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What's Race Got To Do With It?: How Current School Reform Policy Maintains Racial And Economic Inequality

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Introduction

BREE PICOWER AND EDWIN MAYORGA

Often in educational justice circles and critical discussions of educational policy, researchers and activists are of two camps. Some (i.e., Apple, 2001; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Hursh, 2007) have importantly focused on the neoliberal turn in education reform. Such frameworks focus on how market-based reforms and privatization-driven policies have reproduced and expanded economic inequality. Other scholars (Frankenberg, 2012; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002) have centered on race and growing racial inequality as evidenced by opportunity gaps, the school-to-prison pipeline, and segregated schools. These analyses often happen in isolation from each other, continuing to divide those concerned with educational justice into “It’s race!” vs. “It’s class!” camps.

What’s Race Got to Do with It is an attempt to bring together these often isolating frameworks to ask what role race plays in some of the hallmark policies of current school reforms such as school closing, high-stakes testing, and the proliferation of charter schools. Examining one individual policy strand of neoliberal school reform, each chapter in this book uses a lens similar to Leonardo’s (2009) racial economic analytic framework, where “racial hierarchies and class exploitation occur in a symbiotic relationship and that changes in one produce changes in the other” (p. 8). By looking at these reforms through this racial economic framework, this edited volume complicates our analysis of how market-based reforms increase wealth inequality and maintain White supremacy. By analyzing current reforms through this dual lens, those concerned with social justice are better equipped to struggle against reforms in ways that unite rather than divide.

This book reveals the ways in which race, particularly Whiteness, is masked in hallmark neoliberal reforms, and how it operates in real ways to maintain racial and economic inequality. The chapters have similar structures:

Each traces the historical context of a singular reform, examines how that reform maintains Whiteness and economic inequality, and shares grassroots stories of resistance to these reforms. Each author was selected because of her or his cutting-edge racial economic analysis, understanding of corporate school reform, and active involvement in grassroots social movements aimed at increasing justice and equity in education.

Scholar Activism

The editors of this book, Bree Picower and Edwin Mayorga, are both teacher educators as well as core leaders in a grassroots, educational activist group called the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) for more than a decade. The seeds of this book grew from Bree and Edwin's shared work within NYCoRE, specifically with a grant that we received as part of a Ford Foundation funded project titled *The Ford Secondary Education and Racial Justice Collaborative* (FSERJC) (The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2013).¹ Under the leadership of John A. Powell, Michelle Fine, Lauren Wells, and Gina Chirichigno, FSERJC was a national project that convened and supported local-level working groups of educators, organizers, lawyers, advocates, and scholars from across the country to foster the creation of "more equitable and effective alternatives to current federal, state and local education reform initiatives" (The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2013). Within this larger national project, Edwin and Bree used grant money to co-coordinate and facilitate a monthly series called *What's Race Got to Do with It* that engaged NYCoRE teachers in readings and discussions to examine the role that racism played in current school reform efforts such as school closings, charter schools, and high-stakes testing. As we began to center this analysis in more of NYCoRE's as well as our individual academic work, we saw the need to bolster and share our theoretical understandings of this phenomenon. As a result, we put together this volume by bringing together leading scholar activists' voices on how race and neoliberalism work in sync to maintain inequality across the country.

Having been educators, scholars, and activists within the New York City public school landscape for more than a decade, we conceive of our scholarly work as "engaged scholarship" (Hale, 2008) or "scholar-educator-activism" (Suzuki & Mayorga, 2014). From this perspective we, similar to Lipman (2011), feel that "research, and political engagement enrich each other, and that 'knowledge is vital to social action'" (Hale 2008, as quoted in Lipman, 2011). As former elementary school educators, and now teacher educators, we see our work as educators as central to what we mean by scholar activism.

As such, our academic work is centered on mapping the way: (1) dominance operates (Clarke, 2010) in teaching and education policy; (2) analyzing injustice; and (3) examining and using varied forms of resistance taken up by educators, youth, families, communities, and education advocates in schools and in the streets (Lipman, 2011; Picower, 2012). This documentary and analytic work is a beginning, rather than an end, for scholar activists. We direct our scholarship, teaching, and organizing toward supporting educators and education advocates in doing this critical work inside and outside the classroom (NYCoRE, 2002). This book is one way that we formulate and share conceptual frameworks to develop rich analyses of the racist capitalist education policy landscape in which we are situated to foster social justice (Anyon, 2009).

