

Chicago's Consensus Democracy: The Suppression of Public Power in Public Education

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Abstract

This article identifies the broad features of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, and where these rationalities converge in policy and practice. I apply Rancière's theory of politics to the common neoliberal and neoconservative practice of public suppression, specifically as this and these rationalities' features appear in tandem meant to shape public education. Framing Chicago as the example of contemporary education reform, multifaceted efforts to suppress public power and public input in the educational policy process are brought to light and serve as unifying principles between two seemingly different rationalities and the suppression of dissensus in favor of anti-democratic practices.

Keywords: neoliberalism, neoconservatism, political theory, de-democratization, dissensus, Chicago, consensus

Introduction

In order to best observe and understand the anti-democratic movement in public education, we must turn our attention toward cities in which both neoliberalism and neoconservatism appear in policy and in practice.¹ In practice, neoconservative leadership can threaten the rhetorically progressive marketing of neoliberal education policy through conservatism's and neoconservatism's unabashed support of corporate power² and cultural nationalism,³ beliefs that are divergent from neoliberalism's superficial adherence to alleged equality for the masses. Though these rationalities may seem contradictory on the surface, neoliberalism and neoconservatism converge in their "de-democratizing effects."⁴ As Heybach and Sheffield argue, the transition toward "neo" forms of liberalism and conservatism are reflected in how individuals interact with the state on a broader

1. Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*, (New York, Routledge, 2011).

2. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005).

3. Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization" *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (2006).

4. Brown, "American Nightmare," p. 690.

scale.⁵ Within a culture of individualism, anti-democratic policies can seem both natural and inevitable.⁶

Stifling discourses of the radical right and left have resulted in a fusion of seemingly oppositional rationalities in public education policy, shaping not only the goals of public education,⁷ but also the capacity in which decisions around these goals are indicative of truly democratic decision-making. As a result, the actors who shape education's underpinnings showcase rampant individualism, "economic morality," and unwavering patriotism as ideals seen as givens, cornerstones of an ideology that fuses two initially opposed rationalities to paint a particular truth, though grounded in falsehoods and aesthetics.⁸ In addition, the role of the public is severely limited in this practical and ideological shaping of public education.

Chicago, like other Midwestern cities, is unique in its positioning: allegedly progressive policies marketed to the masses, but these policies are stifled by neoconservative and neoliberal political figures. For the remainder of this article, I will refer to both neoliberalism and neoconservatism as "rationalities," rather than ideologies, arguing that the former has the capacity to shape the sayable and how we understand what is both true and sensible.⁹ It is at this convergence against democracy where this article begins its critique. The purpose of this article is to explore how a decades-old "hegemonic alliance"¹⁰ reflects a contemporary fusion of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities and their capacity to erode public education in light of their capacities to suppress public power in favor of manufactured, performative participation.

In addition, this article endeavors to unite these seemingly opposing rationalities (one moral-political, and one market-political) work to erode public education through saturating the state, as well as undermining the political autonomy of the masses meant to engage within the process of preserving education as a public good. As mentioned, though once contested rationalities, neoliberalism and neoconservatism merge in not only their anti-democratic principles, but also in their anti-democratic educational objectives.¹¹ Chicago serves as an exemplary case of this fusion of rationalities meant to erode the democratic principles of public education. In order to best understand the case of Chicago, we must look more deeply at the rationalities that govern its education landscape.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is both an economic and political rationality founded on beliefs of privatization, increased choice, and liberated economic markets to allegedly maximize citizens' well-being and individual freedoms, all while destroying federal and state infrastructure.¹² For a neoliberal society, individuals' desires and acquisitions supersede the needs of the people, allowing for increased individualized, private control of public life and its institutions in order to maximize

5. Jessica A. Heybach & Eric C. Sheffield, "Creating Citizens in a Capitalistic Democracy: A Struggle for the Soul of American Citizenship Education." In *Citizenship Education Around the World*, eds. Aaron M. Kuntz & John Petrovic (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 69.

6. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*, p. 73.

7. Heybach & Sheffield, "Creating Citizens."

8. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 85.

9. Brown, "American Nightmare."

10. Henry Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*, (Herndon, VA, Paradigm Publishers, 2004).

11. Heybach & Sheffield, "Creating Citizens," p. 69.

12. Brown, "American Nightmare," p. 698.

profit. This privatization of public institutions, still however, requires state oversight in the forms of market regulation and access to public facilities, for example.¹³ Other implications of neoliberalism include increased protections of financial institutions, redefining common sense,¹⁴ and finally governance by the elite or alleged “experts”, instead of the critical participation of the masses.¹⁵

The employment of market ideology in the early stages of neoliberalism was meant to open financial markets to curb inflation; but in the process, market ideology converted citizens into mere consumers of goods and services, where good consumers learn to act within the existing, market-centric environment.¹⁶ Freeing financial markets in a neoliberal rationality redistributes wealth toward the elite, rather than regenerating it to the masses. Neoliberalism operates under the belief that since the market is allegedly objective, its liberation will ensure equal resources and opportunities. In this way, part of what makes it “neo” involves its depiction of free markets as both objective and normative.¹⁷ This widely held assertion is achieved through policy, rather than by chance. However, the concept of “freedom” becomes an empty, economic rendition of an individualized, consumer-centered system of choice,¹⁸ where the ruling elite limits the genuine “freedom” of choice for the masses.

