SCHOOLING IN THE AGE OF AUSTERITY:
PUBLIC EDUCATION, YOUTH, AND SOCIAL INSTABILITY IN THE
NEOLIBERAL CITY

by

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This dissertation examines the dynamics of “security” and “insecurity” in U.S. public schooling within the context of neoliberal urbanism and austerity. It argues that the entrenched problems confronting urban public schools today can be attributed largely to systemic failure—a toxic mixture of global economic change and volatility, profiteering and corruption, stunted imagination, and misguided policies, values and priorities. This has contributed to deepening material insecurity and inequality in the urban sphere and the erosion of social commitments to public schools and young people, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. This thesis analyzes these forces through an ethnographic case study in a neighborhood and public high school in Chicago: Ellison Square and Ellison High School (EHS). It asks: What are the pragmatic and imaginative limits of security in urban public schooling in a moment of escalating economic and social dislocation? Through the perspectives of those most affected, namely youth and their teachers, it documents the contradictions and effects of educational privatization, disinvestment, commercialization of curriculum, and the rise of a militarized culture of policing and securitized containment in urban schools and neighborhoods. It argues that these processes represent forms of enclosure that are undermining the democratic and ethical purpose of public schools and thereby making the daily lives and future of young people ever more insecure and precarious. Drawing inspiration from the perspectives of young people and their teachers, the thesis ultimately advocates for an educational vision
that locates public schooling not as a commodity valued primarily for its role in shoring-up technical economic and military demands, but as a commons—a site critical to developing human security, economic justice and democratic life.
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Introduction

Schooling in a Time of Crisis and Austerity

As we proceed further into the second decade of the 21st century, public schooling in the United States has become a focal point of anxiety and a signpost of sobering challenges. Much of this can be traced to mounting concerns over national decline in a context of overlapping global crises (financial, social, political, and ecological). For instance, New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman, has suggested that the U.S. Department of Education has become the “epicenter of national security.” Amidst the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, shifting global labor market demands, and the rise of China and India as “strategic competitors,” Friedman argues that structural problems in the nation’s public education system pose a grave threat to U.S. economic and military power (Friedman, 2010). Similarly, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, a major player in promoting corporate restructuring in U.S. public education, claims that American “national strength and security” depends on dramatic school reform, without which “the U.S. economy will continue to suffer, crime will go up and our children won’t be able to find a job or afford a house…our standard of living will decline, our democracy will be at risk and we will continue to fall behind as other countries far surpass us” (Broad, 2012).

As these comments suggest, the notion that there is a state of emergency in U.S. public education has become an article of faith among many in the financial and political elite. Studies, however, show that a majority of ordinary Americans think quite highly of their own local public schools and teachers. It is only when asked about the system as a
whole that they express a belief that public education is failing (Strauss, 2010). Discrepancies between rhetoric and reality further emerge when we understand that the crisis is invoked largely in relation to international test score comparisons (a reductive measurement to begin with). Research reveals that U.S. youth in the upper middle class and the elite score as well or better than other advanced nations on the tests. It is only as one travels down the socioeconomic ladder that they begin to fall behind. Schools that serve high poverty communities fair the worst. While the quality of individual public schools and teachers does indeed matter, longstanding research indicates that achievement gaps have more to do with socioeconomic class disparities than with intrinsic differences between schools (Coleman, 1966; Rothstein, 2004). In short, public schools themselves are not the problem. The problem is deepening poverty, inequality, and social dislocation.

Despite these ambiguities, the rhetoric of crisis persists. It is most often invoked in relation to “urban education”—a not-so-subtle “race neutral” euphemism for public schools that serve primarily impoverished communities and mostly Black and Latino youth. Dominant explanations for the perpetuation of “failure” in such schools—low-test scores, dysfunctional environments, high drop-out rates etc.—have become increasingly self-assured and predictable. Across a network of high-profile corporate reform advocates such as Michelle Rhee, Joel Klein, and Arne Duncan; to richly-funded right-wing think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institute, and American Enterprise Institute; to various educational corporations, Wall Street financiers, and corporate foundations like the Gates, Broad, and Walton Family Foundations (owners of Wal-Mart)—the failure of public education in the inner-city and beyond is typically presented as either symptomatic
of some inherent deficiency or inefficiency of the public sector, or the fault of supposedly greedy and incompetent teachers and their unions. The only thing that can save urban public schools, so the mantra goes, is to dismantle them through privatization, commercial management, standardized testing, and elimination of the teacher’s unions.¹

Close inspection suggests that this position is as contradictory as it is misguided. Despite being couched in the language of innovation and equity, the evidence continues to mount that the market-based, corporate-driven school reforms of the previous three decades have failed to improve public education in any meaningful sense while contributing to already staggering social and educational inequities. In this light, the reforms appear to have more to do with political ideology and economic expediency than with robust investment in the human development and the educational futures of all young people. How else to explain policies that continue to weaken and undermine the very public educational system on which the future of the nation supposedly depends?²

Not unlike the spectacular failure of the global financial system in 2008, the entrenched problems that confront public schools today can be attributed largely to systemic failure—a toxic mixture of global economic change and volatility, profiteering

¹ For this point of view see Stephen Brill (2009) Class warfare: Inside the Fight to Fix America’s Schools who argues that teachers and their unions are the cause of educational failure. See also Terry Moe and John Chubb (2009) Liberating Learning who advocate for completely privatizing the educational system and replacing public schools with for-profit online learning cyber-charters.

² For further elaboration on this paradox see Christopher Newfield (2008) Unmaking the Public University and Alex Means (2011) “Creativity as an educational problematic in the biopolitical economy” in Michael Peters and Ergin Bulut (eds) Cognitive Capitalism, Education, and Digital Labor. Here I argue that neoliberal systems of knowledge management and reform in secondary and higher education represent a struggle over the global educational commons that opens up new challenges and possibilities for democratic resistance and development. For further analysis and the most comprehensive and acute examination of the failures of neoliberal schooling see Kenneth J. Saltman’s (2012) The Failure of Corporate School Reform. Here Saltman systematically deconstructs how corporate reform in U.S. secondary education has failed as a movement—functioning largely as a means for dismantling public schooling through privatization in the interest of short term profits and long term management of staggering inequalities and systemic contradictions.
and corruption, stunted imagination, and misguided policies, values and priorities. This has contributed to deepening social insecurity and inequality and the erosion of social democratic commitments to public schools and young people, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. This thesis examines this systemic failure “on the ground” through an ethnographic case study in a low-income and racially segregated community and public high school in the city of Chicago. It raises unsettling questions concerning the meaning of human security, violence, and the content and depth of democratic commitments to urban schools and young people today in a context of neoliberal entrenchment and austerity. Through the perspectives of youth and their teachers, it documents the contradictions and myriad impacts of educational privatization, disinvestment, commercialization, and the rise of a militaristic culture of policing and containment in urban public schools and neighborhoods. It argues that these trends represent forms of enclosure that are undermining the democratic purpose of public schools thereby making the daily lives and future of young people ever more insecure and precarious. While the study yields no easy answers, at its core is a belief that a vibrant system of public education is a key ethical component in imagining and realizing a future worthy of our highest aspirations and ideals. As such, I argue for an educational vision that locates public schooling not as a commodity valued primarily for its role in shoring-up technical economic and military demands, but as a commons—a site critical to developing human security, economic justice and democratic life. Such an educational vision is already shared, albeit in often inchoate form, by scores of educators, parents, students, and community activists who are deeply skeptical and disillusioned with current free market experiments in education and who yearn for public schools responsive to the
complex needs and desires of youth and their communities; schools that do not reduce learning to issues of market competition, punishment, and test scores; and schools designed to cultivate peaceful, restorative and sustainable futures for all young people.

Over the last several years, I have had the good fortune of living in the city of Toronto, Ontario. As an American graduate student, this experience has been valuable for observing how issues pertaining to globalization and urban educational politics manifest in Toronto in ways that have challenged and enriched my thinking not only about urban Canada, but the United States as well. In the first year of my doctoral studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the University of Toronto in 2007, a 14 year old student named Jordan Manners was shot and killed in the hallway of C.W. Jeffery’s Collegiate Institute—a public high school in North Toronto. This rare and tragic event engendered an outpouring of public discussion in the Toronto media and prompted three major governmental commissions, one headed by attorney Julian Falconer at the behest of former Toronto Mayor David Miller, another conducted by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and another province-wide study undertaken by former Ontario cabinet minister Alvin Curling and former Ontario Chief Justice Roy McMurtry. Each of the commissions concluded that a variety of factors contribute to violence and insecurity in Toronto’s urban schools including concentrated poverty, racism, inadequate resources, and the racial profiling of students by police.

Writing of the TDSB report in the Toronto Star, David Hulchanski (2008), director of the University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies, has suggested that while the commissions’ rightly identified inequality and racism as central
factors impacting public schools and young people, they nonetheless fell short in sufficiently addressing the economic and political conditions that perpetuate and deepen them. His analysis points toward the systemic realities and effects of three decades of steep cuts to social services and the downward trajectory of income and job security within the city’s postindustrial economy. Moreover, despite being relatively shielded from the most immediate effects of the global economic crisis—largely due to sane banking regulation and a western economic boom spurred by dirty tar sands oil—there has been a steady expansion of social inequality in Canada and a steady upward redistribution of wealth to the richest Canadians. Hulchanski argues that amidst these conditions, Toronto schools by themselves cannot be expected to provide substantive forms of security for students in an increasingly socioeconomically and ethnoracially divided city. He concludes by asking “will 40 per cent of Toronto be abandoned, as the research literature predicts, to become Toronto's vast ‘ghetto of the excluded’?”

Hulchanski’s comments represent an attempt to make visible the economic, cultural, and political relations driving present experiences of insecurity and everyday violence across North American cities and beyond. They also raise basic questions about

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3 The CBC (2011) reports a series of disturbing statistics concerning the effects of the recession on Canada: “In March 2010, 867,948 Canadians (38% of them children) turned to food banks for food support - a 28% increase over March 2008 and the highest level of food bank use ever; In 2010, 150,000 to 300,000 persons were visibly homeless, another 450,000 to 900,000 were "hidden" homeless, 1.5 million households were in "core housing need", and 3.1 million households were in unaffordable housing. In 2010, 59% of Canadian workers lived paycheque to paycheque, "saying they would be in financial difficulty if their paycheque was delayed by a week". In 2009, per capita household debt, at $41,740, was 2.5 times higher than in 1989; in 2010, 20% of Canadians reported they had too much debt and trouble managing it. In 2009, the average annual income ($6.6 million) of Canada's best-paid CEOs was 155 times higher than the average worker's income ($42,988); a third of all income growth in Canada over the past two decades has gone to the richest one percent of Canadians. At the end of 2009, 3.8% of Canadian households controlled 67% of total household wealth”.
the meaning and limits of security within educational institutions and in the lives of youth at the margins of the new urban geography. Over the last three decades, cities across North America have become increasingly polarized along the lines of race, space, and class producing novel paradigms of dispossession, alienation, political repression and contestation (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey 2003 2005; Lietner et al, 2007). This has been driven by globalizing transformations in capital and labor, combined with the concurrent restructuring of state policy frameworks favoring privatization and market integration, financial deregulation, and the empowerment of transnational corporations at the expense of public and social investment. Further, amidst the broader erosion of the social safety net accompanying the decline of the Keynesian welfare state and the emergence of the neoliberal state, a reactionary cultural logic and right-wing politics has emerged that asserts issues of poverty, joblessness, and other forms of social deprivation and dislocation are largely individual failures as opposed to collective problems. This has fed into the emergence of various forms of “get tough” policing responsible for a racially predicated “war on drugs” and “imprisonment binge” generating a “new military urbanism” and “criminalization of poverty” (Graham, 2010; Wacquant, 2009).

While this thesis was conceived during my graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, the ethnographic research was conducted in my former home of Chicago. As a former junior high school teacher in Chicago, I witnessed firsthand many of the profound challenges currently facing schools and young people. The majority of my students, who were predominantly Black and Latino, came from working class homes. Many lived in poverty and many struggled to meet their basic needs. Some had one or both parents in prison, typically for nonviolent
drug offenses, and many had been victims of violence. My students often shared their
sense of frustration at the insecurities permeating their lives and the very real existential
dangers they faced navigating the city. Despite the fact that overall trends in youth
violence have been on the decline since the 1990s, each year dozens of Chicago youth
continue to lose their lives in utterly senseless acts of violence. Unlike in Toronto, these
incidents typically do not inspire a great deal of public discussion, government
commissions, and/or sustained social reflection. When the issue is raised, the discussion
tends to be much narrower such as in the aftermath of the tragic beating death of 16 year
old Chicago honors student Derrion Albert in the fall of 2009. Captured by a cell phone
camera, Albert’s death was run in full, sensationalized repetition on CNN and other
Corporate news outlets. Rather than seeking to understand and illuminate the historical
inheritances and economic and political realities and decisions that perpetuate such
violence, the media worked largely to reaffirm reactionary narratives of urban youth as
pathological and dangerous—legitimating further policies of disinvestment and
containment rather than human development and restorative forms of justice.

As a teacher, it became clear to me that cultivating relationships through trust,
mutual respect, compassion, humor, and socially relevant curricula provide the most
powerful and empowering basis for promoting successful classrooms and ethical school
cultures. Such commitments hold the potential to break down the walls of fear, violence,
and insecurity that pervade the lives of so many of our students, enabling them to develop
their moral, creative, and intellectual potential in safe and enlivening school
environments. Unfortunately, many urban public schools across North America are not
presently organized in ways that facilitate this kind of climate. This is due to a variety of
factors: extensive privatization and the drive to incorporate market forces into public governance leading to the further marginalization and defunding of public schools; deep cuts to social and educational services based on a neoconservative tax schema that serves the rich and deepens systemic inequalities; a deadening standardized test-based curricula that has laid waste to liberal arts and other socially relevant forms of pedagogy; attacks on teaching as a professional and intellectual endeavor; and, finally, the rise of a zero tolerance culture of metal detectors, surveillance cameras, lock-downs, contraband searches, drug sniffing dogs, and punitive law enforcement practices responsible for perpetuating a “school-to-prison pipeline” (AP, 2005 2010). All of these factors present distinct challenges to the democratic purpose of public schooling and the livelihoods, dignities, and futures of young people in the inner-city and beyond.

This thesis examines the unfolding drama of public educational change and the human security of young people in the neoliberal city. Urban public schools and communities find themselves subject to powerful destabilizing forces that have been fashioned in the turbulence of globalization and intensified in the post-2008 climate of economic decline and austerity. This thesis analyzes these forces through an ethnographic case study in a neighborhood and public high school in Chicago: Ellison Square and Ellison High School (EHS). It asks: What are the material and imaginative limits of “security” in urban education in a moment of escalating economic and social dislocation? Recent social science research has tended to examine questions of security in relation to the expansion of state security and global war in the post-9/11 period. In educational studies, the

4 All proper names in this study referring to Ellison Square and Ellison High School including street names and the names of individuals are pseudonyms.
tendency has been to understand security primarily as a mode of educational risk management, violence prevention, and school discipline. While important, these perspectives have tended to occlude an adequate understanding of the systemic and symbolic forms of violence responsible for the fragmentation of human security in the lives of young people in their schools and communities. Specifically absent, are empirical perspectives that chart the relationship between neoliberal transformations and precariousness in public schooling from the point of view of educators and young people themselves. My argument is that reading “security” both as a form of governance and as a lived condition offers essential insight into urban and educational change specifically in relation to the present capacity of youth to secure their lives and futures.

Central to this analysis is a critique of neoliberalism—a mode of free market fundamentalism that has colonized state organization, culture, and public policy in matters of finance, health, education, labor, taxes, and environmental regulation over the last three decades. Despite having its central claims to greater shared prosperity and freedom universally discredited by the financial crisis in 2008 and its aftermath, neoliberal ideology remains more powerful than ever. This is nowhere more visible than in the turn to austerity in the wake of the Great Recession and its impact on youth and public schools. Canadian political scientist, David McNally (2012) observes:

The Great Recession of 2008-9 represents a profound rupture in the neoliberal era, signaling the exhaustion of the accumulation regime that had emerged almost thirty years earlier. Rather than an ordinary recession, a short-lived downturn in the business cycle, it constituted a systemic crisis, a major contraction whose
effects will be with us for many years to come. Among those effects are the extraordinary cuts to social programs, and the resultant impoverishment, announced as part of the Age of Austerity inaugurated by all major states.

As McNally and other analysts have noted, austerity is a strategic response by transnational capital markets, financial elites and institutions to discipline states, particularly across Europe and North America, in order to socialize the costs of the financial crisis (understood here as a symptom of more generalized crisis tendencies in global capitalism). Concretely this means that the toxic debt that accrued in the financial system originating from the U.S. subprime housing and securities markets has been converted into sovereign debt through massive bailouts (a revised estimate of 7.7 trillion in the U.S. for instance). Rather than punishing those institutions whose excesses tanked the global economy, the costs, along with future financial risks, are being passed along to publics through the intensification of neoliberal privatization, painful cuts to social services, and continued tax breaks for corporations and the already rich. The result has been spiraling levels of social inequality and insecurity—mass foreclosures; evaporating wages and savings; levels of unemployment, homelessness, and poverty not seen since the Great Depression; and an explosion of personal bankruptcy and debt.

On the financial crisis as a systemic crisis see David Harvey’s (2010) *The Enigma of Capital*. Here Harvey locates the 2008 meltdown as indicative of the long-term structural barriers to continued economic expansion in the neoliberal era. He argues that while the extension of easy credit to consumers combined with semiotic manipulations in finance offered one avenue of continued growth in the 1990s and 2000s, the failure of deregulated finance capital in 2008 signals broader problems and limits for an accumulation paradigm beset by tensions between, on the one hand, finding new exploitable markets and, on the other hand, outlets for profitable investment and encroaching environmental depletion and resource scarcity.
In the United States, austerity has contributed to aggravating trends well established since the neoliberal and neoconservative counter-revolutions of the early 1980s. Painfully demonstrative of what happens to a society when unfettered capitalism is mindlessly conflated with democracy, the U.S. now holds the ignoble status as the most unequal advanced nation with relative levels of inequality similar to many of the poorest nations in Africa and Latin America, and, despite a national presumption of meritocracy, the U.S. also has one of lowest rates of social mobility (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). The 2010 census reveals that despite three decades of economic growth (90% of which has gone to the top 10%) and despite record breaking corporate profits in the post-2008 period (the benefits of which have accrued mainly to the top 1%) 97.3 million Americans are now defined as “low-income” or “near poverty” largely due to pay cuts, reduced hours, job loss, and rising costs of living, while an additional 49 million scrape by below the federal poverty line (4 million more than in 2009). This means that 146 million or 1 in 2 Americans are now classified as either impoverished or low-income (Mishel et al, 2009; U.S. Census, 2010; Yen, 2011). Further, as of 2011, 28 million people were unemployed or underemployed (meaning they had a job with pay that does not cover their basic needs); 45 million were relying on food assistance; and 50 million lacked health insurance (U.S. Census, 2010). Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to pour trillions of dollars into supporting the planet’s largest and most costly military industrial complex and the planet’s largest and most costly system of internal repression—a booming prison industrial complex (Davis, 2005). According to the Pew Research Center, in the nation that brands itself as a global beacon of freedom, 1 in 31 adults are currently under the direct control of the criminal justice system at any given moment—
the most of any nation (PEW, 2009). There is little evidence that the tepid economic recovery underway in early 2012 will offset these structural trends, particularly given the continued rightward and reactionary drift of U.S. politics and culture.

The continuation of public disinvestment and austerity in the wake of the financial crisis has taken an especially severe toll on young people and public schools. According to research conducted for Duke University’s Child Well Being Index, “virtually all of the progress made in the family economic well-being domain since 1975 will be wiped out” as “families, schools, neighborhood, and community organizations, and governments continue to cope with budget cuts and the loss of jobs” (Land, 2010). Stanford University professor Linda Darling-Hammond (2011) elaborates on the condition of young people and the warped social priorities that drive U.S. policy:

We live in a nation that is on the verge of forgetting its children. The United States now has a far higher poverty rate for children than any other industrialized country (25 percent, nearly double what it was thirty years ago); a more tattered safety net—more who are homeless, without healthcare and without food security; a more segregated and inequitable system of public education (a 10:1 ratio in spending across the country); a larger and more costly system of incarceration than any country in the world, including China (5 percent of the world’s population and 25 percent of its inmates), one that is now directly cutting into the money we should be spending on education; a defense budget larger than that of the next twenty countries combined; and greater disparities in wealth than
any other leading country. Our political leaders do not talk about these things. They simply say of poor children, ‘Let them eat tests!’”.

Alongside extensive cuts to social programs for the most vulnerable children, rising child poverty, homelessness, and insecurity, austerity has been acutely felt in its impact on public education. A report by the National Education Association titled, Starving America’s Public Schools, details how the spiraling costs of the Great Recession and reactionary conservative politics are impacting schools and communities (Bryant, 2011). Since 2007, states have laid off thousands of teachers and staff, cut back curriculum and extracurricular programs, expanded class sizes, shortened school days and weeks, and even closed many schools altogether. For instance, Illinois has cut $152 million, New York $1.3 billion, Pennsylvania $422 million, Washington $1 billion, and Arizona $560 million in state funding to k-12 public schools, early childhood education, and child development services. Further, the report details that while educational budgets are being slashed, public money that would be going directly to schools is instead being redirected to corporate vendors mainly for expanding privatized commercial management, commercial curriculum contracts, commercial online “cyber-charter” school ventures, and commercial standardized testing services (a booming aspect of the $600 billion dollar a year education market). Florida, as just one example, has cut $1 billion from its educational budget while it redirects roughly $299 million to corporate interests in the educational market. These cuts are contributing to the erosion of the educative and civic mission of public schools by raising class sizes, narrowing the curriculum, and eliminating essential services (particularly in the poorest communities), while redirecting
funding from the public to private interests (corporate lobbying for vast educational contracts has become a grand enterprise in the post-No Child Left Behind era). 6

The impoverishment of young people, and the institutions designed to protect and serve them, raises disturbing questions not only about commitments to public education as a basic social good, but also the status of youth as a key symbolic and ethical referent in a democratic society. This has led cultural critics like Henry Giroux (2009) to observe that youth, especially those disadvantaged by class and color, have become the primary collateral damage of the neoliberal era—a “disposable population” increasingly dispossessed of the means to secure their daily lives and future. Similarly to Giroux, I argue in this thesis that the precarious conditions facing young people in urban neighborhoods and schools in the age of austerity are expressive of the elevation of a market imperative and a military imperative over and above a public imperative.

Schools do not exist separately from the social contexts in which they are located. The realities of poverty combined with lack of access to living-wage job opportunities, basic health and human services, and affordable housing all create distinct barriers to successful urban communities and public schools. Rather than investing in young people and their families, free market reforms combined with social disinvestments in neighborhoods and schools are exacerbating a historical legacy of race and class inequality while consigning marginalized young people to an attenuated future at the bottom of the postindustrial labor and consumer hierarchy. Perhaps most disconcertingly,

as I outline in the following chapters, as social commitments to young people and public schools have receded there has been a stunning expansion of militarized zero tolerance enforcement and punishment in urban public schools and neighborhoods. These developments present profound challenges to realizing the promise of public schooling as a commons oriented to social justice and authentic democracy.

The analysis that unfolds over the following chapters is a *critical ethnography of neoliberal schooling*. Critical ethnography is a post-positivist approach to social research that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the social sciences particularly within the fields of sociology, anthropology, and education (Anderson, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yon, 2003). This diverse research methodology seeks to combine critical theory with traditional qualitative methodologies. It is both analytical and normative in perspective and seeks to study social processes, experiences, and human agency as they are produced and articulated in specific institutional and cultural contexts. Critical ethnography’s *analytical dimension* is oriented to understanding the relation between values, understandings, and social practices in relation to the broader political economic and cultural forces in which they are located. In this sense, it attempts to make connections between the global and the local and the particular and the universal through a variety of empirical materials including document and data analysis, observations, and through dialogue with cultural insiders. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest, such an approach represents an effort to “make the world visible” by “attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).
Critical ethnography relies centrally on critique as an analytic tool to not only bring knowledge to light but to unsettle and challenge surface appearances and naturalized assumptions that reinforce and underlie dominant forms of knowledge and practice. Therefore, unlike positivist approaches to research, critical ethnography has an openly *normative dimension*. This is another way of saying that critical ethnography does not subtract ethical considerations from the research process. Rather than claiming value neutrality, it is driven by a sense of “ethical responsibility,” which Soyini Madison (2012) describes as “a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings” (p.5). Critical ethnography thus recognizes that research is a value-laden activity and therefore researcher positionality necessarily impacts interpretation. However, while critical ethnography seeks to remain critical of all knowledge claims including its own, it openly seeks to challenge injustice and to advocate for solutions to social problems in the interest of equity and democracy. The social sciences have a long history implicated in colonial and imperialist assumptions and practices including classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia (Clifford, 1983; Said, 1989). Against this historical legacy, critical ethnography is committed to unraveling and decolonizing relations of domination in the interest of promoting human freedom and social justice (Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 2005). Madison suggests that this entails probing “other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities” (p.5).

While much has been written on the relationship between neoliberalism and educational policy (Apple, 2006; Lingard & Rizvi, 2009; Lipman, 2003 2011; Olsson et
al 2004; Saltman, 2007 2012) relatively little research has been conducted that studies neoliberalism “on the ground” in urban communities and public schools. In this analysis, I theoretically situate neoliberalism as both a form of political economy (Harvey, 2003 2005) and as a mode of governmentality (Brown, 2005; Foucault, 2008) in order to engage questions of educational policy and practice in Ellison Square and EHS from the point of view of those living and working there, particularly young people and their teachers. Such an examination is thus intimately concerned with relations of space, place and subjectivity. Space and place are central in defining and maintaining relations of power, privilege, and security in late modern life (Bauman, 1998; Massey, 2005). Geography plays a constitutive role in determining the uneven historical distribution of material and symbolic wealth along with access to transportation, housing, health care, quality schools, employment opportunities, and social mobility. Moreover, space and place are central components in the articulation and operation of capital, state policy and governance, and social relations across scales and institutional contexts (Harvey, 2006; Smith, 2008). Crucially, relations of policy, governance, and power are not simply imposed from the top-down but meet powerful local forms of cultural and individual agency and resistance. This means that neoliberal schooling is something produced in a dialectical relationship between the global and the local and implicated in forging unique expressions of meaning, understanding, and identity in specific sites and contexts.

Chicago is an ideal city to study the structural and political dimensions of urban change and educational policy and governance (Lipman, 2003 2011; Wacquant, 2008). The city represents many of the profound contradictions of a “global city” between significant corporate economic development in finance, real-estate, and tourism, on the
one hand, and profound economic insecurity and social polarization, on the other. While Chicago has become a powerful global financial center, it also features a fragmenting labor force and some of the most impoverished, racially segregated, and heavily policed neighborhoods and schools in the United States. Chicago has also consistently been at the forefront of adopting market forms of governance and management strategies in the educational sector such as privatization, centralized mayoral control, accountability, scripted curriculum, and high-stakes testing. Its 1995 reform agenda, for instance, was a blueprint for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) serve a population of over 400,000 students almost 90% are visible minorities and almost 90% of whom are considered low-income or live below the federal poverty line. In recent years, the policies adopted by the CPS, particularly under former CPS CEO and current Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2001-2009), have pushed for extensive privatization and corporate integration in educational management. This has meant, among other things, overseeing the closing of dozens of public schools and the opening of over 90 new deregulated charter and contract schools. These policies have been highly controversial in Chicago and have increasingly come under intensive community resistance due to their failure to make good on promises of improvement and because of their implication in deepening historical inequities and disinvestment in public schools.

The choice to focus on a single school and neighborhood at the margins of the neoliberal city was a conscious decision. I wanted the opportunity to shine a light on the human realities of a public school and community too often rendered invisible in the broader public sphere. Furthermore, when urban public schools in high poverty neighborhoods and the teachers and young people who inhabit them are taken up in
media and public debate, the narratives that emerge are too often rooted in stereotypes and faulty assumptions in desperate need of empirical clarification. Moreover, while focus on a specific school and community may present some challenges to generalizability as Chicago and its communities have unique historical and cultural trajectories, it would perhaps allow me to acquire deeper insight into the specific ways that youth and the adults charged with their care understand and negotiate the broader processes of neoliberal schooling described throughout this introduction and thesis.

After a difficult and lengthy access negotiation with the CPS, which I describe in some detail in Chapter 2, I was granted permission to conduct this research in Ellison Square and Ellison High School (EHS) on Chicago’s Southside. Ellison Square and EHS are broadly representative of public schools in Chicago and many U.S. cities. Ellison Square is a majority Hispanic neighborhood; however, EHS draws its students from three neighboring African American communities making the school approximately 50% Latino and 50% African American, roughly consistent demographically with the CPS as a whole. Further, EHS has just under 2,000 students, 97% of whom are considered “low-income” and/or “impoverished.” It has a 55% drop-out rate (close to the district average) and like most of CPS schools it is “on-probation” and subject to disciplinary measures due to inability to meet Average Yearly Progress (AYP) on standardized tests as stipulated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The research for the study was conducted over the course of one semester during the 2010-2011 academic year. The data collection included collecting and analyzing CPS policy documents, research reports and neighborhood data, media coverage, daily observation at EHS, and interviews with students, teachers, and youth workers in the community. I conducted 25 formal
interviews with 10 teachers, 13 students, and 2 youth workers that varied between 30 minutes to 2 hours in length. I also conducted scores of informal interviews with students, teachers, administrators, police, security guards, former graduates of EHS, and parents.

The thesis is organized around five chapters and proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 is a theoretical and context-setting chapter that examines educational policy and governance in the neoliberal city. Drawing on perspectives in urban political economy and governmentality, I develop a concept of securitization that links the erosion of the public sector to the broad extension of market governance on one hand, and the militarization of civil society and criminalization of the poor, on the other. I then examine how processes of securitization have impacted educational policy and the governance of youth within economically and racially marginalized sectors of the urban sphere. In the concluding section of the chapter, I examine how tendencies in the socializing and the social reproductive function of schools have shifted from a predominate concern to socialize workers and citizens under the Keynesian welfare state to a warehousing and containment function under the neoliberal state, or, what I refer to as precarious reproduction.

I follow up this discussion in Chapter 2 by examining the politics of conducting ethnography and social research within large urban school districts today. After profiling neoliberal development in Chicago and providing insight into its educational policy and governance, the chapter draws on descriptions from the field in order to discuss the ethical and logistical difficulties of gaining access and performing social research within urban school systems under systems of market management, resurgent positivism, and institutional cultures of risk and control. The chapter concludes by highlighting the
importance of critical ethnography as a “public use of reason” in order to provide further methodological grounding for the case study in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 takes the reader to the Ellison Square neighborhood and Ellison High School (EHS) on Chicago’s Southside. It utilizes Slavoj Zizek’s (2008) diagram of subjective, symbolic, and objective violence in order to think through the production of dispossession and precarity in the neighborhood and school stemming from neoliberal urban restructuring and the 2008 economic crisis. Through observations and analysis of interviews with educators and students, it details how educational governance processes have contributed to a climate of insecurity, alienation, and educational failure by limiting the capacity of public schools to provide meaningful security to youth in the form of social and holistic educational supports. It concludes by highlighting the production of conflict and systemic violence in the school and the community.

Extending this analysis, Chapter 4 examines militarized security culture at EHS. It profiles how technological surveillance and forms of carceral authority and control produce a variety of inclusionary and exclusionary effects that criminalize student behaviors, identities, and interpersonal relations. It then highlights how youth and adults in the school perceive and make sense of these practices in ways that are at once often trenchantly critical and variously supportive. Drawing on Kathleen Gallagher’s (2007) notion of the “occupied imagination,” what emerges through these discussions is that criminological practices represent an image of militarized “security” that appears as seemingly inevitable amidst relations of entrenched poverty and everyday insecurity.

Chapter 5 engages questions regarding the relation between human security, engagement, and civic and social agency at EHS. It proceeds by exploring tensions
between various forms of enclosure (economic, social, curricular, spatial, political) and how students, educators, and youth workers at EHS imagine their own sense of social and ethical responsibility in relation to possibilities for educational change. The chapter also profiles two models of non-traditional education at EHS (JROTC and programs that promote “education for liberation”) and examines how the assumptions and values that animate them point toward new limits and opportunities for substantive reform.

In the conclusion, I discuss alternatives to neoliberal schooling. Specifically, I draw on perspectives in the social sciences and humanities on the global commons and the common as a way of thinking with and beyond the social democratic reform tradition. Reclaiming public schooling as a commons offers a way of thinking a common schooling for a common security and I offer a series of broad and specific possibilities for reforming urban schools in the interest of restorative justice and democratic development.
Securing Precarious Urban Futures:

Neoliberalism, Public Education, and the Politics of Security

Security reasoning entails an essential risk. A state which has security as its only task and source of legitimacy is a fragile organism; it can always be provoked by terrorism to turn itself terroristic...Nothing is therefore more important than a revision of the concept of security as the basic principle of state politics.

-Giorgio Agamben, “Security and Terror.”

September 11, 2001 and the financial crisis of 2008 mark two key moments in the politics of security in the United States. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon ushered in a stunning expansion of state security and policing. This is registered in the passage of the USA Patriot Act; the creation of the Department of Homeland Security; the pursuit of the “war on terror” in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond; and the diversion of trillions of public dollars into the coffers of the war industry and projects of domestic surveillance and policing (signified most concretely by the fact that the U.S. now has a record breaking 7.3 million people under the direct control of the criminal justice system). Further, instabilities in global markets and continued fallout from the 2008 economic crisis has made visible the stark erosion of social and material security stemming from predatory market deregulation and financialization. While Wall Street and the corporate sector have resumed minting new billionaires and posting record breaking profits (the top 1% now has a higher net worth than the bottom 90%), millions have been left with foreclosed homes, debilitating debt, vanishing jobs and declining
wages. Concurrently, a regressive politics of disinvestment and austerity is hollowing-out commitments to health care, child development, education, labor and environmental protections further eroding the basis for securing human well-being and the future.

In this chapter, I provide contextual and theoretical grounding for what I am referring to as the *securitization of public educational policy and governance*. Securitization typically refers to the bundling of loans and other financial assets into derivative monetary instruments or “securities” that can be bet on and hedged against in the financial markets. I take this to signal the abstract intensification of what Jurgen Habermas (1987) once referred to as the “colonization of the life-world” by expansionary market systems. Securitization is also a term used in the social sciences to describe tendencies toward the extension of state security and the militarization of civil society. This includes the vast extension of state surveillance and into public spaces and institutions like public schools extending both the breadth and depth of the state’s capacity for surveillance, control and punishment. The concept of securitization is mobilized here to think through functional synergies and contradictions between evolving processes of marketization and militarization under the present neoliberal social formation, and how these processes are immanent to the re-configuration of urban governance, educational policy and practice. In this endeavor, I build on social science perspectives that have outlined how global economic realities are implicated in new dynamics of dispossession, alienation, and resistance along with modes of governance aimed at containing these conditions through novel forms of enclosure and repression (Cowen & Siciliano, 2011a 2011b; Harvey 2003 2005; Gilmore, 2009; Graham, 2010; Parenti, 1999; Saltman, 2003 2007; Saltman & Gabbard, 2010; Wacquant, 2008 2009).
These processes resonate with a broader crisis of security in late modern life that Feldman, Geisler, and Menon (2011) have described as a crisis of social reproduction—those “historically contingent processes by which we reproduce the conditions and relations of economic and social security”. This includes not only the ways we “reproduce the physical integrity of our bodies, but also the methods by which we reproduce ourselves as political subjects—that is, the relations of rule we legitimate” (p. 2). As primary sites of social reproduction, schools have played a fundamental historical role in providing the framework in which youth are socialized into their future adult roles as workers and citizens. This has always been contingent upon the demands of a stratified capitalist system (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). It has also always been a contested and contradictory process. Public school systems and schools themselves have historically tracked youth disadvantaged by class and color toward the lower end of the employment structure or out of the formal economy altogether. However, while imperfect and at times oppressive, public schools have also functioned as sites where youth might develop their human potential, intellectual agency, and civic awareness in ways that prepare them for social and democratic engagement and ultimately unpredictable futures. I suggest here that with the fading of a social democratic policy agenda that this process is made increasingly insecure and repressive. I refer to this as precarious reproduction.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I draw on political economic and governmentality perspectives in order to locate questions of security and securitization within the context of neoliberal development. Second, I build on perspectives in urban sociology and critical geography to highlight securitization within the neoliberal city. In the following two sections, I explore the marketization of U.S. educational policy and the
emergence of a militarized crime control model in urban school environments. In the final section, I explore precarious reproduction as marking tensions in the historic socializing functions of public schooling in relation to the securitization of youth.

Neoliberalism and the Politics of Security

The problem of neoliberalism is how the overall exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of the market economy.

-Michel Foucault, “The Birth of Biopolitics,” (p. 131).

Neoliberalism is a term deployed widely in the social sciences to describe transformations in state restructuring and social life under globalization and advanced capitalism. It has been associated with the rejection of Keynesianism and with setting the foundation for the liberalization of global markets and trade under the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, as well as the development of a more “flexible” post-Fordist political economic milieu (Harvey, 1990 2005). With the elections of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. in the 1980s, neoliberal ideology—a revamped form of classical economic liberalism—formally emerged out of neoconservative think-tanks, corporate foundations, and academic departments such as the so-called Chicago School of economics to become the hegemonic successor to Keynesianism and the driving force of the global economy. After the fall of “actually existing socialism” in 1989, it was widely proclaimed across the political spectrum that “there is no alternative” and that we had reached “the end of history.” In recent years, scholars have performed extensive
analysis of neoliberalism as a mode of political economy, a policy regime, and a form of governmentality (Larner, 2000). Here, I briefly synthesize these positions, examining in particular how neoliberal political economy and governance frame issues of security.

Scholars have conducted extensive examinations of the political economy of neoliberal development, identifying it as a particular strategic moment in the history of global capitalism (Duminél & Lévy, 2004 2010; Harvey, 1990 2003 2005 2006). Its emergence is often associated with the crisis of Fordism and the turn to post-Fordism. Fordism (1914-1973) is typically characterized as a mode of political economic organization that peaked in the post-World War II era. It was defined by national systems of standardized industrial production, the Keynesian mediation of labor conflicts and business cycles by the state, and social democratic commitments to public institutions and investments in social reproduction within nationally bounded projects of social and civic identification. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Fordism entered a period of crisis due to economic stagnation and a falling rate of profit combined with expanding levels of resistance and discontent embodied by an explosion of popular social movements—civil rights, labor militancy, feminist and queer activism, and transnational anti-imperialist struggles. These economic and social tensions provided rationale and context for the turn to post-Fordism, or what Harvey (1990) has referred to as “flexible accumulation”—a series of class directed strategies meant to offset capitalism’s crisis tendencies and return the system to profitability and growth, principally by cheapening the cost of labor and opening and colonizing new sites for capital accumulation across global space and time.

The shift to post-Fordism thus signals the emergence of the current phase of world capitalist development, or neoliberal globalization. This has been characterized by
the enhanced global mobility of production and capital; extensive wage repression (outsourcing, automation, free trade/labor zones, the casualization of work); and vast innovations in communicative technologies and expansion of speculative finance. Over the last three decades, these economic and state transformations have opened up new spheres for capitalist development principally through the privatization and deregulation of national economies and public infrastructures resulting in a resurgent phase of enclosure and capitalist expropriation of the global commons—health and education systems, utilities, transportation, cultural production, land and natural resources (Klein, 2007; Mansfield, 2008). These trends have contributed to extensive uneven development creating historic concentrations of wealth and power at the top of the global class structure while leading to deepening inequality across the global division of labor (the richest 50 individuals in the world now have a combined income greater than the poorest 416 million, 2.5 billion people live on less than $2 a day (40% of the world’s population), while 54% of global income goes to the richest 10% of the world’s population). Further, there has emerged a new systemic crisis (2008-2009) for the neoliberal doctrine visible in a proliferation of global social movements from indigenous rights movements to worker and student actions and occupations against corporate and state exploitation of people and the environment across the Global North and South (McNally, 2006 2011).

Scholars have also looked beyond political economic explanations of neoliberalization drawing particular inspiration from the genealogical accounts developed by Michel Foucault (2008) in his lectures at the College de France in the late 1970s. Writing on the cusp of the neoliberal moment, Foucault identified the emergent free market discourse as a distinct form of governmentality by which he meant an ensemble of
institutional, legal, subjective, and political practices and rationalities marking out the broader terrain of governance. For Foucault, governmentality is both material, in the sense that it works within and through concrete activities (production, finance, trade, law, education, policing etc.), and symbolic, in the sense that it is derived from as well as dictates perceptions, values, and the social production of meaning and understanding. As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism can be understood as implicated not only in global processes but in variable local transformations in everyday life including senses of self, ways of being, relating to others, and the organization of sociality and community.

In the 1978-1979 lectures entitled “The Birth of Biopolitics,” Foucault traced the development of neoliberal governmentality from the classical liberalism of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson in the 18th century, through the post-war German Ordoliberal, to thinkers associated with the Chicago School of economics such as Milton Freidman and Friedrich von Hayek. In short, neoliberal rationalities take as given the natural efficiency and ethical neutrality of the market and the supposed inefficiency and corruption of the public sector. Here all social relations from environmental protection, education, health and child care, to conceptions of democratic and civic engagement can and should be brought under the competitive domain of the market and the economic decision making capacity of the individual recast as the entrepreneurial-consumer citizen. While neoliberalism rejects the Keynesian era diagram of a social democratic state operating to

7 My view is that despite epistemological incongruities, a Foucauldian governmentality approach broadly compliments a Marxian political economy perspective, particularly in understanding the mutually inflected relationships between the operations of global capitalism, the state, and subjectivity from the macrological to the micropolitical levels. Thomas Lemke (2001) notes: “the analysis of governmentality focuses not only on the integral link between micro- and macro-political levels (e.g. globalization or competition for ‘attractive’ sites for companies and personal imperatives as regards beauty or a regimented diet), it also highlights the intimate relationship between ‘ideological’ and ‘political-economic’ agencies (e.g. the semantics of flexibility and the introduction of new structures of production)” (p. 13).
regulate capitalism and provide a modicum of security against its worst excesses, it actively recruits the state to restructure society along economic lines. Synthesizing Foucault’s approach, Wendy Brown (2005) has suggested that neoliberalism represents a normative and constructivist political project that has emerged as a powerful form of “commonsense” informing policy, culture, and everyday lived experience: “a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social” (p. 37).

This brief analysis concerning the intersections of neoliberal political economy and governance has profound repercussions for how we understand relations of security, state power, and subjectivity in the contemporary moment. For Foucault, security was an essential element in the art of liberal government as it developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. While sovereignty is concerned with the rule of law and the monopolization of violence within a given territory, security is concerned foremost with the management and regulation of populations—or what Foucault referred to as biopolitics. Under neoliberal governance, security is broadly privatized and de-socialized—meaning that risk and responsibility are increasingly transferred from the state and the public sphere onto individuals and communities as social provisions such as health care, education, and welfare are cut and public infrastructures are deregulated and commodified. If security

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8 Foucault (2003) positions biopolitics as a historical development in modern rationalities and technologies of power and social regulation that emerges out of and compliments two other modalities—sovereignty and discipline. Whereas sovereignty refers to control over the legitimate use of violence within a distinct territory under the law, discipline refers to investments in the individual body—its spatial distribution, serialization, training, and surveillance. Biopolitics, in contrast, concerns itself with the regulation of “man as a multiplicity”; that is, as a “global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on” (p. 243). The target of biopolitics is thus naturalization and regularization of particular frames of economic and political life. Biopolitics thus describe the always contested dynamics of the political in its most basic sense—the antagonistic economic and social processes where some lives and forms of life are made more or less valuable than others. These dividing practices between deserving and undeserving lives, is a crucial axis upon which notions of security operate.
and citizenship were once imagined within a set of social referents containing certain economic and social rights, protections, and responsibilities under Keynesian liberalism (however inadequate this may have been in practice), under neoliberalism it is largely conceived in terms of what I am referring to as securitization—the marketization of society and identity and the generalization and criminalization of social insecurity.

Within this atomized vision of the social, what Ulrich Beck (1991) has referred to as the “risk society,” citizens are positioned primarily as entrepreneurial consumers who are held solely responsible and morally culpable for their own security and well-being regardless of the circumstances. Zygmunt Bauman (1999 2001) has noted that as referents of common security recede in the neoliberal consumer society, individuals must engage in hypercompetitive strategies of acquiring private security such as pursuing constant educational re-training for professional readiness, consumer lifestyle distinctions, and various forms of self-help so as to maximize personal fitness and market value while effectively out-competing their rivals in an increasingly precarious and transient employment structure. This is reinforced by an array of cultural phenomena in mass media that promote market values and identifications such as Oprah-inflected pop-psychology (If I just believe enough, I will prosper!), to Darwinian “reality” television shows, mass corporate advertising and 24/7 news cycles. The inability for individuals and communities to meet normative criteria for entrepreneurial and consumer engagement can lead to the further withdrawal of state supports (as they are viewed in conservative discourse to breed “dependency”) (Fraser & Gordon, 1996). Here social insecurity and abjection are viewed as the private failures of individuals and communities as opposed to collective problems marking out divisions between affiliated consumers and problem
subjects of *suspicion and criminality* (Rose, 1996). This translates into authoritarian tendencies within neoliberal formations, where forms of economic dispossession and social alienation give way to state interventions aimed at those zones and identities perceived as threatening and/or as redundant to the global economic order (Dean, 2007).