The Story of NYCoRE's Hydra

Coming together in 2002 at the start of the war in Afghanistan, NYCoRE sought to be a space for teachers to participate in the antiwar movement, within educational justice circles as well as in broader struggles for global justice. Focused on interrupting the multiple forms of injustice that intersect through schools, "NYCoRE is a group of current and former public school educators and their allies committed to fighting for social justice in our school system and society at large, by organizing and mobilizing teachers, developing curriculum and working with community, parent and student organizations" (NYCoRE, 2002).

Since its inception, NYCoRE has spent a great deal of time identifying key forms of oppression that affect the lives of educators, students, and communities. This has included military recruitment in secondary schools, the criminalization of youth, high-stakes testing, the rise of the charter school movement, and mayoral control of schools, to name but a few. In New York City, and across the country, NYCoRE saw these various oppressive policies and practices being rolled out one at a time in an individual fashion. However, the group understood that these policies were related to one another in cultural, political, and economic ways. In seeking to understand the connections, the group began to read literature and discuss notions of globalization, privatization, and neoliberalism. The readings and discussions gave the group more language to think about what was occurring in the New York City school system, and NYCoRE developed a metaphor for describing what was happening as an interconnected web of activity. Some NYCoRE members kept coming back to the notion that the attack on public education worked like a many-headed monster known as "the Hydra."

Those who are familiar with Greek mythology know that the Hydra was an immortal multi-headed creature. Any attempt to slay the Hydra was a struggle in futility and hopelessness, because if one head were removed, the Hydra would grow back two more in its place. Furthering NYCoRE's social justice metaphor, the Hydra was only finally able to be slain by Heracles because he worked together with an ally, his nephew, to remove all the heads at once, making it impossible for the decapitated heads to grow back.

NYCoRE made the connection that each of these Hydra heads was analogous to one of the market-based reforms unfolding in our city. The group observed that the school system was rolling out a variety of seemingly individual policies, or Hydra heads, one at a time, such as mayoral control, testing, charter schools, etc. The initial response by those concerned with educational justice was to furiously address each individual head by focusing time and energy on one after another. As the progressive education community became increasingly splintered and exhausted, NYCoRE observed that when one project was being addressed, other projects were lined up to continue moving a privatization agenda forward. The group realized that focusing on one head meant that our attention was often drawn away from the larger forces, or Hydra body, driving reform—namely, the form of capitalism that some describe as neoliberalism.

Since late 2010, NYCoRE has amplified this multi-headed analysis by looking at how racism in the United States is continually connected to neoliberal education reform. While there is rhetoric that the United States is living in a “post-racial” era where the material effects of race are no longer pertinent, the economic, political, and cultural problems of U.S. education continue to be tied to racial divisions. This book is a continuation of NYCoRE's efforts to better understand the Hydra of market-driven school reform.

Neoliberalism and Education

What's Race Got to Do With It is an attempt to undergird the Hydra metaphor with theoretical constructs that help those committed to educational justice better understand how seemingly individual education “reforms,” or “Hydra heads,” are all connected to a broader “body” that is pushing public education toward privatization. The following sections outline these theoretical constructs that are, in some ways, the internal organs of the Hydra: neoliberalism, structural racism, Whiteness and White supremacy, racial capitalism, and accumulation by dispossession.

Historical research on U.S. schools has demonstrated that schools and school systems are essential components of the work of the state² (Apple,

1996; Spring, 2001). On a basic level, schools and school systems have served as a site to meet the state's need for the development of individual members of its society. Whether the goal was educating individuals to participate in a democracy or to align with a particular social class, the focus of the school has been on producing people who fit the social order. Coupled with this notion of developing the individual is the school's position as part of the management of society. From the formation of centralized bureaucratic management systems (Tyack, 1974) to the struggles over racial desegregation (Spring, 2001), schools have been integral to social control projects created to meet varying and often conflicting economic, political, and societal needs (Spring, 2004). As such, current trends in school reform are part of a broader turn toward a capitalist, or market, view of organizing schools and the broader social order.

