

NEOLIBERAL POLICIES IN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM:  
IMPACT OF CHARTER SCHOOLS AMONG MINORITY SCHOOL  
CHILDREN IN URBAN CITIES

Ana Lilia Esqueda

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Master of Arts  
In the Department of Sociology,  
Indiana University

August 2017

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Master's Thesis Committee

---

Peter J. Seybold, Ph.D., Chair

---

Robert Aponte, Ph.D.

---

Najja N. Modibo, Ph.D.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Neoliberalism.....	3
Charter Schools.....	7
Statistics.....	14
Educational Achievement.....	14
Poverty.....	15
Social Darwinism.....	16
Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism.....	18
Neoliberal Urbanism.....	20
Mayoral Control.....	22
Education Reformers.....	23
Government, Foundations and Billionaires.....	26
Trump Administration.....	27
Betsy DeVos.....	29
Segregation in Urban Public Schools.....	32
Testing and Merit.....	33
Media, Culture, Stereotypes and War on Youth.....	37
Pedagogy of the Oppressed.....	42
Conclusion.....	44
References.....	49
Curriculum Vitae	

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis is to find out the impact of neoliberal policies in the public education system, especially the impact of charter schools among minority school children in urban cities. The focus will be the ideologies and practices that shape educational policy and their connection to neoliberalism. This will give a better understanding on how different policies, culture and society affect the life of many generations of children from different minority groups in the United States. It is my intent to identify and explain the different causes of the inequality within the primary education system, how neoliberalism has been institutionalized in the primary school system, and the consequences of the neoliberal ideology for economic opportunities of the American children. As I did my research for material pertaining to the subject, I found out that there is a fragmentation within academia. Most journals, books, documentaries, and newspapers had few topics connecting the different problems to the inequality in the public school system. I will try to identify and connect the causes that create such inequality.

Howard Zinn in his book "A People's History of the United States" says that it has been very important for people in power to create the perception of "us vs the others" in our society. Throughout history, this perception has helped the elite to keep white poor people from rebelling against the government; instead, they blame "the others" for their poverty and/or lack of opportunities (Zinn, 2015). In my opinion, there are two benefits that people in power get from this perception. First, they keep minority groups from getting economic opportunities.

Second, people in power continue to amass fortunes without having much opposition. Another perception is that if you work hard, you will achieve economic opportunities. If you are poor, it must be because you do not work hard enough. Totalitarian regimes have succeeded by isolating individuals from the social structures that hold them together. As a result, individuals find themselves alone in a huge government bureaucracy and the power of the state (Hackworth 2010).

After War World II and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, economic opportunities for minority groups were growing, and as a result many Blacks, Hispanics and poor people started to have better opportunities in education. Schools started to desegregate, and poor children, especially children of color, started to attend better schools and had access to a better education. Unfortunately, in the 1990s this advance, that poor children have achieved, started to decline. Urban public schools started to “lawfully” segregate minority children again. Since the 1990s, politicians, corporations and millionaires have been pushing for the privatization of the public school system. They have been claiming that they want all children to have the same opportunities, but the results have not been as great despite the billions of dollars that the government and the private sector have spent on education.

In this literature review, I will explain the ideological economic changes that have taken place in the last three decades. There are different dimensions of this process, from the economic system, cultural ideas, religious ideas, economic interests, social changes, etc. This process has exacerbated economic inequalities that exist in our society. It has specially affected poor and minority

children. Historically, minorities in this country have suffered oppression. There have been some victories like the Civil Rights Act of 1964; but it seems that historically for every victory, there is a setback. Slavery ended, but then Jim Crow laws took place. Jim Crow laws ended and mass incarceration of African American and Hispanics took place. Today, we see how educational opportunities are vanishing from poor and minority school children. As a result, they are sentenced to generational poverty. Religion has played a very important role in the oppression of certain groups. Christianity has been very important in the United States. Christian fundamentalism legitimates inequality as natural, good and permanent. (Brown 2006).

The focus of this literature review is the impact of charter schools among minority school children, and how neoliberal policies are impacting the public education system. This study will attempt to explain how different changes that have taken place are related to the proliferation of charter schools like mayoral control, education reform, education reformers, billionaires, corporations, foundations, privatization, economic policy, welfare, religious ideology, the media, political ideology, cultural ideology, perceptions and stereotypes.

### **Neoliberalism**

Let's start defining one of the most important terms in this research, neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a politico-economic theory that promotes free trade, privatization, least possible government intervention in business, and minimal public expenditure on social services. This theory claims that personal liberty is maximized by limited government interference. Keynesian economic

policy is being replaced by Neoliberalism. Keynesian welfare promotes active government intervention during economic recessions. Keynesian economic policy has been used in developed countries after the recession in the 1930s and World War II in order to create economic expansion (Hackworth, 2010).

Neoliberalism started to influence our economic system in the 1980s.

Neoliberalism does not only impact the economic sphere but the social sphere of our society as well. Lipman describes that “Neoliberalism is an ideological project to reconstruct values, social relations and social identities” (Lipman, 2013). Neoliberalism has been embraced worldwide by most countries, and as a result, we have more inequality and poverty here in the United States and worldwide. We have come to believe that everyone has the same opportunities. It is a chain of personal responsibility. If someone is not successful, it is his or her fault, if someone falls behind, he/she should be able to get up and advance on his/her own, and if someone did not succeed, it is his/her fault. No one should complain for not being able to succeed and advance in life because at the end it was his/her decision. There is not sense of community anymore, and the phrase “it takes a village to...” is long forgotten.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s clearly summarized neoliberalism in her 1987 pronouncement:

there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after our neighbor. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations (Lipman 2013).

Neoliberal thought has made individuals think they have freedom and power by giving up their collective power (like union power and their own civil rights). People have welcomed individualism to their lives by giving up the government safety nets. This ideology has left many people in disadvantage while the ones with most advantages blame them for their own well-being. Unfortunately as time goes by, we see more and more people who live in poverty, with restricted or no access to a good education, health care, food, among other basic needs. Some scholars argue in the book "Rise of Neoliberalism and Institutional Analysis" that neoliberal ideology started because it had to happen. Historic events made neoliberalism happened. It was not an option but the historic circumstances made it possible. They also suggest that it is not the same in every country. Every country established neoliberal policies according to their own needs.

Michel Foucault studied this phenomena. He said that in order for neoliberalism work; there needs to be governmentality. According to Ayo "Foucault was interested in the ways in which humans come to engage in self-constituting practices". He was interested in understanding how individuals shaped their choices to become a certain type of people like health conscious citizen. Foucault described governmentality as a method of social control and political rule in which the development of how such subjectivities happened. (Ayo 2012). Foucault argued that "Governmentality, not concerned with sovereign power, as this is 'too large, too abstract and too rigid', nor located in the 'thin, weak and insubstantial' model of the family." He saw very important relationships

between governmentality and neoliberalism. First one is that under neoliberalism the individual has options and makes “informed” choices without the use of the government’s force or being overtly coercive. Individuals are seen as autonomous individuals who self-regulate and make the best decisions for the best interest of the state (Ayo 2012).

In the last three decades, our government, major foundations and think tanks have invested millions of dollars to improve the education system in the United States (Ravitch 2014). As a result, schools have been privatized, new charter schools have emerged, public schools have been closed, and the government has placed different policies to improve the education system. In 2001, George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, an act intended to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind (Department of Education). Also in 2009, Barack Obama signed in to law the American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009 (Department of Education). According to the Department of Education the ARRA provides:

\$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in 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, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction; Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where

they are needed most; and: Turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

Race to the Top will reward States that have demonstrated success in raising student achievement and have the best plans to accelerate their reforms in the future. These States will offer models for others to follow and will spread the best reform ideas across their States, and across the country (Department of Education).

According to many experts, despite all resources invested in the primary education system; there have been very little or no improvements. Poor children and children of color continue to score low on standardized testing and high school graduation rates have improve minimally. Furthermore, most poor students are not prepared even prepared for college. As a result, poor children and children of color will not have the same economic opportunities creating another cycle of generational poverty (Ravitch 2014). Highly educated and skilled people are a great asset for our society. We need to educate our society, so we continue innovating, discovering, and advancing our society. Also, education provides better economic opportunities for people. Many education specialists agree that a good elementary education foundation will provide to individuals with much better possibilities to succeed in life. After World War II, many countries adopted neoliberal policies in order to create a new economic system and in order to stimulate their economies. The International Monetary Fund was formed in 1944 to advance global monetary cooperation. The IMF has played a very important part in pushing neoliberal economic policies around the world.

