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Education and Capitalism [series↓]

Education and the Structural Crisis of Capital

The U.S. Case

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Today's conservative movement for the reform of public education in the United States, and in much of the world, is based on the prevailing view that public education is in a state of emergency and in need of restructuring due to its own internal failures. In contrast, I shall argue that the decay of public education is mainly a product of externally imposed contradictions that are inherent to schooling in capitalist society, heightened in our time by conditions of economic stagnation in the mature capitalist economies, and by the effects of the conservative reform movement itself. The corporate-driven onslaught on students, teachers, and public schools—symbolized in the United States by George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation—is to be explained not so much by the failure of the schools themselves, but by the growing failures of the capitalist system, which now sees the privatization of public education as central to addressing its larger malaise.

We live in an era of structural crisis associated with a new phase of capitalism: monopoly-finance capital. This phase is characterized by: (1) economic stagnation in the mature capitalist economies; (2) a dramatic shift to financialization, i.e., speculative bubbles as a means of economic expansion; and (3) the rapid concentration (and monopolization) of capital on a global scale.¹ A consequence of the slow growth endemic to the developed economies is that the giant corporations that dominate today's economic world are compelled to search for new markets for investment, outside their traditional fields of operation, leading to the takeover and privatization of key elements of the state economy. The political counterpart of monopoly-finance capital is therefore neoliberal restructuring, in which the state is increasingly cannibalized by private interests.

It should hardly surprise us, under these circumstances, that financial circles now increasingly refer to public education in the United States as an unexploited market opportunity—or that the private education industry is calling for a further opening-up of the multi-trillion-dollar global public education market to capital accumulation.² Education, moreover, plays a crucial role in the development of the workforce, leading to growing neoliberal calls for its restructuring.

The state of emergency of public education and the demand for its restructuring and privatization is to be viewed, then, as primarily the product of the current long-term period of economic and social instability. The structural crisis of capital as a whole is reflected in the struggle over schooling, which, far from being incidental to the system today, can now be seen

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as lying at or near its core. The result has been a resurgence of the long battle on the part of the vested interests to establish a commodified school system, bringing education increasingly within the domain of the market. Every means is now used to achieve this end, including exploiting the contradictions of race and class, international competition, and economic instability itself.

The Political Economy of Capitalist Schooling

In the mid-1970s, radical economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis provided a useful political-economic framework for the analysis of elementary and secondary education in their pioneering work, *Schooling in Capitalist America*.³ Although initially influential in left circles, *Schooling in Capitalist America* was to fall out of favor with radicals by the 1980s as too deterministic and economicist—not accounting for the complex cultural ways in which students and educators negotiated with the system.⁴ Others on the left criticized Bowles and Gintis’s argument for being too “functionalist” and non-dialectical in its analysis.⁵ Nevertheless, I believe that *Schooling in Capitalist America* constitutes a useful springboard from which to address the political economy of capitalist schooling, as this presents itself to us in the neoliberal age.

For Bowles and Gintis, schooling under capitalism—if not countered by powerful democratic resistance movements—tends to evolve in the direction of capitalist-class imperatives, which subordinate it to the needs of production and accumulation. This is evident in what the authors called *the correspondence principle*, or the notion that the “social relations of education” normally correspond to the social relations of production in capitalist society.⁶ Schooling, therefore, is meant to service production, and replicates the hierarchical division of labor of the productive system.⁷ Hence, both the dominant purpose of elementary and secondary schooling in capitalist society—the formation of workers or labor power for production—and the labor process internal to schooling itself, as carried out by education workers, are fundamentally conditioned by the relations of production in the larger economy.

In this view, the forms of consciousness and behavior fostered by capitalist schooling are designed to reproduce existing classes and groupings, and thus are meant to reinforce and legitimize the social relations of production of capitalist society as a whole. Working-class students and those destined for working-class occupations are taught rule-following behavior, while those arising from the upper middle class and/or destined for the professional-managerial stratum are taught to internalize the values of the society. (Those between these two groups are mainly trained to be reliable, in addition to following rules.)⁸

Very little of the schooling at the elementary and secondary levels is oriented to developing actual skills, much less knowledge—which, to the extent that they are needed for later employment, can be obtained on the job or in post-secondary education (vocational-training institutes and colleges). Schools are, then, less about education than a kind of behavioral modification, preparing the vast majority of students for a life of routinization and standardization, in which most will end up employed in essentially unskilled, dead-end jobs. Indeed, most jobs in the degraded work environment of monopoly capitalist society—even those set aside for college graduates—require precious little formal education.

The highest quality elementary and secondary education in the United States, meanwhile, lies outside of the public schools altogether in a very small number of extremely elite private schools devoted to the education of the children of the very rich, whose goal is to generate a governing class. A prep school like Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts (with alumni including both George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush) costs \$32,000 a year for tuition alone, without boarding. It has a student-teacher ratio of 5 to 1, with 73 percent of the teachers holding advanced degrees, and a full curriculum. Such schools are seen as red carpets into the Ivy League.⁹

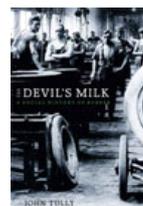
The education system can thus be viewed as corresponding in many ways to the increasing inequality, alienation, and job gradation/degradation of the larger system of production. This argument, as developed in *Schooling in Capitalist America*, was not intended to be deterministic, but rather to raise issues of class struggle. “The extent to which the [capitalist] educational system actually accomplishes its objectives,” Bowles and Gintis observed, “varies from one period to the next....In most periods...efforts to use the schools to reproduce and extend capitalist production relations have been countered both by the internal dynamic of the educational system and by popular opposition.”¹⁰



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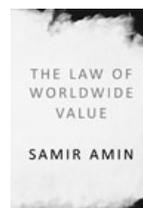
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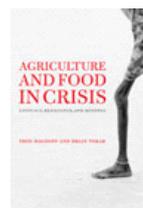
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The historical part of their book dealt extensively with both the internal dynamics of the educational system—that is, the struggles, mainly of teachers, to retain autonomy within the system in the interest of educating children—and the popular movements that periodically arose in opposition to the main drift of capitalist education, in the form of the counter-hegemonic movements of educators, parents, and community members. Yet, both forms of struggle tended to be mere rearguard actions (or, at best, wars of position), almost never taking the form of forcible assaults (wars of movement) on the underlying principles of capitalist schooling. The result was that the corporate agenda dominated overall.

Monopoly Capital and the Rise of the Corporate Model of Schooling

The significance of such a broad political-economic approach to public education is that it allows us to perceive the underlying logic governing the development of capitalist schooling in the United States and elsewhere. Public education arose in the United States early in the nineteenth century. But the education system as we know it today only emerged, beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its modern development thus corresponds in time to the rise of monopoly capitalism, an economy dominated by giant corporations. It has been estimated that “between a quarter and a third” of all U.S. capital stock in manufacturing underwent consolidation through mergers and acquisitions between 1898 and 1902 alone. In the largest of these, the formation of U.S. steel in 1901, as many as 170 separate firms were brought together in a single year to create the first billion-dollar corporation, controlling 65 percent of the steel industry. This represented the great era of corporate concentration, marking the rise of big-business capitalism.¹¹

A key element in the evolution and stabilization of this new stage of accumulation, lay in the opportunity it afforded for what Marx called “the real,” as opposed to the “formal subsumption of labour under capital.”¹² In nineteenth-century capitalism, workers were in a position to retain within their own ranks the knowledge of how the work was done, and therefore exercised a considerable degree of control over the labor process. Hence, control of the labor process by owners and managers was often more formal than real. As corporations and their workforces and factories got bigger with the rise of monopoly capitalism, however, it became possible to extend the division of labor, and therefore to exercise greater top-down managerial control. This took the form of the new system of scientific management, or “Taylorism,” within concentrated industry. Control of the conception of the labor process was systematically removed from the workers and monopolized by management. Henceforth, according to this managerial logic, workers were merely to execute commands from above, with their every movement governed down to the smallest detail.¹³

The chief result of the introduction of scientific management into industry, as Harry Braverman explained in 1974 in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, was the degradation of working conditions for most workers. Increasingly, monopoly capitalist society was characterized by a polarization of skill, with only a limited demand for a relatively small number of highly skilled workers, as compared with masses of unskilled workers. The corporate-designed education system was constructed with the aim of producing workers tracked to these different labor-market segments. But scientific management was also seen as a way of directing the labor process within the schools themselves—subjecting teachers to new forms of corporate management.

