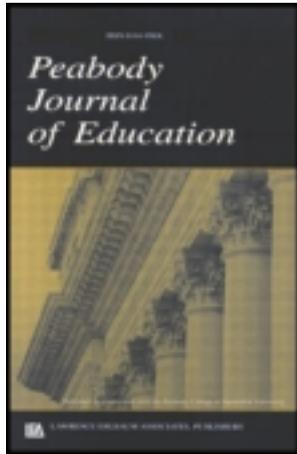


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Market-Driven Education Reform and the Racial Politics of Advocacy

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What is the landscape of the racial politics of public education in the age of Obama? To what factors can we attribute the seeming educational policy consensus from Washington, DC, to the states and from philanthropies and policy entrepreneurs in urban school districts? How should we understand opposition to the policy menu? This article examines commonsense understandings in education reform, which are supported by assertions that market-based schooling options are superior for children of color, and argues that a primary reason for the popularity of such reforms is an underexamined advocacy coalition, formed nominally around school choice, while also encompassing several other entrepreneurial educational reforms. The article describes the structure of this network, arguing that its dominance has precluded an understanding of counter advocacy against school choice and related reforms. It then describes several past and current movements that challenge commonsense understandings of the reforms' currency, as a way of pushing back against the reforms' expansion. The article also discusses the activities of grassroots community groups in response to market-based reforms and argues that these efforts can help to expand public deliberation on complex matters of educational policy. The article concludes with recommendations for further examination of these efforts to highlight the concerns, strategies, and solutions to educational inequality being articulated within communities of color and with their allies.

INTRODUCTION

In the years since President Barack Obama's historic 2008 election office, scholars, pundits, and bloggers have debated the significance of the Obama victory for the country's racial past, present and future. Did Obama's election signal the dawn of a postracial era, in which racial identity would be decoupled from social opportunity, or was Obama's ascendancy simply an historic milestone that would leave persistent issues of race-based inequalities unattended? In tension is the ambivalence many Americans have over the degree to which race maps onto inequality and the certainty that others hold that racism—and related, intersectional issues such as gender and socioeconomic status, for example—are the fundamental organizing mechanisms in U.S. society (Goldberg, 2008; Leonardo, 2004; Wise, 2009). The Obama election has not reconciled these debates, but for better or worse, it has made their airing take place in much more public, if increasingly polarized, forums.

Debates about educational policy under Obama are similarly charged with racial overtones. Although public education was not a major issue in the 2008 presidential election—taking a back stage to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a global economic crisis, the Obama administration’s endorsement of entrepreneurial, market-driven educational reforms has signaled an acceleration of many of the privatization efforts under President Bush while also attempting to increase educational funding in areas neglected under Bush, such as in after-school and summer programs, Pell Grants, school building, and renovation (Giroux, 2009). The 2012 reelection campaign will likely highlight the administration’s educational reform agenda. According to Giroux (2009), this reform agenda is characterized by being in tension with its own progressive and neoliberal ideals; Obama has made equality of educational opportunity a priority, even as the Department of Education, under the leadership of Secretary Arne Duncan, pursues reforms endorsed by corporate leaders, interests not typically associated with a traditional progressive, redistributive equity agenda. Moreover, the impact of the vagaries of the market on low-income and working-class communities continue to be devastating in terms of housing foreclosures, teacher layoffs and school closures, draconian cuts to social services, and disproportionate rates of unemployment by race and gender.

In this political and economic climate, the federal approach to public education has largely emulated venture philanthropy strategies for allocating resources to states, districts, and schools—requiring agencies and external providers to compete for funding by insisting that they adopt a reform agenda based on “what works” (Hess, 2005). Obama administration initiatives such as the Race to the Top and the Investing in Innovation Fund offered awards on a competitive basis, provided states and organizations agreed to adopt the reforms supported by the administration. In the case of the Investing in Innovation awards, grantees were required to demonstrate their ability to also secure funds from private sources. And so whereas much of the emphasis on standards, testing, and curriculum alignment reiterated previous administrations’ approaches, the emphasis on market strategies has become much more pronounced. These initiatives have accelerated a neoliberal education policy shift that had been under way somewhat incrementally for at least the last three decades.

Nominally, these reforms have been embraced at least in part because of their perceived potential to provide for more innovative and equitable schooling—especially for poor children and for children of color (Obama, 2009). In 2010, the controversial documentary *Waiting for Superman* argued that charter schools especially needed to be expanded to better serve such populations. Increasingly, charter schools are characterized less by a grassroots organizational model and instead tend to be run by for-profit and nonprofit educational management organizations (education management organizations [EMOs] and charter management organizations [CMOs]¹; Scott & DiMartino, 2010). And yet the empirical basis for assertions that such models are, in fact, “working” is much more contested than popular policy claims and film might suggest (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009; Henig, 2009; Lubienski, Weitzel, & Lubienski, 2009). And because these policies are primarily being scaled up in urban school districts, they have particular implications for the schooling of poor students and students of color who are concentrated in such schools, and whose communities have long experienced race-based and often intergenerational educational inequality (Lipman & Haines, 2007).

¹EMOs and CMOs are private, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations that contract with local educational authorities to manage public schools.

