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## The Limits of Education Reform in New Orleans and Chicago

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The Limits of Education Reform in New Orleans and Chicago

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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## **Acknowledgments**

This project, in its entirety is dedicated to my best friend, Diamante Sanders, who left this world far too soon. Losing you has made me all the more determined to achieve all we had dreamed of together. All that I do is in your memory.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction:**

New Orleans and Chicago both seem to be key cities when it comes to the spread of charter schools throughout the country. Even though the two cities are in separate geographical locations they have both been marked by numerous problems and reforms that have contributed to the failure of the two cities' education systems. New Orleans and Chicago have gone to extreme measures in order to find a solution for a failing system. When trying to find a solution both cities looked to independent charter schools. However, for the city of New Orleans it was not until the destruction of Hurricane Katrina that New Orleans became so eager to allow independent charters to help with the rebuilding of the school system. Although both cities were on the same path they somehow ended up with different outcomes such as the amount of public and charter schools within their school district. How is that possible ? How was New Orleans allowed to surpass Chicago in the amount of charter schools when Chicago had such a radical reform that pushed for the creation of more charter schools signed into legislation prior to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans?

### *The Overview*

In this paper I plan to explore the power of a collective when trying to force change on a federal level and how they can resist change at a local level. This paper will speak towards the effects of past and present education reforms at both the federal and local level dating all the way back to the desegregation of public schools in America in the 1960s. New Orleans and Chicago prove that the dismantling of an entire system has

to come from some form of disruption. Proving that to be true will also highlight the role of unions. Unions can undermine capitalist beliefs and seek to convince people that the privatization of public schools hinders the education of underprivileged youth. In doing so, unions have the potential to shape the way in which such education reforms are carried out.

In order to examine this possibility I focus on two cities whose education system has cycled through different responses to federal and local legislation, New Orleans and Chicago. Both New Orleans and Chicago are important cities when it comes to the country's charter movement. New Orleans and Chicago have set the bar when it comes to the charter school expansion that has happened in each city and both have been historically strong bastions of the teachers' unions. Each case study will lay out the actors in each city who have featured in the shift from public education to independent charter schools. The Chicago case will focus directly on the role of the Chicago Teachers Union and what enabled the Union to fight back against Chicago's mayor and the Chicago Public School Board's reforms. I trace the major moments within the reform process and role of various actors in these moments. These developments eventually culminated in the Teachers' Union strike that took place when the various players could not come to an agreement. In the New Orleans case I will point out the role which Hurricane Katrina played when it came to the rebuilding of the public education. The New Orleans case studies will seek build on the work of other scholars who suggest that what happened in New Orleans was more than just a natural disaster. Looking once more to the role of the unions, I show that their approach in New Orleans differed in important ways from the Chicago Teachers Union, with a significantly different outcome.



In the final chapter I analyze these differences in order to offer a theory about Unions and how they are able to force change when members of the Union work as a collective with one common goal and one enemy. This chapter will examine the differences in both cities, which ultimately provides us with an analysis of what happened in each city that allowed them to have such drastic and different outcomes. However, before turning to those chapters it is useful to briefly sketch out the recent history of charter schools in the United States.

*What are charter schools?*

In a 1988 address, Mr. Shanker, president at the time of the American Federation of Teachers outlined an idea for a new kind of public school where teachers could experiment with fresh and innovative ways of reaching students.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shanker argued that charter schools could help reinvigorate the twin promises of American public education: to promote social mobility for working-class children and social cohesion among America's increasingly diverse populations.<sup>2</sup> These new kind of educational institutions called a charter schools were defined as "publicly-funded but independent, innovative schools that operate with greater flexibility and give parents whose children attend failing schools an option they do not have."<sup>3</sup> Charter schools were created to help improve our public school system as a whole. Charter schools offered parents another

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<sup>1</sup> Kahlenberg Richard, ed. "The Original Charter School Vision." The New York Times. Last modified August 30, 2014. Accessed April 21, 2016.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/opinion/sunday/albert-shanker-the-original-charter-school-visionary.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/opinion/sunday/albert-shanker-the-original-charter-school-visionary.html?_r=0).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup> Perlistein, Rick, ed. "How Chicago elites imported charters, closed neighborhood schools, and snuffed out creativity." Jacobin. Accessed April 22, 2016.  
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/chicago-public-schools-charters-closings-emanuel/>.

