

Book Review

The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City

Pauline Lipman
New York: Routledge, 2011

Reviewed by: Chris Arthur
York University

In *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*, Pauline Lipman convincingly links the marketization of education to neoliberal capitalism and urban development using methodologies and concepts from an array of disciplines (ethnography, critical policy analysis, activist scholarship, critical geography, Marxist political economy, and cultural studies). From a vantage point located within the city and in solidarity with those who have the least political and economic power, Lipman highlights how neoliberal education policies contribute to the displacement of working class African American and Latino/a communities in Chicago. Weaving together the interplay between class-conscious actions by business and venture philanthropic organizations, pragmatic support by state officials and disadvantaged groups, and progressive and White supremacist discourses, Lipman presents an analysis that reflects the complexity of neoliberalization. While noting that neoliberalism takes different forms, Lipman's analysis of Chicago's neoliberal urban and school reform is one that can inform our understanding of similar urban education initiatives in other political jurisdictions.

The book, the result of six years of activism and research into school and urban reform in Chicago, begins with a brief overview of neoliberalism. Following this, the first chapter presents Lipman's central argument: neoliberal urban and education policies, supported and informed by White supremacist ideologies, displace African American and Latino/a working class communities as part of a project to attract urban investment. The second chapter expands upon this claim, linking post-Fordist global capitalism and White supremacy to school reform and urban policies in Chicago. The third chapter presents an analysis of the Chicago Public School Board's *Renaissance 2010* policy document and exposition of how policy actors use it together with federal education policies to further the marketization and disinvestment of public education in Chicago.

In the fourth chapter, Lipman critiques mixed income housing and schooling policies and the discourses that underpin both while building further support for her claim that urban reform and school reform are part of the same neoliberal urban initiative. She finds that while framed in egalitarian rhetoric, mixed-income urban development and education policies are implicitly supported by racist discourses that disavow the structural problems facing African American and Latino/a working class communities. Moreover, the recodification of poverty as a cultural problem devalues these communities as spaces of intellectual and cultural production

offering resources to resist racist subjective and structural violence. For all the rhetoric around choice, Lipman acerbically notes that African American and Latino/a working class communities are not offered the choice of staying in regenerated and properly funded public schools and communities. In fact, many of those displaced are barred or unable to return to their newly refurbished charter schools or former communities, creating horizontal ghettos in other parts of the city to replace the vertical ones they were forced to leave.

The fifth chapter, written with Christen Jenkins, delves into the role of venture philanthropy in urban education. The chapter focuses on four Gates Foundation projects in Chicago: small schools, Academy of Urban School Leadership, youth organizing, and parent organizing. Lipman finds that despite democratic rhetoric, these projects shift control over education from governments and local school councils to various non-governmental organizations (for profit education providers and venture philanthropy funds). Worse, these initiatives latch onto and subvert potentially progressive alternatives to the underfunded and unresponsive public schools from which venture philanthropists purport to be saving African American and Latino/a communities.

Chapter six utilizes Gramsci's concept of hegemony to highlight how the *good sense* of working class parents is mobilized to support corporate charter schools. As Lipman highlights throughout the book, it is not simply through coercion but also through consent that neoliberalism progresses, promising to give choice and power to parents who want schools that can provide a good, safe education for their children. Some of the parents Lipman interviewed, for example, did not agree with the long-term goals of the corporate school reform movement but supported it nonetheless, viewing the possible benefits their children could obtain in charter schools as their only viable option given the underfunded, racist public alternative.

Attempting to combat this pessimism of the will, Lipman's final chapter provides a wide range of practices that can challenge White patriarchal capitalism. What we must do, she writes, is link up with urban social movements, teach critical pedagogy, make global connections between groups fighting for social justice, demand non-reformist reforms, and build another world today by creating worker-run factories and consumer cooperatives. While I agree with Lipman that what is to be done and what we are to create after capitalism can only be outlined in broad strokes, more theoretical support for how these disparate alternatives operating at different levels can work together to create another world is needed. The final chapter of David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*, a book cited often by Lipman, is of assistance here.

Additionally, anticapitalism is absent from the final chapter's call for a public education for liberation. If the "fundamental problem" is "capitalism, held in place by White supremacist and patriarchal ideologies and structures" (p. 158), then any public education for liberation that is "antiracist, antisexist, antiheterosexist, and fully inclusive of all people" (p. 165) must also be anticapitalist. Moreover, the most powerful argument for such an anticapitalist public education is Lipman's preceding analysis. In contrast to those who privilege class over race (or vice versa), or bring in race or class after the analysis has been done, Lipman illustrates in the first six chapters of her book how political economy and critical race theory can be powerfully used together to make clear the inextricable link between racialization and capitalism. In illustrating how neoliberalism and the racialization of poverty and insecurity are mutually supportive and appear in myriad forms, Lipman's analysis highlights how non-reformist reforms must be struggled for on multiple, coordinated fronts.

The brevity of the final chapter's analysis does not, however, detract from the real strength of

Lipman's book: the timely and nuanced exposition of the ongoing dispossession of racialized working class communities. In fact, the final chapter only stands out as lacking because the other chapters move seamlessly between the abstract and concrete, each enriching the other so that by the end of the book, the initially abstract picture of neoliberalism becomes a complex array of disparate, coordinated, co-opted, and antagonistic practices and discourses. Additionally, while I mentioned David Harvey as a possible theoretical support for the final chapter, Lipman's preceding analysis also provides a particularly rich exemplar that can productively inform future attempts to analyze struggles that challenge oppression.

Lipman argues that we need "organic intellectuals" who can "connect the dots between immediate issues and larger systems of oppression and exploitation" (p. 163), and while she modestly leaves herself out of this category, her work stands as an example of what an organic intellectual ought to do. There is more work to be done, but Lipman's book provides a number of tools and examples of how to connect the dots and moves the reader from what Gramsci called common sense to good sense. Written for both a general and academic audience, the book uses theoretical concepts in a manner that does not simplify the complexities of the phenomena they analyse but rather enriches our understanding of the concepts through their explication with interviews, policy analysis, and concrete examples. Lipman's analysis of the new political economy of urban education illustrates both why interdisciplinary analysis is needed and how it can work effectively. *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* should be widely read as an example of how to fuse activism and research and as an exemplary piece of intersectional research that contributes to the discussion on what to create after capitalism.

References

- Harvey, D. (2010). *The enigma of capital and the crisis of capitalism*. London: Profile Books.
- Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. New York: Routledge.

Chris Arthur is an elementary teacher in the Toronto District School Board and a part-time PhD student at York University. His research interests include Marxism, political philosophy, critical policy analysis and financial literacy education. His recent book, *Financial Literacy Education: Neoliberalism, the Consumer and the Citizen* (2012), is published with Sense Publishers.