Questions about the persistence of race and racism have particular implications for the realization of high-quality, equitable, and democratic public education but are too often neglected in much of educational policy scholarship (Brayboy, Castagano, & Maughan, 2007). In the realm of market-driven, entrepreneurial reforms especially, research that considers the persistent racial segregation of schools and the ways market reforms reinforce and, at times exacerbate these demographic patterns can be underutilized (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Margonis & Parker, 1995). In a policy climate that purports to pursue “what works” policies, ignored is a significant research literature finding positive outcomes from diverse schooling in terms of educational achievement, college attendance and degree acquisition, and the tendency to develop multiracial social networks (Braddock, Crain, & McPartland, 1984; Braddock & McPartland, 1988; Wells & Crain, 1994, 1997). Moreover, overlooked in the policy embrace of entrepreneurial education reforms are the elite advocacy networks that are most able to get their preferred educational reforms on the policy menu given their access to power and wealth (Scott, 2008).

The racial politics of educational advocacy defy easy characterizations, however. Communities of color and progressive reformers have sought to participate in market reforms to escape undesirable schooling options within the traditional public system. And given the legal retreat from race-based equity remedies such as desegregation, school finance, or affirmative action, many urban public school systems lack the ability—and sometimes the will—to effectively and equitably serve their student populations. At times, this has meant that the market options are comparatively more progressive than some regressive state or school district policies (Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Jellison-Holme, 1999). This has happened in places where bilingual education has been eradicated, such as California, where many schools converted to charter schools to avoid implementing Proposition 227 (Miner, 1999). Similarly, tenuous coalitions have been formed between conservative advocates and grassroots activists, particularly in African American communities (Pedroni, 2007). Although African Americans have a long history of alternative educational institution building, and although White allies have often been instrumental in supporting that work (Anderson, 1988), there has been disagreement concerning the degree to which White and other elite “architects” should be able to shape the governance, curricula, and structure of schooling for African American and other marginalized populations (Watkins, 2001).

OVERVIEW

This article is a descriptive, sociopolitical analysis of the emerging networks leading public education reform. Using a multifocal approach (Young, 1999), it integrates theoretical, historical, and empirical perspectives from literature on race, critical policy analysis, multiracial social movements, political framing, and the role of philanthropy in public policymaking. It finds that although many researchers have documented opposition movements to market reforms, as yet, this research has not been aggregated. As such, popular depictions of engagement in these reforms have instead tended to focus on the participation of advocates and parents of color in school choice advocacy, thereby obscuring the financial and ideological backbone of the choice movement, which comes primarily from conservative foundations and think tanks (Chi, 2008; R. Cohen, 2007), and neglecting the issues many parents, teachers, and students care about in their efforts to realize more equitable schooling. The analysis unfolds in four sections. First,

it employs a multifocal conceptual frame that foregrounds race in the context of political and economic shifts, finding that the reduction of the state is limiting the ability of the public sphere to redress racial inequality (Barlow, 2003). Second, I build upon the notion of the construction of “common sense” in educational reform by extending this concept to the politics of advocacy around market-based reforms targeting communities of color (Apple, 2001; Kumashiro, 2008). I also describe the network of reformers and rhetoric currently coalescing around market-based reforms,² which is largely based on claims of the reforms’ (and reformers’) efficacy at reducing educational inequality (Tough, 2006). I argue that this network’s support for these reforms has generated several commonsense understandings of the value of such initiatives. Third, I turn to alternative advocacy from a historical perspective, and also from more recent efforts that have pushed back against market reforms. Finally, the article considers the implications of advocacy politics for the future of democratic and equitable schooling into the next presidential campaign and beyond.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INEQUALITY: RACE, NEOLIBERALISM, AND EDUCATIONAL CRISIS

Ideology often informs the framing of challenges facing public education and the visions for what it could or should be. Where progressives lament that schools have become too test focused, their funding structures too inequitable, their goals too restricted to preclude issues of citizenship and democracy, conservatives and neoliberals see schools as wasteful, ineffective, and insufficiently focused on results, thereby contributing to the failed potential of students, the protection of ineffective and overpaid teachers, school and school system leaders, and the inability of the United States to compete on international educational assessments or prepare workers to fill the jobs needed by corporations (Engel, 2000). In terms of solutions, progressives call for formative, rather than summative testing, equitable distribution of high-quality teachers, equitable school funding structures, culturally responsive and challenging curricula, and racially integrated schooling. In this milieu, regulated choice has a place, especially to the extent it can generate racially diverse schools, but without equity provisions, choice is not central to the progressive vision of schooling. Conversely, conservatives and neoliberals believe traditional public systems need to be reinvigorated by the private sector, public sector unions need to be dismantled, and they also favor entrepreneurial approaches that centers testing to make judgments about teacher and school leader compensation, student retention and graduation, school closures, and the awarding of funding. In this platform, market-based school choice is central. Race-based strategies are shunned.

Many of the reforms under way in urban school districts preclude Obama’s election but have been scaled up since 2008 to create what has been termed “diverse provider models” for schooling, with charter schools and school choice through the creation of small schools at the center (Bulkley, Mundell, & Riffer, 2004; Levin, 2005). Increasingly, school choice is associated with the introduction of private sector actors in the operation of schools, preparation of teachers,

²These reforms include charter schools; private management of schools and data systems; merit pay for teachers based on value-added metrics; and the alternative preparation of teachers, principals, and school system leaders.

and the collection and analysis of data (Burch, 2006), largely based on the premise that urban districts have been in crisis.

Critical policy analysts have described the movement to privatize many aspects of public education as being a part of a broader, global shift toward neoliberalism and part of an overall strategy to dismantle public systems through the use of crisis rhetoric and moments of unrest or disaster, such as 2005's Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast (Saltman, 2000, 2005; Torres, 1995). Moreover, school choice and market expansion has racial and geospatial dimensions as it leaves intact racial and socioeconomic stratification, with relatively more wealthy and racially homogenous suburbs unaffected by the impact of neoliberal reforms as they are largely contained to cities (Margonis & Parker, 1995; Rury, 1997; Ryan & Heise, 2002).