alternative that would meet their child's specific needs. The core of the charter school model is the belief that public schools should be held accountable for student learning. In exchange for this accountability, school leaders should be given freedom to do whatever it takes to help students achieve and should share what works with the broader public school system so that all students benefit.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, charter schools were supportive of teacher unionization. Shanker believed that unions in fact "played a critical role in democratic societies and wanted charter schools to be unionized."<sup>5</sup> However somewhere down the line that vision of what charter schools stood for became politicized, and the unions came to be opposed by and to oppose charter schools. In "The Original Charter School Vision," Richard Kahlenberg states,

Over time, charter schools morphed into a very different animal as conservatives, allied with some social-justice-minded liberals, began to promote charters as part of a more open marketplace from which families could choose schools. Others saw in charter schools the chance to empower management and circumvent teachers unions.<sup>6</sup>

Central to that vision of charter schools was the idea of education innovation. Parents did not believe that public education was improving fast enough, and it was generally accepted that although traditional districts can improve, innovation was rare.<sup>7</sup> In attempting to position charters as a solution to education problems everything is framed in terms of a "re" something: a restructure, a reform, a realignment of staff.<sup>8</sup> At the same

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<sup>4</sup> "About Charter Schools." Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/public-charter-schools/>.

<sup>5</sup> Kahlenbeg Richard, ed. "The Original Charter School Vision." The New York Times.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>7</sup> Gawronski, Jane, ed. "Successful charter schools deserve more support from districts." Last modified August 19, 2015. Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2015/aug/19/charter-schools-district-support-growth/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

time, when it comes to the creation of charter schools some charter leaders come from business backgrounds, and many of the core ideas behind the movement come from the disciplines of economics and political science.<sup>9</sup> Within this environment, the unions came to be seen as barriers to reform. Union leaders are lifelong public sector employees, and their intellectual guides are historians and leftist philosophers.<sup>10</sup> And the distrust of the unions is not without merit as there is this shared notion amongst most who make up the unions typically in education that business people do not belong in education. Perhaps it is for this reason as well as the charter movement's opposition to them, that unions have been central actors in fighting the spread of charter schools.

Alongside the concerns of the unions, other criticisms of charter schools have emerged focusing on the patterns of the management of education they produce. According to David Meens, an instructor in community studies at the University of Colorado,

What's lost in that, some say, is the historical purpose of public schools as a community endeavor that strengthens American democracy. When an elected school board no longer runs a city's schools, it eliminates that space where parents, educators, and public officials talk about what do we value for 'our' kids.<sup>11</sup>

In theory, charter schools let parents "vote with their feet," creating a market-based approach that promotes competition among public schools and pushes them to improve.<sup>12</sup>

However the creation of charter schools contributes to the elimination of public schools when public schools close due to failure and charter schools are rebuilt as their

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<sup>9</sup> Hill, Paul. "The Future of Charter Schools and Teachers Unions." Last modified October 2006. Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495839.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>11</sup> Khadaroo, Stacy, ed. "New Orleans goes all in on charter schools. Is it showing the way?" Last modified March 1, 2014. Accessed April 23, 2016. <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2014/0301/New-Orleans-goes-all-in-on-charter-schools.-Is-it-showing-the-way>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.,

replacement. Within this competition public schools are rendered vulnerable to changing definitions of what counts as a failing school as it varies with the political interests of changing administrations. While charter schools began under the Reagan administration, the role of charters in shaping the future of our national education system wasn't quite established until the Bush administration, when charters made their biggest appearance in national education policy. From school year 1999–2000 to 2012–13, the percentage of all public schools that were public charter schools increased from 1.7 to 6.2 percent, and the total number of public charter schools increased from 1,500 to 6,100.<sup>13</sup>

*What caused the rise of charter schools nationally?*

The No Child Left Behind Act that was implemented by President George Bush in 2001. By all accounts, No Child Left Behind is the most sweeping education-reform legislation since 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson passed his landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act. No Child Left Behind was designed to aid the staggering number of students lacking the proper resources to meet or compete with the national standard of education. After the implementation of No Child Left Behind, all public schools in America were given state standards that would have to be met through a series of testing throughout the school year. If and when a school did not meet these standards, they would be at risk of having their school shut down or transformed. As an increasing number of schools were unable to reach these standards, individuals along with non-profit organizations with an interest in education reform began to transform these public schools into charter schools. The No Child Left Behind Act was a major

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<sup>13</sup> Fast Facts." Accessed April 23, 2016. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=30>.

power shift between states and the federal government. Instead of states being able to handle their own educational plans, the federal government under No Child Left Behind would aim to ensure that every child in every state had access to an equal quality education. Even though No Child Left Behind had good intentions it opened up the door for education experimentation on an entire new level, which further perpetuated the failure of public schools.

