MAKIN' CHOICES:

AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS AND THE CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

by

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Dedication

A mother's love knows no end and neither will my thankfulness. Thank you Mama for always riding for me and with me! "Now let's go, take 'em back to the plan/ Me and my momma hoped in that U-Haul van." I love you, Rockell Henry. Thank you for your love and sacrifice. We gon "touch the sky."

I am always thinking of you.
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Abstract

Market-based school reform policies urging choice, competition, and strong accountability regimes via high-stakes testing have become a fixture in urban education. Charter schools—public schools released from traditional regulations with presumed autonomy in terms of curriculum, personnel, funding, and governance—fall under the umbrella of school choice and have been positioned, in may ways, as the panacea to recalcitrant "achievement gaps" and inequitable schooling for students of color in urban spaces. Because of their entanglements with neoliberalism and privatization charter schools are often seen as controversial mechanisms for school reform. Nevertheless, the proliferation of charter schools informed by neoliberal logic is steady, while *urban grassroots charter schools* are almost nil. In no other place is this more apparent than in New Orleans, Louisiana. Although New Orleans is an 100% charter school district, the granting and approval of African American grassroots, social justice orientated charter schools is almost nonexistent. As such, this critical race qualitative study aims to explore the relationship between the charter school authorization and application process, given its critical role in the production and maintenance of charter schools, and racialized neoliberalism. Two overarching questions drive this research: what challenges do African American grassroots groups face in their attempts to take advantage of charter school application laws in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans, and how do African Americans conceptualize and experience the charter school authorization and application process? This study is based on data gathered via semi-structured interviews with charter school applicants and authorizers, observations, and archival review of both approved and denied applications and rubrics from 2005-2011. As such, this empirical study addresses the racial politics that operates in educational policy and provides textured analysis of processes that produce racial effects in policy implementation. Key findings suggest that the authorization process is a racialized process which advantages white educational

stakeholders connected to elite social networks while devaluing African American educational stakeholders. This leads to a disparity in approval of African American charter applicants and delimits counter-hegemonic charter schools operated by African Americans. In essence, the charter school authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans is embedded within and constitutive of the ongoing process of racial formation.

***Keywords*:** charter schools, critical race theory, charter school authorization, school reform

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Story of the "Other" School

Like most days in New Orleans, the humidity intended to cloak itself on your person, subtly suffocating you until refuge, hopefully, could be found in some air-conditioned building. Speeding past the yellow light—the only thing that separated me from my 2:00pm meeting with Principal Hicks—I traversed through the traffic on this familiar boulevard, now lined with remnants of Katrina: "beauty" and the "blight." Carcasses of homes ravaged by the storm and hollowed out by urban disinvestment and a racio-spacial politics that renders working class Black families and their spaces as abject, disposable, and deprived stood, barely, alongside gentrified "villages" for those who the city and her wealthy elite ordained as "desirable"—entertainment for sure—in the lower 9th Ward.

I pulled into the parking lot on the corner of Caffin Avenue on two wheels, as customary. Walking, I pondered what this experience would be like. What was I to expect? What was Dr. Hicks expecting? How would I create this documentary on a Black feminist leader? I quickly beat the humidity off of me, as I entered the building moving swiftly to the main office. I walked into the office and there was much movement. One elegant, Black woman energetic, majestic, commanding, and filled with humor was moving about. I suspected this was Dr. Hicks, but had no real way of knowing. As I approached the secretary's desk, I asked how she was doing, introduced myself and informed her I had a meeting scheduled with Dr. Hicks. The woman, Dr. Hicks, at the sound of her name, turned around and said, "Kevin, I was looking forward to seeing you." She told me to have a seat and she would be with me momentarily. As we walked into her office, we spent all of two minutes, at most, discussing the documentary project. She

agreed without hesitation and soon asked me if I wanted to take a quick tour of the school. I, naturally, agreed.

I was transfixed in that instance, walking about this school. I saw the walls adorned with student art of Black political figures, writers, activists, and artists, classrooms engaging in what appeared to be culturally relevant teaching, and a library filled with texts that not only covered the range of topics, but also were written by people of color. I also saw a generous amount of Black teachers in this school. Though this should be unremarkable, as with the aforementioned, following Hurricane Katrina is was almost impossible to find a school that had a majority Black faculty. After spending time at the school, meeting teachers, observing, and talking with students, I met one of the art teachers who spoke of the work going on at the school as connected to providing a holistic education for the students, giving them more than just the rudimentary materials. It was about educating the whole child because, generally, this was an educational/pedagogic goal of the school and, particularly, given the students were survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

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I start with this narrative at the outset of this study because I found this school as an anomaly. It departed from the narratives and experiences I have had with schooling in New Orleans Public Schools, particularly after Hurricane Katrina. It also departs from the narratives that abound regarding charter schools in critical policy literature (Buras, 2007; Lipman, 2011a, 2011b; Saltman, 2007). This space was, in many ways, novel to me, confounding as it was, because it did not easily *map* onto the literature. It offered possibilities that had yet been fully materialized in many schools. And, until recently, it took me years to acknowledge that it was

"okay" for there to be a "good" charter school. This charter school was unique because it was started by African American veteran educators in post-Katrina New Orleans. This school offered possibilities for educating African American youth that were more expansive than traditional charter schools operated by the new educational "reformers" in New Orleans who were, and are, deeply concerned, almost singularly, with technical rationality in the form of standardized tests.

Years later, as a graduate student in Madison, the Madison Urban League desired to open a charter school that was tailored to meeting the needs of African American youth in Madison, Wisconsin, a city which prides itself on its liberalness, yet has some of the largest racial disparities for its minoritized citizens in the nation.[1] The proposal from the Urban League that went to the Madison Metropolitan School Board set high expectations and standards for it students, including culturally relevant pedagogies and an IB based curriculum. This proposed school offered an alternative to the current racially hostile environment for African American youth in Madison. However, the proposal was denied. The charter school would not happen. As I soberly, solemnly reflected on the proposal I began to wonder why there were so few quality schools for African Americans. I was familiar with the literature; I technically knew why. But, in truth, I was less sure about why when African Americans—despite the deficit based literature that exclaims African Americans did not care about education—wanted to open and operate charter schools they could not. Why were there so few schools like the one in the opening vignette in Madison? Or, for that matter, why were there so few schools like the opening vignette

[1]The Race to Equity Report provides a detailed rendering of the inequalities and levels of disproportion across Madison. The report can be found at http://racetoequity.net/dev/wp-content/uploads/WCCF-R2E-Report.pdf

in New Orleans, given the zeal with which the charter reform was enacted and seasoned with promises of "innovation"?

At its heart, this dissertation is concerned with the possibility of alternatives for African Americans to the current educational system. Alternatives that may provide our youth with holistic educations, alternatives that are imagined and performed by African Americans. Nevertheless, knowing race *does* matter and, in fact, is the grammar with which legibility is given to our social interactions and structures, I endeavor to trace the ways race and by extension how racism operates in our policy making (Bonilla-Silva ,2012; Gillborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings &Tate, 2005). Omi and Winant (1994) remind us, "in the U.S., race is present in every institution, every relationship, every individual. This is the case not only for the way society is organized—spatially, culturally, in terms of stratification,etc.—but also for our perceptions and understandings…" (p.158). Questions that cocoon and underlie the central research questions for this study, which will be addressed below, are questions that revolve around the politics of race and racism in the institution of education. How does one make sense of and capture the ways in which white supremacy colors, shapes, and organizes schooling, policy processes, and practices? What complications arise in the "polity" when notions of Blackness are morphed into inferiority, void, and un-citizen, un-human? How do race neutral policies, practices, and rationalities reproduce race-based effects? To explore these questions of race, racism, and educational inequality in a more concrete, manageable manner, I investigated the choice movement and more specifically the charter school authorization and application process.

Framing This Study

Black suffering is a normalized, often recursive, event in the life course for Blacks in Western racially stratified societies (Dumas, 2014). The institution of education is of no exception and evidence of the intersection of race, class, sexual, and gender based inequality saturates educational literature (Apple, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Blackburn & McCready, 2014; Kozol, 1991, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Shujaa, 1994; Valenzuela, 2005; Woodson, 1933). The structuring nature of mainstream schools as an apparatus of the state that often promotes and reinforces stratification and the perpetuation of asymmetrical power relations, embodied in white advantage, to the detriment of Black students, not only highlights the urgency of action, but also the permanence of particular structural elements that reproduce racio-economic inequity (Roithmayer, 2014). Several reforms, policies, actors, and institutions have emerged in the name of "school choice" and evolved over the last twenty years in the United States. In a politically bipartisan attempt to eliminate and curtail these "savage inequalities" that so abound for urban, Black youth in public schooling, school reform reflects decidedly pro-market approaches, such as school choice (Watkins, 2012). In theory, school choice polices refer to market-based reform strategies that aim to decentralize public education, give parents and guardians presumed options in selecting the proper educational institutions, thereby forcing schools to compete for their children (Chubb & Moe, 1988, 1990; Henig, 1994; Rasell & Rothstein, 1993; Wolfe, 2003). Charter schools are one of the most controversial and contentious of the choice reforms. Research has shown that many charter schools do not improve the educational achievement and trajectory of their students, are governed by charter management organizations that render students, parents, and teachers voiceless, disempower teachers and teachers' unions, reconstitute the notion of the "common school," and are

emblematic of movements away from democracy and social justice towards the privatization of education (Dixson et al., 2014; Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Lipman, 2011; Scott, 2012; Stulberg, 2008). In fewer words, charter schools, by large, in their current manifestations are circuits and conduits for dispossession (Fine & Ruglis, 2009).

There are over 6,000 charters schools with enrollments of approximately two million students across the United States. During the year of 2012-2013, alone, 500 new charter schools were created (Center for Education Reform, 2013; Institute of Education Sciences, 2013). Comparatively, there are over 92,000 traditional public schools serving approximately forty-seven million students (Institute of Education Sciences, 2015). Nationally, nearly sixty percent of charter schools are located in urban spaces, while only twenty-five percent of traditional public school are located in urban spaces (Institute of Education Sciences, 2015). Moreover, with the Obama administration's *Race to the Top* initiative, charter schools have been enmeshed in federal policy and funding streams, thereby effectively ensuring their reproduction and maintenance (Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Payne & Knowles, 2009). Since 1991 the proliferation of charter schools and their disparate agendas for organizing—ranging from community centered, teacher informed charters to more current forms of for-profit, corporate influenced charters—have punctured the educational discourse and policy arenas, leaving very few urban spaces "*un-chartered.*"[2]

Perhaps, there is no place that best illuminates and illustrates market approaches in the form of charter schools than New Orleans. New Orleans as a site of school reform is both the

[2] It is interesting to consider that charter schools and privatization seem the only mechanism of reform available to Black students. In places like New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and elsewhere, charter schools have proliferated as the model reform strategy.

"grand experiment" of educational restructuring and charter school reform as well as the miner's canary, cautioning us of the dangers of and pitfalls in neoliberal, market based approaches to reform.[3] On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina's violent winds reaching upwards to 127 miles per hour slammed into New Orleans with unforgiving force and uncertain outcomes. As the hurricane left the city, the subsequent flooding practically decimated New Orleans and opened the floodgates for a reshaping of public schooling in New Orleans and, arguably, the United States writ large (Buras, 2007, 2012; Dixson,2011; Dixson et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Lewis, 2010). In this sense New Orleans is the model of corporatist, market based school reform. The progeny of *A Nation at Risk* and *No Child Left Behind,* New Orleans school reform due to the natural and man-made disaster of Hurricane Katrina provided neoliberals a host space for policy implementation. Some 40 years prior to Hurricane Katrina, early architect of neoliberalism, Milton Friedman (1962) bespoke of the need for crisis and disaster stating, "only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change" (ix). The crisis of Hurricane Katrina lubricated policies that "rolled back" redistributive polices and institutions and "rolled out" capital accumulation markets to "remedy" such crises (Barnett, 2010; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011).[4] In New Orleans this has taken root and form in the shrinkage of traditional school boards thereby further removing democratic participation from youth, parents, and communities of

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[3] As Cedric Johnson (2011) notes, "neoliberalism is a form of world-making predicated on the abatement of labor rights, social provision, public amenities, environmental regulation, and other artifacts of social democracy deemed impediments to capital accumulation" (xxi). Johnson's comments are consistent with what education scholars have noted about school choice and charter schools (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2007; Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2012). Moreover, in New Orleans, in tandem with various market based reforms one can see the remolding of the city as privy to and property of neoliberal reformers. For instance, all public housing (now "mixed income housing") was demolished after the storm with rebuilding and maintenance contracts given to corporations such as McCormack Baron Salzar and the units available for low-income individuals will be less than half the pre-Katrina numbers (Adams, 2013; Arena, 2012). Johnson (2011) and Adams (2013) have argued New Orleans is site of the neoliberal laboratory and precursor to the 2008 economic crash.

[4] Unfortunately, since 2007 the poverty rate has actually increased in post-Katrina New Orleans, with more children living in poverty (Shrinath et al., 2014).

color, the rise of venture philanthropy, the mass firing of African American educators, the legislative dissolving and dismemberment of the teachers union and collective bargaining, and the proliferation and expansion of charter schools (Buras, 2014; Dixson et al, 2014; Sondal,2013). Significantly, New Orleans is the *first* entirely charter school district in the United States (Greenblatt, 2014; Kamenetz, 2014).

As such, New Orleans is a critical site for research on the charter authorization and application process and more specifically the reproduction of racialized neoliberalism via the authorization process and the ways subaltern groups engage such reforms.[5] Post-Katrina New Orleans education marks, in many ways, a "critical juncture" in the institution of education (Collier & Collier, 1991). It marks a shift in the terrain of educational policy, organization, and practice, making the current environment not only intelligible, but also acceptable by many institutional actors. As Apple (2006) notes, given the current arrangements, charter schools rooted in corporatist, market based logic are unlikely to disappear. If that is the case, counter-hegemonic subaltern, grassroots efforts at applying to operate and open charters is an important first step in thinking about the interplay of resistance and reproduction. Therefore, the application and authorization process is an essential instantiation of governance regimes, a gatekeeper of power, and a possible site for the reproduction and maintenance of political, educational, and spatial inequality. The voices, perspectives, and experiences of subaltern groups who have applied to open and operate charter schools are seldom heard in educational discourse and policy arenas. Moreover, there is a dearth of empirical and theoretical literature on the charter school authorization process seen through lenses of equity and social justice. This

[5] By subaltern I mean to suggest those who are situated outside of the hegemonic power structure, experiencing dispossession, and are locals or native to the land/space. In this case, New Orleans stands as a neoliberal colony.

research seeks to fill this void by centering and including applicant's voices and experiences in educational research and policy and by offering a more robust theorization of the charter authorization process. This research project seeks to examine if and how racialized neoliberalism translates to the authorization and application process by asking:

1. What challenges do African American grassroots groups face in their attempts to take advantage of charter school application laws in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans?
2. How do African Americans conceptualize and experience the charter school authorization and application process?

Reflecting on the opening vignette, this dissertation study, asks us to consider why are there so few schools of empowerment such as Martin Luther King in New Orleans and writ large. In a city that was decimated by the natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina, and the resulting policy disasters, the centrality of race and the effects of racism are critical in our appraisals, enactments, and deliberative processes of justice, reform, and rebuilding. By empirically exploring larger theoretical issues of racialized neoliberalism, I seek to illuminate the dominant patterns of policy and the perspectives of populations who are often marginalized in policy process.

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Chapter 2: Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

In theory, educational/school choice often refers to reform strategies that aim to decentralize public education, while giving parents and guardians presumed options in selecting the proper educational institutions for their children (Henig, 1994; Rasell & Rothstein, 1993; Wolfe, 2003). As Janelle Scott (2005) notes,

> school choice is actually an umbrella terms referring to a range of policy options that have had unique histories…In recent years, school choice options have grown to include tuition tax credits, charter schools, vouchers, magnet school, inter- and intradistrict choice plans, alternative schools, homeschooling, online and "virtual" schools, and the private management of public schools (p. 2).[6]

Scott's description of the various constituting elements of school choice helps to enlarge our understanding of school choice. Often the conversation is squarely focused on vouchers and charter schools, because of their controversial nature, yet it is vitally important we begin to think about the sum possibilities of choice.[7] Additionally, we must also consider that choice is not only enacted in the form of specific educational policy, but also in the way parents choose to move to

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[6] Hogrebe, Kyei-Blankson, & Tate's (2013) "Interstate School Choice? Evaluating Educational Quality in Regions that are Divided by State Lines" in J.K. Donnor and A.D. Dixson (Eds.), *The Resegregation of Schools: Education and Race in the Twenty-First Century,* investigate interstate education quality "as part of the discussion of offering greater access to improved education to residents of a metropolitan region" (165). Importantly, Hogrebe et al. note that the market has imperfect information and consumers are not all privy to the same or correct information, which can lead to further marginalization. So, when thinking about various market-informed choice polices, we must begin to also provide those who participate with more "perfect" knowledge and secondly to challenge the notion that markets are apolitical and fair.

[7] See Thomas C. Pedroni's work, *Market Movements: African American Involvement in School Voucher Reform* for a strong analysis that takes into account the complex ways African American voucher families negotiate, align, and resist elite conservative educational forces. He calls for a progressive modernization to build up and reconstitute the eroding relations between groups who have the potential to form coalitions. Also, James Forman, Jr.'s (2007) article in the UCLA Law Review volume 54, "The Rise and Fall of School Vouchers: A Story of Religion, Race, and Politics" provides a useful analysis of vouchers and race, vouchers and accountability, and vouchers and religion.

particular neighborhoods that have well funded schools, wonderful facilities, certified teachers, robust curricula, and a host of extracurricular programs, or when parents jockey for specific teachers or classes (André-Bechely, 2005; Forman, 2005; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004; Stulberg, 2008). Nevertheless, whatever the power dynamics may be, and this is most certainly not to dismiss those dynamics, the idea that parents should have some choice in their child's education remains a stable aspect of U.S. culture (Berends, Springer, Ballou, & Walberg, 2009).

I want to pause for a moment to bracket or rather give the parameters of this conversation regarding school/educational choice. While there is a vast amount of literature on magnet schools and a growing literature on alternative schools, homeschooling, tuition tax credits, vouchers, and inter- and intradistrict choice plans, and the ways in which some parents use their financial, social, and cultural capital to make educational choices, given space limitations and the enormity of the literature, my central focus will be on charter schools. My focus on charter schools is not arbitrary. That is to say, another reason I delimit the conversation to charter schools, in addition to the aforementioned reasons, is because of their historical coherence to Black institution building or said another way, the possibility that lies with them for Black institution building (Anderson, 1988; Fisher, 2009; Forman, 2005). I will next discuss some foundational and definitional elements of charter schools and achievement data regarding these institutions before moving to the much larger debate on charter schools.

Charter Schools: The Basics

Charter schools—public schools released from traditional regulations with presumed autonomy in terms of curriculum, personnel, funding, and governance—were initially thought of by progressive educators as a means to serve the unique needs of local communities, with innovative curriculum and pedagogy, teacher autonomy, and inclusive forms of governance

(Forman, 2005; Kolderie,2002; Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010; Myers, 2013). The U.S Department of Education (2010) defines a charter schools as:

> …a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under legislative contract or charter with the state; the charter exempts the school from selected state or local rules and regulations. In return for funding and autonomy, the charter school must meet the accountability standards articulated in its charter.

Charter schools have been constructed as the ideal approach to reform by neoliberal reform advocates. Constructed as the progeny of the Civil Rights Movement, charter schools are held as much needed policy mandates, and dare one say solutions to recalcitrant inequality (Dixson, et al., 2013; Scott, 2013). With well over 6,000 charter schools across the United States, and the creation of over 500, alone, during the 2012-2013 year, charter schools mark a significant turn and transition in educational restructuring (Center for Education Reform, 2013; Institute of Education Sciences, 2013). Moreover, with the Obama administration's *Race to the Top* initiative, charter schools have been enmeshed in federal policy and funding streams, thereby effectively ensuring their reproduction and maintenance (Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Payne & Knowles, 2009).

Yet, the history of charter schools shows a divergence from the initial trajectory in some of the more publicized problems we see in the critical literature stands about them, which I will discuss later in this essay. The first charter was started in Minnesota in 1991 by a group of progressive educators organized with the Democratic-Farm-Labor-Party concerned with creating innovative strategies in pedagogy and to service students from low-income backgrounds

(Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010; Lundy-Wagner & Turner III, 2012). Indeed, even before Minnesota passed the first law, Ray Budde, a former principal and later professor at University of Massachusetts at Amherst, as early as 1974 suggested that charters could be used as a mechanism for groups of teachers to explore "alternative educational models" (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010,p. 4-5). Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers in 1988 even embraced charter schools (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). The push that original charter advocates had for autonomous schools, with innovative curricula, positioned to meet community needs remains underdeveloped in practice and in the literature.

Data on Charter Schools

Overall, the data on charter schools is a mixed bag. Some reports offer glowing reviews of charter schools, while others take a much less sanguine analysis of particular points of data. The question remains what constitutes "good data" and what are the political and ideological currents informing that data. To date, perhaps, one of the most independent reports on charter schools is the 2013 Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University. CREDO's 2013 study, *The National Charter School 2013,* builds on their 2009 study, *Multiple Choice.*[8] The 2013 study expanded it analysis of performance of students in charter schools, increasing to include ten additional states in the report.[9] Over 95 percent of U.S. charter school students were covered in this report.

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[8] Significantly CREDO's 2009 study of charter schools, in 16 states which included the following states: Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado (didn't include the entire state), the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois (didn't include the entire state), Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas, found that there was a wide variety in quality among charter schools. Importantly, students in charter schools did not do as well, in the aggregate, compared to their colleagues attending traditional public schools.

[9] The new states included in the study are: Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Utah. Both Colorado and Illinois expanded to include the entire state.

Significant findings from the CREDO 2013 report indicate, despite the rhetoric about the superiority of charter schools compared to their traditional public school counterparts only 25 percent of charter schools have stronger learning gains in reading. Tellingly over half (56 percent) showed no difference in reading and 19 percent had significantly weaker learning gains in reading. In terms of their findings for mathematics, 31 percent of the charter schools were significantly weaker, 40 percent show no difference from their traditional public school counterparts, and 29 percent showed learning gains that were stronger than traditional public schools. Students, in the aggregate, who attend charter schools have about 8 additional days of learning in reading, compared to the public school peers and show no significant difference in terms of days of learning in mathematics. In terms of student achievement, charter schools are not the panacea for achievement gap, or as Ladson-Billings would more accurately note, "the education debt" (2006).[10]

Moreover, several studies illustrate some serious issues, outside of achievement on standardized tests regarding charter schools. For instance, while charter school advocates often use the language of providing parental voice and choice, Lipman & Hursh (2007) as well as Dixson, Royal, & Henry (2013) show that democratic parental engagement is often limited and lacking in some charter schools, particularly in cities like New Orleans, Chicago, or Philadelphia. Additionally, one of the major claims about charter schools is that they will become incubators for innovative practice and curriculum.[11] However, there is yet to be seen

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[10] Other studies on student achievement have similar findings as the CREDO 2013 study. Barr, Sadovnik, & Visconti (2006); Bettinger (2005); Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, & Dwoyoer (2010); Ladd & Bifulco (2004);

[11] Much of the literature on charter schools looks at achievement outcomes or the governance structure. Further research school look at the pedagogic practices of charter schools, particularly schools that espouse a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). It would be interesting to see the adherence or fidelity to CRP as advanced by Ladson-Billings, G.J. (1994) *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African*

extensive evidence of innovation in most charter schools and, in fact, we see teachers with less experience, qualifications, and receiving less pay, all of which contribute to higher teacher turnover in these spaces (Barr, Sadovnik, & Visconti, 2006; Bettinger, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Henig, 2008; Wells, 2009; Zimmer & Buddin, 2009). Lastly, there is a generous amount of research that shows that charter schools when compared to their traditional public school counterparts have fewer enrolled students that are English language learners and are in special education (Buckley & Sattin-Bajaj, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Frankenberg & Lee, 2003; Garcia, 2008; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Wells, 2009).

Given the very mixed to almost negative data on charter schools, data that actually seem to reinforce and perhaps reproduce disproportionalities in education, one must question why so rapid a proliferation? There seems to be a valuing of empiricism without empirical evidence. Indeed, there lies an issue beyond data to politics and the framing and advocacy power of particular interests groups (Vergari, 2007).