Despite rhetorical commitments to a limited state, neoliberal governance has been marked by a significant expansion of state power. Pierre Bourdieu (1999) described this as the simultaneous erosion of the state’s “left arm,” or social functions, and the expansion of its “right arm”—those capacities concerned with security, punishment, and policing. While the Keynesian state operated as a regulator of the market, under neoliberalism, the market becomes the internal regulator of the state, reducing its role in social reproduction while expanding its security and disciplinary capacities so as to secure the optimal conditions for unfettered financial accumulation. Harvey (2003 2005 2006) details how neoliberal formations have thus been inseparable from neoconservative politics and the new imperialism. For instance, in structural adjustment policies imposed by the World Bank, WTO, and IMF, where nations across the Global South have been coerced into privatizing and deregulating their economies enabling greater transnational corporate control over their markets and natural resources. It is also visible in the Bush and Obama administrations’ efforts to retrench civil liberties, skirt the Geneva Conventions, engage in torture, and pursue extra-legal detentions and executions outside the rule of law. Moreover, as demonstrated by the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent Wall Street bail-outs and turn to austerity, neoliberal capitalism relies on a strong state in order to ameliorate market failure by upwardly redistributing wealth, while downwardly distributing fiscal discipline, debt, and risk onto an insecure and fragmented public
sphere. As Harvey (2006) observes, “public-private partnerships are favored in which the public sector bears all of the risk and the corporate sector reaps all of the profit. Business interests get to write legislation and to determine public policies…if necessary the state will resort to coercive legislation…surveillance and policing multiply” (p. 26).

Securing Neoliberalism in the Revanchist City

While relatively egalitarian cities like those in continental Western Europe tend to foster a sense of security, highly unequal societies are often marked by fear, high levels of crime and violence, and intensifying militarization. The dominance of neoliberal models of governance over the past three decades, combined with the spread of punitive and authoritarian models of policing and social control, has exacerbated urban inequalities. As a result, the urban poor are often confronted with reduction in public services on the one hand, and a palpable demonization and criminalization on the other.


Scholars in sociology, cultural geography, and political theory have made significant contributions to understanding the complex and often contradictory ways that the urban sphere, particularly in its “global city” manifestations (Sassen, 2006), has become implicated in managing the flows of finance, technology, information, and labor endemic to globalization and advanced capitalism. The city has also become a key testing ground for the development and implementation of neoliberal logic, generating new patterns of uneven urban development, work and leisure, and social regulation and control particularly in a post-9/11 climate of hi-tech surveillance and data tracking, emergency orders, and the privatization and criminalization of poverty (Graham, 2010; Wacquant,
The city is also a vital staging ground of contestation and resistance where the global and the local intersect with various forms of identity formation, dissent, and democratic claims-making (Leitner et al, 2007). My interest here in outlining the political economic and governmental tendencies in the neoliberal city is to highlight the logic of securitization between the extension of market forces and the production of disinvested and dishonored spaces of insecurity, inequality and criminological containment.

Neoliberal urbanism has been characterized as a general trend toward the “rolling back” of social democratic policy regimes and the “rolling out” of entrepreneurial and market-based governance (Cronin & Hetherington, 2008; Peck & Tickel, 2002). Liberal urban policy of the 1950s and 1960s was defined by strong commitments to public management, public oversight over capital and the rights of labor, and basic redistributive aims designed to promote economic development and ameliorate urban blight and poverty through investments in welfare programs, job training, and urban renewal schemes. While this social democratic paradigm remained rooted in an entrenched system of racial and gender discrimination and class inequality and often contributed to the very problems it attempted to address (Piven & Cloward, 1993), it nevertheless at least provided a set of referents for an urban social contract defined by commitments to collective security and welfare. In contrast, neoliberal policies have been characterized by extensive urban deregulation and privatization of public infrastructures; the dismantling of welfare programs; concerted attacks on labor unions; extensive tax breaks and public subsidies to corporations; and the subordination of urban governance, the environment, and citizenship to corporate economic imperatives (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This has contributed to the appropriation and transformation of urban space through projects
geared to attract professional class workers and corporate investment into the city (Sassen, 2006; Smith, 1996 2002). It has also meant the marketization of public policy and defunding of public institutions and social services as governance is reframed within entrepreneurial as opposed to social norms and as consumer imaginaries replace social referents in conceiving social engagement and civic identification (Isin et al, 2000).

The marketization of the city has coincided with deepening inequality and social polarization (Brenner &Theodore, 2002; Wacquant, 2008). From New York, Chicago, Toronto, to Paris, neoliberal urbanism has been implicated in the increased bifurcation between urban spaces of consumption and corporate development and increasingly marginalized sectors of concentrated poverty and sociopolitical alienation. This has been articulated most forcefully perhaps in the context of U.S. urbanism, traced to historical patterns of racial segregation, suburbanization and deindustrialization, and the emergence of a “stratified” and “precarious” postindustrial labor market (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sugrue, 1996; Wilson, 1996). Since the 1970s, the enhanced global mobility of capital and production combined with the rise of financial and speculative economies and consumer service sectors has contributed to the steady repression of wages and stable employment in the U.S. This has led to extensive labor segmentation and the formation of a small, highly mobile professional class of corporate managers, executives, and information workers; a declining middle class sector marked by the erosion of long-term contracts, benefits, and union representation; and an expanding pool of precarious laborers, the majority of which are women, immigrants, and people of color.\(^9\) Many in

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\(^9\) Women, particularly immigrant women and women of color, occupy positions at the bottom of the wage scale and in the informal sector of work in far greater numbers, and, along with their children, also bear the brunt of the effects of poverty (Goldberg, 2010). While women and children are overrepresented among the
this bottom tier of “disposable workers” are unemployed and/or underemployed (an estimated 28 million in the U.S. as of 2011 not counting those who have permanently exited the formal labor market altogether) (Magdoff, 2011). This presence of a mass “reserve army” of workers is certainly nothing new to the historical geographies of capitalism (Marx, 1977). However, as production has given way to debt-fueled consumption and speculative finance as the principle drivers of economic growth, and as the individualized consumer norms replace social rights and universal norms citizenship, economically alienated populations are less likely to be viewed as needing to be reincorporated by the state into productive economic and civic roles (Feldman et al, 2011). Thus rather than thought deserving of collective investment in their security and welfare, they are imagined as security threats—surplus populations haunting the peripheries of the city. This includes many young people and young graduates as they struggle to find a toehold in the formal economy and post-2008 labor market.

Class stratification in the urban sphere is complicated by the racial politics of neoliberal culture where social inequality is positioned as the moral failings of communities and individuals as opposed to effects of political and historical conditions. This allows racist and colonial histories of dispossession and discrimination to disappear behind what David Theo Goldberg (2009) has described as “colorblind” or “raceless racism,” the seductive idea that in a post-civil rights era where racial minorities have achieved limited entry to the middle class (although this has begun to reverse itself in the last decade) and even high-profile positions of wealth and power (most notably the U.S. working poor, men are far more likely to face chronic unemployment coupled with higher rates of imprisonment. Here “workfare” directed predominantly at exploiting low-wage female labor and “prisonfare” aimed at managing unemployed men emerge as dominant race and gender-coded class strategies for managing dispossessed and alienated populations in the neoliberal city (Wacquant, 2009).
presidency under Barack Obama) race is no longer a salient factor in determining one’s life chances within the supposedly universal and equitable opportunities provided by the market. If racism does exist it is thought to linger only as a private prejudice as opposed to a structural reality. Assertions of a post-racial society are belied, however, by a deepening chasm in wealth and opportunity in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, in the wake of the 2008 recession and collapse of the subprime housing market, which disproportionately impacted minority communities, the median wealth of white households has increased to 20 times that of black and 18 times that of Hispanic households, while unemployment rates in minority communities persistently remain double and triple the national average (Kochhar et al, 2011). Furthermore, in the wake of this slow moving economic catastrophe and four decades of the disastrous “war on drugs,” a racially predicated imprisonment binge has emerged that legal scholar Michelle Alexander (2010) has evocatively referred to as the “New Jim Crow.” Today, visible minorities make up 70% of the roughly 2.3 million people incarcerated in U.S. prisons, the majority for non-violent drug offenses, even though racial minorities constitute only 24% of the overall population and a small percentage of illegal drug users (PEW, 2009).  

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10 According to a research study by the Pew center (2009), as of 2008, the U.S. currently has 5% of the world’s population and 25% of its prisoners. 1 in 31 adults in America was in prison or jail, or on probation or parole. Twenty-five years ago, the rate was 1 in 77. These numbers are highly concentrated by race and geography: 1 in 11 black adults (9.2 percent) versus 1 in 27 Hispanic adults (3.7 percent) and 1 in 45 white adults (2.2 percent); 1 in 18 men (5.5 percent) versus 1 in 89 women (1.1 percent). Loic Wacquant (2009), Michel Alexander (2010), Paul Street (2007), and Ruth Gilmore (2009) among others, have argued that soaring rates of incarceration in the U.S. are largely unrelated to actual crime rates. For instance, Alexander points out that between 1970 and 1990 the crime rates of Finland and Germany were roughly identical to the U.S., yet the U.S. incarceration rate quadrupled during the same period while the Finish rate declined by 60% and Germany’s stayed about the same. Since 1990, the U.S. crime rate has slightly dipped below the international average while its rate of incarceration has continued to rise 6-10 times faster than any other industrialized country. These statistics and their deep racial characteristics suggest that the imprisonment binge has more to do with extrinsic factors than with crime rates such as institutional and cultural racism; turning profits and providing a tax base and jobs to rural white communities; the gutting of the social state; and the need to exert direct social control of populations dislocated by the global economy.
The retrenchment of race and class inequality has dovetailed with what Mike Davis (1990) has referred to as the “fortress city”: an urban landscape defined by the expansion of militarized surveillance and security from gated communities, CCTV cameras, to SWAT and paramilitary anti-drug police units, ostensibly deployed to make the city “safe” for capital development, tourism and consumer activities, as well as upper income professionals and their families. While efforts to regulate the poor have always been a fixture of urban governance, Davis notes that under present formations:

…the defense of luxury life-styles is translated into a proliferation of new repressions in space and movement, undergirded by the ubiquitous ‘armed response.’ This obsession with physical security systems, and, collaterally, with the architectural policing of social boundaries, has become a zeitgeist of urban restructuring, a master narrative in the emerging built environment. (p. 223)

Fueled by a cultural politics that has long played upon racialized depictions of the urban poor, and urban “Others,” as undeserving and dangerous (Macek, 2006), the city becomes a site of heightened contradictions and contested geographies: new business centers, office parks, and consumer-leisure zones stand as corridors of investment, order, and civility while efforts are made to contain the poor and other problem populations within disinvested spaces of perceived disorder, incivility, and danger via mechanisms of surveillance and state repression (Parenti, 1999; Street, 2007; Wacquant, 2008 2009).

Neil Smith (1996 2002) has utilized the metaphor of “revanchism” in order to describe how the erosion of liberal commitments to social development and universal
citizenship has contributed to the violent return to late 19th century conservative attitudes toward the poor and the indigent. Smith takes revanchism from the French word *revanche* which literally means “revenge”—a term proudly mobilized by reactionary bourgeois movements in Second Empire Paris as a rallying cry for hunting down and eliminating their working-class enemies from the city. Smith locates the roots of contemporary revanchist urbanism in 1990s New York, where under the authoritarian zeal of Rudolph Giuliani new strategies of policing and social control were developed to reclaim public space from the homeless, racialized youth, panhandlers, graffiti artists, squeegee cleaners, protestors and other dishonored populations that had become the primary and most visible scapegoats for urban decay and the failures of urban policy in post-Reagan America. The revanchist approach to urban social control, which quickly spread to cities across North America and Western Europe, has included zero tolerance based “quality of life” policing, new civility and anti-trespass laws, modifications in the built environment such as “bum proof” benches and the proliferation of CCTV surveillance cameras, harsh mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses, and a turn to historic levels of mass incarceration (Beckett & Herbert, 2008). Loic Wacquant (2009) has argued that revanchist politics and the turn to authoritarian policing is directed primarily at managing the racialized poor in an era of public downsizing, the erosion of stable employment, and globalized labor surpluses. He describes this as the “neoliberal government of social insecurity”—that applies the doctrine of “laissez-faire” upstream, when it comes to social inequalities and the mechanisms that generate them (the free play of capital, deregulation of labor law and deregulation of employment, retraction or removal of collective protections), but turns out to be brutally paternalistic and punitive downstream,
when it comes to coping with their consequences on a daily level” (p. 43).

**The Deconstruction of Public Education**

As the previous section has sketched out, neoliberal urbanism represents a number of tendencies in the contemporary governance of the city. It is essential to note, however, that these tendencies are far from seamless or inevitable. Rather, as a product of human decisions and actions, neoliberalism represents a historically contingent and contradictory process that is not simply imposed from the top-down but is actively made-up and contested by ordinary people in the everyday life of the city (Leitner et al, 2007). Thus one of the challenges in examining neoliberalism is to not only identify the overarching tendencies in political economy and the ideological basis of state restructuring and governance, but to remain attentive to how these broader forces manifest in institutions and the lives of individuals (such as in the context of educational policy and practice) in geographically and socially variegated ways (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Lipman 2011).

Educational scholars have duly noted that processes of globalization and neoliberal restructuring have had a profound impact on shaping educational governance and practice (Apple, 2006; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Lingard & Rizvi, 2009; Olsson et al 2004). In the urban context, education reform movements promoted largely by the political and financial elite have pushed market-based policies designed to enhance the global economic competitiveness of cities and to prepare and sort urban youth for the rigors of the postindustrial workforce (Anyon, 2005; Lipman, 2003 2011). This has occurred simultaneously with a decline in social investment in urban public education at
all levels in favor of extensive privatization, market competition, corporate management, and testing that has contributed to the retrenchment of social and educational inequities. Further, as social commitments to schools and to youth have eroded at the bottom of the race and class structure, the state has broadly expanded various technologies and practices of surveillance and policing in schools. What has emerged is a climate of enclosure and criminalization in urban schools and neighborhoods, where, in the name of security, schools have become linked to the criminal justice system in new and unsettling ways. The combination of marketization and militarization marks two key poles of educational governmentality revealing emergent patterns of securitization and precarious reproduction within the present social context and politics of neoliberal schooling.

Unleashing the Market: From the Great Society to No Child Left Behind

Since the 1980s, there has been an intensive and extensive path toward market integration and corporate management in U.S. public education. As the educational historians remind us, business involvement and the desire to make educational systems responsive to economic imperatives is far from new. Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, business and political leaders have attempted to influence educational processes in ways favorable to capital and labor market demands (Bowles & Gintis, 2011). Many of the contemporary reform policies such as increased use of testing and teacher accountability practices resemble older factory-based efficiency models championed by 20th century reformers like E.L. Thorndike, Franklin Bobbit, and David Sneddon to integrate Taylorist “scientific management” principles into schooling. What makes neoliberal education
policies different from this earlier efficiency movement, however, is that they are not only geared toward promoting the forms of management, knowledge, and discipline necessary for workforce preparation, which today is said to be predicated on developing “21st century skills” and globally competitive “entrepreneurial” citizens, but they take the market itself as the very basis for educational reform, school organization, and service delivery. In other words, neoliberl policies not only conflate the democratic and ethical purpose of education with economic rationalities, but project economic principals onto a general art of educational governance. This turn has been decades in the making.

In the United States, the New Deal legacy and the postwar Keynesian consensus were dominated by a substantive federal commitment to a social contract that included basic public protections for the most vulnerable including expanded investment and access to health care, public housing, child welfare, and education. Extensive pressures from the civil rights movement culminated in the early 1960s with Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and the Civil Rights Act in 1964 along with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. The latter supported desegregation of public schools and provided significant federal commitments to educational funding directed toward ameliorating poverty and providing equality of opportunity to low-income urban and rural youth with the greatest need. The social democratic policies of this era should not be overly romanticized. They often proved to be obsessively bureaucratic and paternalistic and ultimately fell short in fundamentally altering the mechanisms that maintained economic injustice and exclusions of women and racial and sexual minorities from the benefits of full citizenship. Further, educational reforms during the 1960s were predicated on deficit models of racial inequality based on a “culture of poverty” discourse, signified
perhaps most famously by Daniel Moynihan’s (1965) reference to a “tangle of pathology” in reference to impoverished black families, which tended to reinforce rather than uproot racist stereotypes and practices in public schools. However, despite these limitations and contrary to neoconservative assertions regarding the failures of “big government,” the social welfare and educational policies in the 1960s and 1970s led to the near equalization of school funding between urban and suburban districts, cut the black white achievement gap in half over 15 years, reduced child poverty rates by 60% of where they are today, significantly expanded access to health care for poor families, heavily invested in hiring and retaining high quality teachers in underserved schools that greatly improved their performance, and achieved college enrollment for minority youth at rates comparable to whites for the only time either before or since (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Perhaps most importantly, these social democratic gains were rooted in public values and commitments to equity that benefitted not only disadvantaged young people and their communities, but the broader shape of democratic life and culture (Judt, 2009).

Over the last three decades, there has been a profound retrenchment in educational equity, achievement, and access leading to the evaporation of gains made in the 1960s and 1970s. Today in the wake of the Great Recession and three decades of neoliberal and neoconservative attacks on the public and the social state, the U.S. has now the highest rate of child poverty of any advanced nation with 1 in 5 children living in poverty, while 31 million, or 42% of all children, now live at the edge of the federal poverty rate ($22,500 a year for a family of four) (Land, 2010). The U.S. also has one of the worst records in providing health and human services to youth while maintaining extreme inequalities in educational investment. As Darling-Hammond notes (2010), in
contrast to Canada, Europe, and Asia where educational funding tends to be centralized and equitably distributed, the wealthiest school districts in the U.S. spend up to 10 times more than the poorest.\(^{11}\) This reinforces a highly stratified and racially segregated education system particularly in the inner-city where class sizes have grown, achievement gaps have widened, and drop-out rates have stagnated. Combined with soaring poverty and generalized insecurity, youth with the greatest needs are being denied the substantive investments necessary to secure their future economic and social well-being.\(^{12}\) It is no coincidence that spending on criminal corrections since the 1980s has mushroomed by 300% (growing at a rate that is three times faster than the rate of spending on public education over the same period) or that the U.S. currently has 5% of the world’s population and 25% of the total number of inmates globally (PEW, 2009).

These trends toward public disinvestment and inequality need to be situated within the turn to neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities in social and educational

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\(^{11}\) Darling-Hammond’s book *The Flat World and Education*, from which I draw in this section, offers a rational defense of liberal and social democratic approaches to educational policy and public schooling. However, while arguing for educational investments and liberal commitments to fairness and equity, Darling-Hammond largely reproduces the neoliberal viewpoint that education is or should be valued primarily according to its capacity to serve economic ends. In contrast, I subscribe to the values articulated within progressive and critical traditions (articulated by the likes of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Henry Giroux) that situate the purpose of education within the terms of human development, social transformation, and democracy as opposed to the reductive logic of global economic competition.

\(^{12}\) Neoliberals like Eric Hanushuk, Paul T. Hill, Stephen Brill, and others roundly reject the notion that school funding and socioeconomic condition have anything to do with educational performance. They cite statistics indicating that the U.S. has one of the highest per pupil expenditures. Deceptively, however, they do not acknowledge two key determinates in promoting educational success (narrowly measured here in terms of test scores). First, the U.S. spends a significantly lower percentage of GDP on education and other social services than other developed nations (Sachs, 2011). This means that the poor receive far less support in matters like health care for mothers and children and early childhood education—things that are consistently cited as key factors in child development and whether or not young people enter school ready to learn (Anyon, 2005; Ravitch 2010). Second, the reformers also deny the impact of poverty on school performance, however, the research is overwhelmingly clear that socioeconomic class is the single greatest determinate in predicting educational achievement (Rothstein 2004). In short, as the vast majority of educational research has concluded (which the market reformers roundly ignore) poverty and inequality matter, while investments in social provision and educational services (or the lack thereof) are central factors in the relative success of individual students and schools particularly at the bottom of the social hierarchy.
policy. Since the Reagan era report *A Nation at Risk*, which worked to stoke national anxieties over educational performance in the emergent global economy, an ethos of corporatization and competition has become a broadly shared form of “commonsense” in educational reform. Part of this story can be traced to concerted attempts to discredit the public sector and equate public spending with the racialized and gendered “dependencies” and “pathologies” of the urban poor (Fraser & Gordon, 1996). Ronald Reagan’s anecdotes of the mythical African American “Welfare Queen” cruising in style in her “Pink Cadillac,” with her “30 addresses,” “80 names,” and “12 social security cards” while collecting welfare checks is a case in point. The narrative tactfully played upon white working class resentment (even though whites have always been and continue to be the majority of welfare recipients) against the gains of the civil rights and feminist movements and worked to build broad support for neoliberal policies and Bill Clinton’s post-welfare *workfare* state. Michael Apple (2005) has referred to this as the “long-term creative ideological work” of “devaluing of public goods and services” where “anything that is public is ‘bad’ and anything that is private is ‘good’” (p.15). Following this logic, the Reagan administration, cut taxes on the rich and corporations, poured money into a Cold War military buildup, all while slashing funds for public education including a 50% cut in Title 1 funds to low-income schools (Bellamy-Foster, 2011).

The market vision in education has been promoted by both the Democratic and Republican parties (Clinton’s “Goals 2000” was an explicit free market education agenda); an extensive network of well-funded neoliberal and neoconservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Fordham and Hoover institutes; corporate philanthropic organizations like the Gates, Broad, and Walton foundations; business
groups like the Business Roundtable and Chamber of Commerce; and through corporate media such as in recent films like *Waiting for Superman* and *The Lottery* (Apple, 2006; Saltman, 2009). The stated aims of the new corporate educational reform alliance are to break down the “public school monopoly” by supporting privatization, eroding the teacher’s unions (to cheapen and control their labor); and to impose a centralized system of corporate management. In terms of policy, this has meant the promotion of school voucher and choice initiatives, the proliferation of publicly funded but privately run charter and contract schools, as well as experiments in direct for-profit secondary education. Second, it has meant efforts to bring market based strategies of accountability and institutional “efficiency” modeled on the corporation into schooling at all levels—standardization, auditing and accountability mechanisms, and emphasis on the rote learning of “basic skills” conjoined with mandatory high-stakes testing. These policies came together in George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

Signed into law in 2001, the NCLB has become the national blueprint for education. The logic driving the NCLB assumes that education, by itself, can provide equality of opportunity through markets and school choice and by holding schools and teachers accountable for test scores. However, as Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe (2006) argue, the law has been more likely to exacerbate race and class inequality rather than ameliorate it. They note that the law has further stigmatized and legitimated disinvestment in low-income schools by holding them to performance benchmarks they were never capable of meeting and then labeling them failures and punishing them for the resulting low-test scores (80% of all U.S. public schools are slated to be labeled failing by 2014). It has also significantly narrowed curriculum as more than 70% of the nation’s
school districts have responded to testing requirements by reducing instruction in liberal
arts subjects and focusing almost exclusively on drilling for the tests. This has been most
intensive in schools serving high poverty students. Most significantly, Kantor and Lowe
point out that while the law rightly rejects the language of cultural deficits that blame
achievement gaps on the psychological deficiencies of the poor and racial minorities, its
exclusive focus on markets and testing fails to address structural economic barriers and
the cumulative effects of historical racial exclusion and discrimination. They state:

The Great Society fore-fronted the connection between race, poverty, and
education, although it framed that connection in terms that were as likely to
reproduce racial and class inequality as ameliorate it. For good reason, the NCLB
rejects that language. In doing so, however, it also rejects the idea that there is any
connection between class and racial inequality and school achievement at all, or
to put it more broadly, that the ‘problem of schooling’ is somehow unconnected to
the larger structures of inequality in which schools exist. Indeed, according to the
presumptions that inform the law, if low-income children or children of color do
poorly in school, it is not because racial and economic inequalities are visited on
the schools, are imported into them, and are reproduced there. Rather, these
children do poorly only because the schools and the teachers harbor low
expectations for their students…Not merely absent but precluded are discussions
about the connections between schooling and unequal access to labor markets,
income, adequate housing and health care, as well as educational resources,
though the ‘problem of schooling’ cannot be addressed without attention to all of
Rather than working to improve the overall quality of the public educational system, the NCLB shifts responsibility for educational success and failure to schools, teachers, and localities. It does so by encouraging privatization and school choice arrangements that position families as consumers and schools as commercial entities that are required to compete over students and scarce resources. Here child poverty, hunger, homelessness, home and neighborhood instability, and racism are considered “excuses,” while low educational performance is blamed on low expectations and supposedly incompetent teachers and their unions. Instead of attempting to mitigate the effects of economic and social dislocation, the law favors market competition and “get tough” disciplinary sanctions designed to hold schools and their teachers accountable for student performance (measured exclusively through test scores). The Obama administration has broadly continued and intensified NCLB style reforms through policies such as Race to the Top where, as Ken Saltman (2010) has noted, “billions in public dollars are being dangled in front of cash strapped states in order to induce them to expand privatized and managerialist school reform…that imagine historically neglected schools as private enterprises that need to be subject to the ‘creative destruction’ of private markets” (p. 4).

Transforming Urban Schools

Market reforms have been particularly prevalent in the urban context. Large urban districts like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles have become “laboratories” for
educational reform experiments (Lipman, 2003-2011). This has foremost meant significant privatization efforts. Under systems of centralized Mayoral control, public-private partnerships with the corporate sector, as well as direct corporate management, large and small urban school districts have widely attempted to create competitive market systems in education through school closures, voucher programs, and the integration of charter, contract, and direct for-profit schools. School privatization and the creation of educational markets work to transfer responsibility for education from the state to individual consumer “choice” as parents are “empowered” to shop for educational access within a competitive education marketplace. Charter schools which are publicly funded but privately operated schools are the most common type of alternative school option. Charters were originally conceived in the 1980s by Al Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, to be small, public, teacher-run schools serving struggling students outside many of the constraints of the formal system. In some cases charter schools have opened up possibilities for needed experimentation and opportunities for progressive pedagogy outside the bureaucratic structures of large urban school systems. However, over the past ten years, charters have become part of a broader policy agenda to defund and privatize urban public schools, break-up the teachers unions, and move traditional secondary education toward a for-profit model (Karp, 2011). As Naomi Klein (2007) has pointed out, the strategic devaluing of the public sector presents business opportunities to institute reforms that enable the transfer of public resources like schools from the public trust to private interests. For example, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, market reformers presented the storm as a “golden opportunity” to “clean the slate” to reform the New Orleans Public Schools through privatization—today 60% of
New Orleans youth attend private charter schools (Saltman, 2007). There are myriad projects across North American cities that have seized on decades of neglect in order to privatize schools, utilities, transportation systems, and various other public entities. Such projects relinquish public control to private interests, funded, of course, through public revenue, representing a stark imbalance between public and private wealth and power.

The second pillar of urban educational restructuring has been the reframing of educational focus in line with the demands of the new economy. This has meant extensive emphasis on basic skills curricula and high-stakes testing. While educational reform rhetoric focuses on preparing students with the 21st century skills needed for college and work in the knowledge economy, the reality is that the vast majority of jobs in the coming decades are projected to be low-wage service jobs that will not require advanced knowledge and/or college degrees but basic skills and little more than onsite training. Very few jobs will be in information or STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 22 out of the top 30 and 7 out of the top 10 fastest growing employment niches are in “low-wage” and “very low-wage” sectors including in-home health workers, food preparation and service (including fast food), security guards, retail sales and customer service representatives (BLS, 2012). Standardized testing and scripted curricula work to shore-up and discipline a low-wage service oriented workforce by emphasizing rudimentary skills and knowledge (Aronowitz, 2008). Rather than promoting a broad liberal arts or progressive curriculum that enable youth to develop their intellectual capacities and human potential in common with others, test-based curricula reduces knowledge to an individualized, competitive and technical process. Within this context, African American and Latino/a youth are thought
to require the mechanistic discipline of “skill and drill” forms of learning, while in contrast their more affluent peers in the suburbs and selective enrollment and magnet schools are provided with elite academic tracks, arts and culture programs, sports facilities, and clean modern buildings replete with new science labs, technology, and supplementary resources and services. With smaller classes sizes and greater emphasis on student centered curriculum these schools exist in stark contrast to many of their urban counterparts, what Jonathon Kozol (2005) has referred to as “apartheid schools”—disinvested and segregated schools that under-serve the racialized poor in substandard buildings, large class sizes, and narrow curriculum. This places limits on innovative pedagogy and creative learning while sorting disadvantaged youth into low-wage service sector labor tracks and/or pushing them out of school and the formal economy altogether.

Under neoliberal discourse the “failures” of urban public schools are blamed largely on public schools, teachers, and localities as opposed to the effects of concentrated poverty and disinvestment in communities and public schools. However, the record of privatization, accountability, and testing has largely been one of failure rather than success (Saltman, 2012). For instance, according to a major Stanford University study, the majority of charter schools perform worse on average than their traditional public school counterparts (CREDO, 2009). Further, research studies from the U.S. and U.K. have noted (Ball, 2003; Gerwitz et al, 1995; Raey & Helen, 2003) that privatization and school “choice” initiatives have tended to most benefit those families with the cultural capital to acquire seats in the best schools over low-income families and youth with disabilities and/or low test-scores. Whereas public schools, at least in theory if not always in practice, operate to serve all young people while being subject to public
oversight—privately run charter, contract, and for-profit schools often have selective enrollment, lack public accountability, are anti-union, and operate under a commercial value structure often at odds with non-commercial democratic values. What has emerged in urban school districts is a deeply inequitable system with a top-tier of options for the elite, a small middle tier of semi-public options for a beleaguered and shrinking middle class, and a large bottom tier of disinvested public schools sorting low-income and racialized youth into a low-wage and no-wage future. Continued expansion of free market policies combined with concurrent economic crisis and austerity measures are exacerbating already vastly uneven educational opportunities for youth.

Securitizing Urban Schools and Criminalizing Youth

Concurrent with the shift to market-based educational reforms, urban public schools have become implicated in broader patterns of criminalization in the neoliberal city. Sociologist Paul Hirschfield (2008) has defined “school criminalization” as “the shift toward a crime control paradigm in the definition and management of the problem of student deviance” (p.80). He states that this “encompasses the manner in which policy makers and school actors think and communicate about the problem of student rule-violation as well as myriad dimensions of school praxis including architecture, penal procedure, and security technologies and tactics” (p. 80). Hirschfield observes that in the post-Columbine and post-9/11 context, public schools have broadly expanded systems of risk management, security, and punishment rooted in the symbolic codes and material practices of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. However, while all schools
have to some degree experienced heightened security arrangements, these practices have been much more prevalent and intensive in urban public schools serving high concentrations of low-income minority students. Hirschfield concludes, “in short, the gated community may be a more apt metaphor to describe the security transformation of affluent schools, while the prison metaphor better suits that of inner-city schools” (p. 84).

The atmosphere of criminological control in urban schools is defined by various interlocking technologies and practices imported from the corporate security sector and law enforcement. First, urban districts large and small have broadly integrated metal detectors, CCTV cameras, access control screening technologies, new spatial designs and architectural arrangements, and uniformed security officers into the everyday security and disciplinary infrastructures and procedures of schools. Second, there has been a vast expansion of direct law enforcement into public schools. For example, as of 2008, the New York City public schools had 5000 “school safety agents” supervised directly by the NYPD, along with an additional 200 armed officers, patrolling school hallways. This means that the NYPD’s school safety division is now larger than the entire police forces of Washington D.C., Detroit, Boston, or Las Vegas (NCLU). As various studies have noted, police presence has broadly transformed how public schools imagine and handle issues relating to security and student regulation and discipline (Kupchik, 2010; Lyons & Drew, 2006; Nolan, 2011). This is accompanied by the use of procedures imported from the prison system such as “lockdowns” combined with invasive contraband searches, where police perform drug and weapon sweeps in schools through random locker checks, bag searches, and frisking—for instance, nationwide 41% of middle schools and 61% of high schools used drug sniffing dogs for such purposes during the 2005-2006 school year
Students are now routinely arrested for offenses that used to be handled by teachers and administrators (AP, 2003 2010).

These trends have been supported by the socio-legal framework of “zero tolerance” which came into U.S. public education via the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994. The law tied increased Federal funding for schools to the adoption of new practices for dealing with and neutralizing crime on campuses. By applying mandatory across the board penalties for student rule violations, zero tolerance was designed to eliminate bias and strengthen consistency in punishments. However, research indicates that the policies have undermined the discretion of teachers and administrators for handling student rule violations (AP, 2005 2010). This has tended to shift responsibility for dealing with student misbehavior from a rehabilitative model guided by social and professional norms of child development, to a punitive one modeled on law enforcement policing (Robbins, 2009). As a result, studies indicate that the integration of zero tolerance has led to the rapid inflation of the number of students suspended, arrested, and expelled in public schools each year and that this has had a significantly disproportionate impact on minority students (AP, 2005 2010). The research also notes that this racial bias in punishment is largely unreflective of behavioral differences across geographical and racial lines, for instance, in the use and sale of illegal drugs in schools which is as prevalent in the suburbs as in the city (Simon, 2007). Uneven distributions of punishments have, however, mirrored the broader racial dimensions of imprisonment contributing to a “school to prison pipeline” (Nogeura, 2003; Johnson et al, 2001).

The expansion of a crime control paradigm in urban schools must be understood alongside broader political economic transformations. In reaction to fiscal crisis,
deindustrialization, capital flight, and unemployment in the mid-1970s—U.S. urban policy has focused public resources and attention to aggressive policing as a central way of containing social unrest. Jonathon Simon (2007) has coined the phrase “governing through crime” to describe how, out of the ashes of the New Deal consensus and Johnson’s Great Society, the “war on drugs” came to replace the “war on poverty” as the central plank in the state management of the poor. He argues that since the passage of Omnibus Crime Control Act in 1968, the logic of “governing through crime” has emerged as a dominant framework particularly in public schools where law enforcement and school organization have become ever more co-extensive. He states:

The merging of school and penal system has speeded the collapse of the progressive project of education and tilted the administration of schools toward a highly authoritarian and mechanistic model. This model collapses all the normal/expected/predictable vulnerabilities of youth into variations of the categories of criminal violence. This transformation is especially problematic since when the generally preferred “solution”—the tight policing of everyone—fails, as it inevitably will, the response is to shift responsibility onto everyone but the incumbent regime, primarily through such emotionally satisfying, but substantively empty, slogans such as “accountability” and “zero tolerance.” (p. 9)

In this milieu, education policies have turned toward privatization, accountability initiatives, testing, and exclusionary zero tolerance discipline as relatively cheap and cost-effective alternatives to investing in the universal modernization of public school
buildings, well-rounded curriculum, small class sizes, highly qualified teachers, community involvement, and other robust ameliorative support services for youth such as restorative approaches to violence prevention and other social work services that could uplift and improve struggling schools. These factors have altered the regulatory function of urban schooling and school space from one oriented primarily toward economic and social reproduction to one of containment and punitive control. Hirschfield (2008) notes:

…schools’ altered disciplinary and security regimes can be traced largely to deindustrialization, which shifted impacted schools and their disciplinary practices from productive ends toward a warehousing function, and the ensuing massive criminal justice expansion that deprived schools of potential resources. Aided by a crime-fixated and punitive political climate, these changes helped reorient school actors more toward the prevention and punishment of crime, and less toward the preparation of workers and citizens. (p. 81)

The emergence of criminological security and surveillance practices in schools also reflects shifting cultural attitudes and contemporary “moral panics” over youth (Grossberg, 2005). Jennifer Tilton (2010) has suggested that “youth today call to mind a troubling set of images: kids failing school or falling behind, ‘babies having babies,’ gang members, and school shooters” (p.3). These moral panics “have distorted our image of youth and our public policy responses at the turn of the 21st century. We are afraid for ‘our own kids’ but deeply fearful of ‘other people’s children’” (p. 3). Henry Giroux (2009) suggests that the punitive treatment of young people in their schools and
communities ultimately represents a profound moral crisis inextricably connected to a culture where consumer values trump civic values and democratic ideals; where a cult of self-interest replaces bonds of solidarity leaving isolated individuals outside the graces of the commonweal; and where war has seemingly become one of the last expressions of collective identity. In this framework that he evocatively describes as a “theatre of cruelty,” Giroux argues that youth, particularly those marginalized by class and color, have become a “generation of suspects” rather than a vital source of hope for the future.

Public Schools as Sites of Securitization and Precarious Reproduction

Schools have long been the central public institution charged with directing young people into their future roles as workers and citizens (Durkheim, 1961; Dewey, 1944). Since the inception of the common school movement in the 19th century under Horace Mann, the social functions of schools have been directed to workforce discipline and acculturating both immigrant and non-immigrant youth into national identification and citizenship (Tyack, 1974). As I have detailed, the emergence of neoliberal governance and the postindustrial economy has had a significant impact on these processes. As this analysis suggests, processes of securitization and relations of security and insecurity in educational contexts need to be understood as deeply implicated and embedded within the socializing and social reproductive functions of public schooling. I want to highlight in this final section theoretical perspectives for understanding tensions in these regulatory and socializing functions of schools in terms of what I refer to as precarious reproduction.

There is a long tradition of critical sociology that has linked educational processes
to the sorting of youth for their future roles in the workforce. In their classic study, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (2011) analyzed the history of school reform since the late 19th century in order to demonstrate a “correspondence principal” between schooling and the economic and social relations of production and accumulation. Bowles and Gintis argued that contrary to operating on a meritocratic basis, schools mirror and reproduce the hierarchical divisions of labor and inequality immanent to “the market, property, and power relationship which define the capitalist system” (p.11). They do so by sorting students according to socioeconomic class, race, gender, and ability into different hierarchical educational opportunities, academic tracks, and fields of study. Bowles and Gintis observed that bottom tier schools and low-level academic tracks tend to emphasize rudimentary skills and rule following behavior suitable for low-wage factory and manual labor, while affluent schools and elite tracks encourage the forms of thinking and skills necessary for college readiness and future positions as managers and professionals. Schools also train and socialize students into the rationalized processes of the modern workplace by teaching punctuality, deference to authority, and individual competition and accountability through various methods of external rewards and punishments such as individualized grading, schedules, and competitive examinations. Lastly, schools manage reserve armies of surplus workers both by warehousing youth who would otherwise be entering the labor market and by “creating surpluses of skilled labor sufficiently extensive to render effective the prime weapon of the employer in disciplining labor—the power to hire and fire” (p.11).

Political economic perspectives have offered an incisive lens to understand the role of schools in reproducing inequality. Rather than situating inequality as derived from
some inherent characteristic of students such as IQ, or simply blaming public schools or
teachers, they have crucially alerted us to the ways that inequality is internal to the
normal functioning of the market, property and power relations that define capitalist
systems. However, these perspectives have also rightly been criticized as being overly
deterministic and blind to the dynamics of culture, contestation, and agency in
educational contexts. Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977), for
instance, have linked social reproduction processes in schools to the negotiation of
cultural capital—i.e. those embodied forms of speech, style, and physical comportment
that demarcate the subtle markers of symbolic status and distinction. Schools tend to
reinforce and reward upper and middle class forms of cultural capital within daily school
interactions thereby serving to exclude and silence the experiences, identities, and
knowledge of working class, racial, and sexual minority students. These struggles over
cultural capital and school knowledge are far from static or one-sided relations of
domination. Rather they represent contradictory and contested processes. Scholars such
as Paul Willis (1977), Henry Giroux (1983), and Angela McRobbie (1978), for instance,
have provided essential insight into how young people across the lines of race, class,
gender, ability, and sexuality exercise their own agency and talk back to structures of
authority and resist dominant school relations. Furthermore, schools are not institutions
that simply reproduce class relationships and/or legitimate inequality through an
ideological smokescreen of meritocracy. Educational spheres have indeed functioned
historically as key sites for what John Dewey (1944) described as the “realization of
democratic ideals” where working people, communities, and youth might develop and
exercise the capacities and practices necessary to attain greater social and political
recognition, material security, and push for democratic change and possibility.

Any sophisticated theory of neoliberal urban schooling has to take all of these dynamics into account. Schools reflect broader contradictions and relations of power and domination in the economic and social sphere while providing a potential site for developing the forms of agency and consciousness necessary to democratically alter these relations. However, the perspectives of Bowles and Gintis, Bourdieu and Passeron, Willis, McRobbie, and others, were largely developed in a Fordist era when the factory occupied a central referent in the organization of society and when liberal social policies broadly supported a social contract rooted in collective security and investment. Questions thus emerge as to how we are to understand these processes amidst the economic and political realities immanent to globalization and neoliberal governance. As I have tried to highlight throughout this chapter, securitization as the interweaving of market governance and criminological discipline highlights tensions in contemporary educational policy and the socializing and sorting processes of schools. Public schools in the United States that serve high proportions of impoverished urban youth have been socially devalued, neglected, and subjected to privatization and market management. These schools are populated by young people living in precarious conditions facing highly unstable economic futures in the stratified global economy. How are we then to understand the regulatory and reproductive functions of urban public schools today when the corporation and the prison have seemingly eclipsed the factory as the primary economic and institutional referents in schools, and the consumer/worker and the criminal have emerged as the principal normative markers of those thought deserving and undeserving of social and political security and recognition as valued citizens?
One angle to approach these questions is through perspectives on the historical operation of social regulation and control. Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, Michel Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary regulation found its apex under Fordism and the postwar Keynesian state, where institutions like schools were tightly bound to national systems of industrial production and paradigms of subjectivity oriented around the worker as a producer citizen. Scholars have argued that neoliberal formations have altered the dynamics of social regulation and that this can be explained by a transition from a Fordist disciplinary society to a post-Fordist society of control (Deleuze, 1995; Fraser, 2003; Hardt & Negri, 2001). Foucault’s analysis suggests that Fordist disciplinary arrangements sought to manage populations through rationalized strategies within bounded institutions such as the school, prison, family, trade union, factory, and army barracks producing labor ready and hierarchically conditioned subject citizens. In contrast, under post-Fordism, disciplinary institutions are said to be everywhere in crisis. This is expressed by dysfunctional schools; the breakdown of the nuclear family; the erosion of unions and the casualization of employment; the transition from notions of universal citizenship and collective responsibility to forms of individualized responsibility and consumer citizenship; and the decline of a rehabilitative ideal in social affairs and the stark extension of state power in the realm of policing, punishment, and social control. These transformations are thought to coincide with and contribute to a post-disciplinary environment of control and regulation. For instance, Nancy Fraser (2003) has written that Fordist discipline was “totalizing, socially concentrated within a national frame, and oriented to self-regulation...mobilizing ‘useful [if not wholly docile] bodies’ in nationally bounded societies of mass production and mass consumption” (p.
164-165). In contrast, post-Fordism and neoliberal culture have reshaped relations of
governmentality toward something increasingly “multilayered as opposed to nationally
bounded, dispersed and marketized as opposed to socially concentrated, increasingly
repressive as opposed to self-regulating” (p. 166-167).

This does not mean that institutions like public schools no longer function as key
sites of social reproduction and discipline as outlined by Bowles and Gintis, Bourdieu
and Passeron, or Foucault. To be sure there are important continuities and discontinuities
between Fordist and post-Fordist educational and social regulation. First, in the neoliberal
control society, public educational systems certainly do not experience a loosening of
bureaucratic authority or regulation. As I have pointed out in this chapter, the cultural and
disciplinary parameters of schools are increasingly defined by market-based incentives
and disincentives, privatization and public-private partnerships (NGOS, Corporations,
Philanthropic Foundations), as well as by modes of administrative auditing and
accountability modeled on the management structure of the corporation as opposed to the
factory (even while many, if not most public schools, still formally retain strong elements
of the factory model). This has tended to significantly expand centralized bureaucratic
control and management in education rather than loosen it. Additionally, urban public
schools have certainly not totally abdicated their role in socializing and sorting youth into
future roles as workers and citizens although this alters its form as well. The dominant
view is that educational focus and investments should be geared primarily toward the
development of little “entrepreneurial competitors” primed for outwitting their Chinese
and Indian rivals in the global information economy along with “warrior soldiers” ready
to defend the homeland. These archetypes occupy the privileged positions for 21st
century youth as they transition to adulthood. However, extensive social disinvestment in low-income communities and schools, narrowed curriculum, and the inanities of skill and drill testing in socially devalued schools raise questions as to which youth are thought deserving to take-up these roles in the future. Further, the transformation of school environments to a crime control paradigm of metal detectors, screening technologies, CCTV cameras, and extensive law enforcement presence signals a shift in the disciplinary function of urban schools. This has meant that that many urban public schools particularly those at the margins of the neoliberal city serving economically precarious communities appear less invested in socializing youth for economic and civic engagement than with containment and control. Such punitive climates situate students primarily as either potential victims or criminals as opposed to future workers or democratic citizens while doing little to address the systemic insecurity that permeates their lives. Instead, they socialize youth to accept a diminished future marked by uncertainty and daily engagements with repressive forms of carceral authority.

