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Education in Urban Spaces:
False Notions About Solutions and
Little Attention to Social Justice

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Abstract

In this critical essay, we explore how overriding media and political frames have constructed education in urban spaces as a "problem" in ways that make possible the framing of neoliberal education reforms as solutions. We juxtapose neoliberalism with theories of social justice to show how social justice theories would lead to deeper understandings of education in urban spaces and different possible solutions. To push back against the current lack historical understandings of schools and people in urban spaces through neoliberal frameworks and discourses, we explore how the "right to the city" (LeFebvre, 1996) has been denied to those living in urban spaces centering the case and history of Chicago. In the end, we argue that social justice has been neglected in the discourses, policies and practices of education in urban spaces.

Key words: social justice, urban education, Chicago

In the late twentieth century, "knowledge" became the key resource in U.S. society and throughout the world (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2003). Knowledge replaced land, labor, and even capital as a key resource. This moment of transition or evolutionary trend in civilization is described as the world society moving to a "knowledge society" (European Foundation, 2003).

Peter F. Drucker has explained the essence of this transformation, noting that the current manifestation of this century's social transformation is:

> an economic order in which knowledge, not raw material or capital, is the key resource; a social order in which inequality based on knowledge is a major challenge; and a polity in which government cannot be looked to for solving social and economic problems. (1994, p. 1)

The meaning of this for the United States was that a structural transformation in societal institutions, including education, was moving into high gear. According to Drucker (1994), the U.S. and other developed countries were caught-up in a change where for the first time everyday people did not earn their wages by the sweat of their brow; "honest work" would no longer mean hands filled with callouses and everyone doing the same type of work (e.g., farming, domestic servants, industrial workers/factory workers). Another meaning of this evolutionary trend was that education would become the center of the "knowledge society" and schools its key institution to prepare highly specialized, technologically savvy people to compete in the world economy (Drucker, 1994).

Drucker's illuminating 1994 article came almost a decade after another narrative – one that rocked the United States. In 1983 the Reagan administration released *A Nation at Risk*, a scathing report on the U.S. educational system that, in dramatic language, argued that America's schools had not prepared the highly specialized workforce needed to compete in the world economy and "knowledge society." Bluntly, the report called the education system to task:

> Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors around the

> world . . . What was unimaginable a generation ago has
> begun to occur . . . other (nations) are matching or
> surpassing our educational attainments. (p. 5)

This report on America's educational system was not created in a vacuum; it was motivated by U.S. firms' loss of domestic and global market shares and a productivity stagnation that caused the nation to experience a severe crisis of competitiveness (Milberg, 1994; Wak, 2003). In the 1970s European and Asian economies had begun competing with American firms on a global scale and were winning. The report argued that that the U.S. was not keeping up and that, compared to other countries, U.S. students were not only never first, they were often well behind all or most other industrialized nations on international academic tests.

With neoliberal discourses and ideologies framing much of the arguments today around global competition, *A Nation at Risk* continues to be the basis for an argument about the "crisis" of American education, with a particular focus on the "failings" of schools, teachers, and students in urban spaces. Here, neoliberalism refers to the ideological, political, social and economic framework that pushes for enhanced privatization, open free markets, and a rolling back of government intervention and welfare that took hold starting in the 1980s (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). The neoliberal framework provided a strong push for standards-based reforms and a framing of education in terms of human capital and students as future workers, who needed to be prepared to be active contributors to and compete in the "knowledge society." Additionally, there is a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)—which has been deemed the most necessary for competing in the global economy—and the privatization of "failing" public schools as well as mayoral take overs of school systems in major U.S. cities that had "failed," including: Boston, 1991; Chicago, 1995;

Baltimore, 1997; Philadelphia, 2001; New York, 2002 and Washington, D. C. 2007 (Moscovitch, Sadovnik, Barr, Davidson, Moore, Powell, Tractenberg, Wagman & Zha, 2010).

In adhering to neoliberal frameworks, there came a major push to restructure and dismantle the U.S. public education system. Hybrid, largely privatized, and corporate-controlled, educational systems were brought in by mayors (in the cases of mayoral control) and educational leaders to schools in urban spaces mainly attended by black and brown students (Giroux, 2013). These new models introduced several changes, including school choice, strict performance accountability measures, curriculum changes, charter schools, and the closing of "failing" schools.