According to Goldberg (2008), neoliberalism's goal is to maximize corporate profits by shifting the role of the state to one that limits public expenditures and taxes. He explained,

It seeks above all to protect and expand the freedom of *flows* of capital, goods, and services, and more recently of information. It is expressly for letting the market regulate itself so far as the artificial constraints of politics will allow. It thus places faith in the market's capacity to optimize resource allocation and expand employment capacity as a result of sustained profitability, subsequent economic growth, and "trickle-down" charity. (p. 332)

Similarly, Barlow (2003) argued that neoliberalism's global reach has resulted in the constraining of the state's ability to directly address racial inequality. Those most marginalized under global economic shifts are people of color, yet the upward distribution of wealth under neoliberalism has starved state coffers from being able to respond to their need, making the degree of inequality in the United States among the highest in the world (Hacker & Pierson, 2010).

With the rise of unprecedented inequality, the middle class has also been destabilized, resulting in political opposition to redistribute resources to the poor or to people of color. According to Barlow (2003), "this destabilization is the context for the intensification of racism in the United States, driven by middle-class fear and political elites' limited capacity to address the crisis in any other way" (p. 3). Private institutions, foundations, and wealthy individuals are able to shape policy according to their sensibilities, without the need to engage in public deliberation about their inclinations. The connection between this assessment and the demographic trends in urban public schooling are important for understanding the racial politics of advocacy in public education more broadly and helps to explain why urban schools have been ripe for neoliberal reforms.

The nation's public schools are one of the only broad-based mechanisms of America's minimalist welfare state, and despite significant obstacles, many reformers hope that schools can work as tools of social equity, provided alterations are made to the way in which the state invests and supports them (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Urban schooling systems have been challenged by a number of factors related to broader issues of political economy, including concentrated poverty and unequal state finance systems. Although the quality of public schools has long been distressingly unequal, they hold promise, given their public nature to be a democratizing vehicle. State constitutions require legislatures to provide for the free education of all their citizens, for example. Because of this constitutionally mandated charge, education is a primary lever through which the state can reify inequality or attempt to redress it. In comparison, there is relatively much less state-level influence over housing, employment, or transportation—areas in which there is great racial inequality in terms of access but places in which the state plays a much smaller role than the private sector. As a result, protracted struggles over racial segregation, unequal funding,

free speech, and discipline have played out largely in the context of the nation's public schools (Kluger, 1975; Lassiter & Davis, 1998; Tyack, 1974).

Conservative and neoliberal opponents of the pursuit of civil rights or the achievement of equality of opportunity through resource redistribution, and/or the state provision and/or operation of public schools, have preferred to focus on expanding the individual rights of parents, largely through school choice mechanisms such as vouchers, homeschooling, tuition-tax credits, and more recently charter schools. In this vision, desegregation and full integration are almost never mentioned as policy options. Because the condition of many urban schools has long been indefensible, some progressives and many parents of color have become tenuous allies of this reform agenda.³ This alignment was under way before Obama was elected, but largely due to the emergence of robust advocacy coalitions and the influx of philanthropic resources, it has become more active and amplified under a federal agenda largely aimed at expanding the very reforms market advocates, conservatives and neoliberals have long championed (DeBray-Pelot, 2006; DeBray-Pelot, Lubienski, & Scott, 2007; Demarrais, 2006). For example, as early as 2002, an equity investment group made this assessment of the K-12 education market:

Already, bipartisan political support exists for both charter schools and the more radical alternative of privatization. Over time we believe that charter schools—which grant an interested community of parents and educators the ability to start a school outside the traditional system—will end up in the hands of professional managers. These same operators will also be the companies tapped to take over the worst performing public schools and school districts (Urdu, 2002).

This prediction has proven prescient, as it reflects the current educational reform model in districts such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Detroit, Washington, DC, New York City, Chicago, and most prominently New Orleans. In these settings, public education is the primary institutional space that neoliberal reformers seek to transform. At its most extreme, neoliberalism would see public schooling abolished (Boaz, 1991). Yet neoliberal ideology also transcends political partisanship. For example, Democrats, Republicans, and Libertarians can ascribe to particular aspects of neoliberal thought and support more incremental approaches to neoliberal educational policies. Increasingly, these partisan approaches to school choice tend to coalesce around the notion of parental empowerment and liberation from traditional public schools, which many conservatives have come to call “government schools.”

Urban public education especially has captured the imagination and investment of, and is increasingly being influenced by, a network of philanthropists, new civil rights groups, and policy entrepreneurs from within and outside of the public sphere (Scott, 2009). In the largely urban school districts in which these efforts are concentrated, a similar reform milieu has emerged: rapid expansion of charter schools; the eradication of elected school boards; the increase in alternatively prepared teachers and school leaders; and the adoption of value added measures to reward, promote, or terminate teachers (Scott & DiMartino, 2009).

³Scholars of the politics of educational advocacy often presume that poor parents of color are politically progressive, and their involvement in market-based reform is purely a “strange bedfellows” situation. This article does not make that faulty assumption; rather, it assumes that there is ideological diversity within high-poverty communities, including the embracing of some neoliberal and conservative tenets.