The perspectives I have outlined throughout this chapter suggest that security has become both privatized and militarized. On one hand, security is imagined as an individual responsibility to be managed through the market as opposed to a collectively lived and democratically mediated condition. On the other hand, security has become conceived through the lens of crime control and the creeping diffusion of militarized responses to social problems across institutional sectors and circulations of everyday urban life. We can see how this operates within the context of educational policy where in the name of security (economic, social, national), public schools are subject to market governance and the extension of criminalizing practices which have contributed to
altering the educative and civic operation and mission of school systems and environments. My concern moving forward to my case study of Chicago school policy and the Ellison Square neighborhood and Ellison High School is to examine how these phenomena are manifest in urban and educational contexts in ways that define conditions of security not only in terms of governance but also as an existential and political reality delimiting social relations and future pathways for youth. In what comes next, I turn my attention to looking at these issues in Chicago and at the process of doing critical ethnography within the institutionalized risk and security cultures. This lays the foundation for the grounded case study in the remaining chapters.
A light rain was falling as I made my way from the bus stop toward Romero High School on Chicago’s Westside. As I approached the school, the first thing I noticed was the police vehicle parked in front—a boxy, truck-like paddy wagon. There was an additional police cruiser across the street. The school itself is a massive pre-war brick structure featuring about twenty different front doors that are all closed and locked except for one at the far right hand side. I notice the unmistakable black plastic eye of a surveillance camera above the open door. As I enter the school, I am immediately met by a male African American security guard dressed in a blue uniform. Not official police, I realize, despite the fact that he does have a pair of handcuffs on his belt. I am asked to put my bag through an airport-like security screener and another similarly dressed female security guard examines its contents via a closed circuit monitor. As I step through the metal detector I raise my arms and the male guard gives me a halfhearted pat down. Next I sign in at the security desk and make my way up the stairs to the main office. On the stairwell, I pass by a large brightly painted mural. It’s a monument to military service featuring a proud looking Latina in camouflage fatigues set against an American flag background. In the office, I am asked to take a seat and wait for the principal whom I have come to see regarding potential access for my research. Above the administrative assistant’s desk are mounted four closed circuit television monitors scrolling through images from the school’s many surveillance cameras. From my seat, I have an
unobstructed view of the hallway. A white, middle age, male cop walks by the office. He has a semi-automatic pistol in his belt and has his hands tucked nonchalantly into the sides of his bullet proof vest. Above a row of red metallic lockers on the other side of the hall is another surveillance camera. Disconcertingly, it appears pointed in my direction. I look to the CCTV monitors on the wall. After a few sequences of scattered images beamed in from cameras throughout the school, an image of me sitting in the office appears on one of the screens. Surreal, I think, welcome to the postindustrial urban school where everyone including researchers are regarded as potential security threats and suspects.

I begin with this reflection from a visit to Romero High School in order highlight a couple of tendencies regarding educational environments and social research in urban districts today. Social researchers, like students, teachers, and other adults, are becoming subject to enhanced institutional surveillance and security protocols. This is concurrent with the general reconfiguration of urban school spaces and practices within a broader culture of risk management dominated by relations of mistrust and criminological control. Moreover, I want to also suggest that this description of my visit to Romero High School prefigures how an everyday aesthetic of fear and security within urban public schools intersects with a more generalized neoliberal/corporate managerialism that has contributed to the marginalization and restriction of qualitative educational research in school spaces. This has occurred within a context of broader efforts to domesticate social research under a neo-positivist framework that favors market oriented technical rationality and risk management over social engagement at the level of policy, research
and governance. This is placing new restrictions on educational research in urban schools that limit inquiry, research access, and possibilities for informed democratic change.

My aim in this chapter is to reflect on the interconnection between context, methodology, and neoliberal management and their impact on the practice of critical social research in educational settings. First, the chapter discusses the Chicago context. Much has been written about Chicago as a postindustrial city (Koval et al., 2006; Street, 2007; Wacquant, 2008) and recent scholarship has also provided excellent overviews and analysis of the neoliberalization of the city’s educational policy and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) (Saltman, 2007; Lipman, 2003–2011). I focus mainly here on linkages between globalization, social inequality, and emerging patterns of austerity in light of the 2008 economic crisis. This provides insight into the present economic and political climate in which this research was conducted. It also sheds light on the context in which the last two decades of educational policy and governance has unfolded in the city.

Second, I turn to critically reflecting upon the research process within the CPS particularly in how my struggles to gain access to the field highlight emergent difficulties in conducting research in urban public schools in relation to the new managerialism and cultures of security and risk management. Lastly, I reflect on critical ethnography as a practice and detail further limitations and challenges to the research within Chicago.

**Chicago as Context:**

**From Global City to City of Austerity**
“When you’re starving and your back is up against the wall and you see no other option, then what are you supposed to do?”

-Community college student in Chicago

Globalization and neoliberal development have had a significant impact on Chicago. Since the “urban crisis” of the late 1960s and early 1970s the city has been shaped by number of intersecting processes: deindustrialization and suburbanization; the growth of service, information, and finance sectors and a shift to contingent forms of labor; the privatization and marketization of public services; and stark urban poverty and social polarization. However, unlike many of its “rustbelt” counterparts such as Detroit and Cleveland, over the last three decades, Chicago has been broadly successful in making the transition from an industrial and manufacturing economy to a service, tourism, and finance model. In many respects, Chicago has emerged as a “world city” (Castells, 1993) or “global city” (Sassen, 2001)—defined as a strategic site for the management and flow of information, labor, and capital on a global scale. Since the late 1980s, under the direction of former Mayor Richard M. Daley (1989-2011) and now under current Mayor Rahm Emmanuel, Chicago’s political elite have followed a neoliberal playbook to make the city an attractive site for capital investment and a competitive force within global markets. It has done so through organizations like World Business Chicago, a non-profit firm chaired by Daley, committed to “marketing Chicago’s competitive advantages, coordinate business retention and attraction efforts, and to enhance Chicago’s business friendly climate” (WBC, 2007). Chicago is currently home to 19 billionaires, dozens of

transnational corporations including 20 in the fortune 500 such as Kraft, Motorola, United Airlines, and McDonalds, and the city hosts the largest securities exchange in the world processing trillions in speculative capital per day.

These transformations have been accompanied by significant uneven development in the city. Chicago’s postindustrial era has been marked by a significant downtown proximate economic boom visible in the construction of new corporate office towers; chic retail, arts, and entertainment complexes; and upscale condos and residential housing developments. However, while these commercial and tourist areas have flourished in and around the downtown core, Chicago’s historically neglected and racially segregated neighborhoods have largely stagnated under the combined weight of concentrated poverty, social disinvestment, and generalized insecurity (d’Eramo, 2002; Street, 2007; Wacquant, 2008; Wilson, 1996). This reflects deep historical and political divisions and Chicago’s long held status as the most ethnoracially segregated city in the United States. Chicago is a tri-ethnic city that is roughly 34 percent black, 33 percent white, and 27 percent Latino. Two thirds of the city’s nearly 1 million African Americans live in neighborhoods that are 80% black, while over half live in hypersegregated and impoverished communities that are over 96% black (Bogira, 2011). The city’s growing Latino population also experiences significant residential segregation. Further, real estate speculation and gentrification has contributed to pushing/pricing-out many low-income and working people of all backgrounds into economically declining neighborhoods and/or out of the city altogether into impoverished inner and outer suburbs (Ibid). 14

14 The key text for understanding the historical causes and effects of urban racial segregation is Massey and Denton’s American Apartheid (1993). Wacquant also provides a detailed theoretical and empirical account including extensive statistics of how and why urban ghettoization has persisted in Chicago in his Urban
John Koval (2006) uses the metaphor of an “hourglass economy” to describe postindustrial Chicago. This is defined on the one hand, by stagnating wages and the decline of stable, full time, middle income and working class employment opportunity and, on the other hand, soaring pay for executives and managers and a tax structure and spending priorities that have contributed to public disinvestment, massive budget deficits, and the steady upward redistribution of wealth. This polarization of work, wealth, and opportunity in Chicago has been driven by neoliberal policy. During the 1990s and 2000s the Daley administration presided over an extensive privatization agenda and cuts to public education, housing, health and family services, and community and social welfare programs. Highlights include selling off the Chicago Parking System and the Chicago Skyway to Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds—decisions that are slated to deprive the city of billions of dollars in crucial future revenue. Furthermore, at the federal level, tax cuts for the rich since the Reagan era (Bush’s cuts alone cost $3 trillion between 2001-2011), profligate spending on militarism and foreign wars ($8 trillion over the same 10 year period), have dovetailed with reductions in federal, state, and local investments in social services. At the state level, a report put out by the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability reports that in the period between 2002-2013, Illinois will have cut $1.64 billion from human services, $2.8 billion from K-12 and higher education, and $277 million from health care (CTBA, 2012). This is experienced at the local level in cuts to libraries, schools, health care, and housing alongside public sector layoffs (8,900 teachers across Illinois in 2010 alone) and wage and benefit concessions for city workers ($32

Outcasts (2008). He cites for main factors: (1) deindustrialization and the dualization of the employment structure under post-Fordism; (2) historical exclusionary residential segregation and state housing policy; (3) the retrenchment of the welfare state; (4) the “planned shrinkage” and collapse of public institutions in economically and racially isolated communities (pp. 69-88).
Public disinvestment has been found to have a greater impact on low and middle income residents. For example, gains made by an emergent black middle class in the 1990s have eroded during the recession as African Americans are disproportionately impacted by public sector layoffs (Williams, 2011).

The erosion of the public sphere in Chicago is one element in the broader erosion of human security that began well before 2008 but accelerated in the aftermath of the economic crisis and recession. The Heartland Alliance (2010-2011) reports that in Illinois “the Great Recession has crumbled economic stability for millions of families in the form of massive job loss, cut backs in hours, the elimination of work benefits, skyrocketing foreclosures and bankruptcies, and the eroding value of retirement investments.” Their data paint a stunning picture of social insecurity in Chicago and across Illinois:

- As of 2011, there were nearly 1 million Illinoisans unemployed or underemployed (working fewer hours than they would like) and many more have stopped looking for work altogether. Workers in the lowest income group in Illinois had a 1930’s-like unemployment rate of 27.0% in the 4th quarter of 2009;
- Almost 100,000 workers in Illinois who work full time, year round still fall below the poverty line. Byron Dickens, a Chicago resident, describes his situation: “Working 40 hours a week in a minimum wage job I don’t earn enough to cover my housing, food, transportation, and all my medical expenses. And I don’t even have a family”;  
- Between 2008-2009 unemployment claims in the Chicago region increased by a staggering 30%; there were 128,049 new foreclosure filings; and 253,000 more
people in the Chicago region (including 87,000 children) fell into poverty ($22,050 for a family of four);

- As of 2011, there were 1.1 million (13.6%) residents in the Chicago region living in poverty with 482,297 classified as living in “extreme poverty,” while an additional 1.4 million have low-incomes (17.3%);

- Unemployment among youth has increased 34% in the Chicago region since 2007 and is much higher than rates for older workers while the average amount of student loan debt among graduating seniors from Illinois colleges is $23,885;

- In addition to those living in poverty, many more households make less than it takes to meet the cost of living in the Chicago region. Around 40% of Chicago region households have annual incomes below $50,000, which is near the amount it takes for a one-parent family with two kids to make ends meet;

- In more than half of Illinois counties at least 1 out of every 4 kids experiences food insecurity. In the Chicago region, there were 1,202,180 people experiencing food insecurity including 488,740 children;

- In 2008 an additional 10,600 Chicago Public School students were reported as homeless, an increase of 32 percent over five years.

These statistics point to deep structural problems that no amount of personal “entrepreneurial spirit,” no matter how robust, can fix. There are simply not enough jobs that pay a living wage to go around. Slashing government only adds more pain, making it harder for working people to meet their needs and to lift themselves out of poverty. Given this stark snapshot of decline, the Heartland Alliance concludes that:
Long-term economic shifts, which have left millions in low-wage jobs that do not pay family-supporting wages, point to the need for a constant and responsive safety net to help families bridge the gap between what they are paid and what it takes to make ends meet. Yet years of disinvestment in Illinois’ safety net, combined with the effects of the recession and an antiquated state revenue system, have resulted in an erosion of human services across the state. The implications of massive service cuts to those experiencing poverty—many of whom rely on state-funded services in their communities literally for survival, particularly those in extreme poverty—will be nothing short of devastating (HA, 2010, p. 1).

Meanwhile, as the human insecurity deepens, the United States continues seemingly limitless investment in militarism and domestic security and policing. Total spending on defense and homeland security in the U.S. in 2012 is estimated somewhere between $1.1 and $1.4 trillion dollars which is greater than the next 50 countries combined. Chicago’s budget is no exception. Over the last ten years, Chicago has spent billions on its militarized surveillance and policing capacities building a hi-tech “Homeland Security Grid” that includes over 10,000 interconnected surveillance cameras, new computer systems of data tracking and risk management, and paramilitary SWAT and anti-drug units. The 2011 city budget, for example, which was 3 billion dollars less than in 1989, allocated 68% of its 6.1 billion dollar total toward policing and emergency management (Fangman, 2010). This underscores years of misplaced priorities and the development of a containment infrastructure in Chicago aimed at managing the racialized poor and urban disorder stemming from employment stagnation and decline of social commitments. In
2002 there were more black males in Illinois prisons than in college while the total number of black males with a felony record (48% convicted on non-violent drug offenses) was equivalent in number to 80% of the total adult black male workforce in Chicago (Street, 2002). Investments in security and policing have also been aimed increasingly at subverting and criminalizing dissent. For instance, in the wake of the Occupy movement and a NATO summit in May of 2012, Chicago has developed emergency ordinances that give police added powers to stop, detain, and interrogate civilians suspected of having any links to democratic protest activities.

**Education Policy and Reform in Chicago**

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) serve approximately 400,000 students in 675 schools making it the third largest school district in the United States. The CPS serves an overwhelmingly low-income population of mostly Black and Hispanic youth. Almost 90% of CPS students are visible minorities and almost 90% live below the poverty line. Like other urban school districts across the United States the CPS is plagued by inequitable access to resources, an unacceptable 55% drop-out rate, and perennially low-test scores. Pauline Lipman (2003 2011), who has written the definitive accounts of contemporary educational restructuring in Chicago, notes that the city “is more than a rich example. It is incubator, test case, and model for the neoliberal urban education agenda” (p.19). Since the 1990s, Chicago’s corporate and political elite have led the way in developing and implementing a variety of market-based educational strategies. For instance, Chicago’s 1995 reforms served as the blueprint for what was to become the No
Child Behind Act. Furthermore, largely under the guidance of former CPS CEO and current Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2001-2009), Chicago introduced the Mayoral control model, unelected school boards, mandatory scripted curricula, top-down accountability mandates, value-added assessments, and competitive high-stakes standardized tests. These policies and promises of greater accountability were met with initial support by communities rightly fed-up with decades of disinvestment and failure in the system. However, they have since become the object of extensive criticism and community opposition due to their lack of community input in decision making, their broad and documented failure to improve systemic achievement, and their implication in continued disinvestments in public schools and educational inequities (Lipman, 2011).

Chicago has also been at the forefront of school privatization. In 2002, the Commercial Club of Chicago, an unelected body constituted by the city’s financial elite, wrote the draft of a proposal that was to become the Renaissance 2010 plan. The plan presented a large scale urban privatization initiative and the creation of an educational marketplace. The policy called for closing up to 100 public schools and opening 60-70 charter and contract schools (publicly funded non-unionized schools run by contracted vendors) and a smaller number of performance schools (selective public schools subject to Renaissance 2010 guidelines). As of 2009, the city had closed or phased out 59 schools, opened 46 charters, 15 contract schools, and 31 selective performance schools greatly expanding privatization of the CPS. While touted as a bold initiative to dramatically improve education through choice and market competition, only 16 of the 92 new schools reached state averages in 2009 on state standardized tests. Among these, only 8 were charter schools. As it turns out, these successful schools benefited heavily
from private foundation money, while the other 8 were selective magnet schools that pick and choose students based on ability and family connections (Catalyst, 2010). Rather than promoting universal social and educational investments in order to improve struggling public schools, critics have argued that Renaissance 2010 has largely been geared to forwarding private control over public education in order to cheapen its long term cost, dismantle the teachers’ union, open up new avenues for commercialism, and to remake neighborhoods in the interest of real estate speculation. Lipman’s (2011) analysis, for instance, points to how Renaissance 2010 has used school closings to lubricate gentrification and financial speculation by closing schools in conjunction with the demolition and privatization of public housing in impoverished African American neighborhoods in order to displace residents and use new schools of “choice” as real estate anchors for professionals. She suggests that this is representative of a neoliberal agenda to remake the city in line with the interests of the financial and business elite.

Finally, with pioneering market-based educational policies, Chicago has also been at the forefront of redefining educational environments through new surveillance and crime control paradigms of security and discipline. In the wake of a fatal shooting at Tilden High School in 1992, then Mayor Richard M. Daley seized on school security issues and youth violence in the media in order to consolidate Mayoral control over schools and to promote a range of “zero tolerance” and “exclusionary measures” that codified harsh mandatory punishments that soon “diffused across the country” (Hagen et al, 2003). Daley also mandated metal detectors in all public high schools and created the School Patrol Unit (SPU) which greatly expanded police presence in CPS schools. In its first year alone the SPU in conjunction with the “zero tolerance regime” made 9,822
arrests of students at schools in the CPS most for low-level and non-violent offenses (Hirshfield, 2010, p. 42). Further, under Daley, the CPS incorporated a large number of security guards and surveillance cameras into schools that are directly connected to law enforcement via the city’s “Homeland Security Grid.” Currently, the CPS has over 2,000 security guards on its payroll at a cost of over $50 million a year, roughly 15 times more than the district spends on college and career coaches (VOYCE, 2010). This pays for an average of seven security guards at each school, with an additional “floating” reserve of guards that are dispatched to “hot spots”—schools that are identified through computerized risk assessment models as having immediate safety concerns. The research indicates that the law and order turn in the CPS has been responsible for dramatic escalation in suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in schools and the perpetuation of a school-to-prison pipeline (AP, 2005 2010). It has also contributed to transforming educational spaces as the semiotics of the prison—guards, lockdowns, and containment—work to instantiate new cultural formations and social relations in Chicago’s schools.

**Barriers to Access and Inquiry:**

**Risk Culture and the Management of Educational Research**

In large urban districts like Chicago, one of the consequences of neoliberal governance is the increasing difficulty of gaining access to research sites due to new bureaucratic and institutional forms of risk management. Access for the research conducted in this project involved a complex and protracted negotiation with the CPS. Beginning with my first trip to Romero High School (originally my proposed research site) that I describe in the
opening paragraphs of this chapter, I began what turned out to be nine months of administrative gymnastics in order to gain access to the field. Before I was granted eligibility to apply for the CPS ethical review, I found myself having to acquire a variety of permissions beginning with the principal at Romero. As it turned out, the principal, while seemingly amenable to the project, would not provide her signed approval without a district supervisor’s approval and signed permission. However, the district supervisor refused to grant his approval until the ethical review was completed. But the CPS ethical review board would not review my proposal without a principal’s signature! While everyone I talked with seemingly expressed genuine interest in the research and agreed it was on an important and relevant topic, my impression was that both the principal and the district supervisor were both fearful to take responsibility as the research dealt with the politically sensitive areas of security and inequality in the CPS.

My access negotiations dragged on for several months through the fall of 2009 until I finally acquired the permissions and signatures necessary for the CPS to make my proposal eligible for review. However, after approximately six weeks, the CPS ethical review committee rejected the proposal on the grounds that they would need the permission of the CPS Director of the Office of Safety and Security, Mike Shields—a former police officer widely known in Chicago as Michelle Obama’s cousin. Once his signature was obtained they would reconsider my application. After I was able to obtain his signature, the CPS had little choice but to accept my proposal but only after they restricted the amount of time I could spend in the field—cutting it down from two semesters to one—while also limiting the number of formal interviews with students and staff. Moreover, it was at this point that the principal at Romero backed out of the project
for reasons unknown to me. Thus, I had to find a new site. After networking through my contacts in Chicago I was able to find teachers interested in facilitating the research at Ellison High School (EHS). The principal at EHS was also amenable, even enthusiastic, and I was able to receive approval for access nine months after beginning the process. To put this in perspective, my original proposal sailed through the International Ethical Review Committee at the University of Toronto on its first draft, certainly not unheard of, but notable because many, if not most, submissions are sent back for at least one round of revisions before being accepted. One could conjecture that the administrative blockages were due mainly to a bureaucratic culture wary of qualitative inquiry.

My access negotiations reminded me of Franz Kafka’s novel *The Trial*. Like the character Josef K, no one would or could take responsibility for my case. There didn’t appear to be a center, only an endless and impersonal bureaucratic authority as my case was passed from one official to another all hoping, no doubt, that I would just simply admit defeat and go away. A former professor of mine who has done extensive research in the Chicago Public Schools remarked in an email to me that she was surprised that I was able to get as far as I did, and frankly, she was somewhat amazed that I was eventually granted approval at all. Apparently, more and more of her graduate students and colleagues are being denied access to conduct research in the CPS. The message is quite clear: certain kinds of questions, methodologies, and researchers are unwelcome and/or are viewed as potentially threatening from the standpoint of risk management.

This is the reality of educational research within neoliberal managerialism and audit culture. On one hand, qualitative researchers are contending with more intensive institutional efforts to govern risk through various technocratic management procedures.
This has meant increased bureaucratic obstacles in gaining access to educational sites and it has meant the increased surveillance of researchers once access has been granted. On the other hand, these obstacles to access have been coupled with concurrent efforts to undermine and marginalize critical research. In the United States, this represents a coordinated attempt by the federal government and the National Research Council (NRC), in collaboration with neoliberal and neoconservative think tanks and policy research centers, to legislate and discipline educational research under a narrow definition of “applied science” and a resurgent neo-positivist/quantitative “evidence-based” framework (Baez & Boyles, 2009; Lather, 2010). This has meant pushing for professional guidelines and research standards rooted in a reductive notion of science that aligns with a corporate policy framework ideologically attuned to market oriented accountability mandates, basic skills curricula, data tracking, privatization, and standardized testing. Such efforts to domesticate educational research have created funding barriers for qualitative projects as well as spurred attacks from both liberals and conservatives against colleges of education and lines of qualitative research inquiry.

Certainly, none of this is new as evidenced by various intellectual movements which have called into question the contours of instrumental rationality and positivism in the social sciences. Here, one might distinguish two broad lines of thought. First, there is the tradition in critical theory stemming from Max Weber that runs through the Frankfurt School and the constructivist approach to institutional sociology inspired by Michel Foucault (Weber, 1964; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Foucault, 1977). This line of thought has sought to trouble assumptions regarding the inherently progressive character of modernist forms of reason and has made important contributions to the analysis of
rationalization as an ideology and as a technology of discipline within various social contexts. Second, a variety of diverse perspectives have been developed over the last three decades in cultural studies, feminist and postcolonial criticism, and in the philosophy of science that have called into question representations of a pure objective image of science (Hacking, 1986; Harding, 1987; Latour, 1988; Said, 1989). This has included identifying the contingent and socially conditioned nature of all knowledge claims while uncovering how scientific methods are always already embedded within material and symbolic systems of value, power, and observer bias that work to shape research questions and outcomes historically in ways that have justified relations of ecological and social domination. Contrary to advocating subjectivism, relativism, or irrationalism, the most astute of these philosophical perspectives have worked to deepen our understanding and ethical attunements to scientific inquiry as a value laden activity. Far from rejecting science, they have sought to deepen its moral and empirical purpose.

In the contemporary moment where corporate power and the political right cynically appropriate the rhetoric of science (in the case of ‘evidence-based’ educational policy and reform) or work to discredit it when it contradicts their interests and worldview (in the case of climate change), it appears that a critical and substantive debate over the democratic purpose of science remains of urgent public concern. Within this context it is imperative to understand how efforts to discipline social research in education within a resurgent positivism are grounded in neoliberal managerialism. Such an understanding is necessary for thinking through limitations and possibilities for what educational research and social science can and should mean within our current historical moment. Ultimately, these trends are leading to the marginalization of qualitative
research projects: 1) lines of inquiry are limited and constrained; 2) social researchers increasingly have to justify the value of their projects within measurement based logics; 3) and, as a result, the voices and experiences of teachers and students are devalued as sources of knowledge in both research contexts and within wider educational debates; 4) further, this marginalization of social experience and the reframing of research within a neo-positivist frame inhibits broader analysis and discussion of the economic, social, and political valences of contemporary educational policies and practices 5) and, finally, this contributes to undermining efforts to promote justice and equity within curriculum, schools, and communities and to deepen the purpose of public education within a democratic society.

**Taking the New Managerialism to School**

Patti Lather (2010) notes that while many assumed in the late 1990s that the so-called “paradigm” or “science” wars were largely over and that qualitative research methodologies had found a secure footing in professional practice, a renewed neo-positivism has emerged that tracks with the broader ideological and political coordinates of neoliberal marketization and neoconservative politics. This is often described simply as the “new managerialism” or sometimes in more Orwellian terms as Total Quality Management. It is characterized by a broad attempt to redefine institutional goals and values within an objectivist and corporate inflected data-driven audit culture. As a dominant form of what Michel Foucault (2007) referred to as a “governmental rationality,” the new managerialism links together systems of knowledge, technology,
and practice at multiple scales from state formations and policy frameworks to institutional orders and forms of everyday conduct and subjectivity.

The new managerialism works to legitimate itself largely through appeals to efficiency and through promises of less regulation, greater flexibility, and an end to the hierarchical and bureaucratic arrangements of the Keynesian welfare state. Within the context of school organization including curriculum and research, measurement and outcomes-based practices such as standardized lessons, testing, teacher evaluation and value-added assessments are held-up as objective and supposedly progressive responses to longstanding educational failures. Numbers do not lie, nor do they have an agenda, so the popular wisdom goes. Additionally, holding teachers responsible for outcomes like meeting test score benchmarks would appear on the surface to promote professional conduct, raise expectations, and ensure accountability. These logics have worked to lend moral justification and an air of ‘commonsense’ legitimacy to the new managerial reforms. However, as Bronwyn Davies (2003) observes, the suturing of business-led data-driven policies and definitions of professional practice to the rhetoric of political neutrality and equity has worked to significantly suppress critical reflection and debate over the philosophical and ethical substance of the policies particularly as they de-professionalize teachers, limit research inquiry, and narrow the curriculum. Davies writes that it is not only the strong sense of inevitability of the new managerialism that limits critical reflection, but pervasive insecurity and fear. She states that:

Within the terms of the new system individuals will be presented with an (often overwhelming) range of pressing choices and administrative tasks for which they
are responsible. But any questioning of the system itself is silenced or trivialized. The system itself is characterized as both natural and inevitable. Resistance to it by individuals…is constituted as ignorance of what the ‘real’ (financial) ‘bottom-line’ issues are, as sheer cussedness, or as a sign reminding management of individual workers’ replaceability… (p. 93)

These observations can be extended to researchers and field work. The all-pervasive discourse of measurable outcomes collides with institutional cultures of risk management and surveillance to define what can and cannot count as legitimate forms of methodology and inquiry leading directly to issues with access, funding, and restrictions on researchers in the field. In my field work for this research project, not only was the amount of time I could spend in the field narrowed, along with the number of formal interviews I could conduct, I also found that students, teachers, and administrators would frequently demonstrate an initial suspicion of my presence. In the field at Ellison High School, I would often, especially in the beginning of the research, receive the same question: “Are you from the board (meaning CPS headquarters downtown)?” What this question meant was: “Are you here to spy and report on me?” Such a culture of fear and surveillance has become an utterly normalized aspect of daily school life for teachers, students, and researchers. Thus, ethnographic researchers increasingly confront pervasive mistrust and paranoia that delimits the practice of field work in overt and subtle ways.

While the new managerialism purports to support democratic engagement and equity through appeals to liberal humanist values (i.e. “No Child Left Behind”), in practice, questions concerning the ethical substance of teaching, learning, and research
are largely hollowed-out. Within a fetishistic adherence to a market-based technical rationality, the system divests itself of discussion or debate over the actual substantive content and values that animate educational processes. Davies states that

…as long as institutional objectives have been specified and strategies for their management and surveillance put in place, the nature of the work itself is of little relevance to anyone. If the auditing tools say that the work has, on average, met the objectives, it is simply assumed that the work has been appropriately and satisfactorily tailored according to the requirements of the institution (and often the relevant funding body). (p. 92)

In the case of educational research this has meant that “the objectives will come first and the ‘experimental research evidence’ will be generated to justify them” (p.100). Taking this argument further, Marc Fisher (2011) has suggested that the new managerialism must be read against a pervasive cynicism permeating neoliberal culture. He states:

Neoliberalism reproduces itself through cynicism, through people doing things they ‘don't really believe’…People go along with auditing culture and what I call ‘business ontology’ not necessarily because they agree with it, but because that is the ruling order, ‘that's just how things are now, and we can't do anything about it’.
For instance, who actually believes that reducing learning to a test score actually serves “educational excellence?” Or that extending the criminal justice system into public schools through zero tolerance policies that send kids to jail for non-violent school related offenses is a positive way to handle discipline? Yet, these are the dominant policy frameworks in public schools today. I have been teaching online graduate courses for educators in the Chicago area now for several years and I have yet to talk to a teacher, regardless of their political disposition, who believes that the fetishistic reduction of learning to testing that is currently dominant in educational policy is in any way beneficial for student learning. This pervasive cynicism and disillusionment, I would suggest, opens up important fissures within new managerial culture even as it attempts to powerfully foreclose alternatives. It is worth quoting Fisher at length here:

The idealized market was supposed to deliver “friction free” exchanges, in which the desires of consumers would be met directly, without the need for intervention or mediation by regulatory agencies. Yet the drive to assess the performance of workers and to measure forms of labor, which, by their very nature, are resistant to quantification [teaching for example], has inevitably required additional layers of management and bureaucracy. What we have is not a direct comparison of workers’ performance or output, but a comparison between audited representations of that performance and output. Inevitably, a short circuiting occurs, and work becomes geared towards the generation and massaging of representations rather than the official goals of the work itself. Indeed, an anthropological study of local government in Britain argues that “more effort goes
into ensuring that a local authority’s services are represented correctly than actually going into actually improving those services”. This reversal of priorities is one of the hallmarks of a system that can be characterized without hyperbole as ‘market Stalinism’. What late capitalism repeats from Stalinism is just this valuing of symbols of achievement over actual achievement. (Fisher, 2009, p. 42)

Neoliberal managerial cultures in education largely fail on their own terms. They do not lessen regulatory authority and bureaucracy but vastly extend its scope while at the same time screen out deeper analysis of the ethical content of policies and procedures. As such, they are representative of what Fisher evocatively refers to here as “market Stalinism.” For instance, standardized testing and the reduction of knowledge to measurable outcomes appears as concrete “evidence” that something called “education” is being taken seriously and accounted for with little in the way of critical analysis of the underlying values of test based education. Similarly, limiting what can be considered legitimate research to narrow questions and positivist methodologies prevents critical reflection on the meaning and purpose of research (beyond serving the status quos) as well as on the social, political, and economic forces that intersect with educational policy and practice in schools. Moreover, restricting researchers through either bureaucratic measures or through a narrow definition of science inhibits inquiry into how values and knowledge are struggled over in research contexts as well as the perpetuation of issues that plague public education such as overcrowding, poverty and economic insecurity, and/or lack of resources and equitable funding to schools.
Critical Ethnography and Further Challenges to Research

As a form of what Lather (2010) aptly describes as “an engaged social science,” critical ethnography is foremost concerned with questions of meaning, power, and human agency as they become articulated and delimited within diverse social contexts and settings.

As I touched upon in the introduction, my own comportment to critical ethnography is rooted in several overlapping principles. First, I take it as both a theoretical and practical activity rooted in analytical contextualization. Rather than attempting to isolate discreet parts of social life in the interest of experimental testing and quantification, it attempts to situate values, behaviors, and practices within the economic, cultural, and political forces that define and give them shape. This means that in contrast to rigid empiricist claims that research should be primarily about classifying and arranging variables and facts, critical ethnography is concerned with mapping wider social relationships from the local to the global and from the universal to the particular. This speaks to a second key characteristic of critical ethnography in that it relies heavily on immanent critique as an interpretive method. This means that the research attempts to penetrate the screen of surface appearances, taken-for-granted assumptions, and values in order to demonstrate their historical and social determinations. This includes reflecting on the research process itself and how the researcher’s own social position and biases inflect the research via an ethical commitment to self-reflexivity. Finally, while critical ethnography seeks to problematize all claims to “truth,” including its own, it is openly normative. Against a long history of social science research that has been implicated in reproducing imperialist, colonialist, racist, and sexist projects and assumptions (Clifford, 1983; Said, 1989) critical
ethnographic work is committed to unraveling and decolonizing relations of domination in the interest of social justice and authentic democracy (Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 2005).

All of this is certainly not to suggest that such a research orientation is not without persistent empirical and ethical dilemmas. I have already described how neoliberal managerialism and institutional risk culture has served to delimit social and educational research. In this study of Ellison Square and EHS, one of the central problems I encountered derived from the institutional limitations that were placed on the project at its outset. Foremost among these were the limitations placed on the amount of time I could spend in the field. As I describe above, the institutional review process with the CPS cut the time I could spend in the field to the equivalent of one semester. Originally, I had requested to spend two semesters at Ellison High School. They also winnowed down the number of formal interviews I could conduct. This impacted various aspects of my data collection that I believe had both negative and positive consequences.

The restrictions placed on the research inhibited a more immersive approach to the data collection. For instance, I simply did not have as much time to develop longer-term relationships with staff and students and to become more deeply acculturated into the institutional framework and everyday life of EHS. This limited the sheer amount of observational data I could collect as well as the capacity to view phenomena and shifts in attitudes and behaviors over a longer period of time. Despite the fact that I have taught in the Chicago schools and therefore have experience working with CPS youth, my presence as a white, male, PhD student and researcher can only ever mark me as an outsider at EHS and in the Ellison Square community. Thus the time constraints on the field research can also be seen as presenting various challenges to building trust and
rapport with people in the school and community. However, the limitations on time may also contain some potential positive value. A central concern in this research and in critical ethnography more generally is to unsettle and de-naturalize taken-for-granted social relations and practices. As such, while I was afforded less physical time in the field, a less immersive experience might have some value in that I was less likely to become normalized into the routines, practices, and daily rituals at EHS. In other words, in perhaps some limited ways, my outsider perspective and positionality could be productive in maintaining a fresh and critical distance to everyday realities.

Another consequence of the restrictions placed on the research was that I ended up relying perhaps more heavily on my formal and informal interviews than I might have if the research was conducted over a longer period. I conducted 25 formal interviews with 10 teachers, 13 students, and 2 youth workers that varied between 30 minutes to 2 hours in length. I also conducted scores of informal interviews and had numerous conversations with students, teachers, administrators, police, security guards, former graduates of EHS, and parents. Interview subjects were selected using a “snowball” sampling method, meaning that I selected interview subjects as I began to meet teachers, staff, and students and make connections with them. In some cases, teachers whose classes I was observing recommended particular students to interview and made introductions for me. Throughout the research process, I attempted to select interview subjects in a way that would ultimately reflect the gender and racial diversity of the staff and student body. For instance, I tried to pick students from across the various grade levels and achieve a close balance of male and female, African American and Latino students. Formal interviews followed a semi-structured format whereby I utilized question guides for teachers,
students, staff, and others with pre-determined questions concerning issues of economic, social, political, and human security at EHS. However, these question guides provided only a loose framework. I attempted was careful in the interviews to allow for flexibility in order to be able to further explore in the moment the often unexpected pathways that open-up in human conversation. For the analysis, I used NVIVO research software which enabled me to develop a set of themes and codes from my interview and observational data that logically followed from my research questions concerning how notions of security are imagined, lived, and practiced at EHS. I made every attempt to allow the codes and themes to develop organically from the data in contrast to imposing a pre-determined schema onto the analysis. In other words, I allowed the data to steer me in particular directions as opposed to the other way around. In this way, specific themes and connections across the data were made and then translated into a chapter schema and written sections for the text. Quotes were selected on the basis of how they contributed to elaborating the patterns, connections, conflicts, contradictions, and themes that emerged during the research and in the analysis. In many instances, I have chosen to focus on one or more interview subjects in depth as opposed to cluttering the text with quotes from multiple subjects. I think that this is a valuable way of humanizing the narratives and a tool for delving deeper into particular points of view.

In theory, a heavier reliance on interview data might be viewed as having the value of letting the young people, educators, and others in the community speak largely for themselves. Such an approach enables a rich picture to develop through the actual voices and points of view of those living and working in Ellison Square and at EHS particularly when balanced out against city and neighborhood data, CPS policy analysis,
and my observations from the field. However, this too has its own ethical and theoretical problems. We cannot simply assume that the educators and young people that speak in the following chapters do so unproblematically. Rather, their perspectives, along with those of the researcher are situated within, and inflected, by particular histories and cultural locations. This situated character of knowledge marks the ethically fraught terrain of relations to truth, to power, and to authority. I have attempted where possible to highlight productive contradictions, moments of slippage in the narratives that I think provide vivid insight into the inner tensions and the often conflicted nature of the reflections. However, I also recognize that my own social location has both informed the performativity of the narratives as they unfolded in real time as well as how I have represented them here. Linda Alcoff (1991) once framed this as the problem of speaking about, for, and on behalf of “Others.” I do not claim to speak either for or on behalf of the participants, nor am I suggesting that I am simply and unproblematically “representing” their voices. Rather I view the narratives as well as their representation here as part of a dialogic process and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher, the interview subject, and the reader (Conquergood, 2003). I think that when viewed in this light we get a much richer and more deeply empirical view of the narratives that appear in this text.

As an engaged social science, critical ethnography enables us to gain access to how broader patterns of economic, social, and political relations are lived and experienced in everyday contexts such as public schools like Ellison High School. This includes valuable insight into the contradictions of policy as it is practiced and resisted and as it collides with the complex and dynamic circuits of cultures “on the ground.” Further, unlike traditional “realist” ethnographic accounts and against a notion of a pure
and neutral science, critical ethnography’s commitment to research as a value laden and openly normative activity can also further our understanding of how we might think beyond these relations and thus the limitations that define our current historical moment. This firmly places critical ethnography in line with the liberatory, in contrast to the instrumentalist stream of Enlightenment reason, or, what Immanuel Kant referred to as “the public use of reason.” In his commentary on Kant’s essay, “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault (1994) describes the public use of reason as that side of Enlightenment thought that reflects critically on the present in the interest of determining the conditions of what can be known, what can be done, and what can be hoped. For Foucault, the “critique of what we are is at the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed upon us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (p. 56). Critical ethnography, as an engaged social science, seeks to not only bring critique to bear on itself and the rules that govern and shape it, but attempts to open up the substantive conditions for justice and formative democratic cultures in schools and communities. It is in this critical spirit that this particular narrative proceeds.
Learning by Dispossession:

Violence and alienation in the age of austerity

Ellison Square and Ellison High School (EHS) are located several miles south of the landmark buildings and lakeshore attractions of Chicago’s downtown. The neighborhood and school are both marked by concentrated poverty and racial segregation. They also both contend with persistent issues related to violence. Indeed, when I first arrived in Ellison Square during the first week of September, 2010 to begin this research, I found a school and community under emergency conditions because of two recent shootings involving students from EHS. One of these shootings took place on school grounds in full view of students, police, teachers, and parents, the other in a vacant lot near the school. Neither incident was fatal—both were gang related.

Maya (African American freshman): I was in my class. I was in my division. I was right there because we were looking through the window. It was hot so we had opened the windows and we were looking out the window and we just saw the boy had just got shot and he was just lying there and somebody was like, “get help” and that’s when the teacher told us to sit down...All I saw was a car pulled over and the boy was just walking and they shot him. And that’s when the teacher was like, “sit down. Stop instigating” and stuff like that...I just felt hurt. Because it

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15 I borrow this term “learning by dispossession” from Shahrzad Mojab and Sara Carpenter (2011).
was like, it’s probably because of the gangs and the bad decisions he chose and stuff like that.

While violence is not uncommon in Ellison Square or its surrounding neighborhoods, this was the first time in the 80 year history of EHS that such events had occurred during school hours and in such close proximity to the school. Statistically public schools remain the safest places for youth even in tough urban neighborhoods like Ellison Square. However, these incidents foreground the persistent dangers and traumas confronting young people in our urban communities. Moreover, such instances of violence are profoundly affecting and understandably elicit strong responses to make neighborhoods and schools more safe and secure. The way we make sense of such violence, however, presents limits and possibilities for how we formulate our efforts to promote substantive forms of security for youth—i.e. adequate material and social supports and sense of hope fundamental to developing more democratic and peaceful neighborhoods and schools.

The philosopher Slavoj Zizek (2008) offers a useful diagram in this regard. He suggests that there are three interwoven types of violence:

1. Subjective: the violence perpetrated by individuals or “identifiable agents”;
2. Symbolic: the violence embedded within language and aesthetic and cultural representation;
3. Systemic: the structural violence inhered within late modern societies

For Zizek, subjective violence is only the most visible of the three. This individualized form of violence appears to us as a disruption to the “normal” state of things, such as in school shootings or in spectacular acts of crime and terrorism. In contrast, as objective
forms, systemic and symbolic violence refer to the violence inhered directly within this “normal” state of things—within the “smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (p.2). While objective violence may be less visible than subjective forms, it is no less visceral or real in its impact and effects. Zizek states that “systemic violence is thus like the ‘dark matter’ of physics, the counterpart to an all-too visible subjective violence. It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be “irrational” explosions of subjective violence” (p.2). Zizek’s analysis suggests that rather than something exceptional, violence is, in fact, quite ordinary, embedded within present political, cultural, and economic conditions.

My aim in this chapter is not to provide a forensic accounting of the root causes of youth violence, but rather an institutional mapping of neoliberal urbanism and policy in relation to the reproduction of human insecurity and conflict at EHS. I begin via a description of the geographic, economic, and political relations underpinning school and community life. Based on observations, school and neighborhood data, and the perspectives of teachers, students, administrators, and youth workers, the chapter proceeds by examining the impact of three interrelated governmental processes on EHS—privatization, social disinvestment, and curriculum management. I demonstrate that these processes are contributing to a climate of educational failure that limits the capacity of public schools like EHS to provide meaningful social and educational supports to youth. It then extends this analysis by looking in detail at specific concerns over subjective violence and physical security at EHS such as spatial contestations, weapons, student conflicts, and gangs. Ultimately, the chapter suggests that dominant educational policy and governance forward market based and criminological rationalities
and practices that both work to govern and to reproduce systemic forms of social insecurity and violence—poverty, inequality, racism, sexism—at EHS and in the everyday lives of youth.

**Ellison Square and Ellison High School**

Ellison Square is a segregated, high poverty community on Chicago’s Southside. Since its founding in the late 19th century, the neighborhood has undergone significant, and at times, deeply contentious socioeconomic and demographic transformations. In the 1920s, the neighborhood was inhabited mainly by Eastern European immigrants from Poland and Lithuania. Ellison High School (EHS) was built in 1929 on the cusp of the Great Depression and the New Deal. The single largest employer for the neighborhood during this time was the Union Stock Yards, best known perhaps for being the subject of *The Jungle*—Upton Sinclair’s classic muckraking account of the dehumanizing aspects of Taylorist production and capitalist exploitation in the meatpacking districts of industrial era Chicago. The neighborhood and school remained solidly white and working class until the civil rights era. During the 1960s, Ellison Square and EHS both became the targets of groups such as the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM), co-chaired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that organized and agitated for an end to restrictive employment and housing practices, as well as for an end to educational segregation and inequality throughout the city. In an iconic moment of the late civil rights era, King led a CFM march in 1966 not far from Ellison Square and EHS calling for economic as well as racial justice. The march was met by mobs of angry local whites hurling projectiles and racist
insults. King himself was hit in the head by a brick. Many people in the area still vividly remember these events providing living testament to the long legacy of struggles and conflicts over race and equity that continue to shape life in the community today.