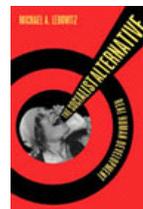
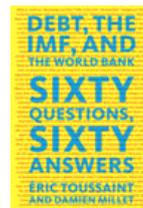
Scientific management first became a widely known concept in the United States after Louis Brandeis, arguing before the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1910, publicly extolled the magic of efficiency engineers in increasing corporate profits. This was followed in 1911 by the publication of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management*, initially as installments in *American Magazine*. Scientific management and efficiency experts soon became the rage among corporate executives and public officials alike, quickly spreading to the administration of public schools, where standards, testing, and Taylorized schools became the defining principles for a new utopia: the corporate-model school system. Thus, efficiency expert Harrington Emerson gave a speech to the High School Teachers Association of New York City in 1911, which he entitled “Scientific Management and High School Efficiency.” The last seven of his twelve principles were: standard records, planning, standard conditions, standardized operations, standard instructions, standard schedules, and efficiency reward.¹⁴ In 1913 Franklin Bobbitt, a specialist in educational administration at the University of Chicago, wrote in *The Supervision of City Schools*:

The worker must be kept supplied with detailed instructions as to the work to be done, the

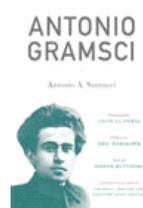
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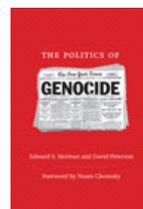
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standards to be reached, the methods to be employed, and the appliances to be used.... Teachers cannot be permitted to follow caprice in method. When a method which is clearly superior to all other methods has been discovered, it alone can be employed. To neglect this function and to excuse one's negligence by claiming the value of the freedom of the teacher was perhaps justifiable under our earlier empiricism, when the supervisors were merely promoted teachers and on the scientific side at least knew little more about standards and methods than the rank and file.

For Bobbitt, “the teacher’s freedom is necessarily narrowly limited,” due to the need for standardized, efficient methods. Bobbitt went on to suggest that students working on penmanship should be tested “by stop-watch as to speed...to determine which of the modes of distributing the sixty minutes of time for teaching the writing is superior.”¹⁵ Likewise, Ellwood Cubberley, an influential educational administrator, and superintendent of San Francisco’s public schools, wrote in 1916 in his *Public School Administration*: “Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life.”¹⁶

For Joseph S. Taylor, district superintendent of schools in New York City, writing in 1912:

(1) The state as employer must cooperate with the teacher as employee, for the latter does not always understand the science of education; (2) the state provides experts who supervise the teacher, and suggest the processes that are most efficacious and economical; (3) the task system obtains in the school as well as in the shop, each grade being a measured quantity of work to be accomplished in a given term; (4) every teacher who accomplishes the task receives a bonus, not in money, but in the form of a rating which may have money value; (5) those who are unable to do the work are eliminated.¹⁷

The primary means by which the efficiency of teachers was to be evaluated under this system was through the testing of their students. Heavy emphasis was thus placed, beginning just prior to the First World War, on developing rigid standards accompanied by standardized tests. The National Education Association (NEA) established a Committee on Tests and Standards of Efficiency in Schools and School Systems in 1911. This coincided with the movement to carry out IQ testing, and various thinly disguised racist forms of assessment.¹⁸

This early attempt to create a corporate-dominated, standardized education system was seeded by the new philanthropic, tax-free foundations that arose in the period. Millionaire industrialists like Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford established private foundations, designed to employ philanthropic financing to leverage major social changes, circumventing the role of government. The Carnegie Foundation was a leading force in both the eugenics and testing movements. It invested \$6,424,000 in testing up through 1954. In 1965 it initiated the development of the testing program, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The Rockefeller Foundation, for its part, contributed heavily to the creation of the Educational Testing Service in the 1930s and '40s.¹⁹

The Failure of the Early Corporate Education Movement

But despite the powerful influence exercised by monopoly corporations and philanthropic foundations early in the twentieth century in developing a corporate model for schools, complete with rigid standards and testing, the public schools remained, in many ways, outside their control. Schools were often the focus of democratic struggles emanating from progressive teachers, parents, and communities. Education remained publicly funded, decentralized, and subject to community pressures. Teachers were low-paid professionals in a labor-intensive field where they had considerable autonomy and often identified with working-class children. Teachers’ unions developed, allowing teachers in public schools to establish minimal bargaining power over their wages and working conditions.

The resulting system of capitalist schooling had very serious defects. As a deeply segregated society, the United States remained institutionally racist—constituting *The Shame of the Nation*, as Jonathan Kozol was to put it in his 2005 book on the continuing role of racial stratification in U.S. schools.²⁰ The curriculum was often degraded to meet the needs of corporations for an unskilled, non-recalcitrant labor force.

Yet, in the interstices, progressive teachers fought against the worst aspects of the system, trying to meet children’s real needs against all odds. *The American Teacher*, which became the journal of the American Federation of Teachers, carried an article in 1912 opposing scientific

management in the schools, which argued:

The organization and methods of the schools have taken on the form of those commercial enterprises that distinguish our economic life. We have yielded to the arrogance of “big business men” and have accepted their criteria of efficiency at their own valuation, without question. We have consented to measure the results of educational efforts in terms of price and product—the terms that prevail in the factory and department store. But education, since it deals...with individualities, is not analogous to a standardizable manufacturing process. Education must measure its efficiency not in terms...of so many student-hours per dollar of salary; it must measure its efficiency in terms of increased humanism, increased power to do, increased capacity to appreciate.²¹

Education remained, therefore, a highly contested realm, with educators, parents, and community members often organizing in opposition to the main thrust of capitalist schooling. Changing conditions gave rise to a series of progressive education movements: the democratic and experimental education movement associated with John Dewey in the 1920s and '30s; the school desegregation movement in the Civil Rights Era; and the free school movement in the 1960s and '70s. Writing in 1916 in *Democracy in Education*, Dewey declared: “There is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education. The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling.”²²

The year 1916 marked the birth of the radical New York Teachers Union (TU). Building alliances with both parents and communities, the TU fought to end racial discrimination and poverty, recognizing that these were the main barriers to the success of students. It thus aimed at an educational philosophy that entailed the transformation of the whole society. Representing a powerful alternative—what today might be called social movement unionism—the TU was rebaited out of existence in the Cold War. Some eleven hundred school employees were called in for questioning and over four hundred were fired or driven out of the profession. In 1950 the New York Board of Education adopted the notorious Timone Resolution, banning the TU from operating in the schools.²³

Although none of these progressive educational movements were able to transform U.S. elementary and secondary education in a truly emancipatory direction—or prevent the education system as a whole from degenerating still further, as inequality, poverty, institutional racism, and economic slowdown increasingly engulfed the schools by the end of the twentieth century—they did succeed in keeping education within the public sphere, maintaining basic democratic values, and preserving hope and the possibility of a more egalitarian educational future.