Arguably, of all of the models that were implemented to improve cities' educational systems, the one that generated the most controversy and protest was the wholesale closing of schools in urban spaces, which included the push to privatize the public school system. Philadelphia and Chicago have been sites of mass school closings and angry protests by parents, students, and teacher union members. The framing of this issue has been around the "crisis" and "problems" of education in urban spaces. The focus in this framing falls in line with neoliberal notions of individual responsibility, and consequently centers on individuals and communities rather than systems and structures. Within this framing, low test scores, violence, poverty, unsupportive or "broken" family structures, frequent student mobility, lack of motivation, discipline and/or assimilation, poor teacher quality, and so forth, are seen as individual "failures" and "problems" to be solved in ways that obfuscate the structural and historical processes that have created and perpetuate such inequities. Through a myriad of discourses that seek to present students in urban spaces as violent, fearful, and out-of-control, a framework

has been created in which "many people have come to accept the idea that the closing of schools is a reform strategy" (Ravitch, 2013). It is within this framework and context that city/urban educational spaces have become a battleground over access to opportunity, equity, and power.

This critical essay uses Chicago—with its complex history and current policies—as a case study to explore the way education in urban spaces has been constructed and addressed through dominant frames (Goffman, 1974; Forsyth, 2003). Frames are the cognitive structures that shape the way people understand and interpret their experiences and the world around them (Lakoff, 2004). Frames create social discourses that define problems in ways that facilitate a focus on a particular limited set of solutions. In this paper we look at how this happens for education in urban spaces through an exploration of the dominant frames used by the media that affect the public's vision of education in urban spaces and makes certain "solutions" possible. Similar to Verloo and Lombardo's (2007) frame analysis of gender inequality as a policy problem, our approach is both constructionist and deconstructionist: educational problems are constructed through multiple interpretations of the "problem," however, the "problem" of education in urban spaces is also created through a deconstructionist paradigm that, as we discuss below, refuses to define "urban education," which leaves it open to "a multitude of meanings" (p. 38).

At the time we wrote this article, Chicago was a site where neoliberal polices to corporatize and privatize public education led to the closing of 49 schools (HuffPost Chicago, June 19, 2013) and planned firing of over 2,100 teachers and school staff (NBC News, July 21, 2013). In writing a story about school closures and education reforms in Chicago, we journey back to the treatment African Americans and Latinos received

when they first arrived in Chicago, because these historical moments allow for a deeper understanding of how "urban" schools in black and brown communities have been structured, framed, and acted-upon. Through this historical journey, we explore how the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1996) has been framed and denied to those living in urban spaces. In the end, we argue that social justice is neglected in the discourses, policies, and practices of education in urban spaces. We use Chicago to explore the discourses and policies targeting education in urban spaces across the country and will explain how Chicago serves as a warning to the reforms being rolled out in school districts in urban spaces across the United States.

Lens of Analysis: A Social Justice Framework

As we move through our discussion of the framing of education in urban spaces, it is important to look to the ways dominant framings eclipse and ignore the possibility for another framework: social justice. Social Justice is often used as a "catchall" term with shifting definitions that depend on the context and vary from person to person. Developing a shared basic understanding of social justice education is a necessary step for critically analyzing educational discourses and current reform policies. The conceptualization of social justice that we use for this essay expands on John Rawl's (1971) theory of distributive justice that is situated in political/economic structures of exploitation. We especially find credence in Nancy Fraser's (2003) theory of the dualism of the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition, which goes beyond distribution and acknowledges that injustice can stem not just from one's unfair exclusion from the macro-level political and economic order, but also from the denial of one's lived experience, identity, and

culture. We can see how Fraser's (2003) theory can speak to the experiences of minoritized people and students who attend school in urban spaces. Students of color routinely have their history omitted and inaccurately or narrowly reported in their school curriculum (Brown & Brown, 2010). Both the official and "hidden" curricula used in schools across the country have been constructed based on a Eurocentric way of thinking and living, including the constructions of what black and brown people can and cannot do (Elson, 1964; Grant & Grant, 1981; Grant & Sleeter, 1996).

In bridging these theories to education, we center Grant's (2012) theory of social justice education for a flourishing life derived from the history and culture of people of color, struggles for civil rights, and the work of multiculturalists. Grant argues:

> Keeping with a robust social justice vision of education demands . . . that we acknowledge that our students are shaped by their histories, and that within this context, the core values of self-assessment, critical questioning, practice (of) democracy, social action, and (having) a criteria for adjudication must act in concert to ensure a robust social justice. (p. 930)

The feeling of an absence of social justice seems to be everywhere. While showing progress in some areas, the goals of the "acceptance of diversity" (Fraser, 2003) and treating people fairly (Smith, 1994) have not been met, especially for students in urban spaces. Many students have not been able to enjoy the full possibilities of a "flourishing" life due to structural inequalities and systems of oppression. Arguments that simply center "progress" being made toward closing the "gaps" are often used as a cover for neoliberals to claim that they are advocates for social justice, because such rhetoric ignores the deeply ingrained structural inequalities that remain.