EHS was officially integrated in 1972 despite significant opposition and even a boycott by white parents. The integration of the school combined with the simmering racial tensions that defined the “urban crisis” of the late 1960s and early 1970s signaled the beginning of decades of white flight, deindustrialization and suburbanization, along with the ethnoracial re-composition of the neighborhood and school. In short, the whites began leaving for the suburbs and so did many of the jobs making concrete the desegregation of EHS. Currently, Ellison Square is a majority working class Hispanic neighborhood with a smaller number of African Americans. The student demographics at EHS are evenly split, however, between Latino/a and African Americans as the school draws its enrollment heavily from two adjacent historically black communities. The school itself straddles the borders of these three neighborhoods, linking them through a shared relationship to EHS. There are no Starbucks here or any of the other trappings of bourgeois living one finds in one of Chicago’s gentrified professional class enclaves. The thoroughfares bordering Ellison Square and its surrounding neighborhoods feature a variety of businesses typical in such urban communities—fast food outlets and used car dealerships interspersed with the occasional pawn shop, convenience/liquor store, church, and check-cashing/pay day lending outlet. The community is dotted with small brick houses interspersed with stand-alone two or three story “walkup” apartment buildings. On the afternoons that I spent walking around the community, people were open and friendly, if not seemingly a little perplexed by the young white man walking their streets.
According to research conducted by the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois Chicago, Ellison Square is a neighborhood characterized by “serious economic decline.” The neighborhood has been severely impacted by the transformation and stratification of the new service based “flexible” labor market and the attendant fracturing of living-wage employment opportunities traditionally available for the working class. This has been aggravated by the twin fiscal crisis of capital and the state stemming from the 2008 financial meltdown and Great Recession. Unemployment in Ellison Square and the surrounding area is estimated to hover between 10-22% not including those who have given up looking for work altogether—or those who are “underemployed”—i.e. attached to a part time or temporary job and unable to find full time employment or meet their basic needs. The unemployment rate for youth is much higher, sitting at crisis levels of 40% for Latinos and 45% for African Americans between the ages of 16-25. Furthermore, foreclosure signs and boarded-up properties have become an omnipresent reality. Like other urban communities across the U.S., Chicago’s low-income racialized neighborhoods became a lucrative target for predatory subprime mortgage lending. Indeed, the foreclosure rate in Ellison Square went from 5.3% in 2006 to 48% in 2008 while median home prices plummeted. The economic crisis has been accompanied by deepening economic dislocation in the community including a rise in homelessness and further cut-backs to social services and to supports to EHS. People in the community frequently cite this pervasive insecurity, and the sense of hopelessness and demoralization that it breeds, as

driving instabilities in home life, informal economic and gang activity, as well as conflict and violence in Ellison Square and EHS.

Ellison Square vividly represents the faltering promise of the civil rights era. Along with extensive economic insecurity, the neighborhood and surrounding communities are defined by race and class segregation and isolation. While the neighborhood is only a short distance from the landmark office towers, professional class jobs, tourist attractions, and trendy shops of downtown Chicago, it exists as a world set apart. The sociologist Loic Wacquant (2008) has described Chicago’s impoverished African American and Latino neighborhoods as “hyperghettos”—stigmatized zones of economic fragmentation and ethno-racial enclosure defined by the duel retrenchment in the labor market and social provision and the simultaneous extension of the surveillance and penal web of the neoliberal state. On the one hand, this is marked by limited access to stable employment opportunities, health care, transportation, and well-resourced schools. For many in Ellison Square, budget cuts have meant that the primary access to social services comes in the form of a Mobile Community Center operated by the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). This is a bus that parks in the neighborhood once a month, offering limited access to job information, foreclosure assistance, health and immunization services, and a food pantry. On the other end of the spectrum, there is an intensive and extensive security and law enforcement presence in the neighborhood. It is impossible not to notice the dozens of police surveillance cameras that blanket the area, hanging like strange mechanical fruit from telephone and light poles, expanding the gaze of law enforcement to virtually every intersection and sidewalk in the community. It is routine to witness police officers interrogating local youth on
street corners—sprawled over hoods or sitting handcuffed in the back of police cruisers. In these moments, the neighborhood has the feel of an occupied territory.

**Institutional Snapshot of EHS**

EHS takes up an entire city block in the center of Ellison Square forming a kind of central hub that the rest of the community orbits. The 80-year-old school is a giant U-shaped red brick institution with one large brick smokestack. There is an open space in the front of the building that features a handful of scattered trees and some patchy grass. My first visit to the school was on a mild and sunny fall morning and the neighborhood had a calm and almost idyllic feel to it. The area was alive with activity; groups of students slowly making their way to school; crossing guards watching traffic; parents dropping off students; teachers hurrying to get to their classrooms; and security officers and police keeping watch while clutching hot cups of coffee.

Despite the prosaic character of this scene, one becomes quickly aware of all the too familiar markers of fortification that have come to define urban educational contexts. EHS itself has the look and feel of a high-security containment center superimposed on the frame of a “traditional” public school: the majority of the steel doors are padlocked from the inside and/or are welded shut; the façade has three vertical rows of windows conspicuously covered by steel reinforced grates; there are countless surveillance cameras surrounding the building—hung over doors, mounted at the corners, and placed seemingly at random on the building’s flanks. At the back of the school is a parking lot with a 20ft high fence rimmed with barbed wire that borders a sparse athletic field. Signs
dotting the perimeter capture in language the palpable sense of fear embedded within the architecture—Warning, Safe School Zone!

When entering the school, one is greeted by uniformed security guards, armed police in bullet proof vests, airport style x-ray screeners, scanning wands, and metal detectors. Inside the school, metal cages on the windows, steel cages over doors, cages that can be expanded across hallways during “lockdowns,” ubiquitous surveillance cameras, and dim fluorescent lit hallways all conjure prison aesthetics. Upon entering the school, students and visitors are required to go through a screening process that involves feeding your possessions through an x-ray scanner and being led through a metal detector and pat-down by uniformed security personnel. After passing through security, one realizes that this new security infrastructure is layered on top of a historical foundation marked by all too visible signs of disinvestment and neglect. The clocks are mechanical artifacts from the 1960s and most do not work. Many of the wooden doors in the school are worn out and some have been reinforced with steel. Classrooms have aging but generally well-kept interiors with desks in various stages of repair. Several classrooms are missing ceiling tiles that expose rusty plumbing along with the soft cotton-candy like tufts of fiberglass insulation. There are two gymnasiums, an auditorium, and a library that serves as a quiet meeting place and de-facto computer lab. The school has a fenced in courtyard that features several red box-like “mobile classroom units”—essentially wood/fiberglass trailers that serve to alleviate overcrowding within the main building.

Throughout the day the hallways intermittently fill with students as they walk, laugh, jostle, and talk on their way to and from their classes breathing intermittent bursts of life into an otherwise drab institutional space. Teachers and administrators can be seen
talking together or walking to and from their classrooms and offices. The school is also populated by a sizable contingent of uniformed and non-uniformed security officers and police who patrol and monitor the hallways. As part of what educational sociologists have referred to as the “hidden curriculum,” intensive security and law enforcement presence combined with deteriorated physical environs send powerful messages to youth that inscribe norms and mediate identities, aspirations, and ways of being and understanding (Brown, 2010; Wotherspoon, 2004). As I will return in more detail in the following chapters, the intertwined governmental and aesthetic dynamics of securitization and social neglect work to shape students’ sense of self-worth and agency as well as their perceptions toward schooling, community, and the future in complex ways while normalizing particular relations of subjectivity, power, and authority at EHS.

EHS’ enrollment during the 2009-2010 academic year was just under 2,000 students roughly evenly split between Latino/a and African American youth. This mid-size public school serves primarily high needs and high poverty students. Better than 90% of the students at EHS qualify for free or reduced lunch, 97% qualify as low-income, 18% are special education, and 8% are English language learners. The school has 200 staff members that include teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and other support staff. The majority of the teachers are “highly qualified” as stipulated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and many have advanced degrees. The official curriculum, however, often limits the professional autonomy of this teaching force. Despite the efforts of teachers to provide meaningful and engaging lessons, there is a strong feeling among faculty that they are limited by an inflexible “direct instructional” and “scripted” curricular approach that emphasizes basic skills and standardized testing. This
curriculum, much of it developed and contracted out to large educational corporations, is often of questionable relevance to students’ lives and experiences. According to its District Report Card, EHS has a 55% percent drop-out rate and only about 10% of its students make or exceed state standards on standardized tests. The school is thus on probation for “low academic standing.” This means that it consistently has not met average yearly progress (AYP) on the high-stakes tests mandated by the NCLB. This can lead to disciplinary sanctions including the loss of crucial funding, and eventually can lead to being targeted for closure or “turnaround” which typically means that the entire staff will be fired and the school will likely be converted into a privately operated charter or contract school. Many believe that in time this will happen to EHS.

EHS struggles to cope with persistent gang problems, conflicts, and student emergencies of all kinds, while trying to provide educational services under difficult conditions. Not surprisingly, the people who inhabit its corridors, classrooms, and offices have complex and, at times, conflicted feelings about the institution. For instance, teachers speak often of their devotion to the students who they describe almost universally as “good” kids, many of whom are struggling under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. While most teachers speak passionately about their commitment to teaching and to the students, they also express a deep sense of collective frustration with the conditions and policies that they work within. Many feel overwhelmed and unsupported. Conversely, many students feel alienated and disengaged from the standardized official curriculum and frustrated by the conflicts that plague social relations among many of their peers, as well as with the security and disciplinary apparatus of the school that many believe to be overly harsh and generally ineffective. However, many
students also expressed affection and a sense of loyalty to the institution and to their peers and teachers as well as a strong desire to commit to their education and go to college despite the significant barriers standing in their way. Furthermore, in their conversations with me, teachers, students, and other staff would often seek to disrupt the palpable sense of stigmatization and failure that haunts the school by highlighting the many positive aspects of life at EHS. Indeed, despite the many challenges, positive and inspiring things happen on a daily basis at EHS. Amidst the difficulties there are incalculable moments of inspired teaching and student engagement while many healthy and supportive relationships take root and flourish. These moments offer a glimpse of the latent, and too often subverted, promise of public schools as potential centers of community building and democratic possibility.

Privatization and the Production of Failure

It is common to hear urban public schools like EHS described in the media and elsewhere as “dumping grounds,” “schools of last resort,” and as “drop out factories.” These terms, of course, are pejorative and speak to the broad stigmatization of urban public schools as they are consistently linked in the media along with their teachers and students to “failure” and “crisis”. Behind this rhetoric, however, lies a constellation of policies designed to integrate market-forces into education through privatization, testing, and accountability arrangements that have placed significant strain on public schools like EHS. As I outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, this has corresponded to disinvestment in public schools and youth, the extension of various centralized layers of administrative control,
and the creation of an increasingly unequal school system in Chicago. While schools like EHS have been labeled “failures” and stigmatized in the media, they have been simultaneously subjected to resource scarcity, overcrowding, and painful sanctions.

Like other neighborhood public schools in Chicago and elsewhere, EHS has become increasingly socioeconomically and racially segregated as families with the material resources and cultural capital have pulled their kids out of public schools throughout the city. This has been exacerbated by privatization initiatives, particularly under Renaissance 2010, a policy platform designed in 2003 by the Commercial Club of Chicago and implemented under former Mayor Richard M. Daley and former CPS CEO and current Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Drawing on neoliberal theory, the policy calls for the transformation of the city’s schools by injecting market competition and business management into the system through privatization and the direct intervention of capital and the state in creating educational markets (Lipman, 2011). The policy has worked mainly to close or “turnaround” public schools that have failed to meet testing benchmarks in high poverty neighborhoods and replace them with privately-run and non-unionized charter schools and selective enrollment schools in order to promote centralized corporate management, cost cutting, school choice, and market competition.

Research has shown that selective enrollment and charter schools skim off students, funds, and social supports from public schools like EHS (Catalyst, 2010). As these schools are often freed to select their students, and as school funding and contract renewals are increasingly linked to test scores under high stakes accountability measures, “high performing” students become “valued commodities” while “low performing” students, students with learning disabilities, and English language learners are made into
“undesirables” and “outcasts.” In the wake of school closures and turnarounds, the vast majority of students—who are typically the most academically and socially in need—are sent packing. According to the Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago, only 6% of displaced students from school closures end up enrolling in academically “strong” schools. The majority of displaced students, some 82%, re-enter other “low performing” public schools such as EHS (Gwynne & de la Torre, 2009). The research also indicates that while privatization has proven a lucrative enterprise for corporations in the education market, and despite the fact that many charter and contract schools are the beneficiary of millions of dollars in supplementary funding from corporate philanthropies such as the Broad, Walton Family, and Gates foundations, privatization, closures, turnarounds, and charters have failed to produce significant systemic or school based improvement (CREDO, 2009; (Saltman, 2009)).

Privatization has placed significant strain on EHS, generating obstacles to providing high quality education and social opportunity for its youth. Teachers I spoke with referred to how school closures and the city’s privatization agenda have impacted the school. Mr. Gates, an African American teacher at EHS, explains:

Mr. Gates: When they made Lawrence, we got all their kids that they didn’t want. Same thing happened when they did the one on Wolcott as a selective enrollment school. So they get to pick and choose their kids and we got all the ones they didn’t want.

Alex: So they get to pick and choose which students they want and the rest came here?
Mr. Gates: Yeah. And Harvey. We got the kids that they didn’t want. Then
Thomas had some problems a year or two ago and they redid their school and we
get all those kids. And kids apply to these schools and they don’t get accepted so
we get those kids. I don’t know. I don’t call it [EHS] a dumping ground but kind
of. It’s not really just a neighborhood school.
Alex: I hear people refer to it as a school of last resort.
Mr. Gates: Kind of. And there’s a lot of kids who are like, “I’ve been accepted at
Lawrence” and I’m like, “no you didn’t. I know who they’re accepting and you’re
not that kid.”

Under the rationality of consumer choice, school privatization and the creation of
educational markets and “urban portfolio districts” have been positioned as a means to
“empower” parents to “shop” around for the best school. These notions of choice have
been understandably appealing for many families justly frustrated by conditions at their
neighborhood public schools that have suffered decades of dysfunction and neglect by the
state (Pedroni, 2007). Yet as Mr. Gates points out, his students at EHS—whether because
of their cultural capital, ability, and/or test scores—are not afforded the choice to attend
the new selective schools. Rather than improving public schools for all youth within
public norms of universalism, equity, and cooperation, privatization contributes to sorting
the most disadvantaged into a bottom rung of disinvested public schools like EHS
through market norms of competition and individual choice.

These processes have created the general feeling at EHS that privatization is
contributing to a climate that is setting the school up for failure. This is an excerpt from
Alex: How do you understand and make sense of barriers to success here at EHS?

Ms. Douglas: The school has been set up by the system for failure. Basically, we have magnet schools that skim the more academically aggressive kids and the kids whose parents can find a better option so we’re kind of known as a school of last resort. There is a set-up right there. Number two, we must take everybody who comes, so we get the kids that are kicked out of charter schools, we get the kids that are getting let out of jail and coming back from alternative schools and we take everyone. At the same time, when you have selective enrollment schools creaming your most academic students and then you get the reputation of being a school of last resort then there is some issues with the attitude people have toward the school and sadly a mindset on the part of the kids... So we’re set up for failure in that way... The other way the system treats us is like a number. Every four hundred kids, one security guard. Eighteen-hundred kid school and we are entitled to four security guards which is preposterous so the school has to dip into its own discretionary funds and buy security guards with it. So instead of lowering class sizes, adding more teachers or resources, or any of those choices that would help the kids, our school has to buy security guards in order to have a greater adult presence...it would be great to have resources put into more social workers or psychologists that really could help the kids with some of the incredible issues that they bring to school including anger over everything that they are dealing with. But instead those meager resources go into security personnel. So instead
we get all the kids that are kicked out and a disproportionate amount of kids that are lower academically than the selective enrollment schools. We have a disproportionate share of special Ed students and yet we are compared to these schools with different circumstances and labeled as a failing or struggling school.

Ms. Douglas here reiterates how privatization has led to the concentration of the most disadvantaged students at EHS. Combined with extensive resource scarcity, this generates myriad problems. In particular, like others I encountered at EHS, Ms. Douglas discussed how these two factors of privatization and disinvestment created a cultural stigma at EHS and a profound sense of failure.

Alex: This goes back to what you were talking about earlier in terms of reputation and that students feel that attached-stigma as a place of failure and the argument on one side is that what needs to be done is the school should be closed down and we should totally revamp the whole thing so we can get rid of that sense of failure and start over, maybe make a charter school. What would you say to someone who would make that argument?

Ms. Douglas: That argument is being made as we speak. UNO – the United Neighborhood Organization is a political organization wired to the Daley administration. They get Hispanic votes for the mayor. They have eight charter schools right now and they want eight more and they are going to the next board of education meeting to get a charter for an Ellison Square High School. With all of their connections, they have capital development money from Springfield. They
bought a plot of land [near EHS] and they are going to grab the best of the kids that we have here, primarily Hispanics. The UNO charter schools are 97% Hispanics. The board is turning over eight schools with the wishes of UNO to get eight more. They have basically a school district within a school district right now. They have four thousand kids in their existing eight schools. So they are gonna come into the community with a brand new building and new computers and the latest of everything and come to our school and obviously parents will say, ‘brand new school that doesn’t have the stigma of EHS, we’re going there.’ So EHS loses personnel, kids, resources because every kid that walks out of here and to the UNO school, the per-pupil expenditure of eight thousand and change goes with them. So all these years we’ve been under-resourced and under-funded with one social worker for eighteen hundred kids and four security guards provided by downtown and at constant threat because our test scores are low.

We’re then blamed for the failure of the kids who remain.

Alex: How would you respond to criticisms that ultimately place the blame for failure on teachers as they are the ones foremost responsible for the quality of education in a school like EHS?

Ms Douglas: Is it extremely unfortunate that fifty percent of the kids graduate from EHS who start here? Absolutely. Is it the fault of the teachers and all the teacher bashing that goes on in the media? Absolutely not. I’ve taught for a very long time and I have never seen such an educated, committed faculty as we have here. Like any school, there are people who could be improved but on the whole, Chicago Public Schools have the most educated teaching force that they’ve ever
had. Is it a lack of care with the teachers? Absolutely not. I can say that with the utmost conviction that the overwhelming majority of my colleagues care about these kids, buy them prom dresses, buy them graduation jackets, and help them in any way possible. And deeply care about these kids, take them on college tours by themselves because the parents are unable to or are unwilling. So is it the teachers? Absolutely not. Does poverty play a role? Absolutely yes. It’s just more expensive to educate a poor child who shows up in kindergarten with half of the word knowledge of a more advantaged kid. As the years go by, those two sets of kids improve, improve, improve but the gap doesn’t close because they start from so much further back. So we were under threat this year because of budget cuts and they were gonna have thirty-five or more kids in the high school classroom. The fact is that system has set up schools like ours as targets and then wonder why when they close surrounding schools and those low performers come to the school that remains open and the scores remain low. It’s just a vicious cycle and I just can’t get the logic of turning over schools to private organizations when in fact the leadership of the city is supposed to be in charge of them. It makes no sense. They neglect these schools, under resource them and then blame them and say, ‘the answer is to turn them over to outside groups.’ It makes no sense.

Ms. Douglas points to how poverty and the external funding and political connections of charter networks like UNO contribute to deteriorating conditions at public schools like EHS. Moreover, Ms. Douglas challenges directly the dominant narrative that teachers are largely to blame for the failures of public schools. As she describes in the above passage,
teachers in the CPS are overwhelmingly dedicated professionals who consciously make the decision to work at schools like EHS in order to make a positive impact in the lives of young people. Ms. Douglas was far from a unique case in terms of my interviews. I found that despite the often trenchant criticisms and palpable frustrations, teachers by and large were deeply invested both professionally and emotionally in EHS as an institution and in the lives of their students. Here, I ask Ms. Douglas how she interprets and understands the politics of the privatization agenda and the marginalization of EHS within the system.

*Alex:* To me, what you are describing points to a marginalization not only of public schools, but of commitments to the public in general. How do you understand that?

*Ms. Douglas:* Well, the public sees a new gleaming charter school with state of the art technology and they see a hundred year old school with a bad reputation. At the same time, the leadership of the city under the control of Mayor Daley has promoted this as the renaissance of the public schools, turning them over to outside groups to run. At this point there are seventy existing charter schools and recent legislation to allow forty more. So the public has bought the notion that Chicago Public Schools are failing our students. Obviously you can see that the statistics are dismal so this is being presented by an unquestioning media as the way of improving school reform when in fact in the last fifteen years under Mayor Daley the graduation rates have remained stubbornly the same. From Paul Vallas to Arne Duncan and now Ron Huberman, one draconian approach after another has not produced. Turning the schools over to charters has not produced. I’m
sure you’ve seen the Stanford study that shows traditional neighborhood schools do better than 83% of charters. So we are destroying a public school system on the basis of a policy with a 17% percent success rate. So it makes no sense but maybe now there’s an opportunity but maybe not. It’s gonna be a continuation of the privatization of everything that moves in Chicago. I think that’s why. It’s systemic and I think that we represent kids that nobody cares about. Their parents are perhaps unwilling, unable, or too overwhelmed to be active in the political arena. The people with more resources send their kids to private and catholic schools and move to the suburbs. These are the kids that don’t have the advocates in the public arena beyond their teachers and when their teachers are vilified and undermined and our schools are presented as failing schools and so it must be the teachers. Their only allies are being scapegoated as well.

Ms. Douglas’ comments undermine assumptions regarding the relative engagement or disengagement of teachers. She is an articulate voice and is invested in her school and its students. This is not to say that all teachers at EHS are perfect. There are moments where even the most dedicated educators become overwhelmed, frustrated, and/or cynical about their work. A small handful of teachers “burnout,” a few “check-out.” However, this remains the exception, not the rule. In the course of my research, I found that while many teachers feel disempowered, they remain dedicated to their work and to students. Moreover, like Ms. Douglas, many harbor a well-developed understanding of the policies they work within. As Ms. Douglas intimates, these policies erode the capacity of teachers to meaningfully address the educative and social development of their students.
In terms of content, Ms. Douglas raises a host of important issues that corroborate what I found in my research at EHS, and the broader research as well, where privatization has been found to have significant local impact on public schools (Burch, 2009; Lipman, 2007 2011). These findings which corroborate and extend the findings of Lipman can be summarized as follows: (1) privatization has meant that public schools like EHS receiving students from turnarounds and school closures find their resources strained as they attempt to handle the influx of new students who typically have the greatest needs; (2) privatization produces a climate of anxiety and fear as public school teachers, students, and families confront the possible closure of their public school; (3) privatization negatively effects teaching and learning as class sizes swell and public schools are denied adequate funding and resources; (4) privatization has contributed to conflict and violence due to students having to cross gang lines in the wake of school closures and due to the increased stresses that accompany overcrowding and enhanced competition over educational services within schools; (5) privatization has made public schools and communities feel like they are being “set up for failure” as they are starved of resources and forced to incorporate new influxes of students; (6) as privatization places strains on public schools, the difficulties that arise become more fuel to discredit public schools and their teachers while legitimating further privatization agendas in the city; (7) privatization is also producing resentment over lack of transparency and the disregard of community voice in matters of school governance (Lipman, 2007).

In contrast to promoting a high quality, universal, and equitable school system in the best tradition of democratic education that stresses integration and inclusion, privatization and free market incursions into educational policy have contributed to
sorting the most disadvantaged and academically challenged students into a bottom rung of disinvested and segregated public schools. Simultaneously, neoliberal culture and policy is eroding the resources and sense of collective social responsibility necessary for realizing academic development and securing social advancement in these schools. This sorting process bears a significant responsibility for promoting failure at EHS while eroding its capacity as an institution to effectively promote the social and educative well-being and human security of its students. Finally, the deliberate underfunding and warehousing of the most disadvantaged students in public schools like EHS and the resulting educational failures become a potent ideological justification for the further privatization every aspect of public education under neoliberal governance.

Social Disinvestment and Abandonment of Youth

*If they keep cutting back we’re not gonna survive and something’s gonna break somewhere. And I don’t know if it’s gonna be test scores, kids going to college, drop-out rates, something is gonna give because we just can’t keep at this pace.*

-Mr. Gates, EHS Teacher

*We just accept the fact that because we are all minorities and we live in this neighborhood that we’re treated second rate. There are dirty rotten books and broken desks and graffiti everywhere. It just kind of adds to that. It’s like you’re looking for someone to blame and you can just go up the ladder but eventually you don’t know who else to blame.*
Alongside privatization, patterns of austerity and scarcity are having a profound influence in shaping life at EHS. Many students at EHS have never been to Chicago’s downtown, to one of its cultural institutions, or to its famous lakefront. Many struggle on a daily basis to secure their basic needs such as food and shelter. Largely invisible in a world of receding economic opportunity, soaring inequality, and hardening attitudes toward the poor, they face a precarious and volatile present/future. This has intensified since 2008 and the turn to austerity by state and city governments. Students and teachers frequently spoke to how economic insecurity and the Great Recession have impacted food security, homelessness, mental health, and the stability of home life in the community. Mr. Bradley, a white social studies teacher, describes some of these difficulties:

Lots of kids have lost their place and have had parents who have lost their jobs and have been foreclosed on. There are students who are just simply homeless. This one girl in my AP class, her family is intact and they seem like a great family, but the father lost his job and then they lost the house and so now they have been living out of a car for a while. So homework becomes out of the question and her focus has shifted from school to finding a job in order to help her family. And she is not the only one...And you know, you hear on like Oprah that inspiring story about the girl who overcomes that and goes to Harvard and that’s awesome, but that girl is not like the rest of us. She is to be admired, but
such things are not done even by the best of people, it’s just too much to overcome.

This type of instability can be understood in terms of what Slavoj Zizek refers to as the “objective systemic violence” inherent within the routine operation of our economic and political systems. Combined with the lack of access to basic services such as adequate health care and employment opportunities, this insecurity (homelessness in this case) can only be understood as a central factor driving instability in the school and community as well as in creating significant barriers to educational engagement and achievement. It is extraordinarily difficult if not impossible to think about things like meeting state standards on high-stakes tests and/or filling out college applications when you and your family live in a car or when you do not have enough food to eat. Malia, a thoughtful African American sophomore explained that problems at EHS often begin from such places of basic deprivation: “some kids come in and make trouble, well maybe they didn’t sleep that night or they haven’t eaten in three days and they are stressed out.”

When considering urban schooling, inevitably questions arise concerning parenting and home life. Many students at EHS come from broken homes, have absent parents, parents in jail, parents struggling with unemployment, and parents with mental health and addiction issues. While it is common to hear youth and teachers speak to the central importance of parental involvement in students’ lives and to be critical of those parents shirking their responsibilities, there is a general recognition that instabilities in home life are intimately connected to poverty and the dire economic situation facing families in the community. The following comments by Mr. Bradley are paradigmatic:
Poverty is a central aspect of what goes on around here. If more parents had decent paying jobs and/or didn’t have to work three jobs just to make ends meet then maybe the situation would be radically different. If they didn’t have this crushing weight over their heads, I think then a lot of the kids would certainly have more stable home environments and would be more likely to succeed at school. I don’t think it’s the only factor the leads to that instability, but I think that it is a major one.

Social science research overwhelmingly corroborates Mr. Bradley’s intuitions that socioeconomic status is the most significant factor in predicting educational engagement and achievement (Wotherspoon, 2004). While race, ethnicity, and gender remain salient features defining relations of power and inequality in education, impoverished students at the bottom of the class structure regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, are far more likely to fall behind in school, dropout at higher rates, and fare more poorly on standardized tests. The reasons for this are complex, involving the intersection of economic, environmental, and cultural factors that impact child development and school-based learning and interactions (Lareau, 2003; Rothstein, 2004). Jean Anyon (2005) cites extensive research indicating that despite neoliberal and neoconservative assertions regarding the “disincentivizing” and “dependency” breeding effects of welfare, it has been consistently demonstrated that even meager economic supports to families in poverty correlates directly to marked improvements in student achievement and academic engagement (pp. 64-67). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2010) documents that economic
investments in instruction, well rounded curricula, and smaller class sizes plays a significant role in school success. Further, Rutgers school-finance expert Bruce Baker has concluded after analyses of data from across the U.S. “that increased funding levels have been associated with improved outcomes, and that more equitable distributions of resources have been associated with more equitable distributions of outcomes” (Byrant, 2011). In short, social investments in the amelioration of poverty and inequality combined with ensuring economic security and social provision are central factors in promoting the success and/or failure of individual students and for creating safe and effective schools.

Despite the preponderance of evidence, educational and social policies inflected by market-based and neoconservative rationalities have come to reject structural explanations of poverty and its impact on schools. In this milieu, teachers, students, and localities are made solely responsible for the problems of school failure, while public schools, especially those serving the most disadvantaged, are consistently asked to do more with less. Simultaneously, as health and social services are reduced or exposed to privatization, public schools become one of the last institutions providing any kind of a safety net, while at the same time they are denied the resources necessary to adequately perform all of the numerous responsibilities charged to them. As Ms. Lorrie a white science teacher explains, EHS is governed largely by a reactive logic driven by scarcity:

*I feel like the schools are looked at as this net that is placed below the community, but not just a net because we obviously have the primary focus of educating the kids which will hopefully help get them out of poverty, but I feel like anything else that might impact our primary focus, we are expected to catch the community.*
Like, “oh well, your kids can’t focus because they are hungry so we’ll have reduced breakfast and lunch and summer meal programs” and things like that. Like, “your kids can’t get access to health care so we’ll have the immunization bus come out once a year because they have to have that to get into school”. Like, “there was a shooting last night, so will bring in crisis counselors”. But I feel like it’s not even a safety net. I feel like it’s just reactionary. I feel like the school is just scrambling trying to figure out how to provide the bare minimum so that kids can potentially have a half of a prayer of getting out the door with an education.

In my observations as well as in my conversations with students and teachers at EHS it became clear that the lack of adequate resources and supports in the school and community contribute to myriad seemingly intractable problems. In particular, teachers and students often spoke to connections between poverty, emotional trauma, and violence at EHS and there is a broad feeling and recognition that the services available for students in the school and community are wholly inadequate for addressing these concerns. For instance, EHS has only one social worker for its 1,600 students and the students are allotted a maximum of fifteen minutes per month with her. This underscores a more general absence of social-emotional support services for students. Again Ms. Lorrie:

Our kids deal with more issues than kids in other schools that would cause them to benefit from social work services. Even some of my kids that have some problems and want to go down to see the social worker have to go down and wait. In terms of what they’re allotted – they get fifteen minutes a month. They do have
counselors for kids, but again there’s only one or two of them in the building and psychologists are here only once or twice a week for a couple hours a day. I haven’t even seen her here yet this year. We share one nurse with several other schools and they are never here, which is another issue and if they are having an issue and they need to talk to someone they’ve got nobody to talk to about it. But again, it’s money. We don’t have the money to do that here. And I think we could make an impact if we just had more resources and staff.

Teachers like Ms. Lorrie feel a deep sense of frustration over the absence of resources that might enable the school to effectively address the emotional, physical, and social insecurity of youth at EHS. The lack of support services for youth only underscores, however, the more general conditions of austerity and disinvestment at the school. Many classrooms do not have enough desks for students as budget cuts have swelled class sizes. It is common to see packed classrooms with students sprawled about haphazardly, sitting on the edges of the class and on the window sills, even some standing without desks. Teachers often complained that they had 40 or more students in their classes despite the fact that this violates district and union rules, not to mention any nominal standard of pedagogical efficacy. This places limitations on the provision of educational services as well as on the capacity of teachers to develop supportive relationships with students. Mr. Parks, a white 12 year veteran of EHS, expresses his frustration over the class size issue:

I had to go to the programming office and say, “are you people not looking at the numbers?” I don’t have desks. There’s just a steady stream, every five kids that
come in changes the chemistry of the class again. That’s not rocket science.
That’s anybody who can look at such a scenario and see that’s a recipe for disaster. But they just shrugged and said this is the new normal and I better get used to it.

The class size issue underscores a more general absence of books and other essential resources. Teachers routinely reach into their own pockets in order cover the costs of basic supplies, such as photocopies of class textbooks, due to their insufficient number. Further, the school has not only a shortage of supplies but a shortage of teachers as well. Over the summer of 2010 the school had to lay-off 15% of its faculty due to budget cuts in the aftermath of the economic crisis and recession. In the wake of the layoffs the school is using what they call “placeholders,” transient substitutes that are something like the educational equivalent of the service sector “perma-temp”. There is significant resentment among faculty and students regarding the layoffs and the use of permanent substitutes. According to Mr. Parks:

When teachers are laid off it affects morale and the culture. And now we have all these sort of transient substitutes. Kids are going to classes where there might be a different teacher everyday and I think that creates some tensions because students don’t feel like they are being treated respectfully or that they should even care. Students need to have regular adults in their classes that they can feel comfortable with where they feel like they can bring up issues that are affecting them and where they might have some chance of getting some help.
Marcus, an African American junior, commented to me one day in the cafeteria on the teacher cuts, “it was a big deal to a lot of kids. A lot of kids were mad about that. Me and a bunch of other kids considered leaving because they had taken a lot of our favorite teachers. But we don’t have anywhere else to go.” I asked him how he thought the teacher layoffs have affected the school. He put it bluntly, “now you tell me, how you supposed to run a school without teachers?” When I asked him how the layoffs had affected his education he responded, “My second period math class has had like 15 different teachers this year. No one cares. Everybody just laughing and talking. It’s like whatever, this is a joke.” Indeed, it wasn’t difficult to recognize what Marcus was talking about. Walking the halls of EHS one often gets the sense of an institution barely holding itself together. There is a deep undercurrent of frustration and fatigue that marks the atmosphere and culture. While many feel disaffected and disempowered, teachers make legitimate attempts to provide educational and social guidance under difficult conditions. However, many students appear to just slip through the cracks with little in the way of the individual and collective attention, guidance, and care they all need and deserve.

Along with Marcus, various teachers, students, and administrators linked disinvestments in the school and the teacher layoffs to straining teacher student relations and to general conditions of disorder in the school and alienation amongst students. Students rightly perceive that their education and needs are not being taken seriously and that their interests, moral development, and input are not highly valued. As a result, relationships fracture and an often corrosive tone of disaffection and disengagement is set in place throughout the entire institution. Many students thus engage in resistant acts such
as disrupting class or withdrawing, arguing with security in the halls, and generally disregarding the school authority which many do not view as being legitimate. As Marcus points out, a lot of kids care deeply about their teachers, but they regard the policies that remove them from their lives and the school as nothing more than a cruel joke. This sense of betrayal extends beyond the loss of teachers to the broader institutional and social structure. In the interview I conducted with Mr. Parks, whom I quoted above, he stated that he believes the current round of layoffs and austerity measures are “systematically dismantling the education of our youth” and that “one could not have created a better breeding ground for violence and a culture of fear.”

Curriculum Management and Reproducing Redundancy

There is good teachers here but it’s hard too because a lot of what they’re teaching...like a lot of students just don’t care. I mean we all have to strive to get an education and do our work but a lot of times it’s just like, there’s a lot of stuff that goes on around here. I would say that classes need to be more toward the students, what we care about, like projects and stuff. Most of time around here it’s just like do this, do that, here’s this assignment. It doesn’t work for a lot of kids.

-Rose, EHS Student
Ninety percent of the incidents that occur are because no one is listening to these young people, they are bored, they’re not engaged, and they don’t see how the stuff that your teaching is indicative of their real world day to day.

-Mr. Charles, Youth Worker at EHS

It’s like, every time you turn around, this vendor or that vendor – just looking at the monthly board meetings and the vendors that get approved for professional development services, for testing services, technology programs, for curriculum, for textbooks, notebooks, everywhere you look there is the corporatization of curriculum and education. And again, if the teachers in the school were presented with these options and looked to decide which ones might best meet our needs, that would be one thing, but that’s not how it goes. It’s all top-down mandatory. And they’ll be able to see in the computer whether you’ve done it or not.

-Ms. Douglas, EHS Teacher

Over the last three decades, urban educational systems have become increasingly subject to marketization and centralized forms of accountability that seek to regulate and discipline processes of teaching and learning. These policies are commercializing and narrowing the curriculum while limiting the professional autonomy of teachers to meet

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17 Mr. Charles is an African American community organizer and youth advocate who has served as a community representative to the EHS Local School Council, worked with EHS youth through organizations such as the Chicago Freedom School and Southwest Youth Collaborative, and has run after-school programs at EHS.
the needs of students, particularly in low-income schools. In the semester I spent at EHS, I observed scores of classes across subjects from English, Math, Social Studies, JROTC, and Computer Science and conducted in-depth interviews and had many informal conversations with teachers. I observed a range of engagement at EHS from focused concentration and enthusiastic discussion to repetitive scenes of standardized nullity and the disaffected boredom that comes from classes dominated by scripted lessons and test preparation. Unsurprisingly, both students and teachers reported dissatisfaction with the curriculum. Many feel that the pressure to gear lessons toward district mandates and testing is failing to engage youth and to address their diverse interests and needs.

Like schools throughout the CPS, EHS has largely dispensed with vocational training. The rationale has been that in the global knowledge economy all students need to go on to college in order to be ready for the jobs of the 21st century. Just what these jobs are exactly or how EHS students will fit into them is unclear. However, sorting processes at EHS no longer function in terms of strict divisions between “academic” and “vocational” tracks but instead work via the division of instruction along academic lines with a small honors and upper tier track, and a lower general curriculum that includes both in-stream and pull-out special education instruction for kids with learning disabilities and special needs. EHS is one of many schools in the CPS that now utilize a program called AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) that is designed to prepare students for college, particularly kids in the “middle” of the academic register. The school also has two supplementary programs that give students additional choices, CTE (Career and Technical Education) and ETI (Equipment Technology Institute) that are geared toward college enrollment, technical/computer skills, and career training.
While these programs emphasize college readiness, the bitter reality at EHS is that relatively few of the youth who start their high school career at the school make it on to college and fewer still attain college degrees. Over 50% of students at EHS do not end up graduating at all. Out of those who graduated in 2009, 40.3% did enroll in some type of college program. Of those who graduated in 2009 but did not enroll in college, 60% were unemployed in 2010. Employment statistics for drop-outs are not available for former EHS students, but the broader evidence would suggest that their labor force participation is much lower, signaling a deepening and profound crisis.

While EHS has made efforts to utilize supplemental programs like AVID, CTE, and ETI explicitly for college prep, much of the instructional focus is geared toward teaching to meet state standards and boosting student performance on state tests like the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), Illinois Alternative Assessment (IAA) and the American College Test (ACT). These tests are used to measure “adequate yearly progress” for the requirements of the NCLB, EHS’s own state and district ranking and report card, and for determining college eligibility for its students. During the semester I spent at EHS, the school was rated a “low achieving school” and was “on probation” (a term taken, it can be noted, from the corrections lexicon) for poor performance on the tests, a distinction that the school had held for several years. These ratings feed into a climate of anxiety where pressure to raise the schools standing on the tests in order to move off probation drives curricular tone and focus.

While the pressure to perform and prepare youth for success on standardized testing has become a central part of schooling, teachers were almost universally critical of these educational practices. In particular, teachers repeatedly sought to highlight how a
top-down emphasis on scripted curricular mandates and pressures to teach skills for the
tests was infringing upon their capacity to meet the educational and social needs of their
students. The majority of the curricular mandates represent commercial programs that
have been contracted out to educational corporations and then pushed on teachers under
threat of disciplinary sanction. Teachers often expressed their sense of frustration at the
arbitrary nature of these programs and the climate of fear that has accompanied them.
The corporate curricular and accountability mandates have contributed to undermining
their professional knowledge and voice while creating a bewildering set of protocols and
reductive requirements that are replacing more progressive teacher and student centered
forms of pedagogy and curriculum. They also report that the mandates have been
accompanied by new forms of surveillance and sanctions for teachers who fail to comply.

Ms. Douglas: So now this school is under some program called IDS, a scripted
curriculum mandate that the school is forced to have because we’re on probation
so we must spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of our own discretionary
money into programs like this that are scripted, rigid, that downtown can see how
your scores are. Just even the online grade book programs where anybody
downtown can just peek right into your classroom and see how your kids are
doing. There is a balancing act because we’re criticized if we have too high of a
failure rate but at the same time we have to be showing progress on all these
indicators. But the insanity is that they just spin around like crazy where a new
guy comes in and that program is out and this program is in and they are trying
to teacher-proof the entire curriculum. It is a basic lack of faith, instead of saying,
‘let’s hire good people and then give them the professional discretion to do their thing.’ So for instance, before the IDS stuff got mandated our English department was just cooking with a fabulous curriculum with freshmen and it trickled into the sophomore and junior years as well. But that just got dumped when the next thing came in and this was mandated and we were a probation school so we have to do this. So after putting out so many years of working on this curriculum and then having it all just tossed out of the way it’s very frustrating.

Mr. Wilson, a white math teacher, extends these observations by describing just a few of the scripted curricular mandates that he is supposed to fulfill:

Last Friday we had a professional development meeting with our district leader about classroom management and testing practice. It follows this CHAMPS model. Conversation Level, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation, Success. And it’s like this is the fifth week of school and now we are supposed to trash our management style that we have developed that works for us and our students and we are supposed to do CHAMPS for everything. We were told that within two weeks they were going to come to our school and do a walk through and come into our classrooms to see if we have CHAMPS posters for independent testing practice and procedures and warm-ups and that all the students should know the program and we were told that principals are going to come in and pull out students from class and ask them questions like “what does conversation level 1 look like” and if that isn’t explained within your classroom then you will have
debriefing and you are no longer a good teacher. And so that is one that came out on Friday. Another one is RTI (Response Through Intervention) which is a literacy program we are supposed to do every Tuesday and Thursday. On this one we weren’t given any information accept the name of a website we were supposed to go to and download the forms to teach ourselves what RTI is which no one has any experience with. We are supposed to do these strategies and every student is supposed to achieve 80% mastery on them and the ones who don’t are supposed to go to some sort of pull out program. So there are all these things like High Quality Instructional Task vs. Powerful Practice that we have to include and be labeled and have an agenda and I could go on and on about these. So there are all these sort of mandates that we are required to do and if an administrator walks into your classroom it better be posted, done, explained to the students along with all this other stuff like remediation plans and so it leaves very little room for creative teaching and we are told that if we don’t do these things then we are not effective teachers. And it’s like that’s not what an effective teacher is to me but that’s how they define it and in this whole culture of fear people feel a lot of pressure to do this stuff and not stand up and say ‘hey this is dumb, today I am doing something else.’ I feel like this is really stifling teacher creativity which then leads to killing the creativity of the students. And it’s just crammed down our throats and we are reminded every week to do these things and if I write up a lesson plan and submit it to my department head and it doesn’t have these things on it then it will be sent back and I have to redo it so it conforms to these prescriptive mandates.
Each of the curricular and accountability mandates is attached to a different district contract with educational corporations and foundations. These programs often work at cross purposes, and as Mr. Wilson’s comments indicate, they place a heavy emphasis on teaching standardized “skills” as opposed to promoting more creative and exploratory knowledge based forms of learning. Here Mr. Parks further discusses these phenomena:

_There are four sets of clipboards that come through my classroom. Number one is IDS. But IDS is not aligned with RTI. RTI is not aligned with Area twenty-three. And Area twenty-three which wants the skills and standards to be the Illinois State are not aligned with the College Readiness. So unless I know who you are coming into my classroom, I don’t know how to sequence the skills that my kids need to be learning in order to meet the expectations placed on me to teach these ridiculous things. As their teacher I’ve got a pretty good idea of which skills I need to start sequencing to get them to the level in which to function in today’s society but those four competing clipboards have no relevance. They’re each connected to different money and different programs that each have a competing and conflicting interest in what happens in my classroom. The curriculum is not just the curriculum, it’s a loaded political football from the Gates Foundation to IDS and Kaplan that’s making an awful lot of money on what I’m teaching. And in this day and age content is just not all that important. It’s about the skills being taught and that’s really not all that content based._
Market management is presented as a progressive force that can break down rigid bureaucratic structures and empower individuals to realize their potential in more open and decentralized institutions and systems of organization. However, as the current efforts to control the curriculum through top-down commercialized accountability mandates makes clear, rather than reduce cumbersome and autocratic bureaucracy, market governance and the proliferation of corporate contracting and influence of corporations in the planning and delivery of curriculum, has vastly expanded it.

The education business has changed dramatically from the days of simply selling classroom supplies, teacher aids, and books. It is now a global multinational business that includes textbook publishers, software and online learning companies, for-profit school management and charter corporations, consulting and curriculum businesses, and for-profit testing, tutoring, and test prep corporations, each vying for a piece of the growing educational market estimated at $600 billion a year in the U.S. alone (Ball, 2012). Each year, the CPS issues millions of dollars in contracts to educational corporations such as Kaplan, Princeton Review, EdisonLearning, Literacy for All, ILearned Online, Sylvan, Non-Public Educational Services, among many others. The influence of educational companies can be seen as having less to do with seeking to support teachers as professionals than to profit from and control what they teach. The imposition of scripted commercial programs and the disciplinary systems put in place to enforce them represents a key formal characteristic of neoliberal governance in schools today. It relies on centralized forms of authority that click with neoconservative emphasis on “getting tough” on schools on teachers, while at the same time it forwards market based solutions and policies designed to integrate commercial interests and profit-making into the
institutional fabric. As this analysis suggests, marketized forms of governance and external forms of centralized control are far from contradictory logics. Rather, they require and inform one another in the daily operations of public schooling.