The school reform trends that have swept the nation over the last 15 years can be seen as part of what critical scholars have described as the rise of neoliberalism within education (Lipman, 2011). Neoliberalism, as a strain of capitalism, is a set of policies and practices that privilege market strategies over public institutions to redress social issues (Kumashiro, 2008). Such policies champion privatizing formerly public services, deregulating trade, and increasing efficiency while simultaneously reducing wages, deunionizing, and slashing public services (Martinez & Garcia, 2000; Tabb, 2001). Neoliberalism uses the ideology of individual choice to promote the idea of a meritocracy "that presumes an even playing field" (Kumashiro, 2008, p. 37). Lipman (2011) notes that "neoliberalism is an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere" (p. 6). This is how neoliberalism creates a two-tiered system of education in which the people with control maintain power and opportunity by stripping it from already marginalized people—typically people of Color. Under neoliberal policies, groups of allies are broken up into individuals who are forced to compete against each other rather than work collectively. Within education, these policies work to challenge the legitimacy of public schooling by promoting vouchers, charters, and other quasi-private schools while privatizing services that were once the domain of public institutions, such as curriculum development and testing (Lipman, 2005).

Neoliberal school reforms share several trends: They increase privatization, slash public services, increase competition, and place both blame and success on individuals rather than systems. These trends use market-based rhetoric to take power from the majority of people and concentrate it in the hands of few while masking the processes that allowed this to happen. As

Lipman (2011) explains, “[i]n this framework, education is a private good, an investment one makes in one’s child or oneself to ‘add value’ to better compete in the labor market, not a social good for development of individuals and society as a whole” (pp. 14–15). By focusing on the rights and responsibilities of individuals, neoliberal policies have resulted in increasing accountability systems that place blame on and then punish individual students and teachers rather than on the inequitable school systems that have inadequately served them. Rather than improving quality of education, this vicious circle creates school climates characterized by compliance, conformity, and fear.

As neoliberal education policies continue to push for competition and choice in city after city, the implications for the future of public education stands in the balance. As Lipman (2011) expounds, “Urban schools are wound up in privatization, public-private partnerships, demands for union ‘flexibility,’ teacher merit pay schemes, and mayoral takeovers, along with high stakes testing and restricted urban school districts, direct involvement of corporate actors and corporate philanthropies dictating school district policies—these are features of neoliberal governance dominating urban school districts” (p. 47). As a network of reforms, neoliberalism has spurred the privatization of education in a seemingly race-neutral yet highly racialized manner, resulting in the accumulation of capital and success for some and failure and dispossession for others. The following section elucidates the role that race plays in supporting this process.

Structural Racism, White Supremacy, and Whiteness

This book focuses on the neoliberal nature of market-based school reform while positioning neoliberalism within a system of racism. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) argue that racism operates on three levels—institutional, cultural, and individual: “It encompasses a web of economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions and beliefs that systemize and ensure unequal distribution of privilege, resources and power in favor of the dominant racial group at the expense of all other racial groups” (p. 10). In the literature that situates race as the organizing principle of such domination (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994; Stovall, 2006), it is critical to name this system and process of domination as White supremacy.

White supremacy is the way in which our society was founded and remains organized so that White people are at the top of the hierarchy of power. It is maintained through institutional, individual, explicit, and covert processes (Jensen, 2005; Leonardo, 2004). As defined by Jensen (2005) a [W]hite supremacist society is

a society whose founding is based in an ideology of the inherent superiority of white Europeans over non-whites, an ideology that was used to justify crimes against indigenous people and Africans that created the nation. That ideology also has justified legal and extralegal exploitation of every non-white immigrant group, and is used to this day to rationalize the racialized disparities in the distribution of wealth and well being in this society. (p. 4)

It is this system of White supremacy, or White dominance over people of Color, that is protected and maintained by current racial ideology and policies. The following section highlights the role of “Whiteness” within this system of dominance.

Within this system, Whiteness is the ideology and way of being in the world that is used to maintain White supremacy symbolically and materially. Bush (2004) argues that Whiteness “reveals the ways in which Whites benefit from a variety of institutional and social arrangements that often appear (to Whites) to have nothing to do with race” (p. 15). Harris (1993), in her legal construction of “Whiteness as property,” describes Whiteness as the “assumptions, privileges and benefits that accompany the status of being White [that] have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect” and is thus protected by law (p. 6). In this construction of White supremacy in which Whiteness carries legal rights as protected property, Lipsitz (1998) explains his theory of the “possessive investment in whiteness”:

I use the adjective possessive to stress the relationship between whiteness and asset accumulation in our society, to connect attitudes to interests, to demonstrate that White supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential, and snarling contempt than a system of protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of Color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility. Whiteness is invested in, like property, but it is also a means of accumulating property and keeping it from others. (p. viii)

When Whiteness is seen as property and investment, the symbolic material effects of White supremacy are not only evident but are also more tangibly linked to the changing movements of capital. For example, Melamed (2011) argues that in the continuing expansion of a global capitalist system, the characteristics of the White supremacist system needed to adapt to be palatable as it helped to maintain a raced and classed social order. Whereas the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a striving for diversity and openness coupled with capital accumulation, the more immediate past has been marked by a focus on “economic freedom” and “consumerist diversity” (Melamed, 2011, p. 43) that obscured histories of racial and economic formations and arrangements.