Framing "The Problem"

In this section, we seek to explore how "urban education" has been framed by the media and political discourse in both constructive and deconstructive ways. Education in urban spaces has been simultaneously not defined and identified as a "problem." Here we explore the way this frame has been made possible, employed, and acts to pave the way for a narrow set of solutions.

Across media venues, Americans are bombarded with discourses about the "crisis" of the U.S. public school system. In the media there is also a prevalent discourse of failure: the failure of public schools to meet national standards and the "failure" of public schools to compete globally (with the U.S. 25th in math, 17th in science and 14th in reading) (HuffPost Education, 2012). Within this discourse of competition, schools in urban spaces have been constructed as sources of the problems with education in the U.S.

When we looked across major news outlets for articles on "schools in Chicago" over the past few years, we were met with the latest news on the struggles against school closings, articles on violence in CPS schools, information on charter schools, and statistics on students' test scores and graduation rates, each of which frames the city as "lacking" and, thus, a "battleground" for reform policies. For example, an article in the Chicago Tribune was entitled, "Fewer Chicago students make grade on ISAT" (Ahmed-Ullah, July 16, 2013). Articles on school violence contained titles like, "Walking to School in a War Zone: A Look at School Violence in Chicago" (HuffPost Education, October 10, 2010) and "In Violent Chicago, 'It's Tough to Be a Kid'" (Slevin & Lydersen, Washington Post, October 07, 2009). Such headlines

reinforce the framing of urban spaces in Chicago as a problem through a pathologizing narrative of the violence and danger in these spaces that shape a narrative of underperformance and an education "problem" in schools.

Across the media and in political discourses we see how connections are made between social problems in "urban" communities and the low test scores of students in these spaces. However, little attention is given to the larger issues of poverty, inequality, structural racism, histories of marginalization, inequitable school funding, biased curricula and testing-systems that favor dominant knowledges (Center on Race and Inequality, 2010; Kumashiro, 2012) and there is no effort to explore the question raised by Kumashiro (2012), "*who made the rules* to this system" (p. 5, emphasis in original). Instead, education in urban spaces is framed as a problem, through narrowly constructed deficits such as low test scores, school violence, poverty, family structure, segregation, student mobility and language and a "culture" problem (such as narratives of a "culture of poverty" and students' or parents' "culture" of not caring).

Such a framing of the "problems" of education in urban spaces have been perpetuated and dispersed through the framework of neoliberalism, which is considered the dominant economic, political, and social theory. Neoliberalism is focused on the "market" and the consolidation of capitalism globally. Neoliberal theory is based on the "utopian" assumption that "individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market" (Harvey, 2005, p. 7). Accompanying this mentality has been a rolling back of the welfare state (that emerged under liberalism), the privatization of public goods, and a move from government to governance. Neoliberalism is also based on "rational" individualism and competition. As Lipman (2011) stated, "Neoliberalism is not just 'out there' as a set of policies and

explicit ideologies. It has developed as a new social imaginary, a common sense about how we think about society and our place in it" (p. 6). Neoliberalism is necessarily raced, classed and gendered, since, as Lipman (2011) explains, public and private are raced and classed terms. However, the frames used to support neoliberalism are created through colorblind, genderblind and class-neutral language that act to hide and reinforce imbedded inequities.

It is within the context of neoliberalism that city/urban educational spaces have become a battleground over access to opportunity, equity, and power; and the framing of education in urban spaces is created through and in support of neoliberal ideologies and policies. With frames that pathologize urban communities and frame "urban education" as a "problem," the subsequent responses to this problem include the facilitation of greater competition through high stakes testing, school "choice" through school closings and the privatization of public schools, and greater "accountability" through merit pay, punitive accountability measures and the elimination of teachers' unions (Lipman, 2011).