Economic Stagnation and Attacks on Public Schools

What changed matters decisively for the worse was the onset of economic stagnation beginning with the 1974-75 recession, and continuing with a declining economic growth trend ever since. Real economic growth in the United States dropped, decade by decade, from the 1970s on, putting increasing pressure on education. Total government spending on K-12 education as a percentage of GDP had risen in the 1960s and early 1970s, reaching 4.1 percent in 1975, only to fall to 3.6 percent a decade later, in 1985. The percentage of public school revenue coming from local government plummeted from 53 percent in 1965 to 44 percent in 1985 due to a widespread property tax revolt. Consequently, funding became more centralized at the state level.²⁴

Schools, meanwhile, were forced to cope with growing deficits from the larger society. The percentage of U.S. children living in poverty rose from 14.4 percent in 1973 to 22.7 percent in 1993; while the proportion of poor children living in extreme poverty—defined as half the official poverty rate—increased from around 30 percent in 1975 to over 40 percent in 1993. Rising numbers of increasingly impoverished children arrived in the public schools, bringing with them more pressing needs, leading to greater strains on limited school resources.²⁵

The response to the deteriorating conditions of the schools in the neoliberal period, characterized by cuts in social spending, was greater emphasis on standards and assessments. Schools were put on a more corporate, market-driven basis and increasingly privatized through the introduction of various conservative school choice initiatives, including vouchers and charter schools. School-voucher initiatives arose with Milton Friedman’s proposal—most famously in his 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom*—for the government to hand out vouchers

to parents equal to their child's share of public education funding, making it possible to send their children to the school of their choice. The main goal was to allow government funds to subsidize private education. This was a direct attack on public education. In contrast, charter schools, which are publicly financed but privately managed schools, no longer run by school districts but still technically public schools, constituted what was to become a more subtle approach to privatization, arising in the 1980s.²⁶

In the 1980s, a powerful conservative political coalition, led by corporate interests, was organized against the public schools. Ronald Reagan sought to institute school vouchers, while frequently indicating his desire to abolish the U.S. Department of Education—established as a cabinet-level department during the Carter administration. Reagan appointed a National Commission on Education, which issued its report, *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983. Its message was that the U.S. education system was failing due to its own internal contradictions. (No mention was made of slowing economic growth, increasing inequality, growing poverty, etc.) In the words of *A Nation at Risk*: “If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.... We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.”²⁷

The Reagan administration, which initiated a huge Cold War military buildup while cutting taxes on the wealthy and corporations, used the rhetoric of reducing the skyrocketing federal deficit to justify jettisoning federal support for schools—including a 50 percent cut in federal Title I funding for schools in low-income districts.²⁸ The late 1980s and 1990s saw the first dramatic shifts toward more rigid standards, accountability, and assessment systems, backed up by coercive mechanisms, in states like Kentucky and Texas (the latter under Governor George W. Bush). This general approach to educational reform was pushed forward within the federal government in the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations, and materialized as a major bipartisan national program for the transformation of elementary and secondary schooling in the presidency of George W. Bush.²⁹

Three days after his inauguration in 2001, Bush unveiled his NCLB program. The NCLB legislation, signed into law on January 8, 2002, was hundreds of page long, but simple in conception, consisting of seven major components: (1) All states were to develop their own tests and three performance levels (basic, proficient, and advanced), with proficiency determined separately by each state. (2) In order to receive federal education funds, states were required to test students in grades three to eight annually for proficiency in reading and math, and to disaggregate the scores in terms of low-income status, race, ethnicity, disability status, and limited English proficiency. (3) Each state was to provide a timeline showing how 100 percent of their students would reach proficiency by 2014. (4) All schools and school districts were ordered to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) for every disaggregated subgroup toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency in 2014. (5) A school that did not achieve AYP for all subgroups would be subject to onerous penalties increasing in each successive year. In the fourth year, the school would be subject to “corrective action,” requiring curriculum changes, staff changes, or a longer school year. In the fifth year, a school still not making AYP would be ordered to “restructure.” (6) A school that was ordered to restructure was allowed five “options,” all amounting to essentially the same thing: (a) change to a charter school; (b) lay off the principal and staff and replace them with others; (c) hand over control of the school to private management; (d) relinquish control of the school to the state; or (e) “any other major restructuring of the school’s governance.” (Most schools and school districts forced to restructure chose the last, relatively undefined alternative, hoping to avoid the other options.) (7) All states were required to participate in the federal test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which, while having no consequences for schools and school districts, was meant to constitute an external check on state testing systems.

The number of schools forced to restructure under NCLB soared year by year. In 2007-08 thirty-five hundred schools nationally were in the planning or implementation stages of restructuring, a jump of 50 percent from the year before. In 2010 the number of schools in the United States that failed to make AYP under NCLB rules had risen to a high of 38 percent, compared to 33 percent the year before.³⁰

Although NCLB put new burdens and expectations on schools and teachers, total U.S. government spending on primary and secondary education as a percentage of GDP did not increase. It had risen in the 1990s, peaking at 4.2 percent in 2001 just as NCLB was unveiled, only to fall back again in the early NCLB years to 4.0 percent in 2006, below the 1975 level.³¹ The NCLB legislation represented a massive, unfunded mandate, forcing district-run public

schools to take on huge additional costs without the means to do so. William Mathis, managing director of the National Education Policy Center in Boulder, Colorado, and a former Vermont superintendent of schools, estimated that it would require a 20-35 percent increase in the current K-12 education budget nationally to fund NCLB. Instead, education funding increased only marginally—remaining flat or even diminishing, both as a share of GDP and as a share of civilian government spending.³²

At the level of large urban school districts, the most celebrated attempt at NCLB-style school reform was Mayor Michael Bloomberg's school restructuring in New York City. Bloomberg, a billionaire, worth \$18 billion, ranked the thirteenth richest individual in the United States in 2011, had made his billions through the development of a financial news media empire, Bloomberg LP.³³ In his campaign literature, Bloomberg proclaimed that the schools were in a "state of emergency." Upon his election to mayor, he immediately sought to transform K-12 education along corporate financial lines. Test scores in reading and math were the central focus; all other areas of the curriculum were deemphasized. Public schools that were determined to be failing were to be turned into charter schools. Yet, despite Bloomberg's restructuring and privatization of schools, the federal NAEP tests indicated that students in New York City made no significant gains in either reading or mathematics from 2003 to 2007.³⁴

Venture Philanthropy and Value-Added Education

Bloomberg was not alone among billionaires attracted to school reform in this period. In the twenty-first century era of monopoly-finance and information capital, the conviction arose in higher corporate circles that education could now be managed fully along scientific-technical and financial lines, making it possible to: (1) gain control of the labor process of teachers, (2) subordinate schooling to the creation of a more differentiated and routinized labor force, and (3) privatize public education (or as much of it as can be seized without meeting serious resistance). In the digital age, bureaucratization, tracking, and testing were seen to be feasible as never before. At the core of this process was the centralization of the labor process of teaching, so that all conception of how pedagogy was to be carried out would be removed from educators and controlled by higher authorities, in line with classic scientific management. Public schools were encouraged to devote an increasing share of their resources to "technology," rather than teaching staff, within the context of an updated Taylorist scheme in which teachers were to be mere appendages to smart machines.

The utopian dream of scientifically managed education, that had failed to materialize completely in the twentieth century, finally seemed within reach under twenty-first century digital capitalism. "Due to technological advances," Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of Education in the George H.W. Bush administration, observed, "many states and districts have the capacity to attribute the test scores of specific students to specific teachers and... many will use this information to hold teachers accountable for the rise or fall of their students' scores."³⁵ The dominant language in the new conservative school reform movement became that of "value-added teaching," and whether teachers had "'added value' to their students"—the new criterion for evaluating teacher performance and merit pay. Adding value, in this case, meant nothing more than increasing test scores, as a proxy for the growth of capital.³⁶

Leadership in the twenty-first century corporate school reform movement—even preempting the role of government in this respect—has come from four big philanthropic foundations, headed by leading representatives of monopoly-finance, information and retail capital: (1) The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, (2) the Walton Family Foundation, (3) the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and (4) the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation. These are widely characterized as a new type of foundation, known as "venture philanthropy" (a name taken from venture capitalism)—also called "philanthrocapitalism."³⁷ Venture philanthropies are commonly distinguished from more traditional foundations by their more aggressive, investment-oriented approach. Money is funneled directly into chosen projects largely eschewing traditional grant-making. A value-added approach is adopted, demanding quick returns based on businesslike criteria. Venture philanthropists are seen as especially aggressive in directly influencing government policy, despite their tax-free status.