Current school reforms follow this pattern and are typically framed in race-neutral or even co-opted civil rights language. This power erasure

(Kincheloe & Steinberg 1997), in which Whiteness remains masked from everyday consciousness, allows current school reforms to appear as equity measures while, in reality, such reforms have dire consequences for communities of Color. Leonardo (2004) explains how current school reform uses strategies of White supremacy through a particular process: “[Whites] set up a system that benefits the group, mystify the system, remove the agents of actions from discourse, and when interrogated about it, stifle the discussion with inane comments about the ‘reality’ of the charges being made” (p. 148).

So while it may appear that race has nothing to do with reform, in fact, it is the driving force beneath it.]

The current school reform of school closings can be used to illustrate this process. School closings are framed by reformers as a race-neutral strategy for equity; these closings are discussed as a way to protect children from having to attend failing schools. In reality, however, school closings have overwhelmingly affected students of Color, displacing them and forcing them into other overcrowded or underperforming schools, into schools in distant neighborhoods, or into the charter system. For example, in the 15 schools closed in Washington, D.C., in 2013, only two of the 2,700 students that were displaced by closings were White students (Rich, 2013). While school closings force the dislocation of thousands of students of Color, it clears the path for new charter schools and other education opportunities designed for White students in often gentrifying communities. This highly racialized process operates in ways that mask what race has to do with school reform while protecting and maintaining racial and economic hierarchies.

Racial Capitalism

Having explored economic, class-based analyses of education, critical theories of race, and Whiteness studies to examine current education reforms in the previous sections, this section moves toward the development of an integrated racial economic framework: the notion of racial capitalism. Leonardo (2012) notes that the goal in “performing a race and class synthesis is to privilege neither framework and, instead, offers an intersectional, integrated, or what I am calling a raceclass perspective” (p. 438). In other words, the analytic framework used in this book is one that seeks not to privilege one analysis (class or race) over the other. Rather the approach seeks to “trabajar en ambo,” or to “work in both,” as a way to better identify and examine the connections between capitalism and structural racism, or racial capitalism.

Racial capitalism, an idea drawn from Cedric Robinson’s (1983) book *Black Marxism*, serves as a guide to thinking concurrently about structural

racism and capitalism in schooling and education policy. Seeking not to reject Marxism, Robinson aimed to carve a distinct vision that linked Marxism with what he describes as the Black radical tradition. As Jodi Melamed (2011) points out, “Robinson’s theory of racial capitalism clarifies the economic dimension, explaining that because ‘the development, organization, and expansions of capitalist relations [have] pursued essentially racial directions [in modernity],’ racialism is to be considered a ‘material force’ and a ‘historical agency’ of capitalism, with no outside between the two” (p. 8).

Over time, racial capitalism in the United States has shifted and adapted to protect capitalist accumulation and the supremacy of Whiteness. As Phelps (2014) points out, the United States is in the midst of its third great system of race and class, moving from chattel slavery to Jim Crow, and now to a system that “operates so subtly that it gives only the barest appearance of being a system” (p. 2). In this era of race and class defined by neoliberalism, institutions and actors have put into play various policies such as the privatization of public institutions, cuts in government services, and capital flight to low-wage countries (Lipsitz, 2011), in ways that are framed by proponents as “common sense” decisions (Kumashiro, 2008).

Commonsense rhetoric obscures from the discussion preexisting inequalities that have been shaped by race and class. Neoliberal policies actually decrease opportunities for upward mobility for most Americans while protecting capitalist accumulation. In this way class inequalities are obscured. But even more pertinent is that economic inequality is always already racialized. While wealth and power accrue, the language of individual responsibility for solving social problems and meritocracy turn a blind eye to those historical inequalities. In this third era of racial capitalism, the rhetoric of reform and justice is woven into the values of the market and becomes a veil for the protection of capitalist accumulation, the ongoing supremacy of Whiteness, and the continued dispossession and oppression of people of Color.