The same No Child Left Behind buzzwords of school choice, competition, and accountability, were present and the new Act share a similar understanding of the driving forces of education reform. Obama's educational blueprint came to fruition with Race to the Top, a competition designed by President Obama and Arne Duncan as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.<sup>14</sup> In February 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the Stimulus Bill) into law, which designated a \$4.35 billion "executive earmark" for the Department of Education. In other words, the Department of Education received the money with no strings attached.<sup>15</sup> Under the Obama administration the expansion of charter has continued.

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<sup>14</sup> United States Department of Education. "A Blueprint for Reform." Last modified March 2010. Accessed April 22, 2016. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.,

## **Chapter Two: Chicago:**

The rise of Charter Schools has sparked controversy throughout the nation. As we continue to watch our nation struggle for a solution to the failure of public education in urban areas, states have begun to take control and shift towards charter education as an answer. In this chapter I examine one instance of this, the attempt to introduce charter schools into the Chicago public schools system also known as “Renaissance 2010.” To do so I draw on the works of Chicago politicians, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and past educators from across academic fields, who have analyzed Chicago’s charter movement. I also pay particular attention to one of the most important actors opposed to the Chicago charter movement. The Chicago Teachers Union is a labor movement that has grabbed the attention of the public in the past few years and gained the support of many, including parents from across the city. The Chicago’s Teachers Union is something that has been around for years. Yet, the Chicago’s Teachers Union resurfaced when the Union decided to fight against one of the most radical forms of change to ever hit Chicago’s Public School system, Renaissance 2010. In this chapter I show why the Chicago’s Teachers Union mattered and specifically the Union’s ability to achieve change at the local level.

### *What is Renaissance 2010?*

The education reform initiative Renaissance 2010, known as Ren’10, began under the leadership of Mayor Richard Daley in June 2004. Renaissance 2010 was a plan to dissolve some of the worst schools in Chicago and replace them with 100 new schools over the next six years, with the belief that the newer schools would provide a better

education than the one that students were receiving before. The move was prompted by the inability of Chicago's schools to meet the standards of the federal No Child Left Behind Act that required students to be able to pass standardized tests.<sup>16</sup> The development of Renaissance 2010 was informed by the following four commitments:

1. Achieve 100 new schools by the year 2010
2. Hold the new schools accountable to a 5 year plan
3. New schools' achievement was to be measured not only by standardized test scores.
4. New schools were to be allowed the option to choose their own curriculum and manage the school budget.<sup>17</sup>

According to Andrew J. McKenna, Chairman of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, an organization of Chicago's most powerful corporate, financial and political leaders, "Chicago was taking the lead nationally in remaking urban education; "No major city has launched such an ambitious public school agenda."<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with McKenna was Arne Duncan, CEO of Chicago's Public Schools, who stated at the time that one should "embrace Chicago's ambitious reform program as a vehicle to advance school reform and the small school movement, which is the push for the decrease of student population within the school while integrating greater accountability into the system."<sup>19</sup> Renaissance 2010 would hold schools directly responsible for either the success or failure of the students.

However, the support for Renaissance 2010 was countered by critics who argued

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<sup>16</sup> No Child left behind was created under the George Bush administration that required states to authorize test for grades 3-8 and once in high school

<sup>17</sup> Gewertz, Catherine. "Chicago to 'Start Over' With 100 Small Schools." - Education Week. July 14, 2004. Accessed February 10, 2016. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/07/14/42chicago.h23.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Gulson, Kalervo N., and Colin Symes. *Spatial Theories of Education: Policy and Geography Matters*. New York [u.a.]: Routledge, 2007. quoted

<sup>19</sup> "Duncan Praised as 'Bona Fide Reformer' of Chicago Education System." Last modified December 16, 2008. Accessed February 10, 2016. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2008/12/16/duncan-praised-bona-fide-reformer-chicago-education.html>.

that that majority of those supporting Ren'10 were for-profit organizations. These critics argued that the organizations' interests did not align with the goals of America's educational system and did not seem to reflect the interests of those who were affected by the changes, which in this case were primarily poor African Americans.<sup>20</sup> If one digs deeper into the goals and execution of Ren'10 these concerns are not without some merit. Since Ren'10 has been put into place, it seems that Ren'10 and former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, reneged on its original promises.