The Gates Foundation, established by Bill Gates of Microsoft, had some \$33 billion in assets in 2010, plus another \$30 billion from financial capitalist Warren Buffet, spread out in annual contributions. In 2008 the Walton Foundation, representing the owners of Wal-Mart Stores, held \$2 billion in assets. The Broad Foundation—directed by Eli Broad, a real estate and financial billionaire, who sold his business, SunAmerica, in 1999, to the later bankrupt-but-bailed-out-

with-public-funds AIG for \$18 billion—had assets in 2008 of \$1.4 billion. While the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation—created by Michael Dell, founder and CEO of Dell—had assets in 2006 somewhat in excess of \$1 billion.³⁸

The direction taken by the Dell Foundation remains closely tied in its activities to Dell, which is one of the major technology companies marketing to public schools. The Dell Foundation works closely with the other three philanthrocapitalist foundations (the Gates and Broad foundations are among its biggest donors). It places special emphasis on “performance management”: an approach oriented to using information technology as the basis of accountability in the schools. This is directly connected to Dell’s own economic objectives in the educational market, since Dell is number two, after Apple, in the provision of technological hardware and infrastructure to K-12 schools. The Dell Foundation claims that it is helping urban schools to use “technology to gather, analyze and report information” for better school management.³⁹ It is a strong backer of school choice, for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) in charter schools, and charter school real estate development.⁴⁰

The Broad Foundation specializes in the training of an enormous new cadre of neoliberal capitalist education reformers, drawn primarily from outside education (recruiting professionals from business, law, the military, etc.). Its goal is to place them in upper management and school superintendent positions. The Broad Center for the Management of School Systems consists of two programs: the Broad Superintendents Academy, specifically aimed at training school superintendents and finding them positions in large cities; and the Broad Residency in Urban Education, set up to place its graduates in high-level managerial positions in school districts. The Broad Foundation expedites such placements by offering to supplement the salaries of its graduates in positions, making them more attractive to hard-pressed school boards and allowing them to hire at corporate levels. Hiring Broad graduates is also understood as a way in which school districts can make themselves eligible for additional Broad Foundation money. The Broad Institute for School Boards has as its specific mission the retraining of elected school board members across the country to get them to adopt the new corporate-management model for schools.⁴¹

In 2009 Broad Academy graduates, according to its Web site, filled 43 percent of all large urban superintendent openings. The Broad foundation is a strong proponent of the privatization of education, and is particularly concerned with breaking teachers’ unions, establishing merit pay for teachers, and, in general, deprofessionalizing education, which it believes can now be run on pure business terms, proletarianizing the work force. In 2009 Eli Broad declared in a speech he gave in New York City, “We don’t know anything about how to teach or reading curriculum or any of that. But what we do know about is management and governance.”⁴²

The Broad Foundation promotes what Naomi Klein has called “the shock doctrine,” or a form of “disaster capitalism,” destroying the public education system in order to open it up for privatization.⁴³ In April 2009, *Seattle Education* posted a guide to parents, “How to Tell if Your School is Infected by the Broad Virus,” on its Web site. Among the symptoms of the “Broad virus” listed were:

Schools in your district are suddenly closed....Repetition of the phrases “the achievement gap” and “closing the achievement gap” in district documents and public statements....Sudden increase in the number of paid outside consultants. Increase in the number of public schools turned into privately-run charters....Weak math text adopted....Possibly weak language arts too....The district leadership declares that the single most significant problem in the district is suddenly *teachers!*...Excessive amounts of testing introduced and imposed on your kids....Your school board starts to show signs of the Stockholm Syndrome. They vote in lockstep with the superintendent....Grants appear from the Broad and Gates foundations in support of the superintendent, and his/her “Strategic Plan.” The Gates Foundation gives your district grants for technical things...and/or teacher “effectiveness” or studies on charter schools.⁴⁴

The Walton Foundation reflects the outlook of Wal-Mart corporation, which has built its business on low-paid labor, virulent opposition to unions, and creating monopolistic power in the retail sector. The Walton Foundation’s emphasis is on breaking down, in every way possible, the public school monopoly of education through attacks on teachers’ unions, promotion of privately operated charters, school choice, etc. Ravitch notes: “As one reviews the contributions of the Walton Family Foundation, it is obvious that the family members seek to create, sustain, and promote alternatives to public education. Their agenda is choice, competition, and privatization.”⁴⁵

In recent years, the Gates Foundation, by far the largest of these philanthrocapitalist foundations, has adopted an agenda very close to that of the Broad Foundation, and the two often operate jointly. Bill Gates has declared that there is no connection between teacher quality and such factors as certification, experience, and advanced degrees, or even extensive knowledge of the subject matter.⁴⁶ The Gates Foundation has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the support of educational advocacy groups meant to pressure public policy, all aimed at restructuring public education, promoting charter schools, encouraging privatization, and breaking teachers' unions. Thus, it has given millions of dollars to Teachers Plus, an organization that supports the restructuring of education, while arguing that the layoffs of teachers should be on the basis of assessments (test scores), rather than seniority rules, as the unions insist.⁴⁷ The Gates Foundation also supports Teach for America, a program that recruits applicants straight out of college, puts them through a five-week boot camp, and sends them off to teach in low-income schools, usually for two or three years—without the benefit of teacher education, or a meaningful apprenticeship leading to professional certification.⁴⁸

The Gates Foundation provided \$90 million to finance Chicago's Renaissance 2010, a "turnaround strategy" then headed by Chicago's CEO of public schools Arne Duncan. Duncan's Chicago shock doctrine initiative was aligned with the Gates Foundation funded report, *The Turnaround Challenge*. Duncan, now U.S. Secretary of Education, has called *The Turnaround Challenge* the "bible" of school restructuring, and has integrated it with official federal policy, making it the basis of Obama's Race to the Top program for schools. In its 2009/2010 annual report, the Broad Foundation declared, "[T]he election of President Barack Obama and his appointment of Arne Duncan, former CEO of Chicago Public Schools, as the U.S. Secretary of Education, marked the pinnacle of hope for our work in education reform. In many ways, we feel the stars have finally aligned." Until February 2009, both Duncan and Obama's former chief economic adviser, Lawrence Summers, were on the board of directors of the Broad Foundation's education division.

Duncan, immediately upon taking office, proceeded to establish a director of philanthropic engagement within the Office of the Secretary of Education, declaring the Department of Education literally "open for business." He packed the upper echelons of the department with Gates and Broad associates.⁴⁹ Joanne Weiss, who directed the Race to the Top Competition in the Obama Administration and is now Duncan's chief of staff, was formerly director of NewSchools Venture Fund—an education restructuring organization heavily financed by the Gates and Broad foundations.⁵⁰

In Race to the Top, the Obama administration has offered additional major funding to a limited number of states (in the end, eleven states and the District of Columbia were declared winners), choosing only those that conformed to its restructuring goals with respect to testing, charters, privatization, and removing teacher tenure. During the selection process, the Gates Foundation reviewed the initial reform plans in every state, and picked its fifteen favorites, offering them each up to \$250 million to hire consultants who would write proposals for Race to the Top. As a result, educators complained that Gates was choosing the winners and losers for the federal program. The Gates Foundation therefore changed its tactics and said it would offer the money to any states that met all of its eight criteria, one of which was restricting teacher tenure.

The central philosophy underlying the Gates Foundation's *Turnaround Challenge*, which represents the semi-official policy of the Obama administration, is that "demographics need not determine destiny" or "school quality can overcome zipcode."⁵¹ This argument, sometimes presented as the "No Excuses" philosophy is made again and again in the corporate-driven education movement.⁵² Flying in the face of the overwhelming results of four decades of education research—beginning in 1966 with the Coleman Report, which determined that when socioeconomic factors are controlled, "differences between schools account for only a small fraction of differences in pupil achievement"—conservative reformers now seek to place sole responsibility for "closing the achievement gap" on the schools themselves.