Advocating for a New Market or Re-inscribing Inequalities? Charter Schools and School Choice

One cannot look at the current terrain of public education without noticing the imprint of neoliberalism. While many on the left have sought to expose and debunk this orientation, those on the right have argued that this system of reasoning with resulting policy prescriptions and

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American Children; Ladson-Billings, G.J. (1995a) *Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy*. American Education Research Journal, 35, 465-491.; Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy.Theory Into Practice, 34(3), 159–165.;Villegas and Lucas (2002) *Educating culturally responsive teachers*. Albany,NY: State University of New York Press; Irvine and Armento (2001) *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades.* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill; Irvine, J.J. (2002). *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices.* New York, NY: Palgrave/St. Martin's Press; Johnson, L. (2006) *"Making her community a better place to live": Culturally responsive urban school leadership in historical context.* Leadership and Policy in Schools, 5 (1), 19-36.; Johnson, L. (2007). *Rethinking successful school leadership in challenging U.S. schools: Culturally responsive practices in schools-community relationships.* International Studies in Educational Administration, 35 (3), 49-57.

propositions is natural and normal, in fewer words, ideal, and supposedly not imbued with inequitable power relations and if there is inequity, it should be situated within the deficits of the individual. Neoliberalism, within the larger debate, is seen as the connective ideology that informs our educational restructuring and more specifically our conversations around school choice and charter schools. Accordingly, neoliberalism, a rightist political, economic, and social ideology, rejects the notion of the planner state as seen in Keynesian welfare states and purports that justice and general human well-being is best advanced through de-regulated free markets and trade, choice, masturbatory competitive individualism, entrepreneurial freedom, and strong private property rights (Harvey,2005; Wells, 1993;Watkins, 2012). As Stuart Hall (2011), who I will quote at length, notes,

> neoliberalism is grounded in the 'free, possessive individual,' with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive. The welfare state, in particular, is the arch enemy of freedom. The state must never govern society, dictate to free individuals how to dispose of their private property, regulate a free market economy or interfere with the God-given right to make profits and amass personal wealth. State led 'social engineering' must never prevail over corporate and private interests. It must not intervene in the 'natural' mechanisms of the free market, or take as its objective the amelioration of free market capitalism's propensity to create inequality (9).

Accordingly, neoliberalism attempts to abrade and eliminate the various hard fought artifacts of the welfare state and more succinctly the remnants of democratic processes. It privileges the "invisible hand" of the market and the privatization of public services. The individual is situated, in continuation of dominant Western epistemes, as the central figure and organizing principal for society. As such, a regime of meritocracy, linked to individual choice, is used to obfuscate and

mystify particular rituals of inequality that are rooted in our social structures and institutions (Kumashiro, 2008; Lipman, 2011).[12] Thus, neoliberalism is not only a policy approach, but also a form of governmentality that shapes and sets logics for action (Spence, 2012).

The phenomenon of neoliberal restructuring of schools and society writ large is not an instantaneously event. In fact, the ideological work needed has taken a generous amount of time, as suspected by its proponents (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal ideology crafted by economists, Frederich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, was positioned as an alternative to socialist ideologies that emerged following World War II and the Civil Rights Movement (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism's focus on the market as the savior and, perhaps one could say, "invisible hand" of justice has become a rather hegemonic notion.

For those on the right, restructuring education with efforts of privatization and marketization is a means first to cure what is seen as an inefficient bureaucracy and incompetent government, while simultaneously providing educational options for those who have been marginalized or denied quality education (Apple, 2006; Friedman, 1955; Wolfe, 2003).[13] I

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[12] Picower and Mayorga (2015), powerfully note that the focus on the individual reconstitutes the meanings of collective action. They suggest a significant approach that neoliberal policies and rationalities produce is the fractioning of communities of color, who opposed to working collectively, compete against each other.

[13] I have merged the two assumptions and arguments about school choice for rightist advocates, that being the efficiency of the market argument and the social justice argument. As Joseph Viteritti (1999) suggests these are two separate generational arguments. The first generation arguments lies more squarely within liberal capitalist economic theory and is concerned with monopolies, inefficiency, and market freedom. The second generation arguments, while still undergirded by the first, are more situated with "social justice" assumptions, particularly as it relates to vouchers. For instance, if middle class parents have the option to send their children to private or parochial schools, so should working class parents. Nevertheless, both generational arguments fail to account for the continuing role of racism in the subordination of Black Americans and the limitations of the market for eliminating racial inequality. Simply providing vouchers to Black students or a charter school with, still, repressive pedagogies does nothing to eliminate recalcitrant racial disparities. One could apply Kimberle Crenshaw's (1988) notion of restrictive equality, which is only concerned with access and options, not quality or result. Providing a student with a voucher may only give them the option or access to a private school.

should say, the latter of the two remains debated in the literature in terms of its intent. Nevertheless, Friedman in his germinal 1955 essay *The Role of Government in Education* argued for a complete overhauling of public schools in the United States. Public education would be replaced with a voucher system; public monies would subsidize private education and because of market competition those schools that are inefficient would be forced to close. For Friedman (1955), "the interjection of competition would do much to promote a healthy variety of schools" (p.130). While Friedman believed that his voucher program, which could be organized by for-profit or non-profit entities, would serve best the poor, his ultimate concern was not justice, but rather individual freedom—freedom as an unregulated market with limited government interventions, except for the lubrication of un-regulation by government (Apple, 2006; Friedman, 1955, 1962;Friedman and Friedman, 1980;Wolfe, 2003).

Friedman's arguments for a fully privatized system were seen as too extreme and given the reluctant national conversation around public school integration post- *Brown*, the argument seemed to also align with various evacuation theses vis-à-vis tuition vouchers programs for opponents to segregation, vouchers used to promote segregation academies (O'Brien, 1997; Rofes and Stulberg, 2004).[14] While otherwise "progressive" educationalist like Christopher Jencks or Theodore Sizer pushed for voucher programs for low-income students, an attempt to remedy educational inequalities for many Blacks and their white counterparts, vouchers and other choice alternatives remained a limited approach to educational reform and was seen aligned with conservative politics (Foreman, 2005; Rofes and Stulberg, 2004).[15] It would take

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[14] Molly Townes O'Brien's (1997) work provides a strong review of white southern resistance to desegregation, providing a historical look at tuition vouchers programs in the south.

[15] Christopher Jencks in 1966 in a piece entitled "Is the Public School Obsolete" critiqued the state of public education in the United States. Jencks essentially argued that public schools were oppressive

years until a rearticulation of market approaches to education reemerged. It found space during a period of retrenchment during Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Sr.'s respective presidencies (Apple, 2006;Crenshaw, 1988; Hursh, 2005).

The resuscitation of market-based approaches to education lured its way back into the national discourse with the commissioning of the now historic policy report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983. This document bemoaning the state of education in the United States creates the necessary crisis for neoliberal, market-based restructuring. The often-quoted introduction to the report opens space for the "disaster" of public education to be reformed:

> Our Nation is at risk. …the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people…If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on American the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.[16]

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institutions for low-income students and families. Moreover, he argued that public schools did have a monopoly on education and that if given the choice parents of low-income urban students would take their children to other institutions that would better meet their needs. Jencks began a more progressively inclined argument for tuition vouchers that was centered around low-income students (Henig,1994; Rofes and Stulberg, 2004). In 1970 Jencks received a grant from the Nixson administration's Office of Economic Opportunity to design an equity-orientated voucher. In 1972 Jencks' proposal was tested, much weaker that initially proposed, in Alum Rock, California. It essentially became a choice plan that provided additional resources to participating schools. Opposition from both left including teachers' unions, civil rights groups, and others who were more focused on school desegregation and from the right who wanted a more robust free market approach with less regulations led to its demise (Forman, 2005; Henig, 1994; Rofes and Stulberg, 2004).

[16] Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice has alluded to the threat that poor schooling has on national security. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education-jan-june12-education_03-20/

As Naomi Klein (2007) has noted, neoliberal reforms find best a host in moments of uncertainty, crisis, and disaster. Milton Friedman (1962) almost 20 years prior to the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* bespeaks the need for crisis and disaster stating, "only a crisis—*actual or perceived* (my italics)—produces real change" (p. ix). *A Nation at Risk* was a part of an assemblage of neoliberal (and neoconservative) policies, that "roll back" redistributive policies and institutions and "roll out" capital accumulation markets to "remedy" such crises (Barnett, 2010; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011).

Early architects and advocates of neoliberal choice reforms of schools attempted to provide a response to the report. John Chubb and Terry Moe's (1988, 1990) work on school choice became the exemplar of Friedman's reincarnated theory, perhaps, with less controversy, but controversy nonetheless. Chubb and Moe's (1990) *Politics, Markets, and American Schools* aided in providing the right with the ideological and empirical ammunition for a restructuring of public schools. In line with Friedman's work were the claims that private schools were superior to public schools, bureaucracy has a deleterious effect on school performance and public schools represent one of the worst monopolies. Departing, however, from Friedman's work was their claim not in a totalizing voucher program, but rather a competition between public schools and private schools. The market because of its self-sustaining, self-regulating powers was a better incubator for innovation and effectiveness in education (Chubb and Moe, 1988). Additionally, because the market allows for change due to market mechanisms such as exit, voice, and autonomy it is superior to direct democratic control of schools and may be more democratic (Henig, 1994). As they have noted, "the nation is experiencing a crisis in public education not because these democratic institutions have functioned perversely or improperly or unwisely, but

because they have functioned quite normally. Democratic control normally produces ineffective schools" (Chubb & Moe,1990, p.227).

Other rightist scholars added to the corpus of literature and growing policy fascination with choice policies (Boaz,1991; Hess & Downs, 2011; Hess & Finn, 2007; Lieberman, 1989, 1993; Peterson and Campbell, 2001; Salisbury, 2003). These pro-market advocates eschew public education, reinscribing the dichotomy between public and private with public schools and their governmental, monopolistic interest groups (teachers and administrators and their unions) as inertia incarnate. As Boaz (1991) suggests to readers,

> [e]ducational choice will lead, if by an invisible hand, to the selection of the best ideas for educational improvement…not just those currently being tried by government schools but also new ideas that bureaucrats would never dream of and that entrepreneurs will naturally discover (p. 49).

Boaz situates public school as the sign and symbol of inefficiency and by extension those within public schools teachers and administrators as unable to create or innovate, as inept and conversely the private sector as anything but public. Within this logic public schools are anathema to "reformers" and those who vigorously fight against the "status quo." Choice is positioned as the sine qua non of change.

While those on the right have fought to change the discourse and structure around public schools and to lower confidence in them, those on the left have increasingly debunked their arguments, highlighting how, in may ways, neoliberal choice reforms reproduce the inequalities they are trying to eliminate or create new inequalities (Buras, 2009; Dixson, Royal, & Henry,

2013; Lauren, 2009; Lipman, 2004; Lipman & Haines, 2007; Molar, 1996).[17] As Wells (2009) stated, "charter school reform…mirrors, and often exacerbates, the broader conditions of inequality in the society as a whole" (p. 156). In other words, the neoliberal choice reforms, while seemingly concerned with improving the educational lot of low-income students of color, often engages in what I term *educational vulturism.* Educational vulturism, masked as altruism, is a form of capitalist-patriarchal white supremacy, where by way of ideology, policy, and practice, actors who are often extra-educational, feast on systems that are disinvested in and "serve" the dispossessed. Educational vulturism is a mechanism of profit accumulation and power solidification.

What is more, neoliberal choice reformers have played an insidious language game. As Dixson, Royal, and Henry (2013), note, "these reforms challenge notions of 'democratic localism' and usurp the language of 'effectiveness,' 'accountability,' 'choice,' and 'citizen,' creating discursive veneers of justice and equity, with little attention to actual equity and justice" (p. 491). Scott's (2013) work on school choice and the marketization of civil rights further details how elite neoliberal choice reformers appropriate civil rights language, "neglecting broader communitarian components" reducing it to the individual (p. 6). These discursive bait and switches that manifest in material realities are constitutive of prevailing power arrangements and arguably are related to forms of symbolic violence, which Collins and Makowsky (1993) define as "power which manages to impose meaning and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (p.259). It is essential to understand the left's critique of the language games that are underplay, as these discursive

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[17] I should add that many communities are not concerned with their public school nor are they concerned that their child will be "left behind." Often the reform mechanisms in place are for policies to alter those "urban" students and spaces.

configurations have the ability to rearticulate what we think of as justice or equity, and play a part in the structuration of possibilities and limitations of thought and action (Apple, 2006; Popkewitz, 2000).

Outside of the symbolic violence that occurs, there are several other critiques from the left regarding school choice and charter schools. One significant critique of the choice movement has to do with its ties to neoliberal restructuring and a much larger project of urban gentrification and reconstituting the city (Davis & Oakley, 2013;Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2007). Lipman (2011) illustrates how neoliberal choice initiatives have not only fractured neighborhoods and communities, displacing and shifting disenfranchised communities of color in the rat race of school reform via "creative destruction" linked to accumulation by dispossession, but also the loss of place-based identity and pride, which is very much a racialized project in urban centers (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2004).

Neoliberal choice advocates have spent a generous amount of time discussing the innovation and subsequent reduction in the achievement gap with the adoption of neoliberal policies and strong accountability measures, particularly due to the autonomy reformers would wield. As discussed in an earlier section of this proposal, there is much to be desired in terms of those unseen outcomes and innovation. Critics of choice initiatives, however, have rightfully pointed out that the privatization cocktail of autonomy, accountability, and competition has actually cast aspersions on and debased teachers, brought more regulation—not freedom—to teaching, and delimited the possibility for innovative curriculum and pedagogy (Ball, 1993; Hursh, 2007, 2008; Weitzel and Lubienski, 2010). The audit culture of neoliberal choice based reforms has created a sadomasochistic fascination with standardized testing which reduces the contours of knowledge, foreclosing the actual knowledge options/choices that parents are

supposed to have under such a regime. The ubiquity of standardized testing as the only legitimate, useful mechanism for measuring student learning often produces narrowed curriculum, tailored to the test, further proliferation of culturally irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy, and psychological warfare on our youth that can be debilitating—to say nothing of the ways standardized tests are biased (Au, 2009, 2007; Hursh, 2008; Steele, 2010; Valenzuela, 2005). Neoliberal choice initiatives do nothing to "remix" culturally relevant pedagogy, or to provide a culturally sustaining pedagogy, or cultivate "flourishing lives," or as Winn (2013) notes in quoting Ihab Hassan, "…to teach literature in such a way that people stop killing each other" (p.128) (Grant, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2014).

Additionally, I should add, accountability becomes a measure of achievement tests and not the desires, perspectives, and wishes of the communities charter schools aims to serve. Moreover, the issue of accountability must be further investigated with equity and justice at center. Apple (2006) reminds us, "the issue is not whether or not we need accountability, but the kinds of logics of accountability, and the question of accountability to whom…" (p. 117). This must remain at center. Currently, these accountability measures seem to connect with the de-legitimization of the public sphere adding further to the abrading of institutional confidence. The top down shift from democratically elected government officials or civil servants to governance structures with extremely limited student, parents, and community input makes notions of accountability empty at best, and destructively disenfranchising at worst (Lipman, 2011; Dixson, Royal, & Henry, 2013).

Given the new governance regimes under charter schools and the question of accountability to whom, critical research has begun to document the policy networks and management organizations involved in charter schools and the often undue influence they have

on policy streams, reifying unequal power dynamics and aiding to the further marginalization of communities of color (Ball and Junemann, 2012; Garcia, Barber, & Molnar, 2009; Hess,1995; Saltman, 2007,2012; Scott, 2002, 2009). Indeed, this is not a new phenomenon of white philanthropic organizations and other elite actors whose attempts to control and fashion public education, specifically that for African Americans and other communities, in a manner of their choosing—often inconsistent with the aspirations of the communities they aim to speak for (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Scott (2012) has noted the disconnect between management organizations who are proxies for choice and the local constituencies. Scott comments, "[m]anagement organizations that bring top-down business models to the management of public schools are not always in concert with the preferences of teachers and community members" (Scott, 2012, p. 202).

Another issue with neoliberal choice initiatives is the shifting of democratic citizen to consumer. Apple (2006) notes "rather than democracy being a political concept, it is transformed into a wholly economic concept" (p.39). As such, individualism and competitiveness, as opposed to communitarian ideals of group uplift become the norm. It moves from ensuring that *all* children are educated to making sure *my* child is educated and has the best (Andre-Bechely, 2005). As Molar (1996) notes,

> [c]harter schools…are built on the illusion that our society can be held together solely by the self-interested pursuit of our individual purposes. Considered in this light the charter school movement represents a radical rejection not only of the possibility of the common school, but of the common purposes outside the school as well (p. 15).

Molar's criticism points to the larger ideological, political, and social repercussions of choice reforms. Molar alludes, interestingly, to the possibilities associated with the common school. Imbedded in this rationality, I would argue, is a belief in the sanctity of school desegregation imperatives for remedying larger social and economic inequities.

One concern for those who critique neoliberal choice initiatives, particularly charter schools, is the belief that these options may further exacerbate segregation in public schools (Cobb and Glass, 1999; Frankenberg and Lee, 2003; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Wang, 2010; Levy, 2010). Indeed, the history of education in the United States is saturated with white resistance to Black educational struggles for quality education and has often been shaped through the prism of segregation as a mechanism for the maintenance of white supremacy (Anderson, 1988; Orfield, 1981). A concerted effort instantiated in public policy and the law, as well as in the tacit everyday practices of individuals and institutions, segregation has manifested itself as standard operating procedure in a recalcitrant racist system. Following *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the courts overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson,* an 1896 law that sustained and further enshrined in policy the second-class status of formerly enslaved Africans in America. *Plessy* marks, in many ways, the retrenchment of citizenship rights post-Reconstruction. *Brown,* on the other hand, while carrying the patina of equality under the law, overturning the *Plessy* decision and thus de jure segregation, was effectively euthanized in the embodiment of *Brown II* with the pronouncement that districts desegregate "with all deliberate speed" (Bell, 2008). School districts and white individuals resisted in a variety of ways, from "white flight," to "intact busing," to developing tracking systems, to closures of Black schools and subsequent creations of segregation academies (Byndloss, 2001;Dougherty, 2004). So, it is not without reason that some on the left are concerned with the role of further re-segregation vis-à-vis charter schools

and other choice options. The types of re-segregation varies nation-wide with charter schools in some locales having a higher concentration of students of color than their traditional public school counterparts (Institute on Race and Poverty, 2008) and in other instances charter schools working as bastions for white flight (Renzuli and Evans, 2005). As Martha Minow (2003) comments, "…some choice systems may generate notable patterns of racial and ethnic segregation. If a public system creates an Afrocentric magnet school...a Hispanic culture-bilingual school, it may seem to be inviting parental choices to self-segregate" (p.223). The notion that charter schools may contribute to and perpetuate the "evil" of segregation causes concern for some left scholars.[18]

Lastly, some of the neoliberal choice critics see choice initiatives as not being able to truly meet the needs of African American parents and communities. They suggest that given the hegemonic status of school choice, parents and communities of color are bamboozled from public schools because of the "common sense" appeal of choice rhetoric, becoming pawns for privatizers (Carl, 1994; Henig, 1996). As Cooper (2005) noted when discussing left scholarship's views of choice and working class families, "they contend that market-oriented school-choice reforms are inequitable and exploit parents of color by capitalizing on their hopes and desperation for better schooling, while advancing conservative political agendas that fail to serve the parents' interests" (p.175). Positioning low income people of color as merely confused vessels who aimlessly or easily accept choice, because they can't see how they've been fooled, is a very dangerous position. It removes agency from us and still situates us as the unintelligent other. With the exception of a few scholars the perspectives of communities of color on choice

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[18] One way of creating more racially balanced charter schools would be to actually stipulate the balancing in authorizations of charter schools. This, however, is unlikely because there has never been adequate buy-in or support for full integration.

remains underarticulated (Cooper, 2005; Dixson, 2011; Murrell, 1999; Pedroni, 2005, 2006; Scott, 2012; Stulberg, 2008; Yancy, 2000).

Rethinking Charter Schools and the Charter School Authorization Process

To date, a dearth of research examines how charter schools may have democratic, counter-hegemonic potential to challenge the current power arrangements (Forman, 2005; Rofes & Stulberg, 2004; Smith, 2001; Stulberg, 2008). Moreover, as Seaton et al. (2007) note, "overlooked in discussions of privatization of education are explicit discussions of the educational needs of minority urban communities" (p. 164). Ginwright (2004) further highlights the reforms often exclude the individuals who they are meant to serve. With the exception of a few studies (Cooper, 2005; Dixson, 2011; Murrell, 1999; Scott, 2012; Stulberg, 2008; Yancy, 2000), African Americans' sense-making of and experiences with charter schools remains under-theorized and explored.

Wells et al. (1999) describes the *urban grassroots charter school* as one, "started by people within the local communities and thus represents localized social movements, people of color fighting for greater independence from what they see as a hegemonic state-run system" (p. 186). These African American grassroots charter initiatives grounded in counter-hegemonic ideals are part of a long tradition of African American educational activism and resistance (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 1988; Fisher, 2009; Grant, 2012; Lomotey, 1992; Moss, 2009; Perlstein, 2004; Siddle-Walker, 2005; Spann, 2002). As a field, far too little is known about these initiatives that have the potential to radically change education or about why African American charter applicants are often denied charters, while there is a proliferation of charter schools in some districts, such as in cities like New Orleans and Philadelphia (Herold, 2011; Vanacore, 2011). Charter laws and thus the application process varies from state to state, with some states

having narrowly defined, tightly regulated laws and others having loosely defined and expansively applied granting processes. Indeed, these regulations, informed by socio-political factors, produce a "charter opportunity space" (Yancy, 2000).

Outside of studies that focus on achievement outcomes and new governance regimes under neoliberalism, there is a paucity of research that explores the rather *a priori* issue of the granting and authorization of charter schools (Renzulli, 2005; Sugarman & Kuboyama, 2001). The few studies that do exist focus on the relationship between charter school authorizing type and student achievement (Zimmer, et al., 2014; Carlson, et al., 2012;), revocation or renewal of a charter's contract based on its academic performance by the charter school authorizer (Bulkley, 2001), the types of authorizers as well as the expansion of alternative authorizers (Palmer & Gau, 2005; Palmer, 2007), and lastly authorizers as a new accountability regime and governance structure (Sugarman & Kuboyama, 2001; Vergari, 2001; Bulkley,1999). While these studies do provide an entry point into thinking about charter school authorizers, they are limited in that they all are situated within a pro-market logic or apathy or acquiescence toward neoliberalism rather than unpacking the relationship between charter authorization and neoliberal political philosophies and educational policy. Said another way, issues of equity, power, and inequality are not brought to bare in this research and the salience of racialized neoliberal restructuring in tandem with spatial reconfiguration linked to governance shifts is not present. Moreover, issues of identity and cultural politics are wholly absent in the aforementioned accounts. Educational researchers and community members bemoan the existence of charter schools riddled with conservative, right-leaning reform orientations, yet rarely ask how it is possible these schools are approved when schools more aligned with "progressive" ideals are not. The charter school application process is illustrative of the way particular systems of reasoning are embedded within

so-called neutral, objective, apolitical processes, that are, indeed, socially constructed and effects of power, foreclosing and delimiting possibilities (Leonardo, 2003;Popkewitz, 2000). Moreover, this process is situated within national narratives of colorblindness and meritocracy, which are in other contexts, often discursive veneers for more insidious racialized inequalities. As such, this research study addresses this gap in the literature by identifying how choice operates in and is informed by already existing structures of racial inequality. More specifically, my research explores the authorization process as not just a gatekeeping mechanism, but as embedded within and constitutive of the on-going process of racial formation.

New Orleans and School Reform

Given that this dissertation study focuses on the New Orleans reform case—and broaden to a nationwide investigation in subsequent studies—a review of the New Orleans school reform context is essential. As Ladson-Billings (2006) clarified for us that "[Hurricane] Katrina reminds us that race still matters, property rights trump human rights and the intersections of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand inequality" (p.vi). Post-Katrina New Orleans as a site for school reform is the hallmark of our current educational reform efforts centered around market based solutions. The significance of the New Orleans case is beyond the notions of its exceptionality that often surround it, but rather toward the properties and powers that aim to situate New Orleans as the norm, exemplar, and model. Several policy briefs and technical reports have been constructed to illuminate the "success" of the New Orleans model. Such reports include the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's *The Louisiana Recovery School District: Lessons for the Buckeye State* (Smith, 2012), *Portfolio School Districts for Big Cities: An Interim Report* by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (Hill, et al, 2009), and *From Tragedy to Triumph: Principled Solutions for Rebuilding Lives and Communities* from the

Heritage Foundation (Meese, Butler, & Holmes, 2005). All of these reports eschew the pre-Katrina educational system, push for market based initiatives for reform, and take nil account of the racialized disinvestment that historically and currently funds public education. Even most recently in Georgia the New Orleans school recovery model is being strongly considered and most likely will be utilized as the approach to reform (Dreilinger, 2015; Lay, 2015).