Initially Renaissance 2010 gained support as a mechanism for improving public education, but this enthusiasm overlooked the potential weaknesses of Ren'10. Key among these was the failure to address systemic issues of race within the administration of the public schools. Chicago's public schools serviced a student body that was majority-minority. As the schools started to become segregated once again due to the rise of Charter schools, building upon the existing absence of white students in Chicago Public schools, it allowed further failure within the communities that were mainly filled with African Americans. According to Catalyst Chicago, an independent body reporting on urban schools, "11 of 25 neighborhoods most in need of better schools have yet to get them under Renaissance 2010 and top officials acknowledge that politics plays a role in where schools end up."<sup>21</sup> While there is no way to prove this is true, the assumptions play into historical patterns of discrimination. Moreover, the Chicago Public School Board

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<sup>20</sup> "African Americans: From Segregation to Modern Institutional Discrimination and Modern Racism." [http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/54133\\_Chapter\\_5.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/54133_Chapter_5.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Forte, Lorriane. "Shifting Course on Renaissance." *Catalyst Chicago*. Last modified August 12, 2010. Accessed December 7, 2014. <http://catalyst-chicago.org/2010/08/shift-course-renaissance/>.



system's response to such accusations failed to overtly acknowledge the racially problematic consequences of its actions:

Closing and reopening schools is both educationally sound and morally warranted. We are hired to fight for kids not for bureaucrats, reform groups, teachers, principals, or local schools councils. We close schools when kids are getting hurt. Under Renaissance 2010, the adults involved are held accountable because the school ceases to exist.<sup>22</sup>

There was still no direct explanation to why certain neighborhoods do not receive better schools; The Chicago School Board offers reasons for the lack of schools in particular neighborhoods in a frame of holding teachers responsible for the failure of neighborhood schools but does not explain the choices regarding where new charter schools are opened.

A second, and linked, issue with the Ren'10 project was its failure to deliver the promised 100 new schools. Although Chicago now has 131 charter schools,<sup>23</sup> Ren'10 did not complete its goal to have 100 new schools by the year 2010. This had consequences for the allied aims of the small school movement. While schools were closed down for failing, the rate of closure was not matched by the creation of new schools. The result was an increase in the overpopulated schools that Arne Duncan had aimed to end. In response to this Ren'10 failure the policy was modified. In 2006, CPS altered its school closing policy to focus on "turning around" academically weak schools instead of closing them. In a turnaround school, students are allowed to remain in the same building while all or most of the staff are replaced. Although this mitigated some effects of the Ren'10 policies, the aim of 100 schools remained uncompleted on 2010. As of 2009, there were

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<sup>22</sup> Carr, Paul, and Brad Profolio, eds. *The Phenomenon of Obama and the Agenda for Education: Can Hope Audaciously ...* Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> "Get the Facts about Charter Schools in Illinois." Accessed January 8, 2016. <https://www.incschools.org/about-charters/get-the-facts/>.

12 turnaround schools in Chicago.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the continuation of the policy of firing teaching staff in failing schools meant that there were still fewer teachers than needed. As such the project missed its goals in 2010, but was nevertheless expanded beyond that year. The support of Ren'10 continued passed its expiration date due to continued support for the policies despite the switch in Presidential administration from George Bush to Barack Obama. President Obama's support for Ren'10 gave it a second chance to make up for its past mistakes. By adding on to the already No Child Left Behind act and appointing Arne Duncan as secretary of Education, Obama's new Race To the Top only modified No Child Left Behind and that modification allowed Chicago to continue in its charter expansion.

*Who are the actors involved in the Chicago's charter movement?*

After Renaissance 2010 went into effect in Chicago, there were several key players in the modification of the original Renaissance 2010 initiative. Stated briefly, these were: the Chicago Teachers Union, Chicago's mayor, Chicago's Public School Board, the Stand for Children organization, and the parents of the Chicago students (the latter discussed in a later section). While publically all were fighting for what they believed to be in the best interest of the children's education, further examination of the intentions of those who are in favor for reform and those who oppose it is warranted. Between these different groups a central debate is the role of environment in determining educational outcomes. Policy makers are increasingly turning away from policies that blame educators for problems largely caused by the impoverished settings in which their

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<sup>24</sup> Gwynne, J. (2009, October). ERIC - When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools, Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2009-Oct. Retrieved January 25, 2016, from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED506954>

students live and cities' own misguided policies,<sup>25</sup> but this remained a crucial divide in Chicago.

Another crucial divide is highlighted in *Strike In America*. Uetricht illustrates this divide with reference to the teachers' unions. We are introduced to two actors who are inevitably at odds. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers intends to dismantle public education in order to privatize it. On the other hand, there are the teachers who are voting for a strike during contract negotiations. This division plays out against the backdrop of Chicago, distinguished by Uetricht as a central neoliberal experiment in education but also as the birthplace of American teachers' unions. Chicago, leading up to the strike there is the feud between reformist educationalists and the Chicago Teachers union. As Magliaro has put it, the "agenda to privatize public education and turn it into a market good requires an attack on teachers and their unions because no other body is capable of amassing the resources necessary to fight such an agenda."<sup>26</sup> As the Chicago strike continued on for days those who thought the Chicago Teachers Union was only fighting for better pay were not seeing this much broader clash.