Indeed, conservative statistician William Sanders of the University of North Carolina, the leading proponent of "value added assessment" in schools, has declared flatly: "Of all the facts we study—class size, ethnicity, location, poverty—they all pale to triviality in the face of teacher effectiveness." Such views might make sense if the issue were simply raising the *average achievements* of students, which is, of course, dependent on teachers. Instead, the issue is *closing the gap between the differentials in average achievement of students from widely unequal class-race backgrounds* (including students who are impoverished and homeless), which is to demand nearly the impossible of mere schools and teachers.⁵³

Indeed, to adopt a conservative, “no excuses” philosophy toward the achievement gap is to close one’s eyes to the fundamental reality—*child poverty*. It is this, says David Berliner, professor of education at Arizona State University, which constitutes the “600-pound gorilla that most affects American education today.”⁵⁴ As economist Richard Rothstein wrote in his *Class and Schools*:

The conclusion that the achievement gap is the fault of “failing schools”...is misleading and dangerous. It ignores how social class characteristics in a stratified society like ours may actually influence learning in schools...For nearly half a century, the association of social and economic disadvantage with a student achievement gap has been well known to economists, sociologists, and educators. Most, however, have avoided the obvious implication of this understanding—raising the achievement of lower-class children requires the amelioration of the social and economic conditions of their lives, not just school reform.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the new conservative education zeitgeist insists that these broader socioeconomic factors affecting the lives of schoolchildren can be safely set aside or ignored. Although it sometimes acknowledges that inequality, race discrimination, and poverty negatively impact school performance, these factors do not, we are told, in any way determine that performance. According to theory, it is thus possible to create schools that systematically erase these disadvantages of needy students. The real blockages to student achievement that should concern us, then, are ones for which schools themselves are responsible: lack of accountability and assessment, and poor teaching.⁵⁶ Class inequality, child poverty, urban deterioration, racism, etc. are to be taken into account only in terms of a recycled 1960s “culture of poverty” philosophy in which poor and minority students are taught to take on “superior” white middle-class values/culture as a key to success.⁵⁷ Reflecting a core capitalist belief, the Gates Foundation insists that schools can “uplift” all students without regard to whatever disadvantages they may bring with them.⁵⁸

The Turnaround Challenge began by acknowledging the avalanche of schools needing restructuring under NCLB, which it projected as already reaching five thousand, or around 5 percent of all schools in the country by 2009-2010. The key problem, obviously, was that 35 percent of all students in the nation and two-thirds of minority students attended high poverty schools, which traditionally underperform. Poverty, the report claimed, constituted a *significant* hurdle to schools in closing the achievement gap, but need not be an *insurmountable* barrier. In very rare, if statistically insignificant, cases, as indicated in a series of scatter-diagram graphs, a few schools could be found that were both high poverty and high performance (HHP). From the standpoint of *The Turnaround Challenge*, these HHP schools were important because they disproved that poverty was an absolute barrier to school progress.

Such rare HHP schools are generally assumed by the Gates Foundation to be charter schools, or “charter-like” schools, freed from school boards, traditional school curriculums, certified teachers, and teachers’ unions, and operating on more businesslike principles geared to high productivity/value-added. The answer would therefore seem obvious: “‘charterizing’ failing schools.” But since this option was not one that was readily chosen by schools or their school districts, it was necessary to get them to choose “the charter-related entry point” —or the “adoption of charter-like rules and authorities” in district-run schools. This, then, could “become the long-awaited vehicle for public schools to adapt to what appears to work in high-performing charters”—and therefore to be progressively charterized.⁵⁹

The Obama administration has followed this Gates Foundation philosophy closely, promoting privately managed charter schools in opposition to district-run public schools, and trying to get district schools, at the very least, to take on charter-like characteristics. It has therefore threatened to restrict federal education funding for states with caps on the numbers of charter schools.⁶⁰

Charter schools are nominally public schools, in that they depend on public funding and are required to admit any student. They operate under a “charter” or contract, which is a legal document, setting up some system of accountability, between the public agency that authorizes them and their operators. They are thus, in essence, contracted-out schools, operating independently of the elected school board and school district, and free of most regulations governing district-run public schools. Although charters can be started by virtually anyone (parents, teachers, community members, nonprofit organizations, or for-profit corporations), in practice, they have moved more in the direction of corporate-style management and

domination by investment interests. This results from either the financial support and guidance of large private foundations, in the case of many nonprofit charter organizations, or from the schools being directly operated by for-profit EMOs.

Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans rapidly charterized its public schools. As Danny Weil explained in 2010 in “Disaster Capitalism: Revisiting the Charter Schooling and Privatization of Education in New Orleans,” “Within less than 19 months [following Katrina] most of the traditional public schools in New Orleans had been ‘charterized’ and not only were all public school teachers fired with lightening speed, but their collective bargaining gains were torn to shreds along with any existing contracts.” More than half of the students were enrolled in charterized schools by 2008, as compared to 2 percent at the time Katrina struck, with many of these schools run by for-profit EMOs.⁶¹

Barbara Miner, managing editor of *Rethinking Schools*, writes that, although the charter school movement had progressive roots, it has ended up appealing to those “wedded to a free-market, privatization agenda. In the past decade, these privatizers have come to dominate the charter school movement.”⁶² Or, as the distinguished educator Deborah Meier, author of *In Schools We Trust*, has stated: “The promise that charter schools offered us at their start was quickly abandoned as they morphed into large undifferentiated chain stores, ruled not by independent-minded ‘moms and pops’ the way we imagined, but by the most powerful billionaires on earth.”⁶³

The Harlem charter schools celebrated in the 2010 anti-public school, anti-teachers’ union documentary film, *Waiting for Superman*, are run by a couple of charter umbrella organizations. One of these, the Success Charter Network, has a board of nine members, seven of whom are hedge fund and investment company managers; one, a managing partner at NewSchools Venture Fund (heavily funded by the Gates and Broad Foundations); and one, a representative of the Institute for Student Achievement (a corporate-sponsored non-profit specializing in school restructuring, receiving substantial funds from AT&T). There are no parents, teachers, or community members on this board. As the *New York Times* noted, hedge funds form the “epicenter” of the charter movement in New York.⁶⁴ Financial capital is obviously attracted to charter schools, which are: (1) publicly financed, but privately managed and leveraged in strategic areas by big foundations; (2) mostly nonunion (and antiunion); (3) geared to testing, data collection, and technology; (4) generally open to a corporate model of organization; and (5) repositories of large funds, requiring financial management.

Charter schools, even if nonprofits, can play into private moneymaking strategies. As Miner writes: “There are those who will make money off of Harlem’s Children Zone” (the second of the two major charter organizations in Harlem celebrated in the film *Waiting for Superman*):

The organization had net assets of \$194 million on its 2008 nonprofit tax report. Almost \$15 million was in savings and temporary investments, and another \$128 million was invested at a hedge fund. Given that most hedge funds operate on what is known as a 2-20 fee structure (a 2 percent management fee and a 20 percent take of any profits), some lucky hedge fund will make millions of dollars off of Harlem Children’s Zone in any given year.⁶⁵

Despite all of the hype about charters as the vehicle for closing the achievement gap, the predicted educational gains have not materialized. The federal NAEP testing of students in 2003 indicated that charter school students showed no measurable improvement over public school students nationally, among students of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds; while, in the case of poor fourth-grade students, public schools outperformed charters schools in both reading and math.⁶⁶ Thus, according to its own narrow standards of schooling, as measured by standardized tests, the charter school movement has been less than successful.

