., Au 2010; Darling-Hammond 2012; Durso 2012; Ravitch 2010), the current iteration of accountability and personal responsibility underlies the taken for granted assumption that you can tell how good teachers are by looking at their students' scores. The *Times* article labeled teachers as "most effective," "more effective," "average," "less effective," or "least effective."

> Mr. Ruelas’ was labeled “less effective” through the VAM (Kopp 2010). It has been speculated that the labeling was too much to handle for someone who cared so much about his students and devoted his life to the school and community in which he himself grew up. His students, mostly poor, had lower test scores. He was labeled as “less effective,” while the government, the bureaucrats, the wealthy, and the history of power and violence in social life both domestically and globally went unrated and unaccountable.

Beyond suicide, it appears as if these two stories have little to do with one another. Rural farmers in India and a fifth-grade teacher in Los Angeles aren’t in the same geographical space, nor do they occupy similar economic or political niches. However, in the global present, an era marked by temporal and spatial compression and global flows of information, materials, and ideologies (Harvey 1991), one can and must think global contingency. Both of the situations described above are symptoms of the past 40+ years of neoliberal hegemony. In the case of the Indian farmers, no intuitions have been more effective and more malicious in implementing neoliberal polices than what Richard Peet (2003) calls the “unholy trinity”: the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). And in the case of Rigoberto Rueles, one need not look much further than a different unholy trinity—The Department of Education, the corporate sector, and the venture philanthropists—in understanding the implementation of neoliberal policies in to the education marketplace.

In this paper, I put forth the argument that current education policies undertaken by the Obama administration, most notably their 2009 Race to the Top (RttT) grant competition and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waivers they are currently dispensing,[6] have mimicked certain aspects of the IMF and World Bank’s implementation of SAPs from the late 1970s to the present—what some refer to as policies that led to a “race to the bottom”—and the types of policies they promote.[7] This, I will argue, is a shift not so much in the content of the education policies, which are more an intensification of the neoliberal policies put forth from the 80s to the present, but a shift in *how* the policies are being legislated.

“Race to the bottom” here refers to the processes of globalized capital that created the conditions of possibility, through the opening of markets by IMF and World Bank loans, for massive international exploitation, pollution, and poverty. Transnational corporations and capital, free to move around the globe and in and out of countries at will through foreign direct investment (FDI) and other means, could find untapped labor and resources to generate short-term profit.[8] The "bottom," in this equation, refers to the processes whereby the business class would find countries with the least restrictive labor (child labor, minimum wage, hours/day, workplace standards) and environmental (pollution restrictions) laws in which to set up factories that could make commodities at the lowest prices possible. The "race" part of the equation describes how developing countries would race each other to attract FDI by lowering their regulations on labor and the environment. As I will make clear below, the educational policies and the global finance policies share many political and economic philosophies such as the push towards privatization and their models of hyper-accountability. However and despite these similarities, I am more interested in this paper in analyzing *how* the World Bank, IMF, and Obama administration have coerced/bribed their *clients*, to use the vocabulary from the neoliberal lingua franca, to accept SAPs and RttT and what the long-term effects may be. The Obama/Duncan regime is using "race to the bottom" as a foil to their RttT and I will argue that the ideologies, the processes, and the effects of racing anywhere are quite similar. I will show how low-achieving schools in the United States and the students, teachers, and communities they materially represent have been treated like the debt-burdened people and communities of the developing world.

What follows is separated into two sections. In the first section, I provide the context for first understanding SAPs and then RttT. I situate each within the political and economic context of neoliberalism, showing how the policies created undermine democratic ideals. I provide these histories not to suggest that they are the same processes happening in the same manner, but instead to show how the current model of neoliberal/austerity/immiseration capitalism can affect various localities in relatively similar ways. I use this first section to explore how the processes of capitalism are used by multiple players in differing arenas to get at similar ends—to accumulate more economic and political power. In the second section, I look at three central issues that arise when analyzing the relationship between SAPs and RttT. I frame these issues as questions: 1) What types of conditions and preconditions must a nation/state agree to in order to gain access to needed money? 2) Is there any evidence that polices put in play by IFIs or the Obama administration work to benefit the dispossessed and disenfranchised? and 3) How did these policies get legitimated? These are important issues to think about as they ask us to consider the relationships between the global and local, and the means by which both are affected by market ideologies and a transforming role of the state in the lives of its citizens.

In Context…

The Word Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Global Neoliberalism

In the direct aftermath of WWII, the IMF and the World Bank were both created out of the Bretton Woods rebuilding project and have gone through a few different paradigm shifts since that have been read by critics in a variety of ways (e.g., Goldman 2005; Peet 2003; Woods 2006). Very generally speaking, they are supra-national bodies, housed within the U.N., that deal with global finance and development. Traditionally, the IMF has focused on the regulation of the rates at which currencies were exchanged and the granting of loans for debt repayment. The World Bank has acted as a development agency/bank, providing money and “knowledge” for projects that would help in “poverty alleviation”—everything from infrastructure (roads, dams) to agriculture, education, and healthcare. Primarily controlled and funded, both historically and today, by a mix of Washington D.C., (who has the needs of Wall St. to provide for) and a few other wealthy state actors, these IFIs have done more to affect and transform the landscape of global finance, politics, and the lives of people from just about every nook and corner of the globe than anything or anyone else (e.g., Danaher 1994, 2004). Though their histories are quite diverse and important in understanding how they work synergistically (e.g., Peet 2003; Woods 2006), I want to focus on the thirty years roughly between 1980 and the present in order to understand the SAPs that both institutions used/demanded. To understand this, one needs to look at the past 40 years of political and economic history.

The economic crisis of the early ‘70s brought about the first hard policy shifts towards a neoliberal doctrine that had been in gestation since around the 1920s (e.g., Peck 2010). By neoliberalism I mean, briefly, the economic and political ideologies and policies that represent the marriage between a tradition of liberalism in political philosophy (possessive individualism and personal freedom) and neoclassical economics (market fundamentalism, free trade, deregulation, privatization, state austerity) (e.g., Harvey 2005; Peck 2010; Robertson 2008).[9] The post-WW II years saw a general consensus on Keynesian economic policies, which meant a fair (if not unfairly distributed (e.g., Duggan 2003; Lipman 2011)) share of state-funded safety nets, unionism, and general social welfare—much of this taken on reluctantly by capital. So when the “first” recession hit in the early 1970s, the neoliberals, who had been organizing their philosophies and policies for some time, were ready to pounce on the moment to enact change.[10] It’s here where Naomi Klein’s (2007) notion of the shock doctrine makes retrospective sense as an explanation of the neoliberal transformation of political economy that transpired at that particular time of recession.[11] Klein argues, persuasively, that *shocks*—wars, recessions, market crashes, and so on—are utilized by those in power, or looking to be in power, to create radical changes in political and economic policies. She explains that a group of influential academics, economists, and bureaucrats "had been perfecting this very strategy: waiting for a major crisis, then selling off pieces of the state to private players while citizens were still reeling from the shock, then quickly making the 'reforms' permanent" (7). The recession created an opening for neoliberal discourse to enter common parlance and neoliberal policies to begin taking hold as it appeared as if the Keynesian model of full employment and state-sponsored welfare had run its course, or so the neoliberals said (e.g., Lipman 2011). The capitalist class, in need of finding new markets abroad for both a surplus of commodities and capital, got behind the neoliberal mantra of deregulation, privatization, liberalization, and state austerity. According to neoliberal ideology, the global marketplace had been restricted behind tariffs and state protectionist policies for too long: there was an entire globe of resources, labor, and consumers to be fully incorporated into *the* market. Those heeding this call, led formatively by Milton Friedman, argued that this would be a good thing for both the developed and developing worlds as the former would find new markets, labor, and raw materials and the latter would get jobs and access to foreign goods. All of this came into material manifestation first in Chile. As Susan Robertson (2008) writes:

> Chile [in upheaval after the assassination of Allende and the CIA-backed Pinochet coup] was the first testing ground for this new model of economic coordination…in 1973, a pure neoliberal experiment was put into place: privatization of all publicly owned resources (aside from copper), liberalization of finance and openness to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), freer conditions for trade for firms, and state withdrawal from many social policy programs. (14-15)

By the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan (and Friedman) in the White House and Thatcher in 10 Downing, neoliberal philosophy was hegemonic and being implemented through policy prescriptions doled out by IFIs.