### **Charter Schools**

Many have seen that a better option to public schools are charter schools. A charter school is a publicly funded, privately managed institution of education

(K-12 education). It operates under a contract, or “charter,” that governs its operation. Contrary to public schools, charter schools have regulatory freedom and autonomy from state and local rules. Every few years, the authorizing agency reviews and renews (or revokes) charter schools permits. Some state laws require charter schools to run by non-profit entities, but they may also contract for-profit management corporations. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2015 there were 6,700 charter schools and enrolled approximately 2.9 million students in the United States. In the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, charter schools are a major component. The act determines that students enrolled in schools that are classified as under-performing by state standards have the option to enroll in a different school in the district. The act also states that failing schools will be designated charter schools if they do not show acceptable progress on a yearly basis.

The general agreement is that public education in the United States has failed, especially in urban cities where minority school children attend. Many also claim that this situation will have terrible consequences for the United States economic power in the world. As a result, many people, whom from now on I will call them neoliberal reformers, see that the answer to this problem is to privatize public education (Peck 2015). Many would say that George W. Bush and Barack Obama are the ones who started reforming the education system and created similar education policies like the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 and the American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009. In fact, the criticism of public education started when Ronald Reagan assigned the National Commission on

Excellence in Education in 1983 a study called Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. Ronald Reagan wanted to minimize or completely eliminate the federal Department of Education. This report seeded the idea that public schools were failing. This is when education reforms started to take place and massive cuts for education started. In the 1990s, schools started to test children in order to have quantitative data to be able to close “failing schools.” By 2009, neoliberal reformers had an obsession on standards and testing students, free market choices, and had a strong agreement that government will not be able to fix the problem (Peck 2015).

Public education was once considered a fundamental individual right and a vital pillar for our democracy. This concept has been transformed in the last thirty years. Public education principles now are free market-based. It requires accountability, choice, competition, deregulation, privatization, and other free market principles. Teacher unions have been weakened leaving teachers with almost no rights such as tenure and seniority rights. The attack on public schools by education reformers have been mostly directed to low-performing urban schools where the majority of students are low-income, African American and Hispanic children. Low-test scores are used to dismantle the public education system (Conner and Monahan 2016). Democrats and Republicans have supported these neoliberal education policies. Neoliberal reformers have stated that “their education reform” is a civil rights movement in order to gain public support. Duncan, Secretary of Education under Obama, said ‘is the civil rights issue of our generation and one sure path to a more equal, fair and just society

(Obama, 2008). Conservatives even say that they are fighting on behalf of low-income children of color in order to pass their education reforms (Peck 2015).

Charter schools have created new problems in the education system. Charter schools have put at risk public education in the United States. Neighborhood public schools have been closed causing the displacement of thousand of students and creating more segregation, some are even calling it hyper-segregation. Charter schools are more segregated than public schools (Conner and Monahan 2016). For example, at nine Boston charter schools, less than 1 percent of students are white. Also, there have been claims that charter schools are not fair when it comes to accepting students. They tend to reject children with disabilities and children who do not speak English. Charter schools in some instances have very complicated application process that put in disadvantage children with uneducated parents or parents who do not know how to navigate on the process (Kozol 2016). Also, charter schools are taking away funds that were supposed to go already-underfunded public schools. Finally, public schools are very important for communities and are part of the civic life. Charter schools are eroding community trust in the public education. Parents and students are being disenfranchised taking away their pride and identity (Conner and Monahan 2016).

Even though, charter schools usually operate as non-profits, the private sector has strongly demanded construction of charter schools. The reason is that private landlords own the lands on which charter schools are located. This has created a lot of interest from real-estate investors. Even state and local

governments have also been willing to help with financing (Grant, 2013). There have been several billionaire groups that have funded charter schools. This has created a lot of concerns because some of these groups have their own agenda, which in the long term this will not benefit many children and our society but only these billionaires will be benefited.

Charter school quality is uneven across the states and across schools. Since they are privately run, each charter schools has different standards. There are charter schools around the country that are in really bad conditions that they do not make it through the school year. Some charter schools close even without notice, and some even close within weeks of starting the new school year leaving children with no school to attend for the rest of the year (Grant 2013). For example in 2014, a Florida newspaper found out that since 2008, 119 charter schools have been closed. Fourteen schools out of the 119 schools never even finished their first school year. One might think that charter schools are rigorously screened before they are allowed to open by making sure that they are financially and academically sound, but this is not the case. Another example is that in 2013 Florida's Ivy Academies closed after just seven weeks of opening due to a lack of school buildings. They did not have enough classrooms to accommodate students. Charter school operator, Trayvon Mitchell, was accused of spending funds for students on himself. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Fraud in charter schools is happening all over the country.

The problem with the approval process for charter schools is that they get paid per student basis, money follows the student. That is on average \$7,000.00

on every student enrollment. Money adds up and charter schools receive millions of dollars every year. It has become easier for operators to commit fraud.

Unfortunately as I already mentioned, these are not isolated incidences. In the state of Pennsylvania, at least ten executives have plead guilty in the last years for committing fraud, misusing funds and obstruction of justice. A study in Ohio found that charter schools wasted public money nearly four times more often than any other type of taxpayer-funded agency.

Charter schools have received in the last 10 years \$3.3 billion from the federal government. In 2006, there were 6,800 charter schools in the United States, and 3 million children were enrolled in charter schools (Richardson 2017). There is the perception among civil rights organizations that charter schools do not have the transparency and accountability for students, especially minority students who attend charter schools. Today, many conservatives think that education should not be funded with public money instead they should be funded by corporations, private organizations and churches. Conservatives and neoliberals claim that corporations, private organizations and churches will determine who can and cannot attend their schools. This is the ultimate goal of the neoliberal agenda. Today, public schools have been closed because of underperformance, but many underperforming charter schools are not being closed. In some cases, charter schools are worse on discipline, have lower test scores and have higher level of racial segregation (Douglas 2017).

The NAACP has spoken out many times in the last seven years against charter schools. Here is the NAACP's 2016 resolution.

The NAACP is calling for a moratorium on the expansion of charter schools at least until such time as: charter schools are subject to the same transparency and accountability standards as public schools, public funds are not diverted to charter schools at the expense of the public school system, charter schools cease expelling students that public schools have a duty to educate and charter schools cease to perpetuate de facto segregation of the highest performing children from those whose aspirations may be high but whose talents are not yet as obvious (Richardson 2017).

It is very important to keep in mind that the charter school concept came when white academics wanted to affect the national conversation about desegregation and public education after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Originally, it did not intend to “improve” education among minority children as many education reformers claim now. It intended to create parent-student choice, competition and school autonomy. This was their solution to what many saw as an intrusion from the government in the public education (Richardson 2017). In the south, charter schools have been used to slow down desegregation and make sure black children would not go to school with white children. As we can see, charter schools have long been used to disempower children of color and not to empower them as many education reformers claim.

Pauline Lipman explains that there is a two-tiered school system in Chicago. There are magnet or boutique schools under the Renaissance 2010 gentrified and affluent neighborhoods and many disinvested neighborhood schools (Lipman 2014). Parents across the city are trying to have their kids in these magnet schools without much success. Instead of investing in every neighborhood school, Chicago school district is closing down public schools in the Renaissance 2010 area and opening charter and privatized schools. Chicago

school district is firing certified and qualified teachers and dismantling locally elected school councils. There has been a creation of a market of public education, and it has become the national neoliberal agenda.

### **Statistics**

Unfortunately after a couple of decades, we have not seen significant educational improvement with the proliferation of charter schools. Educational achievement has not improved among minority children as it has repeatedly been promised. We have also seen that poverty has deepen among minority children. Economic resources have been used in charter schools, but almost nothing has been done to fight poverty. As a result, the ones who have benefitted from charter schools are billionaires and corporations, not minority school children as the following educational achievement and poverty statistics show.

#### **Educational Achievement**

According to the United States Census Bureau in 2015, almost 9 out 10 adults (88 percent) in the United States had at least a high school diploma or GED, and nearly 1 in 3 adults (33 percent) had a bachelor's or higher degree. Blacks and Hispanics had the lowest percentage at both levels. Eighty seven percent of Blacks had at least a high school diploma or GED, and 22 percent had a bachelor's degree. The number for Hispanics are even worse. Sixty seven percent had at least a high school diploma or GED, and 15% had a bachelor's degree. According to many experts and researchers, poverty is the biggest predictor in educational achievement.