However, neoliberalism isn’t a one-size-fits-all rationality, but rather is contingent upon locality.¹⁹ It is not merely an economic rationality, but an organization of the state, the subject, and social life. Thus, while neoliberal political rationality is based on a certain conception of the market, its organization of governance and the social is not just economic ideology spilling into other areas but rather the explicit imposition of market rationality upon these spheres.²⁰ The neoliberal state advocates for free market, property rights, and privatization of assets. As part of strengthening privatization of public institutions, the neoliberal state “assumes the risk” while private entities gain profit.²¹ As mentioned, citizens then function as little more than consumers of public or privatized services, which erodes agency in favor of controlling human behavior and one’s capacity to obtain both power and capital to ensure the very individual freedoms (though initially curtailed) promised by neoliberal policies.²²

Neoliberalism has the capacity to pervade all aspects of public life, including systems of values and beliefs. What makes neoliberalism powerful is its capacity to pervade the masses’ consciousness. Systems of thought are powerful in maintaining a society’s power structures in favor of elites. Neoliberalism’s reshaping of common sense illustrates its ability to infiltrate and control human behavior on a subconscious level, through its capacity to alter what constitutes common sense, and how this second-natured understanding of one’s world is also good sense.²³ Neoliberal elites can control discourse in order to serve their own agendas, resulting in “misleading” representations of how things are, effectively masking root causes and systemic issues that contributed

13. Heybach & Sheffield, “Creating Citizens,” p. 74.

14. Harvey, *A Brief History*.

15. Michael Apple, *Education and Power*, (New York, Routledge, 1995).

16. Heybach & Sheffield, “Creating Citizens,” p. 82.

17. Brown, “American Nightmare.”

18. Heybach & Sheffield, “Creating Citizens,” p. 74.

19. Brown, “American Nightmare.”

20. *Ibid.*, p. 693.

21. Apple, *Educating the “Right” Way*, p. 77.

22. Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism*.

23. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison notebooks*, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

to the problem in question.²⁴ One powerful tool and outcome of neoliberalism remaking common sense involves portraying collective power as unnecessary.²⁵ Common sense framing in this way enables the masses to believe that individual interests hold higher importance than collective needs, diminishing public power and the capacity for the masses to critically engage in public life.

Neoconservatism

Neoconservative rationality manifests differently for the various groups that hold a degree of allegiance to it. Neoconservatism encompasses what Brown classifies as intellectuals and anti-intellectuals, evangelicals, angry white men, and righteous black men, to name a few.²⁶ Despite the differing ideological frames of reference of those encompassed in neoconservatism, multiple principles do exist to unify members of neoconservatism. Neoconservatives believe in corporate power, restoration of class power to elites, and private enterprise. Both ideological influences and corporate-backed think tanks helped to advance individual freedoms as a way to mask the drive to restore class power.²⁷ So, neoconservatism reflects both religious and fundamentalist responses in the political and social spheres. This can create a dilemma for political parties encompassing some degree of neoconservatism, resulting in a less-than-unified rationality. The Republican Party—the political party most often associated with neoconservatism—still struggles to balance between its support of big businesses, and its support of moral values in the social sphere. As a result, conservatism and neoconservatism house figures who represent and support various aspects of this rationality, which can trickle down into the masses’ support of certain aspects over others.

Neoconservative rationality hardly departs from neoliberalism’s erosion of democratic principles and goal of shaping of common sense. As with neoliberalism, neoconservatism aids in the shift of common sense, truth, and the consciousness of the masses. Conservative rationality reflects a rationality based upon alteration.²⁸ It operates under a level of certainty,²⁹ in which the declaration of what is true, right, and good without reference to anything is a neoconservative concept of political truth. The neoconservative rationality rests on statements based upon declaration, or rather, sounding convincing instead of factual. The rhetorical power of a declarative rather than a reasoned or argued truth is buttressed by the neoconservative defense of truth “from the gut.”³⁰ As a result, the communicated conception of truth and common-sense rests in well-circulated hunches from the powerful.

Finally, the largest unifying principle involves the position of the state as one of patriotic and militarized strength. What makes conservatism “neo” involves its moralization of the state on a national and global scale.³¹ “Self-evident” principles endowed upon humanity by their own virtue are, because of their appearance in American documented, are thus accessible to *all* human beings in the United States.³² Neoconservatism paints the United States as the shining example of government. Neoconservatives believe in coercion in the form of militarization to further individual

24. Harvey, *A Brief History*.

25. Apple, *Education*.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 690.

27. Harvey, *A Brief History*.

28. Apple, *Education*, p. viii.

29. Heybach & Sheffield, “Creating Citizens,” p. 72.

30. Brown, “American Nightmare.”

31. *Ibid.*

32. Heybach & Sheffield, “Creating Citizens,” p. 72.

interests, especially by highlighting threats or alleged threats here and abroad. This militarization pairs well with the desire to highlight a moral purpose in the social sphere, both of which speak to neoconservatives' push toward cultural nationalism. Neoconservatives believe that "liberals" eroded the social order to one in which the state provided for non-affluent, non-white populations. This common belief helped to mobilize the Christian right and the white working class under the banner of cultural nationalism,³³ illustrating the elevated conception of the United States.

Similarities and Differences

In both neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, citizenship is distorted: to either individuals acting as economic agents, or as "supporters of the shining city on the hill,"³⁴ as hyper-patriots, "expect[ing] neither truth nor accountability in governance."³⁵ From here, the susceptibility to governance—and the weakening of public agency—increases, just as the concept of choice becomes individualized and politically dominated, masking the genuine conception of freedom. Instead, these rationalities function on the formation of a baseless freedom grounded in individual choice, subsequently distorted to what the elite control and distribute to the masses.³⁶ Profitability and productivity anchor these rationalities' conception of governance, providing conditions for individually motivated actions.³⁷ Thus, democratic principles become obstacles. Ordinary, individualized life and choices are substituted for genuine democratic participation. The capacity for the ruling class to exercise their power "rests on a pacified citizenry" where moral and amoral—neoconservative and neoliberal—discourses have replaced democratic ones.³⁸ As these rationalities diminish political participation through governance, citizens' rights and genuine freedom more generally, become meaningless.³⁹

As these rationalities fuse, the state becomes a source of effectiveness that legitimates those abuses of power, as both a partial and political entity. Neoconservatives model state authority on church authority, while neoliberals fashion the state as a body guaranteeing free market protection. Seemingly opposed to each other, both rationalities jeopardize checks and balances of state power and weaken liberal democratic institutions. While neoconservatism depends on a nationalist, populist, and often working-class base, it reinforces the belief that shunning the rich is "anti-American." Neoliberalism operates under a system of economic winners and losers where the economic elite reaps the benefits of restored class power.⁴⁰ Both rationalities force citizens to protect what belongs to them. to some degree, both rationalities support the intervention of the state as it relates to the economy.