Although poor communities and communities of color have long histories of frustration and anger at inequitable schooling, they have tended to advocate for greater school funding, desegregation, better prepared teachers, adequate facilities, and access to high-quality and culturally relevant curricula (Allen & Jewell, 1996; D. Cohen, 1976). Some argue that these efforts have always included some advocacy for choice (Forman, 2005) and that participation in choice options are often strategic, rather than ideological, choices aimed at securing the best alternative in a set of limited choices (Pedroni, 2007). The degree to which the policy network currently advocating for market reforms attends to long-standing desires and struggles by communities of color for the power to influence their children's schooling and to hold public and private officials accountable is unclear. For example, studies of governance in privately managed charter schools reveal tensions around democratic participation for teachers and parents (Bulkley, 2005).

Significant advocacy efforts appear to be geared toward organizing policymakers, activists, and parents of color to become spokespeople and leaders in the reform movement. For example, conservative foundations have funded alternative civil rights groups such as the Black Alliance for Educational Options and the Hispanic Council for Educational Reform Options, groups operated and led by prominent reformers of color (Tabachnick, 2011; Themba, 2001). Philanthropists and political conservatives, as well as centrists, have also supported the enactment of controversial "Parent Trigger" laws, which allow parents of students in persistently low-performing schools to petition to have their local schools converted to charter schools and/or taken over by a private management organization, such as the one former California Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law in 2010 (Bast, Behrend, Boychuk, & Oestreich, 2010). An advocacy group called Parent Revolution is the organizing body for parent trigger campaigns and receives funding from philanthropies that also support charter school management organizations.

The spate of advocacy documentaries released in the last several years have been careful to include and foreground the voices of parents and students of color in their overall critique of public education and teachers unions, often with heartbreaking effect (see, e.g., *The Cartel*, *The Lottery*, and *Waiting for Superman*). Combined, these activities are helping to inform popular understandings of the role of school choice in the educational empowerment of parents and students of color, but they are doing so under a primarily neoliberal ideological framework that also encompasses Democratic, Republic, Independent, and Libertarian partisan affiliations.

ADVOCACY NETWORKS AND COMMONSENSE UNDERSTANDINGS OF MARKET-BASED EDUCATION REFORM

Although many of the new reformers attempt to present their efforts as apolitical and primarily concerned with the well-being of students, in fact market-based reforms are highly political in that they shift power over schooling systems to new actors. Nominally, market reforms promise to shift power away from educational bureaucrats and to parents by giving them greater access to information about school and teacher performance and mechanisms for them to assert consumer-like choice. In terms of their potential to create equality of opportunity, however, they fall short. This is because market reforms are disconnected from other aspects of social inequality and fail to adequately provide for equal access to high-quality, well-resourced, and diverse schools. For example, market reformers rarely call for broader social policy reform, even when they argue that the reformation of education to be more marketlike is an issue of civil rights (Miner, 2004). Yet the

1950s and 1960s civil rights movement activists, whose rhetoric of empowerment and liberation these reforms assume, in fact called for a radical rethinking of the status quo; a downward distribution of resources and opportunity; and a radical shift in the social, political, and economic segregation that continues to characterize the American social order (King, 1968). In many ways the neoliberal shift was the realization of the opposition to these ideals and aspirations and the ascendancy of identity politics over more radical efforts to equalize opportunity (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005). It has also given rise to a new cadre of educational experts who come largely from the private sector and predominantly attended private schools (Winerip, 2011).

Although it is clear that elite influence in educational policy is not a new phenomenon, venture philanthropies are currently operating in much more policy advocacy ways than has been traditional practice (Scott, 2009). Researchers have studied the ways in which elite networks are able to shape policy but also to inform commonsense understandings of what is possible and desirable for policy to accomplish (Domhoff, 2006). Political scientists and sociologists have documented the heightened advocacy of this network in social policy more broadly, especially in terms of the funding networks of conservative think tanks and advocacy groups (Rich, 2001, 2004; Roelofs, 2003). They have found that the formation of the conservative policy-planning network emerged partly as a response to welfarist social policies of the New Deal but also to civil rights victories as a way to restore the power balance away from such gains. Revealed in these studies is the importance of the funding network, including the Bradley, Scaife, Olin, and Smith Richardson Foundations, in shaping and supporting the ideological, intellectual, and operational work of emerging organizations. The funding strategies of these foundations detracted from more traditional patterns of foundation giving at the time. These included unrestricted general operating funds on a multiyear basis; collaboration and shared funding across grantees; and diversity in funding portfolios: including researchers, think tanks, advocacy groups, and independent research centers frequently housed within universities.

In the more recent iteration of venture philanthropy in public education advocacy, we see many of the same strategies employed, but also the adoption of strategies more commonly associated with venture capital firms in California's Silicon Valley. These include the selection of organizations as investments, the requirement that investees demonstrate quantifiable returns on investment, and the tendency to predetermine desirable reforms (Scott, 2009). From a partisan perspective, these funders are more diverse but, as discussed earlier, share neoliberal tenets in terms of the preferred relationship between the state and the market and the primacy of charter schools in that relationship (Andrus, 2006). Their investments have been significant and highly influential. In the 2008–2009 school year, donors contributed \$31,000,000 to 77 New York City charter schools; those schools run by a private management organization received significantly more per student than schools termed “community grown organizations” (Gittleston, 2010).