### *The Chicago Teachers Union*

The Chicago Teacher Union strike marked the re-emergence of the Chicago Teacher Union. The Chicago Teachers Union has a storied history, dating all the way back to 1897.<sup>27</sup> The Chicago Teachers Union has fought for the rights of the workers

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<sup>25</sup> Uetricht, M. (2014). *Strike for America: Chicago teachers against austerity*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books.

<sup>26</sup> Magliaro, E. (2013). A Look at Some of the Driving Forces behind the School Reform Movement and the Effort to Privatize Public Education. Retrieved January 20, 2016, from <https://jonathanturley.org/2013/03/03/a-look-at-some-of-the-driving-forces-behind-the-school-reform-movement-and-the-effort-to-privatize-public-education/>

<sup>27</sup> "1983, 1984, 1987 In teachers' strikes, Chicago students suffer." Last modified

within the teaching profession. However, the Union's response to Ren'10 highlighted a significant shift in its understanding of its interest. Whereas, historically the Union has been concerned with pay and conditions at the level of the individual teacher, today the focus of the Teachers Union has shifted to a collective level. As framed by the current President of the Chicago Teachers Union Karen Lewis, Corporate America sees K-12 public education as a 380 billion dollar trust that up until the last ten or fifteen years, they haven't had a sizable piece of. Lewis goes on to say, "Our union didn't point out this simple reality: What drives school reform is a singular focus on profit. The drive for profit was what the union would directly confront."<sup>28</sup> The teachers' Union is now committed to the goal of resisting corporate influence in education, which they claim is in the best interest of both the union and students.

The strike that took place in September of 2012 (discussed below) was led by the Chicago's Teachers Union when an agreement could not be made between the Union and Chicago Public School Board. The Teachers' Union had a list demands that they wanted from before the strike had taken place. The Union was bluntly assigning blame for the destruction of public schools on businesses that were trying to invest in schools and the Union wanted them out by any means necessary. Before the Chicago's Teachers Union went into negotiations they issued a list of demands:

1. The Board to stop the closing of public schools and laying off teachers
2. Fair evaluation procedure
3. Protection of benefits
4. Teacher training
5. Salary increase

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June 20, 2012. Accessed March 20, 2016. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-07-20/opinion/ct-edit-strike-20120720\\_1\\_teachers-strike-chicago-teachers-union-salary-dispute](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-07-20/opinion/ct-edit-strike-20120720_1_teachers-strike-chicago-teachers-union-salary-dispute).

<sup>28</sup> Uetricht, "Strike For America,"37.

The Chicago Teachers Union had to prove to the parents that the individuals who made up the teachers union all had one goal in common which was to make public education better for both teachers and students. The union knew that they were up against a huge actor, the city had many big organizations to back the mayor's decision for more charter schools. In *Strike for America* Micah Uetricht states “ The only way teachers unions can survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to adopt the kinds of broad social justice concerns alongside parents, communities and others that the Chicago Teachers Union had come to stand and fight for.”<sup>29</sup> Instead of the union directly focusing on what the Chicago Public School Board was doing they decided to focus on them and win over the people they needed most in order to stop both the mayor and big businesses from investing in public education. As the teachers union became strong with the backing of parents and others from the community it only made those who opposed their actions fight back harder - one group in particular being the Stand For Children organization.

### *Stand for Children*

Stand For Children is an organization that is strongly supportive of education reform and the charter movement in Chicago. Stand for Children focuses mainly on the closing of the achievement gap which measures the educational disparity between groups defined by race and socioeconomic status.<sup>30</sup> For 20 years, Stand for Children has advocated for better and equal education standards for all children by utilizing a strong three-pillared approach: Parents, Politics, and Policy.<sup>31</sup> The organization claims to have

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,50

<sup>30</sup> What We Stand For. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2016, from <http://stand.org/national/about/what-we-stand>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,

achieved over 209 state and local victories and leveraged over \$6.7 billion in education investments. According to the Stand For Children website, the policies and investments they have secured are improving the lives of more than 5.6 million children.<sup>32</sup>