## Poverty

President Obama said in 2013:

A child born into the bottom 20 percent has a less than 1-in-20 shot at making it to the top. He's 10 times likelier to stay where he is. In fact, statistics show not only that our levels of income inequality rank near countries like Jamaica and Argentina, but that it is harder today for a child born here in America to improve her station in life than it is for children in most of our wealthy allies-countries like Canada or Germany or France. They have greater mobility than we do, not less. (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013, para. 22)

Now, let's take a look at the poverty statistics. According to the Census Bureau in 2014, approximately 46.7 million people (14.8 percent) of the U.S. population lived in poverty. Nonetheless in 2014, the poverty rate for Blacks was 26.2 percent and for Hispanics was 23.6 percent. As we can see, there is a big poverty rate disproportion between the national average and the average for Blacks and Hispanics. Also, there is a wide poverty rate disproportion when it comes to education. In 2014, 29 percent of adults without a high school diploma lived in poverty. On the contrary, just 5 percent of adults with college degree or higher lived in poverty.

All children should be considered the most important asset in the United States without considering their race, gender, ethnicity, income and sexual orientation. They represent our future, and we need to make sure they succeed. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In 2014, children represented 23.3 of the U.S. population, and approximately 15.5 million (21.1 percent) were poor. When we consider deep poverty level statistics, which means that annual income is less than half of poverty threshold, rates by race vary considerable. Of the 15.5 million of poor children, 6.2 million were living in deep poverty in 2014. Eighteen percent

of Black children and 12.9 percent of Hispanic children were living in deep poverty, compared to 9.3 percent of overall children living in deep poverty.

Racial inequality in income is worse than it was in 1980. Between 1980 and 2004, the hourly wage gap between White workers and Hispanic workers increased by 24%, and the gap between White workers increased by 162% (Heartland Alliance, 2006). Low-wage service jobs are held mostly by people of color. Also, people of color are hit harder when there is an economic crisis. Since the 1980's, the government has passed laws like war on drugs that have disproportionately affected Blacks, Hispanics and immigrants by tripling the US prison population. As Henry Giroux explains, "this is mirrored in schools by zero tolerance discipline that disproportionately punishes and excludes low-income students of color, contributing to the school prison pipeline" (Giroux 2016).

### **Social Darwinism**

As mentioned before, people in power have used to their advantage the perception of "us vs them" throughout history. We should not continue letting them make the decisions for us. There have been different ideologies at different times. For example, in order to have slavery, Black people were not seen as humans. Another example is the ideology of Manifest Destiny which is the thought the expansion of the United States through the American continent was both justifiable and inevitable. Neoliberalism is just another justification for some people to continue in power and become rich. Many experts believe that neoliberalism is the continuation of the social Darwinist ideology.

According to the End Poverty Initiative, more than 1 in 5 children in the United States are living under the official poverty line. Nearly 1 in 3 Native

Americans (29.2%), over 1 in 4 African Americans (27.2%), 1 in 4 Hispanic/Latinos (23.5%), 1 in 10 Asians (10.5%) and 1 in 10 whites (9.6%) live below the federal poverty line. Social Darwinists argue that there are certain people who are less intelligent and capable and that only the fittest will survive and succeed. In my opinion, Social Darwinism is very similar to Neoliberalism today. Social Darwinism evolved into neoliberalism. Social Darwinism was more overt in the 1800s, and neoliberalism is more unconscious in our society. Our society thinks today that we need to dispose of the unfit. Every time I try to explain this way of thinking to people, they just do not understand. Even when I use the term Neoliberalism, they do not know what neoliberalism is about. Many people, including me, thought Neoliberalism is about the deregulation of the economic markets, but it is not.

Herbert Spencer was one of the most influential Social Darwinist in the 1800's. Spencer was the one who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" which meant a constant struggle among species. Stronger species survived and weaker ones would not. Social Darwinism sees the same thing with humans. Just the "fittest" succeed. It is a natural law, according to Spencer and Social Darwinists. Social Darwinism was used in all aspects of society like social, political, economic and education. Social Darwinism also emphasized individualism and that government should play a very limited role in our society. According to Keb, our education system today continues to be influenced by Spencer's Social Darwinist theories. For example, human needs are still part of the curriculum activities, the continuous growth of voucher systems for private

schools like charter schools, the shrinking role of government in public schools, and testing.

As I already mentioned, Social Darwinism was more overt in society in the past, and today neoliberal thought is more unconscious. It has taken decades for the neoliberal thought take root in our society. People most of the time relate Neoliberalism with the regulation of the market which is just a small part of it. As I read the literature, Neoliberal thought is everywhere. It is part of our culture, institutions and even part of the Judeo-Christian religions. It is in all the structures of our government such as the health care system, education, political, judicial, housing, etc. Jamelle Bouie, a political correspondent for the Slate Magazine, explained that certain ideas are rooted very deep in our unconscious that it is hard for us to realize they are wrong. He mentioned that a racist person will not perceive or acknowledge that other person is being racist because that person has very subjective idea of reality. For example, that person holds ideas that are not necessarily true like thinking that there are people who are superior. Therefore, if someone says that a certain person is inferior, the racist person will not see anything wrong with it (Slate 2016).

### **Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism**

While reviewing all material, when it came to charter schools, there were very few connections between neoconservatism and neoliberalism. I kept thinking that many of the neoliberalist ideas were similar to Christian ideals, especially evangelical ideals. Not surprisingly, Evangelicals have supported the Republican Party since 1980 which is exactly when the neoliberal thought started to take place in the United States. Evangelicals believe that there should be a

limited government and that faith based organizations are should be in charge of providing social services. They do not trust the government in providing social services. Also, they emphasize personal responsibility (Hackworth 2010). A study found that in different articles the most common words used were government, taxes, poverty, regulation and economic policy when it came to social issues.

There was clearly a sentiment of antigovernment, privatization and individualism.

Here is a clear example of such articles:

The solution to the U.S. welfare-poverty crisis is to bring private initiative into partnership with government. One idea of privatizing public charity would allow individual taxpayers rather than politicians and bureaucrats to decide how a portion of welfare dollars is spent. A system would be set up by which individuals would allocate their tax dollars to a qualified charity, public or private. In this way, public and private charities would compete (Hackworth 2010).

Also in these articles, people who receive welfare were seen as children, the government as a parent who spoils his children, and evangelicals were seen as responsible adults who do not depend on the government. Evangelicals claim that when the government is involved in providing social services it usually does it inhumanly, inefficiently, costly and worthless (Hackworth 2010). As we can see there are many similarities in these two ideologies, moral and market political rationalities. Neoliberalism and neoconservatism have devaluated political autonomy, have transformed political problems into individual problems by offering market solutions, have produced a consumer-individual to be governed, and have legitimated statism. We have concentration of power between corporate and governing elites which threatens the foundation of democracy as many critics of these two ideologies suggest. We are facing the extinction of a

democratic political culture and “the production of the undemocratic citizen” (Brown 2006).

Neoliberalism and neoconservatism claim that all political and social problems should be solved by the markets. For example, bottled water as a solution to contaminated tap water, charter schools as a solution to the collapse of public education, security devices, private security guards and gated communities as solutions to the rise in crime due to economic inequalities. Privatization means to outsource police forces, prisons, welfare, and schools to corporations and private institutions. This privatization has penetrated deeply in our culture as the media and other outlets keep normalizing it (Brown 2006). We have seen how increasingly Christian values are constantly mixed within the political discourse and debate. We saw how in the 2016 election, evangelical Christianity mobilized for state authority and power and converted it to right-wing political populism.

### **Neoliberal Urbanism**

One very important aspect that has had a direct effect on the proliferation of charter schools, deepen segregation in public schools and closure of public schools is neoliberal urbanism. In many United States urban cities, neoliberal corporate and politicians are trying to reposition their cities by promoting development in education, housing, infrastructure, and governance. In order to achieve their goals, they are creating social exclusion such as low-income people and people of color. Public schools in urban cities have faced closures to give space to new real-estate developments. The trend has been that low-income people and people of color have been displaced from their communities. In many

cities, big corporations, rich, white people now occupy those spaces (Pedroni 2011). Neoliberal urbanism brings a 'spatial fix' through a process Pedroni and others call "accumulation by dispossession." Pedroni states "this spatial fix, also a racial fix, reproduces and intensifies inequality and exclusion along lines of race, class, ethnicity, and does so in new ways; ways that beg for the imagination of new forms of resistance" (Pedroni 2011).