The IMF and the World Bank were then recruited to make structural adjustments they would now make conditional to the loans they would distribute to developing, post-colonial, and debt-ridden countries. During the '70s, the OPEC countries began to accrue and invest huge amounts of surplus capital in commercial banks and, along with a new plan to turn “short-term deposits into…long term loans,” the banks, mostly based in the U.S., began to lend vast amounts of this money to developing countries (Woods 2006, 47). This made commercial banks extremely vulnerable to the ability of developing countries to make interest and principal payments on those loans. And in 1979, when the Fed raised interest rates to deal with inflation, many of the developing countries, then with a combined debt of about US$70 billion, were unable to make their repayments. In 1982, the Latin America debt crises broke and the global financial markets were on the verge of collapse. Whereas one might think of having massive debt as being bad for the debtor country, the sheer amount of credit that was lent made this dangerous for the creditor country (i.e., the U.S. and the commercial banks). The saying in Latin America, as Robin Hahnel (1999) describes, was that, “If I owe you $10 billion, *I’m* in trouble. But if I owe you $100 billion, *you’re* in trouble” (54; emphasis original). Debtors couldn’t repay. Banks stopped lending. The financial world found life ropes in monetary and supply-side policies that sought to counteract the type of interventionist governance called for by Keynesianism and the Welfare State. As Michael Goldman describes in his work on neoliberal environmentalism and the World Bank, “By the early 1980s, the chickens came home to roost as overspending helped spur the Southern debt crisis, which led the [IMF], World Bank, and the U.S. Treasury to articulate a strikingly different policy for borrowing countries” (15). These different policies were much more important for the creditors than the debtors and the IFIs were pushed to the forefront of neoliberal legitimation both ideologically and on the ground.

This *difference*, in terms of the policy, is marked by what are called structural adjustment policies (SAPs). Though both lending institutions had some form of conditionality attached to their loans, the new version was more strict, more monolithic, and, arguably, more damaging.[12] The U.S., needing to ensure that its private banks were going to remain solvent, moved the IFIs to the forefront of hedging out policy transformations that would ensure that money would continue to flow from the South to the North. The IMF, in particular, became the leading body in making sure that developing and debtor countries could continue to pay the interest on their previous loans. In order to do this, the IMF granted new loans (with new interest) and made these loans conditional on a set of neoliberal principles, which it believed would best generate gross national product (GNP). What is coined the “Washington Consensus” refers to a set of macroeconomic loan conditionalities that adhere to the neoliberal mantras of: “budgetary austerity, devaluation [of national currency]; trade liberalization and privatization" (Chossudovsky 1997, 35). This meant that if a country wanted to get a loan, it needed to adopt these macroeconomic policies, which were basically designed by Washington in order to funnel money back to Washington and the commercial banks it protected/s.

The IMF money was used not to help with infrastructure or long-term planning, but for short-term debt repayments, which meant that the money would flow in from the IMF and then go right back out of the debtor country and back to the bank/country it owed. As Michel Chossudovsky (1997) observes:

> The loan is "fictitious" because the money which had been advanced (i.e. by the IMF or World Bank) is immediately reappropriated by the official and/or commercial creditors. Moreover, this process has resulted in a $500 million increase in the debt stock because the new loan was used to pay back the interest portion of debt servicing and not the principal. (53)

Washington and other lending countries/institutions would recoup their loan money (short-term) and had successfully, and without having to use straightforward military violence, removed restrictions on the flow of capital in and out of many countries (long-term).[13] As Hahnel (1999) describes, Reagan declared that "Our [the U.S.] task is to knock down barriers to trade and foreign investment and the free movement of capital" (50). By using IFIs, this was accomplished at a most astonishing rate and geographical capacity. Though the IMF was the leading institution, as they were granting necessary debt relief loans, the World Bank also instituted these SAPs. In order to get money for a project or for agriculture or education, the Bank, because they knew export crops or electricity produced domestically would not generate the revenue necessary to repay the loans, made sure countries adhered to the same macroeconomic policies enforced by the IMF in order to attract the necessary FDI to generate exportable capital. The IFIs have successfully cracked open the global for global finance and, therefore, global profiteering.

And so, throughout the '80s and '90s and in variations through the present, the IMF and World Bank have demanded, culled, and materially interpellated nations into the New World Order and the There Is No Alternative ideology of neoliberalism (despite much protest). As others have shown with great acumen, these SAPs have wrought havoc on the lives of millions of people from Mexico to Argentina to Jamaica to Nigeria to India to Thailand (e.g., Balogun 1995; Black and Kincaid 2001; Davis 2006; Danaher 2004; Shiva 2008) —not to mention the ways these same policies have affected the poor and vulnerable in the U.S. through incarceration, perpetual unemployment, and psychological warfare (e.g., Alexander 2010; Rupert 2000; Wacquant 2009, among many others). The results of these programs, which I will discuss in more detail in the second section, have meant huge profits for a few and an increased privatized/police state for those on the "wrong" side of history. Increased neoliberal legislation brought about a massive rise in resistance and protest (e.g., Danaher 2004; Peet 2003). Increased resistance and protest have led to increased policing and militarization of urban spaces by the police and military state apparatus (Peet 2003). And, of course, this increased policing has been fully exploited by the capitalist class, as new armies need new tactical and surveillance gear that has been exported en masse by the policing-industrial-complex. And it is in this light that IFIs need to be read through the temporal lens of the *post* in post-settler-colonialism (e.g., Muppidi 2003).

Education Policy, Race to the Top, and Neoliberalism

Though the United States Federal Government isn't exactly an IFI, it controls IFIs, and therefore has been able to play geopolitics behind the curtain of the World Bank, IMF, and the WTO. However, with RttT, the Fed finally came out of the closet and revealed itself as the puppet-master, using the global financial crash of 2008 (*shock)*, similarly brought on by predation and over lending by the commercial banks (e.g., Foster and Magdoff 2009), to show its structurally adjusting muscles. RttT is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, which, as the Executive Summary contends, was "historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors [while] lay[ing] the foundation for education reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a, 2). The program uses a point system to evaluate states based on what types of reforms they are willing to make in relation to a precirculated selection criteria. The selection criteria, as identified by the Department of Education, can be broken down into "four core education reform areas": "Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy"; "Building data systems that measure student growth and success…"; "Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals…"; and "Turning around our lowest-achieving schools" (ibid.). If states, many of which needed to cut spending (even more than they had been in years past) in education from the fallout of the economic crash, wanted a piece of the pie, they needed to make structural changes that spoke to these criteria in their education policies. The more in-line with Fed's demands, the more points a state was granted. The structural changes the Fed wanted were the types of neoliberal reforms that have been slowly building in the education realm since the early 1980s and have reached critical mass over the past five years as democrats and republicans have found reason to support similar policies. Others have detailed this history here at length (e.g., Au 2009; Apple 2005; Lipman 2004, 2011; Saltman 2000, 2007, 2010; Scott 2011; Watkins 2012; Weiner and Compton 2008), and below I will provide a brief history and context for understanding how the policies in RttT represent neoliberal philosophy and how RttT will work to radically change the education landscape into a market-based privatized commodity.