In addition, although neoconservatism, like neoliberalism, projects support and belief in democracy and liberty, neoconservatives displace the key principles and assumptions associated with it. For example, equality is not a value found in neither neoliberalism nor neoconservatism: "egalitarianism, civil liberties, fair elections, and the rule of law lose their standing, becoming

33. Harvey, *A Brief History*.

34. Heybach & Sheffield, "Creating Citizens," p. 76.

35. Brown, "American Nightmare," 692.

36. Ibid.

37. Heybach & Sheffield, "Creating Citizens," p. 73.

38. Ibid.

39. Jacques Rancière, "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 2/3 (2004).

40. Brown, "American Nightmare."

instruments or symbols.”⁴¹ In essence, neoliberal rationality helps to prepare for the anti-democratic policies and ideas that characterize both neoliberalism and neoconservatism. In addition, as egalitarianism and democratic principles lose meaning, moralism and statism gain traction as legitimate visions of governance. In essence, both neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities shift truth by devaluing political accountability and intellectual opposition.

We have seen how neoliberalism and neoconservatism have come to represent anti-democratic rationalities, and in some ways, mirror each other in anti-democratic practices. This context is integral to understanding how the fusion of these rationalities appears in public education. In extension, both neoliberal and neoconservative practices in public education by and large illustrate suppression of the public as it relates to drafting and enactment of educational policy, as well as the mere participation within conversations that dictate the enactment of educational policies on individual cities and communities. As we look toward the appearance of these rationalities in public education, it becomes apparent we must examine the political structure in which these rationalities coexist in order to discourage democratic participation and to frame the fight for equitable public education as a political one. Jacques Rancière’s theory of politics, dissensus, and consensus provide an extensive backdrop for how we can understand the appearance of these rationalities within the existing social arena, and in education, where the suppression of the public—and controlling their capacity to understand this suppression—reflects their lack of power to preserve education as a public good.

Rancière’s Theory of Politics

Jacques Rancière offers a descriptive explanation of politics and the role of particular social classes in its presentation in society. Generally speaking, politics represents the relationship between worlds, or the relationship between societal frames of reference. For Rancière, it represents action driven by reason⁴² that assists in the organization of powers, roles, and systems.⁴³ Therefore, politics is about one’s ideological and physical existence in society: it is a manifestation of how we think and what we do. It can arise based upon how we use our thoughts and actions to challenge the social order. Equality makes actions, objects, and places political by giving rise to a meeting in which the social order is challenged.⁴⁴ This meeting of logics sets up a place for actions driven by reason, a place for worlds, groups, and ideologies to collide and intersect.

For Rancière, there are two forms of politics: the real and the manufactured. The latter, or manufactured, represents the “police,” as Rancière calls it.⁴⁵ This is not to be confused with our conventional understanding of the police, which illustrate an organization or group that enforces law and order. The *politics* of the police reflect creating and maintaining society and the social order, as it exists, without disruption, and to benefit the ruling class. Police politics is not only the organization of power, but also the system in which this organization is legitimized. This systemized organization of power and distribution of social roles is not entirely immune from struggle or challenge, thus the creation of the conventional police to reinforce law and order. However, what

41. *Ibid.*, p. 697.

42. Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics.” *Theory and Event* 5, no. 3 (2001).

43. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 28.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

45. *Ibid.*

makes police politics powerful is its implicit nature: police politics shape common sense and thus actions driven by reason. Anything that breaks from this order reflects real or genuine politics.

Rancière critically examines democracy's roots to illustrate his conceptions of contemporary politics and the position of the people or the "demos." He asserts that democracy is a term invented by its opponents out of mockery, invented by those deemed qualified to rule.⁴⁶ Thus, democracy, by nature and despite its lexical root, is hardly grounded in the agency of the demos. As a group of sorts, the demos are not identified racially or as separate social classes, but are instead deemed as the "poor." However, they are not the poor, but the "uncounted," still superficially acknowledged to enjoy the same freedom as the ruling class.⁴⁷ The demos are the subjects that are a supplement to the parts of society: they are those who have no part in the public, decision-driven sphere. Considered the "unaccounted for," the demos are those "without speech" or rather, those who have no capacity to insert themselves into the public sphere with hopes of being understood.⁴⁸

Finally, the distinguishing feature of politics is the existence of a ruling class, subject, or party who governs others, without any other qualifications to hold this position of superiority. In this way, the social order is not based upon nature, or birthright, but rather, upon just the fact that the social order *exists*. This necessitates that the demos understand the social order and the existing obligation to obey it. The ruling class imposes both the law, and thus, the division of class as part of maintaining the social order.⁴⁹ "Class" is meant to distinguish who can rule, and who cannot—who "counts," and who does not. As a result, the ruling class, by virtue of control, is "counted" in the social order, while the demos are not. The uncounted have no part in decision-making and thus, no part in the construction of society. However, they still make efforts to uproot their inferior position. Equality—since those who give the orders give the orders because they can, not because of birth position—threatens this order. The struggle for visibility begins here: with politics, where equality is consistently jeopardized by the existing order between those in power and the demos, as the latter attempt to gain visibility. These attempts to gain visibility illustrate breaks in the social order, meant to create space for a dispute.