Urban neighborhoods are not just homes, but opportunities for profit and redevelopment. There is the renewal fantasy promotion that developers create in order to hide discriminatory practices to force to move poor residents and create an influx of young, rich white people into these neighborhoods. These cities have been radically altered by gentrification since 2000. Gentrification is the process of renewal and rebuilding by having middle class and affluent people moving to those areas and displacing poor and marginalized residents. Neighborhoods that were occupied by the poorest are now being occupied by the richest. Gentrified neighborhoods are getting whiter and richer while neighborhoods where the poor are being displaced are getting darker and poorer. This pattern is expanding across the United States, and it is not going away anytime soon. We clearly see it here in downtown Indianapolis. Many urban cities have had radical transformations in recent years. This transformation hides within all the racial and class tensions that exist today. It also isolates poor blacks and Hispanics from better opportunities (Lipman, p86).

One clear example of forced removal from their neighborhoods is the residents of New Orleans where the majority of students now attend charter

schools. Investors had clear land, and their investments had almost no risk. Investors are being given tax breaks in urban cities from local governments to invest in these areas for commercial and residential purposes. New schools are being opened in these areas, but they are not intended for the low-income children and children of color any more. As Pedroni claims “Schools now can be recreated as if Brown v. Board of Education never happened.” The discourse of neoliberal urbanism is “change,” “rebirth,” “regeneration,” “renaissance” of schools, housing and neighborhoods (Lipman, p64). Neoliberals have used the failure of models, especially in cities, such as the welfare state, public education and other public services in order to gain public support.

### **Mayoral Control**

Neoliberal ideology is not only supported by the Republican politicians. Democrat politicians also support many neoliberal policies. Today, we can see that many urban cities governed by Democrat mayors have implemented neoliberal policies in the education system. As already mentioned, neoliberal urbanism has taken place in many urban cities in the United States. In order for city mayors to be able to close public schools, open new charter schools, hire and fire teachers, etc., there have been some changes in state laws that give mayors more power, especially when it comes to education. There have been instances in which old public school buildings are now private or charter school buildings. Unfortunately, these private or charter schools do not have same students that used to attend these schools; instead, they have affluent children attending these private or charter schools. Students who attended those public

schools are being displaced to other public schools that are sometimes in worse situation and are segregated (Lipman, p98).

In order to continue with their neoliberal agenda, mayors in many urban cities have taken over school systems. Mayoral control allows mayors to appoint school boards and officials. In many cases, city mayors have appointed CEOs and not educators or people who have knowledge or experience in education (Lipman, p60). As a result, school districts are being managed by corporate, market driven, neoliberal people. Their only concern is being cost-effective and performance of the schools and not the children's education. Mayoral takeovers have used coercive power to enforce their neoliberal agenda. School principals and teachers have been fired without any explanation and being replaced by teachers with lower pay and teaching experience.

Many supporters of mayoral control argue that it will create more accountability in the school system. The people initially elected school board officials, but that is changing in many urban cities in the United States (Lipman, 2011). Their excuse also is there the number of turn out voters has decreased considerably. Finally, they also claim that by having mayoral control of the school districts, the low grades will improve. This claim has not proven true in some cities. Grades and performance has remained the same or has even been worse in mayoral control school boards.

### **Education Reformers**

We change our perceptions or ideas when we use language. Words are very powerful! For example, slavery in the United States used to be called "our peculiar institution," and deportation is called "removal." The same way it was

called when Indians were put into reservation camps. People in power know how to use words in order to convince people that they want the best for children. Politicians and people in the private sector call themselves “education reformers,” and “civil rights fighters” in order to pursue their agenda. Once one word is repeated over and over in the media, school, and everyday life, people believe it is what it actually means.

Opinions about public schools are very negative, especially, urban schools, and it is continually being reinforced by the media. Films and documentaries constantly show that public schools are falling apart and the system is just not working (Ravitch p4). According to Diane Ravitch, there are many education reformers that try to change or get rid of the public school system. These education reformers claim that they are doing it because they want to help the vulnerable populations such as people with disabilities, the poor, blacks and Hispanics, etc. She explains that “It appeals to values Americans have traditionally cherished-choice, freedom, optimism, and a latent distrust of government. Diane Ravitch denounces this claim by education reformers” (Ravitch p25).

Instead, Diane Ravitch asserts that the reasons why urban schools are in such a bad situation are poverty and racial segregation. Furthermore, urban schools’ buildings are in very precarious conditions, class size is larger, have fewer personnel to assist children with disabilities, and have fewer personnel to assist children with different needs. Diane Ravitch criticizes education reformers by saying that in reality they do not want to reform public education but to

eliminate it completely. Reformers, she explains, want education to be privately managed. They want a free-market system of schooling. In my opinion, education cannot be privately managed. Businesses just take the best in order to make a profit. Education cannot just take the best! Children are not merchandise and cannot be treated as such. We cannot return a student because is “defective” as we can do with merchandise. There is evidence that private schools reject children with disabilities and who score low on their tests.

Diane Ravitch also explains how the school system is just teaching children how to test. Teachers are being forced to teach just how to test. There is no more critical thinking in the education system. Rich neighborhood schools have full curricula, experienced staff, arts programs, libraries, gymnasiums and small classes while urban schools do not have any these. Diane Ravitch affirms that there are problems within the education system, but that education reformers fail to acknowledge that poverty and racial segregation are the main problem. Nothing will be fixed if those two important problems are not fixed. In my opinion, all institutions fail to acknowledging these two problems; therefore, we have all the inequality that exists today.

Millions of dollars are being spent by trying to “reform” the education system without really fixing anything. The only thing that education reformers are promoting is the perpetual culture of survival of the fittest and the economic success of the most advantaged. As Paulo Freire explains, there are two types of pedagogies used in education, pedagogy for the rich and pedagogy for the oppressed. There are two school systems in the United States, one for the rich

and one for the poor. The one for the rich ensures these children will be part of the political, intellectual and economic elite. The one for the poor ensures these children will continue to be on the bottom without able to achieve any success in their lifetime. It ensures they will be able to follow the rules and standards without questioning anything (Freire 2000).

### **Government, Foundations and Billionaires**

Now let's take a closer look to who the "education reformers" are. We might think that education reformers are experts on education, psychology, pedagogy, child development, poverty and/or civil rights activists. They are not! Education reformers are politicians, government employees, foundations, corporations and billionaires. Same people and institutions that have never cared about poor children but want to make a profit and get rich. As it turns out, these people and corporations have found ways to create a market within the education system like private schools, charter schools, learning materials, online courses, technology, testing systems, etc.

Venture philanthropy has played a very important role when it comes to education policy. Foundations and billionaires' goal is to restructure the education system in the United States. Gates, Broad, Walton and other corporate foundations have greatly influenced funding cuts to public education. This has changed the basic structure of public education and has affected negatively the lives of low-income children and children of color. Foundations and billionaires have seen great economic opportunities from dismantling the public school system in the United States. These are some examples of the benefits foundations and billionaires see, charter schools get student money, charter

schools have lower labor costs since the teacher's pay is lower, investors see a return on their investments because they get tax credits for investing in charter schools, investors also see an increase in their property value in gentrifying neighborhoods making charter school investments more attractive, and finally there is a multi-billion dollar industry to produce and score tests, learning industry and materials for schools. This is not new since foundations and billionaires have amassed great fortunes in the past by changing public policy (Lipman, p119).

We have seen billionaires and foundations making donations to political campaigns in order to gain access to the business of charter schools and to deregulate the public schooling market. They have also let the society know that they are interested in educational reform and try to help poor children and children of color to have access to a better education. Movies like "Waiting for Superman" focus on parental choice and activism meaning that if parents make the right choice their children will have a better education (Tichell and Lizotte, 2016). Waiting for Superman just shows charter schools that are doing well, and it does not show failing charter schools due to inexperienced teachers, lack of resources, and the segregation problem charter schools are creating. Waiting for Superman was given a lot of publicity in the main street media in order to create the perception that charter schools are a better option than public schools.