On August 29,2005 Hurricane Katrina's violent winds and rains smashed into New Orleans, Louisiana. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan even remarked that "…the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina."[19] Duncan's remarks allude to the "failure and bleakness" of pre-Katrina education while also gesturing toward the hope in and promise of market-based reforms made possible via Hurricane Katrina and the process of disaster capitalism. Critically, while the storm's water was easiest to recede, the ideologically identifiable momentum for reform initiatives rooted in market logics flooded the city. Clint Bolick (2005) of the Alliance for School Choice, quoted in the *Washington Times,* goes on to note,

> If there could be a silver lining to this tragedy, it would be that children who previously had few prospects for a high-quality education, now would have expanded options. Even with the children scattered to the winds, that prospect can now be a reality—if the parents are given power over their children's education funds.

[19] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/29/AR2010012903259.html. Duncan goes further to state, using the logics of Friedman, that the "education system was a disaster." As such, the disaster of Katrina provided the space for rectifying the disaster of public education pre-hurricane. Importantly and noticeably, in these conversations of reform, there is little discussion of systemic racism, white flight, urban disinvestment, inequitable school funding, or the ways in which Black educators in New Orleans fought and struggled for quality, equitable education for Black students. See Donald DeVore and Joseph Logsdon's (1991) *Crescent city schools:Public education in New Orleans 1841-1991* and Kristen Buras (2014) *Charter schools, race, and urban space: Where the markets meets grassroots resistance* for a larger discussion of the racial politics and acts of resistance by African American educational stakeholders.

Embedded within Bolick's narrative is the veiled call for more educational choice. As discussed earlier, the language of parental empowerment is linked to rightist efforts to create more systems that are more aligned with market principles and removed from communitarian, social justice initiatives (Dixson et al, 2014; Scott, 2013). Indeed, following Hurricane Katrina, policy approaches around choice, most specifically in the form of vouchers and charter schools, became the taken-for-granted approach to change (Saltman,2007). New Orleans now stands as a decentralized, portfolio model for education, a "system of systems" or "systems of schools" approach (Cook & Dixson, 2013). The new policy and organizational approach to schooling in New Orleans was developed by an assemblage of actors. These reforms importantly did not include the voices, desires, and perspectives of African American parents and veteran educators, representing both a coup d'état and emerging fait accompli (Buras, 2014; Dixson, 2011; Dixson et al, 2014; Lewis, 2010).[20] That is to say, Hurricane Katrina provided the rational for racialized neoliberal restructuring in the form of disaster capitalism which further muted the already marginalized voices of the Black community (Dyson, 2006; Klein, 2007). Thus, allowing for the enshrining of the current system.

No restructuring initiative is neutral or organic. They are situated within a socio-historical context with particular policy actors, ideologies, practices, and powers that give shape, meaning, and life to the reform. As such, socially constructed. In the New Orleans case the ideological commitment to market approaches was buttressed by economic support and legislative policies. This can be seen for instance in the federal approach that helped to lubricate the state policy. Within a month after Hurricane Katrina, then Secretary of Education under the Bush

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[20] Interestingly for those benefiting from this reform, in the form of ideological adherence, jobs, contracts, spatial dominance, they have identified the storm and resulting educational restructuring as a "coup de grace" (Horne, 2011).

administration, Margaret Spellings released federal funds to the tune of nearly $20 million dollars to help build charter schools (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Newmark & De Rugy, 2006), with no equivalency offered to traditional public schools. These funds could be categorized as “force” or “coercion.” It set the stage for the primacy of charter schools in restructuring efforts.

Shortly after came the advent of executive fiats from Louisiana governor, Kathleen Blanco. Executive Orders 58 and 79 were central to the production of charter schools and the reengineering of democracy in post-Katrina New Orleans education. Executive Orders 58 and 79 subsequently eliminated stipulations that required parties desiring to operate conversation charter schools—charter schools that would take over existing public schools—to consult, collaborate, and obtain votes of approval from parents, faculty and staff before conversion into a charter school could take place; fiduciary responsibility and duty to parties impacted was constructed as juridically superfluous. These executive orders annihilated provisions that would ensure that charter schools remained democratic and responsive to the desires of those who would be most affected—parents and educators. The initial charter school legislation was more inline with charter schools being sites of innovation and experimentation based on the collective interests, wisdom, and desires of veteran educators and communities, not venture philanthropists and corporations (Scott, 2009). Executive Orders 58 and 79 changed the charter school laws in the state to be more amendable to the creation of charter schools aligned with the interests of elite whites (Buras, 2012).

One month later in November, Blanco held a special legislative session to put the final nail in the coffin of public schools in New Orleans. During this session the passage of Legislative Act 35 (Act 35), which reconstituted the definition of a “failing” school and placed it

in the state created and ran Recovery School District (RSD), took place.[21] This legislatively contrived definition of failure shifted from the state cut off score of 60 to 87.4.[22] This nearly 30 point increase allowed for more schools in New Orleans to be subsumed under the Recovery School District. In fact, Act 35 enabled 107 schools to be included in the RSD's dossier. Prior to the shift in the definition of failing schools, the RSD operated only 5 schools in New Orleans. It is crucial to note these legislative mandates took place while the African American residents of New Orleans were displaced due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Twelve out of the fifteen Orleans Parish state legislators voted against the state takeover (Cook & Dixson, 2013). The policy approaches at school reform in New Orleans can best be understood as the shifting away of local, democratic autonomy, in the name of market based autonomy. This brief account of the political history of New Orleans based reforms provides us with context for understanding the current realities of reform.[23]

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

To frame this study, I draw from Critical Race Theory. Understanding that we are situated within a racialized social system, we must consider the significance of race and its operative functions historically and currently, on the macro and micro levels, and discursively and materially. Eduardo Bonilla Silva's (1997) notion of racialized social system is befitting when considering the apparati and structural patterns of racism. Bonilla Silva goes on to note that

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[21] The Recovery School District was created in 2003 and allowed the Louisiana Department of Education to take over "failing" schools.

[22] The state has constantly shifted the standards of success. The state cut off score has now been reduced to below the initial score needed for takeover. This allows for the data to be manipulated showing the "success" of charter schools. It allows reformers to say "we have less failing schools in New Orleans, than when we took over the city."

[23] This is a partial history of the New Orleans school reform initiatives. In addition to these efforts at the creation of charter schools, the mass firing of African American educators took place. This firing is the largest displacement of African American educators since *Brown* and has critical consequences for pedagogy, labour rights, and the education field writ large.

racialized social systems are "societies in which economic, political, social and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories" (p.469). Critically, Bonilla Silva's contention requires us to remove the individualistic fallacy, asserting that racism is a mental quirk of racists, toward seeing it as a much larger hegemonic process that reproduces and conserves inequitable social positions, relations, structures, and outcomes (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Roithmayer, 2014). As such, Leonard Harris' (1999) definition of racism provides a powerful addendum to Bonilla Silva's notion of racialized social system. If Bonilla Silva's notion is what racism sounds like, then Harris' definition of racism is what it feels like. I will quote Harris' definition at length as it vividly articulates the lived effects of racism. According to Harris racism is

> a polymorphous agent of death, premature births, shortened lives, starving children, debilitating theft, abusive larceny, degrading insults, and insulting stereotypes forcibly imposed. The ability of a population to accumulate wealth and transfer access is founded by racism. As the bane of honor, respect, and sense of self worth, racism surreptitiously stereotypes. It stereotypes its victims as persons inherently bereft of virtues and incapable of growth. Racism is the agent that creates and sustains virulent pessimism in its victims. The subtle nuances that encourage granting unmerited and undue status to a racial kind are tropes of racism. Racism creates criminals, cruel punishments, and crippling confinement, while the representatives of virtue profit from sustaining the conditions that ferment crime. Systematic denial of a populations humanity is the hallmark of racism (p.437).

For Leonard Harris, racism is beyond a theoretical abstraction, but rather rooted in the material, corporal, and psychic realities of people of color. Racism is something that is done, not just something that is thought. Its existence, as Salamisha Tillet (2012) notes, "is not just a haunting

of the past but is also a reminder of the present-day racial inequalities that keep African Americans citizens in an indeterminate, unassimilable state as a racialized 'Other'" (p. 9). Therefore, given the centrality of racism, it is essential in my theorizing and investigating of the charter school authorization and application process to consider the ways in which race and racism operate and to have a theoretical framework that does so, as well.

Although there is no set and unitary prescription of beliefs or doctrine of adherence that *all* Critical Race Theory scholars *must* follow, there are ideologically identifiable positions that many maintain—the pervasiveness and ubiquity of race and racism and the efforts of people of color (and their allies) to interrupt and challenge recalcitrant white dominance that intersects with and is multiplied by other forms of oppression. Critical Race Theory, an interdisciplinary endeavor draws from various critical traditions including Black studies, feminism, queer theory, postmodernism, and (neo)Marxism (Crenshaw, 2011;Solórzano, 2013). Critical Race Theory examines the role of race and racism in society and attempts to provide redress for marginalized, abjected communities of color (Dixson, 2011; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Stovall, 2006; Zuberi, 2011). CRT is organized around a set of premises that aim to articulate conditions of inequality and offer alternate constructions of society. Moreover, as Dixson and Rousseau (2006) noted, "CRT goes beyond race and racism as a product of skin color and phenotype to analyze how ways of being, knowledge construction, power, an opportunity are constructed along and conflated with 'race'" (p.48). Additionally, CRT is interested in the perspectives and voices of people of color. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) note, "without authentic voices of people of color it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (p. 58). Critical race theory recognizes the experiential knowledge of African American communities by "shifting the frame" and "looking to the bottom" (Crenshaw, 1989;

Matsuda, 1995; Matsuda et al, 1993). Throughout its evolving history, regardless of if the analysis' orientation is from the idealist school of thought, which often focuses on discourses analysis and the ways race and racism are socially constructed and ideational, or the materialist school of thought, which focuses on the material, structural conditions that produce and reproduce racism, these aforementioned aspects outlined in this paragraph have been crucial for critical race theorization and praxis (Curry, 2012;Delgado, 2003; Rousseau Anderson and Cross, 2013).[24] Essentially, CRT is "conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community" (Parker and Villalpando, 2007, p. 520).

In this section I will explore the "origins" of critical race theory, as well as the major tenets of critical race theory.

"A" Genealogy of Critical Race Theory[25]

While CRT is almost taken for granted in some instances, the theoretical contributions of the theory have come at enormous personal costs and are operative within historical regimes of struggle. Critical Race Theory emerged in the mid-1970s with the writings of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, who were growing dissatisfied with the rather slow pace of racial reform in the United States, particularly as it related to legal measures. (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). A

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[24] The distinction is critical insofar as it has the possibility to shape not only the perception and understanding of racism (the problem), but also in how we go about combating the problem. Delgado is unequivocal in that while some problems lend themselves better to an analysis from either position, we should attempt at both types of understandings, particularly given the morphic choreography of racism. Some problems "will require analysis in both idealist and material terms; either alone will be incomplete" (Delgado, 2003, p. 136).

[25] I want to be as punctilious as possible, as both Crenshaw (2011) and Tate (1997) have been, in providing a history of CRT. I am clear that multiple histories, informed by various perspectives could construct such a narrative. This genealogy is neither definitive or total. It is a partial history, as all histories are.

growing number of scholars and activists held similar beliefs about the rather incremental pace of reform and a growing sentiment that the "civil rights movement in the 1960s had stalled, and indeed that many of its gains were being rolled back" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, pp. xvi). Legal scholars of color sought spaces of refuge in the academy to think about and critique the recalcitrant inequality that prevailed. For many they found space in the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement. This movement, made up of predominately white neo-Marxists intellectuals sought to challenge the taken for granted reasoning embedded in law schools and society writ large (Brown and Jackson, 2013). As West (1993) notes,

> Critical legal theorists fundamentally question the dominant liberal paradigms prevalent and pervasive in American culture and society. This thorough questioning is not primarily a constructive attempt to put forward a conception of a new legal and social order. Rather, it is a pronounced disclosure of inconsistencies, incoherencies, silences, and blindness or legal formalists, legal positivists, and legal realists in the liberal tradition. Critical legal studies is more a concerted attack and assault on legitimacy and authority of pedagogical strategies in law school than a comprehensive announcement of what a credible and realizable new society would look like (p. 196).

CLS provided important contributions to the understanding of law and the ways in which the legal process worked. As illustrated by West the CLS scholarship helped to usher in a significant critique of both the epistemological foundations and pedagogical performances of legal theorists. Be that as it may, CLS was limited for scholars of color who wanted more than a neo-Marxist reading of inequality that chalked dominance up to a base/superstructure model or that stilled allowed whiteness to reign (Delgado, 1987). Put another way, the "dialectical *mis*alignment" between CLS scholars and those who wanted a more centralized explanatory theory for

understanding racial inequality and an approach to challenge it created a chasm (Crenshaw, 2011). As Crenshaw importantly notes, "[w]ithin the context of particular institutional and discursive struggles over the scope of race and racism in the 1980s, significant divergences between allies concerning their descriptive, normative, and political accounts of racial power began to crystallize" (p. 1259). Two of such cleavages can be seen in the issues of citationality and rights discourse. Delgado (1984/1995) notes,

> I think I have discovered a second scholarly tradition. It consists of white scholars' systematic occupation of, and exclusion of minority scholars from, the central areas of civil rights scholarship. The mainstream writers tend to acknowledge only each other's work. It is even possible that, consciously or not, they resist entry by minority scholars into the field (p.48).

Delgado comments highlight the ways in which scholars of color were continuously placed on the margins of legal scholarship, with their voices and perspectives muted. The canonical maintenance privileged white perspectives and white authors, reaffirming their intellectual hegemony.

Additionally, another issue many emerging critical race theorists had with CLS scholarship was its treatment of rights. Those in CLS saw rights as distorting community and atomizing individuals as well as ineffective in addressing inequality (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado,1987; Williams, 1987). Williams (1987) carefully notes,

> I think that CLS has ignored the degree to which rights-assertion and the benefit of rights have helped blacks…I by no means what to idealize the importance of rights in a legal system in which rights are so often selectively invoked to draw boundaries, to isolate, and

> to limit. At the same time, it is very hard to watch the idealistic and symbolic importance of rights being diminished with reference to the disenfranchised, who experience and express their disempowerment as nothing more or less than the denial of rights (p. 405).

While CLS scholars found rights to be indeterminate and those who sought rights as perhaps under some type of false consciousness, emerging critical race scholars thought differently. Emerging critical race scholars, understanding the precarious position of Blacks also understood that without rights, the further solidification of Black suffering and oppression would take place.

Beyond the philosophical debate that waged among CLS scholars and emerging CRT scholars, there too was contestation over institutional structures. Activist demanded that “elite institutions rethink and transform their conceptions of ‘race neutrality’ in the face of functionally exclusionary practices” that reinforced the status quo (Crenshaw, 2011, p.1260). This is most principally seen in the debacle at Harvard over Derrick Bell’s resignation over the limited number of female law professors and the subsequent curricular neglect that ensued. Harvard argued they could not find “qualified” faculty of color to replace Bell, creating a watered down, less critical course. Not divorcing both the ideological critique from the on the ground practice is an essential aspect of CRT in the law.

Like the law, education shares similar elements. Seen as objective, apolitical, and the underwriter of racial progress both the law and education have a paradigmatic kinship. Tate (1997) notes, “both educational research and legal structure contribute to existing belief systems and to legitimating social frameworks and policy that result in educational inequities for people of color” (p. 197). This connection then helps one to realize the emergence of CRT in education in 1995 by Ladson-Billings and Tate. Interestingly, while not sharing an analogous genesis as

CRT in the law, CRT in education has had a similar genealogy. In their germinal article Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that race was not only analytically salient and significant, but also it was under-theorized in educational research. They in a similar vain as the CRT scholars in the law suggested, Marxist, neo-Marxist, and feminist theories are seen as *the* explanatory model for inequality. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) note,

> [c]lass and gender-based explanations are not powerful enough to explain all of the difference (or variance) in school experience and performance. Although both class and gender can and do intersect race, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between whites and students of color (p. 51).

While Ladson-Billings and Tate, indeed, note the significance and theoretical contributions of feminist and neo-Marxist approaches for understanding educational inequality there remained a need for a deeper theorization of race and resistance to racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 1999, 2011; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).[26] This marked the beginning of CRT in education.

Critical Race Theory Major Tenets

Critical race theory has several tenets which are usually categorized as the organizing frames for analysis. These frames are what help situate and give CRT its uniqueness. That is to say, the following frames are what make CRT, CRT, as opposed to just another, un-unified racial commentary (Henry,2013). As Ladson-Billings (2013) reminds us, "…just because a scholar looks at race in her work does not make her a critical race theorist" (p. 36). To not be

[26] Other scholars soon followed suit in applying CRT in education including Solórzano (1997);Parker (1998); and Solórzano and Villalpando (1998).

dogmatic, but it is the use of particular CRT tenets that distinguish it from other articulations of race theorization. Most principally CRT is organized around the following tenets: permanence of racism, whiteness as property, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, counter storytelling- and majoritarian narratives, and intersectionality. Below I will discuss the aforementioned tenets of critical race theory.

Permanence of Racism/Racial Realism

Perhaps, of all the aspects of CRT racial realism/ the permanence of racism is one of the most difficult to accept. Bell (1992) highlights that racism is permanent and endemic within American society, based on the history of racism in the United States. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) note, this is related to the sporadic nature and infrequent peaks of race progress, followed by regression, or retrenchment as Crenshaw (1988) highlights. CRT theorists believe that "racism is ordinary, not aberrational—"normal science," the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 6-7).

While some would like to think of racism as individual quirks, infrequent, or non-normative, this aspect of CRT pushes against that line of reasoning. It suggests that the very structure of our institutions and policies and systems of reasoning are shaped by race and racism (Lopez, 2003). The racial realism aspect of CRT points us toward the importance of seeing racism in all of it manifestations and how deeply engrained and pervasive it is. One can think simply of the work of Michelle Alexander (2010), who documents the overrepresentation of African Americans in the prison industrial complex, or John Diamond's (2006) work that examines racial disparities in highly resourced, integrated schools. Often the working assumption is that we live within a colorblind society and race no longer is an issue. The real concern and

focus one should have is on issues of class. This argument obfuscates the role that racism plays in our society. If that logic is correct, then one would assume that middle class African American students would excel in their respective environments. Unfortunately, that has not been the case, as illustrated in the aforementioned work by Diamond. For instance, in one suburb of Madison, WI students of color make up approximately 14% of the population, yet they are underrepresented in gifted and talented classes and overrepresented in special education by almost double. Moreover, students of color represent 36% of the students suspended and 43% of the students who drop out. Racial realism requires that we not only address these issues attempting to remedy, but it debunks narratives that we live in a post-racist, colorblind society. Race still matters and racism still has a very significant imprint on the lives of our students. Bell (1992) remarks,

> While implementing racial realism we must simultaneously acknowledge that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change, and despite our best efforts, may be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system we are trying to help. Nevertheless, our realization, and the dedication based on the that realization, can lead to policy positions and campaigns that are less likely to worsen conditions for those we are trying to help (p. 378).

Bell cautions us that without large scale, systemic reform that our efforts may very well be usurped within the larger system. Nevertheless, the goal is to keep resisting and fighting, making sure to not have the conditions worsen. Racial realism is perhaps already embedded in the system of reasoning of those Blacks who desire to open and operate charter schools. Having a realist account, acknowledges the savage inequalities in our current system, and move on from there.

Property Functions of Whiteness

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Harris (1993), the notion of property is central to understanding the fabric of the United States. Even a cursory reading of U.S. history provides one with an understanding that "property" is an essential component in the United States for citizenship and rights. Only those who owned land would be able to fully participate in the franchise. In fact, African Americans were beyond citizen—conceptualized and treated as property.

In the United States the interrelatedness of racial identity and property became the basis on which privilege, power, and position were given legibility and stratification upheld. The collapsing of whiteness into property, as both a viable exclusive social identity and the specific privileges conferred to holders of such property is an undergirding aspect of U.S. society (and arguably globally) (Vaught, 2009). As Donnor (2013) highlights, "whiteness is a racialized system of meaning and domination composed of ideological adherents and material components" (p.198). The *possession* of whiteness—as both property and as the figure of (hu)man—relies on the *dispossession* of people of color. Lipsitz (1998) reminded us when discussing his theory of "possessive investment in whiteness" that he uses

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

Lipsitz' conceptualization of the possessive investment in whiteness only further corroborates with earlier CRT notions of the way in whiteness compounds over space and time in a dialectical process of accumulation and disaccumulation (Bell,1987, 1988; Crenshaw, 1988; Harris, 1993, 2006). What must be understood is the linkage of whiteness as property with the notion of possession. Said another way, whites possess this form of property and Blacks cannot because they cannot be "white;" yet, white can be transferred. Harris (1993) clarifies for us that while various definitions of property abound, it is important to think, in the context of whiteness, of property as both rights in things as well as in metaphysical properties. Harris (1993) noted, "…property rights and interests embrace much more than land and personalty. Thus, the fact that whiteness is not a 'physical' entity does not remove it from the realm of property" (p. 1725).

Importantly, Harris (1993) delineates what she calls the "property functions of whiteness" which include (1) the absolute right to exclude, (2) reputation and status property, (3) rights to use and enjoyment, and (4) rights of disposition. While these property functions can stand alone, they are often interconnected.

The *absolute right to exclude* is rooted in the logic, as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted, the "contaminating" influence of Blackness. The exclusion of Blackness from sites, sources, or spaces of un-unified whiteness is an anchor of whiteness. Essentially, it's exclusivity. Harris further noted, "the possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club who membership was closely and grudgingly guarded" (p.1736).

Reputation and status property is a constitutive element of white dominance, as it valorizes, protects, and insulates the fragility of whiteness. Constructing whiteness as supreme and thus a necessity to personhood requires the ongoing reputational funding (and subsequent

un-funding of Blackness) of whiteness as of "significant value." Harris (1993) elucidated, "the reputation of being white was treated as a species of property, or something in which property interest could be asserted" (p. 1734). As such, whiteness was conceptualized and embodied as a status property. The reputational elements of whiteness kept/keeps its pristine. That is to say, defamation of whiteness is an insult to its property value and therefore power. It lowers its status and political purchase. One can think presently of the way in which white police offers are protected even as they use innocent black bodies for target practice. Black youth who then protest these injustices are seen as "thugs" and "criminals" and in less frequently stated Freudian slips of the tongue "niggers."

Like with any form of property, those that possess it can use it and enjoy it as they please. The *right to use and enjoyment* is understood for Harris in the ways in which whiteness is both identity and property interest and therefore can be rendered as resource for ones' pleasure and utilization. Whiteness is used for its self referential profitability; whiteness allows for specific privileges accorded.

Lastly, *rights of disposition* relate to the transferability of whiteness. That is, the ways in which accepted performances, ways of thought, engagements with the world are rewarded for alignment with white mores, morals, and norms. The rights of disposition is the self-aggrandizement of whiteness; it is its maintenance and proliferation as ideal, normal, and central. DeCuir-Gunby (2006) illustrates how Louisiana Creoles were able to receive particular privileges because of their blood connection to whiteness. The transference of those privileges was in relation, not to their Blackness, but to their proximity and performance of whiteness.

Critique of Liberalism

One of the central critiques of CRT is that of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Liberalism, according to Charles Mills (2012) is the

> anti-feudal ideology of individualism, equal rights, and moral egalitarianism that arises in Western Europe in the seventeen to eighteenth centuries to challenge the ideas and values inherited from the old medieval order, and which is subsequently taken up and developed by others elsewhere (p. 307).

Liberalism has become the normative rationality in Western societies.[27] Indeed, while liberalism is progressive when compared to feudalism, for CRT scholars it is still too limited in scope to end racism in the United States (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1988, 2011; Tate, 1997). Many CRT scholars would agree with Catherine MacKinnon's (1987) critique of liberalism, when she states, "the abstract equality of liberalism permits most…little more than does the substantive inequality of conservatism" (p. 16). Liberalism's focus on the atomistic individual "citizen"/ "person" who has property rights against the state, does not most centrally take into account the humanity of Black people, who were "once" considered property, as we have seen in CRT's notion of *whiteness as property*.

Most critically must we understand that liberalism's assertions of "equality," "personhood," and "citizen" effaces and ignores Black claims for/as such. Mills (1997)

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[27] I should add, first, there are variants of liberalism, such as classical liberalism and egalitarian liberalism (Hackworth,2007). Additionally, critiques offered by both those on the left and right abound regarding liberalism, such that some on the left might argue "the logic of free markets, with no defense against the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few…" where as those on the right suggest, that liberalism is "insufficiently sensitive to the value of settled institutions and customs, or to the need for social structure and constraint in providing the matrix for individual freedoms" (Blackburn, 2008, p. 209).

brilliantly pointed out that a critique of liberalism is needed and justified if for no other reason than liberalism's glib alignment with dehumanization. Mills noted,

> Subpersons are humanoid entities who, because of racial phenotype/genealogy/culture, are not fully human and therefore have a different and inferior schedule of rights and liberties applying to them. In other words, it is possible to get away with doing things to subpersons that one could not do to persons, because they do not have the same rights as persons (p. 56).