The combination of discourses of "failure", neoliberal reforms, and discourses around the "economic crisis" has resulted in reduced funding for public services, such as schools. Additionally, there have been a number of responses to and proposed solutions for what schools should be doing. One solution has been for schools to "make do." In 2011, Bill Gates proposed a "new" idea. Gates, addressing a U.S. Governors' conference, argued that "states could save money by using only the best teachers" and having more students in their classes (Depaul, March 1, 2011). Gates advised the Conference to lift the cap sizes on classes and offer financial incentives to "good" teachers to take on more students (Depaul, 2011).

Another solution came from the Center for American Progress in its report, *Return on Educational Investment* (Boser, 2011), which argued that there was little proof that higher spending will equal greater student performance. *Return on Educational Investment* noted that the Center that funded the study strongly advocates equity but argues that is equity must be promoted within a "productivity and efficiency" paradigm. The Report stated, "But while the issue of fairness must be central to any conversation about education finance, *efficiency should not be sacrificed on the altar of equity*" (p. 2).

Popular solutions to the problem narratives in many urban spaces have been school closings and privatization. City leaders argue that because of the national economic downturn—including low funds in state coffers and the cutback of federal monies—they have no choice but to close "failing" schools. The Chicago Tribune stated, "It is necessary to address a projected $1billion deficit…. [and the closings are] expected to save $43 million annually in operating costs . . . " (Ahmed-Ullah, Geiger & Glanton, March 24, 2013). Privatizing schools has also been regarded as a solution to the "crisis" of education in urban spaces. Charter schools and voucher programs, for example, are held up as the answer to the "failure" of public schools. The rhetoric of school choice is built on the argument that parents should have the "right" to decide what schools their children attend. These arguments are built off of a cooptation and manipulation of the social justice rhetoric of "fairness" and equality through shifting the meanings of words like democracy, empowerment, and freedom (Apple, 2006; Kumashiro, 2008; Lipman, 2011).

A deeper investigation of these solutions, however, reveals a focus on corporate interests through moves to privatize public education that are often couched within a narrative of justice. For example, the progressive focus on parental

involvement is taken up and shifted in the push for parent trigger-laws where parents can transfer their children's public school to "outside management." This reform is supported by the Gates Foundation's Parent Revolution and was promoted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) sponsored Hollywood movie *Won't Back Down*, which was taken up in a number of states across the country. As a corporate funded organization made up of corporations and politicians, the role of ALEC in many of these reform strategies highlights the move towards greater corporate involvement in the U.S. educational system. The changes ALEC has promoted have been shown to greatly benefit its corporate members. Yet, parents and communities who ware underserved by the public school system have often bought into this rhetoric of possibility and change searching for a possibility for better educational opportunities for their children. As a community activist (as quoted in Lipman, 2011) stated, "parents on both sides [those for public schools and those in favor of charters] are . . . thirsty for change" (p. 144). Change, within the "problem" framing of education in urban spaces and neoliberal frameworks, is seen to be best promoted through the market.

In addition, a certain notion of "accountability" has been held up as a solution to "failing" schools and "bad teachers." Within the dominant frames, the accountability solutions are seen as high stakes testing, merit pay, and performance measures for schools, which have become the means of enforcement and control used by states and education leaders (Mathison & Ross, 2002). Education Secretary Arne Duncan used this frame when he said, "It's time to stop treating the problem of educational productivity as a grinding, eat-your-broccoli exercise. It's time to start treating it as an opportunity for innovation and accelerating progress" (U.S. Department of Education, November 17, 2010).

In addition, the accountability system envisioned for schools has been developed as a market-centered solution that has facilitated more corporate involvement in education (Lipman, 2011; Apple, 2006). On December 7, 2012 Valerie Strauss of the Washington Post reported on the "ripening profit potentials in the public education arena." Such solutions, which are based on a narrow notion of accountability to address the framing of the problem, work to keep hidden the larger social justice issues, such as a lack of accountability for those making these political decisions and educational reforms, students who are unaccounted for in schools, missing IEPs, and the educational deserts which are starting to form. Rather such frames hide power inequalities and the possibilities for social justice solutions.

A Journey into the Denial of "The Right to the City"

This framing of education in urban spaces as a "problem" has been facilitated through ahistorical and individualistic presentations and narrations. Through such frames and the "solutions" they facilitate, the "right to the city" has been denied to those who live there (Lefebvre, 1996). Harvey (2008) defined the "right to the city" as:

> Far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. (n.d.)

Here we seek to explore how the right to the city has been a source of struggle for those who live in urban spaces, especially

black and brown students.