Critical educational policy scholars, such as Kumashiro (2008), using Lakoff's concept of political frames, have extended this analysis to educational policy, largely by examining the role of conservative foundations and think tanks in shaping the framing and understanding of issues such as the racial achievement gap, school safety, and the very nature of public education. These efforts are coupled with more active policy-advocacy work. Cohen (2007) noted that many foundations have passed the 501(c)(3) restrictions on political activity to form other nonprofit options. These include 501(c)(4) groups that can lobby and engage in political activities, such as former Washington, DC, schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee's new organization, *Students First*. In my ongoing study of this sector, I have reviewed speeches, website information, policy

reports, and editorials generated by entrepreneurial think tanks, foundations, and reformers, and I assembled several commonsense assertions governing their messaging (Scott, 2008). There is significant investment in the marketing and promotion of ideas to the mainstream news media, online social networks, communities, and policy makers. These claims include the following:

- Education is the last remaining civil right; school choice is the best means to realize it.
- Teachers unions are corrupt, bloated, antiequity, and only interested in protecting adult jobs over quality education.
- University-based schools of education do a woeful job preparing teachers and school leaders; alternative programs are superior.
- Charter schools are the clear alternative to traditional public schools and have higher achievement rates.
- The best way to evaluate teachers' performance is through value-added assessments.
- Teachers shown to be better should be paid more.
- The most effective solutions to underperforming schools are sanction, closure, or takeover.
- School integration is no longer desired by parents of color.
- The right of parents to choose schools is sacrosanct. Expanding choice will improve schooling for all students.
- Mayoral control of schools is an imperative.
- Excellence/efficiency requires the dismantling of elected school boards in place of appointed boards or advisory committees.
- There are "real reformers" and educational establishment actors. Real reformers care about inequality, choice, and accountability. The educational establishment seeks to preserve the status quo.
- The racial achievement gap is caused by ineffective teachers who are protected by unions. Hurricane Katrina was the best thing to happen to New Orleans public schools.

The aggregate effects of these claims and the related policy advocacy and supportive state and federal policy environment have allowed market reforms to flourish. For example, we see whole or majority districts becoming "charterized," the attraction of celebrities and new donors joining in the reform movement, such as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who made a \$100 million bequest to Newark, New Jersey, and the remarkable growth of charter schools around the country, particularly those managed by private, nonprofit, or for-profit organizations as franchise schools, currently operating in 31 states. These trends have contributed to the commonsense conclusion that there were not efforts to reform the schools and systems before the network arrived, and it defines who is a legitimate reformer, who is authentically invested in improving education for children in urban school districts.

Although these claims are not all necessarily disingenuous or inaccurate, they are frequently asserted without attending to particular policy, social, or historical context or qualification, and as a result they are misleading for at least two reasons. First, conclusions from empirical study are, in fact, contested on many of these claims, and on some of them the best available research contradicts the assertion. For example, whereas excellent charter schools exist, on the whole, charters do not outperform traditional public schools, and some EMO and CMO models, such as the Knowledge is Power Program, which has received millions in private and public support, has been shown to have significant attrition and to underenroll particular populations, such as special

education students, complicating its advocates' claims that the Knowledge is Power Program achieves superior results (David, Woodworth, Grant, Lopez-Torkos, & Young, 2006; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006; Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010; Lubienski et al., 2009; Woodworth, David, Guha, Wang, & Lopez-Torkos, 2008).

In addition, although advocates claim choice is a civil right, there is compelling evidence that on the issue of racial segregation, charter schools—especially those in schools operated by EMOs and CMOs—are more racially homogenous (Miron, Urschel, & Mathis, 2010). Yet policy is moving ahead to implement these market-based choice reforms in a systemic fashion as if the research support for them were more robust and if racial segregation were not being reified. Even moderate charter school supporters have come to understand that without sufficient attention to professional development, assessment, and access to resources, charter schools are not likely to achieve the results imagined by reformers (Payne & Knowles, 2009).

The second reason that these claims are misleading is that they neglect the expertise of seasoned teachers, grassroots community organizations, and many parent advocacy groups and they are silent on the growing social, political, and economic inequalities that impact communities of color disproportionately. Indeed, in the crisis rhetoric shaping much of the adoption of these reforms, it is those who are deemed a part of the “educational establishment” who are to blame for the current situation. Other social policy issues, made worse by the continued effects of 2008's Great Recession, are held harmless in the challenges facing poor and middle-class families. The “real reformers” tend to come from outside of education, to be White and male, and to embrace particular “paternalistic” approaches to educating poor children of color that are controversial (Whitman, 2008). Related to this issue of neglect is that the seemingly commonsense claims neglect the significant resistance to them by local communities and the efforts that have long been under way to realize better and more democratic schooling. Yet the push back against market-based reforms is active in the very places it is being adopted, and new coalitions have emerged as the reforms have received more financial and political support.

THE POLITICS OF DISSENT: AN ALTERNATIVE TO COMMONSENSE APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

Within many communities of color, multiracial urban school districts, and immigrant populations there are long histories of efforts to make public schools better for the children they are meant to serve, with varied success, largely depending on the relative power of the groups advocating for their children (Tyack, 1974). In this regard, alliances *and* conflict between groups seeking power and elites with greater access to it have characterized advocacy efforts and social movements in public education (Anyon, 2005).

Much has been made of alliances between elite choice advocates and urban communities of color, but less attention has been given to instances of push back from communities to these reforms (Scott & Fruchter, 2009). Yet there has been concomitant resistance to many of the market-based reforms since they began to take hold several decades ago. Even the nation's oldest public voucher plan in Milwaukee was contested by groups of color while also garnering key support from African American policy makers and advocates (Witte, 2000). Currently, there is an insufficient research and conceptual base for understanding opposition to these efforts in light of state and school district policy makers' and the Obama administration's efforts to scale them up.