The relevance of this to our current historical moment is chilling. All one must do is turn on the television or listen to the murmurings of the wind to hear of yet another Black life—female, male, or transgender, child or adult—that does not seem to matter, taken at the behest of institutional accomplices, in the midst of liberalism's fictions of equality. Mills' understanding of the person/the figure of man, or more precisely the reality in and the effects of being the subperson, allows for the critique of liberalism despite various attempts to cast inequality, social misery, and suffering as inconsistencies of liberalism.[28]

Liberalism's focus on notions of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality of law and other institutions becomes a farce in the face of historical and present day realities of liberalism's complacency toward and facilitation of white dominance and supremacy (Bell, 2009; Lawrence, 1987; Losurdo, 2011; Mills, 1997). The critique of liberalism and the aforementioned foci is a move away from liberalism's individual frame method which situates issues of

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[28] While Mills may advocate a recuperative theory of liberalism that aims to bring it into its full life, that is to say, a liberalism that lives up to its name, I contented that U.S. liberalism may make such affordances impossible. Given the connection to and reliance on property, upon which the organization of U.S. institutions and everyday practices are built, we find ourselves trapped by logics of property which cannot contain the humanity of people of color, unless a cyclical reference to property is made (McKittrick, 2015).

inequality within the individual and outside of social structures of accumulation, dominance, and inequality. What I mean to suggest here is that notions of Black inferiority are already built into liberalism by constructing Blacks as other, as abject. Notions of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality of institutions situates issues within the individual, within a space of interiority—a cavalier pseudo-eugenicism—and leaves structural and institutional apparatuses that produce "things that come to matter" almost wholly invisible and unaccountable. Thereby, reinforcing, reinscribing, and reproducing the "inferior" status of Blacks/people of color. Liberal ideology would have one to believe that issues of inequality are antithetical to its structure as opposed to being as aspect of its structure (Crenshaw, 1988; Farley, 1998/1999).

A CRT critique of liberalism also is rooted in a desire to move past liberalism's incrementalism when it comes to racial justice. As Ladson-Billings (1998) has noted, "CRT argues that racism requires sweeping changes, but liberalism has no mechanism for such change" (p. 22). Ladson-Billings' argument hinges on the reality of both a racial realist understanding of society, as well as the understanding that because we are operating within a racialized social system, sweeping initiatives must take place to address deeply embedded social inequities, lest they be consumed by the system. This is best understood via Crenshaw's (1988) analytical lens of expansive versus restrictive views of equality in her discussion of anti-discrimination law. Crenshaw posited,

> The expansive view stresses equality as a result, and looks to real consequences for African Americans. It interprets the objective of anti-discrimination law as the eradication of the substantive conditions of Black subordination and attempts to enlist the institutional power of the courts to further the national goal of eradicating the effects of racial oppression. The restrictive view, which exists side by side with this expansive

> view, treat equality as a process, downplaying the significance of actual outcomes. The primary objective of anti-discrimination law, according to this vision, is to prevent future wrongdoing rather than to redress present manifestations of past injustice. 'Wrongdoing,' moreover is seen primarily as isolated actions against individuals rather than as societal policy against an entire group (p.1341-1342).

However one chooses to understand anti-discrimination law and policies, Crenshaw's nuanced statement on the types of anti-discrimination law proffered as remedy is an acute encapsulation of what a CRT critique of liberalism might entail. While the former of the concepts, expansive view of equality, aims for robust attempts at remedy, the latter of the concepts, restrictive view of equality, is neatly situated within a liberal frame. The restrictive view of equality plays within the liberal notion that inequality or racists acts are anomalies to the system and therefore larger systemic reform is not needed. Liberalism and Crenshaw's notion of restrictive equality attends to universalism. On the other hand, CRT (and expansive views) look for specificity and race consciousness, which is an affront to liberal notions of colorblindness and presumed neutrality. CRT flips liberalism on its head by illuminating and dismantling the "threadbare lies," as Ida B. Wells once said, of liberalism.

Interest Convergence

The notion of interest convergence, coined by Derrick Bell who argued that the advances of Blacks or people of color will proceed when they converge with white elite self-interest is a key concept in CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004). In Bell's (1980) germinal article he outlines the construct of interest convergence. This analytical construct

considers the fortifying factors for polices designed to redress racial malice. Bell (1992) highlights that

> particular racial remedies are the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps unconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure or advance societal interests deemed important by the upper class. Racial justice or its appearance may, from time to time, be counted among the interests deemed important by the courts and society's policymakers (p.646).

This has best been articulated in Bell's work on *Brown* where he suggests that the decision was not rooted in the United States' sincere desire to remedy racial injustices in education, but rather as an attempt to lend "immediate credibility to America's struggle with communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world people" (Bell, 1995,p. 233). Bell also noted two other reasons undergirding the interest convergence in *Brown.* The additional reasons included to prompt economic growth in the South because segregation was seen to be a barrier to capital accumulation and to deter possible uprisings from African American veterans who felt racist discrimination as a profound contradiction, given their service in the name of democracy abroad, yet still unfulfilled at home (Bell, 1980). Mary Dudziak's (1988) work further illuminates Bell's interest convergence principle. Dudziak's (1988) study showed, for instance, how the State Department sent various correspondence to the Justice Department to intervene on behalf of African Americans. Interest convergence is not just merely a rational choice for elite actors, rather it has to be situated within an imperative for change. As Gillborn and Ladson-Billings (2010) remind us, "history suggests that advances in racial justice must be won, through protest and mobilization, so that taking actions against racism becomes the lesser of two evils for white interests" (p. 41). In the case of *Brown*, for instance, the threat of communism was a much larger

fear for elite whites than desegregating schools that their children would not attend. As such, the racio-classed perspective that undergirds Bell's analysis is significant. Bell was under no blanket of naïveté when it came to understanding that whites were neither homogeneous, nor economically monolithic. He knew then, as we can forecast now, that white working class and working poor interests would *easily* be sacrificed in benefit of elite whites. In discussing this Gillborn (2013) shed light on the ways, as Dixson and Rousseau (2006) have noted elsewhere, the various constructs are overlapping and supporting. In this instance interest convergence is also about intersectional analysis. Gillbon (2013) explained, "It [interest convergence] views non-elite whites as a kind of buffer (or safety zone) that secures the interests of elite whites, especially when challenged by high-profile race equality or civil rights campaigns" (p. 135).

Part of the logic of granting or allowing certain efforts at justice to prevail is to give the impression that our liberal institutions and the organization of our society is fair. *Contradiction - closing cases*, as Bell (1985) highlights, are those instances that when racism becomes so obvious, so pervasive, so blatantly discriminatory as to unsettle public illusions and conscience, "justice" will be done. These contradiction-closing cases "serve as a shield against excess in the exercise of white power, yet they bring about no real change in the status of black" (p. 32). Delgado (1998) commented, "contradiction-closing cases…allow business as usual to go on even more smoothly than before, because now we can point to the exceptional case…" (p. 445). The most obvious instance would be the election of President Obama.

Nevertheless, interest convergence, given the structuring power relations, is a modus vivendi for change. Unfortunately, given the current and historical nature of the racist state, interest converge benefits the dominant class more than those suffering the racial injury (Donnor, 2005). Indeed, this may corroborate with the Marxist mantra that "men" will make history but not under

"circumstances of their choosing." Part of what interest convergence and racial realism remind us is that the effort and fights for justice are always ongoing. There is no "finished" product.

Counter-Narrative or Use of Voice

Writer and anthropologist, Zora Neal Hurst once said, "if you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoy it." For many critical race theorists the expressed articulation and chronicling of the realities of living in a racially stratified system in which Black suffering is normalized and taken for granted is essential (Dumas, 2014). The use of voice and narrative to give both a testimony/testimonio to our experiences of suffering, as well as challenge the master narrative is a foundational element of CRT (Delgado, 1989; Perez Huber, 2008). Importantly, in his discussion of suffering, Michael Dumas (2014) noted, "it is (enough) to make empirical and theoretical space for attention to loss, to mediate on what it means to experience disregard and lack and betrayal" (p.4-5). Counter-narratives provide that space, and perhaps even the psychic relief for minoritized communities, who may situate their subjugation within themselves; counter-narratives help to shift responsibility to larger systems of inequality (Bell, 2009;Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition to shifting the frame, counter-narratives can provide the impetus for group solidarity and community building (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Derrick Bell (1995) noted, "critical race theory writing and lecturing is characterized by frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary treatment of law, and the unapologetic use of creativity" (p. 899). The use of narrative or fictionalized stories assists in our ability to fully comprehend the nuances of a particular situation that may be theoretically and conceptually complex. Writers "analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks

and other minorities one-down" (Delgado &Stefancic, 2000, pp. xvii). These scholars hold that the dominant culture structures social realities based on the promotion of its own self-interest, given that, CRT scholars endeavor in constructing a new reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). In constructing this new reality "counterstories," Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano (2007) suggest, "challenge this facade of truth by revealing the perspectives of racialized power and privilege behind it" (p. 565). These stories are part of the arsenal in challenging the presumed neutrality and objectivity of dominant narratives. While as aforementioned, counterstories may provide both psychic benefits and assist in building community, it is vitally important, as well, that these narratives are connected to larger efforts of justice. Ladson-Billings (2013) urged us to understand that the use of "storytelling as a way to illustrate and underscore broad legal principles regarding race and racial/social justice." These stories must be used to "advance larger concerns or help us understand how law or policy is operating" (p.42). The reliance on narratives disconnected from the tenets of CRT both weakens the theoretical approach, as well as makes it difficult to distinguish for other narrative approaches to social science or the humanities.

Intersectionality

While Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989, 1991) is the first to utilize the term of intersectionality, it is most definitely not a "new" concept for those marginalized at multiple converging axis of identity. In fact, one can easily think of the age old question rendered by Sojourner Truth, in 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, of "aint I a woman?" The question posed by a Black woman, former slave and then,at that time, free is an indictment against narrowly tailored questions and considerations of the human, of feminism, of race based projects. The inequality that convergences at sites of gender and race and the specificity of which those corporal inequalities manifest, provides us with the rational for an intersectional approach.

The Combahee River Collective in 1977 made undeniably clear their position and conceptualization of intersectionality when they stated,

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.[29]

The call for intersectional analysis predates CRT, yet CRT has taken up this call in the literature looking at the confluence of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other statuses (Beratan, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Valdes et al. 2002)

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), "intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings" (p. 57). Many CRT adherents are concerned with the elimination of racial oppression and other forms of oppression (Tate, 1997; Solorzano, 1997).

Intersectionality works both as an analytic tool to understand large scale oppression that is enacted and performed in a local manner via the confluence of multiple intersecting identities, as well as to provide critique of the insularity of within group eliding that mutes and erases particularities of those with less privilege. I will quote Crenshaw (1991), at length, as she makes patently clear the latter of the two points.

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[29] http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html

> With identity thus reconceptualized [through a recognition of intersectionality], it may be easier to understand the need to summon up the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, 'home' to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home…The most one could expect is that we will dare to speak against internal exclusions and marginalizations, that we might call attention to how the identity of 'the group' has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few…Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics (p.1299).

If we are to understand CRT as not just a theory, but also a theory of action, a movement to build, then the alliances cannot not solely be based on presumed guarantees of group identity coherence. That is to say, shared identity does not always produce shared politics (Cohen, 2005). Or, in other words, colloquially, just because we wear the same color, doesn't mean we're on the same team. CRT is a movement focused on identity but also about, centrally, politics and power imbalances. Crenshaw's comments guide us in understanding the manifestations of power across and within various categories and identity networks.

CRT pushes up against notions of essentialism, which essentially argue there is no nuance, individuality, of difference within groups; they are all they same. CRT takes an anti-essentialist stance, understanding both the need to not over generalize, utilizing intersectionality to discern critical moments and strategies, while also understanding the need for group solidarity (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Valdez et al. (2002) remind us that while the anti-essentialism critique was rooted in, as Crenshaw illuminated, justice initiatives that did not reproduce injustice, today rightest scholars and actors utilize the same anti-essentialist critique to push forth conservative

agendas. Valdez et al. (2002) noted, "Anti-essentialism can be, and perhaps has become, a way of not only co-opting CRT externally but also of distracting us internally from the bottom line: antisubordinationist social transformation" (p.3). Intersectionality, at it heart, is not just about an endless multiplication of difference, but rather a mechanism to understand how oppression, dominance, and privilege manifest themselves.

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Importantly, CRT provides both guidepost and map for the road ahead. It helps to situate the analysis of phenomena that are as jarring as they are frustratingly predictable. The theory helps to locate us on a terrain not of our choosing, yet a path we must travel. Nevertheless, CRT is a theory of action, of reflection, of movement, informed and informing, made up not of the abstractions of disconnected theorist, but of the everyday experiences of those who suffer, die, and rebel. And whatever theory magic its practitioners have, they should use in the service of a more equitable vision of the world. As Sylvia Wynter (1995) reminds us, "human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities…And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms" (p. 35). Critical Race Theory dares us to construct a new world on a level beyond the page.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examined and investigated the charter school authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans. More specifically, this study was interested in the racial politics of educational reform. It aimed to examine if and how racialized neoliberalism translates to the authorization and application process. As such, the study is centered around the experiences and conceptualizations of African American educational stakeholders. To investigate the aimed of the study, I ask two questions: (1) what challenges do African American grassroots groups face in their attempts to take advantage of charter school application laws in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans? and (2) how do African Americans conceptualize and experience the charter school authorization and application process?

In this section, I will address my research design, selection of participants, data collection approach and instrumentation, as well as my approach to data analysis. Additionally, I will discuss the validity of this study, my positionality, and its significance.

Design

This study is a critical race qualitative case study. Critical race theory, as detailed in the theoretical framework section, aims to both unearth and challenge inequality. A critical race theory project is situated within the critical tradition of research and its goal and approach is for social transformation. The importance of notions of power and inequality not just in what is studied, but also in how it's studied is a central concern for critical race researchers (Cook & Dixson, 2013). Tuhuwai Smith (1999) reminds us about research stating that it is "not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (p.5). As a researcher focused on racial politics in education I am deeply concerned with racial inequality that manifests itself in my sites of

investigation and in the lives of my participants. As such, this research is interested in learning about and developing theory on as well as working to change inequitable processes and patterns (Nygreen, 2006).

My study draws on the case study approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Compton-Lilly (2013) highlights that cases studies attempt to make sense of local experiences by focusing on a specific case(s). Compton-Lilly (2013) quotes Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) stating, "case studies are rich empirical descriptions of particular instances that are typically based on a variety of data sources" (p. 54). More specifically, these case represents an instrumental case study, as it provides "insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case…facilitates our understanding of something else" (Stake, 2005, p. 445). In this instance, the case of racialized neoliberalism. I use the charter school authorization and application process to understand racialized neoliberalism. This case is bounded by time, location, and relevance to topic (Creswell, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005;Stake, 1995; 2005). The boundaries are set around the authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans. Dyson & Genishi (2005) caution us in our consideration of boundary and context noting that the bounds of the case are important " so that we can identify 'the case'…every 'something' exists within a context, which defines the case and teaches us about the 'something small' (p. 43). In this case, we have the context of natural disaster and rebuilding to consider in understanding the case.

This critical race qualitative case study is of the charter school authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans. My central unit of analysis is the charter application. To better understand the power dynamics of the application (and process of authorization), I have several data sources including: African Americans who have applied to open and operate charters schools, charter application reviewers, and other stakeholders familiar

with the charter school authorization process such as district level administrators or organizations assisting groups with the application process. I also analyzed artifacts such as the actual charter application and National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) rubric and recommendations, as well as minutes from school board meetings. I also engaged in participant observations of a local African American group, who is attempting to apply to operate a charter school. I collected data from August 2014 until December 2015. I conducted 26 interviews.

Selection of Participants

As I mentioned in my design, there are several types of participants in this study. The first type are those African Americans who have applied to open and operate a charter school. I used purposeful sampling to identify these participants based on media accounts, prior background knowledge, as well as recommendations from local level informants—most principally the teachers' union because of their familiarity with veteran educators and their experiences post-Katrina (Patton, 1990). I then employed snowball sampling (Merriam, 1998) to recruit additional participants. Additionally, I contacted participants based on the charter applications. Information was found in the biographic section of the application. I should also add that I am defining African American charter groups applicants whose boards are made up of a majority of African Americans (so, over 60%). I first contacted applicants via e-mail and detail the bounds and parameters of this study. I also, if e-mail did not work, reached out to applicants via phone. African American charter applications are germane to this study as they provide key insight to the charter application and authorization process. Their perspectives help inform this study given their on the ground experience with these reform efforts. Importantly, as mentioned earlier, little is known about the charter authorization process and even less is known from the perspectives and experiences of this group.

I identified charter reviewers based on the NACSA rubrics and purposeful sampling. I also contacted two individuals affiliated with NACSA, which is housed in Chicago, to ask if they were willing to participate in the study. They agreed. NACSA was the major "third party" reviewer in New Orleans of charter applicants from 2005-2012. NACSA also has specific individuals who handled the charter application reviews for New Orleans. As such, I contacted my NACSA informants via e-mail and phone, regarding participation. I did ask for additional participants, in a snowballing effort, however they were unable to provide names. Similar, to the applicants, the reviewers possess a form of knowledge about the charter application and authorization process. They are important as they are a de facto entity of the state and gatekeeping mechanism.

Additional stakeholders I am defining as those who have a familiarity with the charter application and authorization process. This is a loosely defined category because in the New Orleans case traditional lines of authority, oversight, and involvement have shifted. For instance, while the Recovery School District (RSD) is the larger entity in which most charter schools are situated, various extra-educational organizations and stakeholders have emerged, some of which provide support to applicants during the application process. I also include in this category individuals affiliated with the RSD, like those in administrative positions that govern charter school authorization and evaluation. These individuals are identified via the Recovery School District website. I reached out to these individuals via email. The email discussed the parameters and scope of the project, as well as their participation.

In total this study had twenty-six participants. Eight of whom were women, eighteen of whom were men. Out of those twenty-six participants, twenty-three were African American, while three were European American. Twelve applied to operate charters, nine were stakeholders

with whom were familiar with the process and charters school, three with reviewers, and two were RSD administrators.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data from this study came from three major units: interviews, artifacts, and observations. In-depth semi structured interviews with applicants, reviewers, and other stakeholders lasted approximately 45 to 120 minutes and took place at a location and time that was convenient for participants. A copy of the interview protocols are located in the appendix. Each participant participated in one interview. During the interviews notes were taken by me as well as the interviews were recorded via the garage band application on my computer. All interviews were transcribed and research memos created after interviews.

I also collected various artifacts. The most central artifact were the charter school application and rubrics. The approved applications, 57 in total were downloaded from the Cowen Institute website. The Louisiana Department of Education failed to provide me with the approved and denied applications and rubrics for the period of 2005-2012. The denied 2011 applications and the NACSA rubrics and recommendations, 40 applications, were provided from the Louisiana Department of Education's Office of Portfolio. I eliminated applications outside the scope of Type 5 charters in Orleans Parish. This reduced the number to 28 applications. I was also provided an incomplete set of applications and rubrics for the 2010 application cycle. For each application descriptive attributes such as: type of charter; authorizer; charter management organization (and partner organizations); board members; school structure, leadership team, and governance; mission and vision; educational philosophy; academic program, pedagogy, and curriculum; personnel issues: teacher recruitment, selection, and evaluation; and parent and community support were documented. For rubrics the charter school type, race of applicant,

NACSA recommendation, break down of NACSA recommendation into education plan, organization plan, business plan, and evidence of capacity were documented, as well as reviewers. I then created another file to highlight the biographic and demographic make up of reviewers. Additional artifacts such as journalistic and documentary accounts (newspapers, blogs, videos) on New Orleans schools and reform, The New Orleans Parents Guide (this is a document which is published by a group of parents that has detailed information on charter schools), district, state, local, and national policy groups' data on charter schools, and Louisiana state charter school law and statutes were included in the study.

Lastly, I also engaged in participant observations of three planning meetings of an African American group who was in the process of developing and applying for a charter. This was approximately 90 minutes for each session. I also attended two local university events that included activists, scholars, and local educators. These events were approximately 90 minutes to 120 minutes. During the participant observations with the charter group, I kept my note taking limited during the process, as to not further "disturb" the process. I took copious field notes post interview session.

Data Analysis

Given the use of critical race theory to conceptually frame this study, part of the analysis is deeply rooted in a critical race theory analysis (Dixson, 2014). That is to say, the particular tenets of the theory, as discussed earlier in the proposal, allow for the use of "pre-existing," "prefigured," or "a priori" codes (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Creswell, 2013). As such, codes like "whiteness as property," "racial realism," "critique of liberalism," or "interest convergence," emerged. While I do rely on a CRT coding process. I also did not want to limit my analysis to these a priori codes. I remained open to what emerged from the data. Codes of the interviews,

artifacts, and the observation were developed and thematic categories established based on such. Similarities and differences among approved and denied applications and discourses used in rubrics/feedback were constructed and analyzed. Data from the three classes of participants and the charter school applications was triangulated. Additionally, the observations and relevant archival evidence was utilized for their contextual understanding of the cases. Data collection, transcribing, and analysis was done simultaneously, allowing for what emerged to guide my process (Dixson, 2003). Additionally, I analyzed the data using both inductive and deductive measures.

Data was stored electronically, on paper, and via electronic cloud provided by the University of Wisconsin. Interview transcripts, consent forms, and other documents will be stored electronically, as well as in a locked file cabinet. Lastly, I kept a personal journal documenting my experiences as a researcher.

Validity and Positionality

To ensure the validity of this study, I attempted to first and foremost to build rapport with participants. This included communicating with participants informally and assisting with for instance the construction of a policy report. As has been suggested, the researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research (Pezalla, et al., 2012). I, as well, spent a prolonged period of time in the field (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This allowed me to build trust and rapport with participants, as well as gain a deeper understanding of the research context. As mentioned earlier in this section, I also triangulated this data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). I used peer debriefing with those familiar with charter school research, as well as those familiar with critical race theory and neoliberalism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, in line with the qualitative

tradition I will used rich, thick descriptions in my findings section to allow readers the ability to determine transferability (Creswell, 2013).

My positionality is what drives me to this research. It extends beyond my desire "to know" more about the charter school authorization and application process. As Dr. Arnetha Ball reminded us in 2012 with the AERA program theme, *non satis scire: to know is not enough*. I am deeply committed to improving the educational and life outcomes of African Americans and other minoritized groups and I desire my research to be one mechanism in doing so. Moreover, as an African American, native of New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina survivor, and person to experience the chartering of New Orleans as student, preservice teacher and volunteer, and now scholar, this research, courses through my veins. Of course, this provides me with a unique perspective which may also limit my study, if we are to understand this through Western notions of proximity, detachment, and narrow objectivity (Smith, 1999). I intend, as I did in the opening vignette[30], to offer honest clarifying remarks throughout the study to both make my biases known and to allow myself, the data, and the reader a level of authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Limitations

This study is limited by four aspects. The first limitation has to do with the incomplete application and rubrics provided. Unfortunately, the Louisiana Department of Education was unable to provide me with the full records request I made. Having the full request would have allowed me to examine differences across time, as well as assist me in painting a fuller picture. Secondly, my study lacked diversity in terms of gender. Perhaps, there would have been different

[30] My example in the vignette was my inability for so long to consider the possibility of a "good" charter school.

levels of analysis had I had more female participants in my study. Third, there was a limited number of perspective from authorizers and administrators. Their narratives could have provided more context and understanding. Lastly, I was unable to observe the actual charter application interview process. This is a central component of the application process.

Significance

As the ten-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina has approached, the reformation of New Orleans and the resulting educational restructuring stands as the grand site of school reform experimentation. If for no other reason than this, we should pay attention: other locales are seeking to emulate the New Orleans school reforms.[31] As such, researchers and concerned citizens should look to effects of these reforms. This study provides an examination of the charter school authorization and application process as a site of reproduction of power relations and social inequality. Currently, no study exists that examines the charter school authorization process and its link to racialized neoliberalism. Moreover, my research explores and adds to the paucity of scholarship on grassroots, progressive efforts at charter school creation/institution building, African American educational activism and advocacy, and school reform movements. Additionally, my research may inform policy processes for charter applications and evaluations and provide implications and directions in the support socially just orientated initiatives for charter creation.