The Chicago Teachers Union and Stand for children are at odds even though both groups share the similar aim of making great public schools. Stand for Children wants to strip the Chicago Teachers Union of its' power. In 2011, while the Union was at the negotiating table in Springfield, a bill designed to remove much of the Chicago Teachers Union's power was being pushed in the state legislature by Stand for Children.<sup>33</sup> By examining the Board members for Stand for Children, it can be seen that they all have degrees in either business or finance. The board members do not have any background in education besides the advocating for education reform and their investments in charter schools. While the Chicago Teachers Union had to fight against the Chicago Public School Board they gained another enemy along the way. Not only was Stand for Children trying to put a stop to the Chicago Teachers Union but they were also trying to put an end to strikes period. The bill supported by Stand For Children took the viewing of strikes in America to an entire new level; "by setting the bar for a strike approval far above a simple majority, the bills sponsors aimed to make a teachers' strike impossible."<sup>34</sup> According to an article published by *Seattle Education* entitled "Stand For Children, Chicago Public Schools and the teachers union," Stand for Children co-founder Jonah Edelman famously bragged at a conference that they used access to important and influential political figures like Rahm Emanuel and Michael Madigan, and insiders like

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<sup>32</sup> What We Stand For. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2016, from <http://stand.org/national/about/what-we-stand>

<sup>33</sup> Uetrict, "Strike For America,"43.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.,46

Jo Anderson to tighten restrictions on the Chicago Teachers Union.<sup>35</sup> To make a strike virtually impossible Stand for Children and its allies proposed a requirement that 75 percent of union members participate in any strike vote. Based upon previous experience no union has ever secured more than 50 percent of votes from its members to authorize a strike.<sup>36</sup> The Chicago Teachers Union unaware of this knowledge agreed to the deal that Stand for Children had proposed to secure 75 percent of member votes in order to strike. However Stand for Children's plan backfired when the Union took a vote to strike and more than 90 percent of votes worked in the Teachers Union favor. Although they failed to stop the authorization of the strike, Stand for Children had made their point. By coming close to such overwhelming change, they had the unions coming to the table looking to find a middle ground.<sup>37</sup>

### *The Chicago School Board*

In the midst of both groups stands the Chicago School Board. This board is in charge of the public school education system of Chicago, and, along with Mayor Rahm Emanuel have ultimate authority over education policy. The election of the current President of the Teacher's Union Karen Lewis prompted an increase in tensions between the Board and the Union. Shortly after Lewis's election she challenged the continuation of Renaissance 2010 as well as Arne Duncan who was responsible for the increase of charter schools and the firing of many of Chicago teachers. Following Mayor Emanuel's

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<sup>35</sup> Stand for Children, Chicago Public Schools and the teachers union. (2012). Retrieved March 12, 2016, from <https://seattleducation2010.wordpress.com/2012/06/09/stand-for-children-chicago-public-schools-and-the-teachers-union/>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>37</sup> Perez, J. (December 14). CTU: Chicago teachers authorize a strike if contract talks break down. Retrieved January 30, 2016, from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-chicago-teachers-union-strike-vote-results-met-20151214-story.html>

election he appointed Jean-Claude Brizard as Chicago Public Schools new chief executive officer. Like Stand for Children, the Chicago School Board pushed for the privatization of schools by implementing policies that would destroy public schools and transform them into charter schools.

The School board wanted longer school days. Emanuel and the Chicago Public School (CPS) CEO Jean-Claude Brizard touted their push for a district-wide longer school day, one of the loftiest proposals the mayor campaigned on during the mayoral race.<sup>38</sup> Since the extended school day was not at the root of the problem between the Board and the Union they both quickly reached an agreement on a 90-minute extension of the day. However the school board refused a pay raise for the increase in hours and that allowed for the continuation of concern that the Union had about the Board. Due to the standards of Ren'10 and the requirement to hold teachers accountable for student failure, the Board closed hundreds of schools across the Chicago area. The Emanuel-appointed School Board, blaming the district's massive budget deficit, voted unanimously to rescind the 4 percent annual pay raise that teachers were anticipating as part of their contract.<sup>39</sup> With rumors of a strike on its way the Board threaten teachers with layoffs if they did not to go to work. The City could not afford for teachers to have a strike - CPS said, in response, that the city's students "can't afford to be removed from their classroom at a time when they're starting to make progress with the Full School Day." After days of negotiations the two could not reach a deal causing the Chicago Teachers Union to strike.