With the recession in the '80s, the same recession that vaulted the IMF and World Bank into their neoliberal enforcer status, the Fed, under Reagan and parroting Friedman, began a discursive attack on public education. In 1983 *A Nation at Risk*: *The Imperative For Educational Reform* was published and the Reagan administration used it to carefully construct a narrative suggesting that the slowing economy of the '70s and the future of American hegemony was a result of and in the hands of public education (e.g., Berliner and Biddle 1995; Saltman 2000). As Nichols and Berliner (2007) write, *A Nation at Risk* "predicted that unless public education received a major overhaul and unless expectations for student achievement were raised, America's economic security would be severely compromised. American education became the scapegoat for a host of bad business decisions" (4). The American economy had been in decline as a result of the issues with fixed capital and uneven and unplanned development (Brenner 2006). However, unable to look at the ontology of capitalism itself, which is dependent on a volatile ecology and mass unemployment, the government and corporate class turned to education in a paternalistic manner. Public education was failing the country by failing to create a flexible and trained workforce and the U.S. was on the brink of letting the Russians or the Japanese or the Germans, depending on which post-war fear one wanted to play on, take over the world. As Timothy Scott (2011) suggests in his study on the past 40 years of neoliberal education reform, "Inflaming a sense of crisis over public education not living up to its intended function of training a servile workforce has provided the primary rationale for what has commonly become known simply as 'education reform'" (273).

Two things should be noted here. First, despite the rhetoric that education was failing students and this was going to hurt the economy, the students who were in these schools during the early 80s made up the workforce in the early to mid 90s when the U.S. experienced growth and prosperity (Au 2009). So the causal correlation between international test scores and economic growth is not based on any empirical evidence. The discourse about international testing, that Americans fall short compared to global competitors, is still common in the media today. However, even if one accepts test scores as a measure of school "success," the international claim of US scholastic inferiority is at best dubious and at worst duplicitous. When class is controlled for, researchers find that the United States surpasses all other nations in reading and science and comes in 3rd in math (Kovacs & Christie 2008). What is never mentioned when talking about international test scores is that the United States comes in first among industrialized countries in terms of child poverty and when these kids get added into the mix, test scores start to fall and a picture of failure starts to emerge (ibid.). What this should suggest is that some public schools in the United States, those with kids who have access to nutrition and healthcare, whose parents or guardians have access to living-wage jobs, and who live in relatively safe neighborhoods, are quite successful – at least if these tests are the normative criteria.

And second, this moment marks a time when the public discourse on education went from one that at least made lip service to things like citizenship and democracy to a technocratic discourse about human capital and economic determinism (e.g., Rose 2010). The business community, in collaboration with the corporate media, think tanks, academics, and other civil society actors, were able to construct a discourse that precipitated a hegemonic shift in the *common sense* about how things *should* be in education. In the Gramscian (1971) sense of hegemony and common sense, which I'll return to later, those in political power were able to compact two slightly contradictory narratives about, on the one hand, equity and social responsibility (i.e., no child being left behind) and, on the other hand, neoliberal/economic reforms/ideology (e.g., Apple & Buras 2006; Pedroni 2007). In his work on the historical and political ecology of the standardized testing movement, Wayne Au (2009) writes that:

> If we look closely at contemporary education policy, we can see how dominant elites work within the common sense boundaries of the capitalist model of production in their discussion of education reform, as well as the way in which they draw on peoples' "good sense" to gain as much support as possible for policies that, in the end, may serve to increase educational inequality. (66)

For education, those in power wanted the public to believe that the *government* monopoly stifled innovation in public education and no one was accountable for the decline in international test scores as teachers were protected by unions and most parents had no choice as to where to send their kids. Goods and services would be better distributed by the private sector, under the guidance of "scientific" Taylorism, which would be motivated to innovate and be more efficient as a result of competition with other education providers. This would provide parents with a choice as to where to send their child and these choices would be *sound,* as they would adhere to scientific principles that facilitated accountability such as standardized assessment and objective measures. In the Taylorist model, those in power have come to define what society wants out of education (standards/human capital). "Experts" and technocrats are called in to tell laypeople, teachers, and administrators the best way to attain these goals and hold workers accountable for generating outputs (test scores). Market competition ensures the quality of these processes, as parents, acting as Smith's rational and self-interested homo economicus, would want their children to get into the best school, regardless of locale and the fact that this model demands that some schools service the capitalists' class kids in order to reproduce social life. Most of this discourse of neoliberalism was sound bytes resurrected from Friedman's (1962/2002) influential *Capitalism and Freedom*, where he argued that democracy is best met and commodities (schooling being one) are best devised in a market-based system where competition and the invisible hand are able to bring about access and opportunity. The discourse of neoliberalism was famously applied to educational doctrines in 1990 with the publication of Chub and Moe's *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, which, like Friedman, framed market-based education "reform" as part and parcel of the democratic project. This transformation of the use of democracy within market-based models of education has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Saltman 2000; Wells, Slatyon, & Scott 2002)

Though at the time the Reagan administration failed to pass legislation on vouchers that it supported (e.g., Henig 2009), it provided a language to begin the process for reforming education within the neoliberal dogma. Jack Gerson's (2012) research on neoliberalism and teachers unions suggests that the "neoliberal campaign initially based itself on two claims": 1) public education was in the decline and the U.S. was falling behind other "industrial nations economically and technologically;" and 2) "this decline was caused by bad teaching and lack of uniformity, and could be fixed by introducing standards, mandatory statewide tests aligned with those standards, and punishment or rewards for schools and teachers based on students' test scores (test-based accountability)" (102). The 80s and 90s (Bush/Clinton/Bush II) saw a rise in the standards and high stakes testing regime with the construction of *America 2000* (Bush I) and the passing of *Goals 2000* (Clinton) (e.g., Sleeter 2007). These acts began to formalize a bureaucratic-inspired national standards and curriculum movement, though ultimately, with the U.S. public still centralization-phobic from the Cold-War Era, states retained the freedom to create their own standards and testing procedures. David Hursh (2011) writes:

> Beginning in the 1980s, states such as Texas and Florida, with George and Jeb Bush as governors, began to implement high-stakes testing as a way to hold students and teachers accountable. Both states began to require that students pass one or more standardized exams in order to graduate from high school. Similarly, in 1996, New York State began to require that students pass exams in five different subject areas in order to graduate. (12)

This positivistic notion of education, which fetishizes the quantification of skills and narrows the possibility for critical and ethical thinking and imagination (e.g., Johnston 2006; Kohn 2012), fails to take into account the radically diverse population of students who make up our classrooms and all of the research, beginning with the Coleman Report in 1966, that indicates that social factors outside of school affect a student's performance on tests (e.g., Rothstein 2004). Instead, with the standards and testing regime in place and the creation of data documenting how students weren't meeting the targets, *failure* became the buzzword surrounding public education. The Bush II era would use this to pass federal legislation that opened up public education to the private sector and a corporate ethos in a way never seen before.