Philadelphia announced in 2009 that its charter schools were a failure. Although six of the twenty-eight privately managed elementary and middle schools had outperformed the district-run public schools, ten had underperformed in relation to the district-run schools. At least four of the charters were under federal criminal investigation for financial mismanagement, conflicts of interest, and nepotism. Managers of some Pennsylvania charters had created private companies to sell products to their charters.⁶⁷

Even when charter schools have strong assessment scores, they are open to the charge that they do not enroll their fair share of the neediest students. A study in 2002-03 by Jack Buckley and Mark Schneider, the current and previous commissioners of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, showed that, of thirty-seven charters in

Washington, D.C., special education students were underrepresented in twenty-four, while English-language learners were underrepresented in twenty-eight.⁶⁸

The most celebrated charter school program is the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), which has benefitted from a constant inflow of funds from the Gates, Walton, and Broad foundations. Like most successful charters, KIPP enrolls students by lottery, which tends to bring in only the more motivated, better students from families similarly motivated. KIPP schools are demanding and require that students spend 60 percent more time in school than they would in a traditional public school, in order to fulfill specific requirements. These heavy work-time demands drive out the more needy and lower-performing students, who end up back in the regular public schools. Research on KIPP schools in San Francisco in 2008 showed that 60 percent of the students who started a KIPP school in fifth grade were gone by the end of eighth grade. As Ravitch states: “Regular public schools must accept everyone who applies, including the students who leave KIPP schools. They can’t throw out the kids who do not work hard or the kids who have many absences or the kids who are disrespectful or the kids whose parents are absent or inattentive. They have to find ways to educate even those kids who don’t want to be there. That’s the dilemma of public education.”⁶⁹

In New Orleans, the failure of charter schools to serve students with disabilities has resulted in a legal administrative complaint filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, on behalf of 4,500 students with disabilities. The complaint charges New Orleans charter schools with systematically violating the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.⁷⁰

Charter schools are characterized not only by high attrition on the part of their students, as in KIPP schools, but also by high attrition on the part of their teachers, who frequently vote against overwork and low pay with their feet. A study of charter schools nationally from 1997 to 2006 found that attrition among new charter school teachers is almost 40 percent annually, while charter school teachers as a whole leave at a rate of 25 percent a year, about double the public school teacher attrition rate.⁷¹ In general, charter school teachers receive lower pay than public school teachers, even without considering the better benefits of the latter. Research on Michigan public schools in 2001 found that the average yearly salary for charter school teachers was \$31,185, as compared to \$47,315 for regular public school teachers.⁷²

A significant number of charter schools are run by EMOs. These for-profit companies operate charter schools with the goal of capital accumulation. Such firms have employed a number of strategies for increasing profits, starting with reducing labor costs. Charter schools are normally nonunionized, paying lower wages. Teachers who work there, like those provided by Teach for America, often do not have professional teacher education. EMOs are not required to participate in state retirement systems, and, while they hire at relatively competitive salary rates, benefits are slim and increases in salaries with seniority are less likely to occur. Class size is often larger. EMOs also commonly contract out to low-wage firms for support services and rely more heavily on parent volunteers. EMOs tend to reduce the extra services that children receive: school lunch programs, transportation, and extracurricular activities. They provide a more restricted curriculum, geared to basic-skills testing. All of these measures are considered standard ways of protecting the bottom line.⁷³ A number of recent, high-profile studies have indicated that EMO-run charters are prone to higher levels of racial segregation.⁷⁴

The Education-Industrial Complex

The restructuring of public schools has given a big boost to the private education industry, which is now seen as a growth area, promising enormous profits. On May 16, 2011, CNNMoney.com reported that the “job market rockstar” after the health industry, since the onset of the Great Recession in late 2007, has been the education sector, which has added 303,000 jobs over the last four years, primarily in education services and state colleges.⁷⁵

As early as 2000, *Bloomberg Business Week* issued a report on investment in education, which projected a general trend toward marketization and privatization of schools. Scott Soffen, an education analyst at Legg Mason, a global asset management firm, was quoted as saying that “the major competitor [of the private education industry] is the government, and over time the for-profit sector is going to consistently capture business from the government.”⁷⁶

The education industry has naturally been a strong supporter of the new systems of high-stakes assessment and testing. In 2005 ThinkEquity Partners LLC published a report, *New Industry, New Schools, New Market: K-12 Education Industry Outlook, 2005*, for the Education Industry

Association. It found that the education industry in 2005 represented “a domestic business opportunity in the [\$500 billion] K-12 market” of “\$75 billion, or 15 percent of all K-12 expenditures.” As a result of the new standards, testing, and accountability measures of federal and state governments, plus the growth of charter schools, the K-12 education industry was expected to grow to \$163 billion (20 percent of the K-12 education market) within ten years. Already in 2005, K-12 purchases from the education industry included \$6.6 billion on infrastructure and hardware, \$8 billion on instructional content materials, and \$2 billion on assessment (testing systems). Spending on technology—overlapping among the above categories since software is incorporated in instructional content—was estimated at \$8.8 billion. The education industry report concluded that all of this reflected a much “deeper acceptance and integration of education and business.” All sorts of “new money paths” were opening up.

The companies most likely to benefit from the expanding-education-industry slice of the K-12 pie were large corporations, particularly Apple, Dell, IBM, HP, Compaq, Palm, and Texas Instruments (technology); Pearson, Harcourt, McGraw-Hill, Thomson, and Houghton Mifflin (instructional content); CTB McGraw, Harcourt Assessment, Thomson, Plato, Renaissance (assessment); and Scholastic, Plato, Renaissance, Scientific Learning, and Leapfrog (supplemental instructional content). A number of the smaller technology companies and up-and-coming supplementary instructional content firms were designated in the ThinkEquity K-12 education report as ripe for acquisitions. Indeed, the big instructional content companies were shown to be grabbing up smaller firms. Already nine companies accounted for 87 percent of the test market.⁷⁷ Both computer hardware and assessment were viewed as rapid growth sectors.⁷⁸

Noted educational researcher and critic Gerald W. Bracey issued a report in 2005, entitled *No Child Left Behind: Where Does the Money Go?* focusing on the role of big capital, corruption, and kickbacks. Symbolic of the influence wielded by the private education industry was George W. Bush’s meeting, on his first day at the White House (only days before the unveiling of NCLB), with his close family friend and member of the Bush transition team, Harold McGraw III, CEO of McGraw-Hill. The Business Roundtable, representing two hundred of the largest U.S. corporations, was a strong supporter of NCLB. State Farm Insurance CEO Edward Rust, Jr., who orchestrated much of the Business Roundtable’s support for the NCLB, was simultaneously Chairman of the Business Roundtable’s Education Task force, a McGraw-Hill Board member, and a member of the Bush transition team. According to Bracey, the entire realm of the expansion of for-profit educational services under NCLB exhibited a “stunning double standard”—when “the feet-to-the-fire treatment of public schools” was “contrasted with the lax treatment of private corporations that provide materials or services the law requires the schools to use.”⁷⁹

Education Beyond Capital⁸⁰

The true nature of the struggle over schooling in the United States today is evident in the daily vilifying of teachers and teachers’ unions by the neoliberal school reform movement and the corporate media.⁸¹ Speaking to teachers in Chicago, Ravitch (who worked in both the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations and was originally a strong supporter of NCLB) declared:

Corporate School reform is a fig leaf for the real purpose: getting rid of unions. Corporate school reform calls on legislatures to roll back collective bargaining rights, get rid of unions. But once they’re gone, there is no one to speak for children, for working conditions....