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<sup>38</sup> Erbentraut, J. (2011, October 03). Rahm Emanuel, Jean-Claude Brizard Go Door To Door To Promote First Day Of School (VIDEO). Retrieved March 15, 2016, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/03/rahm-emanuel-jean-claude-\\_n\\_917578.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/03/rahm-emanuel-jean-claude-_n_917578.html)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.,



*The Strike and negotiations*

While the firing of teachers and closing of schools were happening throughout Chicago, teachers were joining together to fight against the closing of schools and the privatization of public education. Teachers, principals and other staff members decided to go on a strike against the Chicago School Board. Teachers felt as if they were not getting paid sufficiently for the extra work, feared the effects of policy reforms, and were unsatisfied with the terms the mayor and the Chicago School Board offered. Chicago Public Schools proposed a five-year deal that guarantees teachers a 2 percent pay rise in the first year and lengthens the school day by 10 percent.<sup>40</sup> However the Union wanted a two-year deal that reduces class size and calls for teachers to receive a 24 percent pay raise in the first year and a 5 percent pay raise in the second year, so they declined the deal they were offered.<sup>41</sup> The Chicago School Board assumed that this would eventually go away, although teacher strikes have happened, they've become rare in the United States with the last one in Chicago taking place in 1987.<sup>42</sup> Unable to reach an agreement, the municipality perhaps underestimated the strength of the Teachers Union. On September 10, 2012 Chicago Teachers Union went on their first strike in 25 years.<sup>43</sup> Mayor Emanuel furiously denounced the strike saying "This is totally unnecessary, this is avoidable, and our kids do not deserve this."<sup>44</sup> Unwilling to compromise in the face of this industrial action, the Mayor dug in and stuck fast to the City's position in

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>42</sup> Chicago Teachers Reach Accord in 4-Week Strike. (1987). Retrieved February 15, 2016, from <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/04/us/chicago-teachers-reach-accord-in-4-week-strike.html>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>44</sup> Davey, Monica, ed. "With No Contract Deal by Deadline in Chicago, Teachers Will Strike." The New York Times. Last modified September 9, 2012. Accessed April 2, 2016. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/10/education/with-no-contract-deal-by-deadline-in-chicago-teachers-will-strike.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/10/education/with-no-contract-deal-by-deadline-in-chicago-teachers-will-strike.html?_r=0).

negotiations. For example an important concern for the Union was class size, but Mayor Emanuel decided that classroom size was not up for negotiation and was not a main issue.<sup>45</sup>

The response to the strike was mixed. As the days went by and hundreds of students were still out of school, the nation as a whole started to pay attention to what was happening in Chicago. While some picked up signs and joined teachers across the city others decided to take their opinion to social media causing a national debate throughout the country. Some even expressed their concerns on social media, commenting on Twitter whether they were for or against the Teachers Union strike. According to “What’s wrong with CPS’s Renaissance 2010?” an article written in *Pure Perspectives*, Sen. Bennet argued that it was time Chicago Public Schools stopped basing educational decisions on “common sense,” “gut feelings” and other political sound bites.<sup>46</sup> He argued that Chicago politicians should let educators do their jobs. As we look back in to the original negotiations surrounding the strike the board of education demanded that the union either give up a contractually negotiated pay raise or face layoffs, while, around the same time it was demanding a longer school day, meaning that the board wanted more work for less pay.<sup>47</sup> Again this was something the Chicago Teachers Union would not agree to and as a result 1,500 teachers were laid off. The Chicago School Board thought this consequence would put a stop the Chicago Teachers Union, but as a result they created a stronger union. The layoffs contributed to mobilizing

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>46</sup> “What’s wrong with CPS’s Renaissance 2010?” *Pure Perspectives*. Accessed April 1, 2016. <http://www.pureparents.org/data/files/WhatsWrong2008.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Uetricht, “Strike For America, 40

members internally.<sup>48</sup> The plan of the Board only created a stronger union than before. The Union members were not willing to gamble with their careers and the education of the kids in order to reach a better deal. Never mind that while these negotiations were being undertaken that Chicago Public School Board was closing schools and accepting proposals for new charter schools. As the strike and negotiations continued both sides finally came to a compromise. As one of demands of the Chicago Teachers Union they received a commitment that teacher evaluations will now count as 30 percent instead of 45 percent, and the Union was able to secure benefits like health insurance. Although they did not walk away emptied handed they did not receive everything they were hoping for. The Union had to compromise on the increase in teachers' salary, and not only was the school day extended so was the year. After 8 long days of striking the Union finally made the decision to end the strike and return to the classroom.