In early 2002, and to illustrious bi-partisan support that signified the Left's full backing of a neoliberalism-with-a-human-face discourse purported by the Clinton administration (e.g., Rupert 2000), Bush II reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), which is commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).[14] Structured around a discourse of excellence and equity, NCLB mandated that every state receiving federal funding must implement a "statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students [and] [a]ssessment results and State progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind" (U.S. Department of Education cited in Sleeter 2007, 2). Many others have written persuasively, both explicitly and implicitly, about how NCLB fits within the logic of neoliberalism (e.g., Au 2009; Biesta 2010; Hursh 2008; Lipman 2004; Meier and Wood 2004; Nichols and Berliner 2007; among many others). This literature argues that NLCB has made teachers solely accountable for student test scores and as students failed to meet targets, teachers and unions came under full frontal attack (e.g., Goldstein & Beutel 2009). Schools that didn't make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) were forced into a series of punitive punishments that included outsourcing teacher development to private companies, sending students to private tutoring providers, and turning schools into charter schools or turning them over to for-profit Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) like Edison (e.g., Saltman 2005). The synergetic difference between NCLB and RttT in terms of getting policies implemented should be noted here. Whereas NCLB waited three or four years to allow for a discourse of failure to generate punitive and neoliberal punishments, RttT is far more coercive. RttT uses the discourse of failure generated by NCLB as its starting point to legitimate its far more aggressive and structural adjustments towards state law.

The punitive punishments of NCLB represent what Patricia Burch (2009) refers to as the "hidden markets" in public education that the private sector had been trying to get at for some time. Though schools have always been under the influence of various forms of commercialism and dependent on private operators (e.g., Molnar 2005), NCLB represents a moment in which the State intercedes on behalf of capital and generatively opens markets up to the private sector while simultaneously expanding the rights of parents, not as engaged participants in their local schools, but as consumers (Burch 2009, 8). Carr and Porfilio (2011) write that NCLB and the Bush era represent the:

> confluence of communications technologies, transnationally oriented state managers, and a cadre of supranational institutions, such and the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO, whose chief purpose is to promote corporate imperatives over the needs of people and the environment, and a corporately controlled mass media meshed together to condition the public to acquiesce to the hegemonic *consensus* that the solution to economic and social problems is to allow the "free market" to be the central force in every aspect of social life, including education, catastrophes, prisons, imperial conflicts, and health care. (xxiv; emphasis original)

Instead of treating education or health care as a fundamental public or common good, guaranteed through public financing and public approval as a foundational institution in American society, the logic of neoliberal individualism contends that, "there is nothing distinctive or special about education or health; they are services and products like any other, to be traded in the marketplace" (Peters cited in Christianakis & Mora 2011, 98). Like wealthy countries and private companies making money on poor and developing countries through SAPs, NCLB enabled the opening of markets for the wealthy and private to capitalize on poor and developing students, eschewing critical dialogue about the history of race in the United States or the role of the widening gap between the rich and poor. Instead, a discourse of blame—toward teachers, parents, and students alike—circulated and individualized the problems. And despite the rhetoric of hope that came with the ascendancy of Barack Obama, the policies of the previous regimes were only intensified and the role the Fed took in initiating these changes only more pronounced.

By choosing Arne Duncan as Secretary of Education, President Obama announced that the types of reforms pursued under the Bush administration were *almost* hopeful and audacious enough for him (e.g., Christianakis & Mora 2011; Lipman 2011; Saltman 2007). If anything is about *change* with the Obama educational regime, it is that Democrats have fully embraced the neoliberal parlance and policy (e.g., Carr & Porfilio 2011). Duncan and Obama would be more effective than the Bush administration in bringing about neoliberal shifts in policy by coercing states to change legislation and adhere to their corporate-sponsored dogma on charters, tests, accountability, and anti-unionism in order to access money from the federal government. While the Bush regime at least feigned giving schools a chance by not making them privatize until they showed that they were going to fail anyway, the Obama/Duncan regime cut the façade of letting schools fail on their own and just got to the point. As CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Duncan oversaw Renaissance 2010, a city-wide plan to "close 60-70 schools and reopen 100 new schools, at least two-thirds as charter or contract schools run by private organizations with greater autonomy than regular public schools" (Lipman 2012, 33). The push behind the project was to create an educational marketplace made up of non-unionized labor and controlled by private organizations, while also reinvesting in certain parts of the city in order to attract business and white, middle-class, suburbanites as residents (Lipman, 2011, 2012). As David Harvey (2008) has suggested, the processes of gentrification, reinvestment, and redevelopment must be read vis-à-vis capital and the reforms in education policy understood as part of the redevelopment game. The city needed to create "good public" schools in gentrified areas to accommodate a new influx of middle-class residents who wanted to send their kids to "good public" schools in the suburbs. They did this by closing down "failing" schools and opening up a slew of charters and contract schools that white, middle-class parents would feel good about (e.g. Saltman 2007; Lipman 2011).

On the poorer and racialized side of the gentrification process, neighborhood schools were closed and thousands of residents in Chicago were displaced from public housing as the private sector moved in to "develop" blighted areas for middle-class families (Lipman 2011). Displaced families had to find new schools for their children and, in the portfolio model of schools in Chicago (some traditional, some charters, some contract, some military), parents were turned into so-called consumers with different choices. Most of the newly opened charters are run by for-profit EMOs and, in line with the corporate model of efficiency and effectiveness, most have a one-size-fits-all curriculum of watered down test-prep and operate under the idea of schooling-for-human-capital. These schools use students' test scores to assess their teachers, most of whom are non-union and considered at-will employees. Moreover, closing down schools and turning them around with charters has "resulted in experienced teachers losing their jobs, not being rehired, and being replaced at the new schools by younger, cheaper, less-experienced teachers" (Christianakis & Mora 2012, 103). Many of these teachers came from the likes of Teach for America and New Leaders for New Schools (Rotella 2010).

With RttT, Duncan was given $4.3 billion of discretionary funding to implement the types of changes he made in Chicago, despite a lack of any evidence that these changes yielded significant shifts in academic achievement (e.g., Klonsky 2009). This fund "far exceeds the discretionary funding for education reform made available to all of Duncan's predecessors combined [and he] is poised to become perhaps the single most influential secretary of education in our Nation's history" (de Sousa 2010, 635). As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, RttT has an economic stimulus pedigree both in regard to what it does to deregulate the educational marketplace for private consumption as well as how it sees a certain type of education (normative/standards-based) as being pivotal to a burgeoning economy. Duncan has referred to the economic crisis as "the perfect storm for reform [that will] transform public education in America" (ibid., 637-638). Though the RttT money is merely a fraction of state expenditures on public education and doesn't get close to sorting out the real infrastructural issues that plague institutions, all fifty states applied for funding looking for anything extra they could get from the federal government, which today funds about 10% of public educational costs. Even Michael Petrilli of the conservative Fordham

Institute calls RttT "the carrot that feels like stick" (cited in Ravitch 2010, 218-219)—it's money (carrot) that comes with disciplining demands (stick), much like IMF and World Bank loans. The application process was arduous and states had to adhere to certain principles if they even wanted to be considered for the funds. These principles, which top-ranking republicans have called a "Republican agenda," are said by Duncan to promote reforms "without regard to ideology or past practice" (Rotella 2010.). However, and as we'll see in the section below in which I examine some specific issues that come up when comparing RttT and SAPs, the evidence suggest quite a different story.