[31] In addition to Atlanta, we see similar reform efforts taking place in Memphis, particularly among those in the Frayser community who have suffered decades of under-resourced schools and now battle with an ensuing state takeover and conversion of public schools with deep community roots into charter schools. Of the 13 schools which have been converted into charters and placed in their state's Achievement School District, only two are operated by members of the local African American community. These deep spatial and racial cleavages are significant in our considerations of equity in educational reform, and as Michael Dumas (2014) cautions, "how policy is lived and too often suffered" (p.2). For more information see: http://wreg.com/2014/12/04/frayser-families-continue-to-fight-asd-takeover/

Chapter 4: Findings

...[t]here is a deep need for Black leadership in this [the charter] sector. I don't subscribe to the notion that just because one is well-intentioned it means that they will effect positive change in the lives of young Black people. Our kids need more than well-intentioned folk entering their respective communities hoping to 'save them.' Our kids need to make connections—strong ones. Connections to their history, to themselves, and to their community. ...I want young Black kids from New Orleans to be proud not only of our rich city culture, but also to be proud of themselves because they know their worth.

–Wayne Thomas (2015), African American Educator, Native New Orleanian, and Charter Applicant

"Memory—of what has been, of acts of commission or omission, of a responsibility abdicated—affects the future construct of power in any form."

--Wole Soyinka, "The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness"

This study, at its heart, is deeply interested in the possibilities of education to be daring in its efforts to "build a new social order." A new social order which actively aims to challenge and dismantle, unsettle and undue, what Saidiya Hartman (2007) terms the "afterlife of slavery."[32] The unasked, but present question that lingers in these pages is "can charter schools be an

[32] For Hartman (2007) the afterlife of slavery is the perpetual haunting of racialized captivity and dehumanization which is made manifest in the present. Hartman reminds us, "if slavery persist as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (p. 6).

apparatus to challenge systemic sedimented racial educational inequality?" Might they, in the counter-hegemonic imaginaries of some African Americans, pose, as Achille Mbembe (2001) suggests, "a problem for [dominant] Western consciousness" that is predicated on gauges of humanness that exclude or excise African Americans?

The above quotes one from a participant in my study, Wayne Thomas, an educator and charter applicant, and the other from Nobel Prize winning author, Wole Soyinka, illuminate what is at stake in New Orleans and the charter authorization and application process. Thomas' comments bespeak of a hope. He not only challenges en-whitened assumptions about well-intentioned individuals who came to New Orleans to "save them"—"them" being those who under the clasp of epistemic violence are pinched into positions of being the "wretched of the earth" and therefore always already seen as in need of white salvation or at the very least policing and surveillance—but he also underscores a central difference between those who come to save and those who come to restore. The latter is concerned with remedying the mis-education that results in dehumanization, suppression, and erasure, while the former is concerned with purification practices that extract the culture, mores, and local ontologies of existence. For Soyinka memory is an essential element in our arsenals to combat inequitable power relations and inequalities. Memory serves as a base through which reflection and action are conjoined and once conjoined make a demand of power. The findings from this study add to our memory of Hurricane Katrina and the resulting disassembling and restructuring of public education in New Orleans, as well as makes a demand for educational justice.

As such, this dissertation study utilized critical race theory to examine the racial politics of the charter school authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans. Critical Race Theory was utilized to answer the central questions framing this dissertation study. The two

questions that animate this study are: *(1) what challenges do African American grassroots groups face in their attempts to take advantage of charter school application laws in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans? and (2) how do African Americans conceptualize and experience the charter authorization and application process?*

In the New Orleans case, what is first gleaned is that there exists a plurality of charter schools in the Recovery School District (RSD) that are governed by elite white interests. Whites in New Orleans control about 70% of the "market share" of RSD charters. The remaining charters are governed by African American groups or multicultural groups, which have governance boards and school leadership of color. Moreover, during the 2011 charter application cycle, 90% of the African American applicants were denied, while approximately 40% of the white applicants were denied.[33] Yet, how does one make sense of those statistical figures? My findings help to make sense of those realities. The findings suggest that as it pertains to question one, local African American grassroots groups are challenged by: (a) negative conceptualizations of native New Orleanian African Americans that position them as anathema to "reformers," (b) ideological illegibility/coherence, which is to say there was a privileging of applicant groups who espoused fidelity to and discourses of market/neoliberal ideology, and (c) lack of connection to elite social networks. As it pertains to question two, African American participants conceptualize and experience the authorization process as biased, challenging notions of neutrality and objectivity. These findings are interconnected and mutually support each other. What this suggests is that the authorization process is a racialized process, which produces racial effects in

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[33] This becomes centrally important for the aforementioned reasons regarding the construction and governance, but also important when we consider the RSD student demographics is overwhelmingly African American and having school governance and leadership, as well as educators who are reflective of the communities from which students and families come.

policy implementation. The authorization process in post-Katrina New Orleans advantages white educational stakeholders connected to elite social networks. This leads to a disparity in approval among African American charter applicants and delimits counter-hegemonic charter schools operated by African Americans. The data collected demonstrate the charter school authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans is embedded within and constitutive of the ongoing process of racial formation. Yet, more precisely, taken together these findings suggests the chartering of New Orleans is a part of, what I term, *educational vulturism.* Educational vulturism is a form of capitalist hetero-patriarchal white supremacy, where by way of ideology, policy, and practice, actors who are often extra-educational, feast on marginalized communities and the systems that "serve" them. Using symbolic/discursive and material approaches, educational vulturism is a mechanism of profit accumulation and power solidification.

This chapter will explore these themes, interweaving narratives from participant interviews, discourses within charter applications and reviewer rubrics, media sources, field notes, and observations. New Orleans is renowned for its fine cuisine. In keeping with the feasting metaphor, as we digest my findings, they will be presented in the form of a menu.

Appetizer: Racial "Roux"

Gumbo is a New Orleans delicacy. It is time consuming and prepared with great care. Anyone who has ever cooked gumbo will tell you, regardless of the ingredients you add, how fresh they may be, if the roux isn't right the gumbo is all wrong. The roux is the base of the gumbo. It's foundation. Its flavor permeates throughout the dish and infuses the other ingredients.

In existing scholarly literature, the charter school authorization process is understood as an objective, colorblind process which aims to ensure the production of "quality" charter schools

and proper oversight (Bulkley, 2001; Palmer, 2007; Sugarman & Kuboyama, 2001). To my knowledge, outside of this study, no current study examines the charter school authorization process as a racialized policy performance with dysconscious racist undertones. This first finding suggests how race is embedded within the process and the synaptic hallucinations of the dominate group. This racial roux based on the debasement of African Americans imbues, according to participants, the charter authorization and application process.

Negative Constructions of African American Educators and Pre-Katrina New Orleans

"Wanting Memories to Teach Me"

Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans on August 29, 2005. I was a senior in high school. My family, best friend, and I evacuated to Houston, Texas a few days before the storm. We were fortunate. We initially were going to ride out the hurricane, staying at my grandmother's house in the 7th Ward. However, my grandmother urged us to evacuate. So, we did. That was for the best. I, for one—actually no one really— had any idea that our lives would change so drastically that hot, humid fall day.

At my aunt and uncle's house, I vividly recall sitting at my grandmother's feet, watching CNN. Nothing could have prepared me for what we were watching. It was the second time in my life that I witnessed actual death and destruction on screen. The first time was September 11th. This time it was much more personal. I wish I could say the images that flashed upon the television, flooding my heart, engulfing my spirt, were like the beautifully intricate Tibetan sand mandala's that were created only to be destroyed. This was not the case. My home and life as I knew it…as we made it was being destroyed. The atmosphere in my aunt's living room was

doused with dizzying cacophonies of "Oh, my God, that's by Mama," "Y'all, that's the Circle Food Store!" and tears. Until the only saturating sound was silence. Suffocating silence.

When we saw the Circle Food Store submerged in water, we knew that was it. Thankful that we didn't stay at my grandmother's house, but also realizing that her house was no more. It wasn't just the loss of property. Though let me be clear: that property mattered because my grandmother worked like hell for the little property she had. But it was also the loss of homespace, of the memories that adorned the walls and made up the house—first report cards, wedding albums, baby clothes, family bibles, first communion outfits, homemade movies—our artifacts.

In October, we had the chance to return to New Orleans to collect some belongings. We salvaged whatever we could. Most was lost. As we drove back, I resolved I would return to New Orleans. It was like Houston and more precisely the school I attended was eating me alive. Most of my days, I felt like a phantom. Had I died and was forced to walk among the living? What had I done to deserve this purgatory? The good thing is that purgatory doesn't last forever.

Soon came later and my high school was one of the first to re-open in December, a few days before Holiday Break. My mother, aunt, and I took the pilgrimage to New Orleans for the reopening of my high school. I had to be there. I had to get back to "home"…to what was familiar, dare I say, "normal." I wanted to return to the space that had nurtured and cultivated me. We were all so excited to return to our school. To see familiar faces and extend warm embraces. Most of us were in some state of nirvana. Just to be back was to transcend, even just for a moment, all the pain we had experienced.

Our school would close for holiday, but would reopen in January. I just had to figure out how to return permanently. My family was in no state to return to New Orleans. However, I

knew, perhaps selfishly, as Sweet Honey in the Rock knew, that "we all…everyone of us have to come home again." The silver lining came when my former English teacher, offered to house and serve as my guardian for that remaining semester. My prayers had been answered. It was settled. I was to live with her. I returned to New Orleans in January. Hopeful. Excited. Anxious. I returned to school, but things were different. It had become a "charter" school. I knew not exactly what that meant. And truthfully I didn't exactly care. What I did begin to notice, however, as the days and weeks passed was that the complexion of the teachers changed. Some of my favorite black teachers weren't back, including Ms. Serrette, who went beyond the call of duty and opened her home to me. They had all been fired and replaced with new, young white teachers. At the time, I really didn't understand what was happening in New Orleans. I just knew my school and the city was becoming much more white. And that the New Orleans, I so desperately wanted to return to, that I had valued so intimately pre-Katrina was being discussed in terms of blight, failure, and corruption.

*

The above memory helps to frame this first finding. Native African American New Orleanians were constructed negatively in popular discourses following Hurricane Katrina. Participants' narratives suggest that these discursive constructions had an impact on the sense-making of those who review charter school applications. Embedded within this sense-making, according to participants, was an implicit racial calculus that subtracted them from the process of charter school governance.

> We tried. We really did. But it became clear they didn't want us. We didn't have a board made up of people who weren't from New Orleans or who only taught for two years. You'd think that would be a good thing, huh? But nope! (laughter) We represented [to

> them] a failed, bloated Black bureaucracy . . . controlling and operating schools isn't for us. It's for them.

Mr. Raymond Black, an African American veteran educator and school administrator, like most African American educators in post-Katrina New Orleans was summarily dismissed following Hurricane Katrina. With more than 20 years of experience in New Orleans schools and deep roots in the community, Mr. Black brought a wealth of heritage knowledge (King, 2006) to his classroom and a strong commitment to his students during his time as an educator. Despite his being fired after Hurricane Katrina, he remained active in education by being involved in his church's education ministry, doing various educational consulting projects, and being active in his alumni association. It was via his alumni association that he participated in planning to operate a charter school.

Mr. Black's aforementioned comments bring into sharp relief the perspectives of African Americans who desired to create an alternative education for their students. Mr. Black's perspective illuminates the ways in which localness and more precisely a thinly veiled anti-blackness, which becomes discursively affiliated with inferiority, buoy the application process to operate a charter school. Mr. Black suggests there is a collapsing of Blackness and bureaucracy into failure or an ineptness for leadership and governance. This is key when once considers how rationalities of the market hinge on notions of efficiency and bottom lines. Moreover, embedded within Mr. Black narratives are specific allusions to what is perceived as ideal within the minds of those who review applications and via the authorization process. According to Mr. Black, having non-local boards and having individuals with minor experience as teachers was a preference for reviewers and policy elites. That is to say, the policy preference valued those who were not from New Orleans, but more precisely in Mr. Black's allusion to those "who only

taught for two years" we see a subtle reference to Teach for America (TFA). Following Hurricane Katrina, Teach for America became a major policy player with individuals making up both the teaching force, policy makers, and leadership of charter schools. Teach for America, an organization which aims to de-professionalize teaching and de-centralize education—this aligning with market-principles—is, according to Mr. Black the preferred leadership for education. When I asked Mr. Black why was Teach for America so ubiquitous in New Orleans he remarked, "…it's excellent marketing. TFA has everyone believing in TFA and they're a clique. If you not in their clique, sorry for you." Suffice it to say, Mr. Black's comments regarding TFA speak to its colonizing mission and legacy of white conservationism. Mr. Black's theorizing about why denials of African American applicants exist help us to better understand the authorization process.

Like Mr. Black, Ms. Janette Sere's perspective on race and school reform, pulling back hallow notions of neutrality and explores, what she understands as the deeper racial politics and animus at play.

> KLH: So, were you rehired to teach?
>
> Janette Sere: I was *told* I could *reapply*. That's different from being rehired. You know. Reapplying meant I had lost something. But it wasn't *my* fault. It was the storm. We had a catastrophic hurricane. Why would I reapply for something that should have been mine to begin with? That was already mine if we didn't have a storm?
>
> KLH: I feel you. So…
>
> Janette Sere: We lost our jobs and they tried to take away our dignity. I would have to reapply. Why? For what? I was a good teacher. We all were good teachers. But after the storm you wouldn't know *that*. You know they talked about us like dogs. All you kept

hearing was about how corrupt everything was—we [Orleans Parish Public Schools] had problems, nobody would say it was perfect. But just the way they made *us* sound, like your common criminal.

KLH: I remember.

Janette Sere: Isn't that sad? That's how it went down. But I said, "not me. I'll retire."

KLH: I know several teachers who decided to retire. That was something else.

Janette Sere: I can think of at least four from my school who decided to retire. You know many of us stayed active or decided to return to teach later.

KLH: Yeah. That's true. I wonder why they did that?

Janette Sere: For different reasons. You know family responsibilities, wanting to get back in the classroom. You know all types of reasons.

KLH: Sorry. I meant. What I was trying to say was I'm wondering why they fired you all?

Janette Sere: That's another story. People like Leslie Jacobs and her uptown friends have wanted to take control of schools for a long time. You can't take control of schools with a strong union [pause] and you can't control 'em with people who know better. So, we had to go.

Ms. Sere, a retired African American educator from New Orleans, who remained active in education post-Katrina, worked with a local group of educators and community members to apply to operate a charter. Her group was denied. Ms. Sere, while not explicitly mentioning race, does explore the absent presence of race in New Orleans school reform. Ms. Sere's narrative helps us to make meaning of why African American teachers were fired. Taking her perspective into account we recognize that in firing and as a consequence dis-membering the teachers' union,

which was overwhelmingly African American, this laid the ground work for chartering New Orleans schools. Without a strong teachers' union or actual veteran teachers to resist these reforms, a blank slate was laid for the ushering of market-based reforms. Moreover, we see the deeply insidious power grabs which we operative during the reform. Her mention of Leslie Jacobs, a key architect of the charter movement that reconstitute traditional public schools as semi-private entities known as charters, is significant for at least two reasons. First, Ms. Sere's narrative suggests that the chartering of New Orleans was an idea of an elite, white business woman in New Orleans, who has, for some time, had her eyes on public schools in New Orleans. Secondly, crucially, Ms. Sere's remarks about Leslie Jacobs' "uptown friends" is a particular race and class critique. In this instance uptown New Orleans is a location of white wealth. Known for its extravagant mansions, Tulane University (another key architect of New Orleans education reform), and several elite private and parochial K-12 schools, uptown New Orleans is a bastion of sensibilities that have wanted to reform and contain Blackness in New Orleans, while simultaneously profiting off of Black labor. Her comments suggest that once given the opportunity, elite white New Orleanians would monopolize on the chance to restructure education.

Importantly and most critically to this discussion of negative constructions of African American educators and pre-Katrina New Orleans education, Ms. Sere's comments illuminate that motifs of corruption and criminality became inscribed on pre-Katrina educators and the system as a whole. She does allude to the problems, stating that essentially no system is "perfect" but for her it is the mapping of criminality onto particular Black bodies which is most problematic. One can deduce, similar to Mr. Black's comments, by representing this overwhelmingly African American system, and the individuals within it as failure incarnate,

void, and corrupt, neoliberal reformers could create the necessary 'crisis' for restructuring.

I want to pause here to mention, as well, that beyond the racial politics that are deeply embedded within this narrative we can sense the intensely emotional toll being fired had on Black educators in New Orleans. During the interview I recall Ms. Sere's tone changing and the frustration and disappointment was apparent. Her deciding to not reapply is indicative of the frustration and disappointment that she and many other African American veteran educators experienced. Her retirement was an act of defiance, an act to maintain her "dignity."

Yet, the dignity of African Americans educators was continually feasted upon. In public discourses that circulated both locally and nationally we see that New Orleans Public Schools, as well as it's employees are seen as criminal and corrupt. In an interview, for instance, with PBS New Hour, James (Jimmy) Farenholtz, former Orleans Parish School Board member and Bill Roberti and Sajan George of the New York firm Alvarez and Marsal, who handled the pre-Katrina turnaround of Orleans Parish Schools, constructed the pre- Katrina school system as in need of the salvific grace of charter school reform.

> Farenholtz: "Fraud, corruption, contract scams, flat-out-theft, people walking out with laptops, anything you can imagine. Any way you could steal they were doing it."
> Roberti: "Just years and years and years of abuse, and of people just doing what they wanted to do. I mean there was—-there was no discipline.
>
> George: "We had a person that has been on paid leave for 35 years. I joked with somebody. Do we send them, you know, like a silver anniversary card? Thank you for 35 years of non-service? We had documented cases of people that were putting in 50 hours of overtime a week, 50 hours a week, every week of the year, including Christmas."

Taken together these parasitic narratives negatively construct Orleans Parish schools and more precisely the individuals within them as menacing. Tacitly embedded within these narratives are dog-whistle politics that propel notions of black inferiority and criminality. Farenholtz's comments give the "necessary" allusion to the sinisterness of blackness. It tells a single narrative about African American teachers, painting them as serial offenders. Both Roberti and George's statements, too, offer a glimpse into white rationalities of abjection. These narratives evoke the always already notions of black savagery and shiftlessness. According to the dominant narratives, one might assume that all of the issues of public education can be collapsed into the figure of the black teacher. Deeply entwined and entrenched racism is removed from the conversation, while African American employees are seen as the problem. They are constructed as the abject.

These teachers were constructed to represent a pre-existing crisis and chaos that could be expunged via their removal. Farenholtz, again, makes the necessary historical, discursive linkage, alluding to these Black women's criminality and "dependency." Farenholtz states,

> I don't think you are going to see it, the 'old okey doke,' as a friend of mine used to say. Some of those people aren't coming back. The light's on them; they can't do the things they used to do with the kind of oversight that we have now.

The extermination of these teachers marks the dawn of a new day of reform. Farenholtz's statement sheds light on white rationalities that debase African American educators.

There is a presumed level of accountability, fairness, and justice that is always already built into the restructuring of New Orleans via neoliberal charter schools. The success of neoliberal charter schools hinges, in part, on the "personnel." This "successful" personnel is made possible by the erasure and dismissal of the African American teacher.

Among other participants of mine we see the “official” narrative of black inferiority and criminality remaining upheld. Spenser Finn is a lawyer by training, turned “educational entrepreneur” who has been active in the restructuring of education in post-Katrina New Orleans. He currently works for one of the largest authorizing organization in the United States. He was one of the top leaders to organize and implement the charter authorization process in New Orleans. He also has been active in consulting projects overseas in the United Kingdom and New Zealand that have push for market approached to education. Mr. Finn goes on to state,

> Spenser Finn: The major issues impacting public education and New Orleans public schools, if I could sum it up is that children were not a priority.
>
> KLH: And what would you say were some of the priorities of the board or the district?
>
> Spenser Finn: I’ll qualify it because we started working in New Orleans post-Katrina, like many people. So, this is kinda understanding from a historical perspective, as opposed to a personal perspective. But from a historical perspective, my understanding, is the priorities were the adults. [The priorities] Were greed…about power, as opposed to being about children.

Prior to opening one of the first charter schools in St. Louis, Benjamin Silverman, was a principal at a private school. Dr. Silverman currently is in a leadership position with the Missouri Charter Public School. While in New Orleans he was a charter leader in New Orleans and remains active at the national level with charter school authorizations and advocacy. Dr. Silverman was instrumental in the charter authorization process in New Orleans. He offers similar thoughts as Mr. Finn.

> KLH: I’m curious to know how would you describe the educational landscape in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina?

> Benjamin Silverman: I would say, in all fairness, I did not have experience with education pre-Katrina in New Orleans. So, I only know what was relayed to me. Those anecdotal stories and statements are very similar to what is being heard nationally and the mainstream about how challenging the school system was and about how much corruption and how much dysfunction there was.

Both Dr. Silverman and Mr. Finn provide us with the master-narrative surrounding New Orleans and blackness. First, one can notice that both of these narratives index an imposed narrative. That is to say, these narratives are coming from individuals who aren't "local." This is a patently different perspective than those, who are from New Orleans and have experienced Hurricane Katrina. Secondly, their narratives further show how New Orleans public schools and the individuals within them are negatively constructed. While neither have direct experience with pre-Katrina New Orleans education, they have both been effectively socialized within the dominant narrative used to usurp traditional public education. In each of their narratives we see rationalities that suggest that the individuals within public schools are corrupt, dysfunctional, greedy, and selfish. The impression one gets from these narratives is that those operating public education pre-Katrina are, in fewer words, criminal and have abdicated their responsibility to the children of New Orleans.

Walter Woodard, who has served in various capacities in New Orleans from educational consulting to serving as a charter reviewer, and chief executive officer of a charter schools goes on to say,

> There was a need for new talent. There's a lot to be said [about New Orleans public schools]. But in general, it was a low performing district: operationally, educationally, as well as socially.

In many ways, Mr. Woodard's comments get at the heart of these particular negative constructions that abound. His statement that "there was a need for new talent" highlights how one of the key rationalities that existed post-Katrina among the architects of market-based education was that of needing to rid the city of the old, for the new. This new talent opened the door for a group of educational stakeholders who often were not from New Orleans, were white, and operated using neoliberal perspectives. They were the "new talent."

This first finding suggests that negative constructions of native African Americans of New Orleans were positioned as anathema to reformers and as such need not be stakeholders in the rebuilding of education in New Orleans. This finding, I would argue, serves as the foundation for understanding the subsequent findings and racial politics that were operating in post-Katrina New Orleans. The specter of Blackness is mapped onto the sensibilities of those in authority. This leads to the second finding which suggests that there existed ideological illegibility within the actual applications. I will explore this finding next.

Hungering for Control

Ideological Illegibility

The second major finding from this study suggests that there existed ideological illegibility, which is to say there was a privileging of applicant groups who espoused fidelity to and discourses of market/neoliberal ideology. Many of the African American local applicants espoused narratives of community or bespoke of larger concerns beyond that of testing in their applications. Out of the 2011 applications pool, 9 out of 10 of the African American applications were denied, compared to 5 out of the 12 European American applications. More to the point, with respect to the discourses embedded within the applications, there existed more variability among the African American applications. Some of the applications written by African

American groups utilized a hybrid language, which merged communitarian concerns and accountability language, while others focused more on community. By and large, nearly 80% of the approved applications utilized discourses of accountability and marketization. Moreover, there existed a particular narrative arc in approved application that relied on constructing pre-Katrina New Orleans as in need of salvation.

Bare Plates at the All You Can Eat Buffet: Discourses within Black Charter Applications

Given the proliferation of charter schools within the New Orleans context, many local African Americans attempted to apply to operate a charter school. They wanted to, as Mr. Black said, "get in the game." The reasons varied among applicants—some because the genuinely believed in charter schools as a possibility, others because they were fed up with what they were witnessing in current schools, all because they wanted to make an impact on the lives of children in their communities. One of the challenges faced by African American applicants was the actual application and "writing" a successful application. While there are some successes, most applications by African Americans were denied. I will provide, sometimes at length, the narratives within some of the charter applications written by African Americans. These narratives suggest and help us to understand how the authorization and application process is both capricious and chock-full of indeterminancies, yet has a level of racialized stability that, too, is fully operational, entrenched, and reproductive.

Mr. Kenneth Johnson, a veteran African American educator and administrator, who worked with his alumni association to apply to open a charter school goes on to state,

> Mr. Johnson: You want to know why *we* didn't get approved? (laughter). It's simple. Hugh. We're from New Orleans and we're BLACK! That simple!

KLH: I feel you. But can you tell me more? Like what about being Black and from New Orleans?