"Space" as we have used it in this article, is more than simply physical space, so we draw on Lefebvre's (1991) notion of "social space" which he argued "is a social product" (p. 26). Lefebvre explained that in the construction of space "there is a productive process…we are dealing with *history*" (emphasis in original, p. 46) and that "representations of space have . . . combined ideology and knowledge" (p. 45). Thus, in order to understand urban spaces, such as Chicago, it is important to understand the history of the space as well as the ideologies at play that have helped construct its image. Situating the urban space of Chicago in its historical context brings power inequalities and social injustices to the surface and opens space for the possibility of centering social justice theories and frameworks to pushback against the problem framings and harmful "solutions." While this exercise is specific to Chicago, such a look into the historical context would be insightful for many other cities and possibly open spaces for alternative frames that might facilitate change.

"Urban" space in this paper is the area in Chicago where predominantly working class and poor blacks and Latinos resides. The Southside and Westside of Chicago are areas where African Americans and Latinos have lived since they first arrived in Chicago. They are spaces that continue to be "social products" and have been, from the beginning, constructed out of racism. Race and racism continue to structure activities (e.g., politics, life chances, conditions) across Chicago. The following example illustrates the persistence of racism on the South and West sides of Chicago. In 1919, as a large number of blacks were settling into Chicago, whites openly discussed the control of blacks through the use of space. An issue of *The Property Owners' Journal* stated:

Keep the Negro in his place, amongst his people, and he is healthy and loyal. Remove him, or allow "his newly discovered importance to remove him from his proper environment and the Negro becomes a nuisance." … [E]very colored man who moves into Hyde Park knows that he is damaging his white neighbor's property. (quoted in Pattillo, 2007, p 33)

With rulings that segregation and restricted housing covenants were illegal, the corralling of blacks in a particular space in Chicago was supported by a "new" idea in the 1960s that held-fast until 2005. In the early 1960s the largest public housing project in the world at the time, Robert R. Taylor Homes, and other high-rise housing projects were constructed in Chicago. The Robert Taylor Homes were the forerunner of several other public housing projects, such as Cabrini Green, that vividly highlighted Castells' (2007) idea that "space does not reflect society. It expresses it. It is a fundamental dimension of society, inseparable from the overall process of social organization and social change" (p. 419).

The Robert Taylor Homes were "28 high-rise buildings with 16 stories each, with a total of 4,415 units, mostly arranged in U-shaped clusters of three, stretching for two miles" (Steinhaus, 2004, p. 1). They expressed that Chicago was a racialized space and the social organization of the City was fighting against progressive social change. *Blackpast in the Classroom* contributor, Aaron Modica, explained, "The Robert Taylor homes reinforced racial segregation since they were constructed in the black community . . . by accident or design, the Robert Taylor Homes reinforced much of the pre-existing poverty and racial isolation of the city's Black Belt that still continues today" (Modica, n.d.).

Like African Americans, Latinos have a deep history in

the city and have had similar experiences with marginalization and the spatial construction of the "Windy City" through restricted housing and "gentrification" processes. Just before the beginning of the 20th Century Mexicans and other Latin Americans began to arrive and settle in Chicago in search of economic opportunities (Kerr, n.d.). Ramírez (2011) lays out the Mexican immigrant experience with housing conditions in Chicago and juxtaposed their experiences with those of African Americans: "No matter where Mexicans resided their lives were made difficult . . . White ethnics typically rented only the worst apartments to Mexicans . . . However, Whites refused to rent to all Blacks. Citizenship was color coded and not merely a product of longevity in the country or residency status" (p. 4). This example highlights the racialization of Mexicans (and other Latinos) in Chicago and the racialized housing restrictions for black and brown communities.

When Latinos first immigrated to Chicago they settled in various areas across the city. However, early waves of gentrification and "urban renewal" pushed many Latinos to Chicago's South and West Sides. Along with the construction of the high-rise housing projects, the 1960s were a period of displacement for Latinos throughout the city. During this time, for example, Mayor Richard J. Daley called for the construction of the University of Illinois' Chicago campus in the Hull House neighborhood on the Southwest side of Chicago, which at the time was a Mexican neighborhood, displacing residents. In addition, Lincoln Park and Lake View, neighborhoods in North Chicago that had large Latino (predominantly Puerto Rican) populations, were targeted for urban renewal/removal and became too expensive for many of the Latinos living there. Through these policies and social practices, space in Chicago was constructed in color-coded and racialized ways.