Accumulation by Dispossession

Much of the research that looks critically at corporate school reform examines the negative impact on communities of Color (Fabricant & Fine, 2012, 2013; Watkins, 2011). For example, such research tells the story of the amount of schools closed that disproportionately impact communities of Color, the services not provided to English Language Learners in charter schools, or the disproportionate impact of testing policies on African American students. This research helps paint a picture of institutional racism that is critical to dismantling a legacy of discrimination and deculturalization (Spring, 2004)

brought forth by public education. However, missing in this picture are the ways in which these same reforms heap privilege, capital, and opportunities on White and middle-class students. Another goal of this book is to look at both sides of this same coin by examining how these reforms simultaneously oppress communities of Color while at the same time rewarding Whites.

Referred to as *accumulation by dispossession*, Harvey (2006) defines this process in which assets that belonged to one group are taken and put into circulation as capital for another group to profit from (Buras, 2011). Once such capital is within the market ready for investment and speculation, Harvey (2006) explains that “[n]ew terrains for profitable activity were opened up... Once in motion, however, this movement created incredible pressures to find more and more arenas, either at home or abroad, where privatization might be achieved” (p. 158). Within education, these reforms are often framed as meritocratic opportunities—or even civil rights measures, but in reality such reforms remove power, opportunity, and capital from people already marginalized by institutional racism and economic inequality and transfer it to those with power in a seemingly “race neutral” manner. Buras (2011) examined this process at work in post-Katrina New Orleans, now a 100% charter district, in what she described as a “strategic assault on black communities by education entrepreneurs” (p. 296).

Fine and Ruglis (2009) also build on Harvey’s accumulation by dispossession to show how current neoliberal education policies dispossess poor students of Color from quality education. “As public educational funds are handed over to testing companies, publishing houses, private security, and policing organizations, the very conditions of teaching and learning degenerate and a discourse of individual responsibility for educational achievement permeates—especially in the most impoverished schools” (p. 21). This capital dispossessed from the public system accumulates in the hands of private corporations writ large, but also has implications for the lived experiences of racially diverse groups of students.

While Fine and Ruglis (2009) illustrate this process of dispossession, another example that concretely highlights the accumulative component of this cycle is that of school closures in New York City. Aggarwal and Mayorga (in press) illustrate that when a large comprehensive high school in a ritzy neighborhood was in the process of being closed, or phased out, and the mostly poor, emergent bilingual student population was being displaced, there was a parallel process of offering the now available space to new, more selective, small public schools and charter schools. These new schools would also have significant amounts of new funding funneled into remaking the building. In this particular case, the wealthy, often White, families from the

neighborhood, as well as a branch of a local charter management organization, used the dispossession of students as an opportunity to demand neighborhood schools of their own. Ultimately a new school that fit this vision, and a more privileged student body, accumulated a large portion of the building and related funding.

The rapid-fire process of accumulation by dispossession under neoliberal school reform has profound implications for the permanence of racial and economic inequality. As Cheryl Harris notes, “the dialectical phenomena of White accumulation and Black disaccumulation—the incremental economic and social advantage for Whites and corresponding disadvantage for Blacks... aggregate[s] and compound[s] across generations” (as cited in Fine & Ruglis, 2009, p. 30). Lipsitz (2011) reminds us, “under these [economic] circumstances inherited wealth becomes even more important for those positioned to receive it” (p. 5). Throughout this book, each chapter author builds on this phenomenon, moving away from simply an identification of institutional racism to a more nuanced understanding of the maintenance of White supremacy in which the process of both racialized accumulation and dispossession through individual market-based reforms are made visible.

Seeing the Hydra Through the Heads

As the book editors, we want to also raise a point of caution as readers dive into each chapter. While we have invited each author to focus on a specific policy or set of practices, we caution against reading any of these as static, isolated, racialized neoliberal strategies. As Peck and Theodore (2012) assert, “neoliberalisation,” as opposed to neoliberalism, is “a signifier for an always-contradictory process, and for an evolving/rolling programme of restructuring” (p. 179). A key characteristic of this current era of race and class is its undergirding logic of dynamism and adaptability. Some of the policies and practices that are discussed in the book, such as small schools, were not initially designed to move forward neoliberal logic. What underlying neoliberal logic does do is to encourage the re-appropriation of ideas like small schools and adapt them to achieving social goals.