Dissensus

Genuine politics, on the surface, transforms the space people occupy at a given time. It functions on its reconfiguration of space, manifesting a dispute, or what Rancière calls dissensus.⁵⁰ The real, genuine presentation of politics appears through dissensus, or rather, when differing worlds or frames of reference collide, and the issue surfaces of whether dispute and potentially understanding will originate from this collision. Dissensus illustrates the attempt to challenge the *manufactured* appearance of politics—the politics of the police. Dissensus reflects a dispute and it creates a distance between the sensible and itself, a moment or series of moments in which "two worlds are put into one."⁵¹ In this way, opposing political subjects confront each other to legitimate themselves within the political space. Finally, dissensus begins with a major "wrong" or injustice: an existing, ever-present gap between the rulers and the demos, created by the empty freedom of

46. Rancière, "Ten Theses," p. 5.

47. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 8-14.

48. Rancière, "Ten Theses," p. 2.

49. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 73.

50. Rancière, "Ten Theses."

51. Rancière, "Who is the Subject," p. 304.

the people within the social order.⁵² It is here that the demos' efforts to gain legitimacy carry significance. Politics only exists through the questioning or upholding of equality amidst this empty conception of freedom.

As easy as it would be to conceptualize politics as merely a class conflict, it is important to frame its appearance in light of dissensus, which illustrates exercising agency beyond equality between social classes. Politics isn't just a conflict between rich and poor, but rather, causes the poor or the demos to exist.⁵³ Dissensus illustrates the effort to uproot the existing order, to right the "wrong" inherent in politics and to expose these oppositional frames of reference in order for the demos to be seen and understood in the public sphere. The opposition of logics inherent in Rancière's understanding of politics allows for the different "counting" of parts and groups of society differently. This ideological struggle exposes different and sometimes opposing frames of reference. It is here that questions of what is equal, just, and fair are brought to the surface by the demos, attempting to gain visibility and to be understood by those who rule. However, understanding is jeopardized when the powerful cannot understand or choose not to understand (or refuse to acknowledge) the arguments presented by the demos. As a result, the foundation of politics rests upon an opposition of logics that resurface in dissensus.

However, dissensus is much more than argument or ideological opposition. It can rupture the social *and* the conceptual order of society. It can change not only what we do, but also how we *think* about what we do. Rights to and control of a space can be legitimated, jeopardized, or denied. Dissensus is based upon the capacity to which each party understands each other, or attempts this. Rancière explains this situation further: there's a simultaneous understanding and lack of understanding between both parties. It is a question of how both parties come to define and understand the *same* concept *differently*" (emphasis added).⁵⁴ This reflects contention, rather than misunderstanding. However, the larger question focuses on whether both parties have equal capacity to assert themselves. This is justice, when each party is given due to exhibit agency. Dissensus illustrates the manifestation of efforts toward preserving this justice. Even more so, dissensus embodies justice in its capacity to give rise to questions of equality and the role of the uncounted, or the masses: can we, the people, make ourselves both seen and heard? Actions themselves are political once they give rise to dissensus. Thus, actions are political when the question of whether equality is either jeopardized or maintained.

The Threat of Consensus (Democracy)

As a form of governance, consensus democracy is modeled off of the politics of the police. It is born out of consensus, which does not reflect a general agreement, but rather a surrender of sorts to what is common, which no longer allows for dissensus. Consensus democracy is characterized by promises of alleged justice, economic production, and is allegedly apolitical and classless, where individuals not part of the elite are only counted when in combination with others present in the same space.⁵⁵ It eliminates appearance of genuine dissensus and dispute to the control of the rulers shaping the state. Consensus democracy involves encompassing individuals and

52. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 19.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

54. *Ibid.*, p. x.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

groups simply showing common humanity and overlooking the ever-present partition that determines the way in which the different parties are counted in society. Because consensus democracy is built on the idea of “common humanity,” with everyone existing at the same time among the same understanding of what is sensible, its efforts to saturate social divisions to create an illusion of equality, where politics and thus dissensus cease and common humanity is meant to serve as alleged social equality.

The objective of consensus democracy, and arguably from where its influence stems, is to eliminate genuine politics. In order to do so, consensus democracy endeavors to erode the difference between politics and the police.⁵⁶ By eliminating the difference between politics and the police, spaces in which the demos can attempt to be seen and understood are removed. Police intervention, in a conventional sense, involves breaking up demonstrations.⁵⁷ In these cases, places for agency are quite literally, removed. However, consensus here is not always explicit. Opportunities to exercise agency either do not exist, or common sense is shifted to portray these spaces as unnecessary due to the prioritization of individual over collective gain. Politics then, when it does appear, becomes performative, as the demos’ space for truly exercising agency no longer exists. In addition, freedom promised to the demos via “democracy” is empty in nature, as common humanity no longer offers the assurance of genuine equality, especially where public participation is concerned. Here, the real and performative forms of politics are indistinguishable, creating a “police figure” of the demos.⁵⁸ A unified group may be visible—and thus meant to stand for the demos—but operates within a deconstructed, manufactured space devoid of genuine politics.

As a result of the existence of consensus democracy, Rancière argues that genuine democracy does not exist. He argues that consensus democracy suppresses the common space in which the demos can gain visibility, thus diminishing their participation in addition to the distorted, performative nature of the fleeting opportunities for dissensus. Democracy as we think of it, allegedly ensures justice, wealth, and gains for all on an individual basis,⁵⁹ but instead becomes the manifestation of the power of those who have no qualification for exercising that power.⁶⁰ As a result, genuine democracy does not exist: it becomes a performative manifestation of politics, demonstrating theatrics of dispute and cancelling out true and genuine occurrences of politics.⁶¹ Humans gather under the rule of those qualified to rule, which are only ruling because they can, within a common space. These gatherings illustrate efforts for dispute, but in consensus democracies, merely represent just enough of a temptation to still disingenuously participate in public life. As a result, those who engage are just political performers, an appearance. They are not agents of the state, or parts of the masses. These actors reflect an image of the demos themselves, but only assist in the creation of consensus democracy with the absence of genuine dispute.