Schools in African American and Latino neighborhoods were historically overcrowded and under-resourced and often have lacked cultural and linguistic relevance for the students. Latino and African American community members and organizations have been vocal and active in pushing for school reforms and more equitable and culturally and linguistically relevant education opportunities (Cabrera, 2013; Chicago ASPIRA). Urban education as it relates to place and space (e.g., schools on Chicago's south side and west side) as a social product is the miseducation of black and brown children. To borrow from Lefebvre (1991), these schools are products of cultural and social processes that are shaped by the flow of power and privilege that control equity, equality and students' chances of having a flourishing life. As a social product, schools in urban spaces are thought of and portrayed by the mainstream media in particulars ways. In the U.S., the focus is often on pathologies around ethnic identity, race and class (poverty) and the violence of those living in urban areas. In addition, we see a clear contradiction today that, even with increased gentrification in cities, "urban," especially in relation to education, is still located within a deficit framing that is not generally applied to gentrified city spaces, which means it is not simply used a locational word for city spaces.

The Neglect of Social Justice: A Warning

Thus, the framing of urban spaces through deficit discourses is central to the ways neoliberal policies, particularly those around education, have been constructed for those living in these spaces. However, when we interrogate the histories of Chicago and center social justice theories and frameworks, we see a different story that exposes structural inequalities. The right to

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the city, as defined by Lefebvre (1996), has been denied to large portions of the urban population, particularly poor communities of color, many of whom have deep roots to urban spaces. Instead, policies are made *for* these communities by dominant groups rather than *with* them, despite huge protests against them, such as in the case of Chicago's school closings. The right to the city is a point of struggle for marginalized communities in urban spaces. Harvey (2008) argued that the right to the city is central to struggles for access and equity for those who live in urban spaces:

> Precisely because it focuses on the question of who commands the necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use. The democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanization. Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term, or nothing at all. (p. 2)

White supremacist power structures have continued to dominate these spaces. Forms of subtle racism are present and continue to persist in policies, discourses and practices, in many cases, through what Joyce King (1991) has called "dysconscious racism . . . an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given . . . tacitly accept[ing] dominant White norms and privileges" (p. 134). Furthermore, Perry (2011) agued that we should no longer frame our understanding of racial discrimination in terms of intentionality. As Perry stated, "An employer can intend to hire a particular person and make that decision while being highly influenced by racial stereotypes and yet not intend to be 'racist'"

(p. 21). Intent is too weak a conceptualization of discriminatory sentiment and behavior; and does not capture all or most discrimination. It creates a false distinction between "racist" and "acceptable" that is "deceptively clear in the midst of a landscape that is, generally speaking, quite unclear about what racism and racial biases are, who is engaging in racist behaviors and how are they doing so" (p. 21). Such is so, when neoliberalism operates through a manipulation of social justice rhetoric that belies the consequences of such ideologies and policies.

When we look back at the history of Chicago and current policies and discourses through the social justice framework we presented above, we see that the concept of social justice in its multiple iterations has been sidelined in Chicago and throughout the neoliberal education reforms being rolled out across the country. For example, restricted housing policies, the segregation of communities of color, and a disinvestment in quality, culturally relevant public education opportunities in urban spaces speak to a historical denial of social justices in these spaces. In addition, recent and ongoing protests against the current reforms by parents, students, teachers and community members (e.g. in Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, and New York) and the lack of consideration given to these voices in the development of current reform policies demonstrate the undermining of communities' and citizens' ability to pursue a "flourishing life" (Grant, 2012) and an overall neglect of social justice to those living and going to school in urban spaces.

We used Chicago intentionally as an example, because its history and current experiences should serve as a warning call for what is to come in other urban spaces. Lipman (2011) argued that Chicago "is an incubator, a test case, and model of the neoliberal urban reform agenda" (p. 19). As Ayers et al. (2010) stated:

Chicago . . . can be considered not singular at all, but

> rather a somewhat representative site of the complex and abiding crisis experienced by people everywhere, particularly in poor areas and in communities of color: deindustrialization and a lack of viable job opportunities; massive un- and underemployment; gentrification and "urban removal;" a runaway prison-industrial complex, militarization, and surveillance, and galloping environmental degradation (p. 5).

We have seen the beginnings of such policies across the country. Such policies specifically are seen in Texas through the expansion of charter schools, which are concentrated in urban spaces across the state and the push for the "parent trigger" law. Within this context a re-centering of social justice (not just rhetorically as a justification for neoliberal reforms, but "thick" social justice) is imperative as communities struggle for educational equity and "the right to the city."

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