### **Trump Administration**

Many politicians, foundations and billionaires are so pleased with Donald Trump being elected president. Most members of Trump's cabinet are white males, wealthy, highly corporatized and militarized. Also, most members of his cabinet are not experts and/or have experience in the agencies they are

representing. It seems that what they want is to weaken the agencies that provide social resources to the population. This is the opportunity that neoconservatives have been waiting by having the government run as a business. Most members of his cabinet are neoliberal evangelicals. As already mentioned, they truly believe that free markets should run all aspects of social life. They want to destroy the welfare state and deregulate business as Trump has already done his first month in office.

Donald Trump did not win because he is a great politician. He won because of neoliberalism. This ideology has been around for thirty years. Donald Trump realized that by talking about trade deals, the rigged system, workers being screwed, closed down plants, and the silent majority, it will create an impact on voters because it is all real. Unfortunately, I do not think that Donald Trump will fight for many of the people who voted for him. The human element of his voters was anger and hopelessness, and he capitalized on these feelings. Bernie Sanders supporters and Trump supporters had some of the same feelings and issues. They have two or three jobs, they have a long student debt, they do not have access to a good health care, etc. This is the result of thirty years of policies that benefitted corporations, billionaires, banks, and the professional class. Also, the democrats started abandoning these voters who used to vote for them by aligning their policies with corporations, billionaires and banks. These working people felt abandoned by the Democratic Party, and the Republican Party took advantage of it. Donald Trump will not fight for those people, but he identified those people.

Hillary Clinton did not win because people in the rust belt states have been hurting in the last twenty years, and she did not offer any solutions to them. These same people are the people who were part once of the middle class in the United States. These people were abandoned in the name of globalization, neoliberalism and cheaper goods. Trade deals were to benefit corporations and billionaires, not for middle class workers. The Republican Party love trade deals, but they exploited the desperation many of this workers have. Donald Trump gave them the message, and they believed more that Donald Trump will help them more than Hillary Clinton.

Current secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, has been a strong supporter of charter schools in the last decade. During his campaign, Trump promised to spend billions of dollars in charter schools and vouchers. Many fear that Trump's election might put an end to public school and turn the education system to private control (Richardson 2017). Civil rights activists see Betsy DeVos as Wallace legacy's successor. Gallace's inaugural speech "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever." Also, activists see Betsy DeVos as someone against secular education. In 2003, Betsy DeVos provided funding for the Center for Individual Rights during its legal battle with the University of Michigan over affirmative action. She has claimed that the affirmative action policy is unfair, and it should not exist anymore.

### **Betsy DeVos**

One clear example of Trump's cabinet member is Betsy DeVos. She is a neoliberal evangelical, billionaire, and does not have knowledge on education

and/or experience. Her only goal is to dismantle the public education system and privatize education. Betsy DeVos is one of many billionaires who accelerated the expansion of charter schools since 2000. When Betsy DeVos was chair of the Michigan Republican Party in 2000, she supported an initiative that amend the state constitution to allow students to use taxpayer dollars to attend nonpublic schools. Betsy DeVos is head of the American Federation for Children. As described by Rachel Tabachnick:

The American Federation for Children is now the umbrella organization for two nonprofits that have been at the center of the pro-privatization movement for over a decade. In addition to the renamed Advocates for School Choice, it includes the Alliance for School Choice, formerly known as the Education Reform Council. Both entities received extensive funding from the late John Walton, one of the Wal-Mart heirs. The boards of the two related entities included movement leaders Betsy DeVos—scion of a Christian Right family who married into the Amway home goods fortune—William Oberndorf, Clint Bolick, John Kirtley, Steve Friess (son of Foster Friess), James Leininger, John Walton, and Cory Booker (Hutchinson 2017).

The DeVos foundation is part of many right-wing foundations, institutes, organizations and think tanks that firmly believe that Christians must have control over societal and government institutions. DeVos foundation is among other billionaires (the Bradleys, the Coors, and the Kochs) benefactors of the conservative movement and the Christian right. These billionaires fund anti-union and anti-tax organizations as well. There have been strong Christian fundamentalist efforts to impose creationism in public schools and rewrite history, especially the history of minority groups. As an example, some history textbooks have change the word “slaves” for the word “workers.” Christian fundamentalists also want to undermine science literacy (Hutchinson 2017). The DeVos

foundation has financed the ultraconservative and homophobic Family Research Council and sponsored school choice initiatives in Michigan and Wisconsin.

Many activists see that the Christians right's privatization agenda is to destroy racial justice in education. As it was mentioned before, charter school agenda is the result of the Southern states' efforts to stop desegregation mandate in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. It is today a basic strategy in the white nationalism/supremacism empowered by Trump's election (Hutchinson 2017). Many fear that Betsy DeVos will accelerate creation of more charter schools, union busting, public school closings, high-stakes tests and the militarization of school campuses. Current administration's agenda to privatize education also threatens undocumented students already facing a precarious future. Under the current administration, undocumented students face deportation, homelessness and family separation. This will impact enormously for years the already fragile communities that rely on social services to survive.

As we have seen, neoliberalism is the idea that society should be shaped by the free market, and that the economy should be deregulated and privatized. Right-wing people think that what works in the private sector will also work in the public sector. They also have the idea that the public sector should subsidize the private sector in which as we already know is owned by only a few global capitalists (Davis and Bansel, 2016). Business interests have infiltrated the education system in the United States. In the past, public education promoted humanist ideals of democracy, liberty and equality. With the rise of neoliberalism, the education reformers allowed heavy investment into the education system

from private corporations and individuals. In the name of liberty, neoliberals use the works of “choice,” “free-market,” and “deregulation,” to dismantle and then reconstruct the education system in a corporate image. Unfortunately, neoliberalism is everywhere in it is just one political party who supports it. It is both!

### **Segregation in Urban Public Schools**

Neoliberalism has immensely affected public education, and unfortunately poor children and children of color have been the most affected. Education reformers have failed to ones they claim they are fighting for. Instead, billions of dollars are currently going to the private sector instead of being spent on these children. Since neoliberalism started taking place in the United States, segregation in urban public schools has become the norm. Children living in poverty will not have most of the opportunities rich children will have in their life time.

A good primary education is very important for a country, any country, to be successful. Unfortunately, poor people, Blacks and Hispanics do not have access to such education; nonetheless, there is the expectation that these people need to be productive people. If they are not, it is their fault and not society's! According to Boshma and Brownstein, most Black and Hispanic (75 percent approximately) children attend segregated public schools where the majority of children live in poverty. Sean F. Reardon, a professor at Stanford University's graduate school of education and one of the nation's leading experts on residential and educational segregation, said “It's the measure of segregation that is most strongly correlated to the racial achievement gap. Concentrated

poverty is tightly correlated with gaps in educational achievement” (Boshma and Brownstein 2016).

American schools are more segregated now than they have been in more than four decades. In 1988 there were 2,762 schools where 1% or less of the student population was white. In 2011, there were 6,727 schools where 1% or less of the student population was white. As we can see, school segregation has more than doubled in the last twenty years. According to the UCLA Civil Rights project, the south is the least segregated region for black students. In fact, the New York state is the most segregated system in the United States in large part because of the city of New York. It would not be as much of a problem if the quality of the schools were similar, but that is not the case. Black and Hispanic children are more likely to attend schools with higher concentrations of inexperienced teachers and are less likely to attend schools that offer college-prep curriculum. Since race and class are linked, black and Hispanic children are six times more likely to attend such schools. Teachers and principals in poor neighborhood schools have fewer resources. In a study in 2015 by Rucker C. Johnson, found out that minority children who attended desegregated schools were more likely to graduate and 22% less likely to be incarcerated. It also found that it did not have any negative effect on white students (Dynarski 2016).

### **Testing and Merit**

Another example of how people in power and government institutions are making sure poor children do not succeed in their education is standardized testing and meritocracy. As already mentioned, the private sector is benefiting and making money out of these practices. Testing and consulting companies,

among others, are profiting from standardized testing. Testing companies get paid billions of dollars to create tests; nonetheless, many states have had many problems with these tests. For example, in Indiana computers did not grade tests correctly. Also, scores tend to be higher in public schools where middle class and upper class children attend, and lower in public schools where low income children attend.