What this demonstrates is that there is a connective tissue that is continually being forged between ideologies, intentions, and the formation of policies and practices. We refer back to NYCoRE’s Hydra metaphor here, to remind the reader that the heads of the Hydra are not static, but evolving in relation to the underlying logic of racial capitalism and what is happening in the external world. When chapter authors were invited to look at a particular head of the Hydra, our intent was to give readers an opportunity to look

broadly across the various, interconnected heads, while giving the authors an entry point for their analyses. Much like Jean Anyon (2014), who recognized that “education is an institution whose basic problems are caused by, and whose basic problems reveal, the other crises in cities” (p. 170), we are suggesting that an analysis anchored by one head of the Hydra helps reveal how it is connected to other heads and an underlying racial capitalist logic that has shaped the broader world. Understanding each of these policies and reform projects as part of a Hydra, or nexus (as Pauline Lipman suggests in this book), of racialized neoliberal policies and shifting strategies thus becomes a key component to resisting these oppressive forces. It is our hope that the thorough examination of each Hydra head will help the reader be able to better articulate what race has to do with each of these neoliberal reforms and the role it plays in maintaining racial and economic inequality.

Slaying the Hydra Through Social Movements

In creating this book, we asked our group of authors to end their chapters with discussions of resistance and social movements. A question we then ask ourselves, and may be asked by the reader, is, Why resistance? Or why social movement? We go back to the myth of the Hydra to think about this question. Heracles could not defeat the Hydra by himself, because he needed to take on individual heads of the Hydra and keep new heads from emerging. He called on Iolaus, his nephew, to help him. Every time Heracles decapitated a head, Iolaus would scorch the neck stumps to keep heads from regenerating. Iolaus’s help allowed Heracles to begin attacking the Hydra’s head and body altogether.

What the story of the Hydra foretells is that resistance to, or the slaying of, the Hydra will not be addressed through incremental policy changes, piecemeal reforms, or charitable giving by well-intentioned nonprofits. Rather, transformative change will require a coupling of policy/institutional work to social movements. Social movements are a vital social form where groups of people, or collectives, “give voice to concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in different forms of collective action and public protest” (University of California, Santa Barbara, Sociology, n.d.).

What the myth of the Hydra clarifies is that collective analysis and struggle are necessary in documenting how oppression works, articulating alternative perspectives on how the world should be, and taking actions that would improve the well-being of not just ourselves but those who are disproportionately harmed by structural inequality.

Since 2010 NYCoRE has used its meetings and political actions as generative spaces where members have an opportunity to discuss and analyze our social conditions and move toward taking individual and collective action in classrooms, in schools, in policy, and in the streets. It is NYCoRE's belief that by expanding collaborative struggles while maintaining a clear and compelling political analysis, the Hydra will eventually be slayed. Through the metaphor of the Hydra and this organizing work, NYCoRE has arrived at the following question: How might NYCoRE and others who are part of the educational justice movement develop a shared political analysis to defeat the Hydra of racialized neoliberal education reform?

It is in response to this question that *What's Race Got to Do With It* was formulated. It is also a rationale for why we asked authors to share and discuss potential and existing forms of resistance to their particular head of the Hydra and/or the Hydra as a whole. The chapter authors have come together to ask questions and generate answers and analyses of those questions. But asking those questions and analyzing research is only half the battle. Drawing on those analyses to inform action is what comes next. In education research, descriptions of social action are often missing from texts. Ironically, it is samples of action that are the pieces of research that readers are often most interested in learning from. In this book is analysis from an inspiring group of scholar activists who are not only writing and theorizing justice but also actually engaging with it every day in their localities. To ask them to document and analyze oppression and despair without providing examples of resistance and hope would have been a disservice to them and to the reader.

To us, this book and each chapter serves two purposes. First, this book and its chapters can serve as a guide to action. We encourage readers to facilitate these forms of inquiry to action in their own communities and across communities to slay the larger Hydra. Second, the book can remind people "the struggle for justice does not end when the school bell rings" (NYCoRE, 2002). The work of the scholar activist and teacher activist is daunting because it does not end when we leave our place of teaching or work. By providing the reader with artifacts of resistance, written by scholar activists, we want the reader to see that this work is about a deep love of humanity and seeing embers of hope glow ever brighter because of collective struggle.