Who applauds when schools are closed? Wall Street hedge funds, Democrats for Education Reform (wolves in sheep’s clothing), Stand for Children [which receives millions of dollars from the Gates Foundation], the Billionaire Boys Club (Gates, Walton, Broad), various Washington, D.C. think tanks, almost all of which are funded by the Gates Foundation, and influence many of the leading editorial boards. It’s a circular corporate reform movement. And I do want to say that whenever we speak of this education reform we label it correctly as corporate reform.⁸²

The new capitalist-driven school reforms principally target teachers and their unions for a reason: teachers, as a rule (although often politically passive), strongly object to both the new corporate schooling being imposed on their students and the Taylorization of their own labor process. Teachers generally view themselves as educational professionals, but are today being rapidly proletarianized. Hence, they are the most powerful potential opposition to the school restructuring plan and the commodification of school children. For this reason, the new testing systems are aimed first and foremost at teachers. They are intended to be assessments, not primarily of the students themselves, but of the degree to which teachers have succumbed to Taylorization—and thus they constitute the main weapon in the attempt to wrest control of the *practice of education* from teachers. Duncan has on several occasions proclaimed that one of

the main achievements of Race to the Top has been forcing states to abandon restrictions on using student-assessment tests to evaluate teachers.⁸³ As Ravitch observed in *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*:

[Teachers'] unions have many critics, including some within their own ranks who complain that their leaders fail to protect teachers against corporate reformers....But the critics most often quoted in the media see unions as the main obstacle to education reform. They fault the unions for their resistance to using test scores to evaluate teachers. They want administrators to have the freedom to fire teachers whose students' test scores do not improve and replace them with new teachers who might raise those scores. They want to use test scores as the decisive tool of evaluation.⁸⁴

Here it is useful to return to the basic point—made in the 1970s in Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*—that there is a rough correspondence in any given historical period between the social relations of production and the social relations of education. Viewed from this general political-economic standpoint, the conditions leading to the neoliberal assault on the schools can be attributed to the current historical period of economic stagnation, financialization, and economic restructuring, characteristic of the age of monopoly-finance capital. The slowdown in economic growth, beginning in the 1970s, weakened the capacity of labor to struggle by purely economic means, while also weakening workers' political clout, as conservative, corporate forces strengthened their hegemony over the society. The relative growth of financial and information capital, spurred by the stagnation of production, created a new impetus for digital-based Taylorism and tight financial management in the schools. At the same time, inequality, poverty, and unemployment soared, as capital shifted the economic losses to the working class and the poor. When the new burdens resulting from slow growth, increasing inequality, and rising child poverty were coupled with tightened restraints on state spending, the schools went into a rapid downward spiral. Public schools, as the ultimate social safety net for most children and communities, were forced to step in to make up for the collapsing social and economic fabric.

With “the revolt of the haves” that developed in this period, the traditional local financing of schools based on property taxes eroded. States and the federal government were forced to take over the financing of the schools, local control was reduced, and a corporate-finance model came to dominate, along with traditional corporate management goals. The failure of the high-stakes testing and accountability to effect improvements, even in terms of their own narrow criteria, led to even more intensified attacks on teachers and teachers' unions as the source of the problem. The bursting of the financial bubble beginning in 2007 and the Great Recession that followed further undermined schools and teachers' unions, creating a generalized state of emergency.

Although the share of K-12 education in GDP rose slightly, to a seeming high watermark of 4.3 percent, in 2009, this did not reflect a greater overall commitment to education, but rather the relative weakness of the private economy in relation to government spending in the context of the Great Recession. More indicative of the deteriorating trend in education spending in this period is the fact that U.S. elementary and secondary education fell from 22.7 percent of total government spending in 2001, to 21.7 percent in 2005, and to 21.0 percent in 2009—with every indication that its share of total government expenditures is continuing to plummet.⁸⁵

In this rapidly decaying situation, the attack on teachers and the destruction of their morale can be seen as fatal to the public education system, since teachers generally in capitalist society have sought to promote education (not mere schooling), out of a commitment to children, often in defiance of an alienated system. Teachers have adopted counter-hegemonic practices and upheld by sheer force of commitment, a collapsing school system that, without their often extraordinary efforts would surely have given way. Most teachers surveyed by the National Education Association in its most recent *Status of the American Public School Teacher* work at least ten non-compensated hours (beyond the standard 40-hour-work week) each week, and supplement classroom budgets/resources with their own purchases, averaging \$443 a year.⁸⁶ Without the strong social commitment of teachers, the overstrained public education system would surely have succumbed to its own contradictions long ago.

Most teachers, over the last few decades, have gotten used to being on the frontlines in dealing with the effects of economic crisis and class-race war on schoolchildren. The creation of a program of national assessment, aimed principally at teachers and teachers' unions, with the goal of privatizing the education system and turning the mass of students into drones for industry has brought public education into the very center of the structural crisis of the system.

Many teachers have been fired, while others have fled the dying public schools.

Given the effects of worsening socioeconomic conditions on public education, any reference to closing the achievement gap that does not centrally address the wider social problems and their effect on schools represents a cruel hoax. Summarizing the conclusions of decades of educational research in the *Teachers College Record* in 1995, Jean Anyon observed:

It has become increasingly clear that several decades of educational reform have failed to bring substantial improvements to schools in America's inner cities. Most recent analyses of unsuccessful school reform (and prescriptions for change) have isolated educational, regulatory, or financial aspects of reform from the social context of poverty and race in which inner-city schools are located....The structural basis for failure in inner-city schools is political, economic, and cultural, and must be changed before meaningful school improvement projects can be successfully implemented. Educational reforms cannot compensate for the ravages of society.⁸⁷

In the past few decades, the response of the nation's overworked teachers to "the ravages of society" and the accompanying attacks on schools has usually been to use what energy they had on helping their students, while avoiding organized political activity. But this may be changing. Today political resistance around schools from teachers, parents, students, and community members seems to be emerging at long last in the United States—though it is too soon to know what this portends.

Already in 2010, Karen Lewis, a high-school chemistry teacher and the leader of the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), won an upset election to become president of the Chicago Teacher's Union, deposing the two-time, old-guard incumbent. This emanated from a desire on the part of Chicago teachers, in Arne Duncan's hometown, to fight for their jobs, working conditions, and the future of education for their students. CORE arose as a grassroots rebellion against Duncan's Chicago "turnaround" legacy of school closings and the charterizing of schools. It therefore represents a turn away from a business union structure, toward a more politicized union.⁸⁸

In April 2011, in Detroit, students protested to prevent the closing of the award-winning Catherine Ferguson Academy, a public school for pregnant teens and moms that boasts a 100 percent college acceptance rate in a district where one-third of all students do not even graduate. The protests gathered national attention after some of the students and their supporters, engaged in a peaceful sit-in, were arrested. Detroit as a whole is facing massive school closures at the orders of the emergency manager of Detroit Public Schools, Robert Bobb, a 2005 graduate of the Broad Superintendents Academy, who receives an annual salary supplement of \$145,000, provided by the Broad and Kellogg foundations. It is not surprising that some have called Bobb's management strategy "financial martial law": in April 2011, all 5,466 of Detroit's public school teachers were given layoff notices.⁸⁹

The intense class struggle in Wisconsin in 2011, brought on by Governor Scott Walker's attempt to eliminate public sector unions in that state, may mark a new stage in the conflict between labor-community and capital. In May 2011, as part of the general revolt against Walker's actions, radical education activist, Bob Peterson, a fifth-grade teacher and a founding editor of *Rethinking Schools*, was elected president of the 8,000-member Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association.⁹⁰

Throughout May 2011, students, parents, and teachers participated in national protests over the gutting of public education. On May 9, 2011, thousands of teachers, students, and supporters commenced a weeklong "State of Emergency" for public education in California. In a May 9 teachers' protest at the state capitol in Sacramento, California, sixty-five students, teachers, and their supporters were arrested, followed by the arrest of a further twenty-seven on May 12, including the president of the California Teachers Association.⁹¹ The protests pointed to a student and teacher (as worker) alliance in this area that is particularly alarming to the powers that be.