One clear example of the inequalities that exist in the public education system is the standardized test SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) which is widely used in the United States for college admissions. The SAT started being used in 1926. The SAT was designed to determine students' preparation for college. Many of the critics of the SAT argue that this test has economic and cultural biases which directly affect poor students and students of color. Proof of these arguments is that low income students score lower and middle and upper income students score higher. For this reason, SAT scores have a significant impact on students' admissions (Ravitch 2016). One would ask if this is a fair measure of students' potential. We see that more poor students and students of color are being denied admission to college because of their SAT scores, and as a result this system oppresses them even more.

There is evidence that students with higher SAT scores are not necessarily more intelligent than students with lower SAT scores, or that students with higher SAT scores will eventually contribute more to society than students with lower SAT scores. One variable that researchers have found is that students with higher SAT scores have access to more resources like test preparation

materials and coaching programs (Ravitch 2016). Poor families are not able to provide for these materials that can be very expensive. Another variable that researchers have found is the construction of the questions. Poor children have different vocabulary than rich children, and the vocabulary used in the tests are similar to the vocabulary rich children use. This makes it easier for rich children to have higher SAT scores. Ravitch calls this “cultural bias” because the words used in the questions put poor children in disadvantage (Ravitch 2016).

Some other problems with public schools that are located in poor communities are that they have fewer resources, they have parents with lower educational achievement, they have more single parent families, and they have in some cases less prepared teachers. Even more discouraging, just 5-6 percent of poor children and children of color are ready to enter into college. They score very low in the ACT and SAT test for reading and math. All these factors make it harder to give poor children and children of color equal education opportunities. A strong primary education is very important for children. It will give them the tools to succeed in the future and to compete with other people around the world. Unfortunately, as we already saw poor children and children of color have a huge disadvantage.

Diana Ravitch, a historian of education, believes that the achievement gap is the result of standardized testing which starts in elementary school. Ravitch claims that standardized test results are associated with family income. Rich kids who have access to more resources score higher than poor children and children of color. Ravitch says that causes of achievement gaps and low scores on

standardized testing are poverty and segregation. She also claims that standardized testing does not measure educational quality (Ravitch 2016). For example, children who are really good in arts or are gifted in a different way might score low on standardized testing. These children might not have the opportunity to grow in the fields they have talent.

Our education system is based on meritocracy and not democratic education. The education system in the United States only measures students' intelligence by testing them. It is the only method that exist to evaluate students, so they can have access to an elite university. When test scores and grades are high, students will have access to better opportunities. Unfortunately, students' values, social skills, creativity, ability to solve problems, emotional intelligence, etc. are not taken in consideration most of the time. On the Tyranny of the Meritocracy, Lani Guinier explains that the SAT only benefits white, rich children. Guinier says "the SAT does not measure aptitude, the SAT is actually more reliable as a "wealth test." Meritocracy in our education system perpetuates poverty and lack of opportunities for poor children and children of color (Ravitch 2016).

As already mentioned, rich children have access to preparation resources for the tests than poor children. Parents of rich children spend \$30,000 to \$35,000 in advisors to prepare their children for college. Poor children and children of color cannot afford to spend this amount of money. As we can see, rich, white children have easier access to top universities in the country. It does not necessarily mean that they are smarter than poor children and children of

color. It also does not prove that rich, white children will contribute more to society than poor children and children of color (Ravitch 2016). Different researches tell that when given the same opportunities, poor children and children of color perform at the same level as rich, white children. We need a democratic education system in our society if we want to continue growing economically, scientifically, and intellectually, etc.

The rules in our culture are from the elite's point of view. They are not from the oppressed. The primary education system, particularly in urban schools, is not tailored to poor children and minority children as it should be. These children live in very violent communities, unstable and poor quality housing, have restricted and no access at all to health care, English is not their first language for many children, do not have access to healthy food or no food at all, and finally according to Henry A. Giroux a war against them by the elite. Primary school system is tailored to healthy, rich, advantaged children. The meritocratic school system only rewards to the kids that work hard. Yet as children and adults, poor and minority children are expected to perform at the same level as advantaged children (Giroux 2014).

### **Media, Culture, Stereotypes and War on Youth**

It is not that children of color used to have the same advantages middle or upper income, white children have always had; but as neoliberalism started taking place in the United States, we see how income inequality has affected children of color. The safety nets that the government used to give in order to protect them started disappearing in the 1980's and 1990's with the welfare

reform. Government has reduced the amount of financial help to poor families. As a result, poor families struggle to improve their lives because they do not have money to even cover their basic needs such as food, health care, rent, utilities, etc. Neoliberalism has exacerbated the inequalities that have always existed in the United States. Militarized weapons and tactics are being used in minority children. Privatization of the prison system is also being used against them.

There is a war on children, Henry A. Giroux claims. Children are being bombarded by corporations without any institution to protect them. The media such as TV, movies, and advertisers are selling directly to them a culture of violence, individualism, and unhealthy behaviors. Giroux gives an example on how parents are more worried about a pedophile preying on their children than to all the violence, unhealthy food and life styles they are being exposed to. As an individualistic society, we think that social problems are individual problems; therefore, government should not be involved in fixing social problems (Giroux 2001).

According to Giroux, "White middle-class children often are protected by the myth of innocence and are considered incapable of exhibiting at risk behavior. And if they do exhibit deviant behavior, it is often blamed on the "alien" influence of popular culture or other "outside" forces-well removed from the spaces of "whiteness" and affluence" (Giroux 2001) Unfortunately, this ideology is not applied to kids who are poor, black and/or Hispanic. For example, a cop would not take a white, middle class teenager to jail for a minor offense, but he/she most likely will to a Black or Hispanic teenager for the same offence.

Black and Hispanic youth is usually blamed for the violence in our society and any destructive behavior. These children are being jailed for reasons that should not be allowed in any society. Children have been handcuffed and jailed because they yelled at a teacher, threw a tantrum, disobeyed school rules, etc.

Urban public schools look more like jails than actual schools. Urban school buildings have the most advanced antiterrorism security systems. It seems that schools instead of educating people, they are preparing people for jail, for a system of perpetual oppression. Poor children are being thrown in jail for offences that are minor. Poverty is being criminalized. People in poor neighborhoods are being fined and penalized just for being poor. Advantaged children who commit same infractions or worse ones are being treated differently by the judicial system. As Giroux explains, "In essence, it has become a class and racial sorting machine constructing impenetrable financial and policy boundaries that serve updated forms of economic and racial Darwinism" (Giroux 2014).

The elite even put minorities against each other. For example, Los Angeles School District in the 1990's used propaganda to argue that Hispanics were to blame for Blacks not getting the resources they needed and vice versa. It created a lot of resentment within the African American community against Hispanics. Conservative media such as Fox News continuously blames the poor, blacks and Hispanics for all violence in the United States. They are being called criminals by many politicians and people of power. Donald Trump's campaign was about white supremacy. It blames all minorities for all the economic

problems the United States has. He also blames the first African American president for all the racism that exists in this country.

We have seen in the last decades a war on youth. Instead of investing on youth, they have become the subject of attack. It does not apply to all youth but poor minority youth. Henry Giroux says that the social state has become a punishment state, especially in neoliberal societies. Minority youth live in an era in which there is not hope for them to have a better future. Many scholars agree that the United States is at war with its youth. It is failing enormously to protect its youth. We live in an era in which there is zero tolerance for poor minority youth. On the other side, we have infinite tolerance for the bankers and investors that affect the life of millions of people when they commit fraud and crimes against millions of people (Giroux 2014).

Social problems are being criminalized and social services are being cut back, especially services that are provided to poor minority youth. We usually see that main street media instead of having an informed dialogue, it contributes to the attack on the youth (Giroux, 2013). The United States has entered into a new historical era in which policy decisions translate into an intentional disinvestment in public institutions. This disinvestment makes it harder for poor minority youth to get out of the poverty cycle. In many instances, we have seen how the government has tried to quiet the voices of the youth. For example, the media and conservative politicians harshly criticize the Black Lives Matter movement. Also, liberal and progressive politicians do not support these movements openly fearing criticism.