Summary of Chapters

The first chapter of the book opens with an examination of high-stakes testing, a reform that in some ways serves as the lynchpin and justification for the others that follow. As NYCoRE activist Rosie Frascella stated at a rally

against the punitive impact of testing, “Racism and privatization are destroying our schools, and standardized tests are the weapon.” In this first chapter, **Wayne Au** traces how standardized testing has become the central tool for measuring education in the United States over the last 100 years. His chapter offers an overview of key concepts about high-stakes testing, provides a brief, modern-day history of high-stakes testing in education policy—including how our modern-day testing has roots in the racism of IQ testing and the eugenics movement—and reviews research evidence showing the disparate impacts of high-stakes testing on students of Color specifically. Using these lenses, Au argues that high-stakes, standardized testing operates as tool for the maintenance of White supremacy. Concluding with a brief description of the kinds of resistance building against high-stakes testing generally, Au also illuminates the White supremacist impulses embedded so deeply within the tests.

While the results of these tests continue to justify educational policy decisions, corresponding shifts in governance consolidate power in ways that decimate democratic local control. **David Stovall’s** chapter articulates a theoretical and praxis-oriented analysis of the realities of mayoral control through the broader ideology of Whiteness and the current project of neoliberal school reform. To understand mayoral control as ideology and policy, Stovall uses critical race theory (CRT) to gain a further understanding of its function as hegemonic machination of the state. Instead of resting solely on analytical critique of mayoral control, his contribution concludes with tangible examples of community opposition that has the potential for substantive change in the current landscape of city and educational politics.

Facilitated by the kinds of power consolidation described by Stovall, **Pauline Lipman’s** chapter that follows sheds light on one of the most formidable neoliberal reforms under mayoral control: school closings. Lipman situates school closings in the neoliberal and racial logics that drive the restructuring of public education in the United States. She argues that closing schools in communities of Color is a racialized policy of state abandonment that facilitates capital accumulation by dispossession. Racial ideologies and histories of White supremacy are central to this process. Yet, Lipman shows us that closing public schools is just one strategy of a shifting process of neoliberal experimentation. Thus, she argues for transformational education politics that incorporates opposition to school closings and other neoliberal strategies in a larger challenge to the underlying capitalist and racial logics that are remaking public education and cities. She concludes with the promise of an emergent grassroots movement and alternative agenda that centers the

knowledge and experiences of parents, students, and communities of Color in strategies of school transformation and targets both corporate privatization and racial oppression.

Central to the project of power consolidation and closing schools is the ongoing corporate attack on teacher unions. While others have focused on the need for unions as one of the only united forces broad enough to push back against the privatization agenda, **Brian Jones's** chapter sheds light on an often overlooked component of this attack: the impact on Black wealth and political power. He highlights a two-fold paradox of contemporary education reform, the first of which is that corporate reformers cast themselves as antiracist and antipoverty champions of Black youth while undermining trade unions that are a historic source of Black wealth and political power. The paradox only deepens when we notice that their attacks on teacher unions fall disproportionately on Black teachers. The second paradox Jones illuminates is that although Black teachers are, in many cities, being displaced by White teachers, White teachers are not the ultimate beneficiaries of this process. Jones argues that the attacks on Black teachers will have negative consequences for all teachers and for working people as a whole. In fact, Jones concludes that the faux "antiracism" of corporate education reform will ultimately benefit elites: politicians, business owners, ed-profiteers and some upwardly mobile middle-class professionals.

Using a historical lens to help trace the pathway that set contemporary reforms in motion, **Ujju Aggarwal** provides a critical genealogy of choice as a key principle of reform and management in education that emerged in the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* era. This genealogy illuminates that neoliberal restructuring dates back further than the 1980s, and can be understood as emerging in tandem with the Civil Rights Movement. By extending this timeline, Aggarwal illuminates that neoliberal restructuring in the United States is organized through race and is not reliant upon privatization mechanisms alone. *Brown* signified a moment when universal rights to education were won, thus indicating a different structure of citizenship than Jim Crow. However, Aggarwal argues, how universal rights were structured (as individual choices) became critical to understanding how the continuity of a tiered citizenship was both guaranteed and embedded within the capitalist state.