In societies operating under anti-democratic principles, consensus and consensus democracy result, reflecting the end of politics and the isolation of political spaces from the demos.⁶² Though democracy exists in its label, consensus democracy is hardly democratic with regard to public agency and participation. Consensus democracy creates a society in which communities *undermine* opposition of the police and dissensus. At their core, anti-democratic principles in fact

56. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

57. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” p. 9

58. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 70.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

60. Rancière, “Who is the Subject,” p. 304.

61. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 62.

62. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” p. 16-17.

expand the division between those who count and those who don't. State rule by "experts," or those deemed qualified to rule, happens as a result of consensus to the newly constructed common sense and ideological underpinnings shaped by the powerful and meant to impact the demos. Individual freedom, government incompetence (in favor of privatization of public institutions), and competition reflect seductive aspects that continue to entice the demos to superficially participate in the political process but ultimately erode their grip on public institutions, as well as their capacity to preserve their agency.

Consensus illustrates both isolation and eventually public subordination to the state of society as shaped by those in power, in much the same way that neoliberalism and neoconservatism reflect rationalities that gain power from public subordination. The reproduction of the sensible, or in this case, the public's understanding of their coercion to the state of affairs, reflects a process by which groups and classes have the capacity to gain consensus over whom they can rule. The elite in power help to legitimize subordination and consensus of the demos. Thus, "consent" to these ideas of the sensible results in consent to the powerful in shaping ideology, as well as public life, public institutions, and thus the capacity (or lack of capacity) for the masses to participate in this regenerative process.

The Case of Chicago

What then, does this all mean? How can we think about public education in the context of the fusion between neoliberalism and neoconservatism, and Rancière's theoretical framing of politics? The convergence of these rationalities and politics appear poignantly in cities, hotbeds for neoliberal and neoconservative restructuring of public institutions, especially in public education. The remainder of this article will focus on Chicago as both an example of "neoliberal urbanism,"⁶³ as well as the prime example of neoliberal and neoconservative shaping of educational policy at the expense of the city's citizens. The anti-democratic principles of both rationalities appear through Chicago's venture philanthropy scene, its large-scale district reforms, and mayoral-district control. Like Rancière's concept of consensus, these facets illustrate efforts to convert politics into performative gestures and to suppress public power in the shaping of public institutions.

Chicago Governance and "Right to the City"

David Harvey classifies the city as a "vantage point" from which to examine multiple aspects of and contradictions within public life,⁶⁴ where one's "right to the city" is measured by the ability to access public spaces and institutions.⁶⁵ Having rights to the city involves the capacity to democratically participate amidst conflict between ideologies. However, those who are qualified to rule are those who govern the city, thus imposing division between the counted and uncounted,⁶⁶ giving way to ideological conflicts between the rulers and the ruled. These conflicts demonstrate a reconfigured space for genuine politics and opportunities for dissensus. Though elites have the capacity to run the city as they see it, we must question the extent to which the uncounted possess a "right" to their city, despite the existence of political spaces.

63. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*, p. 19.

64. David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, (London, Arnold, 1973).

65. Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville*, (Paris, Anthropos, 1968).

66. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 83.

In addition, rights to the city are both literal and figurative. There exists the tangible, literal possibility of remaking and restructuring cities and their policies. However, there also exists the capacity to shift, diminish, or eliminate what is exploitative and what is sensible, illustrating the figurative conception of “rights”. For the uncoun­ted demos, they have no part in the fashioning of the city in addition to the controlling of the city or the political processes that shape it.⁶⁷ The lack of visibility is both literal and figurative, where physical and ideological representation is lacking. Ironically, the demos are those who are uncoun­ted in the public sphere, one of the very elements they seek in order to establish themselves as agents in the political and social processes of taking up public spaces and occupying public institutions. Such efforts illustrate attempts to possess rights to their city

Diminishing public power and accountability allows for urban governance⁶⁸ by integrating economic elites into the framework of policy meant for re-development of cities. This ultimately results in the gentrification of neighborhoods and inequitable resource distribution in order to increase funding for the city. More broadly, these actions extract the resources and rights to the city from the public, as governance is dependent upon the elites’ power and decision-making capacity. Cities demonstrate the endless shifting of social cultural, monetary, and political capital—where neglect of a particular area demonstrates the devaluing of capital that has ultimately been funneled elsewhere within the city—demonstrating a new space for capital accumulation. This new “space” is both literal and figurative.⁶⁹ It is where power exists, and where certain populations can physically organize to acquire and exercise that power. The demos are limited in their access to these spaces; both neoliberalism and neoconservatism exacerbate these limitations in reframing how we understand cities and where development of capital and power can occur within them.

Lipman characterizes Chicago as an example of “neoliberal urbanism,”⁷⁰ a case that exemplifies one particular type of neoliberalism manifested in urban restructuring of the city. Neoliberal urbanism is the result of scaling the national government’s power in favor of expanding local governments. This has historically justified fiscal cuts to cities across the United States; which, in Chicago especially, has affected some areas more than others. As a result, cities became competitors within the global market in order to offset the funds lost at the diminishing of the federal government’s role in disbursing funds to localities for public services.

This neoliberal urbanism directly shapes urban education policy as well. Chicago is not just an example, but is instead a “test case and model” for urban education policy, often neoliberal in nature, but dependent upon financial and corporate actors that characterize neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities. However, Chicago’s recent large-scale education policies reflect a fusion of neoconservative and neoliberal rationalities in light of their anti-democratic implementation in relationship to the public. Chicago’s role as a “zone of experimentation”⁷¹ for education policy illustrates its capacity to define and shape the practice and implementation of these policies and practices across the country, giving way to social movements to preserve public education, literally and figuratively as a *public* good.

67. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” p. 16.

68. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*, p. 26.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Chicago's Education Landscape

So, what does looking at the city as a hotbed for social control of the demos have much to do with education? If we understand the city as a place in which politics, consensus, and dissensus give rise (and fall) to one another, we must understand that the fight to preserve public institutions by and for the masses reveal questions of whether the masses have “rights” to their cities and its resources. Public education, arguably the last existing, genuine public good⁷² then becomes a battleground for the masses to engage in potential spaces of politics and thus create opportunities for dissensus and visibility, demonstrating a true democratic process. How does Rancière’s theory serve as an ideological frame of reference for how neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities converge within the sphere of public education? Not only do these converge on the issue of education policy, but also in how the masses attempt to and thus fail to collectively shape these policies and the restructuring of not only their schools but of the city as a whole. The anti-democratic principles of these rationalities do not allow for the masses to genuinely participate, let alone create, maintain, and exist in political spaces for dissensus to happen.

Framing public education in a state of crisis, a relatively recent development, not only undergirds neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, but also the basis for the implemented anti-democratic education policies. *A Nation at Risk* ushered in a new era of education and education policy,⁷³ an era in which public education was and still is consistently portrayed as a failure. Both neoliberal and neoconservative education discourse executes a common sense of public education’s perpetual state of being in crisis, pairing this crisis with catchy claims for “change” and “reform”⁷⁴ that seem common sense and necessary to believe. The purpose of manufactured crisis is to enact or create the conditions for social change. Though initially created, the crisis of public education is now quite real, illustrated through the starving of schools of necessary resources to open up opportunities for venture philanthropy and privatization schemes, two cornerstones of Chicago’s education landscape.

Chicago’s educational policies over the last decade exemplify both the fusion of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities in practice, as well as the dire impact of these rationalities upon masses’ capacity to truly participate in gaining access to public education and in the formation of these decisions that dictate their own access to educational opportunities. To best understand the case of Chicago, it is important to provide some background on the city’s role as a breeding ground for neoconservative and neoliberal policies. This framing results from understanding not just Chicago’s schools, but public education more generally, as in a perpetual state of crisis. As we will see in the case of Chicago, privatization and venture philanthropy and landmark education reforms resulting in mayoral control of the Chicago Public Schools (or CPS) reveal the performative nature of masses’ albeit minimal participation in any aspect of coordinating, drafting, and executing educational policy.

72. Apple, *Educating the “Right” Way*.

73. National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for School Reform: A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education*, (United States Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1983).

74. Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, (New York, Vintage Books, 2013).

Venture Philanthropy

We often find examples of venture philanthropy in disenfranchised communities. The early 2000s marked the beginning of a period in which corporate actors viewed education as the next big investment opportunity, pouring obscene amounts of money into education reforms nationwide. According to Diane Ravitch, venture philanthropy involves investments in reform initiatives, in this case, in education reform. It builds on corporate, market-based concepts of competition, and deregulation and implements these concepts into the education sector.⁷⁵ In addition, these corporate actors consistently cite the alleged low performance of public schools to tout the necessity of their education reforms. Venture philanthropists encompass corporate figures, companies, and foundations. The Gates, Broad, and Walton foundations—powerhouse venture philanthropists—have and still pave the way for corporate-focused, de-professionalized education agendas that drastically shift the goals and practices of public education closer toward an unfettered education marketplace. These entities understand that cash-strapped school districts can hardly return any discretionary funds upon receipt of a foundation’s grant. Therefore, corporate actors view their “gifts as investments, [with the expectation of] measurable results” in exchange.⁷⁶ As a result, school districts across the country readily shift their positions in order to accommodate stipulations attached to generous foundation-based grants to appease the grants’ benefactors.

In education, market ideology manifests itself through practices of venture philanthropy. Venture philanthropy frames education as an investment opportunity, in which economic elites capitalize on areas of disaster or disenfranchisement in order to privatize public education opportunities in those areas.⁷⁷ Venture philanthropy projects promote a grants culture, where venture philanthropists and corporate actors become the gracious saviors of education by endowing private funds to schools that agree to adopt their vision for education. In addition, this grants-culture allows for funds at the neighborhood schools to dwindle significantly, while insulating corporate actors from backlash of constituency groups.⁷⁸ Moreover, the corporate actors’ visions for education often illustrate neoliberal and neoconservative anti-democratic, consumer-driven conceptions of the successful student. The practice of giving toward schools as investment in exchange for control solidifies the corporate role in shaping education. Venture philanthropy maximizes influence of elites on the education landscape, which has the capacity to shape the public’s conception of what public education should be.

School choice illustrates one concrete example of venture philanthropy found in urban school districts. Lipman draws connections between the assault on urban education through privatization and the “economic polarization” of urban cities.⁷⁹ Privatization is framed as a plausible solution to the allegedly ineffective public sector, but also serves as a welcomed solution for those dissatisfied with the public sector and its institutions and absolves the state’s responsibility in providing equitable education opportunities. Non-affluent and non-white communities are the first to experience privatization schemes that result in loss of funding for neighborhood schools. Some of the privatization schemes such as closing allegedly failing schools, expanding school “choice,”

75. Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*, (New York, Basic Books, 2010).

76. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

77. Kenneth Zeichner and César Peña-Sandoval, “Venture Philanthropy and Teacher Education Policy in the U.S.: The Role of the New Schools Venture Fund,” *Teachers College Record* 117, no. 5, (2015).

78. Ravitch, *The Death and Life*, p. 214.

79. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*, p. 2.

and implementing top-down accountability measures can be found within urban environments. Here, choice implies quality and creates a veneer of empowerment in making individualized decisions and appeals to upward mobility, college access, and agency. However, these options are not egalitarian in nature; and despite their appearance to the masses, are not equitable. As a result, the masses struggle with the choice of the underfunded neighborhood school and the well-resourced privatized option, illustrating the inequitable nature of these choices.