In his May budget outline, California Governor Jerry Brown responded to these growing protests against the onslaught against the schools, in what may be a major departure, by indicating that he intends to put the brakes on out-of-control state testing. Brown declared: "Teachers are forced to curb their own creativity and engagement with students as they focus on teaching to the test. State and federal administrators continue to centralize teaching authority far from the classroom." Brown says he intends to "reduce the amount of time devoted to state testing in

schools” and to “restore power to school administrators, teachers and parents.” Brown is seeking to suspend funding for the state longitudinal data system for education (designed to integrate existing databases in order to facilitate the retention of long-term student assessment data), and to end all further planning for the accompanying teacher database. He had earlier declared, as California Attorney General, that the real problems affecting “struggling low performing schools” are “deeply rooted in the social and economic conditions of the community.”⁹²

The strategic goal of a resistance movement to public school privatization should not simply be to defend the existing school system—but to make use of this state of emergency to create the basis of a truly revolutionary approach to the education process, based in community schools. This could take place under the motto promoted by the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center in Detroit: *Another Education is Possible*. As Grace Lee Boggs has written, we need to engage our children in the community-building process, including education, “with the same audacity with which the civil rights movement engaged them in desegregation activities.” Radical education theorist Bill Ayers has called for rebuilding the model of “liberatory education” and freedom schools in defiance of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, rearticulating “the ideal that each human being is of infinite value.” This means emphasizing, as radical educators historically have, a process of self-engaged learning—recognizing, in line with Marx and Paulo Freire, that the answer to the question, “Who educates the educator?” is ultimately one of liberation pedagogy, in which the students themselves are the main protagonists.⁹³

We have to understand this as part of a global struggle. The same corporate reforms of schooling are being exported throughout the capitalist world, Brazil, being but one example.⁹⁴

The stakes are extremely high. In his article, “Why Socialism?” published in the first issue of *Monthly Review*, in May 1949, Albert Einstein wrote:

The crippling of individuals I consider the worst evil of capitalism. Our whole educational system stems from this evil. An exaggerated competitive attitude is inculcated into the student, who is trained to worship acquisitive success as a preparation for a future career. I am convinced there is only *one* way to eliminate these grave evils, namely through the establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system which would be oriented toward social goals. In such an economy, the means of production are organized by society itself and are utilized in a planned fashion. A planned economy, which adjusts production to the needs of the community, would distribute the work to be done among all those able to work and would guarantee a livelihood to every man, woman and child. The education of the individual, in addition to promoting his own innate abilities, would attempt to develop in him a sense of responsibility for his fellow men in place of the glorification of power and success in our present society.⁹⁵

For Einstein, education and socialism were intimately, dialectically connected. Such a vision of education—related to social transformation and planning—meant that education needed, in his view, to be part of our whole lives, not confined to the realm of schooling.

I believe we must prepare ourselves today for a for a long revolution to create, among other things, a new education tied to community, and developing out of peoples’ real needs. Such a “community-centered and person-based” education, situated first in public schools, but extending into the society as a whole, is best achieved by creating the widest possible respect for education, as constituting, at one and the same time, a way of life, a key to human emancipation, and an indispensable basis for the creation of a world of substantive equality.⁹⁶

Notes

1. □ See John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis* (New York: Monthly Press, 2009). A more complete view of the structural crisis of capital would have to focus on the fact that capital is pressing in all areas on its absolute limits, manifested in the growth of inequality (rather than substantive equality); the growing conflict between the state and the reproduction and preservation of the system; and its generation of a planetary ecological crisis. See István Mészáros, *Beyond Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), 142-47.
2. □ “Global Education Market,” <http://apolloglobal.us>, accessed May 15, 2011.
3. □ Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).
4. □ A quite different ethnographic approach to the way in which “working class kids got working class jobs,” was provided in Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Westmead, England: Saxon House, 1977). On the general nature of the debate that arose within the sociology of education in relation to

Bowles and Gintis's work see David L. Swartz, "From Correspondence to Contradiction and Change: Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited," *Sociological Forum* 16, no. 1 (March 2003): 167-86.

5. □ Sherry Gorelick, "Undermining Hierarchy: Problems of Schooling in Capitalist America," *Monthly Review* 29, no. 5 (October 1977): 20-36. See also Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "Reply to Sherry Gorelick," *Monthly Review* 30, no. 6 (November 1978): 59-64. Bowles and Gintis, it should be noted, have now abandoned in large part their original analysis, adopting more conservative views in line with a general change in their standpoint. Indeed, they moved gradually away from their original Marxism so that by 2001 their original views were hardly discernible in either tone or content. Compare Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited," *Sociology of Education* 75, no. 1 (January 2002): 1-18. Bowles and Gintis now support both school vouchers and charter schools, which are part of the conservative educational reform agenda. See Swartz, "From Correspondence to Contradiction and Change," 181; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "Efficient Redistribution," *Politics and Society* 24, no. 4 (December 1996): 307-42.

6. □ Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, 13, 48, 130-32; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "Prologue: The Correspondence Principle," in Mike Cole, ed., *Bowles and Gintis Revisited* (New York: The Falmer Press, 1988), 1-4.

7. □ Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, 48-49, 131.

8. □ Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, 131-40. This tripartite division of labor markets was backed up by considerable empirical work, which evolved into segmented labor market analysis, developed by radical economists in the 1970s and '80s.

9. □ Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), 309-10; "America's Best Prep Schools," *Forbes*, April 30, 2010.

10. □ Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, 129.

11. □ Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 44; Richard Du Boff, *Accumulation and Power* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), 57-59.

12. □ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 1023-25.

13. □ See the analysis of Taylorism in Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 59-95.

14. □ Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 54-79.

15. □ Franklin Bobbitt, *The Supervision of City Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1913), 54-55, 89, 93-95; Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, 87-93.

16. □ Clarence J. Karier, "Testing for Order and Control in the Corporate Liberal State," *Education Theory* 22 (Spring 1972), 158.

17. □ Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, 103.

18. □ Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, 100-01. On the abuses associated with IQ testing see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), especially 85-90.

19. □ Karier, "Testing for Order and Control," 157-72; Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, 198.

20. □ Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

21. □ Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, 121.

22. □ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916), 51.

23. □ Clarence Taylor, "Dreamers and Fighters: The NYC Teacher Purges," <http://dreamersandfighters.com>, accessed May 24, 2011, and *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

24. □ National Education Association, *K-12 Education and the U.S. Economy*, NEA Research Working Paper, April 2004, 10.

25. □ Children's Defense Fund, *State of America's Children, 2010*, <http://childrensdefense.org>, B-3; David C. Berliner, "Our Impoverished View of Educational Research," *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 6 (June 2006): 958.

26. □ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 91. Charter schools were promoted initially by both liberals (including American Federation of Teachers President Al Shanker) and their more right-wing counterparts. It was the conservative, more market-driven model, geared to the privatization of schools, however, that increasingly came to define the charter school movement.

27. □ National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, April 1983, <http://teachertenture.procon.org/sourcefiles/a-nation-at-risk-tenure-april-1983.pdf>.

28. □ Stuart Jeanne Bramhall, "The History of School Privatization," Salon.com, March 15, 2011, <http://salon.com>.

29. □ On Kentucky see Edward B. Fiske, *Smart Schools, Smart Kids* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 62-69.

30. □ Diane Ravitch *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 15-21, 93-98, 104-05; Center for Educational Policy, "New Report Finds Nearly 38%

of U.S. Schools Do Not Make Adequately Yearly Progress Under NCLB,” April 28, 2011, <http://cepdc.org>. Diane Ravitch was originally a critic of the left in her *Left Back* (New York: Simon Schuster: 2000) for allegedly claiming that schools don’t matter, and has been accused by some on the left of helping to initiate the current conservative attacks on the schools. See Alan R. Sadovnik, “Waiting for School Reform,” Teachers College Record online, March 17, 2011, <http://tcrecord.org>.

31□ National Education Association, *K-12 Education in the U.S. Economy*, 10; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education, 2010*, 288.

32□ William Mathis, “No Child Left Behind: Costs and Benefits,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 84, no. 9 (May 2003): 682; Stan Karp, “NCLB’s Selective Version of Equality,” in Deborah Meier, et al., *Many Children Left Behind* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 63-64.

33□ “Michael Bloomberg,” *Forbes*, <http://forbes.com>.

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39□ Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, “Urban Education,” <http://msdf.org>, accessed May 17, 2011.

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56□ For a summary and critique of such “no excuses” views see Rothstein, *Class and Schools*, 61-83.

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