There are a number of observations that can be made regarding the management of curriculum at EHS and the intersection of market logics and centralized control. Foremost, it is eroding teacher autonomy. Teachers simply no longer have a high degree of professional freedom to make connections between their students’ experiences and unique needs and the planning and delivery of curriculum. Much of the curriculum is being planned by educational companies and their internal “experts” many of whom may know little if anything about the culture and needs of students in schools like EHS. The curriculum is simply created in order to align with state standards and tests and then sold to the CPS. Not only does this remove control over curriculum from the professional discretion of educators and the voice and input of communities, but it also elevates the role of the private sector in determining what knowledge is taught and how it is taught. Further, and related, through a network of administrative strategies derived from the central office and carried out by district and school-based administrators, teachers are placed under intensive surveillance and can be severely penalized for failing to comply with the mandates. As Ms. Douglas stated above, computerized data-tracking is connecting what teachers do in their classrooms directly to the central office, where officials can examine a teacher’s records and the scores of their students on a variety of metrics. This high-tech networked form of control and surveillance further contributes to a culture of fear and suspicion that limits the recourse teachers have to resist and influence policies. Such a disregard for the voice of teachers has a demoralizing effect.
that I found common among educators at EHS who do not feel like they are treated as valued partners in curricular decision-making. Further, and as a result, teachers have few options but to become active agents of neoliberal policy (Davies, 2003).

Beyond the erosion of teacher autonomy and the institution of new forms of teacher surveillance and discipline, efforts to manage curriculum at EHS are revealing of differential and unequal approaches to education.

*Mr. Parks: At the present time, every week we get something else added to our instructional clock, to our curriculum, and administrators have stopped even trying to justify their way. They’ve just been mandated, that’s why we do it. And that’s where children of poverty and children of such institutions continue to be raped by the educational system. It’s because if you try to get away with mandating this at a middle class suburban school like Walter Paten or North Side high school in the city of Chicago you would be burned at the stake. Who in the hell gives you the right to do it to our school?*

Mr. Parks here touches upon a common observation found in academic studies regarding the current emphasis on standardized and scripted curricula and testing. As researchers like Jonathon Kozol (2006) have noted, the technocratic management of curriculum and the drive to orient teaching and learning around test based skills have been enforced most intensively in low-income schools serving high proportions of impoverished Black and Latino/a students. This differentiation and excessive emphasis on testing and basic skills in low-achieving and socially disinvested public schools leads to the further stratification
of educational and social opportunities for youth. This can be explained in part by how scripted test-based curricula constructs knowledge. Reduced to a set of procedural skills, knowledge becomes a lifeless object—a thing to be consumed and mastered as opposed to something that is open, contestable, and dynamic. Test pedagogy socializes students to accept knowledge as something detached from power and everyday life. As opposed to teaching students about a complex and increasingly interdependent, dynamic, and unjust world to which their histories and experiences are intimately connected, the rudimentary emphasis on teaching skills for tests socializes students to believe that learning and thinking involves finding one correct answer out of a small handful of de-contextualized and static choices. Moreover, the imposition of scripted “teacher proof” curriculum disables the capacity of teachers to make meaningful connections to the cultural location and experiences of their students and their unique geographies, needs and interests.

Such an approach to knowledge does not impart the kinds of creative thinking and high-end analytical skills that are said to be required for the new global and postindustrial information economy. Instead it teaches conformity of thought and the ability to follow basic directions in order to perform repetitive tasks. Mr. Wilson described this as a process of “institutionalization” which he describes as follows:

\begin{quote}
*It’s like being treated like a number. Like you’re a number almost in a factory worker sense like you come in to the school as a number, you come into class and I give you something to fill out, I record it and you get a grade and that is the extent of our education. The students are just treated as little pieces and I think a lot of students feel that way. And that comes from everything from security to*
\end{quote}
Realities at EHS present distinct contradictions to claims that market based reforms in public education are preparing youth with the skills they need to find stable work in the global economy. The impact of social disinvestment combined with the reductive organization of curriculum at EHS appears to do little to support and prepare these youth for knowledge work and professional class opportunities. Instead, it reproduces broader conditions of economic and social inequality, where through narrow and rudimentary curricula, most EHS students will primarily occupy spaces at the lowest end of the service based job market or will be pushed out of school and the formal economy altogether. Their labor largely no longer needed in the new economy, these youth become cast-off populations fit primarily for low-wage and no-wage futures and/or the burgeoning for-profit prison system. Shahrzad Mojab and Sara Carpenter (2011) have described such socio-pedagogical relations as “learning by dispossession” whereby young people are disconnected from the forms of learning and knowledge necessary to understand, overcome, and transform the socioeconomic conditions that confront them. The impersonal systems of curriculum management and testing tend to objectify relationships between students and teachers and students and knowledge, producing an environment of disaffection, insecurity, and alienation. Such forms of learning disarticulate those relationships and forms of knowledge necessary for youth to critically map the social, economic, and political forces which impact their lives and in the process leaves pressing forms of objective and symbolic violence unexamined and unchallenged.
It thus disconnects students from the support and social relations needed to imagine alternative and more just and democratic frameworks of educational and social life.

**Foundations of Insecurity and Circulations of Violence**

*When you have a boring curriculum you create an opportunity for other things to be of interest that should not be in the building because you are simply not keeping people’s attention with the curriculum. You’re not pulling out the potential of the youth for the most part without taking away that there are good programs and teachers that care. But for the most part the culture of that place turns into one that is – education is fleeting and you’re walking on your tippy toes not to fall into the cracks. But there’s a whole other school culture of cliques, of violence, of he said she said, of respect and disrespect and upholding that. That becomes so much more important than everything else.*

- Mr. Charles, Youth Worker at EHS

*I really like it here but the violence that is going on is too much and I was thinking about transferring for my sophomore year because I feel like – I like it here. I like the teachers, I like the students but I feel, I just don’t feel comfortable here.*

- Maya, EHS student
If I could change one thing about this school, it would be all the drama.

-Sasha, EHS student

In the previous sections, I have pointed to how privatization, social disinvestment, and the organization and management of curriculum contribute to a climate of insecurity, teacher and student alienation, and educational failure that limits the capacity of public schools like EHS to provide substantive forms of social support and meaningful educational services and experiences to students. In short, they contribute to perpetuating what Zizek describes as objective and symbolic violence and insecurity in the lives of youth and in the everyday structure of school life at EHS. In this section, I discuss how this climate has also fed into and contributed to conditions of interpersonal conflict and subjective violence at EHS. While it is important to be cautious about ascribing direct causality between subjective conflict and violence and the political economic and governmental trends I have outlined thus far, it is clear that privatization, disinvestment, and the neoliberal management of the school’s curriculum are part of a broader context of insecurity and dispossession in which such phenomena emerge and flourish.

Expressed in the intensive fortification of the school and throughout daily interactions, conflict, or “drama” as the students refer to it, appears as a taken-for-granted part of everyday life at EHS. One central source of conflict is derived from broader processes related to neoliberal policy and contestations over space and social resources.

Mr. Wilson: Since Chicago is so divided, everything east of Markham Avenue is primarily African American and everything West is Hispanic. Our school is
situated on this border essentially. So while Ellison Square is mostly Hispanic this doesn’t really represent our school which is 50% African American. I think that causes some tension, people coming over and crossing these boundaries. So the community is very segregated and the school boundaries do not really match up with the community boundaries and I think that causes some tensions.

As in all large urban centers, there have been historic frictions between various ethno-racial communities in Chicago. The roots of these frictions lie largely in institutionalized forms of discrimination and historical struggles over the uneven distribution of access across race, space, and class to affordable housing, employment, and high quality education (Street, 2007). Moreover, ethno-racial tensions have been repeatedly exploited by the political class in the city in order to divide loyalties, acquire allegiances, and to win and maintain power (d’Eramo, 2002). In recent decades, race and class based tensions have been further exacerbated by extensive gentrification, real estate speculation, and the privatization of schools in the city that have amplified spatial conflicts across Chicago (Koval et al, 2006; Lipman, 2011). These forces have contributed to the displacement and the intensified concentration of low-income African American and Latino residents in hypersegregated residential zones while sending students displaced by public school closures outside their neighborhoods and across often hostile gang territories. These connections between privatization and conflict have been repeatedly raised in local communities across the city by parents, teachers, students, and activists and have been consistently ignored by the political class and mainstream media.
Mr. Charles: Organizations five years ago reached out to the mayor before some of these school closings were about to happen and they said, ‘do not close these schools.’ For safety reasons because of where students were gonna have to go. And that didn’t happen, schools were closed, people went places, overcrowding. Now we’ve got problems. What you’ve seen as a result of not listening to the community is a rise in school violence.

Mr. Charles’ comments point toward the empirical linkages between the exclusion of community voice, privatization, and the elevation of security related concerns at public schools. According to research conducted by journalist Sarah Karp (2009), amidst a broader decade-long decline in overall youth crime and violence, at the height of school closures in the late 2000s there was a system-wide increase in school security and discipline issues in the CPS. For instance, violations of the CPS discipline code at the most serious levels of 4, 5 and 6 code violations have risen steadily, from 5,762 in 2006-2007, to 12,058 in 2007-2008, to 15,094 in 2008-2009. Reports of students bringing dangerous objects to school rose 43% and reports of fighting, gang activity and bullying rose 18% during the same period. These concerns over physical security and violence are no doubt connected to multiple factors including economic pressures stemming from the Great Recession. CPS officials, for instance, cite enhanced accuracy in the reporting of school incidents. However, the evidence strongly suggests that the effects of disinvestment in public schools and the arbitrary shuffling of kids through market experiments have likely played a significant role. As public schools become collection centers for the most socioeconomically distressed and academically challenged coupled
with the neglect of these same institutions—conflict and insecurity inevitably emerge.

At EHS this manifests in three general areas of concern over physical and personal security: (1) weapons; (2) student conflicts; (3) and gang violence. The concern over weapons is certainly justified considering the reality of gang related shootings in the community; however, there has never been a documented incidence of a firearm in the school. With this being said, students have on occasion been found in possession of knives and other objects that could be used as weapons. While weapons are rare, student conflicts are common. These conflicts have many sources. They start as the result of different factors including gang disputes, petty gossip, bullying, sexual harassment, and frustrations brought to school from conditions at home. Sasha, a freshman student of Mexican and African American descent, discusses some these issues.

Alex: What’s it like to be a student at EHS?

Sasha: For me it’s decent. I mean, I haven’t gotten into any fights yet. I’ve gotten into arguments which is the problem with me because I don’t like when people – I don’t have good people skills.

Alex: Really? That’s surprising. You seem like you have pretty good people skills.

Sasha: No, nice people I do but people who have conflict with me for no reason, I don’t like that. For me it’s okay right now.

Alex: So sometimes you get into arguments?

Sasha: Yeah. But never fistfights.

Alex: So it sounds like what you’re saying is that school is pretty good except for these conflicts. Tell me, why do these conflicts happen?
Sasha: I don’t know. Like, yesterday I was in my next class that I have after this one and there was a girl – what was I doing? I was playing music because we were in the gym and she was like, ‘turn that shit off’ and I was like, ‘what?’ I wasn’t doing anything to her, she just started a big argument with me and was like, ‘I’m not a talker, I’m a fighter’ and I was like, ‘okay.’ So I don’t know. Little stuff like that just gets into people’s head and just messes with me.

Alex: Where does it come from?

Sasha: I don’t know! It’s really stupid stuff. Most of it is over boys, some of it is over ‘he said’ ‘she said’ stuff. It’s basically what every fight is about in EHS.

Sasha here describes the everyday conflicts that are a common feature of life at EHS. As she describes in this passage these conflicts often spring out of ordinary everyday situations and most are over seemingly inconsequential or “stupid stuff” as she puts it—i.e. rumors, everyday frustrations and acting out, bullying, romantic conflicts. It is absolutely vital that programs and strategies are developed and supported that address the realities of such conflicts particularly as the current security and disciplinary climate utterly fails to. Sexual harassment, bullying, homophobia, and other forms of everyday conflict contribute to a culture of fear and social fragmentation that can lead to pushing many students out of school. Thus these concerns need to be addressed through the development of holistic and restorative approaches to school organization a point I take up in greater detail in the conclusion.

While most conflicts at EHS manifest as personal and verbal disagreements as outlined above, physical altercations between students do occur. During the semester I
spent at EHS there were several such incidents. For instance, one afternoon as I was leaving the building I suddenly heard all of the security radios going crazy. I could hear the word “fight” and “police” being repeated amidst a barrage of radio squawks and static from the security guards’ two-way radios. Security immediately began scrambling into their “lock down” mode. The guards began closing doors and blocking off hallways with steel gates. I ran upstairs to where the incident was unfolding. Just adjacent to the cafeteria in air thick with adrenaline and the recognizable tang of processed school lunch there were 20 or so students excitedly milling about. In the middle, several security guards were breaking things up and calling for students to exit the area. Up the stairs behind me came four plain clothes police officers clad in body armor and semi-automatic pistols. The officers entered the scene but remained passive observers, allowing the security staff to control the situation. I saw a school security guard lead away a skinny freshman girl who could not have weighed more than 70 pounds and who was apparently one of three students involved in the fight. Slowly the crowd of students dispersed. The police stood back and watched things unfold, they gave me looks like “why aren’t you doing anything.” They obviously thought that I was a teacher and had no way of knowing that it would (ironically given the circumstances) be a legal liability for me to get involved.

Paradoxically, despite the threat of serious punishment, physical altercations like this one often take place in the school precisely because students believe it offers a sense of safety. Students will choose to have a brief “face saving” altercation in a school hallway where they know it will be broken up by security rather than take their chances in the streets where the feeling is “anything can happen.” However, while the school’s
security and disciplinary apparatus was successful in diffusing this unfortunate incident, it is not organized to take these kinds of nuances into consideration. Such incidents immediately elicit a militarized threat posture defined by the symbolic codes of “lock down,” body armor, and weapons. This does indeed serve to break up fights when they occur, but does little to prevent them and often works at cross purposes to counseling those engaged in the actions. This is aggravated by conditions of overcrowding, scarcity, and neoliberal accountability as educators and administrators are not afforded the time, resources, and support needed to attend adequately and substantively to the myriad needs and problems of their students. In the incident described above, the three female students were subject to automatic suspensions while one was detained on a potential criminal misdemeanor. As I describe in the next chapter, such a reflexive turn to the criminal justice system does little to teach, uplift, or to address the underlying problems, while furthering a culture of suspicion, fear, and punishment that erodes the educative and social foundation of public education as a space of democratic human development.

While the majority of conflicts between students at EHS do not represent a serious threat to student safety, violence remains a serious and legitimate concern, particularly the threat of gang violence. One teacher described EHS as the “Middle East” of gang activity because the school sits on the boundary of as many as six rival gang territories. Problematic metaphors aside, this crossing of gang boundaries poses serious problems as these rivalries can and do lead to violence and internal conflicts in the school. However, with this being said, the question of gangs at EHS is far from straightforward as the question of what actually constitutes a gang is itself highly contested. The general consensus seems to be that a relatively small percentage of EHS
students perhaps 7-12% have an actual affiliation with a known street gang such as the Latin Kings, Satan’s Disciples, and the Black Stone Rangers, three of the active gangs in the area. With this said, there remains a pattern among students to form “cliques” or “crews” which resemble gangs. These cliques and crews are typically groups of youth from the same neighborhood block. They may or may not have anything to do with illegal or violent activity. Many simply exist as a support network that offers friendship, belonging, and a sense of security and protection. A Latino sophomore named Raul explains:

Alex: What can you tell me about gangs here at EHS?
Raul: Gangs are what cause most of the problems around here. Everyone has to protect themselves because things that go on in the streets might come into the school. So everybody has to have a crew to protect themselves.
Alex: So then some students are in gangs just to protect themselves from other gangs?
Raul: See it’s not like everyone is in a gang. But sort of. You need someone watching your back in case you have problems. It doesn’t mean like you are like selling drugs or causing mayhem or whatever. It’s just like you have to have a crew, if you don’t, no one is gonna have your back if someone tries to mess with you. So a lot of students have their own crews but that doesn’t mean they are doing the gangbang.

Rose, an African American freshman, adds:
Alex: Why do students join gangs?

Rose: For safety. Mostly because they think if they’re in a gang with this person that it can protect them. It’s like, “if I stay with these people they’ll help me out and I’ll help them out” and stuff like that but it’s not really like that because if you get caught up in something they’re not going to jail with you.

My research suggests that the forces driving youth gangs and cliques at EHS are very much in line with the broader social science research. As John Hagedorn (2008) demonstrates, gangs are deeply connected to and shaped by multiple overlapping forces such as broken families, racial oppression, and entrenched poverty and social inequality.

Mr. Wilson: Right now gang violence is exploding all over the place and it’s because no one has money or jobs and so they are selling drugs and fighting over territory. This school year has been the most violence by far and it’s because of the economic depression. Two kids shot on school property already this year. Like that has never happened before. So I see a definite connection between the economy being worse and the recent violence.

Contrary to dominant narratives that depict gangs as simply a manifestation of social pathology, gangs persist today because they provide youth who have been abandoned in a world of crumbling public institutions and savage inequalities a means to form local solidarities and to exert some sense of power and agency within struggles over urban
space, economic opportunity, and social status and recognition. After all, despite the fact that most gang affiliations do not translate into much more than a subsistence income for the majority of those involved, the urban “drug dealing” gang member can be understood as representing nothing less than the inverted image of the rugged entrepreneurial subject mythologized by neoliberal ideology—a street corner CEO hustling in a competitive market to maximize his/her flow of capital and to outcompete their rivals by any means.

Pointing out the underlying forces driving gangs and gang violence is certainly not the same thing as romanticizing them. At EHS and in Ellison Square, gang rivalries take a tragic and destructive toll on the social fabric. While gangs do function as an informal sphere of social organization and a means for youth to exert some sense of power and to exercise a form of entrepreneurial initiative, they too often prevent larger and far more important solidarities from developing while contributing to nihilistic violence and social fragmentation. The two gang related shootings involving EHS students that I discussed in the introduction to this chapter certainly speak to this stark reality. Moreover, while youth violence has declined overall since the late 1980s, each year dozens of young people are shot and killed in Chicago, many related to gang disputes of one form or another. Importantly, however, an understanding of violence cannot be limited to gangs. To do so not only limits our ability to understand the persistence of gangs, but our understanding of violence itself as a systemic and objective force implicated in broader patterns of oppression and social insecurity in schools and communities. As scholars have pointed out, the violent historical and institutional realities of racial oppression, stigmatization, and the inability to enter into stable employment contribute to a landscape of broken families, demoralization, trauma, and
cycles of violence (Alexander, 2010; Wacquant, 2008 2009; Wilson, 1996). Based on my observations and conversations with those in the community, I conclude this section with perspectives for thinking through the circulation of violence in Ellison Square and at EHS. These perspectives, I would argue, are necessary to consider if we are to rethink security in schools and communities from the standpoint of equity, human development, and democracy as opposed to punishment, containment, and exclusion.

First, violence is embedded within economic insecurity and inequality. The inability to find employment, to provide for one’s basic needs, and the physical and emotional wreckage that poverty and unemployment exerts in the lives of individuals and families is itself a form of objective violence as well as a source of subjective violence.

Alex: What do you think are the primary factors driving the violence in the community?

Ms. Douglas: Poverty. We’ve got ninety percent kids that qualify for free lunches and breakfasts. Poverty drives a lot of the crime, especially the theft… Certainly family issues and family breakdown. I have a lot of kids where I don’t know how they get themselves here every day. They don’t have anybody at home getting them up for school or somebody there getting them out for school. In some cases, like a student that never comes I called her father and he said, ‘well I don’t know if she goes to school or not. I’m up and out to work at six am.’ That’s one case where there is a parent in the home and they’re working but they’re not aware whether their daughter is going to school. In other cases it might be that there is
no parent there or no parent that is up in the morning to get them up and out. So some of it is the attendant issues of poverty, unemployment, family breakdown.

In their book, *The Spirit Level*, epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009) present a transnational comparative study of sociological data that unequivocally concludes “the association between inequality and violence is strong and consistent; it’s been demonstrated in many different time periods and settings. Recent evidence of the close correlation between ups and downs in inequality and violence show that if inequality is lessened, levels of violence also decline” (p. 144). Wilkinson and Pickett indicate that the linkage between inequality and violence is multidimensional involving struggles over access to economic and social resources as well as over cultural capital and social status. However, in their trenchant analysis of the transnational data they find that the social factors that contribute to high levels of subjective violence such as low educational attainment, family breakdown, high levels of stress and depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and social mistrust all correlate to the relative distribution of income, power and wealth in a society. In short, what matters is not how affluent a society is but how unequal it is—the more unequal the society, the more socially atomized and objectively and subjectively violent it becomes. As I have described in this chapter, the hard realities of homelessness, food insecurity, and rampant poverty and joblessness amongst families in Ellison Square serves to erode the conditions in which young people can secure their daily life and future. This means, for instance, that when families lose their homes through foreclosure and are forced to live in the streets, it not only erodes the necessary conditions for youth to “perform” in school but contributes to the splintering of
the social fabric and to the proliferation of subjective conflicts in the school and community. In Malia’s words, “some kids come in and make trouble, well maybe they didn’t sleep that night or they haven’t eaten in three days and they are stressed out.”

Second, violence not only stems from economic dislocation and inequality, but emerges out of various interlocking forms of trauma and oppression. The historical legacies of slavery and Jim Crow along with contemporary institutional realities of racial inequality, stigmatization, and the inability to enter into the formal sector of work and employment produce a landscape of broken lives and loss of hope. Mr. Charles here powerfully links the lure of gangs and violence to demoralization and stigma of failure.

*I think it’s deeper than hopelessness. It’s deeper than despair. We’re talking about all-out failure and disbelief. How do you live without belief? What does the classroom represent to people who are not doing well in school? Failure. What does school represent as a building? Failure. So when I get suspended, that’s cool because I don’t have to go to that space where I am a failure. So how are you gonna convince someone who is trying sometimes but they are failing for whatever reason...So when the building and the space and the curriculum and the assignments represent failure, how do you increase one’s belief that this is actually important to them? As a survival mechanism I have to tell myself that this is no longer important to me and I can survive without this because I can’t do it and I’ve been told I can’t do it and that I’m horrible. Well okay, I can make this money. I can organize this or plan this. That makes sense.*
Orlando Patterson (1982) has suggested that histories of racial oppression and contemporary racial inequality and despair perpetuate a form of “social death,” which he defines as the combined socioeconomic and political processes that deny the fundamental dignity of human beings. As Mr. Charles describes above, poverty, societal racism, and intergenerational trauma contribute to the normalization of conflict and violence. He suggests that EHS, as it is currently organized, is failing to make up for the deficit of hope and belief that emerges within this milieu. Rather than a source of inspiration and uplift, for many youth, EHS represents more failure and a seemingly unrealistic option for a better future. This lack or absence of belief feeds into the lure of gangs and the streets. While the picture painted here is terribly bleak, I would suggest that while hopelessness and despair are no strangers to young people and adults at EHS, this only tells one part of the story. As I will suggest in chapter five, there is also a tremendous amount of resilience and hopeful engagement amongst educators, youth workers, and youth at EHS. While the situation is indeed dire, there nonetheless exists powerful, yet all too often subverted, forms of critical knowledge, desire, and cooperation for promoting more peaceful, just, and ethical social relations at EHS and in the community.

Third, violence is connected to struggles over social status and respect. Adults and youth at EHS frequently link subjective acts of violence to conflicts over status or what they refer to typically as “respect.” Links between violence and status relations are well documented in the social science literature. For instance, Harvard psychiatrist James Gilligan (2003) has argued that almost all acts of violence stem from feelings of shame and humiliation. Based upon long-term research with violent offenders in the Massachusetts prison system, he states that “the basic psychological motive, or cause, of
violent behavior is the wish to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation a feeling that is painful and can even be intolerable and overwhelming and replace it with its opposite, the feeling of pride” (p.1151). Drawing on the work of Gilligan, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) further argue that poverty and inequality drive feelings of powerlessness and in turn, conflicts over status. In this framework, “respect” becomes of heightened importance to youth who, in a context of poverty and powerlessness, possess little of the material or symbolic capital valued within the broader culture. The desire to maintain dignity and to demonstrate self-respect and pride then becomes not only a source of potential conflict as when someone feels disrespected by another, but an important survival mechanism. Raul defines respect as such:

*Alex: So what does respect mean to you?*

*Raul: Respect means that you have pride in yourself and that you aren’t going to let anybody mess with you. It means you stand up for yourself and your people.*

*Alex: Why is respect so important?*

*Raul: Well it’s kind of about who you are and having pride in yourself. Like you respect yourself and you won’t let anyone take that away or disrespect you in anyway. And like also if someone thinks they can get over on you then you are in trouble. If you get checked and you like, back down, they’re gonna think that you a punk. Then you got trouble.*

Respect is one of the single most important issues for youth and informs the way young people perceive themselves and others in relation to their world and future.
As Raul here explains, “respect” has a dual significance. It refers to a person’s sense of self-worth and dignity. It is also something one must have in order to protect oneself against subjective violence. Each of us understands how important it is to feel valued and respected by others. The powerlessness and lovelessness that young people too often experience in their daily lives, and that we all bear a responsibility for perpetuating, can translate into feelings of shame and ultimately feed subjective conflict and violence.

*Fourth, violence is articulated via raced and gendered social relations.* As a variety of researchers on urban schools and young people have observed (Thomson, 2002; Fine & Weis, 2005), questions of violence are experienced differently for young people across the lines of social difference including class, race, sexuality, and gender. At EHS, for instance, male students report that they are more likely to be pressured to join gangs and are more often confronted or “checked” on the streets by gang members than female students. Male students also articulate that they are more likely to experience harassment by the police when in school and out in the community. This exchange, I had with Darien, an African American Junior, describes these phenomena:

*Alex:* What’s the relationship like between the police and students in the neighborhood?

*Darien:* I think the relationship is that the police, when they see people outside sometimes – it depends on who it is but sometimes the cops, they’re around and trying to figure things out and catch what’s going on but sometimes the police officer there will let you go if you give them information. Sometimes they come up to you for no reason and try to get information out of you.
Alex: What kind of information?

Darien: Information like, ‘do you know this person’ or ‘where this person be’ or ‘what did they do at this person’s house’ and things like that. Sometimes the police officers – there are racist police officers around here. Like, a couple of months ago a detective car, they grabbed this one guy like they were gonna arrest him and put him in the back of the car and took him somewhere and they beat him up and then they put him back in the car and dropped him back off and things like that just for no reason.

Alex: Has this kind of thing happened to you?

Darien: It happens to me all the time. I’ll be outside and they’ll stop me and pat me down and ask me questions...Like, one time they stopped us we were just walking down the street and this was before curfew, so we were just walking down the street and this cop pulled over and pulled their guns on us and pushed us against the car. That was unnecessary, we wouldn’t have resisted. When they pulled up next to us we stopped, we didn’t keep going we stopped and I just think all of that is unnecessary.

While Darien shows remarkable restraint in his comments regarding such hostile violations of his and others bodily integrity and civil rights, he highlights what has long been a reality for young men of color in urban America, which is to be always under a constant state of siege either from forces of violence on their streets or under suspicion and threat of racist violence from police. As Paul Street (2007), Loic Wacquant (2006 2009), and others have noted, the rise of a neoliberal economic and social milieu of
declining economic opportunity and the turn to mass incarceration as a central mode of governance of the poor has meant that Black and Latino men, in particular, have become increasingly subject to enhanced police scrutiny and victimization via law enforcement brutality. In Chicago, for instance, between 2002 and 2004 alone there were more than 10,000 complaints of police brutality with only 18 of these resulting in meaningful disciplinary action of police.\(^\text{18}\) It is little wonder why issues of respect and status become of such heightened importance to young people who often witness such blatant acts of disrespect and violence by authorities.

While also exposed to these same forces, female students cite sexualized violence and harassment as primary concerns. As Sasha describes:

\[\text{As a female I’ve been checked by a lot of grown men and that’s what I’ve gotta worry about. For example, me and my cousin we used to go to the store outside and people would stop their cars and try to talk to me and stuff like that. And I try to avoid that because my dad is really overprotective of me because I’m an only child and my mother passed away so he’s really protective of me. And if he ever sees something like that he’s gonna go crazy. That’s why I try to prevent everything from happening.}\]

Confirming Sasha’s concerns over sexual harassment, McCormick (2003) found in her study of youth in an urban school in New York, that female students experience the “twin

abuses” of both racism and sexism in their everyday lives at school and in their communities. McCormick observed that female students often have to develop strategies, as Sasha intimates above, to “shield” themselves from unwanted sexual attention, harassment, and intimidation on the streets and in their schools from other young men as well as from adults. I will come back in more detail in the following chapter to how this sexualized violence is articulated amidst the militarized security culture of EHS.

Fifth, heavy-handed suppression efforts do not work to prevent violence. Over the last three decades, the United States has poured billions of dollars into expanding state power in the realm of policing while concurrently it has slashed investments in communities, families, and schools. What has emerged is a penal net that functions as both a growing sector of the new economy and a source of violence unto itself. As Barry Weisberg (2010) has argued in a special report for Chicago Public Radio:

In the United States the twins of crime and crime control are big business. The wars on crime, drugs, gangs or terrorism perpetrate violence in the name of public safety. In the attempt to control the toxic consequences of inequality and racism, some local police have become armies of occupation and oppression. Cops, courts and corrections account for half of the budget in some cities. This will never lead to functional families, successful schools or healthy communities. (p.1)

A 2007 report by the Justice Policy Institute reports that despite unprecedented investments in heavy-handed suppression efforts, a general strategy of surveillance and mass incarceration has failed miserably to reduce gang membership, crime, and violence
in inner-city neighborhoods. The report goes on to state that in Chicago, in particular, “a cycle of police suppression and incarceration, and a legacy of segregation, have actually helped to sustain unacceptably high levels of gang violence” (p.6). As Weisberg comments, rather than continuing the failed trends of state repression “the values, behaviors and institutions of violence must be replaced with the values, behaviors and institutions of peace-building in families, schools, businesses, communities and cities”.

Public schools have often been viewed as a “social leveler” enabling youth at the bottom of the social pyramid to have a chance at a better life. However, social mobility in the United States has all but evaporated over the last 35 years (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Many youth like those at EHS now form a surplus population outside the needs and demands of the current economic system. In relation to the realities I have thus far described at EHS, it is not difficult to understand how public schools have played a role in contributing to this stagnation and downward mobility. But contrary to what neoliberal and corporate school reformers claim, the failure of public schools has little to do with some intrinsic deficiency of public governance or schools themselves. As my analysis of privatization and free market governance in Chicago and its impact on EHS suggests, neoliberal reforms have failed to fundamentally improve public schools while contributing to the exacerbation of deepening systemic educational dysfunctions and inequities. In this climate of disinvestment and narrowing of educative goals and substance, the promise of public schooling to provide human security and hope to struggling youth is subverted. In place of broad based social and democratic commitments to investing in young people and their future are sown the seeds of conflict, violence, and alienation. In the next chapter, I extend these perspectives through a
discussion of the how these systemic conditions of violence and inequality are increasingly managed through crime control and militarized surveillance at EHS.
Criminality and sociality:
A zero sum game

The sole effect of extemporary police actions is to render the need of further police actions yet more pressing: police actions, so to speak, excel in reproducing their own necessity.

-Zygmunt Bauman, “Interview—On The U.K. Riots”

The School Safety Office, home to Officers Duggan and Jones, is tucked away on the first floor and down a back hallway. After finding the office one morning, I proceeded to knock on the plain wooden door. After some audible shuffling around inside, a burly white cop with cropped brown hair opened the door. “Yeah, can I help you,” he said, in the flat unmistakable cadence of a white working class Chicago accent. This was Officer Duggan. He told me to come in. As I entered the small office I notice two desks against the opposite wall. At one of the desks sat Officer Jones, a middle age white female officer in a blue bullet proof vest. Against the other wall I notice a skinny African American student in a greyish t-shirt and blue jeans. I guess that he is probably a sophomore or a junior. After a quick double-take I realize that the student is standing while handcuffed to a steel ring protruding from the wall. The kid gave me a wry smirk as I introduce myself to both Duggan and Jones. Duggan motioned toward the student and said, “we can’t really talk right now cause we have this problem.” “Problem,” I asked? “Yeah, we gotta
wait for the paddy wagon to come pickup this goofball.” “Come back in a couple hours and we can talk,” he said. On my way out I wonder if the “goofball” is going to be handcuffed to the wall for the next “couple of hours?”

As this image of a student handcuffed to the wall of the School Safety Office suggests, a punitive climate of policing and crime control has emerged in urban public schools like EHS. In what follows, I pick up largely where I left off in Chapter 3 by analyzing processes of surveillance and criminological discipline at EHS and their impact on school culture and the security of youth.

**Surveillance and Control**

When visiting EHS in the morning, one will find two lines on opposite ends of the building, one of female students and the other of male students. CPS policy encourages “where possible” for female security guards to scan and search female students and male guards to scan and search male students during security checks. At the front of the female line, one security guard monitors the contents of book bags via an x-ray machine and a closed circuit television monitor, each manufactured by a company called Sonex. The other guard beckons each student through a metal detector, then proceeds to give each student a once over with a metal detecting scanning wand. The security officers bark directions: ”Hurry up now” ”Take of those belts” “Bags on the left!” “Lets go!” “Move it!” “Off with the jewelry!” “Take off those belts and earrings!” “Move along !” The students are visibly annoyed. Eye rolling and talking back are standard operating procedure. As the students proceed through the metal detector, one security guard, a
middle-aged African American woman in a dark blue “SECURITY” jacket, sweeps each student with the electronic wand. The other guard sits on a stool watching the CCTV monitor viewing an x-ray image of the contents of each book bag as it passes through the device. “How does this thing work, and what are you looking for?” I ask. The guard replies, “drugs, weapons, anything that they aren’t supposed to have. They come through and we check them. They have to remove anything that might set off the alarm. We use the wand to make sure they aren’t hiding anything”. A guard asks a student to remove her belt, the student responds: “Damn, why do you have to waste my time every morning?”

A similar scene unfolds at the male entrance. Here, I stand with a talkative security guard named Alberto. As the male students line up for their screening, I notice that Alberto is dressed in the same dark blue SECURITY jacket as his female counterparts and I can see that he has handcuffs on his belt. There is no electronic wand on this side. The scene on the male side is remarkably tranquil. The students line up calmly and without protest. Many of them look tired as if they just rolled out of bed and they all seem more or less resigned to the security process. An African American youth in a black jacket sporting a neatly trimmed low-rise afro sets off the metal detector (BEEP!). At this he is promptly frisked head to toe by Alberto. Out from the kid’s pocket emerges a red cigarette lighter. Neither Alberto nor the other non-uniformed security guard seem much concerned by the lighter. “You know you can’t bring this in here…what are you thinking.” Alberto says as he sets the lighter in a little yellow container next to the screener as he lets the kid pass through, Alberto remarks: “When the metal detector goes off we pat the students down. Mostly its nothing but sometimes we get lucky and find things they aren’t supposed to have like drugs and weapons.”
Alberto tells me that he has been working security in the CPS for eleven years. I ask him his opinion of the security situation at EHS. He says that “the teacher layoffs are making things more difficult” and “without the teachers things have been more hectic”. He is also frustrated that some of the other security guards do not always act professionally by refusing to wear their uniforms or to always show up to work regularly and on time. “Some of them just don’t care,” he says. As I talk to Alberto, a white male teacher with a pony-tail walks past us carrying a small green plant; I notice he is wearing a t-shirt that says “I Love Standardized Testing.” He offers us a cheery “Good morning!” A skinny boy in a red sweatshirt and jeans who looks like he might be a freshman or a sophomore sets off the alarm again (Beep!). Alberto’s partner, a non-uniformed male security guard tells the kid in a less than sympathetic tone, “take out those earrings, next time I see those I am going to suspend your ass.”

As conveyed in this description, the scanning line is a complex site of social interaction. It can be a stressful place as well as a place of monotonous repetition and routine. Every day the security guards and the students engage in a variety of power struggles, most of which are trivial and tangential to any serious security concerns—guards checking ID’s and dress code while students shift about in line fretting over being late for class. However, despite the seemingly benign nature of the scanning process, the failure to comply is backed up with the threat of exclusion and physical eviction from the school: “take out those earrings, next time I see those I am going to suspend your ass!”

Maryann Dickar (2008) has used the notion “cleansing ritual” to describe this scanning process. In her research in New York City, she observes that intensive scanning systems in schools institute “safety” by “making student bodies fit for the institution by
removing the element of the street” (p. 65). She argues that “such practices work to identify certain items and cultural markers as ‘unclean’” (p. 65). In particular, the scanning ritual, in conjunction with the school’s dress code policy, tends to target styles that are associated with Black and Latino/a youth culture and specifically anything that might be perceived as “gang” related. Dickar states that “one of the symbolic roles of scanning is to clearly differentiate school space from street space by coercing students to remove such styles, at least at the entry point” (p.65). Such processes discursively produce meanings of “safe,” “compliant,” and “acceptable,” along with “dangerous,” “unruly,” and “criminal” that are inscribed onto students as they pass through the scanning system. Surveillance thus produces and inscribes distinct meanings and understandings of both virtuousness and deviancy within the process of schooling.

The scanning process is designed to produce a safe and protected space whereby the ordered and functional business of education can proceed beyond the supposed threats posed by the unruly and dangerous norms of the street. However, such meanings produce powerful overt and tacit understandings of power, place, and identity, signaling who belongs and who doesn’t in this space (Gallagher & Fusco, 2006). These understandings impact how students perceive themselves and their relation to authority as they are immediately confronted upon entry to the school by a mesh of security procedures that are both concretely and symbolically designed to make their bodies and appearance “suitable” to the institution—in a sense de-contaminated of those elements deemed potentially threatening. Olivia, a junior who self-identifies as “mixed-race” remarks:

_Honestly it’s frustrating. But there isn’t anything you can do but just take it. And_
so I just try to ignore that part of the morning because it makes me feel bad about coming to this place. Like this is a ghetto school so we must all be criminals. But I try and not let it take anything from who I am.

Kristina, a Latina freshman adds:

I have learned from experience that if you go through a metal detector you feel like you’re in a prison like, ‘Check here. Check there. Take off your coat’. They are like, ‘good morning kids, get in there. Take off your coat and make sure you’re ready’ and blah blah blah. It isn’t a warm welcome, it’s more like a, ‘here we go again, more daily routine.’ It’s more like that.

According to Christian Parenti (2003), technological developments in surveillance have historically been linked to the desire to know and control the movement and behavior of racially suspect and criminalized populations. He documents how the earliest forms of surveillance technologies in North America were information systems such as ID systems designed to restrict the movement of runaway slaves, immigrants, and political dissidents. Today, surveillance practices such as CCTV cameras and digitally networked data tracking systems sort people according to various threat assessment and risk management criteria which single out particular individuals, behaviors, and groups for scrutiny within sites as diverse as hospitals, airports, schools, streets, and shopping malls. This contributes to differentiated forms of mobility (Bauman, 1998; Salter, 2003 2004), various racialized and gendered effects (Haggerty & Ericson, 2006), as well as discourses that work to justify expanded technological and criminological control (Garland, 2001).
Public schools currently utilize a variety of surveillance technologies for a range of purposes: human, electronic/digital, data analysis, record keeping, profiling, and spatial manipulation. In the name of security, these practices target and affect teachers, administrators, students, and researchers in diverse ways throughout the school. Like the scanning process described above, they operate to sort and regulate bodies and behaviors based upon criteria that work to define notions of the virtuous and deviant and the included and excluded. They also highlight and frame new subjectivities as students are socialized to accept a penal web of surveillance as natural and inevitable while learning to identify as either potential victims, suspects, or criminals within a postindustrial economic landscape of diminished opportunity and mass incarceration (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Gallagher and Fusco note, contemporary regimes of governmentality and risk management in schools have inaugurated a new constellation of surveillance and discipline that in a climate of expediency and heightened security “have multiplied the forms of discourses on the subject of security; they have established various points of implantation for criminality and danger; they have coded and (dis)qualified (un)worthy individuals” (Gallagher & Fusco, 2006, p. 306).

Data Tracking and the ID System: Monitoring the Criminogenic Environment

At EHS, students are under the gaze of surveillance from the time they leave their homes to when they return at the end of the day. To be a student is to be watched, tracked, monitored, and under suspicion by authorities at all times. Cameras on the street corners record their movements for real-time inspection by law enforcement. Once they arrive at
school they are met immediately met by a thick mesh of security and scanning procedures: security guards, cameras, scanning wands, and x-ray screeners. As students pass through and beyond the scanning system at EHS and have entered school, they are promptly confronted by additional layers of surveillance and control. One of the most prominent is an intricate web of data tracking.

Data tracking is a central form of surveillance at EHS aimed at the regulation and monitoring of students as well as teachers and other staff. The modes of data tracking vary from the attendance system; accountability policies and computer software that monitor test scores; lesson plans and the record keeping of teachers; to the district wide software system “Verify Net” that tracks student infractions related to school discipline.

Perhaps the most significant form of tracking surveillance is the school’s ID system. All students and visitors including researchers are required to have and display an ID at all times. The ID’s have a photo, name, grade level, and a bar code on one side. On the other side, is a printed class timetable and schedule. Each ID can be scanned into a computer system, where, depending on the level of clearance, one can access student records and input new information on students including grades, schedule changes, and disciplinary infractions. Administrators, teachers, and security are constantly checking ID’s throughout the day in efforts to monitor the flow and traffic of students in the building. Combined with the extensive security infrastructure, the ID system contributes a broader control network whereby students become a tracked and “knowable” population whose mobility is always subject to scrutiny, enacting what Foucault called a “grid of visibility” (Foucault, 1977). This serves to enforce to students their place within the hierarchical and authoritative structure of the school environment. Kristina comments
on the de-humanizing aspects: “it makes me feel like it’s a jail, like Cook County or something, with the ID’s, like I’m number 4025. You might as well just tattoo it on my forearm.”

The ID system is used not only to monitor the movements of students throughout the building but also to keep track of who has been suspended or expelled in order to control access to the gated school itself. Each day, a list of students who have been suspended or expelled is compiled and this information is then converted into dossiers with large color photos, student names, and other identifying information. These dossiers are generated and distributed to security throughout the school who use them as tools to control and deny access to the building. Some schools in the CPS apparently keep bulletin boards by their front entrances with the photos of those students who have been suspended or expelled displayed prominently for all to see—enacting a spectacle of punishment and public shaming. At EHS, the guards keep the dossiers on clipboards and/or have them available for review at the security desk near each entrance.

The ID system is also implicated within processes that move beyond symbolic criminalization. The ID dossiers, or “most wanted” lists or “mug shots” as I came to think of them, are also used by the disciplinary staff to build cases against students in coordination with law enforcement. For instance, the ID dossiers are often used as identification tools in the wake of violations of school rules and/or laws. If an incident occurs, police and school staff can use the photo dossiers to verify the identity of potential perpetrators in a way similar to a police line-up. After lunch one day I found myself standing in the hallway outside the central office talking to the Freshman Dean Mr. Meyer. Ms. Jacobs, the vice principal, approached us and handed Mr. Meyer
several student dossiers. She informed him that these students had been accused by another student of assault in an incident that took place outside of school the previous afternoon. Ms. Jacobs gave Mr. Meyer instructions to go and show the dossiers to the accuser in order to make a “positive ID” before involving law enforcement and before pursuing a potential “mob action” criminal charge against the accused youth. I went with Mr. Meyer as he took the dossiers to find the accuser. After pulling the young man out of class, Mr. Meyer proceeded to acquire a positive ID based on the dossiers. Next Mr. Meyer informed EHS’ two police officers, Duggan and Jones, who are permanently stationed at the school, that an ID had been made and that charges may need to be filed. The police then proceeded to make arrangements to bring in the accused for questioning and to potentially pursue arresting the youth and pressing criminal charges.

Such incidents are a regular occurrence, demonstrating how forms of data-driven surveillance become implicated within the larger web of crime control at EHS as information is freely shared and integrated through technological tracking systems between school and police officials. The incident is thus revealing of how surveillance works to link the administration of the school and law enforcement in a direct and unmediated way as administrators and Dean’s frequently work together to build cases that funnel students into the criminal justice system. One of the most troublesome aspects of this is that because the accused are being directly connected to police in the confines of the school, their First Amendment rights to due process are subject to violation, as interrogations routinely occur without the presence of parents or legal representation (Robbins, 2009; Ruddick, 2006). As opposed to dealing with unfortunate incidents of this type in-house through administrative intervention or counseling, students are often
sent directly to the police. Such examples highlight how surveillance is implicated in processes that link the movements and behaviors of students to law enforcement while in some cases divesting them of rights to due process. They become a targeted population excluded from the rights and protections supposedly afforded to all citizens within the very institution responsible for developing their moral and civic potential.

The Camera Network and the Institutionalized Mistrust of Youth

Beyond data tracking and the ID system, EHS relies on a sophisticated network of CCTV cameras in order to keep watch over all aspects of life in and around the school. In 2003, the city of Chicago was awarded $48 million dollar grant by the Department of Homeland Security and has spent tens of millions more of its own funds including a $50 million dollar sum in 2007 in order to link emergency communications systems and CCTV cameras into an integrated “Homeland Security Grid”. According to an article in the Associated Press, Chicago now has “the most extensive and sophisticated video surveillance system in the United States, and one that is transforming what it means to be in public…in less than a decade and with little opposition, the city has linked thousands of cameras — on street poles and skyscrapers, aboard buses and in train tunnels — in a network covering most of the city” (AP, 2010). This network includes over 10,000 cameras with over 6,500 of these concentrated in Chicago schools making educational institutions the most watched spaces in the city. This includes CCTV cameras that now have the capacity to zoom, scan, and pivot along with a new generation that are “covert,” meaning that they can be as small as a thimble and are designed to be hidden and thus go
undetected. The CCTV cameras are accessible in real time via an internet network where city officials and police officers can log in and literally “surf” surveillance cameras throughout the city, representing a vast expansion of state surveillance into schools and communities.