Chicago is not just one example, but rather *the* example of venture philanthropy and privatization of education in cities as manifested in the recent increase in the district's granting of charters as public schools slowly starve. Charter schools illustrate both privatization of public education and the expansion of school choice. They are marketed as a solution to failing public education. Conversion of socially, economically, and politically-produced problems into consumerized fixes in the form of brand-new privately-run schools diminishes historical disenfranchisement. Eroding public marginalization into a choice between schools forces the public to navigate dire conditions and to craft individualized solutions.⁸⁰ The existence of charters exacerbates competition with already scarce resources. Despite its seemingly well-intentioned philosophy, privatization of disenfranchised neighborhoods and their schools reflect a deficit frame of thinking about allegedly "deficient" populations⁸¹ in need of allegedly better school options in place of the resource-starved neighborhood schools. Charters and education reforms more broadly reflect attempts to weaken resistance to privatization. As a result, the masses have also adopted a similar crisis mindset in seeking consumerized "solutions" to allegedly failing public education, inadvertently ensuring elites' control of public education.⁸²

Despite the reforms' capacity to directly impact the masses, the lack of public input in these reforms illustrates the performative nature of politics in neoliberal and neoconservative education rationalities. These anti-democratic education reforms create a reality in which the masses must operate within a zero-sum game when accessing educational opportunities. Policymakers are able to "see like a state," by having no connection to the constituents their decisions readily impact⁸³ and execute policies that, for them, will produce the greatest return. Education reforms in disenfranchised communities impact how the masses understand equitable resources within examples of selective disinvestment. Both neoliberals and neoconservatives view the federal government and the people as "untrustworthy" and lacking expertise in education,⁸⁴ and the increase in businesses and state governors writing and enacting centralized and "intrusive"⁸⁵ education policy reflects this viewpoint that public education is "obsolete."⁸⁶ Such sources are portrayed as both objective and rational and therefore prioritized and elevated in the policy-making process. The sense of urgency in crafting and executing what are allegedly solutions to the crises within public education cloud the capacity to understand the origin of these proposed solutions, and who these solutions actually benefit.

Chicago illustrates an example of coercive and the well-orchestrated fusion of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities in education, all at the expense of the public and their ability to

80. Brown, "American Nightmare," p. 704.

81. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*.

82. Peter Taubman, *Teaching by Numbers: Deconstructing the Discourse of Standards and Accountability in Education*, (New York, Routledge, 2009).

83. Ravitch, *The Death and Life*, p. 11.

84. Taubman, *Teaching by Numbers*.

85. Heybach & Sheffield, "Creating Citizens."

86. Ravitch, *The Death and Life*, p. 10.

access equitable education. Its recent education reforms span beyond just school choice schemes: mayoral control of the school district in conjunction with the shifting influence toward elites and venture philanthropists serve as catalysts for historical disenfranchisement over decades. This accumulation by dispossession allows both power and capital to be gradually shifted away from the masses toward the elite, all while these same actors employ rhetoric championing equality in education for all students. Two examples illustrate Chicago's role as an exemplary case of education reform: adopting mayoral control of its school district and Renaissance 2010, each initiative dealing an enormous blow to equitable public education and public power in education still felt today. These examples illustrate Rancière's political theory in practice and the anti-democratic nature and formation of these reforms directly impacting educational opportunities for Chicago's masses.

1995: Mayoral Control

Two Chicago education reforms—one in 1995, and the other in the early 2000s—illustrate the city's role as a model for neoliberal and neoconservative, anti-democratic education reform. These sweeping reforms, deemed largely ineffective in preserving public education, served as efforts to increase accountability of schools and practitioners. In 1995, the state handed control of CPS over to the mayor as an effort to increase school and personnel accountability, a frequent cry of the Chicago elite over subsequent decades instituting sweeping education reforms. In addition, the mayor was now able to take control of the school board and the district's CEO. The school board reflected corporate and business figures, prominent within Chicago's financial sector, a statement that still applies to the current school board. Moreover, the school board and CEO were an extension of the mayor and his prospective policies, none of which were elected or illustrated a genuine representation of the masses in the enactment of these policies. Thus, the mayor has the capacity to push through an unencumbered education agenda without public input.

Richard M. Daley, the mayor during 1995, hand-picked a CEO who became responsible for immense top-down accountability of schools, teachers, and students. These practices resulted in the probationary classification of non-white, non-affluent schools, which resonated with families dissatisfied with the “ineffective” nature of the public school system in Chicago. These top-down policies created the conditions for future top-down education reforms and their agents to further undermine public schools, their teachers and the Chicago Teacher's Union in order to implement privatized educational options and instrumental pedagogy. Neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities manifest decreased collective public power and input in decisions and policies within public education. This is especially evident in the elite governance of Chicago through the mayoral control of the district, despite the lack of empirical evidence in support of a singular form of governance.⁸⁷ With the transfer to mayoral control, so began the explicit public suppression in Chicago's education sector.

In continuation of Chicago's suppression of the public in education, Lipman paints the picture of a school board meeting, arguably a place where both politics and dissensus can occur. We are reminded in this scenario that genuine democracy, per Rancière, does not exist, saved instead as a luxury for the elite⁸⁸ and meant to mock the masses it should intend to serve. In a Chicago school board meeting, board members meet with community members, practitioners, students, and active citizens to discuss policies directly impacting schools, students, teachers, and

87. Ravitch, *The Death and Life*, p. 97.

88. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*.

communities within Chicago. These, on the surface, seem to be places in which dissensus could happen: where the rulers and the ruled must make attempts to understand each other, and where the latter attempts to legitimize their arguments and gain visibility within the reconfigured political space. The individual member of the demos who attempts to gain visibility in the public space reflects the identity of the demos themselves, speaking up for constituents now “counted” as a result of being in the presence of others.