Mr. Johnson: Let me put it like this. We had different goals from those people. We wanted to create a school that wasn't KIPP! We wanted *our* vision. You know our group is from the Westbank and we're really a community and alumni group. That's what we wanted. You know, something that was a reflection of *our* community.

Mr. Johnson's comments are central for understanding how applicants are coded for success via the type of vision articulated within their application. Moreover, his comments are corroborated with the discourses presented within many of the approved applications, which I will explore shortly. For now, let us examine the discourses within African American charter applications.

> Watson Memorial Boys Academy will prepare males for success in a college-preparatory high school within a setting that prioritizes scholarship, family, community responsibility and positive self-image….The Family Center of Hope[34] envisions a city in which a child's education will mitigate the impact of disasters, poverty and challenging family situations. ..The Watson Academy believes that self-actualization and community wellness demand that each child reaches his learning potential through relationships that instill foundational academic skills, motivation for scholastic success as well as compassion for fellow human beings.

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[34] The Family Center of Hope is the non-profit charter management organization that would govern the school. The Family Center of Hope is a local New Orleans non-profit that has been in operation for nearly 25 years. The Center, described as a "holistic institution of education and social services" aims to address various issues such as poverty, community violence, drug use, and school drop out. I should say, one critique of The Family Center of Hope has been the connection with the faith-based organizations. Nevertheless, The Family Center of Hope commitment to challenging inequality is well known and long serving in the New Orleans area. Their approach to wrap-around, holistic services, is also important.

The Watson Memorial Boys Academy's 2011 charter application was denied. While denied, it is still important to consider the particular logics within this above excerpt from the application. The Watson Memorial Boys Academy (tWMBA) offers a narrative rooted in connecting education to family, community, and positive representations of the self. In their application they discuss a desire to open an all boys school to address some of the specific inequalities and oppressions young Black male youth endure in New Orleans. They state, "[t]he number of young men of color who are lost each year to senseless violence, imprisonment, and substandard employment" as a motivating force for envisioning a charter school such as theirs. Their narrative suggests a deeper connection and impact for education, beyond standardized testing and entering college. They situate education as a force to combat, not ignore, "disaster, poverty, and challenging family situations." This is important because it is attentive to the real lives of marginalized youth of color in New Orleans. They see education as linked to both the self and community. tWMBA discusses how education serves as a tool for the wellness of the community and as a mechanism for self-actualization. This is crucial because their vision of the school is for the impacting of not-only the self, but also the self in communion with others. The interconnected nature of our being.

Similarly, the L.B. Landry charter groups focuses on larger notions of community. In their charter application they state

> The mission of Lord Beaconsfield Landry College Preparatory and Career Focused Charter High School is to create a researched based educational environment infused with technology driven instruction for students who have been *placed at risk* [my italics] for educational failure. In partnership with parents and community, the school will promote a culture of achievement that maximizes the potential of all children empowering them to

> become positive contributors of society and competitive in an evolving economy….A strong alumni association works in tandem with the school to support its success. It remains the desire of the alumni association and the community to be chartered by the LBCA (Lord Beaconsfield Charter Association) Board of Trustees. They are in full support of the first community ran charter school in the city of New Orleans in which their voices will be heard.

Like other charter school applicants who are Black, the L.B. Landry alumni association was denied the opportunity to operate a charter. This group, a collection of alumni and those who live within the neighborhood—this isn't mutually exclusive—desired to open a charter school. For the alumni association they desired to open a school so that students would not be "placed at risk." This is an important discursive approach to thinking about education and moves away from the master narrative that situates the educational disparities within the individual student and their community. As opposed to deficit-orientated perspectives that rely on pseudo-eugenic rationalities, this group unashamedly states that Black students have been strategically placed at risk for educational failure. Moreover, one can see within L.B. Landry's a commitment to parents and community. This partnership is an essential aspect of the charter and departs from the logics of white neoliberal charter applicants, which will be discussed later in this chapter. For the L.B. Landry group, the reality is that African American youth are given less opportunities, structured for failure, and therefore disadvantaged in our economy. For them, opening a school is a mechanism to challenge these "savage inequalities." It's connected to community economic uplift. Lastly, for the Landry charter group opening this charter school allows for governance to be held by those in the community. Moving beyond the paternalism that is often associated with current neoliberal school reforms, the Landry alumni association wanted a charter school that

was constructed through their vision and importantly attentive to the voices and perspectives of those who would be most impacted, working class African American parents, students, and community members.

I will quote at length from the application of AMIkids Infinity School of Environmental Studies. This charter application represents a joint effort among local New Orleanians who decided to partner with a charter management organization and a local non-profit, Integrated Family Services. AMIkids aims to support youth who have experienced push-out and containment within a neoliberal, carceral state. Integrated Family Services is a social work agency in New Orleans. In their application they write,

> The mission of AMIkids—Infinity School of Environmental Studies is to build character and scholarship in "at-risk" youth, while developing responsible and productive student citizens…We believe that all students will succeed in school when surrounded with professional, responsible, caring adults who value the needs of students in conjunction with maintaining high expectations for achievement. Providing this platform for building relationships between educators and students, and reinforcing productive peer relationships, the AMIkids Infinity School of Environmental Studies will channel the unique skills of each student into the development of productive citizenship and community enhancement.
>
> Educators within our school focus on individual student strengths, while introducing new competencies that can enrich the learning experience for all within the school community. Engaging students in dialogue, hands-on activities, and action-oriented learning, the educational team will promote high-order thinking which requires students

> to consider the multiple options that they have in life, while acquiring a sense of responsibility to the community in which they live. …
>
> By engaging diverse members of the community in our efforts, as well as partners from the business and public sectors, we will deconstruct the stereotypes and deficit-oriented perceptions that contribute to the unnecessary sorting of students, by ensuring high-levels of student success as measured by academic achievement and civic engagement. …
>
> Our goal is to provide students with a learning environment rich with applied, action-oriented learning practice to encourage knowledge transference outside of the traditional classroom setting, thus promoting relevance.
>
> The AMIkids Infinity School of Environmental Studies has established its instructional delivery on three primary methodologies for enhancing learning. They are: Experiential Education, Project-Based Learning and Service Learning.

AMIkids Infinity School of Environmental Studies, a joint effort from various stakeholders, espouses a narrative of commitment, community, and concern for African American youth who have been historically and presently marginalized. For AMIkids this charter school represents an opportunity to challenge dull pedagogies that they believe contribute to worsening the educational experiences of these youth. They want to engage in teaching that connects students beyond the four walls of the classroom, beyond rote test preparation and rather towards an education based on students' personal experience, service learning, and projects. If one reads carefully, at the very outset of their statement one can notice that AMIkids situates their work in a position that differs from that of white neoliberal charter groups. The entire philosophy of having caring adults who value the needs of students in tandem with maintaining high academic expectations is a critically important difference. As opposed to focusing

singularly on having high academic expectations of youth, divorced from their lived realities, AMIkids takes an expansive approach to care and education. Again, this perspective moves away from dominant narratives that aim to camouflage inequalities that so deeply abound for our youth. Moreover, within their narrative students are situated from an asset based frame. AMIkids recognizes that Black youth have abilities and talents the moment they walk into the school. As opposed to extracting these abilities, AMIkids desires to build off of them and as a consequence develop students who are committed to being productive citizens—not consumers, not test takers—but citizens, engaged in community enhancement. Additionally, AMIkids desires to open a school which sees the community—diverse individuals, as well as business and public sectors groups—as assets to the school and student achievement, which is measured not only by scholastic achievement, but also civic engagement. Once more, AMIkids endeavors to move beyond trite notions of schooling and academic success toward seeing the school as a constitutive element of the community, as well as actively engaging community members in the school. One can get the sense from AMIkids that it is not enough to do well scholastically and not be committed to community uplift and civic engagement.

These above narratives from African American charter groups bespeak of an expansive view of education that values collaboration, community, and students culture. They are rooted in asset perspectives and extend beyond mere fascination with standardized testing. These charter groups are deeply interested in community and civic engagement. They are in stark contrast to the narratives of elite white charter applicants who were approved. I will discuss those narratives in the subsequent section of this chapter. Nevertheless, one will notice the unambiguous difference and focus among those applications and the aforementioned. However, before I move to approved applications, I want to pause and provide a snapshot of additional narratives of

African American charter applications that provide a hybrid-discourse. Those narratives while not approved, utilized market-based language. I will provide an example of such.

> The mission of Mary D. Coghill Accelerated Charter School (MDCACS) is to educate, empower, and motivate the future leaders of New Orleans by infusing the latest technological resources with competent education professionals; while creating an educational environment that fosters academic excellence, and challenges young minds to exceed the highest levels of educational expectations in every academic field.
>
> Serving All Children, College and Beyond
>
> At MDCACS, we believe that all children are capable of learning, achieving academic success, and are due the opportunity to excel to their highest expectations of learning. All of MDCACS's faculty and staff (teammates) are asked to make a commitment to instruct and motivate students to want to learn. A positive attitude toward learning is encouraged and dedicated teammates rigorously teach to high standards, using differentiated instruction and activities so all students will be able to learn. In order for all students to learn, we make learning relevant, meaningful, and connected to real-life experiences where they can make practical applications.
>
> No Excuse in the Pursuit of Excellence
>
> In addition to preparing our students for academic success, we seek to develop a strong sense of responsibility and leadership in each child. We want students to take personal ownership of their success or failure, regardless of their backgrounds or previous

> experiences. …Students will sign a Commitment to Excellence contract, wear uniforms and abide by a team approved code of conduct.

The Mary D. Coghill charter application utilizes a hybrid approach to constructing its school. That is to say, while a focus is placed on making instruction relevant there is an almost singular focus on educational outcomes. Later in their application they note they have "a focus on results." Of course, those educational outcomes are essential, after all schools are here to "educate," but one can notice a clear difference in tone and approach to education, compared to the aforementioned charter applicants. Additionally, this applicant group provides an allusion to KIPP's "no excuse" method to education. The Coghill group then proceeds to situate student success within the study, presumably connected to the students' "grit" and renders structural forces that impact students moot. Coghill, as well, focuses on student discipline and corporal adornment, as an indicator for student success. The Coghill application does complicate African American narratives by it appropriation of neoliberal discourses.

Similarly, the Friends of King School (FKS) invoked a "no excuse" discourse that was linked to communitarian concerns. The Friends of King Association was the only African American charter group to be approved during the 2011 charter application. In their application Friends of King Association goes on to state,

> The Friends of King School encourages students to value education and understand that learning is a lifelong process. At Craig School, the Friends of King will immediately start creating a culture of high achievement and will make no excuses for ensuring that all students have the opportunity for academic success. It is crystal clear that the Treme community needs a charter school built on high academic achievement and linkages to

> the community that have largely gone untapped. The Friends of King School has had years of successful experience…

In the Friends of King School application, we see the utilization of "no excuses" as a mechanism for school governance, as well as an acknowledgement of the central role of community for the school. This is actually consistent with the other school they operate, Martin Luther King Charter School. Unlike the Coghill application, the FKS application moved beyond the "no excuse" mantra to a community and asset based approach.

The second finding of ideological illegibility is linked to the first, in as much, as Blackness still envelops the process, coloring the review process. This suggests negative construction of Blackness saturates the synaptic workings of reviewers. Even as African American groups appropriate the use of particular ideologically identifiable market-based language, they struggle to get approved. This, again, is rooted in particular negative conceptualizations of local African Americans. College professor, turned educational reformer, turned educational choice critic, Dr. Andre Perry commented saying, "[m]any in New Orleans believe that locals didn't have the capacity to make needed changes to the school system…The architects of education reform in New Orleans did not trust the managers, employees or consumers of the prior system." Perry's comments further illuminate how political elites held a deep distrust for locals and understood them as the problem. As such, the use of neoliberal language still was not enough to gain access to the new governance system. And the illegibility was not only guided by a "racial roux" that allowed Blackness to be deemed inept and criminal, but also an ideological disconnect from market-forces. However, it is clear, that among approved white applicants market-narratives were grounding regimes in the conceptualization of their schools.

'Work Hard and be Nice' at the All You Can Eat Buffet: Discourses within White Charter Applications

Ideological Coherence

While many of the African American charter applicants espoused a discourse connected to community, situating success not just in terms of test scores but also in terms of larger communitarian concerns, European American charter applicants espoused a discourse connected to the market and accountability regimes. This finding suggests that authorizer and reviewers maintained a preference for groups who articulated a vision that cohered with the privatization of New Orleans schools.

One participant, Malcolm Robin, who did not apply to operate a school is a key African American stakeholder in the city. He works with one of the largest African American non-profits in New Orleans and is over their educational division. A lawyer by training, Mr. Robin moved to New Orleans after working in policy oriented positions that addressed the school-to-prison pipeline. Mr. Robin comments,

> There is a lack of talent and breading of talent, whether it be teachers or paraprofessionals or principals for that matter. We are just…we are packing in and shipping in new folks all the time from all over the country to serve as leader of this "no excuse charter" or that "no excuse charter." With that said, there is a lack of innovation in the charter movement. It looks like a regular school. We just put college banners around. This also goes to my next point: discipline is a problem. The way that we deal with discipline. We use discipline [for] the lack of innovation. So, basically how do we "discipline" the problem. The problem is not us as schools. It's these kids. They don't stay still. And the don't sit still for the three-hour bloc that we're supposed to be teaching them math. It's them, they

> are the problem. So, we discipline the problem away. Instead of trying to create innovative ways to have our kids be active.

Mr. Robin's comments illuminate two central realities in the New Orleans charter market—there is an inundation of "no excuse" charters and as a consequence the charter market suffers from a lack of innovation. This translates into punitive discipline approaches. Importantly, as well, Mr. Robin's comments reference the notion that New Orleans has a lack of talent. Talent needed to govern charters must be imported into the city. Though his discourses rely on the negative conceptualization of local New Orleanians, his comments do assist in framing how nearly 70% of the Recovery School District charters are operated by whites with nearly just as many utilizing the "no excuse" mantra. Not only do we witness within charter applications the use of language that coheres with market-logics, but also this suggests there is a type of racial cartel and monopoly operating.

Like Mr. Robin, another participant, Tonya Sanford, a native New Orleanian and mother of three, and secretary, who was a community member participating in the construction of a charter application commented on the hegemonic status of the "no excuse model." "It's hard to compete against the media." Ms. Sanford said, "All over New Orleans you really hear how good some of them are. And everybody wants to be like KIPP because like I said they the it thing." Ms. Sanford comments further suggest how the perception of KIPP being successful, popular, and "the it thing" reproduces charters that seek to emulate them. Reviewing the narratives embedded within White charter applications, one will notice the distinctiveness of KIPP language and neoliberal, deficit ideologies.

Take for example this excerpt from the Langston Hughes Academy Charter School. While not focused on KIPP, they state:

> In 2003, the valedictorian of Fortier High School took the Louisiana Graduate Exit Examination seven times before passing and earning her diploma. The New Orleans system for public education was failing dramatically.

Situated within this application, first, is a narrative of failure of the pre-Katrina New Orleans system. This foundational narrative, as discussed previously, comports with the un-nuanced perspectives of new reformers in New Orleans. This narrative suggests the inefficiency and inferiority of the previous system and the individuals within it. This quote more specifically uses the student as a pawn for embodied failure. Interestingly, it is not her persistence or resilience and ultimately her passing that matters, only the notion of the failure of public schools. Absent from this discussion are larger concerns of urban disinvestment and educational neglect that plagued Fortier High School.

Embedded within Akili Academy's application are explicit discursive links that illuminate the narrative arc privileged in these applications. The writers in this application state,

> The need for outstanding public schools in New Orleans predates the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and Rita. Like most large cities in the United States, New Orleans students living in poverty, particularly students of color, have had no choice but to attend schools that demonstrate chronic student underachievement on statewide and nationally-normed assessments. In response to this crisis, the Recovery School District has been charged with recreating the public school system…as charters. This unprecedented overhaul has created a need for high-capacity charter school operators with unrelentingly high expectations for the students of New Orleans to create outstanding schools that deliver on the promise of legitimate, high-quality choices for these students and their

> families. Akili Academy of New Orleans will seize this opportunity and provide a no-excuse, highly structured, and fully accountable school….

For Akili Academy the focus is on providing parents and students presumably better choices than what existed in pre-Katrina New Orleans. They make a discursive jump by suggesting the superiority of the RSD as savior and hope. Along with suggesting that more choices may equal better choices for parents and students. Moreover, Akili invokes the KIPP household phrase of "no excuse" to illustrate both their commitment to educational improvement and neoliberal governmentalities of education, which situates success solely within the individual merits of one. Unlike the applications by African Americans which discussed larger structural issues that impact young people, connections to relevance, and using education as a mechanism for community uplift, Akili's narrative is about proving its "legitimate, high-quality" nature. This also suggests that some schools are illegitimate.

From the application of New Orleans College Preparatory similar logics as those above abound. The New Orleans College Prep application asserts,

> New Orleans College Prep is focused on results. We seek to implement curricula, pedagogy, and school culture that have been clearly demonstrated to succeed in preparing students for success on state standardized exams and college matriculation.
>
> Expect all students to exceed the highest academic standards.
>
> Research on high-performing schools serving low-income and minority populations has consistently demonstrated that a culture of no excuses and a belief in the ability of all students to achieve at high levels is of paramount importance to securing positive student outcomes. …[we have a] refusal to make poverty an excuse for academic failure…Our

> response to a child who is not meeting the school's rigorous academic and behavioral standards in not to make excuses or lower the standards, but instead to say to the child "you're better than this!" and "work harder!"…
>
> Recruiting and training great teachers will thus be one of New Orleans College Prep's foremost priorities. Teacher recruitment in New Orleans is an especially difficult challenge, as many of the teachers in the city's public schools pre-Katrina were not producing strong student achievement. The search for talent in the community is now harder than ever, as there is a sever labor shortage in all industries due to the widespread displacement of the city's population. We will leverage every recruitment resources available, including TeachNOLA, an initiative of New Schools for New Orleans, Teach for America…

The New Orleans College Prep charter application provides a glimpse of racialized market-based rationalities that are privileged within the authorization process. In their narrative not only are notions of no excuses invoked, but they give a troubling, pronounced example of such. If students are struggling with the rigor or behavioral expectations of the school, the response is essentially to shame the student by telling them they are better than whatever issues the may be having or to ignore the struggles of a student and tell them to work harder. There is a total neglect and inconsideration of what students and their families may be experiencing personally toward a singular focus on "results." The bottom line for New Orleans College Prep is not the overall well-being of students, but test scores. While articulating a vision that proffers care and belief in students, the narrative espoused in this application suggests a cavalier, unsympathetic disregard for the students. The notion that poverty is an excuse, as opposed to a structuring reality that delimits possibilities for students and their families is troubling. Moreover, within

New Orleans College Prep's application we see the negative construction of pre-Katrina New Orleans educators as well at the utilization of alternative teacher providers who de-professionalize education and support privatization of education and anti-unionization.

Similar to the other charter applications, ARISE Academy, The Choice Foundation, and ReNew all provide similar logics.

> Arise Academy
>
> No Excuses in the Pursuit of Excellence
>
> In order to execute our mission, we cannot blame parents, students, or social conditions for poor performance. It is upon us as educators to empower students to achieve excellent academic results…Too often schools focus on educational inputs rather than student outputs. ARISE Academy will not fall into this trap: it will have an unwavering focus on results.
>
> The Choice Foundation's mission is to promote school choice initiatives in Louisiana. The ultimate promotion of school choice is to demonstrate that school choice results in better schools.
>
> ReNew's model is heavily influenced by the "No Excuses" school model, one that has proven to be effective in raising student achievement levels in at-risk student populations, and which can be characterized by schools that employ "principals and teacher who demand excellence and reject the notion that poor kids can't learn." …There is clear evidence that the "No Excuses" model—one that embodies the idea that all students will be successful, go to college, and have the opportunities that follow academic achievement—can raise the level of academic achievement particularly within at-risk

> student populations. Many of the highest performing open-enrollment charter schools in New Orleans are themselves based on the model.

Each of these applications extols the use of market-based approaches to education that focuses on rendering the harsh realities that Black working class and working poor children, families, and communities face as fictions at best and "excuses" at worst. These applications rely on neoliberal rationalities that ignore externalities and exogenous factors. They dismiss structural inequalities and deeply rooted inequalities in funding and access. And, for instance, with ARISE Academy they use a binary logic that debases and narrows possibilities for action and educational justice initiatives that are interested in addressing both inputs and outputs.

All of the discourses coagulate around neoliberal logics. As such, there is an ideological coherence with market mechanisms. The privileging of the KIPP "no excuses" model of reform is idealized and clearly valued, as these schools have all been approved and have the largest share of charters within the RSD.

While the discourses within applications are central and deeply important for considering the application and authorization process, the hydra has many heads. The discourses within applications only serve as one mechanism for understanding the process. Dr. Silverman goes on to note,

> As we were evaluating applicants and their applications and their capacity, we were really sensitive to determining whether or not they had capacity. It's one thing to write an excellent application. It's another thing to actually be able to operate a school. We became very sensitive to assessing capacity, assessing quality of applicants' skills set. In order to do our very best in predetermining whether when they open they would actually operate a successful public school.

Dr. Silverman's comments are illustrative of the shifting terrain of the application process. On one hand the application is seen as the most objective and meritocratic mechanism for determining if one should be approved to open and operate a school. It allows for the critical decision to be made if someone should have access to the governance of schools and the possibility of structuring, as best as possible, education for young people. To say nothing of the deeply important issues pertaining to labor and community relations. However, Dr. Silverman's comments also provides us an entry into understanding the process as highly subjective and connected to the readings, whatever they may be, of particular reviewers. Even if an applicant has a perfect application, does revisions to their application, if the reviewers don't think the group has the "capacity" to operate a school, they are denied.

This is crucially important when we consider that Black applicants are denied at higher rates than their white counterparts. This helps us to further make sense of the first finding of negative constructions of Blackness as being embedded within the authorization process. Determining capacity is an opaque as it is wrought with specific rationalities that seem to value white neoliberal logics. Yet, these logics are not isolated. They are connected by an ideological and structural network.

The Charter School Mafia: The Role of "Social Circles" in the Charter Authorization Process

(Lack of) Connection to Elite Social Networks/Social Circles

> These schools didn't seem to be driven from the local community. They were like the brain child of what I have begun to call "the charter school mafia." These are people who were very involved with New Schools for New Orleans. … It was like they [New Schools for New Orleans] were granted carte blanche in getting what they wanted. But indigenous

New Orleanians, alumni members, community members, people who lived in these neighborhoods by these schools, we were pushed aside.

The above quote from Ida Clark, a parent, community activist, and educational stakeholder brings into sharp relief the role that social networks play in the decimation and reconstruction of schools in New Orleans. Critically, local African Americans were castigated and further marginalized in the remaking of New Orleans. Her comments suggest that the authorizing process was deeply informed by the connection or lack thereof groups have to New Schools for New Orleans, an elite group in New Orleans. New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) was charged with essentially overseeing the entire reconstruction of New Orleans schools. As per their website, “New Schools for New Orleans is dedicated to delivering on the promise of excellent public schools for every child in New Orleans. We make strategic investments of funding, time, and expertise in high-impact organizations to help improve the city’s schools.” What that materializes as is investments in particular schools, individuals, and ideas. NSNO has helped to launch, expand, and replicate several charter schools in New Orleans. NSNO provides funding and technical support for their select schools. Additionally, NSNO advances their efforts to expand markets by creating leadership fellowships, the creation and dissemination of research reports and policy blueprints, and other advocacy based endeavors.

Ms. Clark’s comments shed an important light onto the role of social networks when considering the charter authorization process. The third finding of this study is that African American’s lack of connection to elite social networks was a challenge for them in taking advantage of charter school application laws. In post-Katrina New Orleans, the key educational actors are: KIPP, Bloomberg Philanthropy, Walton Foundation, Broad Foundation, and Gates Foundation, New Orleans Urban League, Bring New Orleans Back Commission, New Leaders

for New Schools, Teach for America, teachNOLA, The New Teacher Project, New Schools for New Orleans, and the Cowen Institute (Tulane University).[35] These actors are key aspects of the reform movement in New Orleans. As such, they orchestrate much of the reforms in New Orleans. I should add, the finding that the connection to elite social networks is further buttressed by three sub-findings. Those sub-findings are as follows:

1. White charter applicants have boards comprised of elite power brokers connected to major networks/social circles.
2. Charter application reviewers are overwhelmingly white and have demographic profiles affiliated with elite power brokers or connections to the choice movement.
3. Additional funding/ incubator grants help lubricate the process.