This section assembles and aggregates several instances and cases of resistance in order to better understand the politics of advocacy in relation to race and educational reform in a more cohesive way. The point in elevating these activities here is not to dismiss the support for market reforms from progressive, conservative, and neoliberal constituencies of color but rather to complicate what have been commonsense understandings of the reforms' universal support—especially from parents of color depicted as queuing for coveted spaces in charter schools in popular educational documentaries.

For all the rhetoric about increasing choices for such parents, there has been hostility and derision directed at communities and leaders who choose to resist the expansion of charter schools and market-driven reforms, who detractors describe as being beholden to or duped by teachers unions and the educational establishment (Kaplan, 2001). This was most recently evident in 2010 in the aftermath of the Washington, DC, mayoral election, in which African American voters largely supported Adrian Fenty's opponent Vincent Gray, which many interpreted to be their frustration over Fenty's support of the reform platform of Michelle Rhee and her foundation supporters (Schemo, 2007; Turque, 2008). This platform included the firing and rewarding of many teachers and principals on the basis of criteria such as student test scores, which later were asserted to be faulty and which are the subject of an ongoing investigation (Turque, 2011). In the last several years in Chicago and New York City, community groups, parents, and teachers have organized to oppose school closures and the increase in charter schools housed in existing school buildings. Moreover, tensions around school governance have emerged in cities as elected school boards have given way to appointed policy advisors (Lipman & Haines, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Scott & DiMartino, 2009). Other opposition movements in New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and among national organizations predate and coincide with these most recent iterations.

New York and Philadelphia

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when for-profit EMOs such as Educational Alternatives, Inc. and Edison Schools were taking hold, there was significant opposition from teachers unions that saw these for-profit organizations as part of a broader move to dismantle organized labor and privatize schooling. But they were also opposed in communities where supportive policy makers lobbied to get schools turned over to private management through the charter school mechanism, which by design allows holders of charters to contract out for management services. In some states, management organizations can directly hold the charters.

Two cases are illustrative of the early push back on market-based reforms: New York City and Philadelphia. In New York City, the Giuliani-supported campaign to turn over low-performing schools in Harlem and Brooklyn to the for-profit Edison Schools was met with fierce resistance that succeeded because the charter school law required that a majority of parents vote for school conversions. In Pennsylvania, then-governor Tom Ridge contracted with Edison Schools to conduct a study of Philadelphia schools. The company's report recommended that the schools be turned over to a private provider.

In 2000 and 2001, in each city, coalitions led by the now-dismantled Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now and teachers' unions, parents, and students opposed the proposals to take over academically underperforming schools and turn them into charter schools that would be run by EMOs, which are private for-profit and nonprofit management companies. In 2000 in New York City, intensive organizing and a contentious public relations campaign resulted

in the proposal to privatize and convert existing schools into charter schools being overturned. Community organizing against a similar plan in 2001 in Philadelphia, however, did not succeed in overturning the proposal, though organizers were able to scale back the plan (Maranto, 2005). Although the outcomes of the opposition movements are somewhat straightforward, the conditions that led to them were highly charged and grounded in school racial advocacy politics that long preceded the privatization proposals. The policy contexts of New York and Philadelphia are important backdrops. There are a few key similarities. The primary one is that both New York City schools and Philadelphia schools operated for years with insufficient funding from their state governments. Each had fiscal equity lawsuits in play at the time. Although New York City's initiative was defeated, the city now has an array of private operators in charter schools. New push back is coming from schools that share buildings with new charters and oppose their expansion due to issues of overcrowding and the perception that the charter schools are siphoning resources away from traditional public schools. In Philadelphia, a diverse provider model has been adopted by the School Reform Commission, and there is variability in terms of school outcomes between traditional and charter schools and across the charter school sector (See Scott & Fruchter, 2009, for an extensive discussion).

New Orleans

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, reformers moved quickly, with the support of the Louisiana legislature, to dismantle the troubled New Orleans public schools system, and the Bush administration offered private school vouchers for families displaced by the flooded levees. In New Orleans, teachers were fired, schools were shut down, and the Recovery School District was formed. Many entrepreneurial reformers saw New Orleans as a blank slate where reforms could be implemented in a far more comprehensive way. Teach for America expanded the number of corps members it placed there, and new organizations were seeded by Teach for America affiliates, such as New Schools for New Orleans. There has been significant push back on these initiatives, however. Community-based advocates have lamented the treatment of seasoned African American teachers and the loss of community-school connections by the mass entry of teachers and school operators from outside the city (Buras, Randels, Salaam, & Students at the Center, 2010). Recently, the Coalition for Louisiana Public Education, made up of union leaders, teachers, parents, and school leaders, has formed to organize community members dissatisfied with the educational reform landscape (Vanacore, 2011).

National Organizing

The rise of market-driven reforms and the unprecedented federal and philanthropic investment in seeing them widely implemented have given rise to other important instances of push back at the national level that must be considered in understanding the politics of dissent. These instances of organizing and coalition building offer glimpses of efforts to articulate alternative visions for public education, often visions that adhere closely to ideals of democracy, civic preparation, school quality, and diversity in terms of student body composition and in curricular offerings.

In 2010, a coalition of civil rights groups⁴ produced a response to the Obama administration's "educational blueprint." This policy report, titled *Framework for Providing All Students an Opportunity to Learn through Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, repositioned traditional civil rights concerns for high-quality and accessible schooling and called into question current market-driven policies. In their stead, the signatories called for equitable opportunities for all, utilization of systematically proven and effective educational methods, public and community engagement in education reforms, safe and educationally sound learning environments, diverse learning environments, and comprehensive and substantive accountability systems to maintain equitable opportunities and high outcomes. Although this report allowed for the importance of choice forms and testing in public education, it argued that these were to be tools for more democratic and equitable inputs and outcomes, rather than tools for sanction or the dismantling of public schooling.