However, each person endeavoring to speak is limited to just a few minutes, and a conclusive closed-door session illustrates “where all decisions are made” without public input.⁸⁹ In any space in which there is something to discuss, all subjects engaged are tested in their capacity to be seen and understood.⁹⁰ However, because the masses are viewed as uncounted consumers, rather than citizens, they must have no part in what they are believed to not understand.⁹¹ Elites then, serve as not just a stable source of governance, but also the *only* legitimate source of governance within the space of education, as the uncounted lack speech, or rather, a frame of reference to be viewed as legitimate within the political space. The closing off of democratic participation not only illustrates consensus democracy—further discouraging collective participation—but it also illustrates the neoliberal and neoconservative distrust of citizens in the decision-making process in education and that public participation is ultimately just a performance as a result of district mayoral control.

2004: Renaissance 2010

Instituted in 2004, Renaissance 2010 illustrated a “market solution for failing schools.”⁹² Pushed by the city of Chicago, for-profit corporations, and Chicago Public School leaders, Renaissance 2010 hoped to establish 100 new schools by the year 2010. However, while advocating for new and seemingly equal educational options, the district closed 60 neighborhood Chicago public schools and opened 100 new ones—a mix of charters, contract schools, and public schools subjected to performance contracts mandated by the district. Originally, the reform meant to close what the district deemed to be “failing schools,” since all schools were held to a performance standard based upon test scores. Instead, the agenda was constantly reworked to appease significant protest to the policy in practice. The reform later included the “turnaround” policy, where the district would fire all adults in a school building and rehire a completely new staff. Each school would have a specialist that would ensure the implementation of this agenda on a school-wide basis.

What resulted from Renaissance 2010 involved the deepening division between the district and its officials, championing the increased school choice and alleged bump in student achievement. As a result of the division between the district leaders and the people, the parents, students, teachers, and community members argued that such a measure increased gentrification and destabilized black and Latino communities, citing the inequitable educational opportunities for particular areas of the city, and the inequitable treatment of the existing educational options in non-affluent neighborhoods in comparison to options for more affluent ones. Little proof surfaced to indicate measurable successes of the schools targeted for change. The student displacement as a

89. Ibid., p. 63.

90. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 55.

91. Rancière, “Ten Theses.”

92. Lipman, *The new Political Economy*, p. 51.

result of the school closures (not unlike the outcome of the 2013 school closures in Chicago—the largest in the nation) increased the levels of violence and instability within these communities, jeopardizing the capacity to provide stable and adequate educational options and resources.

Such practices contradict the supposed objectivity of education reforms, as certain communities are prioritized over others when gaining equitable public educational opportunities, and the decision to implement Renaissance 2010 passed without public input. Moreover, the idea of egalitarian educational opportunities is merely a farce: in order to appease the corporate actors, CPS needed to close already-existing and already-starved neighborhood schools to make way for—to be fair, some new neighborhood schools—but for many charter and contract schools. Therefore, the opening of privatized, privately-run school options were meant to appease the elite, rather than the public, the latter of whom had little to no say in the process or implementation of the initiative.

For the police, injustice functions as a mistake, where the “experts” qualified to rule construct the almost indistinguishable law and subsequent alleged fact.⁹³ Egalitarianism loses its meaning; and in this particular case, the masses are forced to shift their understanding of educational equity to one grounded in inequitable choices. Coupled with, again, the lack of public input regarding the formation and execution of this reform, and the enormous influence of corporate actors in the educational process, Chicago exemplifies a district and a city more broadly grounded in experimentation. The “false analogies” created between business and education that unite both political, anti-democratic rationalities promote a top-down structured means of governance while further suppressing the public’s agency and understanding of equitable education.⁹⁴ Education becomes an investment opportunity where the students, practitioners, and the public more generally matter little in the decision-making and policy-crafting processes. As a result, the public has little choice but to concede to the conditions created for them as governance closes off opportunities for dissensus.

Conclusion

Despite Chicago’s dependence upon governance and public suppression in education policy, I wonder how long this model will last. Some years after the fruits of Renaissance 2010 were to have taken effect, I participated in one of the largest teachers’ strikes in the country. The moment I stepped off the blue line train at Washington and was enveloped into a sea of red amongst my union brothers and sisters, amidst thunderous applause from other train-riders, will be forever etched in my memory. As a young twenty-something, it was the greatest manifestation of public power I had ever seen, the greatest moment of dissensus. As years passed however, it became harder to see our progress between the mass school closures of 2013, the revolving door for district leaders, and the increased presence of financial actors and their measures of accountability in the educational decision-making process, in addition to the suppression of public workers and unions.

It took years for me to realize that all hope wasn’t lost yet. Witnessing collective power in Kentucky, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and other places made me realize we lit an important fuse back in 2012. Politics—dissensus—exists when the uncouneted disrupt the social order. As teachers, practitioners, and community members, we are innovative: if a space for dissensus closes, we create another. These are becoming more prevalent, and span beyond education. However,

93. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 112.

94. Ravitch, *The Death and Life*, p. 12.

Rancière reminds us that in order for politics to occur, a constructed time and space for mutual understanding must exist. In addition, Ravitch reminds us that there are no “shortcuts” or “utopias” in education,⁹⁵ a sector that beckons both hard work on-the-ground, and evidence to support our practices. Efforts to assert collective agency in light of anti-democratic policies and rationalities in education illustrate powerful examples of making our voices and our expertise known, heard, and part of the greater conversation, cementing rights to our cities.⁹⁶ It is our duty to challenge policies, reforms, and decisions that seek to undercut the true democratic nature of public education and to continue creating opportunities for dissensus.

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95. Ravitch, *The Death and Life*, p. 3.

96. Lipman, *The New Political Economy*.

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