The camera network at EHS is integrated directly into the broader Homeland Security Grid. While presented to the public as a security net designed to prevent terrorism and crack down on crime, the integration of school cameras into the Homeland Security system blurs the material and symbolic lines between militaristic, post-9/11 anti-terrorism discourses directed at neutralizing external enemies and the monitoring of internal populations, in this case, urban youth who are deemed potentially dangerous. As part of the broader anti-terror security grid, images from the cameras at EHS can be pulled up and monitored anywhere with an internet connection by city officials and police. One morning while in the School Safety Office with the police Officers Duggan and Jones, I was shown firsthand the extent and power of the CCTV cameras. During our discussion we somehow moved onto the topic of the cameras and Duggan said, “I’ll show you how they work.” He then proceeded to log-in on his computer to the city’s surveillance network. He asked: “What do you want to look at?” “You want to see a train?” “How about the Red Line Stop at 95th and Western?” Within seconds, he had multiple surveillance cameras pulled up on his computer monitor. It looked like the interface featured in some post-9/11 Hollywood film. I could see three different real-time images from around the 95th EL stop not far from where my sister lives and teaches. In the far right-hand corner of the screen, I could see people on the train platform and others waiting for the bus outside the station. “How about one a little closer to us,” he said. He
then demonstrated how he could pull-up cameras from other Chicago Public Schools, cameras downtown, and indeed from the hallway outside their office at EHS. We saw students and security guards walking the corridor of a nearby public school and people walking the sidewalks in the Ellison Square neighborhood. They demonstrated how they could pull-up a camera from the neighborhood and use a zoom function to read the license plates of cars and even to peer right into the front windows of houses. “I didn’t realize you guys could remote view all these cameras,” I said. “Oh yeah, we have the entire city covered.”

The camera network at EHS operates on multiple levels both as a deterrent to crime and as a system for identifying suspects in the event of an illicit incident. Indeed, administrators have on occasion used the network in conjunction with police to identify students who have committed legal violations inside and outside the building. The cameras are also integrated into the broader cultural fabric of the school, standing as a symbolic warning to students and others that they are always under the watchful gaze of authority. Peter Kelly (2003) has referred to this as representing the “institutionalized mistrust of youth” where surveillance cameras are symptomatic of what has become an often excessive effort to police student behavior for any sign of criminality either real or imagined. For instance, one afternoon I was sitting in the hallway outside the Dean’s Office with two female African American students. They said that they had been caught ditching class. The Freshman Dean Mr. Meyer had dropped them off to talk to the acting Dean of Students, Mr. Morris. The three of us began talking about what kind of music we like. I told them that I like the hip-hop artist NAS which immediately made them laugh hysterically at me. Next one of the girls made a joke about the artist T-Pain and the girls
started giggling and performing a handshake. At this gesture, I heard a security officer approaching us from down the hall yell, “hey where do you think you are…I’ll write you up on a gang violation…look up at that camera right there [the guard points to the surveillance camera above us]…you are on camera gang banging right here.” The girls responded, “no we ain’t, we just playing around!” The guard pointed at the camera and said, “don’t you see that camera, we got you on film, we’ll have you written up and arrested for a gang violation right now.” Overhearing the commotion in the hallway, Dean Morris called the two girls into his office where he proceeded to give them a suspension warning for skipping class and to also warn them again against any future handshakes in the school hallway on threat of being charged with a gang violation.

In this example, CCTV cameras become integrated into a culture of security, suspicion, and criminalization at EHS. I do not know if these two young women were in fact engaging in a “gang” related handshake. It is possible that they were, but it is also possible that they were not. As my comments regarding the reality of gangs at EHS in Chapter 3 indicates, there is an often ambiguous line between “innocent” affiliations between students and supposed “criminal” gang activity. In either case, the cameras are not simply performing a security or safety function warding off potential gang activity, but are serving to expand and legitimate a gaze of punishment that criminalizes even those interpersonal expressions among students that are deemed illicit and/or potentially dangerous according to rationalities and definitions held by authorities. Here surveillance becomes directed as much at the possibility or potential of illicit conduct as actually “catching” or neutralizing violations. While these two students were not arrested for this particular incident, it became clear throughout my observations of daily life at EHS that
the behavior of students is always under a kind of criminological scrutiny and potential involvement of police. This modifies the distribution, composition, and authority of school governance and generates a culture of suspicion and criminological control. In this case, two students who had skipped class found themselves potentially drawn up on criminal charges via evidence from the CCTV cameras. I found that the cameras and the security culture in general had this kind of multiplying effect or what Michel Foucault (1977) once referred to as “a state of conscious and permanent visibility” (p. 201), proliferating the possibilities within given times and spaces where students could be monitored and potentially punished, or as I will describe in upcoming sections below, formally charged with crimes. The cameras thus occupy part of a broader culture of suspicion permeating daily life at EHS that presents a challenge to our understanding of the democratic and educative purposes of public schooling in the contemporary moment.

Environmental Design and Internal Confinement

Another prominent form of security and surveillance at EHS concerns the built environment itself and the management of space. As Foucault noted in his historical studies of modern institutions, architectural arrangements in places like schools, factories, and clinics represent rationalized processes and forms of knowledge that are designed to maximize visibility, regulation, and order (Foucault, 1977). In schools, this has historically meant dividing, tracking, and ranking student populations by age and ability; creating hallways, stairwells, and open spaces that enhance the regulatory gaze of adults; and organizing classrooms with straight mathematical rows of desks and chairs that place
the instructor prominently at the front of the room ready to administer examinations, keep
order, and to maintain individualized records of each student’s progress and behavior.
In schools like EHS, this industrial era model of factory discipline has been overlaid not
only with the extensive systems of digital networking technologies outlined above, but
also with new strategies of spatial repression. These strategies click with the current
realities and concerns over violence, crime, and student disorder. Taking cues from Oscar
Newman’s (1972) notion of “defensible space” and from “Crime Prevention through
Environmental Design” (CPTED), schools like EHS have experimented with new
mechanisms for managing space so as to maximize control and minimize disorder and
criminological threats. At EHS, this has meant sealing off doorways and limiting access
points to two secured entrances, keeping certain bathrooms under lock and key, posting
security guards at strategic locations to monitor hallways and flow of students,
mobilizing CCTV cameras and wireless communications, and periodically performing
“hall sweeps” and instituting “lockdowns” where steel gates are used to block hallways
and students are confined in their classrooms for intermittent periods of time.

One of the most extreme environmental/spatial arrangements that EHS has
experimented with involved the internal containment of a specific population of students.
Teachers and students alike often shared their frustration in describing the most
disruptive students at the school. I found that it was common for teachers and students to
indicate that 10-12% of the students were responsible for the vast majority of the school’s
discipline problems including classroom disruptions, fights, and trouble in the hallways.
These concerns are quite real. However, in a neoliberal economic and sociopolitical
environment where grinding poverty and loss of hope meet the realities of the neglect and
the criminalization of institutions like EHS, they are entirely not entirely surprising or unpredictable. During the 2009-2010 school year, the school attempted to directly identify, isolate, and contain the most disruptive youth by separating them from the “general population.” Lists of students were drawn-up and these students were mandated to be confined to the “mobile” classroom units in the school’s inner courtyard. In these windowless fiberglass and wood trailers, the identified youth were assigned their own internal security force of guards to monitor them. Teachers brought the curriculum to the students as they were not allowed to circulate in the broader population of the school. Administrators, and even many teachers, argued that the “solitary confinement” of these students was a way of improving the learning environment for the majority. However, the project broke-down as the detained students began openly rebelling and parents and district officials became aware of what was happening and made EHS end the program.

I do not think it is hyperbolic here to suggest that this experiment in the spatial isolation and exclusion of this “problem” population represents the extent to which the prison has become the model and imaginative horizon of the disciplinary authority of the urban public school. As with all of the surveillance practices I have described in this section, this example also signifies how schools like EHS are increasingly becoming less invested in counseling and rehabilitation and more oriented toward warehousing and containing threats posed by certain populations of youth. The temptation to isolate and exclude may perhaps be somewhat understandable for teachers and staff overwhelmed by real problems of disorder and conflict in schools. However, such measures do nothing to address the root causes of these problems, or the problems youth bring with them to school, nor does it function as an effective strategy for constructively and ethically
addressing them. Instead, it relies on a logic that criminalizes young people and thus contributes to a climate of punishment and exclusion as opposed to uplift and healing.

**Criminological Discipline and Authority**

Thus far I have profiled the use of surveillance technologies at EHS including metal detectors, scanning wands, CCTV cameras, computerized identification and data tracking systems, along with modifications to the built environment that are used to control the flow and monitor the movement of bodies within and across school space. In this section, I examine disciplinary processes and authority at EHS. This includes an active contingent of district appointed security guards whose duties include patrolling hallways and policing student behavior. EHS has seven full time security officers and often has an additional influx of “floating” CPS security that are available to respond to “hot spots”—school sites that have been identified as experiencing or anticipating conflicts and/or violence. These “floating” security officers were present a great deal during my research due to the shootings that occurred during the first weeks of school at EHS. Beyond the security officers, EHS has two Dean’s of students in charge of discipline, Mr. Meyer the Dean of freshman and Mr. Morris the head Dean. The Dean’s are the primary school officials in charge of enforcing discipline and for implementing the CPS Uniform Discipline Policy or “Student Code of Conduct”. EHS also has two full time Chicago Police Officers stationed at the school that I came to refer to in my notes as Officers Duggan and Jones. The officers are an added security, surveillance, and disciplinary presence who work closely with the Deans and administration to manage and
contain student conduct and violations of the uniform discipline code and the law.

Due to consistent community opposition, the CPS officially ended “zero
tolerance” as district policy in 2007. However, thus far, this has proven to be largely a
rhetorical measure. The uniform discipline code still assigns mandatory “interventions
and consequences” for each of its six levels of infractions that proceed from the least
serious level 1, that includes such violations as “persistent tardiness” or “making noise in
hallway,” to the most serious level 6 that includes “robbery,” “murder,” and “arson”.

Under Arne Duncan between 2002-2008, suspensions nearly quadrupled from 23,942 to
93,312 a year in the CPS. In the 2009-2010 school year, there were more than 89,336
suspensions equivalent to 1 suspension for every 8 CPS students (Dignity in Schools,
2010). Many of these suspensions were for low-level and non-violent incidents and
African-American males, only 25% of CPS students, represented 45% of all suspensions
and 60% of all expulsions (Catalyst, 2009). Students at EHS are routinely suspended for
lower level violations and are even sometimes referred to the police for potential
prosecution for such subjective and undefined infractions as “disorderly conduct,” a level
4 violation that might include persistent “insubordination,” among other things. During
the 2007-2008 academic year there were 750 suspensions and 23 expulsions at EHS
while in 2008-2009 there were 1,126 suspensions and 39 expulsions. This is equivalent
to having 7 out of every 10 students suspended at some point during 2008-2009.

Chris (an African American senior): If you are involved in anything you
immediately get suspended. And these range from things as small as loss of ID to
things as big as fighting. You are immediately suspended for X amount of days
without trying to understand why something happened. Like when students get suspended for fighting, you never knew why the fight started, it’s automatic suspension. Just like ID, you don’t know why the person lost their ID or don’t have their ID but after a few questions they are immediately suspended.

The research is clear that reliance on suspensions and expulsions is associated with multiple negative consequences. Extensive research compiled by the High Hopes Campaign (2012) in Chicago indicates that:

• Suspensions and expulsions do not make schools safer and do not improve students’ behavior;
• Suspensions and expulsions have long and damaging effects on student behavior and learning;
• The higher a school’s rate of suspension and expulsion, the lower the academic achievement of its students even when taking socioeconomic status out of the equation;
• High levels of suspension do not make students and teachers feel safer, and, instead, can negatively affect the school environment by creating distrust;
• School districts which have focused on decreasing suspensions have seen an increase in graduation rates. For example, Baltimore City Public Schools lowered suspensions from 26,000 to 10,000 and experienced an increase in their graduation rate by 20%.
Beyond suspensions and expulsions, dozens of students are arrested every year at EHS. Data on these arrests is difficult to ascertain because the school does not keep track of these statistics. After filing a Freedom of Information Request with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) to access this information, I was told that they only keep track of student arrests in the police districts and do not delineate arrests by school. During my observations, however, I witnessed that arrest was a routine phenomenon at EHS with students leaving school in handcuffs each week. This lack of transparency in the availability of arrest data has become a common concern of scholars and civic groups increasingly blocked from obtaining reliable information on juvenile arrests in schools. Simply put, the CPS and the CPD are not inclined to share with the public details regarding trends in arrests at public schools perhaps due to concern over community blowback. What we do know is that arrests of students in the CPS are a matter of routine. In 2003 alone there were 8,539 students arrested in the CPS the vast majority of which did not involve injuries, weapons, or serious crimes (AP, 2005). Between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 there were 9,683 arrests at CPS schools (Project NIA, 2010).

In the name of safety, order, and violence prevention, school discipline has come to operate on the pre-supposition that criminality is an ever present feature of school life while naturalizing the presence in schools of external forms of power and authority such as security companies and law enforcement. This generates myriad effects that are often at odds with the democratic aims of schooling. For instance, research has shown that these security environments and excessive reliance on suspensions, expulsions, and arrests correlate to student disaffection and insecurity in schools, higher dropout rates, poorer academic performance of schools, and racial profiling. Students suspended,
expelled, and/or arrested in their schools has also been shown to correlate to a greater likelihood that students will spend time in jail as adults thus creating a “school to prison pipeline” fundamentally at odds with promoting and developing the social, intellectual, moral, and civic capacities of youth (AP. 2005 2010).

Security Guards: Norms of Professional Conduct and the Mind/Body Division

_Alex: When you think about security at EHS, what do you think about?_

_Chris: Security Guards. It reminds me of an overseer at a plantation. It’s very strict and authoritative, the security guard relationship with the students at EHS. Almost like police and inmates. The security guards in the hallways have more power than the teachers when you are in class._

Security guards are the most visible and controversial layer of disciplinary authority at EHS. The guards are charged with performing most routine surveillance functions in the school as well as serving as the front line of discipline and behavior management. EHS has 7 full time district appointed security guards. However, as I have already discussed this number periodically goes up to 12 or more during those times when the school’s threat level is raised making it a “hot spot”. At these times, typically in the wake of heightened gang activity or violence in the community, the CPS sends over additional security guards. The security guards play a key role in controlling access to the building and they actively patrol the hallways and monitor the flow and behavior of students. Throughout the day, guards are posted in strategic locations in the school—at the
entrances, the ends of hallways, outside the cafeteria etc. During class sessions they make sure that students are not lingering in the hallways and/or avoiding their classes. They also are periodically called into classrooms by teachers in order to address disruptive students. Sometimes security guards engage these students in dialogue and give them verbal warnings before sending them back to class and at other times they end up referring students to the Dean for disciplinary action. During passing periods, the guards hasten the students to classes and attempt to enforce the ID and uniform requirements. When problems arise during passing periods security guards are there to address them including mediating potential student conflicts. Thus the security guards perform a number of functions that on the surface work to promote order and safety.

Students have hundreds of interactions with security guards throughout their days, weeks, and months in school. Some of these interactions are positive, convivial, and educative while others are harmful, inappropriate, and have a poisonous effect on school culture and the learning environment. Through my observations and conversations with security guards, I discovered that some guards strived to be a positive presence in student’s lives, while others were far less committed to these professional and ethical aspirations. Amongst students and staff certain security guards have better reputations than others. The guards with good reputations are known to take their jobs seriously and many attempt to provide guidance to students and help them solve various problems ranging from replacing a lost ID or lending out bus fare to students in need.

Malia: Some of the security guards do a good job, like Smitty, he actually tries to help you out and he makes sure everything is running smoothly.
However, there is also a widely acknowledged dark side to the presence of security guards at EHS. Security guards throughout the CPS have minimal training and are not required to have any background in adolescent development, counseling, and/or conflict mediation and resolution. As a result, norms of professional conduct are close to nonexistent. Students and teachers both voiced a litany of concerns over the professional conduct of the guards. I was told that certain guards over the years have been involved in a myriad of unprofessional and unethical behaviors including suspected drug trafficking, gang activity, and sexual harassment, while stories circulate that some guards have even attempted to frame certain students for crimes. One of the most often repeated accusations was that male security have engaged in sexually harassing female students.

Such outrageous and shameful conduct contributes to a hostile environment for all students that can be understood to perpetuate cynicism amongst youth and disorder in the school. Mr. Burke a white teacher here gives voice to some of these concerns:

Alex: So you have said that security guards act in unprofessional ways, do you have any examples that you’ve seen of this?

Mr. Burke: I have heard about male security guards giving notes to female students with their phone numbers on them or inappropriately touching or speaking to female students. Those are just the ones I’ve heard about but if they’re getting to me then I’m sure there’s a lot more like that that we don’t even know about at all and have been for years. Some curse at kids and the automatic lack of any type of care or respect for the kids causes the school to be a little bit –
it takes away from the atmosphere of the school. If kids don’t trust the security guards who are they gonna trust besides their friends? It’s their friends and them.

Such behaviors work to produce a culture of fear that contributes to gendered violence and the insecurity and alienation of all students. As intimated by Mr. Burke, amidst such conduct, the only thing binding students to the authority of the school are norms of force and threat of punishment. As a result, the relations of trust between students and the school break down, eroding the social contract underwriting the democratic and educative purposes of schooling and undermining the capacity of students to secure their daily life and futures. Such a climate, where present, has to be understood as connected to the persistence of high drop-out rates amongst students across the CPS while feeding the escalation of various forms of oppositional behavior amongst students. As the female student exclaimed in the scanning line: “Why you have to waste my time every morning!”

These resistances, born out of frustrations, reflect and serve to reproduce students’ lack of voice in school affairs as these behaviors can easily translate into suspensions or worse. Tensions between the unethical conduct of security guards and student resistance is revealing of deeper transformations in the socializing mission of public schools. For instance, in his study in New York City, John Devine (1996) observed that the presence of security guards creates a division in schools. On one hand, the classroom becomes a separate, enclosed universe where “learning” is conducted under the authority of teachers responsible for the “minds” of students. On the other hand, the school corridor becomes a space governed by security guards and police who operate less as an extension of the school’s educative and democratic mission than as an apparatus of containment directed
toward disciplining the student “body” that is thought less in terms of an investment in 
the future than as a potential threat to order. As a result, public schools like EHS that rely 
heavily on the disciplinary authority of security guards who are untrained in the 
professional care and guidance of youth, abdicate much of their role as key sites for the 
holistic and democratic development of youth. Instead, by relying heavily on the 
normative parameters of criminological discipline these institutions contribute to pushing 
students out of school and into a school-to-prison pipeline (AP, 2005 2010).

The Deans: Prescriptive Punishment, Counseling, and the Criminological Limit

Beyond the security guards, the next line of disciplinary authority at EHS resides with the 
two Deans, a freshman Dean named Mr. Meyer and Mr. Morris the Dean of Students. 
The Dean’s are responsible for student misbehavior, meting out punishments, and for 
working closely with law enforcement and parents in light of violations. During the time 
I spent at EHS, the head Dean of students was out on medical leave and Mr. Morris, 
normally the head of the security guards was standing in for her.

Mr. Morris is a tall middle aged African American man who grew up near EHS 
and many feel his roots in the community give him credibility with the students. My own 
observations of Mr. Morris indicated that he knows the students well and that they 
generally respect him. Mr. Morris views his role largely as enforcing the rules as they are 
articulated in the CPS discipline codebook. He makes no apologies for his blunt style and 
he believes that the uniform and prescriptive nature of the disciplinary system prevents 
misunderstandings while providing a consistent and fair formula for ascribing sanctions
against students. Mr. Morris believes that a prescription of suspensions, expulsions, and presence of law enforcement provides an adequate system for maintaining order in the school and he is not particularly concerned with the potential negative repercussions of these policies. He states that “if you do the crime, you have to do the time.” As a result, Mr. Morris relies heavily on suspensions and the threat of arrest and expulsion in his disciplinary oversight. In my interactions with Mr. Morris it became clear that this attitude derived from a belief that without clear, consistent, and even potentially severe consequences, the students would not learn to behave themselves and order would further break down. Despite his comportment toward following the prescriptions laid out in the codebook, Mr. Morris is constantly making judgments based upon his own discretion, his knowledge of the students, and what he thinks is appropriate given the context of an incident. However, despite using his discretion, Mr. Morris relies heavily on the use of suspension and expulsion as a primary means of discipline.

In contrast to Mr. Morris, the perception among many students and also many teachers is that the school’s discipline system and its heavy reliance on suspensions, expulsions and law enforcement is largely ineffective. In fact, I didn’t speak to any students or teachers who thought that the punitive system of punishment is effective in deterring misbehavior or for promoting safety.

Alex: As far as suspensions and expulsions, do you think they’re effective for correcting student misbehavior?

Malia (African American Sophomore): No, I do not think they are effective.

Alex: Why not?
Malia: Because most of the students who get suspended, they don’t take it as a, ‘well, I need to get back on track and not get suspended anymore.’ They will come back and get suspended right the next day. There’s more to it than getting suspended. You have to actually communicate.

Alex: So how could the school do better as far as discipline? What do you think would be more effective than suspensions and expulsions?

Malia: Detention but not the regular detention that you usually have just sitting there being quiet. They should have a circle where everybody explains why they are in there and what happened and then maybe the students around them could be like, ‘it could have been handled differently.’ It should be something like that instead of automatically suspending someone for ten days because it’s not gonna get you nowhere but missing your classes and falling behind.

Malia’s comments reflect a much broader critique against the overuse of suspensions and expulsions at the school as well as a real hunger for a more communicative and educative approach to discipline. Students I talked with seem to universally believe that the disciplinary system fails to serve the needs of students and that the school should make greater efforts to council students and to work through problems in more constructive and communicative ways rather than to simply banish students from the school via suspensions, or, in the case of expulsion, to push them out for good.

While the school does rely heavily on prescriptive zero tolerance based punishments there are significant attempts made to talk things through with students when they break the rules. The freshman Dean Mr. Meyer in particular values such an
approach. Mr. Meyer is a young white Afghan War Veteran with a penchant for stripped ties and for casually addressing students as “pal,” buddy,” and sometimes “dumbo.” He has been at the school for four years at first in the capacity as a World Studies and an AVID teacher but took his current job as freshman Dean as he faced the prospect of being forced out of his job due to the teacher layoffs. Mr. Meyer is a key point person at the school for security and discipline and he is quick to recognize the limits of the school’s security and surveillance system and the need to work more proactively with students in a counseling and restorative capacity.

Mr. Meyer: We can flood this place with security guards and all that stuff and at the same time there is gonna be fights and all that stuff because these kids bring problems off the streets and they have this idea that even the slightest look of disrespect equals a fight. It’s the culture. I don’t know how to do it, but we gotta get out there and get these young kids to realize that you don’t always have to go to blows. There’s things that can just be talked out.

Alex: How do you personally approach disciplinary issues?

Mr. Meyer: You have to ask yourself, what’s the situation, have you dealt with the kids before? If so, how have you dealt with them? What kind of situations have you dealt with them? And also for me, can you get the situation under control without taking it to the next level. A lot of these kids out here just don’t have the skills of confrontation and knowing how to confront a teacher and knowing how to effectively deal with the situation so they explode. So my biggest goal is to teach them how to deal with those situations. I don’t just take them, not listen to
them, suspend them and be done with it. I take them, I listen to the teacher’s side, I listen to their side and I try to get them to understand how they are dealing with the situation, bring them back to the teacher and have them deal with the confrontation a better way and the teacher is almost always like, ‘okay great, no problem. Come back to class.’ Now it’s different obviously with a violent situation or something like that but as far as most situations you have to go off of your discretion – how well do you know the kid, what’s the situation, what did they do, how are they reacting to you in the office, how are they explaining things to you, are they freaking out, are they threatening. It depends on the situation.

Mr. Meyer’s approach to discipline is broadly respected by teachers and students throughout the building. Mr. Parks states that “Mr. Meyer represents a personality type, a disciplinarian that is personable and personal and kids like him although they may be frustrated by him sometimes. I think that represents a more realistic approach – we tend to have the police commander type in which the kids are adjudicated as opposed to a parental style that listens and teaches”. Cynthia a female African American sophomore agrees with Mr. Parks saying that, “Mr. Meyer is good because he will actually listen to what you have to say and try and help you, he doesn’t just suspend you for no reason”.

While he is technically in charge of freshman, Mr. Meyer’s presence is felt throughout the building. During the day, he is roaming the halls, counseling students, and encouraging them to get to class which is a major headache for staff as students love to linger and avoid their classrooms (the security guards and the Deans wage daily pitched battles against tardiness). Periodically, he receives a call that he is needed for any number
of reasons: to help break up a fight, to meet with a parent, or to diffuse a conflict. One morning I was with Mr. Meyer as he was sent to pick up two female students from their classes who were seen having some sort of verbal conflict during the previous passing period. Both young women were African American, one a junior with short curly hair and a bright smile and the other a skinny freshman with grey jeans, a black jacket, and medium length braids in her hair. At first the two students denied even knowing one another. “I don’t know this girl!, the junior girl said, “she’s just some freshman.” At this, the freshman rolled her eyes. After some prodding by Mr. Meyer they admitted that “words were going around”—i.e. rumors were being spread. After some discussion in the hallway. Mr. Meyer then took the students to his office. After we sat down he asked: “Tell me, what do you two believe is worth fighting over?” The junior said “my people.” Similarly, the freshman responded with “my family.” Meyer responded, “if these are the things that you think are worth fighting for then why on earth are you fighting with each other over some rumors that you don’t even know are true?” “You know that rumors are spread by people who just want to see a fight.” The students agreed that their differences were “petty” but they couldn’t seem to drop whatever it was between them.

After a particularly passive aggressive exchange, Mr. Meyer lost his patience. He exclaimed, “I have had enough, apparently you don’t understand who you are talking to. You may not know me but I am not here just to pass my time. I know a few things about protecting and losing friends. I was in Afghanistan, and I lost friends over there. When I was over there I realized that the things we fight over here are just incredibly stupid. Just because some girl gives you a look in the hallway that is no reason for fighting! That is just STUUUPID! You two need to figure out a way to let this go. If I hear that you two
end up going at it, you are going to be arrested. Is that what you want? To mess up your life over some look or some rumor?” The two girls both responded with almost simultaneous recitations of the word “no.” Meyer continued, “this is your warning, if you two decide to settle this through a fight then you are going to be arrested. You both need to go about your day and ignore one another.” He proceeded to send the girls back to their respective classes. To my knowledge the problem between them was resolved.

This incident is telling because it represents a genuine attempt to resolve student conflicts through dialogue without automatically resorting to immediate arbitrary punishment—a style that Mr. Meyer has sincerely tried to cultivate. However, here, Mr. Meyer relies ultimately on the threat of arrest as a way of deterring these students. While a sincere effort is made to counsel students and to promote dialogue and healthy problem solving, it appears that law enforcement and arrest represent the final authority in which student conflicts are to be ultimately mediated. It thus functions as a kind of criminological limit and final arbiter of student misconduct to which even those like Mr. Meyer, who believe in counseling and dialogue, readily submit. This exchange represents a broader pattern at EHS as the threat of arrest was one of the most common deterrents I witnessed adults use to correct student behavior. Over and over, I saw students threatened by security staff and administrators with criminal charges for things ranging from everyday conflicts similar to the one described above, to more mundane things like uniform violations and/or signs of “disrespect” toward adults. While Mr. Meyer places most of his emphasis on trying to cultivate a more humane and democratic approach to discipline, ultimately even he submits to law enforcement and the criminal justice system as the overriding and final authority on matters of school discipline.
The Cops: Policing and Arresting Youth

This brings us to our final layer of disciplinary authority at EHS—the police. EHS has a significant police presence. Probation officers find and meet with students at the school; detectives and plain clothes officers also meet with the Deans and other administrators to investigate incidents; and additional officers enter the school during “lock downs” as a show of force and to keep order. Duggan and Jones, however, are the primary police presence at EHS. They monitor the outdoor spaces before and after school and they walk the hallways adding yet another layer of surveillance and disciplinary force at EHS. But their most significant responsibility is to investigate incidents and make decisions over charging students with crimes such as in cases of theft, conflicts and physical altercations, and the possession of drugs or other illegal contraband.

Duggan and Jones are adamant that they use arrest only in the most exceptional circumstances. They state that they prefer to “talk things out rather than lock kids up.” This might involve having a meeting with students, issuing a warning, or organizing student and parent meetings in order to try and resolve a problem through dialogue. This is not always successful, in one such parent meeting that I observed, a father was adamant that two students who had assaulted his son outside the school be criminally charged despite efforts to resolve the incident another way. Despite apparent efforts by Duggan and Jones to minimize criminal charges, arrest is used throughout the building by security and the administrative staff as a threat and is often supported by mandatory punishments in the CPS uniform discipline code that provides a pre-text and mandate to
arrest youth for specific types of violations. As I mentioned above, students are often warned by security guards that they will be arrested if they break this or that rule or if they show disrespectful behavior toward adults. Duggan and Jones claim that they do not arrest students referred to them under such circumstances even though security guards routinely request it. This does not mean that arrest and criminal convictions do not occur. On a weekly basis multiple students are led away from EHS in hand cuffs and sent to the local police station to be booked on criminal charges. Duggan and Jones claim that they arrest anywhere between 2-6 students per week for a range of offenses. However, they feel strongly that incidents that take place in the school should be addressed first and foremost by teachers, administrators, counselors, and security. They believe that they should be present only to handle incidents that are “exceptional”. The problem here is that the “exceptional” nature of an event is always subjective. For instance, how does one determine a relatively harmless altercation from a criminal assault? Or a young person testing the boundaries of authority from disorderly conduct?

Stories relayed to me from students indicate, for instance, that students live in almost constant fear of being arrested for even minor and trivial kinds of rule breaking. For instance, here a Latino junior named Javier describes his run in with police due to a water fight outside the school during heat wave the previous June.

_Javier: You know how last year the school didn’t let us go to water fountains when it was really hot. So what we did is we got a couple of water bottles and water balloons and just started playing around. And I had a couple of water balloons—_
Alex: Was this outside?

Javier: Yeah, it was outside. And then I had two water bottles that I was hanging on because my friend had gone inside school and he had just opened up a water bottle on my bag so I was waiting outside and I had two water bottles and I was hiding them just in case I saw him so I could – and then one of the cops came up and he told me – I don’t know why but my first instinct was to run but then I took four or five steps and I thought, ‘why am I even running. I don’t have anything’ so I turned back and they handcuffed me and searched me. The thing is when you’re running from the cops there are certain alley ways you can take and they started searching me and they said that if they find a gun that they were gonna arrest me for it. I was like, ‘Why? You can finger print me it’s not mine.’ All I had were these two water bottles but they had me on the floor. They had me on my knees, they had me handcuffed and they kept asking me what I am and I kept telling them, ‘nothing, nothing I’m not a gang member. I only have these two water bottles,’ and they asked, “why did you run?” and I was like, ‘because I don’t want to get arrested!’

Students referred to the criminalization of students during the water fights as the “great water balloon controversy.” This would sound almost comical if it weren’t for the excessive punitive treatment exercised by the police as relayed by Javier and for the fact that students were branded and treated as criminals simply for participating in what was perhaps a disruptive but ultimately harmless water fight on a hot day.

EHS has uniform discipline policies in place for serious infractions such as
weapons and drug violations, however, most behavioral incidents are left to the discretion of administrative staff and security officials as to whether the police should become involved. Such discretion is crucial. School officials need to be the first line in terms of understanding the context of an incident and the background of the students involved so that they can mediate incidents in a restorative manner without involving the police. While the school does attempt to handle problems in this manner, too often students are just simply dumped on the police because the police happen to be there. This allows security and administrators to avoid responsibility and liability for safety and discipline. Discretion is thus only as ethical as the norms of professional conduct that guide it. Moreover, if we take Duggan and Jones at their word, there would be far more arrests at EHS if they did not try to avoid them. This consideration does not always extend to their peers. For instance, there are law enforcement officers stationed at other schools in the CPS that indiscriminately arrest first and ask questions later. Duggan and Jones claimed, for instance, that a particular officer at a nearby high school openly brags about arresting 180 students during the 2009-2010 academic year. This suggests that zero tolerance and uniform punishments are applied in highly uneven ways. I found when it comes to student criminalization, professional norms of ethical conduct, or the lack thereof, play a fundamental role in the number of students funneled directly into the criminal justice system. These arrests have far reaching consequences and have been shown to increase the likelihood that youth will spend time in jail or prison as adults (AP, 2005-2010).

Police presence at EHS is contested. For instance, students often report feeling more safe because of the police. Further, Duggan and Jones do make attempts to constructively work with students rather than just simply applying reactionary
punishments. However, I also witnessed countless incidents of police and administrators working together to build cases against students accused of violating school rules in ways that erode the line between the criminal justice system and the school, extend the gaze of police into the community, while socializing youth into the norms and authority of criminological authority. Similarly, Aaron Kupchik (2010) found in his study of four public high schools that “police help school administrators run the school and the police department regulate communities, enhancing the school’s control over students and the police department’s surveillance of communities” (p. 133). According to Kupchik:

…officers affect the overall school climate. Having an officer can escalate disciplinary situations; increase the likelihood that students are arrested at school; redefine situations as criminal justice problems rather than as social psychological, or academic problems; introduce a criminal justice orientation to how administrators prevent and respond to problems; and socialize students to expect a police presence in their lives. (p. 115)

Despite the fact that Duggan and Jones did voice criticisms of the tendency of the school to rely on arrest as a central mode of discipline, their presence and actions nonetheless contribute to the general criminalization of youth; the naturalization of penal systems of authority; and an invasive web of crime control in the life of students. Ultimately, public schools need to reclaim their mission in the social and human development of youth. This would necessarily mean greatly reducing the disciplinary role if not also the presence of police in schools and the creation of restorative systems of investment and school
authority rooted in social norms as opposed to the authoritarian logics of containment and
criminalization. I will return to these themes in the next chapter and the conclusion.

**Beyond Criminological Discipline?**

**The Culture of Calm and the Failure of Neoliberal Governance**

In recent years, the surveillance and disciplinary practices I have described in this chapter
have come under increasing criticism from scholars, communities, and activists as
evidence has begun to mount that these practices are not only harmful to youth but are
ineffective at preventing violence and for promoting healthy and democratic school
environments. Public concern over these issues became particularly intense in Chicago
during the fall of 2009 in the wake of the death of Derrion Albert. Albert, an honors
student at Fenger High School on the Southside, received a fatal blow to the head as he
was caught in the middle of a fight involving two groups of students on his way home
from school. The incident was captured on another student’s cell phone camera and the
footage turned up on YouTube. It then went viral before becoming an international news
story culminating in several CNN specials on youth violence in Chicago.

Critics began to point out how the demolition of housing projects combined with
gentrification initiatives and school closures under the Renaissance 2010 policy had led
to escalating youth violence on Chicago’s streets. Before 2006 there were on average 12-15
deadly shooting of CPS youth in Chicago. At the height of school closures in 2006-2007 there were 24 deadly shootings involving CPS youth. 2007-2008 brought 23 deaths
and 211 shootings, and 2009-2010 saw 34 deaths and 290 shootings (none of which took
place at a CPS school it should be noted) (NBC, 2009). In the case of Albert’s tragic death, the fight involved youth from the Altgeld Gardens housing projects who had been arbitrarily transferred to Fenger as their former school was converted into a selective military academy, despite significant community opposition. This created overcrowding and tensions at Fenger which ultimately led to the fight that took Albert’s life. Amidst the bad publicity and ensuing media circus that involved, among other things, an Illinois state representative calling for the military occupation of Chicago’s poor neighborhoods by the national guard, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (one of the principal architects of the Renaissance 2010 plan) was dispatched by president Barack Obama along with Attorney General Eric Holder to meet with CPS officials and Mayor Daley.

What came out of these meetings was an anti-violence and school safety plan called the “Culture of Calm”. On the surface, the plan appeared to recognize not only the failures of the past but also the need for a more robust social response to the issue of neighborhood and school safety. The $60 million dollar plan was made possible largely from stimulus grants from the federal government. It was intended to be a two year pilot project that focused intensively on 6 schools but also provided services to 32 other “high risk” schools including EHS. The Culture of Calm was largely the brainchild of then CEO of the CPS Ron Huberman. A former police officer with an MBA, Huberman is a proponent of data driven statistical models of governance. As such, the plan was designed to focus resources on those schools and students deemed at highest risk for violence as identified through computer and statistical models. Those schools and youth would then supposedly have resources directed to them including opportunities for one on one mentoring, social work services, and help finding employment. The program also planned
to initiate programs to promote alternative and restorative disciplinary practices in schools and to create healthier school climates. It also provided funds to hire community members as part the Safe Passage initiative that helped walk student to and from their schools. These aspects of the Culture of Calm represent a real step in the right direction. Based on the realization that the status quo at schools like EHS is fundamentally intolerable, the program was presented as a way to redirect policy toward providing services to students and to transform punitive disciplinary environments.

Between the fall of 2009 and spring of 2011, the CPS claimed the program had significantly reduced out of school suspensions, serious incidents of misconduct, and incidents of violence in the schools and communities receiving services. However, the plan only provided services to a small number schools and students. Further, it did not seriously attempt to alter or address many of the systemic problems that create insecurity and violence in schools. It transferred a large amount of money over to private companies to provide services to selected schools and students but according to reports there were myriad problems with the implementation of these services (Karp, 2010 2011). EHS was one of the targeted schools under the Culture of Calm, however, there was very little implementation of the program at the school while I was there. In fact, I was surprised to find that many students and even some teachers and administrators appeared to know very little about it except for one program that proved to be somewhat controversial. As part of the Culture of Calm, the CPS awarded a large contract to Luster Learning Services an educational consultancy firm headed by Jai Luster the executive director of Mesirow Financial, one of the largest hedge funds in the United States. At the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year teachers at EHS participated in a professional development
session led by Luster in order to learn the secrets of his patented “calm classroom” method. Within the “calm classroom” every teacher is assigned a “zynergy chime” to ring as they lead their students through a series of deep breathing exercises. Based on a mystical “new age” sensibility, the exercise is designed to “control and concentrate the mind, enhance alertness, improve physical stamina, decrease stress, and find greater personal satisfaction” and thus ultimately to create a “culture of calm” in the school (Calm Classroom, 2012).

In the fall of 2010, EHS teachers were mandated to integrate Luster’s “calm classroom” method into their homeroom routines. There isn’t anything necessarily wrong with such a practice. Having a built in period of quiet meditation during the day could very well have positive benefits. However, for many in the community, in light of concerns over violence, resource scarcity, and other cut backs to services including teacher layoffs, the program appeared as an absurdity.

Malia: They’re doing a thing called culture of calm where I think during second period they take ten minutes out of your day and they’ve got this little chime and they hit it and it’s like ‘ding’ and you’re supposed to meditate but a lot of kids are not okay with that at all even though it’s supposed to like make you want to chill out and relax sometimes it makes kids pretty angry. And a lot of teachers don’t like it either because it wastes class time. Maybe if that was something we were used to since the get-go that would be awesome and that would facilitate a calmer body but it doesn’t. It just makes you angry.
The implicit message of Luster’s meditation program is that youth violence has little to do with matters of economic insecurity, structural inequality, and/or misguided policies. Instead, these issues are imagined as something that can be overcome through a retreat into the individual psyche. Here the effects of poverty, oppression, and disinvestment are thought to melt away through the pursuit of “greater personal satisfaction” and “a heightened sense of calm”. While EHS was one of the targeted schools under the Culture of Calm program, which was widely touted in the media as a bold plan to address youth violence, they received little more than a corporate new age meditation program and a few boxes of “zynergy chimes” that psychologized systemic problems while doing nothing to address the roots of violence in schools and communities. Currently, the future of the Culture of Calm initiative hangs in doubt as the grant money has run out and the city has turned to public austerity.

The story of the Culture of Calm at EHS finds commonality with a broader narrative of the limits of security in the neoliberal city. Surprisingly, at least to me, one of the most critical perspectives on governance at EHS and larger security politics in the city that I encountered in my research came from officers Duggan and Jones. Over the course of several informal meetings that ranged from 1-2 hours in length, these police officers shared various trenchant critiques concerning connections between public school governance and the governance of the Chicago Police Department. These perspectives shed light on the more general hollowing-out of institutional and public life in the city.

For Duggan and Jones, the Culture of Calm, and indeed the broader surveillance and disciplinary structure at EHS, share a common foundation. One of the core elements of which is an increased emphasis and reliance on data driven surveillance technologies
and systems of risk measurement. This reliance on data driven technology and auditing can be seen in how both teachers and police are increasingly governed through intensive accountability and productivity targets. For teachers, this is based on test score benchmarks, and for police it is based on tickets written, dispersals made, and bodies locked away. These numbers are then used by those in positions of power in order to make a case to the public that something like education and something like public safety is taking place when in fact both of these social services are being redefined in ways detrimental to the public interest, particularly in addressing the roots of conflict and insecurity. In the case of the Culture of Calm, the program did not seek to fundamentally alter existing institutional, economic, or social relationships but to target resources at a small handful of schools and students identified through data mapping as “hot spots” and “at-risk”. This may have played well in the media and even accomplished some positive things in some schools, but it has done little to address the broader problems and underlying conditions of violence and insecurity in the lives of youth at schools like EHS.

Duggan and Jones were highly critical of the so-called “hi-tech revolution” in law enforcement dismissing data driven technocratic governance as nothing but “smoke and mirrors” justifying extensive cut backs to schools and communities. They feel that the reliance on numerical targets and computer models of policing are largely projects that funnel money away from supporting police on the streets into the coffers of security companies while redefining police work from community work to mass incarceration.

*Duggan: It’s just so some higher up can point to the cameras and say look we are utilizing technology to protect you, while at the same time all this money is going*
out the door to these security companies...Its money plain and simple...politicians out there saying look what I got for you...meanwhile there aren’t any cops on the streets doing their jobs for the community...it’s all bullshit...boiling everything down to numbers, to productivity targets, dispersals...It’s not about police work. We are judged by the numbers, bodies locked up, dispersals made, tickets written.

They gave several interrelated examples of what they view as the systemic corruption in security and policing. First, they cited the surveillance camera network as a massive corporate giveaway (some cameras costing as much as $60 dollars each) with little merit in terms of crime prevention or prosecution. They pointed out that it is impossible for police who are already stretched thin to be watching the 10,000 plus cameras in order to prevent crime and they do not believe they deter or catch criminals. Jones stated, “they don’t deter anybody...people know where they are and if they are going to do something they just pull a hood over their head.” Because they do not have the capacity to watch all the cameras, some officers are now supposed to spend a certain amount of time watching a camera each week—just sitting at a desk hoping to randomly spot a crime. According to Duggan and Jones, the Chicago Police Department even proposed pulling each patrol unit off the street one day a week in order to watch cameras—“an utterly absurd waste of time and resources.” Second, and related, the officers cite how the economic crisis led the city to cut back in the number of officers on patrol in the community. They feel that this prevents police from building meaningful relationships in communities which they claim translates into more arrests and more antagonism between residents and police. The political class has justified the cutbacks by stating that new technologies will offset the
reductions of police, but Duggan and Jones insist that no amount of data mapping can replace community policing and the process of relationship building. Third, the officers claim that the so-called hi-tech revolution in law enforcement has been ineffective in crime prevention because it focuses its effort on prediction and reaction as opposed to community policing, prevention, and rehabilitation for those convicted of crimes. Duggan and Jones point to the two shootings at EHS as evidence that these processes fail to prevent crime. For example, they point out that the Chicago Police’s “crystal ball unit,” a computer modeling and data tracking program used to identify potential hot spots for crime, failed to identify EHS in either incident as a place where a shooting might occur.

Within this framework, Duggan stated that all we are left with is a “law enforcement system that only knows how to lock people up…that’s all we do in Chicago, we just lock people away.” For some, it might be difficult to take at face value the critical perspectives of CPD officers who represent a police force that has been embroiled in countless scandals involving all manner of charges of racist brutality and abuses of power—charges that were made real to me in discussions with youth in Ellison Square who relayed countless stories of police harassment. Regardless, what I think one can take away from the implementation of the Culture of Calm at EHS and the corruption that Duggan and Jones describe, is that they are both indications of the deep systemic failure at the core of the neoliberal project. Here, the web of state surveillance, policing, and control can be seen as representative of loss of public ethics and endemic exploitation and profiteering that speaks to the dysfunction and corruption spawned by free market governance (Bauman, 2001; Brown, 2005; Giroux, 2009). In the context of EHS, it represents the social and moral disinvestment in the future of young people.
In this chapter, I have described some of the ways that security is imagined and operates through technologies of surveillance and criminological control at EHS. I have suggested that in the name of safety, surveillance and disciplinary practices contribute to a culture of suspicion and mistrust that blurs the lines between schooling and the criminal justice system while framing students as potential victims or criminals as opposed to future citizens worthy of investment and guidance. As one would imagine, attitudes toward these practices at EHS are complex and often conflicted. For instance, there is no shortage of critiques of these practices and there is a broad recognition and concern at EHS that security technologies and procedures are contributing to a harmful climate of fear and criminalization. Mr. Wilson elaborates:

_They [students] are immediately under suspicion almost like they are being considered guilty before being proved innocent. It is just assumed that since you come from this community that you have to walk through a metal detector because you might be carrying a gun. And that’s just an assumption that is made around here and there are certain things that are just put on the students that are not always fair. Like you are an urban youth in an impoverished area so therefore you must be a criminal. And that’s not true for the majority of our students. It takes away a little bit of their youth when adults assume they are guilty before even knowing them._
I also found that there is a sense at EHS that the heightened security atmosphere and emphasis on monitoring, ID’s, uniforms, and other surveillance practices are representative of misplaced energies and priorities that often overshadow or subvert educative and pedagogical concerns. There is also a strong sense that the surveillance and security apparatus of the school is plagued by questionable efficacy.