Similar sentiments emerge from a review of coalitional organizations that have arisen to question the new educational common sense. A key example comes from the national group, Parents Across America (PAA; <http://www.parentsacrossamerica.org>), which has chapters in nine states and the District of Columbia, frequently in cities (or markets, to use the current parlance) where market-driven, neoliberal reforms are being expanded. Its goal is to bring the parental voice to bear on matters of educational policy. On its website, PAA proclaims that it is "committed to bring the voice of public school parents—and common sense—to local, state, and national debates." PAA chapters have weighed in on matters such as class size, testing, school desegregation, Teach for America, school finance and budgets, school choice, and school governance. PAA is just the most recent in an existing terrain of progressive community-based and regional advocacy for education reform, groups whose missions have been to offer educational policy alternatives. These include organizations like Rethinking Schools, Class Size Matters, New York Committee for Radical Educators, FairTest, Parents United for Responsible Education, Parents for Public Schools, and the New Orleans Parent Organizing Network.

These historical, contemporary, national, and regional instances of dissent and push back demonstrate that commonsense understandings of market-driven reforms need to be made more inclusive. A key challenge is that the groups endeavoring to offer alternative perspectives are disadvantaged in terms of access to public and private revenue to support their work and their ability to work in coalitions. Although teachers unions are somewhat better positioned in terms of resources and advocacy, they have also been the subject of attacks by recently seated governors around the country, most controversially in Wisconsin under Governor Walker, but also in New Jersey, where efforts to dismantle teachers unions is occurring while Governor Christie attempts to cut funding for public education, and where school choice and management organizations are expanding in major cities.

⁴Signatories included Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., National Council for Educating Black Children, National Urban League Rainbow PUSH Coalition, and the Schott Foundation for Public Education.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: TOWARD ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL UNDERSTANDINGS AND COALITION BUILDING

If the post-Obama era portends anything for race, education, and the politics of advocacy, it signals profound uncertainty about which visions for public schooling discussed in this article will prevail in a neoliberal context of growing wealth inequality; hyperracial, linguistic, and socioeconomic segregation; and increased roles for corporations, private sector providers, and philanthropists in educational and public policy. Harvey (2005) argued that many citizens seek alternatives to the neoliberal agenda that privileges individual freedoms and market solutions over community concerns and democratic processes. Neoliberal theory and rhetoric have embraced a freedom and liberty frame that obscures the maintenance and preservation of elite class power. “The exploration of alternatives has, therefore, to move outside the frames of reference defined by this class power and market ethics while staying soberly anchored in the realities of our time and place” (p. 188). Critical policy scholars employing multifocal conceptual lenses are well positioned to offer alternative frames (Young, 1999).

This analysis argues that policy scholars can work with grassroots advocates and social movements to conduct research that more comprehensively maps the racial politics of advocacy along with a consideration of elite and grassroots networks. According to Harvey (2005), understanding and leveraging the power of these movements is essential for a robust and responsive scholarship:

The effect of such movements has been to shift the terrain of political organization away from traditional political parties and labour organizing into a less focused political dynamic of social action across a whole spectrum of civil society. What such movements lose in focus they gain in terms of direct relevance to particular issues and constituencies. They draw strength from being embedded in the nitty-gritty of daily life and struggle, but in so doing they often find it hard to extract themselves from the local and the particular to understand the macro-politics of what neoliberal accumulation by dispossession and its relation to the restoration of class power was and is all about. (p. 200)

Here, Harvey helps to identify a point of collaboration, with theory building and intellectual investigation taking place within opposition movements, so as to be mutually informative. Researchers might accomplish this work by attending to political *and* philosophical concerns in the conceptual framing of their scholarship. Questions to be considered would include, What roles should the private sector play in public education policy? How should we understand the disproportionate access to influence that characterizes wealth-based advocacy in relation to power and race? Who decides what counts as success? In the classic political science sense, who governs? What role will our schools play in realizing a more equal and democratic society? How can we mitigate allocations of power over schooling policy to those with more material resources? How has neoliberalism impacted social relationships between parents, community members, teachers, and school leaders, as well as the popular and personal understandings of educators’ work?

To begin to speak to these questions, this article argued that the politics of advocacy in contemporary market-driven educational reforms is intimately linked to, and shaped by, historical racial dynamics but also signals several important shifts in the overall structure and dynamics of U.S. schooling and the global economy. For example, school choice can be used as a tool for desegregation and a way for parents to have options for their children, selected from an

array of resource-and-outcomes equal schools, and yet it could also be used as a mechanism for privatization. The policy design depends largely on the philosophical and ideological perspective of the choice advocates most able to wield influence. At question is whether private interests will continue to shape school choice and other schooling policies, not just for students in urban school districts but also in terms of radically altering the purposes and orientations of public schools to the public writ large. In 2011 in several states, efforts are under way to dismantle public sector infrastructures—school districts, libraries, parks, social services, and public pensions, some from the corporate community have in their sights a dismantling of existing public education systems and construction of a more hybridized system of private, religious, public, and homeschooling options for which minimal fiscal support is required, allocated without prejudice to sector, and for which the ultimate oversight is provided by parents through their choice of schools. The advocacy to expand school choice—and its related menu of policies—is often cast in terms that evoke, and at times appropriate the language of civil rights. Those whose children are most vulnerable to substandard education deserve exit from those schools and school systems that do them such a disservice.

