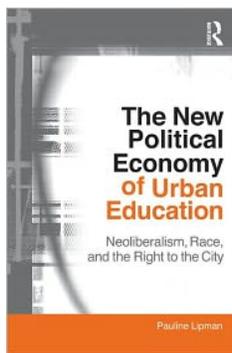


## Professional Book Review

Lipman, P (2011). *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*. New York, NY: Routledge Publishing. 224 pp., ISBN: 0415802245. \$29.08

Reviewed by Ruanda Garth McCullough, Loyola University Chicago, U. S. A.



In *The New Political Economy of Urban Education*, Professor Pauline Lipman masterfully synthesizes complex theory and the consequences of market-driven educational policy to issue a wake-up call on neoliberalism. She blames the persistence of stratified educational and economic opportunities in urban areas on our allowing neoliberal governance to disinvest in our cities. As a recognized activist scholar, the author interrogates the intersections of education, urban development, race, and power. While Lipman draws parallels with other cities, the city of Chicago serves as the primary case for her critical analysis of educational policies and reform. The dynamic discussion impels us to reflect on the long-term effects of privatization in the education market. As an example of the issues with public-private partnerships, Lipman includes interview data from parents and a charter school administrator to examine the cultural politics of charter schools. Designed for critical scholar activists, the book engages theoretical lenses (i.e., critical geography, urban sociology, and critical race theory) to guide an examination of social justice and rights in racialized urban space. The text concludes with Lipman's call to progressive educators to respond to the current crisis in our cities and schools by reimagining a new social paradigm and rejecting exclusionary policies and practices.

Lipman's alarm alerts the reader to the consequences of the neoliberal urban restructuring agenda that she asserts has caused the crisis. In order to accumulate capital, city government, with the support of corporate actors, philanthropists, and civic organizations, has created markets where they had not previously existed, in areas like public housing and public schools. In an effort to justify this reordering of urban space through housing and education, neoliberal policies and practices have worked to reframe how the public thinks about the city in terms of who has the right to live there and what kinds of development are desirable. Beginning in the 1990s, Lipman argues that the changes in housing and school policy in Chicago were intentional, concerted efforts driven by proponents of gentrification and the displacement of low-income communities of color. She offers Chicago's Renaissance 2010 policy and charter school development as examples of these contested policies. Building on her earlier work, Lipman contends that the schools were set up for failure by the increase in accountability that normalized classifying and penalizing schools for low-performance with no concern for the glaring inequities in resources. According to Lipman, the high stakes accountability regime set the stage for identifying schools to be closed under

Ren2010. Her analysis exposes the democratic failings of the policy. Legitimized by discourses of “change,” “rebirth,” and “renaissance” of neighborhoods, schools were strategically closed or phased out, with little-to-no community participation. The author also asserts that within the discourse of “choice” and “competition” put forth by charter school advocates, charter schools became viewed as an affront to neighborhood public schools. Taken together, privatization and market-driven policies, which are aligned with the neoliberal agenda, place governance power over public institutions in the hands and wallets of experts and elites. Examinations of the power and politics that have shaped educational reform in the city are critical, since Chicago’s efforts to revitalize and re-imagine urban space through education policy are being held up as the national model for other large districts facing economic decline.

Starting in the introduction of *The New Political Economy*, the discussion encourages educators to ask themselves critical questions about whom educational reform privileges and whom it excludes. The introduction provides the foundation for the investigation of the relationship between economic policy, educational experimentation, and social justice in our schools. Beginning in Chapter 2, Lipman defines and exemplifies the neoliberal influence on urban restructuring efforts through her discussion of housing and educational policy. One theme running throughout the book is the author’s contention that educational reform and housing policy are being manipulated in tandem with the shared goal of racial containment under the guise of mixed-income options that intentionally fail to address the underlying issues of poverty. Chapter 5 goes on to explore venture philanthropy’s role in shaping urban education by examining the effects of involving venture capitalism in public policy as an example of the neoliberal agenda. Then, Lipman takes on the complexities of the appeal of one kind of public-private partnerships: charter schools. While offering flexibility for progressive educators, charter schools also attract educational entrepreneurs. She uses interview data from parents whose children attend charter schools to investigate the cultural politics of the entanglement. In the final chapter, Lipman builds on the global and local examples of urban social movements that have successfully rejected the domination and exploitation that she has presented throughout the book as evidence that it is possible for educators and activists to respond to her call to reimagine alternatives to capitalism.

*The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* provides readers with a theoretical-based lens to examine their own views of urban reform. Written for scholars and activists, the book synthesizes a unique set of theories that pertain to the current trends in educational reform. Presented to reflect the realities of educational policy, the book tackles issues of racism, poverty, power, and capitalism. Lipman offers a compelling historical record and a valuable critical analysis that will be instrumental in developing the reader’s understanding of the urban educational crisis and effective responses. The text will inform any critical analysis of urban educational reform.