Mr. Parks: I’d like to brainstorm the removal of the metal detectors The notion that we have metal detectors is so fucking stupid…It takes a fourteen-year-old freshman thirty minutes to figure out nine ways to get a gun and if they wanted to get one into the building they would. And I’ve been here twelve years and we’ve never found one. Think of the hundreds of thousands of repetitions through a metal detector which we play this silly game that we’re protecting anybody. So deconstruct it. If you want a safe place, then have greeters. Welcome students into the school, actually try and create a culture of calm as opposed to promoting fear.

While many individuals shared concerns over the effects and the efficacy of the surveillance and security process, for many if not most adults and youth at EHS these practices appear nonetheless as an inevitability. Despite the problems that these practices generate many people expressed that they at the very least they provide a modicum of safety amidst real concerns over violence. Olivia comments:
The metal detectors only detect so much. And I can’t even tell you how the metal detectors work because a lot of times they don’t really do what they were made to do. Metal gets past the metal detectors very often. Sometimes the metal detectors are pointless but they provide a sense of security. And even if they don’t work they make people feel safer and that’s just because they’re there and they make you go through this long process. And that’s a bad way to start your morning anyway.

Similarly, Mr. Burke here expresses his view that despite the questionable efficacy of the metal detectors and surveillance cameras they are not only inevitable but necessary in order to promote safety and security.

The cameras are on the corners, they are everywhere now and there’s only gonna be more in the future. I think we need that stuff. Especially the metal detectors and the cameras too. There’s been multiple times when we’ve been able to go back to the camera, pick out a kid who did something and actually prove it. They don’t work all the time because some are in bad condition. We just got new ones and it’s still really hard to see anything when you’re watching the cameras, but I feel like a lot of our kids without that wouldn’t feel safe.

What the comments by Mr. Parks, Olivia, and Mr. Burke capture is a sense that the surveillance and security practices function largely on an emotional or psychological register or what might be called in Raymond William’s (1977) terminology as a “structure of feeling”. For Mr. Parks the metal detectors are of such questionable efficacy
that he views their negative impact on the culture to outweigh whatever safety they may or may not provide. He also feels that there may be more holistic ways to create a culture of security. However, Olivia and Mr. Burke seem to suggest that despite their obvious limitations they at least make people feel safe even if this sense of safety is illusory. Further, Mr. Burke’s comment that “there will only be more cameras in the future” gels with a broader sense of inevitability that I found at EHS among youth and adults who express their belief that there isn’t really anything that can be done to change security policies at the school. Many recognize the negative consequences of intensive surveillance measures, but aside from Mr. Park’s wish to remove the systems altogether, many appeared to lack a language to describe alternatives. Kathleen Gallagher (2007) has referred to the sense of inevitability of intensive security and crime control practices in schools as representative of an “occupied imagination”. Here, neoliberal ideologies, forms of governance, and insecurities stemming from extensive economic fragmentation and social disinvestment have become so entrenched that even while there may be broad recognition of the harmful consequences of intensive surveillance and security cultures, there is often a limited sense of alternatives. While surveillance technologies and punitive disciplinary policies may not be proven to effectively prevent violence and make the school a more safe and socially uplifting place for youth, they appear for many as the only option. This ultimately collapses into a socially degraded vision of security.

Chris: Instead of being so harsh and pursuing the zero tolerance policy we could talk and get a better understanding of what’s going on in the school outside of harsh discipline that is already happening. Even though we have this harsh
discipline at EHS it doesn’t work because the crime still builds inside the school. Crime gives verse to crime in this school. I wouldn’t necessarily say that security encourages it but they don’t do anything to prevent it or stop it from happening the next time.

Rather than investing in public education and other social measures that could work to reduce conflict and gang violence, neoliberal policies have contributed to pouring resources into technological security and law enforcement measures that while they may provide a veneer of safety within the very real threat of violence in and around poverty stricken urban schools, they do little to address the root causes and insecurities driving conflict and violence. In other words, these practices do little to provide youth with the material or emotional support or sense of purpose, belonging, and hope necessary to break the cycle of gangs, oppression, and social fragmentation permeating their lives. This means that the school suspends, expels, and arrests youth for what are often non-threatening and minor forms of conflict and misbehavior as opposed to instituting restorative justice, peer remediation programs, and social services. Not only does this fail to create a culture of healthy conflict resolution and pedagogies of peace, but it fails to promote collective responsibility as it denies student voice and ownership in school-based issues contributing to student disengagement and alienation. As a result, the roots of conflict and violence go unattended, while the monitoring, containment, and punishment of students becomes a central overriding objective of school governance that largely overshadows efforts to teach, to heal, and to promote social development.
This chapter explores tensions between various forms of enclosure (economic, social, curricular, spatial, political) and how students, educators, and youth workers at EHS imagine their own sense of social and ethical responsibility in relation to possibilities for democratic change at EHS. To begin with, I examine the experiences and perspectives of students, their criticisms of schooling, and their anxieties and hopes regarding their lives and future. Next, I discuss how teachers understand and negotiate their professional responsibility and ethical obligations to students in relation to neoliberal accountability and management. In the second half of the chapter, I profile two different models of non-traditional education at EHS (JROTC and Education for Liberation). I examine the structural and pedagogical relations articulated through the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) program at EHS, highlighting in particular its position as an exceptional form of social and civic development at the school. Lastly, I discuss how youth workers and organizations are utilizing the principles of social justice education to engage youth at EHS and throughout Chicago in order to pressure political changes within the Chicago schools and broader society. Throughout, I highlight how these different social actors (students, teachers, soldiers, and activists) struggle with understandings of individual responsibility and the need for collective action in order to develop more ethical and restorative approaches to schooling.
Young people in the neoliberal city face a growing set of challenges in their communities, schools, and daily lives. Rapidly advancing economic dislocation and the disappearance of stable and accessible employment opportunities; an unresponsive state wedded to corporate power and austerity; and growing presence of punitive forms of policing and control on neighborhood streets and in public schools present distinct barriers and limitations to promoting human security, equity, and democracy in the lives of youth. Further, young people who inhabit spaces at the margins of contemporary urban geography along with their struggles, hopes, perspectives, and dreams are largely absent if not rendered completely invisible to broader public consideration. When they do appear in mainstream corporate media, youth who live in poverty especially in racially segregated urban communities like Ellison Square and its surrounding neighborhoods, are too often painted in one dimensional terms as either objects of fear and derision or as helpless victims in need of pity and salvation. In my research, I have found that the youth at EHS broadly defy and reject these stereotypes. They do not see themselves as victims and they do not view themselves in need of saving. Like anyone, what they want is to be treated with respect and to have an opportunity to find dignity, peace, and a fulfilling life.

The young people I talked with at EHS are diverse in background and personality. And like all young people they have complex and often contradictory feelings about their lives and future. Young people in Ellison Square and EHS often demonstrated a significant degree of awareness of the social conditions that confront them. However, due to a variety of factors many feel incapable of impacting or meaningfully transforming
these conditions. This is inextricably tied to how youth relate to EHS as an institution and to how they perceive the broader role of education in their lives. In what follows, I mark out contradictions and tensions in how youth view life at EHS particularly between, on the one hand, critical understanding of the forces impacting their lives and, on the other hand, the difficulty of finding support and openings for social development and transformation under conditions of inequality and rigid systems of enclosure and control.

In general, I found that young people at EHS have a strong intuitive sense of how the neighborhood and the school are positioned in relation to broader socioeconomic conditions and realities. For instance, students often describe Ellison Square and EHS as a “ghetto” neighborhood and school. On the one hand, “ghetto” is used among youth as a pejorative to describe behaviors amongst their peers that are deemed unruly, uncouth, violent, or embarrassing: “Oh that girl, she’s so ghetto!” “Ghetto” here has connotations of internalized negative social status. This negative social status clicks with feelings of stigma, indignity, and shame about living in Ellison Square and attending EHS. On the other hand, the term is used to materially locate the neighborhood and school as spaces of poverty, neglect, and racial segregation. In this manner, students often describe EHS as a “ghetto” school out of a sense of frustration and awareness of the conditions in which they live and learn: “I swear, this school is so ghetto!” This usage has a critical edge to it. It is an act of naming certain interlocking realities, injustices, and assumptions that have concrete effects on the social and cultural fabric and life and identity in the community. Olivia comments:
When you go to this neighborhood you might see the signs in the yards that say ‘Bank of America failed this home and I lost it to foreclosure.’ Things like that affect people’s mentalities. Again maybe if we were in a suburb where everything was nice and clean and it was low gang violence outside of school then maybe the inside of school would be a less violent place. But because of the fact that this place is ghetto or whatever, it’s just the mentality that we bring in. I hear people say all the time, ‘well, it doesn’t matter. It’s just Ellison Square.’ Well, that’s just the culture of this school.

Olivia points out how larger social, political, and economic forces such as the foreclosure crisis impact the perceptions and attitudes of families and youth in the community. As intimated in Olivia’s comments, there is a strong sense amongst young people of the inequalities and injustices that permeate the spaces they inhabit, their own identities, and their life chances and opportunities. Importantly, there is an understanding that the material and symbolic forms of violence and deprivations that they face occur in relation to other spaces of affluence such as the “suburbs” that Olivia describes here in idealistic terms as “nice and clean” spaces relatively free of gangs and violence. Such observations concerning the construction of space, inequality, and identity contain intrinsic judgments on the operation of race and the distribution of relative opportunity.

Alex: When you talk about the ‘culture of the school’ and ‘student mentality’ what do you mean? How do you understand these connections and the broader problems we have been discussing?
Olivia: We just accept the fact that because we are all minorities and we live in this neighborhood that we’re treated second rate. There are dirty rotten books and broken desks and graffiti everywhere. It just kind of adds to that. It’s like you’re looking for someone to blame and you can just go up the ladder but eventually you don’t know who else to blame. You can blame your principal, but your principal has someone to blame because she’s got a boss, and her boss’s boss has a boss. So I don’t know. It’s a hierarchy. You just have to climb the ladder and ask who is ultimately to blame.

Olivia here broaches questions of racial inequality and responsibility. While she recognizes clearly the inequities that mark life in Ellison Square and EHS, she does not assign blame other than suggesting that “it’s a hierarchy,” where everyone is apparently implicated. I found that students in general reject the trope of victimization. However, for Olivia and others, a central problem that emerged again and again in my conversations with youth is that the realities of concentrated inequality so permeate life in the neighborhood and school they become normalized and in turn feed a kind of everyday acceptance and resignation: As Olivia put it in her comment above “...it’s just the mentality that we bring in. I hear people say all the time, ‘well, it doesn’t matter. It’s just Ellison Square.’ Well, that’s just the culture of this school.”

Forms of resignation often stem from, and translate into, the internalization of dominant neoliberal narratives of individual responsibility. Such narratives tend to frame the understanding of inequities in terms of private and personal failure detached from historical and socio-structural conditions. This contributes to feelings of stigma and
Alex: You just said something like ‘we’re thought of as second rate’ or something like that. Could you explain that a little bit more?

Olivia: I don’t know – it’s like, we are in this place for so long eventually you just embrace everything that it is. So if you have to deal with a book that has so much graffiti on it that you can’t read the words or there are ripped out pages eventually you are like, ‘oh, it’s alright. It’s Ellison Square.’ You don’t worry about it. That’s just kind of like the mentality that everyone has. And that probably comes from home too. Like if you’re parents are on welfare – I don’t think that public aid is something you should necessarily be ashamed of but it’s something you should work to get away from. You want to be able to stand on your own two feet but you see people that love link [Illinois food program], because you can go to the grocery store and get free food...You don’t want to work for yourself or strive to be better.

Olivia doesn’t reflect on why someone might be in the position of needing food assistance, but is more concerned to affirm the value of self-determination amidst what she views as the tendency among students and their families to just accept the status quo and their place within it. These comments can be read as the reproduction of anti-welfare ideologies and tropes of “personal responsibility” that have become so prevalent in mainstream discourse concerning the poor. While Olivia states that public aid is not something to be ashamed of, I found that welfare carries profound stigma in the
community and there is considerable shame that comes from having to rely on
government assistance. The reality is, of course, that many families in the community
have very little choice but to accept food assistance in an economic milieu where jobs are
scarce and the ones that are available often do not pay enough to meet basic needs. As
Olivia’s comments suggest, this can be stigmatizing and demoralizing for youth and their
families. However, I want to suggest that there is more going on here than simply the
internalization of dominant narratives and victim blaming. While there is an element of
this operating at EHS among youth and adults, Olivia’s avowal of self-determination
cannot simply be reduced to the realization of narratives regarding the supposed
culpability and pathology of the poor. As I come back to below, it has as much to do with
her belief in the talents and capacities of those around her than it does in their personal
flaws and failures. Like many youth I spoke with, Olivia maintains a faith in the capacity
of those around her to determine their own lives despite the obstacles they face.

Talking with Olivia about these matters was particularly enlightening because she
embodied and clearly articulated many of the contradictions I found at EHS amongst
youth and also among adults. These contradictions not only define attitudes toward
inequality and everyday life in Ellison Square but also attitudes toward EHS as an
institution and the value of education in the lives of young people in the community.
When we first spoke in the hallway outside of her 7th period class, one the first things
Olivia said to me was that she really enjoys school. She appreciates her teachers and
although she is often frustrated by her peers she voiced a strong sense of loyalty and love

19 As of 2011, 45.8 million mostly white Americans receive some form of food assistance.
for them. She likes coming to EHS everyday because she values learning new things and interacting and taking part in what the school has to offer. She would like to attend art school after EHS but doubts that she or her struggling mother can afford it. Realistically, she thinks that she might be able to afford training as an auto mechanic and make a good living this way. While Olivia expresses strong affection for EHS, like other students and staff, she also expresses deep frustration with how the institution is organized.

*Olivia: It’s very reminiscent of a prison. Even though I’ve never been in prison but it is reminiscent. Like ‘why are we treated like this’? I haven’t done anything bad but I kind of have to pay by having to be searched by the metal detectors or having to be caught in a hall sweep. It does make you feel – if you treat me like a dog I might want to react like a dog. It does explain why some of the students act the way they do. Like I said, it’s bad energy that you’re giving, and I’m gonna give it right back. That’s just how people are. But the thing is you kind of learn to just take what you’re given. We don’t think about these things. When you’re walking down the hallway it just kind of blends in to your everyday – it’s like you’re mentality. You’re like, ‘just take it’ because it’s where you are from and a lot of times you think it’s just not gonna get any better. I mean, if you strive for better, you’ll get better but a lot of people are like, ‘well, if you can maintain than you can do it.’ This is not necessarily what I want for the rest of my life. I don’t want to have to deal with just watching people fall. I don’t think anyone should want that.*
Contemporary educational policy and educational reform discourse tends to frame equity and opportunity through the logic of market efficiencies, accountability, and testing. The stated goal is make sure all children are learning what they need to make it to college. As I have discussed in the previous chapters these goals are tied to a misguided policy web that subverts its own stated aims by marginalizing public schools like EHS via privatization and disinvestment while narrowing curriculum and de-professionalizing teachers. This places limits on the intellectual development of youth and degrades connections between knowledge and learning and cultural and everyday experience.

Moreover, as Olivia describes above, this policy web has also been responsible for the punitive transformation of educational environments that creates spaces and cultures of insecurity and conflict. The stated mission of EHS and its public school counterparts throughout Chicago is to prepare all students for high school graduation and some form of college. In turn, at EHS, post-secondary education is viewed by teachers and by youth as the primary legitimate way to secure a better life. However, as I have already detailed, the statistics concerning how many youth eventually make it out of high school and into a college track are sobering, as EHS currently has a 55% drop-out rate. Of those who do graduate only 35-40% go on to college and of these only a small handful acquire degrees.

Amidst these conditions, youth at EHS articulate a variety of complex views regarding the role of education in their lives. Many like Olivia have conflicted feelings. They appreciate many aspects of school while they are profoundly critical of the punitive governmental structure. Many youth simply reject the culture of EHS outright. For instance, as with the description Olivia voices above, the institutionalized prison aesthetics along with the dominant standardized test-based curriculum leave little to be
desired in terms of inspiring youth to realize and fulfill their human potential. As a result of a complex mix of factors, many students simply do not view high school graduation and college as representing a pathway for a viable and secure future. They may not have role models that have been successful in the high school to college and career track, or they may know someone who graduated high school and even invested in post-secondary schooling only to remain unemployed and/or underemployed while being saddled with often crippling levels of student debt. Many young people recognize quite clearly the value of education but struggle to succeed amidst multiple external barriers and limited choices. I broached some of these issues with Javier a Latino junior at EHS.

Alex: How do students view schooling and education at EHS?
Javier: All of us know the value of education. All of us know that it's supposed to get us somewhere and that someday in life all of us know that we're going to need it for the future. The thing is, like I said, a lot of students don't really believe it. For a lot of us we don't like school so they are not going to do it. They're going to care more about staying off the streets and doing whatever they can to survive.
Alex: So even though students know the value of education many just don't care about school?
Javier: They see how it is around here. How it is everywhere. We don't have as much chances as everybody else. Us blacks and Hispanics, we don't get as much as white people and all that. We can do it if we set our minds to it, but once we stop thinking something, we just stop caring. Like me, I used to be an A-B student.
I stopped liking school, I stopped doing my work, I stopped going to class. I mean like Mr. B, he knows I’m smart and he knows that I can do it but the thing is...

Alex: Why did you stop caring?

Javier: A lot of stuff that goes around. I had some stuff going on at home. Everything just went crazy. I guess that’s what it is with everybody. We all adapt to it differently. The way I saw it was, I’m not gonna get a chance. The least I can do is help my siblings get a chance to do something. I mean, the way I see it, the only way I can get out of here is if I do my work and I pull up my grades, but how hard it is to pick up your pace after how I started, and the only way out of it is if I get some kind of athletic scholarship or something. Because basically, the only way we’re gonna get out of here – I mean, education is only for people who haven’t screwed up already. Everything else is down to athletic, entertainment and all those sorts of things like that.

Javier believes that education is a primary avenue for achieving economic security and legitimate social status. This certainly challenges assumptions that minority youth are failing because they do not understand the importance of education. However, Javier is not at all blind to the fact that opportunities are not evenly distributed and that the odds are stacked against him. Javier said that he fell behind in school mostly due to issues at home. His mom has struggled financially and he has had a difficult time dealing with the stress. There were moments when food was scarce and bills piled up. He had a hard time concentrating on his school work and eventually Javier stopped caring about school altogether. After falling behind in his grades he now focuses his attention on his two
younger brothers helping them to stay focused on school and stay out of trouble. Javier has placed much of his hope now in making sure they succeed while placing hope for his own future in acquiring a football scholarship so he can attend college.

Alex: Is part of the problem with school related to how you feel about your classes?

Javier: Sometimes when they are reading or lecturing us, some of us get put to sleep. All we hear is them talking and we have to listen. Like, if they find activities that we can do that are – like group projects that we can do in the classroom. That’s when I see that most kids actually do work. Because when it’s mostly individual work, some do it and some don’t. They do it when they want, some even copy. It’s not really good. If we don’t like it, we’re not going to do it. I mean, I know they gotta keep up with their lesson plan and what the city wants them to do and what the city don’t get is that if we don’t like it we’re not going to do it.

Alex: So you think quite a few students just give up?

Javier: That’s what I did. I mean, I know it’s not too late but I think it is. I have a 1.8 GPA. Out of high school all I can see myself is working and helping my brothers get to university so they can have a future.

Alex: What kind of a job do you think you’ll be able to get when you get out of here?

Javier: I don’t really know. If anything, I can try applying around. But mostly I can see myself working a fast-food place or landscaping, shoveling snow and all of that.
Alex: Have you thought about dropping out?
Javier: I’ve thought about it. But something’s always stopped me. I see how it is outside when you don’t even get your high school diploma. My cousin didn’t get it and now he’s stuck working the graveyard shift for twelve hours, then he goes home and he’s tired and he has nothing to do. I see that and the same motivation that I want to give my Mom the pleasure of seeing me walk across the stage—those two things combine together and that’s why I am still in school today.
Alex: Why have some of your friends dropped out?
Javier: They didn’t like school. They saw no point in it; they were failing. They gave up. A couple of them got involved in some stuff, a couple of them got arrested. A couple of my cousins dropped out and started working day-to-day jobs, not going anywhere. It’s not like it’s gonna be easy finding a good paying job if you drop out, chances are of getting that are really slim. It’s hard to know what to expect. I mean, things happen here. I think it’s on the kids, if they want to drop out that’s what they’re gonna do. If they want to fight and they want to stay on the streets fighting and getting involved in gangs and all that, they’re gonna do it. It’s basically on us.

I think that Javier captures here the sentiment of many youth I spoke with at EHS. He finds the curriculum to be generally less than engaging, framing it in the terms of what Paulo Freire (2003) referred to as “banking education”—the dull transmission of information from teacher to student—“all we hear is them talking and we have to listen.” He also understands that the creativity of teachers is limited by “what the city wants them
to do”. He suggests that perhaps project based and problem posing learning might be a more effective and engaging approach than the transmission oriented test based pedagogies currently in place. Javier also recognizes that his future options are extremely limited despite the fact that he doesn’t intend to drop-out and would like to go to college. However, ultimately Javier appeals to individual responsibility and self-blame—“it’s basically on us.” He doesn’t see any real possibility for collective social change in the conditions that confront him. In the following comments, Olivia connects the resignation expressed by Javier to the failure of the school to provide the basis of student engagement and to foster an environment where they might discover and learn the tools to transform the conditions of their own lives and secure a different future.

Like, most students see the fact that things aren’t that great but they don’t really connect the dots that there’s a reason, that there’s a cause and effect for everything. They just kind of take it as it is and go with it. I don’t know, it’s just – I guess I’m realizing it as I speak about it. We just don’t do anything. And there is probably things we could do but then again we all are degraded sometimes. Like what I said about the prison aspect. You do have a voice and I think people know they have a voice but they don’t use it and when they do use it they use it in a negative manner so it doesn’t really do anything for them. Like, a lot of kids are probably really opinionated. They are opinionated because I see it all the time. But they’re just opinionated about the wrong things I guess, in my definition anyway. I just feel like there is a lot of energy that can go into better stuff that we just don’t – we just aren’t given the basis to care. We’re not even given the
option. Because you can be given the key to a door, it’s your choice to open it or not. But I think that we aren’t given the key at all. Even though we have the ability to. I don’t know, it’s strange. We’re just kind of lost.

We see in Olivia’s comments that students want to assume responsibility for their own actions and their future. However, as Olivia articulates, they are denied the basic supports necessary to make doing so a reality. Part of this denial is the fact that the feelings and perspectives of young people are simply not taken into substantive consideration in school governance, curriculum, and school organization. Students for the most part have very little recourse to affect change in their schools, and often this denial of student experience and agency along with the emphasis on control and passivity in the curricula, translates into the kind of resignation that Javier and Olivia describe. This production of resignation can be thought of in terms of what Michelle Fine (1991) has referred to as “silencing” where disinvested urban public schools both overtly and tacitly undermine and fail to support and nurture the capacities, voices, hopes, and talents of young people due to unresponsive organizational structures, curricula, and policies. This “silencing” often translates into the channeling of what could be positive critical and transformative energies into ultimately destructive processes such as pushing students out of school altogether. For Olivia, and for many young people I spoke with it appears that the impersonal and punitive culture of the school largely fails to provide either the substantive or inspirational basis from which they can develop their full human, creative, and academic talents and their capacities as future adults and citizens. Many simply end up assuming a cynical distance to the dominant narrative that tells them that hard work in
school will translate into a better life and successful future. For many, this narrative simply does not cohere with their experience.

*Olivia:* I feel like EHS has so much potential because there are so many kids in here who can do really amazing things but maybe they aren’t just facilitated in what it is they want to do or maybe they have bad direction. You know, maybe they have a great talent but aren’t using it in a way that is beneficial to them or anyone around them. For the most part, if we were given the right something, the right one thing – I don’t want to say it’s money because I don’t want to give that much power to money. But like, if we were given some money and it actually made things nice here it might put a better mentality on the kids and we would see the results. But I don’t know if that’s what would really happen, if the result would be a better school.

The work of establishing a more thriving, socially just, and attentive educative culture would necessarily involve multiple elements. One of those elements would be the need to rethink how public schools like EHS can tap into and harness the talents and creative energies that Olivia recognizes in herself and in her peers. As articulated by Olivia and Javier, students want to assume responsibility for their own lives. However, they generally do not view their school in terms of how it is currently organized as a reliable partner either in the affirmation their humanity—“we are all degraded sometimes”—nor in facilitating their educational engagement and potential. As a result, students are caught within a set of opposing tendencies and forces that delimit the conditions of possibility
and capacity for social agency within the neoliberal school. As Olivia articulates above, there is a wealth of creativity, talent, and desire for direction and change amongst youth themselves. However, while Olivia and other youth demonstrate a degree of critical awareness of the sociopolitical forces that shape their lives and a desire for transformation, this critical energy is often left underdeveloped, lost or subverted.

**Teachers: Struggling for Professional Autonomy**

Like students at EHS, teachers are also caught within systems of enclosure and the search for meaningful engagement and change. It has been well established that neoliberal policies have had a significant impact on teachers extending to how teachers are understood and understand themselves as professionals and the vital work that they perform (Ball, 1993; Ingersoll, 2003; Luke, 2004). While there has been a historical tension between teachers’ professional status and efforts to control their work, neoliberal governance attempts to refashion this struggle in specific ways. Under the social democratic paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s, institutional norms and policy objectives were rooted (at least formally) in norms of social accountability and professional ethics. Here teachers were understood to be largely self-regulating actors within a system of professional knowledge and public responsibility. In contrast, under market governance, top-down centralized systems of management have sought to rationalize what teachers do within new schemas of performativity and accountability. Teachers are still required to regulate themselves under the ubiquitous mantra of “personal responsibility” but this self-regulation is re-touted through economic rationalities and enhanced external systems of
discipline such as tying teacher pay to “value-added” performance and the proliferation of administrative tasks and performance targets and evaluations. Bronwyn Davies (2003) suggests that this means that “the locus of power is removed from the knowledge of practicing professionals to auditors, policy-makers, and statisticians, none of whom need know anything about the profession in question” (p.91). This represents an attempt to make teachers accountable within a system ruled by “an almost subliminal anxiety and fear of surveillance rather than a sense of personal value within the social fabric” (p.93).

This can be viewed as the turn to more explicit control of teacher labor via market rationalities or what Stephen Ball (1993) has referred to as “overdetermined and over-regulated situation of schoolteachers’ work” (p.106). The current proletarianization of teaching has included the intensification of teaching work through the growth of class sizes, top-down accountability mandates, and pressure to meet market driven norms of entrepreneurialism and service delivery of commercialized test-oriented curricula. It has also included shifting more of the burden for educational responsibility and achievement from the state to teachers while simultaneously eroding their input in decisions regarding curriculum content and pedagogy. In this schema, measurement is everything. Those aspects of teaching and curriculum that cannot be measured and tested are devalued if not eliminated from the instructional clock altogether. Performance becomes less about content and achievement than simply about making the numbers. This has coincided with broad-based attacks of the teaching profession in recent years. Allan Luke (2004) notes:

The common discourse strategy of the political right is a shunting of responsibility for changes in youth culture, community demographics, and
employment, and, indeed, moral stance to schooling as cause and concomitant of such changes. Teachers and teaching get blamed for everything from deteriorating physical plants and eroded funding of schools, changing family structure and community social relations, youth unemployment, to changes in identity and dominant technologies for intellectual formation and cultural expression. (p.1424)

Blaming teachers and controlling their work has significant benefits for educational and political leaders. It presents a ready scapegoat for social and educational problems of all stripes and has also proven useful in undermining teachers unions and building resentment against public sector work in general. Moreover, emphasis on accountability and testing present a cheap and cost effective alternative to investing in proven measures such as lowering class sizes, providing equitable resources and support services, and promoting well rounded and culturally relevant curriculum at schools like EHS.

In Chapter 3, I outlined how the neoliberal management of curriculum at EHS has reflected many of these trends. It has been defined largely through efforts to control what and how teachers teach particularly in the integration of commercialized and standardized test-based curricula. This has impacted the way teachers at EHS approach their work and in turn has significant impact on institutional and social life including how students relate to learning and the educational process. Mr. Wilson here reflects on how systems of control have served to limit creative teaching and in turn inhibit student curiosity and engagement:
We drill these objectives and these units and stuff like that and it makes them [students] more institutionalized. In the sense that you need to do this and hit this number and if you don’t then you need to come back and do it again. Would I rather teach math in a more investigative way like “what’s going on in the community” like ‘what are some social issues that we could look at and use math to analyze and even solve these problems.’ I think that would be a better way of going about it. It would allow students to perhaps better comprehend the issues that are effecting them and teach them to express themselves about things that matter in their lives. Like our arts program is hugely popular with the students and I think they love it so much because they are actually allowed to express themselves whereas in most of our other subjects that are so strict with testing schedules and things like that there is no expression. There’s no imagination. There’s nothing. It’s a very rudimentary sort of education and so I think some shifts of emphasis within the curriculum would be greatly beneficial. I know that for instance the creative writing classes are very popular. And so when I see like creative writing and art and these other subject areas that kids absolutely love to go to and when you see them in class and they are so involved and attentive even calm in a sense. Even those students who are often crazy in the hallways are often model students in those classes, so if we could somehow model our curriculum on those kinds of experiences for students and to allow the students more freedom I think it would make a huge difference.
Mr. Wilson’s comments echo much of what I heard and observed in this study regarding the controls that are placed on teachers and the way that this impinges on their capacity to reach and engage students. Along with myriad other issues such as expanding class sizes and resource scarcity, the rigid rationalization of teachers time and work functions as a barrier to promoting enriching learning opportunities. It is also indicative of the disempowerment of teachers and the frustrations that accompany it:

*Mr. Wilson: It’s not about pushing teachers to expand their ideas of what teaching can be or what a classroom can look like. These are just not conversations I have ever had with the administration. It’s always just did you do these five things and that’s it. And this is what it’s like throughout the CPS just knowing teachers at other schools, it’s the same throughout the system. I mean we receive very little respect or support. I had a student last year pass the AP calculus exam which is huge at a school like this and all I was told was that next year I need to have at least two to pass because I have to always improve my pass rate. If I don’t I was told they would cut my class. So they didn’t show any curiosity about how I was able to get a student to pass. Or maybe “hey great job”. All they said was our AP numbers are low this year so we need to have more students pass next year. Because they said if our percentage doesn’t go up (and percentage is such a terrible metric for judging this I can’t even believe they use it but they it’s what they use from downtown) then my calc class will be cut. So I have a success that could actually be used to terminate the entire class. So our knowledge is not respected and we have very little voice.*
Research suggests that when teachers feel they are valued, their knowledge is respected, and their work as professionals is acknowledged in a supportive learning community that academic instruction improves, expectations are raised, and students are more likely to feel that faculty care and support their well-being (Fine, 1991; McNeil, 2000). In short, it furthers community, learning, and security. Conversely, disempowered teachers are more likely to go through the motions, punch a clock, and experience burnout. Linda McNeil (2000) has referred to this as the “contradictions of control” where efforts to manage teachers and rationalize their work through authoritarian bureaucratic structures serves to undermine the depth and quality of education. She argues that this can lead to “defensive teaching,” characterized by a shift in the focus of teachers’ energy toward meeting minimal institutional requirements at the expense of engaged teaching (2003, pp. 11-12).

They [students and teachers] fall into a ritual of teaching and learning that tends toward minimal standards and minimal effort. This sets off a vicious cycle. As students disengage from enthusiastic involvement in the learning process, administrators often see the disengagement as a control problem. They then increase their attention to managing students and teachers rather than supporting their instructional purpose. (p.11).

The erosion of teaching and learning is not the only consequence of excessive efforts to control curriculum and manage teachers’ work. It also contributes to strains on the foundation of all successful school communities—teacher-student relationships. Rigid
and impersonal structures in urban schools tend to coincide with overworked teachers, scarce resources, larger class sizes, overcrowding, and institutional structures seemingly more invested in control of teachers and students than in creating uplift and community. Darling-Hammond (2010) notes:

…when teachers have little opportunity to come to know their students well, and students have little opportunity to relate to any adult in the school on an extended, personal level, it should not be surprising that factory model high schools create virtual chasms into which students can fall. (p. 64)

Ms. Gibbs, an African American special education teacher, expressed to me that “they have us doing a whole lot of paper work about nothing, I feel like I don’t have time to follow-up with a lot of my students. And our students have more problems than students at some suburban school…we all just do the best we can.” Large class sizes and increased demands of teachers’ time for administrative tasks presents a challenge to building substantive and supportive relationships. Teachers are thus torn between fulfilling what they perceive as their ethical obligations to their students and pressing administrative responsibilities to standardized mandates and commercial programming. As a result, many classes I observed at EHS could be classified as lifeless, transmission oriented affairs, with teachers engaged in “defensive teaching.” However, I also observed teachers routinely going far beyond the accountability and testing regime by organizing dynamic learning including student discussions, projects, and making essential connections between curriculum and students’ life experiences. The formal curriculum is generally
indifferent to such efforts, placing value largely on meeting measurable outcomes as opposed to the ethical content of teaching. Moreover, teachers face intensive and extensive forms of surveillance where deviation from the script can translate into shaming and disciplinary sanction. Despite this, and due to their own sense of professional responsibility, teachers nonetheless work to create spaces for creative engagement within and beyond the official curriculum. Mr. Parks, for instance, graciously invited me into his English classes for group discussions with students on issues related to security and insecurity in their lives and neighborhood. This coincided with creative writing assignments where students reflected on the roots of conflict and violence and the way these problems are currently managed by the school. Mr. Parks comments that many of his students are not used to such exploratory engagements as they have been acculturated at a young age into the regime of curricular and imaginative enclosure.

*My teaching style is very frustrating to the good students because they have been programmed and brainwashed by teachers over the years to get a cue of what I’m looking for and they’ll give it to me. ‘Just tell me what you want’*. And the frustration of, “we don’t have good students,” my problem is no, I’ve got way too many good students but it’s killed their imagination, creativity and their ability to be learners.

Struggles for meaningful and creative teaching, also underscore how teachers in the building have attempted to carve out alternative spaces in the school beyond the official
curriculum to address issues of immediate concern to students and to foster supportive relationships. This includes partnership programs such as Building with Books, Helping Hands Chicago, VOYCE, and various after school clubs oriented to enhancing student engagement, literacy, and for providing safe and alternative spaces for dialogue. For instance, in response to the violent death of one of her students in 2006, Ms. Lorrie started a student club called Peace Café as a safe space for students to discuss and reflect on issues of violence in their lives.

Ms. Lorrie: We needed to have some place where we don’t just have to keep going with the lesson. Some place where it’s okay to just be and actually talk about it. That said, I know nothing about counseling or crisis intervention or anything, I just agreed that there needed to be a space to talk about violence in the community. Another teacher, one of the main founders of the group also felt similarly. She is an art teacher so I feel like she at least, even if she doesn’t have any formal training in that area, has a medium for getting feelings out on paper or by other means. And then we had another gentleman who – I don’t know if he has any formal training but he is just really good at that. He’s a very spiritual person. So we and a couple of other teachers came together and nobody had any – it wasn’t founded as a crisis intervention or anything like that but it kind of worked because it gave the kids options, whether it was through art or just talking about violence.

Despite her involvement in creating this space for educators and students to come
together and reflect as a community in a safe and supportive setting, Ms. Lorrie, like other teachers I spoke with, does not feel like enough is being done to engage and serve youth in the school nor to support teachers who are attempting to do so. While teachers are making various attempts to go beyond the official curriculum in order to address their students varied social and emotional needs, due to the often overwhelming challenges of performing their formal duties they may simply not have the time, energy, and resources needed to provide the kind of focused attention that students require. In sum, I found that teachers were placed in a position where they had to struggle between fulfilling what they believed were their professional and ethical obligations to students in ways not addressed in the official curriculum, and fulfilling their working obligations to the systems of accountability and control defining the official curriculum. This highlights two very different forms of accountability. On the one hand, an ethically driven form based on a sense of professional and social responsibility to young people, and on the other, an externally imposed and individualized form of responsibility rooted in threat of disciplinary sanction. That is, one based in a moral and ethical register, the other in instrumental rationality and enclosure. Amidst overbearing administrative demands and the realities of large class sizes and minimal external support for students such as social-emotional services and counseling, teachers are placed in an exceedingly difficult position. In order for teachers to meet their professional obligations they are forced to individually carve-out spaces within and outside an official curriculum that operates to limit and police these very aims. This contrasts sharply with having a curriculum responsive to the knowledge and judgment of teachers as a community of professionals. The development of such a curriculum and community of practice could not be more
necessary and urgent.

Soldiers: Exceptional Citizenship and the Desire for Service

“Class attention! Fall in line! Four squads people! Cover down!” I am in the EHS gym watching Sergeant Major Davis head of the school’s JROTC program lead a group of rag-tag freshman “cadets” through a 20 point uniform inspection. The youth are all clad in the same light green army uniforms with shiny black patent leather shoes. Two Hispanic students one male and the other female are at the front of the formation. The female cadet is wearing a dark green coat with a U.S. Army JROTC patch on the upper arm; the male cadet is wearing a light green shirt and black tie. The solid black bars patched on his shoulder signify his rank in the unit. Sergeant Major Davis explains that the boy is being trained for a “Cadet Captain” position. In his hand the boy has a folder with the slogan “There’s Strong, and Then There’s Army Strong” emblazoned on its cover. I watch as the two budding commanders proceed to check each student in the formation for proper posture, stance, and uniform before engaging in a string of 16 separate drill commands that the youth perform in unison: “Ready, open rank, march!”

The Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) was created in 1916 by Congress as a readiness program to inculcate martial and patriotic values and to facilitate the matriculation of young men into the U.S. armed forces. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell is widely credited with overseeing the contemporary revitalization of JROTC. In the wake of the Los Angeles riots in 1992 when white middle class fears of urban chaos and black and brown youth reached a recent high water mark in U.S. culture,
as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Powell worked to double the size of the JROTC. Powell later wrote in his memoir *My American Journey* that JROTC represents a great “social bargain” where mostly “inner-city kids, many from broken homes, found stability and role models. They got a taste of discipline, the work ethic, and they experienced pride of membership in something healthier than a gang” (McDuffee, 2008). According to the JROTC, the program is not a recruitment tool. Rather its stated mission is “to infuse in its student cadets” who are, as Powell noted, overwhelmingly urban youth from low-income and minority backgrounds, “a sense of discipline and order” through the “study of ethics, citizenship, communications, leadership, life skills and other subjects designed to prepare young men and woman to take their place in adult society” (JROTCweb).

The growth of JROTC programs can be understood as part a broader expansion of military education in Chicago and throughout the United States. Today, the Chicago Public Schools are widely considered the “most militarized in America.” David Goodman (2002) notes that “Chicago is in the vanguard of a growing national movement that is responding to the problems of struggling inner-city schools by sending in the Marines and the Army, Navy, and Air Force.” There are currently around 11,000 6-12th graders participating in some type of military education program in Chicago. This includes those enrolled in JROTC at schools like EHS as well as those students currently attending one of the city’s twelve distinct military academies. These military academies are public schools of “choice” funded by a combination of Pentagon and Department of Defense (DOD) money along with local tax revenue. Andy Kroll (2009) reports:
Chicago has six military high schools run by a branch of the armed services. Six smaller military academies share buildings with existing high schools. Nearly three dozen JROTC programs exist in regular high schools, where students attend a daily JROTC class…And at the middle school level, there is a new JROTC program for sixth, seventh- and eighth-graders…[this] “Middle School Cadet Corps" program brings the JROTC's lockstep, uniformed culture to students as young as 11 or 12. Five hundred middle school students from more than 20 schools enrolled in the Cadet Corps in the 2008-2009 school year.

Military education in Chicago needs to be understood in the context of the broader military incursion into schools since September 11th and the War on Terror. Falling explicitly under the Pentagon’s $20 billion dollar yearly recruitment budget, funding for military programming in schools rose from $76 million a year in 1992 to $210 million by 2002 (Schaeffer-Duffy, 2003). This has been directed, among other things, to creating military academies, the troops to teachers program, the training of former military officers as school leaders and superintendents, and the vast multiplication of JROTC programs across U.S. school districts particularly in urban areas (Saltman & Gabbard, 2010). For example, in 2009 the National Defense Authorization Act provided an additional $170 million explicitly to expand JROTC in schools nationwide with a goal of 3,700 programs by 2020 (Kroll, 2009). This expansion of military education has occurred primarily in struggling urban communities and traditionally underfunded and neglected public schools in cities like Chicago, Oakland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New Orleans. This turn to military education in impoverished urban schools can be seen as a
powerful symbolic and institutional infusion of military influence in education while framing the civic and social development of young people through prescriptive military values and service.

All incoming freshman at EHS have a choice between taking two years of traditional physical education (PE) or JROTC. However, in 2010, the school had to lay-off two physical education teachers due to the austerity measures and budget cuts. As a result, the JROTC program has swelled, turning what would be a choice into something more like conscription for many youth. The JROTC program at EHS is facilitated by two former African American male U.S. Army officers who I refer to as Sergeant Major Davis and Lee. Like other JROTC instructors they received their JROTC leadership training at the U.S. military recruitment center at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Like all JROTC instructors Sergeant Majors’ Davis and Lee receive half of their pay from the Army and the other half from the school district. The U.S. Army directly provides educational resources and technology to the cash-strapped schools that adopt the program. This makes the JROTC classroom at EHS the best resourced classroom complete with new state of the art Apple products and new textbooks and supplies. Davis and Lee oversee the JROTC curriculum at EHS which includes military formations, inspections, and drills along with classroom instruction in U.S. military history and organization, military terminology and values, and the application of military principals to physical, moral, civic and character development. JROTC students at EHS also participate in JROTC related service and events such as attending JROTC sponsored outdoor excursions where they receive leadership training and participate in activities such as orienteering and war game simulations.
After cadet formation and inspection in the gymnasium, Sergeant Major Davis and the cadets transition into an adjacent classroom. The room is plastered over with army iconography. There are multiple flags representing different branches of the armed forces and posters adorn the walls with recruitment slogans such as “Army of One”. In one corner of the room there is a life size cardboard cut-out of a noble looking “storm-trooper” with weapon ready in full battle dress and desert camouflage presumably of the type worn in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bulletin boards feature various JROTC codes, slogans, and procedures set against dark green army camouflage backdrops. Sergeant Major Davis calls the class to attention, “class, on your feet, face the colors!” With hands over chests the students proceed to face the US flag and recite the JROTC creed:

I am an Army Junior ROTC Cadet.
I will always conduct myself to bring credit to my family, country, school and the Corps of Cadets.
I am loyal and patriotic.
I am the future of the United States of America.
I do not lie, cheat or steal and will always be accountable for my actions and deeds.
I will always practice good citizenship and patriotism.
I will work hard to improve my mind and strengthen my body.
I will seek the mantle of leadership and stand prepared to uphold the Constitution and the American way of life.
May God grant me the strength to always live by this creed.
Next Sergeant Major Davis asks the cadets to open their textbook “Citizenship in Action and Leadership.” They are going to review vocabulary terms for a section titled “The History of Drills”. On his DOD issued Mac laptop, Sergeant Major Davis brings up a colorful computer generated version of hangman on the class smart-board. The cadets are clearly familiar with the game. On the screen appear blank dashes above which hovers a hangman post. The students take turns guessing letters. After a few guesses, a young Latina cadet correctly identifies the word “discipline” after which the definition appeared on the screen: “Discipline: Orderly, obedient, or restrained conduct.” This was followed by several other words including “drill and “precision”. The remainder of the class was spent learning the proper military procedure for folding and carrying the American flag.

Sergeant Major Davis has been serving in the US Army for over 25 years and has been working in Chicago schools for over a decade. Before joining JROTC he served as a military recruiter and as a procurement officer for the Pentagon (“You’ve probably heard of the $10,000 toilet seat? That was me. That’s what I did, I was a middle man between the Pentagon and defense contractors”). Sergeant Major Davis is a congenial and talkative fellow who I believe sincerely loves his students and views his job largely in terms of community service and citizenship development.