The Issues

What types of conditions/preconditions did nations/states have to adhere to if they wanted money from IFIs or the Obama administration?

This issue has been implicitly addressed above, but should be clarified here. In order for a nation to be granted a loan from the IMF or World Bank, every country, regardless of specific locale or history, needs to adhere to a prescription of neoliberal economic and political ideals that will fully integrate that country, whether it wants to or not, into the global capitalist economy. The structural adjustments a nation must obey include but are not limited to:

> selling state enterprises to the private sector in order to make government more efficient[;] devaluing local currencies…to make exports more competitive in foreign markets[;] reducing government budget deficits by cutting consumer subsidies and charging user fees for social services such as health care and education[;] encouraging free trade by dropping protectionist measure and by reducing the regulation of the private sector[; and] creating incentives to attract foreign capital. (Danaher 1994, 3)

The engine behind these policies works to coerce developing economies to change both agricultural and manufacturing spheres to start producing for export, while simultaneously opening up the borders for FDI and importing foreign goods. V. Spike Peterson (2003), in her post-structural and feminist account of how these neoliberal economies affect women, writes that, "This has often meant a shift from state support for import substitution strategies—which have the benefit of producing for local/domestic consumption and developing local industries—to export-oriented strategies that require a favorable environment for private (foreign) investment" (70). Import substitution strategies are a type of development model that strive to substitute imported goods and services, especially basic needs, with domestically produced ones. Instead, SAPs demand that countries turn their natural resources into export commodities and create internal competition rather than using these resources to develop their own local infrastructures and utilizing a sustainable model to pay off debt. These policies have been implemented universally, without regard to local economies, customs, culture, history, or population. They have, as Kevin Danaher (2004) writes, been inflicted to "discipline the Third World and to weaken the capabilities of the Third World governments in dealing with Northern states, corporations, and Northern-dominated multilateral agencies" (16).

Like the IMF and World Bank, the Obama administration would only do business with states that agreed to pre/conditions that adhered to its philosophy. States couldn't even apply for money if they didn't agree to two preconditions.[15] In the most detailed critical study of RttT to date, Monica Teixeira de Sousa (2010) writes that:

> States were eligible to compete only if their applications for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) under ARRA had been approved and they had no legal barriers at the state level preventing data on student achievement or student growth from being linked to teacher and principal evaluation. (640-641)

SFSF is the name of the $48.6 billion that was earmarked by Congress for education "to help stabilize state and local budgets and to minimize and avoid reduction in education and other essential services" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2009b).

In order to even be able to apply for money from this fund, states essentially had to adhere to the same guiding principles that RttT does:

> college- and career- ready standards and high-quality, valid and reliable assessments for all students; development and use of pre-K through post-secondary and career data systems; increasing teacher effectiveness and ensuring an equitable distribution of qualified teachers; and turning around the lowest-performing schools." (U.S. Dept. of Education 2009a, 2)

$48.6 billion is a decent chunk of money and, as they were strapped for cash due to the recession, most states needed to apply for it. Without that money, states would likely have had to make additional cuts to education budgets, leading to even more unemployment. As "all fifty states were approved for initial SFSF funding," however, they were effectively primed to make the other changes RttT demanded (de Sousa, 2010, 641). The second precondition pertained to not having any legal firewalls at the state level in terms of basing teacher evaluations on student test scores. Again, under the human capital/Taylorist mindset that good teaching means having students that score well on standardized tests, the Administration here is promoting its attack on teachers unions that, as critics say, *protect bad teachers* (e.g., Klein 2011; Klein and Rhee, 2010), as well as continuing its normative use of data to legitimate the idea that "teachers are everything" (Nakamura cited in Ravitch 2010, 172). This is a discourse that has been even more pronounced in policy and pop cultural debates about education since everyone from Oprah Winfrey to Davis Guggenheim, with his Bill Gates-funded *Waiting For 'Superman'*, have contributed to the "bad teacher" discourse.

RttT built on these preconditions by making states show how, precisely, at least on paper, they were transforming their educational landscapes to adhere to the Department of Education's demands. In 19 areas of selection criteria, states could earn points based on their past work in the academic achievement of their students and what they planned to do for the future. The emphasis was to be put on what they were going to do to help *turnaround* the lowest achieving schools. And, as the rhetoric about turning around schools didn't discuss the disparity of inputs between schools, all of the shifts in policy had to do with making the internal/structural workings of schools decidedly more focused on being efficient and expedient in terms of producing outputs (test scores). Turning around schools meant:

> linking test scores to teacher evaluation and compensation [merit-based pay]; the rapid expansion of charter schools; the development of data systems that could facilitate remote control of schools and classrooms; and aggressive intervention for schools with low test scores, including closures, firing of staff, and various forms of state and private takeovers. (Karp 2010).

All states had to implement the same types of reforms, regardless of location and particular history.

Like the IMF and World Bank, these policy shifts mandate top-down reform highlighted by a certain kind of exporting cash-crop/commodities mindset. The entire impetus of the policy is about human capital creation for the economy. To better oneself, the public and cultural pedagogy (e.g., Giroux 2004) around education policy suggests that, one must be career-ready or college-ready (if you're a poor/racialized body) and able to make a contribution to the economy so that the U.S. can compete globally. The net result of education is about economic surplus through exporting oneself into a global marketplace. The local, both in terms of the self and the locale, are seen as commodities to be bought and sold. Ideas about participatory democracy, education for full development, equitably funded free public education, education as a tool for liberation, and other sustainable models, have been torn asunder (Lipman 2011, 165).

Do the types of policies IFIs and the Obama Administration coerced countries and states into adopting help the people they are supposed to?

The short answer is no for both countries and states. In the close to 200 countries—more than four billion people—that the IMF and World Bank policies have had a direct effect on during the neoliberal era (~1973-present), research reveals that: growth of the GDP slowed (Hahnel, 1999, 13); a 60% decline in real salary earnings (Chossudovsky, 1997, 38) and a sharp increase in unemployment as governments were forced to downsize (Hahnel, 1999, 29-30); mortality rates for women and children increased as nations needed to cut spending for healthcare and education (UNICEF 1986); debtor countries' debt increased by 60%, with Sub-Saharan Africa's debt increasing 133% (Gorringe 1999); massive amounts of community-managed uncapitalized land was transformed "into transnationally regulated zones for commercial logging, pharmaceutical bioprospecting, export-oriented cash cropping, megafauna preservation, and elite eco-tourism" (Goldman, 2005, 9); people living on less than one U.S. dollar a day has increased (Danaher 2004, 17); and the distribution of global wealth has become even more askew with 10% of the world population now holding 85% of the wealth. And all this data does little to explain what these changes have meant for the everyday lives of poor people living in these countries (e.g., Balogun 1995; Biehl, 2005; Farmer 2005; among many others). What is perhaps most perplexing about the SAPs put in play by the IMF and World Bank as models for economic growth and development is that they have no precedent in ever creating long-term economic growth and development. Did the United States, or the United Kingdom, Germany, or even Brazil or South Korea or Japan, find various modes of growth and infrastructure through practices of deregulation and privatization? Again, the answer here is no. Though the models of growth for each of these countries have been radically different and each must be historicized locally, some commonalities exist. In the U.S., for example, from about 1940-1973, what Robert Brenner (2006) calls The Long Upturn, the economic and political ecology was marked by state-interventionist policies, strong labor unions, and pretty strident regulation over the markets and the private sector. Further, the U.S. and other developed countries don't adhere to the neoliberal dogma they enforce on other countries as, and in relation to the stories that began this paper, the U.S. spends about $43 billion a year on farm subsidies (e.g., Brown 2003). And so in regard to the IMF and World Bank, a gaping disconnect exists between the policies being put into place and various historical examples of how countries grow and develop.