With the concept of choice now seamlessly embedded in mainstream ideology about educational "improvement," we have seen the expansion of charter schools and other reforms that frame quasi-private options as civil rights opportunities. **Terrenda White's** chapter uses critical theories of Whiteness

to understand proliferations of particular kinds of charter schools in urban communities of Color, such as No Excuses charter schools and charter schools with franchised models of private management and organization. As these schools have increasingly out-paced community-based charter schools in urban neighborhoods, it is unclear the racial and cultural significance of these shifts and its impact on everyday school practices. Using observations and interviews with regional directors, school leaders, and teachers in a charter school in New York City, White illustrates the ways in which Whiteness operates as a structuring force that shapes school norms, expectations, and practices. In doing so, readers will be able to identify what is at stake for teaching and learning of Black and Latino/a children whose schools have shifted drastically in light of market-oriented policies emphasizing choice and competition.

In keeping with Terrenda White's analysis that highlights how race and neoliberal reforms are experienced daily in schools, **Amy Brown's** chapter also peeks inside a New York City School to examine the way that the dependence of current reforms on private dollars racializes relationships both inside and outside of schools. Based on two years of ethnographic teacher research at College Prep, a small, traditional public, New York City high school, Brown documents the ways in which the lived experience of privatization in urban education rearticulates race, class, and gender inequalities. Her findings at College Prep demonstrate a clear relation between philanthrocapitalism, White supremacy, and economic inequity. By tracing a brief history of what Ealy (2014) calls the "problem industrial complex," Brown connects this to a racialized political economy of education in New York City under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Through describing College Prep, and analyzing its relationship to funders, she demonstrates how the problem industrial complex intersects with the experience of College Prep teachers and students, concluding with possibilities for resistance.

While the majority of chapters in this volume focus on the neoliberal educational policy in the K-12 setting, **Barbara Madeloni** reminds us that institutions of higher education are not safe from such invasions from market-driven reforms. She situates teacher education as an essential site for the development of educators with the knowledge, commitment, and reflexivity to engage in social justice education. Recently, teacher education has seen the imposition of a standard national high-stakes assessment of student teaching, in the form of edTPA. In this chapter, Madeloni argues that the edTPA severely limits the possibilities for teacher educators to engage in teacher education for social justice. As an instrument of standardization

and corporate education reform, Madeloni shows how the edTPA reproduces White supremacy by narrowing our understanding of teaching to simply what is measurable rather than the work that it truly is: complex, uncertain, and emerging within human relationships.

We end the book with *artifacts of resistance* to complement the set of examples of struggles for justice that are discussed throughout the book. They are the visual representations of action taken by the educators and youth doing this work every day. First there is a speech by **Asean Johnson** from when he was nine years old in 2013 in Chicago, Illinois. Asean has become a nationally prominent speaker against various aspects of racist neoliberal school reform in Chicago and beyond. His reprinted speech makes clear the devastating effects of school closures. **The Dreamyard Action Project** is a New York City-based youth organization, and their 10-point platform, modeled after the Black Panthers, was a critical response to the impact of mayoral control in their city. **The Teacher Activist Group (TAG)** platform provides a national scale response to current school reform. TAG is a network of educator-activist groups from different parts of the country, and of which NYCoRE is a member. The platform is an articulation of what these local organizations, collectively, believe to be the foundation for a just educational system for all youth, families, and educators. Finally, we have images and documents from the **Stand-Up-Opt-Out campaign** organized by the Prospect International High School in Brooklyn, New York. The teachers at the high school refused to administer state exams to their students who are all newly arrived immigrants and were set up to fail by this exam.

Collectively, these *artifacts of resistance* are a glimpse at the growing demands for educational and social justice that are emerging across the country, and of what Jean Anyon (2005, 2014) described as “radical possibilities.” For Anyon the production of economic justice and just schools required the envisioning of another world and doing the collective work needed to make those visions a reality. Anyon (2005) wrote, “[i]f those of us who are angry about injustice can recapture this revolutionary spirit of democracy, and if we can act on it together, then we may be able to create a force powerful enough to produce economic justice and real, long-term school reform in America’s cities” (p. 200). These artifacts, and chapters, are a testament to both the anger felt by many about the oppressive conditions in which education is situated, and the power of coming together to create change. We hope the book not only provides the reader an opportunity to deepen his or her thinking on what race has to do with these issues but also the inspiration to take part in the struggle for justice.

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Note

1. www.fserjc.org/
2. The “state” refers to the constellation of processes, power relationships, and institutions that give shape to the formation of society. As such the state is a site through which power is distributed and fought over in relation to the society (See Apple & Aasen, 2003; Gramsci, Hoare, & Nowell-Smith, 1972; Scott, 1998; Trouillot, 2001.)