*Alex: What would you say the goals are for JROTC?*

*Sergeant Major Davis: Our motto is to motivate young people to be better citizens so we try to establish a dual program. Not only do we have an academic*
curriculum but we also have a very competitive curriculum, which teaches them to be a leader and not just follow the group. So we’re constantly putting them in situations where they have to stand up before the class and they might have to review a subject or give an impromptu speech or take control of a small unit of six or seven cadets like you saw yesterday folding the flag.

Supporters of JROTC argue that JROTC has little if anything to do with recruitment. For example, current Secretary of Education and former CPS CEO Arne Duncan has argued that military education is about providing “options” and consumer “choice” to families along with the promotion of discipline in the lives of disadvantaged youth (something they are imagined as lacking in sufficient quantity). He has said: “I love the sense of leadership. I love the sense of discipline.” I heard similar sentiments from students in the program at EHS. Rose a freshman African American female cadet explains:

I like that it gives you discipline and self-control. It’s like, you have to act and remain a certain way, you have to represent them well.

Kristina suggests that part of the appeal of JROTC is that there aren’t many other activities available for students.

It’s really a great opportunity. Here they promise you except it’s not there. I’m asking a million people, ‘where’s acting class? Where’s music class?’ and they’re like, ‘oh, we don’t have it right now’ and if no one develops it you have no luck
whatsoever. That’s why I’m not really in any activities besides JROTC. It’s just a class but with military basics. It’s not like, if someone’s goofing off they give them a hundred push-ups. That doesn’t happen. I was expecting that a little bit of that though.

Many parents have also expressed support for military education and each year applicants for the military academies far exceed the number of slots available (McDuffee, 2008). Critics of the program have argued, however, that JROTC is a blatant recruitment strategy that has no place in public schools. Sergeant Major Davis is insistent that the JROTC program at EHS is not a recruitment strategy. Although as a former army recruiter this does not mean that Sergeant Major Davis is against recruitment per se.

*Sergeant Major Davis: Not everybody is gonna go to college and everybody that goes to college doesn’t graduate. I made a living off of that, I was a recruiter and my market was college dropouts. They are smart enough to pass the test to get into the military and they don’t want to tell Mom and Dad that they dropped out of college.*

*Alex: So they go home with, ‘I’ve made the decision to join the army’ as opposed to, ‘I’ve dropped out of college.’ How would you identify those kids? Did you work on a college campus?*
Sergeant Major Davis: Yes. I was the commander for the city of Pittsburgh recruiting and the people before me were not successful and so when I looked at the demographics I found that there was a huge population of high school grads who only had one or two years of college and were just lingering around at home. And so I redirected our efforts into that market and I was very successful but it was because these guys go to Jr. college and they might at best get a job as a manager of a restaurant chain or something like that and they were kind of happy but kind of disenchanted too at the same time and so I worked on them and redirected their efforts. I got out of the high school and into the college market, the grad market and it really worked well.

Sergeant Major Davis claims that very few youth join the military directly from EHS. Similarly, the Department of Defense has estimated that around 10% of JROTC students enlist directly from high school. However, these numbers are highly misleading because they are based on surveys given to students long before they graduate. If the student has not enlisted at the time of the survey they are not considered to have enlisted. Official statistics kept by the Department of Defense indicate that between 45-55% of JROTC students later in enlist in the military—a far higher percentage than the general population. In Chicago the figures are estimated at 40-50% (thus almost half of JROTC cadets end up joining the military at some point after high school) (Goodman 2002, McDufee, 2008). It is well known that the U.S. military has faced a recruitment crisis in the wake of 9/11 and has had to continually lower its own enlistment criteria in order to meet quotas—for instance, providing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrant
youth and adults if they join the military. Militarized education is inextricably tied to post-9/11 strategies of military recruitment in schools such as making federal education funding contingent upon allowing the military access to student information and allowing recruiters access to campuses through the No Child Left Behind Act. This coincides with military marketing promotions like the “Army Strong” and “Army of One” campaigns, military sponsored home and internet video games, and a more robust online presence with pro-Army music videos and other interactive media meant to capture the imaginations of young people and their desire for belonging, adventure, and educational and economic opportunity. The expansion of military education and JROTC in schools can hardly be viewed separately from these trends. As former secretary of Defense William Cohen stated to the House Armed Services Committee in February 2000, JROTC is “one of the best recruiting devices that we could have” (Shaefer-Duffy, 2003).

While the ethical implications of recruitment on campus are an important element in this story, I think that what is at stake here are deeper and more important questions regarding the pedagogical and structural relations embedded within and communicated through the expansion of military education. The majority of those who join the military out of JROTC programs are low-income urbanized African American and Hispanic youth from schools like EHS (Robbins, 2009). Marvin Berlowitz and Nathan Long (2010) state:

Defense Department guidelines for JROTC specifically seek ‘the less affluent large urban school’ and populations who are ‘at-risk’. These children are trapped by a form of economic conscription referred to as the ‘push-pull phenomenon,’ in
which they are pushed by poverty and the economics of racism and pulled by the promise of military benefits. (p. 185)

Military programs like JROTC tie acquisition of economic security and citizenship to military values and participation (Cowen & Siciliano, 2011). Here, prescriptive military discipline is positioned as an exceptional form of civic development for “at-risk” and “troubled” young people. Participation in military learning and soldiering becomes a key “legitimate” avenue for racially marginalized students with few other options to acquire economic and educational opportunity along with the status accorded to full citizens. My position here should not be misinterpreted as a rejection of the need to provide young people with avenues for developing self-discipline and economic and civic participation. Rather my intent is to raise fundamental questions about the underlying system of value and assumptions which animate military programs. Lost is any recognition of the violent and destructive realities of war, such as the human suffering and terror inflicted by American imperialism either historically or in the disastrous wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond. Lost too is recognition of the tragic realities facing veterans—many maimed, wounded, and/or suffering deep psychological trauma—as they are forced to wage shameful bureaucratic struggles in order to make good on the educational and medical benefits promised them. Most importantly perhaps, military learning favors prescriptive forms of knowledge over expansive and critical forms of learning and intellectual inquiry. Underlying this is an emphasis on the value of obedience over the intrinsic values of autonomy, questioning, and dissent within a democratic society. In this light, military education can be seen largely as another symptom of neoliberal enclosure rather
than an opening of new horizons and possibilities for young people. Such questions about underlying values are necessary if we are to develop systems of student engagement and citizenship beyond encroaching militarization and the narrowing of security for young people. As articulated alongside other forms of neoliberal enclosure and violence, militarization in all its forms represents a threat to developing sustainable economic opportunity and cultures of collaboration and justice in cities, schools and communities.

There is something more going on under the surface of military education that is crucial to note, however. Expansion of military schooling positions itself as a legitimate “way out” for disadvantaged kids, and its popularity with many students and parents speaks to something deeper about the desires of young people and their families that should not be ignored. In contrast to ideological tropes that position poor Black and Latino youth as lacking the sufficient drive and desire for participation and achievement, the apparent popularity of military programs in schools speaks to a profound hunger for opportunity, belonging, and service. It is precisely this desire for participation and community that military education presupposes and seeks to capitalize on. For those like myself who oppose all forms of militarization and therefore do not support military education in public schools, we must recognize that the attraction of these programs are symptoms of a fragmented free market culture and that military education promises a sense of belonging and community amidst the broader erosion of the commonweal under neoliberalism. In an atomized culture where notions of the social good are increasingly privatized, military education becomes an exceptional site of civic development for young people, offering the promise of otherwise unavailable benefits, belonging, and
security in exchange for service (Cowen & Siciliano, 2011). Any effort to critically re-think educational policy and practice has to take these forces and desires for participation and belonging seriously. We need to consider how educational environments and practices can work to promote and nurture holistic and vibrant senses and formations of community, service, and security in social democratic rather than militaristic terms. As I detail in the following section, there are already myriad community organizations and social collaborations throughout Chicago working toward these important goals.

Activists: Learning as Liberation

On a cold and rainy evening in early November, 2010, I attended a meeting at the Chicago Freedom School (CFS), an autonomous non-profit organization dedicated to youth development and movement building. This particular meeting involved a small group of Chicago Public School (CPS) students who were working on a project to pressure EHS to change their discipline policies in line with the principals of restorative justice. Two of the youth in the group were students at EHS, the rest had come from schools and neighborhoods throughout Chicago. Brought together by their involvement in the CFS and broader youth activist networks in the city, the students had chosen to focus on disciplinary issues at EHS as part of a longer term strategy to challenge the school-to-prison pipeline in the CPS. They identified EHS as a site to focus their work

21 Restorative justice is a philosophical and practical alternative to punitive forms of discipline based in aboriginal traditions and principals of dialogue, peer mediation, and community reparation and accountability.
because they felt that the school is broadly representative of the larger demographics of
the CPS while EHS has a reputation for having a punitive school culture. With support
from their two adult allies at the meeting, the students developed a plan of action. This
included holding workshops for students at EHS in order to build awareness and inform
them about their civil rights and the school-to-prison pipeline with the goal of
encouraging EHS students to join them in pressuring administration to develop a peer
jury and to have the security guards and Dean’s trained in conflict mediation and other
restorative alternatives to suspensions, expulsions, and use of law enforcement and
arrests. Eventually, due to the group’s efforts, along with the efforts of others in the
school and community, administration and CPS did agree to adopt a peer jury at EHS
where students are afforded the opportunity to mediate and settle certain disciplinary
matters through dialogue. Broader struggles over training and substantive alternatives to
suspections, expulsions, and arrests are ongoing.

The Chicago Freedom School is one of many non-profit youth organizations in
Chicago committed to popular education and to working with youth in order to develop
their potential as activists and critical citizens. These groups include Voices of Youth in
Chicago Education (VOYCE), Blocks Together, Gender Just, Project NIA, Community
Renewal Society, MAGIC, Dignity in Schools, and many more. Youth in these programs
develop their sense of agency and citizenship; they take part in community building; they
learn movement history; they conduct participatory action research; they plan protests
and rallies; they run workshops for their peers; and they engage in social justice
organizing and activism through direct action and the arts. In recent years, blossoming
networks of youth organizations and activism in Chicago have been at the forefront of
challenging neoliberal educational policies such as school closures, teacher layoffs, and cut backs while organizing movements around a host of issues of importance in the lives of young people such as zero tolerance policing and criminalization, bullying, violence, LGTBQ and immigration issues, and economic, racial, and ecological justice. One of the young people involved in the Freedom School project against zero tolerance policies at EHS was a senior African American student named Chris whom I interviewed for this research.

Alex: Talk to me a little about the Freedom School. What motivates you to get involved like this?

Chris: Because at the Freedom School I see more people that are like me that actually want to see change and pursue change for the better and they challenge me in a way so that I challenge myself. So it’s like I find myself being attracted to the Freedom School because they bring a lot of the things out of me that I knew they were there and they help me understand the things that are inside of me that I couldn’t understand by myself.

Alex: Do you feel like you guys have a chance to change some things at EHS?

Chris: Of course. As much that goes on at EHS, I can always see potential for change which is why I stayed all four years and which is why I love this school so much. I want to see change and I know I can make a change in this school. Chicago Freedom School will actually help me do that. Right now we are trying to introduce restorative justice to EHS and to open up a peer jury here that gives students a chance to be heard by other students.
Alex: Do you think that will help improve life at EHS?

Chris: Yeah, I think it will help to an extent. But we need to do more. We need to find things that will get the attention of students. Offer more programs. Allow students to be creative. Allow students to be students rather than prisoners of CPS and that’s how it is at EHS. Students feel the need that they ‘have to’ and we need to focus more on the ‘we want to.’ Find what’s attractive to the students so they can find happiness within themselves. Every student here at EHS is different. Every student has their own feelings and every student is involved in their own situations and experiences and if we find these things than we get the attention of the students. I believe EHS can be one of the best schools in Chicago but if people continue to be afraid and fear themselves the school will only go in the direction it’s been going for a while now.

Alex: What would restorative justice ultimately mean here at EHS?

Chris: It’s important to give and show love to the students that may not have it at home or that they can’t find on the streets. School is a big deal for children in my generation. School is a big percentage of what’s going on in a kid’s life. It’s school, home and the in-between school and home, the travel, the streets, you know. School, like I said, you spend six hours in school so it ultimately has a big role in deciding what a student becomes. It’s very important to understand that.

Social and community based organizations like the Freedom School provide a crucial space for young people to engage with issues that matter to them in safe and supportive environments. For Chris, his involvement with the program has tapped into and nurtured
his own capacities for leadership, reflection, and action. It has given him a sense of hope that things can be otherwise and that his participation and ideas matter and can make a difference. As he articulates above, his involvement in activism with the Freedom School has opened his eyes to possibilities for positively impacting life at EHS. This not to say that all of this is free of tensions. Chris, and other youth workers and youth activists, also described the many barriers they confront from unresponsive administrators, bureaucratic hurdles, and from police and other adult authorities invested in maintaining the status quos. This is particularly pronounced in efforts to transform school cultures and curriculum in line with the principals of progressive and social democratic education.

In the course of this research, I interviewed one of the founders of the Freedom School, Ms. Roberts, who has worked with youth at EHS and throughout the city. A prominent figure in many different progressive youth organizations and movements, Ms. Roberts was an articulate adult voice in describing the many challenges confronting youth development work and what this work means for educational struggles.

*The biggest part of my work as an adult ally is and has been for years to run interference against the adults who attempt to crush these young people on a regular basis. They do it all the time. It’s not so easy when you are fifteen years old and you want to change your community. In this day and age it’s very hard to figure out where the points are where you can make a difference. It’s very difficult to figure out how to navigate it. It’s very complicated. These young people are not provided in this culture with a lot of places where they are seen as valuable and valued, where their voices are taken seriously ever. Most of them are super*
oppressed, living in very difficult circumstances and their resilience is remarkable. So for me, I always think about it as, the young people I have worked with I have always wanted to find a way for them to take control of their own circumstances and their own lives. It may not look like the activism that is prepackaged, but for some young people that is a huge activist life step, to start becoming conscious of your surroundings so that you don’t fall into the trap of destroying yourself while the system is already trying to destroy you. I guess I think about it as having levels of activism and organizing defined by your circumstances, which looks different for every young person. I think the young people that come to the Freedom School feel that. They feel very much like it is a family space where they can figure out their own identities. We focus a lot on that. ‘Who are you and what are those identities about you like your race, your class, your gender – how do those play out for you? Your sexual orientation – is this the first time you’ve ever met an LGBTQ young person and talked with them. What is oppression, what does it look like, how does it work?’ So providing them a space and a sense of history about what came before and then providing them the support they need to create their campaigns and make those work. I feel like if we can have more spaces like that around the city and the country, that would be a helpful thing. I think that’s what it’s going to take.

Ms. Roberts describes the core principal of her work with the Freedom School and other youth organizations in the terms of “education for liberation.” Education for liberation has its roots in a variety of traditions ranging from the Enlightenment ideals of reason and
autonomy articulated by Immanuel Kant; to the progressive pedagogy of John Dewey; to the tradition of popular education within the American labor, civil rights, feminist and black freedom movements; to critical pedagogy developed by thinkers like Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. All of these various strands of education for liberation, while bearing distinct histories, have in common the ethical faith that all human beings have the potential to understand and transform the conditions of their own lives in the interest of promoting greater human freedom and the common good.

Ms. Roberts: Education liberation doesn’t mean that you don’t have the basic subjects, it just means that they have to be applied and relevant and make sense. You can still teach people how to read by reading a book that is interesting. The girls at the Chicago Freedom School hated me at first because I would do everything possible – every Thursday night we would all read together because it’s important in order to survive in the world. You’re not going make it through school or life. Those things are critical. You have to have basic computational skills. You can do that. I will never forget this example; I worked with this one young woman when I first started Rodgers Park Young Woman’s Action team seven years ago. She was one of the founding members of the organization and she came up to me one day early on, we had just met each other. She said, ‘I’m not going to college’ and she was like fifteen at the time. I was like, ‘why are you announcing that to me?’ She was testing me and she was like, ‘I’m not interested in college’ and I was like, ‘I don’t care what you’re interested in, you don’t need to go to college,’ and she said, ‘I’m going do hair,’ and I said, ‘that’s great. I’m
glad you’re going do hair.’ I knew what it was about because she knew that I had been to college and that I had gotten my Masters degree. Her notion was already that she was going be antagonistic with me because her idea was that I was doing this group so that they would all go to college when that wasn’t it at all. I was like, ‘you do whatever you want to do. I don’t care what you do.’ So then about a year later, she came up to me and she was like, ‘you never talk to us about going to college...all these programs I go to people go up there and start talking about how to get into college.’ So she is thinking, ‘here is this black woman who is educated. Why isn’t she doing the same thing?’ I said, ‘well, the reason I’m not talking to you about going to college is because I don’t care whether or not you’re going to college. I care whether or not you actually know how to understand stuff. I want to know whether or not you can look at a piece of paper and make sense of it. If you don’t go to college but you can do that, I’m going to be really happy.’

Alex: That seems like almost the polar opposite of what the education system is geared towards right now particularly for working class and racialized kids.

Ms. Roberts: Right. So I said, ‘if you can understand what we are reading in our sessions, I am really happy. That’s your college for me.’ She just graduated from college last year. She had decided to go, and it was a very difficult time and we had to do all these things to get her scholarship money and loans and her family was sabotaging her experience to go to college. She was the first one in her family to graduate from high school let alone go to college. So we went through this whole thing and I went to her graduation last year and she said to me, ‘Do you
remember when I said to you that I wasn’t going to college?’ and I said, ‘Yes I do,’ and she said, ‘I felt like you were going tell us that this is what we needed to do because you think that you’re better than us because you were educated. You would be telling us that we need to go in this direction. But I just watched you all those years and I thought to myself, she doesn’t even push it. She just makes us learn stuff and learn how to do research and learn how to go out and write our own surveys and do interviews and focus groups for these projects we were doing, the participatory research projects.’ I’ll never forget that she called me in November of her first year and she said, ‘Ms. Roberts, everything we did we’re doing here. I already know all of this stuff.’ Later on she said, ‘it’s amazing because you taught us how to do all this stuff without it being school. We didn’t even know we were learning how to do this stuff. We didn’t know we were learning how to do research by doing it this way.’ Her senior thesis was easy for her because she had already learned how to do all that stuff. They knew that at sixteen. That’s the point. That you can still teach basic knowledge and skills you just have to apply it, it has to make sense to young people, and you have to be able to master it. That’s what keeps them going. People always say to me, ‘how do these girls do all this stuff where they are creating all these things’ but it’s like, ‘because they care about the issue.’ They pick the topic, they want to do it, that’s why. It’s not magic.

I include this long excerpt from Ms. Roberts’ interview because I think that it captures a number of important insights. To begin with, the point here is not that kids shouldn’t be
encouraged to go to college. I do not believe Ms. Roberts was at all indifferent to the further education of the young woman she mentored. Rather, Ms. Roberts is suggesting that authentic learning and the desire to learn does not emanate from external sources of authority or from coercion such as telling kids that the primary purpose of school (and by extension learning) is to pass standardized tests. In contrast, Ms. Roberts intimates that to substantively engage youth, especially youth living under various forms of oppression, learning has to be connected to both the internal curiosity and interests of young people and also to their historical and cultural locations. Crucially, Ms. Roberts’ comments suggest that such approaches to learning are not at all incompatible with the educational skills required to survive in the current economic and political order. As Ms. Roberts articulates, young people cannot hope to meaningfully operate in the world without learning to read, to think analytically, and to have competence with math and science. However, progressive and critical models of education root the development of these skills within the internal motivation of the learner and their social reality as opposed to extrinsic authority such as the reductive technical calculations and curricular content privileged under the dominant emphasis on markets, testing, and workforce preparation. Moreover, progressive and critical models of learning do not view learning as simply a means to accommodate oneself to the existing economic, social, and political order but to develop the critical capacities and intellectual tools to participate and transform this order in the interest of deepening democratic social relations. This frames the pursuit of knowledge as an active and collective engagement with the world for human development and democratic understanding and transformation as opposed to a prescriptive set of discreet, privatized, and de-contextualized skills transmitted to students
to be mastered and tested. I would argue that such a reordering of educational values is precisely what is required for creating future citizens capable of redefining what human security and dignified work might mean beyond the present race to the bottom of wages, workers’ rights, and environmental protections in the stratified global economy.

My interest here is not to suggest that the Freedom School and other organizations that effectively engage youth in activism should simply be translated into another standardized model to be implemented into public schools like EHS. Such a move runs counter to the logic of education liberation that views social organization and learning as part of a democratic process as opposed to a prescriptive and static method. Rather I would argue that organizations like the Freedom School provide valuable lessons about how the real desires of youth for participation, service, social change, and authentic learning can be translated into engagement and action. Such insights are not only critical for building social movements capable of deconstructing the harmful assumptions and underlying systems of value that animate neoliberal educational policy and practice, including military education, but also provide real working alternative models of learning, hope, and youth engagement from which to draw valuable insights for rethinking our approaches to educational policy and practice on a broader scale.

In this chapter, I have explored different barriers and possibilities for the development of human security and engagement at EHS, highlighting tensions between various forms of enclosure and how students, educators, and youth workers at EHS imagine their own sense of social and ethical responsibility in relation to educational change. As the perspectives I have outlined throughout the chapter (students, teachers, soldiers, and activists) make clear, there is a wealth of creativity, talent, and intensive
desire for direction, service, belonging, and change at schools like EHS particularly among educators and the youth themselves. I would argue that reclaiming public schools as spaces of hope and possibility as opposed to spaces of enclosure for youth will require imagining ways that educational institutions can unleash and redirect this energy toward expansion of broadly shared opportunities, meaningful work, human development, and democratic life. The privatize, test, control, and punish agenda will not ultimately uplift this generation of young people. We will have to rethink our approach to public education particularly in its connection to the human and economic security of youth along with a broader focus on developing critical public values and ethical cultures beyond narrow economic or militaristic imperatives and forms of enclosure and control. Importantly, this requires more than simply rejecting the values and destructive consequences of market governance. It will require fostering cultures of investment, solidarity, and collaboration, themes to which I return in the conclusion.
Conclusion

Public Schooling for a Common Security

Speaking to the Progressive Education Association in 1932 at the height of the Great Depression, renowned sociologist and radical educator, George Counts, observed a historical moment similar to our own—a moment that he described as “full of promise, as well as menace”. In language as fresh and as relevant as anything written about education today, Counts observed that:

…there is no good education apart from some conception of the nature of the good society. Education is not some pure and mystical essence that remains unchanged from everlasting to everlasting. On the contrary, it is of the earth and must respond to every convulsion or tremor that shakes the planet. It must always be a function of time and circumstance.

Counts argued forcefully against the prevailing dogmas of his time. Rather than seeing a rational social order on a march toward infinite progress, he saw a society that was fundamentally irrational: where “mastery over the forces of nature, surpassing the wildest dreams of antiquity, is accompanied by extreme material insecurity;” and where “dire poverty walks hand in hand with the most extravagant living that the world has ever known.” Counts argued that for education to realize its promise as a truly progressive force that it must be connected to a transformative vision of society. On the one hand, this meant an educational project that directly addresses the contradictions in the economic
sphere, where, he argued “competition must be replaced by cooperation,” and “the urge for profits by careful planning.” On the other hand, it meant the cultivation of the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic capacities at the heart of any viable notion of democracy. “Life cannot be divided neatly into a number of separate compartments,” he argued, and therefore “educational theory will have to embrace the entire range of life.” This is the “great need of our age, both in the realm of education and in the sphere of public life.”

In this thesis, I have argued that the entrenched problems that confront public schools today can largely be traced to a broader systemic failure composed of multiple interwoven threads with damaging consequences to the lives and futures of young people. Foremost is an economic system that is not working for the vast majority. This has been made particularly visible by an interminable financial crisis that continues to undermine the livelihoods and dignities of millions of individuals and families while plunging societies into deeper social inequality and precariousness. As David Harvey, Robert Brenner, David McNally and others have noted, continued instabilities in global markets, sovereign debt crises and austerity measures stemming from the 2008 financial meltdown can be understood as a historical turning point organizing new limitations and possibilities for the neoliberal project. As Harvey (2010) states, “financial crises serve to rationalize the irrationalities of capitalism. They typically lead to reconfigurations, new models of development, new spheres of investment, and new forms of class power” (p.11). Furthermore, the neoliberal and neoconservative counter-revolution along with attendant innovations in media and digital communications has produced a cultural milieu where seemingly all spheres of late modern life from policy, citizenship, art, friendship, to ethical judgments are subject to the permanent tribunal of commodification.
The historian and political theorist Tony Judt (2009) has perspicaciously noted that the result is an “eviscerated society” where “the thick mesh of social interactions and public goods has been reduced to a minimum, with nothing except authority and obedience binding the citizen to the state” (p. 118). Any movement for educational and social justice will have to consider these economic and cultural dynamics and work to reimage and transform the system of values, beliefs, and practices in which they are embedded.

The dominant narrative in educational reform asserts that access to an educational marketplace and “get tough” corporate management designed to hold schools and their teachers accountable for low-test scores combined with gritty individual determination can lift people out of poverty and ensure material security and well-being. Such assertions have tended to transfer the blame for entrenched educational and social inequality from historical and structural considerations and political decisions onto the backs of public schools, teachers, and the students and communities that they serve. Rather than investing in universal public education, young people, and vibrant neighborhoods, neoliberal school reform punishes urban public schools and students for externally produced conditions such as concentrated poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, racial segregation, endemic unemployment and underemployment, and general lack of access to human resources and social services. As Jean Anyon (2005) has pointed out, urban public schools do not exist in a vacuum and are ultimately limited in what they can do. Particularly for those communities at the margins of the postindustrial economic order, schools do not provide health care or other basic social protections that ensure healthy child development, nor do they create living-wage jobs for communities and students. She states, “we have been counting on education to solve the problems of
unemployment, joblessness, and poverty for many years. But education did not cause these problems, and education cannot solve them. An economic [and political] system that chases profits and casts people aside (especially people of color) is culpable” (p. 3).

In my analysis of educational life in Ellison Square and EHS, I have argued that the current educational policy agenda is deeply misguided and is contributing to already shameful conditions of social abandonment and precariousness in urban neighborhoods and public schools. While privatization, testing, and accountability policies are intended to spark improvement and innovation they have largely failed to improve public schooling in any meaningful sense. In contrast, these policies have tended to extend and intensify the worst aspects of industrial schooling, while pioneering new mechanisms of securitization, technocratic management, and repression. I have highlighted in this thesis how the emphasis on privatization has led to the further marginalization and defunding of public schools like EHS. I have shown that amidst the drive to close public schools and replace them with privately run charter and selective contract schools, public schools like EHS have become warehouses for the most disadvantaged students (those in poverty, those with low-test scores, those for whom English is a second language, and those with learning and other disabilities). This is heightening race and class segregation in the educational system, undermining neighborhood public schools like EHS, and paving the way for further school closures and privatization. Continued austerity measures and financial disinvestments are further raising class sizes, reducing the teaching force, and destabilizing and stigmatizing public educational environments. Moreover, my analysis has pointed to how the cult of measurement, competition, and standardized high-stakes testing in the management of curriculum is eroding meaningful instruction and student
engagement, the professional discretion and autonomy of teachers, and commitments to broad emphasis on liberal arts, progressive, and critical forms of teaching and learning. Such a curriculum can hardly be seen as much more than sorting youth in public schools like EHS into the lowest employment tracks and/or pushing them out of formal schooling and the labor market altogether. As I have shown, this is exacerbated by the integration of law enforcement and punitive forms of social control which are eroding the educative and civic mission of educational environments while framing students as either potential victims or criminals as opposed to young citizens on the path to adulthood. Such policies tend to reinforce what Slavoj Zizek (2008) has delineated as objective, symbolic, and subjective forms of violence that are immanent to our economic and political systems.

Lastly, I have brought to light the lucid and often conflicted perspectives, stories, and feelings that young people and their teachers and other adult caretakers have about life in Ellison Square and EHS as an institution. For teachers, commitments to young people and the institution are constrained by multiple pressures that include frustrations over class sizes, external control over curriculum, and their marginalization in decision making. This is combined with a general sense of being overwhelmed and overextended due to lack of time and resources to address the profound social, emotional, material, and intellectual needs of their students. As Mr. Charles puts it:

*It’s unbelievable the things that teachers have to go through on a regular basis, that students have to go through. Literally you find yourself having to sift through so much more that’s not really part of the curriculum. And you could heal more*
students and create more safety and security if you are able to address some of those things in your curriculum or classroom and give time to it. But you can’t.

Despite their often insightful and passionate critiques of the systems of control, scarcity, and authority that they work within, teachers often have little choice within the institutional structure of EHS but to become active agents of neoliberal policy. This creates a conflicted reality for teachers. On the one hand, under the threat of sanction and almost constant surveillance, teachers must expend a great deal of time and energy meeting the expectations and putting into practice mandates stemming from the external control of their curriculum. Further, while teachers are denied a meaningful democratic voice in key decision making, responsibility has largely been framed in privatized terms. What this means is that teachers are no longer held accountable within a system of professional standards and social responsibility per se, but are subject to and become agents of a regime of “personal responsibility” defined narrowly by their willingness and success in implementing the narrow and reductive forms of curriculum and pedagogy that the system demands of them. On the other hand, teachers do often seek to actively perform another type of social and ethical responsibility whereby they go beyond the official curriculum in an attempt to meet the diverse needs of their students. This includes often ignoring and/or subverting the official test-based curriculum in favor of more exploratory and culturally relevant learning. It also includes other things that do not fall under the structured curriculum such as helping students cope with family problems and/or intrapersonal issues and creating alternative learning spaces in the school to address issues of immediate social and emotional import to students. This conflicted
reality for teachers is only exacerbated by further privatization and cutbacks to schools and communities symptomatic of a neoliberal age of crisis and austerity.

Students also inhabit a conflicted reality at EHS. For many students, there is a broad recognition that education can and should be a vehicle for a better life and future. They have been told from an early age that education is the only legitimate avenue for making it in the broader society. Unfortunately, many do not view EHS as a reliable or sufficient partner in making this a viable option. The impersonal and socially de-contextualized nature of much of the curriculum alongside the punitive culture of the school elicits for many a sense of disillusionment, alienation, and/or cynicism. This opens a space where interpersonal dramas, conflicts, violence, and oppositional behaviors against school authority often become more important than academic pursuits and investments. These conflicts reflect and contribute to a milieu where students are viewed and treated more as potential criminals than future citizens worthy of compassion and investment. Not only does this betray the democratic promise of public schooling, it functions to push many students out of school altogether and thus aggravates a cycle of gangs, violence, joblessness, hopelessness, and mass incarceration. As Olivia suggested, “we just aren’t given the basis to care. We’re not even given the option. Because you can be given the key to a door, it’s your choice to open it or not. But I think that we aren’t given the key at all”. This sense of abandonment reflects a more general state of precariousness that marks educational life for students. For many, dire economic conditions and lack of access to employment and social services combined with ubiquitous criminalization renders hope in a different and brighter future fleeting if not inoperable. In line with the dominant narrative and against the trope of victimization
some youth place responsibility and blame for their circumstances largely on themselves and/or on their community. As I have argued, however, neoliberal schooling more often than not serves to exacerbate rather than provide a basis for ameliorating or transforming these structures of insecurity and exclusion. Coming of age and living in a moment of austerity and social fragmentation, young people are actively being failed by the very institutions that purportedly aim to serve, guide, and protect them.

Despite these entrenched problems and myriad dysfunctions, many of the young people and teachers I spoke with maintain a love and commitment toward their school. This sense of loyalty and faith in the community provides hints toward positive institutional and social change. Again in Olivia’s words: “I feel like EHS has so much potential because there are so many kids in here who can do really amazing things but maybe they aren’t just facilitated in what it is they want to do or maybe they have bad direction”. Students are broadly not satisfied with the status quo at EHS. Some channel their desire for service and belonging into the deeply problematic form of martial discipline and future opportunity promised by military education at EHS. Others have joined organizations such as the Chicago Freedom School that seek to develop the potential of youth for activism and for pursuing transformative change in their schools and communities. Such examples point to a strong current of desire amongst students for more opportunities to develop their sense of leadership and voice in an institutional structure at EHS that too often simply ignores or subverts it. As I have argued, efforts to transform educational environments like EHS from spaces of enclosure to spaces of hope and possibility will require tapping into and providing more opportunities for students to
become involved and facilitated in decision making regarding their school and their own learning. The question remains, however: Where do we go from here?

In the years and decades that followed George Counts’ lecture to the Progressive Education Association in 1932, the U.S. entered the New Deal era which culminated in the social democratic reforms of the 1960s. This included Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society initiatives, landmark civil rights legislation, and the war on poverty. The policies and social reforms adopted during this era contributed to dramatically reducing poverty in rural and urban America; promoted employment, stable wages, rights to organize, and social benefits for many working people; and supported large scale investments in public education and social infrastructure at all levels that worked toward the amelioration of deep historical inequalities while providing a pathway to the middle class for millions of young people and their families. There is much to be learned from this social democratic tradition. While it never seriously attempted to alter the structural relations of race, class, and gender inequality at the heart of the U.S. capitalist system, it does provide a set of historical and ethical referents from which to advocate for substantive reform of public policy and strategies to greatly expand equity and opportunity in education and the broader society. With this being said, such postwar models of social democratic reform cannot be viewed as entirely adequate to the task of ensuring social justice in light of increasing technological complexity, inequality and looming environmental exhaustion accompanying the current phase of globalized capitalism and neoliberal governance.

With these concerns in mind, in recent years, scholars in the social sciences and humanities along with activists of all stripes have sought to rejuvenate a discourse of the
commons as both a critique of the neoliberal drive toward the enclosure and expropriation of public wealth and natural resources and also as a rallying cry for a different kind of politics suitable to the unique challenges of the contemporary moment. The various movements associated with Occupy Wall Street are only the latest instantiation of social movements emerging in the shadow of the 2008 financial meltdown that have flourished under a call to reclaim the commons for the collective good. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009) have offered a useful definition of the commons, or what they simply refer to as the common, that encompasses both the totality of the public goods and natural resources that we all share as well as the world of immaterial communication and cultural production—language, ideas, affects, knowledge, and social relations. Educational spheres are firmly grounded on both sides of this equation. They represent not only vital public goods beneficial to all, but are also key sites for the production of knowledge, ideas, and social relationships vital to the common good and democratic life.

The common school movement that began under Horace Mann in the late 19th century is an important referent in the history of public schooling. However, by and large educational theorists haven’t thought much about the common lately. I read present concerns over the commons and the common as providing a language and set of creative and ethical referents for not only thinking substantive educational reforms in the social democratic tradition but as a means to think creatively and critically beyond this tradition as well. Perhaps, most significantly the commons provides a frame for thinking past stale impasses dominating educational politics today. One of the consequences of the neoliberal turn in education has been to put progressive and critical educators on the defensive. Suddenly, the forces of conservative reaction have become the “progressive
innovators” by promoting “choice” and “competition” in educational spheres while framing the democratic purpose of education within the language of the market and the private concerns of business. Conversely, those traditionally critical of the status quo in public schooling have become the conservatives, left to defend a public educational system that continues to spectacularly fail the most disadvantaged young people.

Thinking public schooling as a commons is one way of avoiding this dilemma, that I refer to as the “blackmail” of neoliberalism, which paints our only options as that between a business agenda of deregulated market sovereignty and thus a global race to the bottom of wages and environmental protection, and an outmoded image of unresponsive state domination of the public and uncritical liberal accommodation to the existing economic and political order. In this sense, the common, as Hardt and Negri suggest, is a concept that slices diagonally across the private domain of the market and the public domain of the state opening a space for critical experiments in democratic reform and transformation based on the principles of participatory democracy. What this means, simply put, is an open commitment to the common control and governance of common wealth and labor for the democratic good of society and all its members.  

In what follows, I want to suggest several areas of reform conducive to reclaiming public schooling as a commons. I do not claim to be offering a prescriptive program here but merely some suggestions and possibilities that would not only provide a set of concrete ways to improve public schooling in the inner-city and beyond, but potentially open education and educational discourse toward a broader democratic vision of

22 I owe Ken Saltman (2012) for this phrasing from his The Failure of Corporate School Reform. Ken Saltman, Noah de Lissovoy, and I intend to further develop these ideas concerning the educational commons in a co-written book project that is currently under contract review with Palgrave Macmillan.
possibility in public life. Further, given the polarization and endemic corruption that mark the U.S. political system, these areas of reform may seem rather farfetched at the moment. I would only offer that historical change is often rapid and unpredictable. It is typically carried out by ordinary people, often spurred by deep frustrations and profound contradictions. I remain, therefore, guardedly optimistic.

1. Democratization of the Economic Sphere: For public schooling to serve as a force for promoting shared economic prosperity, social opportunity and equality for all young people, its reform will have to be connected to greater equity in the control and distribution of material wealth and security. Beyond the long-term social and environmental necessity of developing viable democratic alternatives to an endless growth model of capitalist political economy, one immediate reformist approach might be to revive a 2nd bill of rights similar to the one proposed by FDR in his 1944 State of the Union address. In this speech, Roosevelt stated that “we cannot be content, no matter how high the general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people—whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth—is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure.” He proceeded to outline a series of goals where “a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed.” At the core of his proposal was a series of public rights and protections including the right to dignified work and a guaranteed basic income; the right to a decent and affordable home; the right to medical and health care, the right to protection against economic dislocation, old age, and sickness; and the right to a free, equitable, and enriching public education. These rights are crucial to promoting human security and well-being. As Roosevelt put it,
“unless there is security here at home there cannot be lasting peace in the world.”

Reviving, renewing, reimagining, and agitating for such a bill of rights and protections would give progressive educators and citizens something concrete to rally around and also work as a useful intervention into transforming some of the most immediate and pressing issues facing working people and marginalized populations in the inner-city and beyond.

2. Progressive Reclamation of Public Schools: Schools are public resources and should be treated as such. Charter and contract schools and other small school experiments have generated an important discussion about the need for opening-up and modernizing public school bureaucracy and creating spaces for creativity and innovation in curriculum. In some cases, they have even provided opportunities for progressive organizations in partnership with communities to have a direct positive impact on schools including opening spaces for critical and progressive learning environments. However, the charter school movement has diverted resources away from traditional public schools while the research shows that they typically perform no better than their public school counterparts. Most significantly, the charter movement has been broadly co-opted by a neoliberal agenda invested in moving the public system toward a private corporate run system. I believe that the evidence suggests that this would only aggravate many of the problems I have outlined throughout this thesis concerning equity, the professional role of teachers, and the engagement of young people. Not to mention, it would deeply pervert the ideal of a universal and democratically operated public education system. The leading advocates for charter schools today are not progressive non-profit organizations and communities,
many of which have become utterly disillusioned with the movement, but educational corporations, Wall Street financiers, and other prominent figures from the business world many of whom know nothing about education or young people in communities like Ellison Square, and whose ultimate aim is the conversion of the public system into a cheap, union free, and for-profit system. For those who doubt this claim, one need only peruse the publications of the market reformers themselves (Brill, 2009; Chubb & Moe, 2009). Lastly, despite their claim to efficiency and innovation, neoliberal school reforms have only added to dysfunctional bureaucracy in the public system through the top-down management of decision making and curriculum while limiting the input of educators, parents, students, and communities over school organization. This is not some intrinsic characteristic of the public, but the result of over three decades of failed market governance. Demands for a moratorium on privatization should thus be combined with a path toward equity and opening-up flexibility and democracy in the public system in order to spur progressive innovation, student enrichment, and creativity.

3. Public Investment in Communities, Youth, and Schools: Transforming schools like EHS would require substantial investment. Closing such schools, firing the staff, and re-opening as a “turnaround” school or as a charter will not alter the fundamental problems. This should be viewed as an opportunity and not an insurmountable obstacle. We could create millions of stable jobs by substantially investing in public infrastructure in low-income communities. This could include early childhood education and human services for young people and families; the modernization of school buildings; the re-hiring, hiring, and investment in the retention of high quality teachers in disadvantaged schools
and communities that will lower class sizes and improve instruction; and the creation of new positions in schools for college and career coaches, counselors, nurses, and social workers that provide key “wrap-around” services for youth. How do you pay for it, one might be reasonably expected to ask? Current budget realities can in fact be brought into alignment with such a program of public and social investment. First, we need to close corporate tax loopholes; end corporate welfare, personhood, and subsidies; raise taxes on the personal income of the wealthy and lower the tax rates on small business. This would dramatically increase revenue, encourage locally owned small business, and generate economic investment and employment. Second, we could generate hundreds of billions of dollars in additional revenue by dismantling the military and prison industrial complexes; ending the war on drugs (which is a public health problem not a crime problem); raising the capital gains tax rate and implementing a financial transactions tax (FST) on Wall Street (ECP, 2012). According to the Economic Policy Institute, such an FST tax would raise tens of billions of dollars per year while tampering down on the activities that led to the last financial crisis. These measures would not only spur job creation and economic development but free-up significant revenue streams that could be used to square the long-term federal debt, shore-up social benefits like social security, and provide investment in public infrastructure, job training, rebuilding communities, and investing in public schools and the future of young people.

4. Shifting Practices and Values in Curriculum: The creation of successful urban schools will require a shift in curriculum. Too much of our educational discourse and policy is

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23 An FST tax has broad support even among hard core neoliberals like Lawrence Summers, only the most recalcitrant and regressive factions of the conservative and libertarian right oppose such a measure.
rooted in the reductive logics of economic and individual competition as opposed to social development and cooperation. This is a degraded and atomizing vision of education in a democratic society. John Dewey (1944) reminds us that “democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a form of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 87). The incessant calls to make public schools accountable to economic imperatives and the reduction of learning to test scores lies at the root of many of the problems in schools today. It mistakenly assumes that the reason why people teach and learn is only out of either economic self-interest or fear. Like other urban schools, key decisions affecting teaching and learning at EHS are made by reformers from the business world and business minded politicians who often know little if anything about education and are miles removed both physically and culturally from the “on the ground” dynamics of schools and communities. This has led to the commercial standardization of curriculum and a focus on testing that is doing little to engage youth and to prepare them adequately for the world. Here I would refer back to my conversation with Ms. Roberts at the Chicago Freedom School who eloquently spoke of making education meaningful to the cultural experiences, histories, and everyday lives of students. This is not to discourage mastery of such core skills as reading and mathematics, on the contrary, it is to suggest that these skills are best learned through broad exposure to liberal arts, progressive, and critical approaches to learning that have relevance to the lives of young people and that reflect their interests and desires. Such a shift would require the professional empowerment of those closest to youth, namely their teachers, and a commitment to engage parents and youth themselves in decision making. This would have the added benefit of developing and supporting a notion of
accountability based not on test scores, labeling, and punishments, but on professional and social norms of cooperation and reciprocity which would certainly be more humane, if not also far more efficacious and effective in promoting responsibility and trust.

5. Community Schools and Transformative School Environments: Public schools have the potential to be exciting and transformative places. Catalyst Chicago, an independent journal that reports on education in the city has suggested that public schools need to be community schools that are open well into the evening and provide learning and services for whole families. Such community schools, “must be planned and run with deep and democratic involvement by parents and others, and must be welcoming learning communities responsive to community needs and cultures”. Based upon years of extensive research they make a number of critical suggestions for improving the quality and efficacy of public schools. This includes investing in smaller class sizes and high quality teachers in order to facilitate academic excellence and the conditions for supportive relationships among faculty, students, and parents to take root and flourish; developing college and career services and counseling in order to help lower drop-out rates and enable youth to make a successful transition from high school to the next stage in their life; investing in students overall health and wellness including access to health care, counseling, and healthy food; and working to build real working forms of leadership and governance that involve and empower all members of the community. Lastly, it includes replacing harsh criminalizing discipline policies with restorative approaches that eliminate the corrosive impact of punitive forms of surveillance and policing of students at their schools and that work toward building safe and nurturing learning environments.
Such a restorative approach recognizes that student misbehavior and conflict in school is often an understandable reaction to physically, psychically, and spiritually adverse conditions. As such, it would concern itself with teaching and healing as opposed to punishment and containment in matters of school safety and discipline.

These five areas of reform are, of course, incomplete and open-ended. Ultimately, I believe that it will be up to educators, students, parents, and communities to agitate for educational and democratic change. This may take many different forms depending on the geographical, social and political context. In Chicago, there has been a groundswell of educational activism in recent years. This has included high-profile protests, hunger strikes, and occupations such as in 2010 when parents in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood took over a local public high school field house for 43 days in order to push the city to provide a working library for the school. It has also included the development of alternative community based organizations like the Chicago Freedom School, VOYCE, Teachers for Social Justice, Project NIA and many others designed to engage youth and communities and to press for change. What has united these actions and organizations is a broad dissatisfaction with the direction toward neoliberalization in education and a strong desire for public schooling to become more responsive to the complex needs of young people and communities—in short, to function as a commons. There is certainly no shortage of this sentiment in schools and neighborhoods like Ellison Square and Ellison High School where the general sense is that the status quo is intolerable. The translation of this dissatisfaction into viable social movements and alternative public models of educational policy and governance remains undecided. The philosopher
Hannah Arendt (1961) perhaps put it most eloquently by suggesting that the sphere of “education is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (pp. 174-175). This is and remains our fundamental educational challenge.


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