Despite President Obama's declaration that the policies he was putting into place were a "classic example…of evidence-based policymaking" (cited in Karp 2010), research and the data suggest, rather, a Shock Doctrine application of neoliberal social engineering. I'll focus on just two of the conditionalities of RttT: expanding the charter market and tying teacher evaluation to test scores. In terms of the former, Fine and Fabricant (2012) have organized the most recent and robust review of the empirical literature on charter schools regarding whether or not they have "improve[d] test scores, enhance[d] equity, and promote[d] innovation" (37).

The question as to whether or not charters have improved test scores first came to the forefront on August 17, 2004, when the *New York Times* ran a page one headline that read: "Charter Schools Trail in Results, U.S. Data Reveals" (Henig 2009, 1). The claim of the article was that the Bush administration had buried findings of charter school students scoring lower on their tests as compared to students in "regular" public schools. The political inference was that the Bush administration intentionally kept these statistics quiet as they went against both their education policy and their free market ideology. Jeffrey Henig's *Spin Cycle* (2009) documents the aftermath of this headline, showing how think tanks with political objectives use "science" to legitimate their competing claims. Since 2004, and despite the celebration of charter schools, the two largest national studies (CREDO 2009; Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, & Dwoyer 2010; see also Fine & Fabricant 2012, 40-41) comparing students in charters and "traditional" public schools show that charters are, in the aggregate, either only as effective or less effective than public schools. They do not represent a magic bullet raising student achievement/test scores. And yet, despite the abundance of hard evidence, RttT fixes the possibility of receiving money on removing charter caps in order to turn-around "low achieving schools." Even though "poverty isn't destiny," as the Secretary of Education is fond of saying in relation to poor students in this country, and even though there are examples of excellent public schools serving high-needs students and helping them succeed, most charter schools serving high-needs students aren't helping them surmount the "achievement gap." Charter schools *as* "education reform," have taken the focus away from the core issues that plague our schools and society, particularly social stratification and income inequality. Charters have also been found to be more segregated by “race, class, and possibly language and are more racially isolated than traditional public schools in virtually every state and large metropolitan area in the country” (Orfield cited in Fine & Fabricant 2012, 46; see also Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang 2010). Further, charter schools have also been found to serve a lower percentage of English Language Learners and students with disabilities, which could inflate any of the testing data that shows marked increases in aggregate test scores (e.g., Christianakis & Mora 2012; Dudley-Marling & Baker 2012). Again, this analysis only operates from the normative position of using test scores as data. If this analysis incorporated categories in relation to radical democratic theory about access and diversity, our critiques would be even more severe (e.g., Sizer & Wood 2008).

Part of the logic behind charter schools is to make it easier to tie teacher evaluations to student test scores. As most charters do not have unionized teaching forces, teachers have little say in how they are being evaluated and on what terms their contracts will be negotiated. For years, the Right has made it clear that unions protect “bad teachers” (and by bad teachers they specifically mean teachers whose students do not make good testing marks) by protecting them with tenure and seniority policies.[16] In charter schools, if a teacher isn’t doing a good job (by producing the test scores necessary to promote the ideology affirming charter schools that claims they are helping to close the achievement gap), they can be fired by the administration. This is what accountability means in the RttT ideological context. With RttT, the Obama administration pushed states to ensure that union contracts can’t get in the way of tying student scores to teacher evaluations in traditional public schools as well. Further, the administration looked fondly upon tying teacher salaries to student test scores with what is called merit-based pay. The higher their students’ scores are, the more money teachers can make. The question to be asked is: Is there any evidence that these policies work in producing higher test scores? The answer again here is no. Jack Gerson (2012) writes, “A recent large-scale study of performance pay for public school teachers, conducted by the National Center on Performance Initiatives at Vanderbilt University, found what others had found before: ‘Merit pay’ doesn’t work” (105; see also Garrison 2011). Instead, merit pay increases an environment of competition between teachers and has played a part in the United States’ epidemic of cheating scandals on standardized test scores (e.g., Goldstein 2011). It creates an environment in which teachers are pitted against each other for a piece of the merit-based pie and pushes them to teach to the test instead of fostering a more collaborative environment where teachers are encouraged to work together to meet collegium-implemented learning goals. The comparison between this model and models of creating competition among laborers within IMF/World Bank SAPs is readily apparent.

RttT does not promote the insights of critical or historical research about what makes a (normatively defined) good school. If, for the sake of argument here one defines “good” schools as schools that get high test scores, such schools have not, historically, been entrenched in a series of neoliberal educational policies like charter schools, hyper-accountability, or merit-based pay. Instead, this history might include students who both come from resources and have ample resources on hand for them at the schoolhouse. These are children who have parents with fair-wages, have access to healthcare and nutrition, live in safe neighborhoods, aren’t racially profiled, aren’t stopped and frisked, and aren’t asked to produce documentation of their citizenship. These students, in one form or another, had access to early childhood care and pre-kindergarten. These students have well-paid teachers who work in decent environments and are encouraged to collaborate. They have teachers who have a say in their curriculum and don’t feel externally coerced to adhere to a watered-down, test-heavy pedagogy. These teachers aren’t deskilled by the bureaucratic dogma of standards and assessments, but are seen as professionals and intellectuals, with knowledge and know-how.

If there weren’t data that supported these changes, how’d they gain legitimation?

With the policies that stand behind both SAPs and RttT, you have the richest nations, people, and corporations funding think tanks and other knowledge production agencies to make sure that their messages about free-market ideologies become hegemonic and legitimated. Others have written about this at length and I will just briefly recapitulate what that theory and research explains (e.g., Au 2009; Goldman 2005; Lipman 2011; Peet 2003; Ravitch 2010; Rupert 2000; Saltman 2010).

Moving past a simple notion of ideology—the notion that the political/capitalist class legitimates a set of beliefs and policies by naturalizing them—Gramsci theorized that ideology was held in fragile place not by state institutions, but by civil institutions and individual actors (Peet 2003, 15). Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony suggests, instead, that “common sense” is produced through a continual process of ideological struggle—what he called a “war of position” (242-3; see also Rupert 2000, 11). Through a process of rhetorical sedimentation, including scientific/medical discourses, political rhetoric, education, word of mouth, religious influence, academic discourse, and other iterations, common sense emerges as a contested and unstable set of practices, languages, and ideas. It is not, merely, that those without political power are indoctrinated into the dominant class' ways of thinking, but that those on the ground, through the influence of multiple voices, come to consent to the status quo for a multiplicity of reasons. Ideology works best by preserving the interest of the bulk of the people. Therefore, different discourses about a single policy emerge from different places. For example, in the realm of school choice and vouchers, while on the one hand the neoliberals like choice and vouchers as they represent free-market politics, while poor families and families of color like school choice and vouchers as they may enable options for other private and public schools (e.g., Pedroni 2007). With hegemony, there can be multiple interpretations of a given situation, and yet both of these interpretations (ideologies) may support the same policies. However, and as I'll return to in the concluding paragraphs, hegemony, precisely because it isn't univocal or monolithic, also presents opportunities for counter claims and active protest and agency. Rupert (2000) writes that,

> common sense [which Peet (2003) describes as the "internalization of hegemony" (15)] was understood to be a syncretic historical residue, fragmentary and contradictory, open to multiple interpretations and potentially supportive of very different kinds of social visions and political projects. And hegemony was understood as the unstable product of a continuous process of struggle, a "war of positions," a "reciprocal siege," hardly a foreclosure of the horizons of meaningful political contestation." (11)

Hegemony and common sense are socially produced, and Gramsci provides a model that helps to understand that social change can occur through situated social actors who understand their political and social contexts and actively work to change them in line with radical democracy. Counterhegemonic change can occur through social actors/movements participating in the democratic processes of generating consensus by creating their own positions.