Since 9/11, the United States has militarized domestic police agencies by providing them with military weapons, war like technologies, training them in war zone military tactics and imposing a war mentality on these agencies. The problem many see is that these agencies will find permissive ways to use these weapons. We can see now that by the age of 23, approximately a third of American will be arrested for a crime (Giroux, 2016). Poor minority youths are seen as predators, a threat to corporations and a disposable population. Their civil rights are being violated with society's permission by the punishment state (Giroux, 2013). In the meantime, many billionaires and corporations have found a way to make money by selling all these weapons to the punishment state. Schools have become repression systems for poor minority youth. We live in a time where poor minority children are being corrupted, disposed, criminalized, etc. Henry Giroux calls these schools prison pipelines because black and Hispanic children are being sent directly to prison (Giroux 2016).

The United States culture is increasingly shaped by a disturbing collective desire of intense excitement by violence. When we see every day images of torture, death and violence, it is easy to be desensitized to the violence poor minority youth is suffering by the punishment state. Our society has blocked its ability to respond politically and ethically (Giroux, 2013). Poor minority youths are only seen as criminals, suspects, consumers, commodities, and disposables. They are not being seen as human beings who have the right to be invested on, deserve compassion or social protection. We see this in schools that model prison and the criminalization of disadvantaged youth. For example, a five year

old in Florida who was handcuffed because she threw a temper tantrum, a 12 year old in a Maryland school who was arrested for refusing to say the pledge of allegiance, or an 11 year old in New York who was arrested for not turning off her cell phone.

There is a very rooted idea that poor minority youths are a threat to adults, and that the only way to deal with them is to punish them by the state. Schools in Florida and Ohio use a disciplinary practice called “seclusion” which means repeatedly locking children away in rooms, closets and offices without parents’ knowledge. These does not happen in affluent school districts but in disadvantaged ones. In the school year 2009 – 2010, Ohio school administrators sent to seclusion rooms over four thousand times. What is even worse is that 60% of the students had disabilities (Giroux 2016). There is no educational value on these punishments. Seclusion has been proven to be very traumatizing for students. Some students even have committed suicide. Think Progress, a non-profit organization, reported that one student in Georgia hung himself in a seclusion room in 2004. Also, the Department of Justice found out that in a school in Meridian, Mississippi, the teachers and principals send black children and children with disabilities to prison for minor offences such as dress code violations, profanity and disrespect (Giroux, 2013).

### **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

As I was working on my research I kept thinking what would be a better option than the education system we have today. One of the answers might be the theory that Paulo Freire developed, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire proposed a pedagogy where individuals learn from everyday language and

situations, and not from the point of view elite or people in power's point of view (Freire 2000). He suggested that educators needed to provide the conditions for individual autonomy in order for the students to be liberated. Freire understood the potential and importance of an empowering and democratic education in order to minimize the effects neoliberalism was causing. Freire said that education was not about training, learning technique and methods, and/or political indoctrination. He said it was about giving students a political and moral practice that provides knowledge, skills and social relations in order to for students to become engaged citizens and to freely participate in a democracy (Freire 2000).

If Paulo Freire saw today's primary education system in the United States, he would say what he said years ago. The primary education system is making children internalize what the elite wants. In this case, elite would be the oppressor. The primary education system is adapting children to the neoliberal culture that exists today without giving them the opportunity to realize they are being "oppressed." As Freire explains "One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness." How adults are going to realize they are being oppressed since when they were children the Neoliberal system has been part of all institutions starting by their primary education system.

Freire proposes pedagogy to be tailored from the oppressed reference not from the oppressors'. We need to understand and be able to attend the individual

needs of each child and not as treat them the same, as a standardized procedure! We need to make sure children develop critical thinking and become aware of their oppressed status, so they can be free thinkers as Freire proposed.

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement (Freire p69).

For Freire, “pedagogy had to be meaningful in order to be critical and transformative” (Freire 2000). In my opinion, this is the pedagogy we need to be giving to all children and adults regardless of their income or race. We can see how educational institutions are being converted into businesses and market competition. Those spaces are being transformed into business, and are not a place where critical thinking exist anymore. We need to start engaging all individuals in our society in order to have a better future for the next generations. Also, we need create the conditions for children to become aware of their responsibilities of living in a democracy; otherwise, we will soon have an authoritarian state. In a moment where our current education system is being dismantled and destroyed by the people in power, Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed is now more important than ever before.

## **Conclusion**

Neoliberalism, charter schools, poverty, neoliberal urbanism, Christian values, government, foundations and corporations have played an important role

in how minority children are being denied of economic opportunities by not given them one of the most important rights they have, the access to a good primary education. We are forgetting what democracy is about and the ideals of democracy; instead, we are driven by free markets and privatization of social services. Wealth and income inequalities continue to grow enormously. Many people in our society have become disposable. The only thing that matters in our society is profit making.

Our social structures are being dismantled and a punishing and authoritarian state keeps getting stronger. People prefer to let go their liberties and rights and instead have a state that keeps “other” people in their place. The United States is a country that is controlled by financial interest. Billionaires and corporations influence elections, so they can shape policy in the future. These policies are affecting the middle class and the poor. There are thousands of lobbyists in the United States. If Gorsuch is confirmed, we will have a supreme court that is business oriented not individual oriented. We have a society with short-term memory that immediately forgets who and what causes problems. We think that our only responsibility is to consume, consume, and consume.

Because of my own struggle in the United States, I have been sensitized to many of the social problems our society has, and how they are connected to neoliberalism. The phrase “one size fits all,” does not fit all, including me. This is one of the many reasons I have a bachelor’s degree is in Sociology, and also why I am pursuing a master’s in Sociology. Since I remember, I have always been curious about how our society works, why there are rich and poor people,

etc. Two years ago, I was assigned to read in a theory class about Social Darwinism. That term stayed in my mind for a long time, and I started to think what ideology would be a similar term today since I know history repeats itself. After a while, I realized that it might be Neoliberalism. I did a couple research projects on Neoliberalism, and finally I decided my topic for my thesis to be Neoliberalism and education. I wanted to find out how Neoliberalism affected minority children in the education system.

It is been a long and hard process at times. I always kept thinking “if this happens here, it is probably is ten times worse in Mexico.” I consider myself to be a very idealistic person, and I want one day we could live in a society without inequalities. Going through all readings has made me understand that it might be impossible to reach equality for all. Then, I thought that we might never live in a society were people are equal, but it is worth trying to achieve it, and it is our responsibility. We cannot just pretend that nothing happens we need to continue working and making people aware of our problems and find ways to fix them. It is a crime not to invest in our children. It terrifies me to live in a society where nobody cares about anybody anymore.

During my research, I noticed that there were not all pieces connected in many studies. As already mentioned, there is a fragmentation within academia. It took different sources and time to find most variables I found. One of my favorite authors is now Henry Giroux. He became my hero. He has such an amazing way to describe and explain things that it made easier for me to understand. As I am writing my conclusion, I am still thinking if there is something I missed or did not

research in order to understand how Neoliberal policies in the public education system impact minority school children in urban city charter schools. It seems that politicians, our government and society in general are more worried about grades than truly fixing one of our biggest social problem, poverty! It is probably in our own nature to always have someone in worse situation than us in order to feel better about ourselves.

Another aspect that I have been thinking about lately and probably it would be worth to take a look is what especially blacks and Hispanics have in common when it comes to their own history. My quick answer is that blacks were enslaved in the past and have never have the same opportunities as whites in this country. Also, most Hispanics come from countries that were colonized and conquered by Europeans. We, blacks and Hispanics, have along history of being oppressed, and in some way we have internalized it making it more difficult to become aware of our own oppression. As I already said, this is just a thought that might as well need to be taken in consideration when we try to find answers to this complex problem.

The night Donald Trump was elected, I could not even sleep all night. All this time while I was doing my research, I kept thinking how his presidency would make all these problems much worse, especially for minority children. Since his election, I have consumed more news than I have had in ten years. I check many news outlets, conservative and liberal, to see what they are talking about. I do not think it is healthy, but I feel there is a great need to be informed. His presidency will exacerbate neoliberalism to a degree we have not seen before.

The elite and corporations are probably salivating about big financial gains under his presidency without any concern of being stopped. As I already mentioned, Christian values have played a role in the neoliberal era. Maybe much more than we might imagine. It might be a future topic for me to study. In summary, neoliberal policies impact negatively children of color. It denies them the opportunity to have a better life and to pursue happiness.