Yet neoliberalism is not the sole ideological and philosophical frame operating in the politics of education and increasingly, efforts to adhere neoliberal tenets to progressive ideals is met with dissent and skepticism, especially when arguments for market-driven reforms are cast in civil rights frames (Scott, 2011). Critical policy scholars have explored the movements in which many parents and communities have engaged that have not placed the kinds of market-based choice proffered by contemporary advocates as central (Anyon, 2005). Rather, school finance reform, discipline policies, testing and retention policies, and culturally relevant pedagogy and community-bonded schools have all been prominent (Perlstein, 2004). So have efforts to allow communities to have greater say in the structures, policies, and processes of schools and school districts, most notably in the community control and site-based management governance eras (Lewis & Nakagawa, 1995). In the contemporary landscape, critiques emerge when expertise over the education of marginalized populations is invoked by entrepreneurial reformers who support measures that have little in common with the redistributive policies advocated by civil rights leaders and activists just one generation ago (Miner, 2004).

The current advocacy politics have created a context in which critics of market-based reforms are relegated to being supporters of an indefensible status quo. The result of this rendering is that market advocates, many of whom are White and come from elite backgrounds, are seen as legitimate, the “real reformers,” even when their efforts contribute to racially stratified schooling and are silent on other matters of inequality and poverty. And those who raise questions about the directions and effects of their reforms are seen as obstructionist, in the pockets of the teachers unions, as anti-civil rights, and in support of maintaining a racial achievement gap—after all, they are bucking common sense. This dynamic marginalizes many community-based organizations that have long understood and based their advocacy on the notion that social policy is interconnected with educational inequalities and require a rethinking and reprioritizing of the state role in creating or remediating such conditions, particularly in relation to communities of color. These dynamics also take place in an era in which Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts argued that the only way to ameliorate racial discrimination is to cease enacting race-based policies.

African Americans, immigrant families, and nonmajority communities have long chafed at the constraints limiting their ability to be full participants in American democracy and in the substandard schools afforded to them. African American activism vis-à-vis public education has

typically been grounded in a critique of the policies that uphold racial and social hierarchies, and has predominantly emphasized community concerns, rather than individualistic ones. Over history, reformers, scholars, critics, and activists such as Carter Woodson, Anna Julia Cooper, Ella Baker, and W.E.B. DuBois called for high-quality, equitable, and culturally responsive education. Although self-determination has typically been a part of these visions, it is not advocated for at the expense of the greater good, nor does it preclude a role for the state to regulate and redress inequality. The connection between educational and social policy in righting persistent inequality, then, is clearly articulated in much of grassroots organizing and advocacy from communities and leaders of color. And as Harvey (2005) noted, these connections do not presume to return to a glorious past in which things were ideal. “To bring back the demands for democratic governance and for economic, political, and cultural equality and justice is not to suggest a return to some golden age” (p. 206). Rather, these efforts to advocate to benefit the collective are juxtaposed with current neoliberal frames that emphasize individual parental effort and benefit, most graphically represented in the recent documentaries depicting individual parental efforts competing to secure spots in charter schools for their children (Ravitch, 2010).

One example merits discussion as it demonstrates that leaders from communities of color have long advocated alternatives to neoliberal educational strategies, and it also offers insight into issues around which multiracial coalitions—along with elite allies—might continue in their tradition of dissent and issue articulation. In 1989, the Joint Center for Political Studies published the report by the Committee on Policy for Racial Justice. Entitled *Visions of a Better Way: A Black Appraisal of Public Schooling*, the report’s aim was to advance a “policy framework for racial justice” that countervailed the rollback of civil rights and return to segregated schooling that was taking hold across the country. It implicitly called for an increased role for the state to regulate and enforce equity-based measures. This committee’s recommendations included recognizing the centrality of human relationships, eliminating barriers to effective teaching and learning, and mobilizing physical and political resources. It placed the schooling of African American children within the broader context in which schools operated at a moment when the “excellence” movement aimed to reframe conversations about educational equality away from inputs and primarily on outputs. The committee argued,

The under-education of black children does not exist in a void; the school is not an isolated social institution. The crisis in education is also a crisis in democratic citizenship . . . the transformations taking place in the American economy and the proposals of school reform promote a narrow view of “excellence” devoid of social justice concerns for black youth and their families. If these distorted reforms are implemented without input from the black community, it is clearly in danger of being locked out of the new economic arrangements that will structure U.S. society well into the 21st century. (Committee on Policy for Racial Justice, 1989)

There are ongoing struggles for justice and equity in health care, employment, tax policy, housing, law, and education to see a vibrant advocacy community engaged in hard work redressing inequality. The current politics of advocacy and race in education, largely informed by conservative and neoliberal tenets, renders these ongoing struggles virtually invisible. As a result, it advances a commonsense approach to “what works” in educational reform that excludes the voices and input of stakeholders most necessary for schools to become vibrant sites of democratic participation, intellectual exchange, and rich sites of teaching and learning. With wealth inequality increasing and the effects of the 2008 financial crisis still being disproportionately

experienced by urban communities in terms of unemployment, housing foreclosures, and limited public revenue, the trend of elite influence over public education policy from foundations, think tanks, and advocacy groups can work against such efforts, but it need not do so. There is no doubt that President Obama's 2008 election was a triumph for racial progress in terms of having racial diversity in the representation of the nation's political leadership. This analysis imagines that significant racial and socioeconomic progress can be made in terms of a more representative and participatory politics that pushes on notions of social and racial justice, in educational and other social policy forms.

AUTHOR BIO

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