With SAPs and RttT, what exists is a culmination of neoliberal institutional hegemony and ideological discourse, conflating science and philosophy into a common sense narrative about what makes the most sense in terms of dealing with questions of development and education. For neoliberal educational administrators, the free market brings democracy and freedom, eschewing conversations that frame having access to quality *public* institutions and goods as human rights. The World Bank and the IMF are filled with extremely wealthy professionals and intellectuals, most of whom had the same type of economic education in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada, who produce reports and make declarative statements about the best possible models for sustainable development on behalf of capital (e.g., Wood 2004). Since the 1970s, the World Bank, in particular, has funded a "scientific-bureaucratic infrastructure…to produce the knowledge necessary to support its loans [and] these investments fueled the growth of national agencies, institutes, universities, and a burgeoning class of professionals whose budgets and livelihoods depended on development agency funding" (Goldman 2005, 35). In other words, not only do IFIs coerce developing countries to agree to structural adjustments, but, as they have fueled and funded an entire development economy, they have also made civil institutions dependent on their loans and, therefore, on their knowledge about development processes. This type of dependency marks a culmination and collusion between political/economic ideologies being espoused by IFIs from their offices in D.C. to more local, on-the-ground institutions in developing countries.

The turn of the 21st century saw a shift in philanthropic giving to public education. Whereas the history of "traditional" philanthropy in the U.S. was marked by a sense of "giving back" to the community (liberalism), the emergence of the Gates, Walton, and Broad axis represents a shift to what Ken Saltman (2010) calls venture philanthropy (VP). VPs, all of them making their fortunes in the global marketplace, started to press that the organizations they gave their money to were accountable for producing results. As Frumpkin writes, "Rather than simply being a purvey of charitable funds for deserving organizations of all sorts, venture philanthropy promised to turn donors into hard-nosed social investors by bringing the discipline of the investment world to a file that had for over a century relied on good faith and trust" (cited in Saltman 2010, 75). Instead of giving money out of social obligation and allowing experts in education or art or healthcare do with that money as they see fit, VPs want to see their own policies implemented and returns on their investments. They provide seed money and production costs to organizations that push for corporate changes in education like charters, vouchers, standards and testing, and teacher accountability that they politically and ideologically favor. Without any expertise in the realm of education, without any data to show that their policies work, and without being able to articulate an idea of education outside of the confines of economic human capital, venture philanthropy foundations have done more to set the discourse on education policy than any student, teacher, or professional organization ever has (e.g., Kovacs 2010; Kovacs and Christie 2008). They are called VPs, as part of their agenda, taking a cue from venture capitalism, has been to open up education to the private market through policy (Kumashiro 2012b). VPs have worked to create discourses around public education—that it is failing and what is needed are neoliberal reforms—in order to transform policy (through RttT) and to bring education, which represents a yearly multi-billion dollar marketplace, into the grasp of the private sector. They give money to charter schools, to alternative certification programs like Relay U., to organizations that facilitate mid-career job changes from the private/financial sector to education (principals/superintendents), and, in regard to the Gates foundation, to help states write their RttT applications. Further, as these philanthropies represent the bulk of the possible grant money for research in the field of education, many researchers have felt unable to say anything negative about these institutions or their policies for fear of being turned down for future funding (e.g., Ravitch 2010). This has stifled the conversation about the future of education policy outside of the discourses these institutions represent. The synergy of this process is nothing short of magisterial, ruthless, and all encompassing. And it's here, as Gramsci pointed out, where hegemony is revealed. It's not only when and how the dominant bloc produces knowledge, but also when those in power "'pos[e] the questions around which the struggle rages'" (Gramsci cited in Goldman 2005, 7). As common sense now functions, to do "education reform" means adhering to the neoliberal dogma. Any other talk about capitalism, about inputs, and about equity is written off as childish, utopian thinking. And this is precisely what Mark Fisher (2009) means when he describes the current moment as being inflicted with *capitalist realism*.

Moving Forward

In this paper, I've sought to describe the similarities between global and domestic institutions that have had their way with people in unequal positions for quite some time. In the interest of capital, politics, and power, these institutions have brought about a sea change in policy that will continue to affect the dispossessed and disadvantaged in adverse ways for the foreseeable future. Moreover, they have affected the way the majority of society thinks about living in a global world, the way members of society speak about neighbors and strangers, and the way moral questions about what is possible get articulated. More fundamentally, in terms of political process, IFIs and the Obama/Duncan regime denigrate democratic participation, dialogue, and collective input by implementing top-down procedures. The policy prescriptions tied to loans and grants are not only undemocratic in their implementation. The policy results, the marketization of social life, are anti-democratic in their material manifestations.

The hegemonic discourses put forth by the IMF and World Bank and the Obama administration are best fought and countered by those on the ground most materially affected by their implementation. Within the realm of the hegemonic exists room for dissent—both based on past experiences and in more emergent forms. Since the mid-70s, when SAPs came to be forcefully imposed on "developing countries, strikes, protests, and mass organizing has been seen in Argentina, Morocco, the Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Venezuela, Indonesia, Berlin, Seattle" (Peet 2003, 87-93), and, against a different institution implementing the same types of austerity measures, in Greece, Spain, and Portugal. In the U.S., a variety of different organizations are beginning to speak out against RttT, NCLB Waivers, and Obama/Duncan's Blueprint. To name just a few, groups like the Forum for Educational Accountability, The Forum on Democracy and Education, the NAACP, The Urban League, Education Radio, Rethink Learning Now, NYCore, the Chicago Teachers Union, and Communities for Excellent Public Schools all have or are starting to forcefully speak out against the President's education policies. Most of these groups vehemently oppose the one-size fits all model of school reform and the excommunication of communities and democratic processes that highlight the administration's mercenary tactics. In a powerful document titled, *Our Communities Left Behind*, Communities for Excellent Public Schools (2010), a "national coalition of community-based organizations composed of parents and students [and teachers and academics and community members] in low-income communities" (1) pushes for what they call a "Sustainable School Transformation" (13). This model for turning around the poorest and lowest-achieving schools (on test scores) calls for: 1) "a highly qualified staff, high expectations and a challenging and engaging curriculum that prepares all students for higher education and meaningful work and civic participation [and] supported with the necessary resources," 2) a "social service scaffolding necessary to ensure that all students have their basic health and emotional needs met," and 3) "[f]amilies, students, communities and school staff…play[ing] a meaningful role in designing and implementing a school transformation plan" (11-12). This last articulation speaks directly to what Ken Saltman (2000) has in mind when he writes:

> First, a theory of school choice would need to grapple with the political economic question of who controls the means of production and, second, the cultural-linguistic related question of who controls the means of identification production. . . . Any meaningful democratic theory of school choice must grapple with the issues of radically redistributing to the people the control of capital and the control of identification production (meaning-making technologies). (52)

In order to think about choices and possibilities in education, collectives and movements first need to have conversations about what is being chosen and why students are being educated. Those interested in social justice need to reclaim these conversations as part and parcel of the terrain of struggle and resistance to neoliberal reforms. Conversations about education should clearly resonate with conversations about access to public resources and a variety of issues that come up in progressive media outlets. The fight for schools is lead by similar values and questions that arise when thinking about the values of any public institution: equity, access, public purpose, and public ownership (Sizer & Wood 2012). The wealth and power behind the IMF and World Bank is the same wealth and power bankrolling the types of reforms represented in RttT. Critical pedagogies, ones that counter the privatization and standardization of contemporary life, seek to highlight these relations so as to raise sociopolitical consciousness. This consciousness is one born in the political, for the political, and its development is crucial for fighting these institutions in pursuit of justice and radical democracy. Activists, scholars, educators, parents, and community members need to work to make visible the relations between the Unholy Trinity of Peet's work and charter schools, highlighting the centrality of capitalism and the impossibility of radical democracy and radical equity within it. As RttT continues to privatize education in mostly poor communities and communities of color, and as we continue to highlight the relationships between these reforms and global processes linked to colonialist and imperialist ventures, one has to hope that those speaking out against what "education reform" means today will see relation and engage in larger global solidarity.

Notes:

[1] This number, CHRGJ (2011) reports, is also considerably low, as it does not include women. In order to be officially counted as a farmer in the terms of the Indian state, you need to have title to land, which in many instances excludes women.

[2] International Financial Institutions (IFIs), like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, have played a major role in the institutionalization of neoliberal policies like the "extension of market forces and [the] commodification of the Third World" by leveraging their economic and political weight on "developing" countries (Brenner & Theodore 2002, p. 350). As I flesh out in this article, these institutions, which are funded and controlled by powerful countries like the United States, are actively used to hedge desired global policies that will benefit wealthy and powerful countries and the international business class.

[3] Structural adjustment policies (SAPs) is a term used to describe a bundle of macro and microeconomic policies that IFIs forced borrowing countries to adhere to in order to receive loan monies. These policies, as I will describe below, radically restructured borrowing country's economies while ensuring debt repayment to the lending countries.

[4] I use the word "developing" in this paper to mimic the language used by IFIs and not in a normative sense. I also use scare quotes around other terms to suggest a meta-distance between the discursive language and material realities. I only put each term in quotes the first time used.

[5] See: http://projects.latimes.com/value-added/.

[6] These waivers, which most states are likely to apply for, grant the states "flexibility" from the punitive measures outlined in NCLB. However, this is anything but the case. Stan Karp (2012), editor at *Rethinking Schools*, writes that "states applying for waivers had to commit to implementing another generation of

standardized tests based on the 'common core' standards that states were also forced to adopt [and] [s]tates must identify the 5 percent of schools with the lowest test scores and turn them into charters or 'turnarounds' or close them down. Another 10 percent with low graduation rates or wide achievement gaps must be targeted for similar intervention." In other words, far from being flexible, The Obama/Duncan regime is using these waivers to further their RttT mandate of neoliberal education reform.

[7] In a general sense, others have also looked at various relationships between education policy and IFIs (e.g., Nyambe 2008; Rikowski 2007; Weiner 2007, 2008). This article both builds on these articles and paves new ground by examining how the U.S. federal government acts like an IFI through the way it narrates, implements, and oversees policy change.

[8] Foreign direct investment (FDI) allows for capital to flow directly from one country or a private entity within that country to a business or production operation in another country. In neoliberal terms, it's thought that FDI, as a process of deregulation, will create more efficiency and unregulated competition as restrictions for production are removed. However, as Harvey (2005) clearly points out, FDI has mostly been used to extend the capitalist class' power by further concentrating power and wealth.

[9] Despite the neoliberal mantra, present both within liberalism and neoclassical economics, of being in favor of small government, actually existing neoliberalism relies massively on the state to set up and maintain markets in sectors such as health care, education, transportation, and communication in order for the private sector to profit. The state actively retreats from the public, and yet, in its retreat, leaves scaffolding reserved for the multinational business class. Further, and moreover, this private class exists within a type of capitalist socialism, or corporate welfare, where the state diverts *public* funds away from social welfare for the people and towards bailouts, tax breaks, loan guarantees, and public-private partnerships. "The state," writes Scott (2011), "acts as a major funding source for private profit…Ultimately, the free-market is a myth within neoliberal capitalism; instead the neoliberal state imposes market discipline and austerity measures on the poor and working-class, while ensuring that socialism flourishes for the ruling class" (272).

[10] I put "first" here in quotes as Robert Brenner (2006), in *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, suggests that the post–war boom showed a marked slowdown in the mid-60's, but didn't manifest itself in the form of a recession until the early 70s with the Oil Crisis.

[11] I put "first" here in quotes as Robert Brenner (2006), in *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, suggests that the post–war boom showed a marked slowdown in the mid-60's, but didn't manifest itself in the form of a recession until the early 70s with the Oil Crisis.

[12] I say arguably as for thirteen years, from 1968 to 1981, Robert McNamara ran the World Bank ruthlessly in the name of Cold War politics. McNamara, former Secretary of Defense for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and before that head of the Ford Division and the Ford Motor Company, fancied his time at the Bank as being part of moral cleansing in the wake of Vietnam. However, as Alexander Cockburn (2009) notes, though perhaps Vietnam occurred on a more vivid and mediated scale, his performance at the World Bank "amplified the ghastly blunders, corruptions, and lethal cruelties of American power as inflicted upon Vietnam to a planetary scale." McNamara expanded the Bank six-fold, and with it American power and geopolitical needs from the mere borders of South East Asia to the globe.

[13] Goldman (2005) cites Robert Wade, a leading scholar on the World Bank, when talking about how the IMF and World Bank were used in the post-1989 (fall of "communism") era to include instead of exclude parts of the world into their economic hold. Wade writes: "'Powerful segments of [U.S.] national elites; realize that Southern and former communist markets could be transformed into U.S.-influenced 'blue areas' more cheaply through multilateral arm-twisting by Bretton Woods institutions than through direct coercion by the U.S. state and its military'" (18).

[14] It should be noted that the neoliberal discourse on the Left wasn't merely accepted within the narrow confines of its conservative ideology. Many poor families and families of color, who traditionally vote Democrat and who had been systemically and systematically left out of public schools in the United States, got behind many of the neoliberal policy shifts not because they believed in their ideology, but because they saw these shifts as possible leverage for more democratic options (e.g., Dougherty 2006; Pedroni 2007).

[15] The *Eligibility Requirements* state that: "(a) The State's applications for funding under [RttT] must be approved by the Department proper to the State being awarded a Race to the Top grant" and "(b) At the time the State submits its application, there must not be any legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers at the State level to linking data on student achievement (as defined in this notice) or student growth (as defined in this notice) to teachers and principals for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2009a, 4).

[16] It should be noted, of course, that teachers unions in wealthy and/or suburban public schools where most students have access to the types of resources necessary to, in the normative sense, achieve at school, are never mentioned as problematic.

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