Sub-Finding 1: Boards Comprised of elite power brokers connected to major networks/circles

The data suggests that African American charter applicants were disadvantaged in the charter authorization process because their boards were comprised of individuals who were not a part of the preferred social network/social circle. While these groups did have members who were educated and credentialed, with a variety of non-profit and community based experiences. Unfortunately, these experiences fall outside of the preferential scope of reviewers. Before exploring the board composition, I want to allow the words of Mr. Jerome Martin—a lifelong

[35] Following Hurricane Katrina significant funding was sent for the rebuilding of the city. Nearly $18 million dollars from the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Those funds were disbursed to three entities New Schools for New Orleans, New Leaders for New Orleans, and Teach for America. Additionally, Broad committed nearly $2.4 million dollars to KIPP for expansion of charter schools. UNICEF provided $450,000 to KIPP for additional resources.

resident of New Orleans who, while not an educator, ran a small business and mentored African American males—to speak. Mr. Martin was on the board of directors for a local African American alumni group who applied to open and operate a charter school. Mr. Martin's alumni group's charter was denied. Mr. Martin had this to say about social networks or as he calls them, "social circles"

> There is no social network. There are social circles. Let's me clear about that. Social networks mean that if I decided that I'm going to invest in what public education looks like from a charter standpoint or from a reform it would be inclusive. Who would be those people included, who would we invite to the table? It's [social network] about expansion and connecting. Social circles mean the same people, around the same people, around the same people, during the same time, all the time. It's exclusion. Which by the way, in a political, casually we can call that cliques. …These social circles are not inclusive to or representative of the students they serve.

Mr. Martin's comments, while some may consider simply semantic, draw out the complexities of social networks or circles for our considerations of inequality. For Mr. Martin these social circles enclose opportunity to those within their "clique" or group, hoarding resources, as well as walling out those who are not a part of the circle. When one considers the authorization process, Mr. Martin's comments assist us in noticing the dynamics at play. Essentially, what Mr. Martin has alluded to is that there is a connection among "reformers." This connection delimits participation of local groups who desire to open and operate a charter school.

To make more concrete and explicit the connection of boards being affiliated with elite social networks let us examine a few instances. Success Preparatory Academy (SPA) was a charter school approved. Success Preparatory Academy had working space in Tulane

University's Cowen Institute. Working at the Cowen Institute afforded the charter board members access to a wealth of policy resources. Moreover, Success Preparatory Academy had New Schools for New Orleans as a partner organization. SPA's co-founder, Niloy Gangopadhyay comes from an elite background which is valued in the charter market. Mr. Gangopadhyay earned a masters from Harvard Graduate School of Education where he focused on charter schools. Moreover, he is a TFA alumni and served in a leadership position in the Uncommon Schools charter network. SPA's other co-founder, St. Claire Adriaan has extensive experience as an educator with KIPP. Mr. Adriaan opened a charter school in Cleveland, as well. Board members have various expertise. One board member works as a high ranking administrator at Ochsner Hospital, a premier hospital in New Orleans. Another member is the assistant director of a center on Tulane University's campus, another member in a senior level leadership position with JP Morgan Chase Bank, as well as having a member who is affiliated with The New Teacher Project/teachNOLA.[36] These board members possess connections to major white networks in New Orleans and nationally.

Paul Habans charter school is operated by Crescent City Schools. Crescent City Schools is a well connected, well resourced charter network. Habans makes clear in their application their connection to elite social networks by stating,

> Crescent City Schools is committed to working with other organizations in the city and has established numerous partnerships with other educational institutions, both locally and nationally. We will leverage these relationships to create a variety of academic

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[36] The New Teacher Project and teachNOLA are both market affiliated groups that aim to provide teachers, with little to no experience or training in some of the most underserved districts. Moreover, TNTP and teachNOLA aid in the de-professionalization of teaching and contribute to union dis-memberment.

> training opportunities for the Principal Fellow. Leaders at Crescent City Schools have built solid relationships with leaders of other CMOs in New Orleans and the CEO has mentored six Directors of Curriculum in charter schools across the city including Sci Academy, Akili Academy, Success Academy and ARISE Academy. Furthermore, Crescent City Schools is supported by New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), who awarded the organization an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant, and Building Excellent Schools (BES), who is providing extensive training and support to our school leaders. The organization also has established relationships with national CMOs KIPP, Democracy Prep, Achievement First and Mastery Charter Schools.

Crescent City Schools makes abundantly clear its connection to elite social networks in education and suggests that this connection illustrates their capacity to run a strong charter school. Moreover, the board of directors for Habans is comprised with individuals connected to elite social circles. Most of the board members are affiliated with Tulane University, two board members are from the business sector having affiliations with Johnson Controls, Inc. and Shell Oil Company, another two are from prestigious law firms in the city: King, Krebs, and Jurgens, PLLC and Jones Walker Law Firm. Additionally, board members are associated with elite educational groups such at TFA and Metairie Park Country Day School.

Similar boards composition can be found in the largest charter networks. Akili Academy has board members affiliated with Goldman Sachs, TFA, and Newman, an elite private school in New Orleans. The leader of Akili Academy was awarded a teaching fellowship with Building Excellent Schools, an educational interest group and non-profit that trains educators to work in "high risk" urban environments. The fellowship is for those who want to start their own charter school. ARISE Academy, as well has a board comprised of members affiliated with TFA, KIPP,

and Adams and Reese law firm. Additionally, they have a leader who was a fellow for NSNO in their incubator program. ReNew has a board made up of members affiliated with Tulane University, KIPP, and the Recovery School District. Importantly, ReNew also has one particular individual who stands out on their board, Stephen Rosenthal. Mr. Rosenthal is the brother of Leslie Jacobs, one of the key architects of the charter movement in New Orleans. Mr. Rosenthal serves as treasurer for both FirstLine Schools' board and KIPP New Orleans' board. Rosenthal also serves as the chairperson for the New Schools for New Orleans board and the Collegiate Academies board. FirstLine Schools' board also has elite actors affiliated with it. They have members associated with TFA, the New Teacher Project, KIPP, and Tulane University. Like ReNew, FirstLine Schools also has a notable individual on their board, Steve Usdin. Mr. Usdin is a partner in the prestigious law firm Barrasso, Usdin, Kupperman, Freeman, and Sarver. He is also related to Sarah Usdin, who was the founder and past CEO of New Schools for New Orleans, former executive director of TFA in Louisiana, partner in The New Teacher Project, and was elected to the school board in 2012. These are clear conflicts of interest.

Sub-finding 2: Charter reviewers are overwhelmingly white and have demographic profiles affiliated with elite power brokers or connections to the choice movement

> KLH:… how were reviewers identified during your time in leadership in Louisiana?
>
> Dr. Silverman: You know it's not a [pause]…it's relationships and networking. As I started working with Louisiana, I didn't know anyone. So, it was my colleagues who worked on this work, it was based on who they recommended…based on who they thought I should talk to.

Dr. Silverman, a lead organizer of the review process, admits that the those selected to review applications for charter schools are based on the suggestions of his colleagues. His comments suggest that being affiliated with elite networks grants one entry into decision making spheres. Upon review of the biographic information of reviewers, we see a disturbing connection among those who review. Similarly, as those who sit on boards of charter organization, we see that a trend among those who are reviewers—TFA, KIPP, or affiliations with groups who are pro-marketization of schools. For instance, the demographics for the 2011 cohort of reviews illustrates this. Nearly 75% of the reviewers are White, compared with 8% who are Black. Another 17%'s race is unknown. In terms of sex, 54% are female compared to 46% of the reviewers who are male. Nearly 95% of the reviewers are from out of state. More specifically, some of the reviewers experiences include: Director of School Choice at the Minnesota Department of Education, board member of the Walton Foundation, advisor to New Schools for Chicago, Director of Charter School Authorizing with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, affiliation with the Chicago Public Education Fund[37], Teach for America, KIPP, Director of School Performance for the D.C. Public Charter School Board, Rodel Foundation[38], Illinois State Charter School Commission, Chief Operating Officer of the Tennessee Charter School Incubator, Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), and New Leaders for New Schools.

The make up of reviewers poses a challenge for community groups who lack such affiliations and those using discourses that don't register with those who review. This also seems to suggest that implicit bias may very will be at play in the granting of charters. Groups who

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[37] The Chicago Public Education Fund is a venture fund started in 2000 with connections to the city's business elite and TFA. They also have a charter incubation program and support Breakthrough Schools, New Teacher Project, New Leaders for New Schools.
[38] The Rodel Foundation provides seed funding to TFA and other incubator groups.

have similar experiences, repertoires, connection, symbolic systems, and capitals, in fewer words cultures seem, as suggested by the data to prefer "certain kinds" of groups.

Sub-finding 3: Additional funding/incubator grants help to lubricate the process

The last sub-finding suggests that money matters and matters in profound ways. Being connected to an elite social network, not only provides access to information and space, but also funds. New Schools for New Orleans provides funds to local charter groups to assist in the incubating of charters in their vision. The data suggests that during the application and authorization process schools with funding from NSNO are approved. This funding may work as a mechanism of coercion or endorsement. That is to say, because of NSNO elite, powerful status in New Orleans, as participant Ida Clark calls them "the charter school mafia" their money backing a school may push reviewers to consider a school they otherwise would not. This reasoning is less plausible, given the deeply incestuous relationships. But it is possible. The second line of reasoning this finding suggests is that the funds from NSNO works as an endorsement for particular charter schools. Those schools were the "chosen" schools.

Figure 1 depicts the funding NSNO provided to particular charter groups. Those entities that have checks in their box have received funding from NSNO. Additionally, one can notice that the schools that have received that largest share of NSNO funding happen to also have the largest market share of Recovery School District charters. This also correlates with the racial make up of schools. Schools that are operated by white groups are circled.

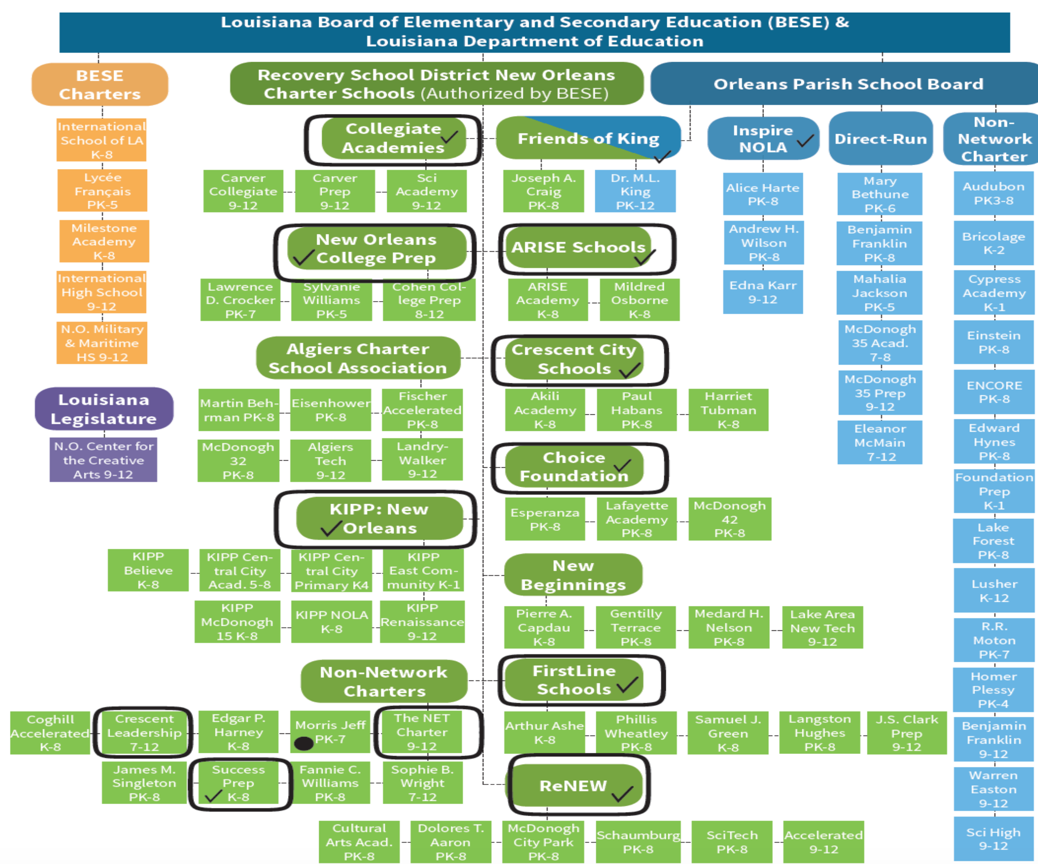

Figure 1.
Adapted from Sims, P. (2015). New Orleans Public School Governance. Cowen Institute.

This additional funding also places local Black applicants at a disadvantage. Applicants who are not associated with and connected to elite networks have a difficulty securing such funds and as a consequence do not have the endorsement during the authorization process. Funds such as these help in polishing the application, hiring for additional research assistance and consultants, and provides groups the luxury of time to think about their applications. One participant, LaShonda Reeves, an African American parent and community member who was involved with her community's charter application remarked,

> Money makes the world go 'round. It's like that here [New Orleans] and everywhere. We applying for buildings and land. A school, yeah. AND buildings and land. AND that's why we couldn't have our school. You try racing a Corolla and one of them, I don't

> know, Corvettes or Mustangs or something. You and me both know who gon finish first. Who you think? It's gon be that Mustang, baby. And that's how it is. They got money and influence. Something we didn't have. So, yeah they get they schools. They get our children. They get the land. They get the building. They get it all. I mean that's how it is. That's what happened for us and I'm sure them other people too.

Ms. Reeves incisive, powerful comments richly detail the role that money and social network play in the authorization process. For Ms. Reeves money is a central operative element in the authorization process. Money that can be made and money that can assist in the authorization process. For Ms. Reeves, money operates as a motivating factor for those applying to open and operate a charter. Money also serves as a lubricate for those applying, easing the way of the applicant in Ms. Reeves' perspective. Moreover, Ms. Reeves suggests that "influence" plays a roll when considering the authorization process. If one has the combination of money and influence they can be sure to finish the proverbial race and be award the prize of being able to govern schools and children, as well as control the spatial configurations the school occupies.

Taken together—sub-points one, two, and three—the data suggests that one's connection to social network or social circle impacts the charter authorization process. Importantly when one considers these networks, disturbingly there is a lack of connection to the communities these leaders purport to serve. They are affiliated with elite interests in New Orleans who have desired to reshape and refashion the city to reflect their desires and aspirations. This seems to suggest that community based groups who have boards made up of individuals the community respects and values are at a disadvantage when competing against "the charter school mafia." These groups are not situated within the social circles that are valued by authorizers and reviewers. As such, indigenous Black New Orleanians are further marginalized within the charter process

because of the relationships they do not have with these groups. I will close this section with the words from participant, Malcolm Robin who suggests in reference to the role social networks and social circles play,

> You automatically get a wheelhouse of individuals who have done it before. Who have gone through the process and you have an intimate connection to who the players are. When you're homegrown you might know of them, 'oh that's the person.' But when you have a system or network who have gone through and successfully gotten a charter before then you actually have a closer relationship. Because now you're not just trying to get authorized. You have a school, so they have a personal relationship with you. So, you just have to learn those folks. You start to figure out how they think. And so if you're a part of that network you automatically get a leg up. Second of all, you get to see the charter that they've already put out. That in itself puts you in a different place.
>
> We know of Black, homegrown charters who have gone in and used the the template of a charter, of a predominately white charter group and have not gotten through. This in itself has to do with the relationship. You can re-package a lot of things, or plagiarize a lot of things. But we all know, at the end of the day, what makes people do things is relationship. You can have the same product of someone else, be rated the same way. But that's my cousin, so I'm gonna beat you. Or, that's my people. Or, we went to school together, so I'm gonna beat you. It gives people an extra leg up…. Relationships matter and in a place like New Orleans, you know that it matters!

This isn't what I ordered: Critiquing the Chef's Cooking

African American Counter-Conceptualizations of the Authorization Process, Challenging Objectivity and Neutrality

The aforementioned findings thus far have suggested that the authorization and application process is deeply subjective and informed by rationalities of the market. These rationalities have a racial component which disadvantages local African Americans from New Orleans. The perspectives of African Americans who have experienced the charter authorization process or have a familiarity with it challenging notions of the "objective and neutral" status of the process. Instead, unraveling, as Ida B. Wells once said, the "thread bare lie" of it all. I will start this section with two perspectives from participants whose narratives represent the master narrative.

Dr. Benjamin Silverman was an instrumental player in the authorization process. He not only was key in selecting reviewers, but has provided leadership and direction with respect to authorizing. Dr. Silverman states,

> You can call me a purist. I don't think there should be any intervention. Any assistance. Just turn in the application and we review it. If there is intervention, it taints the application process.

Mr. Thomas Carson, a top African American administrator in the Recovery School District in his remarks about the low approval of local African American charter applicants goes on to comment saying,

> It's not our [the Recovery School District] job to help them. We shouldn't have to assist them in their application. They should already have their stuff together. We don't need to

> help weak applicants that would ruin what we're trying to do all the progress we've made since Katrina.

Mr. Carson and Dr. Silverman's comments at face value allude to notions of fairness and abstract equality. However, the previous findings and narratives of local Black New Orleanians puncture and deflate empty narratives of objectivity. Mr. Carson's and Dr. Silverman's narratives are based on the assumptions that all things are equal and that every applicant has equal resources as they apply to open and operate a charter school. Their logic is rooted in notions of merit and market theories that privilege competition, without considering how structures and rules may be rigged to produce a specific winner.

Ms. Dolores Walker, an African American retired educator, started a small, informal group for Black educators who were dismissed after Hurricane Katrina. They meet to stay abreast of current educational issues and to enjoy the fellowship of one another. Ms. Walker was also a member of her alumni association's charter application committee. Her association, comprised of former and current educators, social workers, attorneys, entrepreneurs, and community members, wanted to take back their school that was being underserved and "not valued" by its current charter leaders who, according to Ms. Walker, "didn't understand the context, culture, community, or children!" Ms. Walker goes on to note,

> It [the authorization process] was a sham. A flat out sham! We kept going back and forth with these people. They'd tell us change this. We'd change it. They'd tell us do this. And we'd do. We did all they asked for and still got denied. After all of that. It was exhausting and heartbreaking. And what was worse for me was [that] I know the people who were running that school didn't know about our children… What was happening all over New Orleans was they were locking the door before we got the keys and that wasn't just

education, that was in everything.

Ms. Walker's frustration with the application process resides in what she believes was a concerted effort to keep African Americans locked out of school governance, as well as in other areas such as housing, employment, and health care. Her disillusionment regarding the authorization process came from repeated attempts to perfect the application, all to no avail. For Ms. Walker, the authorization process was an exercise in futility and suggests deeper issues of White power solidification and inequality.

Like Ms. Walker, Mr. Garrett Reed, a retired middle school principal, who attempted with his alumni association to open a charter school, but was ultimately denied wanted to open a school to address what he saw as the fabrication of authenticity, charter schools and leaders who performed as if they cared about Black communities. Mr. Reed comments,

> We wanted to make sure that outsiders weren't presented as insiders. You know there was very, very little interest from them [new reformers] coming in…you know to create this inclusive table. And that's been the biggest part of the barrier for reform; there's no table for anybody other than them. It's their table. It's like Leslie [Jacobs] sits at the top of the table and all her cronies are around the table. And there's not input from community folk. And the problem with that is when they say "we're a community school." Well, really you're not a community school. You're a school that resides in a neighborhood. That happens to be a community. We are a community school.

Mr. Reed's comments shed light onto the ways elite groups, "new reformers" worked to exclude those who were not a part of elite networks. His alumni associations desire to open a charter school was to have a school that was deeply community focused and orientated. A school that did not only give lip service to to notion of community. Yet, Mr. Reed's comments highlight

how white charter groups would commandeer the language of community, while simultaneously closing the door of community to them.

Mr. Jerome Martin, a lifelong resident of New Orleans who, while not an educator, ran a small business and mentored African American males, was much more explicit in his racial critique of the charter authorization process. Mr. Martin was on the board of directors for a local African American group who applied to open and operate a charter school. Mr. Martin comments,

> The [authorization] process is raced, bruh. It's led by that. It's designed that way because of generations and generations of thinking. We've not gotten out of that [racist] thinking. When white people say [about Black students] "these are our children" and they don't know where they live. Or, they've never been in their living room, don't even know their families. Don't know where they came from. I couldn't go to Newman [an elite private school in New Orleans] and hug a white kid. And call them my children. But if they [Black youth] were your children why are you sending them to prison? If they were your children, why are you suspending them every day? If they were your children, why do you have them going through the [educational] practices they're going through? It's the way "we" think. They've got these thoughts of us as if we're criminal or dangerous or stupid. The people on the other side of that table [those that review applications] got those same views. That's how they think about us and our children.

Mr. Martin's perspective is unambiguous regarding the deeply entrenched racial ideologies and systems of reasoning that tacitly and dysconsciously shape social interaction and realities. Mr. Martin makes patently clear that from his perspective race is a central organizing phenomenon of the charter authorization process, even if reviewers and authorizers do not see it as such.

Moreover, he suggests that there exists a disconnection between liberal discourses of care and the actual realities concerning interactions among Whites and African Americans. He draws a timely parallel between the language of care and disproportionate, state-sanctioned violence against African Americans, the increasing criminalization and incarceration of African American youth, and the authorization process. The abstract hopes of market diversity by educational reformers embodied in charter authorizations fall short when compared with the disparities in approval.

Mr. Martin helps us to understand how particular ideologies are written onto particular bodies. But just as importantly, the role of particular ideologies are legible within the actual charter application. This is a key component for understanding how certain groups, while having "access" to apply are ultimately denied their charter application.

Wayne Williams, an attorney and local to New Orleans has worked with his alumni board to get their charter approved. He explains what he believes is the linchpin undergirding why local New Orleanians struggle to get their charter application approved. It is not because they do not have the talent or the ambition, but rather a more insidious phenomenon, historically pervasive, and currently abounding.

> Mr. Williams: They all talk about this competition and parents having choice. It's interesting that most of us [Black groups who apply to open charter schools] are removed from that choice like they don't want us to compete with them. It wouldn't be the first time they did this, ya know. Cause if you know anything about sports you know exactly what I'm talking about. [pause] You know anything about sports?
>
> KLH: I'm no expert. But I know a lil somethin' (laughter)
>
> Mr. Williams: Think about it . . . boxing, football, basketball, baseball, golf, tennis. They

> [whites] had to keep us out. They didn't want to compete with us! I think that's how it is with these charter schools; they don't want us in because then they lose!

Like Mr. Martin, Mr. Williams challenges taken-for-granted assumptions of objectivity and critiques liberal choice advocates who allude to the democratizing effects of school choice. He situates the denial of his group's charter application in anti-competitive market mechanisms. He believes that the charter authorization process actively works to keep local African American groups out of operating charter schools. Essentially, keeping African Americans out means to keep White dominance in.

I will close with a statement for the Coalition for Community Leadership in Education (CCLE). The Coalition for Community Leadership in Education identifies as "a consortium of community advocates, public school alumni groups, educators, parents and professionals," who "represent a growing number of concerned residents of New Orleans desiring greater community control of New Orleans' public schools. They state quite succinctly and powerfully ,

> It takes a Community to raise a child and we, the Coalition for Community Leadership in Education are the Community!...We share a common commitment to the academic, physical and emotional well-being of our children! We hail from all corners of our city and collectively reflect the diversity of our community to ensure there are high-quality academic options that can meet the needs of ALL children. We have responded to the very urgency of this moment by developing diverse school options to meet the critical needs of our children. We have been unfairly denied and told that the community from when our children hail is inadequate to effectively educate them. Today we stand as a community demanding a fair and equitable process for chartering schools that allows local groups to fairly compete in the opportunity to educate our children.

> We want a level playing field and reliable process in which to compete. The current tone of the education reform movement in New Orleans is that of corporate reform and community disenfranchisement. This is evidenced by minimal local leadership of local charter schools, the diminishing role of locally elected officials with decision-making power on public education issues, and community groups' inability to successfully gain charters to local public schools. …Several of us have tried unsuccessfully a number of times to secure charters. We are concerned that being community-led and driven organization is a scarlet letter for groups navigating the BESE/NACSA charter application process.[39]

These narratives in this section give a trenchant examination of the charter school authorization and application process. They challenge deeply held assumptions about the nature of colorblindness, merit, and objectivity. Rather, the perspectives of participants give a reckoning of the ways race, class paternalism, and privilege operate in the charter authorization and application process. These narratives suggest the authorization process is a racialized mechanism that privileges elite white neoliberal groups. As such, these narratives suggest the authorization process works to stratify and reconstitute racial inequality.