## References

2001. *The rise of neoliberalism and institutional analysis*. Princeton, NJ, United States: Princeton University Press.
2012. "U.S. Poverty statistics." Federal Safety Net. Retrieved August 30, 2016 (<http://federalsafetynet.com/us-poverty-statistics.html>).
2014. "Institute for research on poverty." Retrieved August 30, 2016 (<http://www.irp.wisc.edu/faqs/faq3.htm>).
- Anon. 2005. "Questions and Answers on No Child Left Behind...Charter Schools." Home. Retrieved October 18, 2016 (<https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/choice/charter/charter-faq.html>).
- Anon. 2010. *Waiting for superman*. USA: Paramount.
- Anon. 2016. "Is Trump a Racist?" How Trump Happened?
- Anon. n.d. "Charter schools: Finding out the facts: At a glance." Charter schools: Finding out the facts: At a glance. Retrieved September 18, 2016 (<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Charter-schools-Finding-out-the-facts-At-a-glance>).
- Anon. 2005. "Questions and Answers on No Child Left Behind...Charter Schools." Home. Retrieved October 18, 2016 (<https://www2.ed.gov/nclb/choice/charter/charter-faq.html>).
- Anon. n.d. "The Condition of Education - Participation in Education - Elementary/Secondary - Charter School Enrollment - Indicator April (2016)." The Condition of Education - Participation in Education - Elementary/Secondary - Charter School Enrollment - Indicator April (2016). Retrieved September 18, 2016 ([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgb.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp)).
- Anon. n.d. "We, the Plutocrats vs. We, the People." Common Dreams. Retrieved September 12, 2016 (<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/09/12/we-plutocrats-vs-we-people>).
- Anon. n.d. Heartland Alliance- What's the Poverty Rate in Your Community? It's 15% in Illinois -- Will We Accept this as our New Normal? - Heartland Alliance. Retrieved March 18, 2017 ([http://action.heartlandalliance.org/site/MessageViewer?em\\_id=12961.0#.WM10-RiZPUo](http://action.heartlandalliance.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=12961.0#.WM10-RiZPUo)).

- Ayo, Nike. 2012. "Understanding health promotion in a neoliberal climate and the making of health conscious citizens." *Critical Public Health* 22(1):99-105.
- Beginning - Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/beginning.html#sec1>
- Boschma J. and Brownstein R. 2016. "Students of color are much more likely to attend schools where most of their peers are poor." February 29.
- Brown, Wendy. 2006. "American Nightmare." *Political Theory* 34(6):690–714.
- Conner and Monahan. 2016. "School Inequality: Challenges and solutions: Allen Chair Issue 2016: Charter Schools: The costs of neoliberal education reform: The case of Philadelphia school closures. University of Richmond Law Review Association.
- Davies, Bronwyn, and Peter Bansel. 2007. "Neoliberalism and education." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20(3):247–259. doi:10.1080/09518390701281751.
- Dynarski, Susan. 2016. "Why American schools are even more unequal than we thought." *The Upshot*, August 17.
- Freire, Paulo, Myra Bergman Ramos, and Donald Macedo. 2000. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2001. *Stealing innocence: Youth, corporate power, and the politics of culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2008. *Against the terror of neoliberalism: Politics beyond the age of greed*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2014. *America's education deficit and the war on youth: Reform beyond electoral politics*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2016. *America's Addiction to Terrorism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Giroux, Henry A. 2016. "Henry A. Giroux | why teachers matter in dark times." Truthout. Retrieved August 30, 2016 (<http://www.truthout.org/opinion/item/35970-why-teachers-matter-in-dark-times>).
- Grant, Peter. 2015. "Charter-School Movement Grows-for Real-Estate Investors." *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved September 18, 2016

(<https://www.wsj.com/articles/charter-school-movement-grows-for-real-estate-investors-1444750383>).

- Guinier, Lani. 2015. *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hackworth, Jason. 2010. "Compassionate Neoliberalism?: Evangelical Christianity, the Welfare State, and the Politics of the Right." *Studies in Political Economy* 86(1):83–108.
- Hofstadter, Richard, and Eric Foner. 1992. *Social Darwinism in American thought*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hutchinson, Sikivu. 2017. "Segregation Now and Forever: Betsy DeVos and the Looting of Public Education." *The Humanist*. Retrieved February 2, 2017 (<https://thehumanist.com/magazine/january-february-2017/up-front/segregation-now-forever-betsy-devos-looting-public-education>).
- Kozol, Jonathan. 2016. "Vote 'no' on charter schools - The Boston Globe." *BostonGlobe.com*. Retrieved November 1, 2016 (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/editorials/2016/10/27/kozol/MGo99xSE2n8JslSsVXZnFJ/story.html>).
- Lazare, Sarah. 2016. "Trump's Education Pick: A Billionaire Heir of Right-Wing Dynasty and Champion of School Privatization Efforts ." *Truthout*. Retrieved December 12, 2016 (<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/38516-trump-s-education-pick-a-billionaire-heir-of-right-wing-dynasty-and-champion-of-school-privatization-efforts>).
- Lefebvre, Elisabeth E. and Matthew A. M. Thomas. 2017. "'Shit shows' or 'like-Minded schools': charter schools and the neoliberal logic of Teach For America." *Journal of Education Policy* 32(3):357–71.
- Lipman, Pauline. 2013. *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*. Florence: Taylor and Francis.
- Mitchell, Katherine and Lizotte, Chris. 2016. "Governing through Failure: Neoliberalism, Philanthropy and ..." Retrieved March 18, 2017 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280102414\\_Governing\\_through\\_Failure\\_Neoliberalism\\_Philanthropy\\_and\\_Education\\_Reform\\_in\\_Seattle\\_coauthored\\_with\\_Chris\\_Lizotte&p=DevEx,5085.1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280102414_Governing_through_Failure_Neoliberalism_Philanthropy_and_Education_Reform_in_Seattle_coauthored_with_Chris_Lizotte&p=DevEx,5085.1)).

- N.d. Retrieved August 30, 2016  
(<http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>).
- Peck, Janice. 2015. "(Neo)Liberalism, popular media, and the political struggle for the future of US public education." *European Journal of Communication* 30(5):587–603.
- Pedroni, Thomas C. 2011. "Urban shrinkage as a performance of whiteness: neoliberal urban restructuring, education, and racial containment in the post-Industrial, global niche city." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32(2):203–15.
- Ravitch, Diane, and Professor of Education Diane Ravitch. 2014. *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's public schools*. New York: Chronicle Books.
- Ravitch, Diane. 2016. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. New York, NY: Basic books.
- Richardson, Joan. 2017. "Charter Schools Don't Serve Black Children Well." *Phi Delta Kappan* 98(5):41–44. Retrieved February 2, 2017 (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0031721717690364>).
- Rushing, Sara. 2016. "Project MUSE - what's left of 'Empowerment' after Neoliberalism?" *Theory & Event* 19(1). Retrieved August 30, 2016 (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/607286>).
- Shammas, Brittany. 2016. "Charter school operator accused of spending funds for students on himself." *Sun-Sentinel.com*. Retrieved March 30, 2017 (<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fl-charter-school-operator-arrest-20160701-story.html>).
- The White House, Office of Press Secretary. 2013. Remarks by the president on economic mobility. Press release. Retrieved January 2, 2017 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/04/remarks-resident-economic-mobility>
- Tienken, Christopher H. 2013. "Neoliberalism, social Darwinism, and consumerism masquerading as school reform." *Interchange* 43(4):295–316. doi:10.1007/s10780-013-9178-y.
- Zinn, Howard D. 2015. *People's History of the United States*. S.I.: Harpercollins.

## Ana Lilia Esqueda

### Education

#### **MA in Sociology**

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

**Aug 2017**

#### **BA in Sociology, *with Distinction***

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis  
Minor in Women's Studies

**Aug 2012**

#### **BA in General Studies**

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis  
Concentration in Social and Behavioral Science  
Minor in Business

**Aug 2007**

#### **AA in Economics**

Los Angeles Valley College

**Jun 2005**

#### **BA in International Commerce**

Instituto Politécnico Nacional - México

**Jun 2000**

### Professional Experience

#### **Burritos and Beer Restaurant LLC**

Founder and Managing Member

**2013 – to date**

#### **AEF Crane Services LLC**

Business Administrator

**2006 – to date**

#### **AEF Construction LLC**

Business Administrator

**2005 – to date**

#### **Univision Music Group**

Office Manager / Accounting Manager

**2001 – 2005**

#### **BBA Nonwovens México**

Production Planner and Inventory Control Manager

**1996 – 2000**