Summary of the Data

This chapter presents the findings of a year-long critical race case study on the charter authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans. These findings are interconnected and mutually support each other. The findings suggest that local African American grassroots groups are challenged by: (a) negative conceptualizations of native New

[39] http://cclenola.yolasite.com/joint-statement.php

Orleanian African Americans that position them as anathema to “reformers,” (b) ideological illegibility/coherence, which is to say there was a privileging of applicant groups who espoused fidelity to and discourses of market/neoliberal ideology, and (c) lack of connection to elite social networks. Moreover, African American participants conceptualize and experience the authorization process as biased, challenging notions of neutrality and objectivity.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Refuge in No Delusion

What happened after New Orleans?

-Messy Mya

This wasn't the way America was supposed to be…Many people in the United States genuinely believe—with a fervor that puts religious fanatics to shame—that nobody else in the world can do anything better than America. But the failure of government at all level in responding to the hurricane disaster rehashes a much older story about the United States, one that has been steadily and deliberately noisily drowned or whited out of mainstream discourse. It is the story of race, class, poverty, and studied incompetence…for the rest of us, blacks in the United States serve as the proverbial canary in a coal mine. Those images on TV should, therefore, be a lesson for Africans and other people of African ancestry all over the world. Whether you are in peril in Darfur, Sudan, Ruhengeri, Rwanda, or New Orleans, saving your black behind isn't a priority for the American government, founded on a doctrine of white supremacy

-ukoni Lupa-Lasga

For the sake of one's children, in order to minimize the bill *they* must pay, one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion…

-James Baldwin

This dissertation study explores a lesser known, yet significantly important aspect of education policy and implementation—the charter authorization process. Charter schools have become the preferred policy approach to remedying recalcitrant inequality. Charter schools in many of their current iterations serve as parasitic neoliberal, market approaches to education that

feast on the hopes of often dispossessed, disenfranchised groups, who have experienced protracted educational suffering. Yet, this dissertation study is concerned with the ways in which subaltern communities attempt to repurpose and rearticulate charter schools and more evidently the challenges they face in doing so. The authorization process is one such challenge. The authorization process is the central gatekeeping mechanism for communities who may desire to create charter schools that move beyond audit cultures and accountability regimes that do very little in actually providing an education worthy of our children.

This study is significant as it illuminates how the charter school movement, generally, and the educational reform politics in post-Katrina New Orleans, specifically, index and illuminate the deeply critical issues of race, access, power, and representation in the U.S. polity. New Orleans, beyond its exceptionality as being the nation's first entirely charter district, shares similarities with other spaces, which have undergone profound privatization—Chicago, DC, Detroit, and Philadelphia to name a few. The New Orleans case is significant because it is constructed as the ideal case that policy makers desire to export to other areas. Yet, the findings from this study serve as a cautionary tale and suggest that communities of color must remain vigilant. What does it exactly mean when charter advocates discuss equity and justice in a diverse democracy that has been and continues to be wrapped in the caul of white dominance that intersects with and is multiplied by other forms of oppression? A caul that encloses, as well as attempts to foreclose, the life chances of and futurities of joy within marginalized communities, of unimagined dreams that have been yet deferred, and of lives that seem to "not matter" for the "apprentices" of white supremacy. A caul that white neoliberal charter advocates aid in constructing. These findings are of import as they provide us with a bird's eye view of how that caul is constructed in one particular region.

Taken together, this study illuminates the ways in which White dominance informs and shapes the charter school authorization and application process in post-Katrina New Orleans. These participants' narratives, applications, and archival materials suggest that the authorization process is informed and delimited by market rationalities that are rooted in White regimes of truth. In addition, racial inequality is made and remade in the authorization process. The institution of education via the authorization process organizes, conserves, and may indeed further worsen already existing inequitable power relations. This is particularly poignant given that over the last 25 years, school choice and charter schools have become fixtures of education policy discourses, formation, and implementation, and yet African Americans continue to experience dehumanization, social misery, and the retrenchment of rights (Crenshaw, 1988; Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Watkins, 2012). That is not to say, school choice rooted in neoliberal logics is the cause of current inequality; it is to argue, however, that such neoliberal logics and, thus, actions help to reproduce inequality (Brewer, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Klein, 2007; Lipman, 2011). Moreover, these accounts are particularly instructive when juxtaposed to dominant narratives that attempt to link market-based charter schools as the progeny of the Civil Rights Movement. As Janelle Scott (2013, p. 9) notes,

> While school choice is often part of the much-discussed "unfinished work of the Civil Rights Movement" for which market reformers claim to advocate, their efforts do little to expand access to deliberation, power, and resources for communities of color and their allies beyond the ability to choose schools.

Having access to democratic participation and decision making is central to any justice-orientated movement. The erasure of overwhelmingly African American voices and the constraint of Black self-determination are significant indictments when one considers that

African Americans have fought for access and control to the governance and organization of schools since slavery (Anderson, 1988; Dixson, 2011a; Watkins, 2001).

Participant narratives challenge deeply rooted epistemologies of whiteness that masquerade as normal, fair, apolitical, color blind, and just. Participant counter-narratives give meaning to David Roediger's (1994) assertion that "it is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is nothing but oppressive and false" (p. 13). Yet, however, the truthfulness of whiteness resides in its parasitic dispossession of and feastings on blackness (Henry, in press; Woodard, 2014).

Critical Race Theory and the Charter Authorization Process

Traditional educational policy formation, implementation, and analysis operates from the perspective that the field of policy functions in a technical and rational manner. Embedded within this assumption are liberal notions, particularly within the field of education, that policies are equitable, evidence-based, and neutral (Smith, Miller-Kahn, Henecke, & Jarvis, 2004). Policy analysis is often understood through narrowly tailored and theoretically unstated premises (Stein, 2004). In this manner, policy analysis is limited in scope and almost only concerned with issues of instrumentality. This has been the case for the current studies on the charter authorization process (Bulkley, 1999, 2001; Carlson, et al., 2012; Palmer, 2007; Renzulli, 2005; Sugarman & Kuboyama, 2001; Vegari, 2001; Zimmer et al., 2014). These traditional approaches to policy analysis have not been attentive to the ways in which unequal power relations shape policy and eliminate counter-hegemonic actions.

CRT policy analysis takes to task normative policy analysis by making central race, power, and "minority criticism" (Wynter, 1987). It understands policy formation and

implementation as central elements in the reproduction of White dominance. Therefore, CRT policy analysis attempts to dismantle the deeply structured racist ideological underpinnings of current policy, as well as the material realities of policy. CRT policy analysis starts from the position that the voices, perspective, and experiences of people of color matter and matter in deeply profound ways. CRT operates as a hermeneutic that sees through the emperor's clothes.

By examining the authorization process as a site of racial politics, meaning making, and structure, we are further able to understand how race is continually constructed and performed within our institutions. This critical race case study illuminates what Marion Fourcade (2007) suggests is sociologically important about markets "the social networks that sustain them, the system of social positions that organize them, the institutionalization processes that stabilize them, and the performative techniques that bring them into existence" (p. 1015). The elements that Fourcade outline as important are all saturated within a racial net. As one considers the New Orleans case of the charter authorization process, this study's findings present a counter-narrative that challenges majoritarian narratives that work as discursive blinders to power inequalities that normalize white dominance. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) remind us that the counter-story is a "tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32). The majoritarian story of New Orleans falls within the liberal discursive repertoires that argue that the charter movement has a profoundly positive impact on the African American children and their parents. However, this study's findings suggest otherwise. These findings suggest the authorization process is a racialized process, which produces racial effects in policy implementation. The authorization process in post-Katrina New Orleans advantages white educational stakeholders connected to elite social networks. Importantly, despite post-racial desires that consider market inequalities that produce racialized effects, as having to do nothing

with race, these racialized effects are birthed from white dominance (Dumas, 2014). The four major findings[40] implicate the state in racial projects, as well as illuminates the salience of race to our social organization and resulting distributions. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994, p. 85) remind us

> Under 'normal' conditions, state institutions have effectively routinized the enforcement and organization of the prevailing racial order. Constituency relationships and established political organizations are at least implicitly and frequently explicitly racial.

For the institution of education and the case of the charter authorization process, the normalization of race and racism is apparent. The first tenet of CRT acknowledges that racism is normal, not aberrant. This racial realist notion of the deeply embedded, strikingly permeant reality of racism, shines through in this data. For Ms. Walker, for instance, who comments "we did all they asked for and still got denied," the permanence of racism is apparent. Her comments help us to see the pervasive intimacy of racism to our everyday lives. It is precisely racism's routinized, normalized, rational irrationality that makes the absurdity of differential treatment hegemonic.

The findings from this study also illuminate two critically important tenets within CRT: the notion of the critique of liberalism and that of whiteness as property. CRT's tenets are mutually overlapping, however, I will separate them for the sake of discussion. Liberalism's focus on notions of incremental change, objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality

[40] (a) negative conceptualizations of native New Orleanian African Americans that position them as anathema to "reformers," exist (b) ideological illegibility/coherence, which is to say there was a privileging of applicant groups who espoused fidelity to and discourses of market/neoliberal ideology, and (c) lack of connection to elite social networks. And lastly, that African American participants conceptualize and experience the authorization process as biased, challenging notions of neutrality and objectivity

of law and other institutions becomes farces in the face of historical and present day realities of liberalism's complacency toward and facilitation of white dominance and supremacy (Bell, 2009; Gotanda, 1991; Lawrence, 1987). The coherence among approvals, race, and social network illustrates this point. If we move past notions of color-blindness that refuse to acknowledge the racial realities that exist, then we can address the inequalities that exist. That is to say, we must move beyond the notion of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva says is "racism without racists." The patterned practices of the authorization process contribute to the stratification of African American applicants. If we recall the narratives of Dr. Silverman and Mr. Carson, they both argue for an authorization process that is based on the standards of meritocracy that does not take into account the saturated racial system in which the African American applicants are situated. Two assumptions undergird their logic: one, that the playing field is level and secondly, that utilizing equitable practices to assist marginalized communities in their pursuit to open and operate charter schools is tantamount to cheating. Liberalism with its focus on merit, objectivity, and colorblindness situates the problem within the individual and outside of social structures of accumulation, dominance, and inequality.

This disavowal to acknowledge the way the system is stacked and favors white, elite applicants suggests the ways in whiteness works as a form of property. The "invisible ink" of whiteness provides the legibility to applications, resulting in approval. Importantly, the possession of whiteness relies on the dispossession of people of color. Harris' (1993) notion of whiteness as property helps to explain "the collapse of whiteness with exclusively enjoyed rights to freedom, privilege, and expectation, undergirded by the singular ability to draw advantage from these owned rights" (Vaught, 2009, p.547). Cheryl Harris delineates what she calls the "property functions of whiteness" which include (a) the right to exclude, (b) reputation and status

property, (c) right to use and enjoyment, and (d) right to disposition. As Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) comment, “whiteness is constructed in this society as the absence of the ‘contaminating’ influence of blackness” (p.60). Taking, for instance, Mr. Carson’s comments into view when he discusses not allowing “weak” African American applicants into the charter market because they would “ruin” the work that has been done since the storm. His comments are related to the notion of “reputation and status property.” Anti-Blackness which is the “racial roux” that undergirds this entire process, relies on the construction of blackness as sinister, criminal, and contaminating, while whiteness is subtly constructed as salvific and pristine.

Whiteness as property suggests that the charter authorization and application process valorizes, protects, and insulates the fragility of whiteness. Constructing whiteness as supreme and thus a necessity to personhood, requires the ongoing reputational funding (and subsequent un-funding of blackness). The negative construction of blackness in this case allows for white dominance to feast on blackness—dispossessing Black communities and gaining access to space, power, people, and property who are theirs not to own. Pauline Lipman (2011, p. 5) when discussing the right to city, borrowing from David Harvey, remarks,

> …the right to the city includes, but is more than the right to housing, jobs, and public space and more than the right to participate in electoral democracy. It is a right to transform the city, to make it the city we wish to live in, and in the process transform ourselves and how we live together.

The right to envision and remake the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was an act that almost all who were impacted by this catastrophe wanted to partake. Lipman’s comments draws attention to a central issue of civic and communal engagement; it is at the heart of democracy. Her comments also bring into view the question of who does not have the right to the city. Who

does not have the right to imagine and construct the city and education? Considering the New Orleans charter authorization and application process helps us to answer that question. Framing the opening and operating of charter schools within the contours of whiteness as property we are better able to discern that this "enterprise" is firmly within the hands of elite white entities. African Americans experience the discursive and symbolic violence necessary to allow for whiteness to flourish. This is the type of parasitism that undergirds whiteness as property and affords elite whites "market dominance" in the charter sector. Thus, creating a deeply monopolistic market. The "invisible hand" of the so-called equitable market is rendered visible via this study.

The role of elite white social networks in this study fortifies whiteness. These networks allow for white entities to exclude local African American charter applicants. Elite social networks and the subsequent funding—from within network actors—acts as endorsement and confers upon elite, white educational actors the 'right to use and enjoyment' of charter schools, while simultaneously excluding African Americans. The African American applicants in this study are denied via the market to "self-determine" and to actually participate in the market. The educational market in New Orleans becomes privy to and property of White reformers who act as gatekeepers. And perhaps as Daria Roithmayr (2010) suggests whites "engage in racial exclusion not because they have a taste for discrimination or because they are irrational, but because they derive significant economic, social and political benefits" (p. 52). Whatever the case, the data suggests that there is an implicit collusion among elite white groups, who actively use and enjoy their whiteness at the expense of Blacks. They have rigged the system by anti-competitive means that allows for the reproduction and consolidation of their political power.

This critical race case study challenges the notion that educational markets desire diversity and actual competition.

Toward a Theory of Educational Vulturism

In some ways, what I have attempted to do is explore the conjoining of the crisis of late capitalism and always early racism in this era of racialized neoliberalism. This study illustrates not just how a city is creatively destroyed and remade in the image of the market, but it also tells a second story about the profound pain and frustration caused by the appetites of consumption, of desire, of power lust. The screams of an African American community go loudly unheard as elite white groups swoop in and feast on their identities, land, culture, children, and homespace. These extra-educational groups, arrive with their exclusive networks, settle and colonize—land, body, and artifacts of the body politic (institutions). This is what I term *educational vulturism.* Educational vulturism is a form of capitalist-hetero-patriarchal white supremacy, where by way of ideology, policy, and practice, actors who are often extra-educational, feast on marginalized communities and the systems that "serve" them. Using symbolic/discursive and material approaches, educational vulturism is a mechanism of profit accumulation, power solidification and debasement. Educational vulturism is made possible because it relies on the notion that African Americans and other marginalized groups are anything but human. As such, all that African Americans are and have created can be used to fulfill and gratify the appetites of the conservationist of capitalist-hetero-patriarchal white supremacy. Educational vulturism is a mechanism of sustenance.

Implications for Theory

This study offers four implications for theory. The first implication is that that it recasts the current theory of charter school authorization in light of power relations and is embedded within structures and processes of accumulation. Secondly, this study critiques dominant theory of markets that suggests “market diversity,” “expanded choice,” and “competition” are actual market preferences and rather proffers a notion of anti-competitive collusion. Third, this study extends a critical race theory analysis to the study of policy implementation. Fourth, this study moves toward a theory of educational vulturism which situates the consumptive practices of white marketers in relation to a legacy of black debasement.

Implications for Practice

This study offers implications for practice. First, it calls for the restructuring of the authorization process to be more equitable. Community councils made up of parents, students, veteran educators, and community members should be added to the authorization process review. These groups’ voices should be heard and valued as it relates to the approval of a charter school. Moreover, there should be a diversity of perspective and experience on the board—beyond that of market ideology. Secondly, extended oversight of and extended transparency with respect to the authorization process. Clear explication of rules, funding streams, and rubrics. Oversight of boards and removal of conflicts of interest must take place. Third, the development of critical consciousness of charter reviewers about macro and micro level barriers applicants of color encounter. And lastly, incubation and support for progressively orientated charter schools and charter school leaders.

Future Studies

Future research should further examine the role of the charter school authorization process in other regions, as a way to develop a more robust theory of charter authorization. While the New Orleans case is a strong example of the authorization process, New Orleans does offer a level of uniqueness that may not be applicable to other regions. Having multiple cases from regions that have varying charter laws and authorization processes allows for a stronger picture to be painted of the authorization process.

Coda

This study examines the racial politics of the charter school authorization and application process. Its findings illuminate the ways in which racism remains an intractable problem around the the necks of African Americans, particularly those who wish, as best as possible to self-determine and create an education for their children. While the challenges these community groups have faced are large and deep, they must still be fought—strategically. The legacy of struggle and resistance will continue and must continue. The strategies must be creative and adaptable to the ever changing, yet perennial haunting that African Americans encounter in the afterlife of slavery. In the words of Derrick Bell (1987, p. 257),

> Finally, let us find solace and strength in the recognition that black people are neither the first nor the only group whose age-old struggle for freedom both still continues and is worth engaging in even if it never results in total liberty and opportunity. Both history and experience tell us that each new victory over injustice both removes a barrier to racial equality and reveals another obstacle that we must, in turn, grapple with and—eventually—overcome. For emancipation did not really free the slaves; and Lincoln's

order was but a prerequisite, the necessary first step in a process that will likely continue as long as there are among us, human beings who, for whatever reason, choose to hold other human beings in their power.

Appendix

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of Study: Charter School Application and Authorization Process

Principal Investigator: Gloria Ladson-Billings, Ph.D. (Faculty Advisor) (Phone: 608.263. 1006) (Email: gjladson@wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Kevin Lawrence Henry, Jr. (Phone: 281.755.7192) (Email: henry3@wisc.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of African American educational stakeholders who attempt to apply and go through the charter school authorization process.

You have been asked to participate because you have applied or are in the process of applying to operate a charter school or because you are familiar with or involved in the charter school authorization process.

The purpose of this research is to collect information about why some African American communities choose to apply to operate charter schools, as well as to explore their conceptualizations of and experiences with the authorization process. The information gathered will assist public policy officials and authorization boards, educational researchers, charter school applicants, and the general public better understand the experiences of African Americans during their charter school application and authorization process. Additionally, this study will make recommendations to policy makers for future policy changes to better address the needs of this population.

This study will include participation in an interview. Additionally, for charter applicants, a review of your charter school application and any additional documents you would like to provide will take place.

Audiotapes will be made of your participation. The only persons who will hear the audio recording will be the faculty advisor and the student researcher. The audiotapes will be transcribed into text files and analyzed. The audio and transcripts will be destroyed seven years after the completion of the study.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to answer questions about the following subjects: personal background, your understandings of school reform, your experiences with and conceptualizations of the charter school authorization process, and factors that impact the charter school authorization process.

Your participation will last approximately 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes with a possible 30 minute follow up session at a time, date, and location of your choosing. All interviews will be conducted in a quiet setting of your choice.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

While every aspect of this study has been designed to minimize any harmful experience to the participants involved, you will be asked to share personal experiences during the interview about school reform and the charter authorization process. Some of these experiences may frustrate you or be difficult to share.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

Although there are no direct benefits to participating, information gathered from the interviews and photographic component may be used to inform policy and research.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published. If you participate in this study and are later quoted in the research, your quotations will be used without your name attached. You will have the opportunity to create a pseudonym.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Student Researcher, Kevin Lawrence Henry, Jr. (Phone: 281.755.7192) (Email: henry3@wisc.edu) or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (Phone: 608.263. 1006) (Email: gjladson@wisc.edu).

Your participation is completely voluntary. Not participating or withdrawing will not involve any kind of penalty.

Your signature indicates that you understand the purpose of the research, have had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to participate.

____

Participant’s Signature Date

Applicant's Protocol

Clarifying Questions

- Do you have any questions for me before we begin?
- Can you tell me your name? Where you are from? And if you have a preferred pseudonym what would it be?
- If you are comfortable with it, would you mind sharing your age?

Grand Tour Questions

- Can you tell me about yourself and what prompted you to be active in educational reform in New Orleans?
    - Have you always been involved with school reform? (If not, what prompted the shift/change)
    - Can you share with me some of your personal or professional experiences that shape and inform the current work you do regarding education?

New Orleans Schools/Educational Reform

- Were you in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina? How would you describe the educational landscape (in terms of student achievement, school funding and infrastructure, charter schools, community participation, etc.)
- What do you think were the major issues impacting New Orleans Public Schools prior to Katrina?
- What do you see as the major shifts or changes in New Orleans public schools post-Katrina?
- What are your thoughts on the current charter reform movement?
    - Are there any areas you see as strengths? Areas of weakness?
- Who do you see as the major actors in the movement? Why do you see them as such?
- Outside of applying for a charter school, how have you and/or your organization/group been active in educational reform or other equity based justice initiatives?

Choosing to Apply for a Charter

- Can you tell me a little about your group/organization? How did you all form? Why did you all form?
    - What is its mission and purpose?
    - What is or has been your role in the organization?

- Why did you and your organization decide to apply to operate a charter school?
- What was/is your vision of education? What is its purpose?
    - More specifically, what is your vision of your charter school?
    - How would you say the vision you had/have for your school connects with or departs from other visions/missions of charter schools around New Orleans? (In other words, in what ways, if any, was your charter school similar to those already in existence? In what ways was it different?)

The Application and Authorization Process—Challenges, Conceptualizations and Experiences

- What was your process for applying to operate a charter school?
- Where there any particular experiences that stand out for you during the authorization process?
- What types of support, if any, did you all receive from charter authorizers or other charter groups?
- What challenges did you all experience when trying to take advantage of charter school laws while applying?
- Did you feel that there were any outside impediments to your application during the authorization process (i.e. not having the right connections or networks, not having an affiliation with a major CMO or groups such as TFA or TeachNOLA, money/funds, etc.)?
- What role, if any, do you think social networks play in the charter authorization process?
- What role, if any, do you believe that race and racism play in the authorization process, if any?
- What do you believe is the reason there is a disproportionate number of approval of white applicants, compared to their Black/African American counterparts?
    - (Aside from race) what factors do you believe have an impact on the authorization of charter schools?
- When you think of the charter school authorization process, what comes to mind?
- What do you know now about the authorization process that you wish you knew when you applied?
- While the authorizers may have had a rubric already in play to adjudge and evaluate your application. Do you think there were other considerations not discussed?

- How might the charter authorization and application process foreclose participation from communities of color?
- How do you think one could make the charter authorization process more inclusive for African Americans?
- What criteria do you think applicants should be evaluated on?
- If you had to redevelop the charter application and authorization process, what and how would your reconstruct it?
- What do you think would make a strong application?
- Who do you believe should be authorizers?
- Was there any transparency in the process of authorization?

Closing

- What advice would you give to community organizations, veteran educators, or grass roots organizations who are attempting to apply for a charter school and go through the authorization process?
- Is there any other information you would like to share regarding you or your organization's experience with charter schools?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Reviewer's Protocol

Clarifying Questions

- Do you have any questions for me before we begin?
- Can you tell me your name? Where you are from? And if you have a preferred pseudonym what would it be?
- If you are comfortable with it, would you mind sharing your age?
- Can you tell me more about your role and position in authorizing charter schools?

Grand Tour Questions

- Can you tell me about yourself and what prompted you to be active in educational reform in New Orleans?
    - Have you always been involved with school reform? (If not, what prompted the shift/change)
    - Can you share with me some of your personal or professional experiences that shape and inform the current work you do regarding education?
    - Do you have any affiliation with Teach for America, TeachNOLA, or Broad Foundation, or similar organizations focused on reform?

New Orleans Schools/Educational Reform

- Were you in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina? How would you describe the educational landscape (in terms of student achievement, school funding and infrastructure, charter schools, community participation, etc.)
- What do you think were the major issues impacting New Orleans Public Schools prior to Katrina?
- What do you see as the major shifts or changes in New Orleans public schools post-Katrina?
- What are your thoughts on the current charter reform movement?
    - Are there any areas you see as strengths? Areas of weakness?
- Who do you see as the major actors in the movement? Why do you see them as such?

The Application and Authorization Process

- Who role do you see the charter authorizer playing in the application and authorization process? (i.e. gatekeeper, accountability enforcers, etc.)?
- Can you tell me your process for reviewing applications?
- What are the objectives for authorizers when reviewing an application?

- What do you consider to be a successful application?
    - What measures are used?
- What do you consider to be an unsuccessful application?
- When you think of the charter authorization process, what comes to mind?
- What changes, if any, would you make to the charter application and authorization process?
- Media reports suggest that local New Orleanians, most principally veteran educators and grassroots groups have struggled to get their applications approved. Why do you believe that is?
    - There are a disproportionate number of white applications that are approved, as compared to their Black counterparts. In what ways do authorizers consider race, representation, and equity?
- What supports, if any, are in place for applicants?
- How transparent is the process of authorization?
- What factors, if any, may impact or have bearing on the charter authorization process, aside from the individual merit of the application?
- If applicants are denied, what steps, if any, are taken to assist them in reapplication?
- How are authorizers selected?

Closing

- Is there any other information you would like to share regarding the application and authorization process?
- Do you have any questions for me?

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