*Where did Parents stand and why did their support matter?*

Identifying the attitudes and interests of as diverse a group as the parents of school children can be difficult. The Chicago School Board along with the Mayor had the support of the parents and the state, which is something they needed in order to invest money into new schools. Moreover, most parents do not have a full understanding of Charter schools. Parents can be caught up in the ideal offered by the charter schools but they do not fully understand how charter organizations work. Parents are frustrated with the poor education their children are receiving and the lack of resources but they cannot understand how kids being out of school helps. They also tend to comprehend the claims of each side at the micro-level of the direct consequences for their children. This became

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<sup>48</sup> Uetrict, "Strike For America, 41

an important point during the Teachers' Union's strike. Nonetheless at the outset of Ren'10, parents were generally in favor of the policy because the Ren'10 schools included the involvement of parents.

The general attitudes of parents over the course of this period began as sympathetic to the Charter school movement even if it increasingly moved towards support of the Union. When looking into public education in Chicago the past decade suggests that much blame has been placed upon both the teachers and the principals by parents when students fail to reach the goals of standardized test.<sup>49</sup> The failing of children is what has been driving the wedge between most educators and parents, leaving parents suspicious. When children are at risk of failing everyone thinks they see a solution that most teachers have failed to recognize. Micah Uetricht states, that the long history of such attitudes has given the neoliberal reformers an opening for attack.<sup>50</sup> Uetricht claims that this blame game has paved the way for those who believe in for-profit education to step up to the plate and offer a fix to education system. Most for-profit organizations have money; whenever money is involved there is this implied notion that money fixes everything, because more money leads to more resources. In terms of numbers, in 2013 Chicago Public schools got private funding of \$482 million and in 2014 that number increased to \$570.5 million. Yet, "studies of charter schools show that students at all levels do not outperform traditional public school students."<sup>51</sup> Most people assume because there is more money then that will give most schools the resources that

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<sup>49</sup> Ravitch, Diane, ed. "American Schools in Crisis." Last modified September 2011. Accessed March 25, 2016. <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2011/08/16/in-the-magazine/trends-and-opinions/american-schools-crisis.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Uetricht, "Strike For America,50,

<sup>51</sup> "CHARTER SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT: HYPE VS. EVIDENCE." [http://www.educationjustice.org/newsletters/nlej\\_iss21\\_art5\\_detail\\_CharterSchoolAchievement.htm](http://www.educationjustice.org/newsletters/nlej_iss21_art5_detail_CharterSchoolAchievement.htm).

they do not have, but there is no evidence of positive or negative effects on children's educational performances. The neoliberal educationalists dogma suggests that once schools have resources then it will lead to both the success of the students and the school. These assumptions alone became the foundation that may have created rocky building blocks for charter schools.

The most important factor leading up to the Chicago's Teacher Unions strike is the election of the current President of the Teacher's Union Karen Lewis. Shortly after Lewis election she challenged the continuation of Renaissance 2010, and Arne Duncan who was responsible for the increase of charter schools and the firing of many of Chicago teachers. Following the election of Karen Lewis was the election of Mayor Rahm Emanuel who appointed Jean-Claude Brizard as CPS' new chief executive officer. Brizard's. In 2011 the Chicago board decided to not go through with the 4 percent pay raise that was promised in teachers contract instead the Board offered teachers a 2 percent raise if they were to accept a 90 minute extension of the school day. The Teachers Union and the Chicago School Board went into negotiations. In April of 2011 the two could not come to a new deal and both sides rejected each other's offer. Immediately following 75 percent of the Chicago Teachers Union voted to strike. The strike took place on September of 2012. After 8 days of striking and parents were becoming concerned for their kids missing school, the Chicago School Board and The Chicago Teachers Union came to a compromise and they agreed to end the strike.

*However due to the actions of previous unions in Chicago history has shown that not everyone who was apart of the Chicago's Teachers Union has the same goal in common. "Too many teachers unions have pursued agendas of self interest for decades, focusing solely on bread butter issues even at times of great upheaval among communities outside of schools."<sup>52</sup> But perhaps this self interest can be justified. In order*

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<sup>52</sup> Uetrict, "Strike For America.,50

*for the Neoliberals to create a private sector, there has to be an attack on the unions, which fight for pay benefits and on-the-job protections. Here, we see the cyclical back and forth of the teachers union that has gone on for decades. It can be argued that the self-interest issues are unavoidable because they directly affect the teachers both inside and outside the classroom: expanded class sizes, longer hours, and reduced/ no planning periods. All of which affects the performance of the teacher, hence affecting the students' achievements. If teachers do not fight for bread and butter they will be left underpaid, overworked and without anytime to prepare their students*

However this support did not remain as the strike and its aftermath played out. Many parents of the students kept at home by the strike initially could not see how it was beneficial for their kids, causing them to question the motivations behind Teachers Union strike. However parents' perspectives changed when negotiations rolled around again and Mayor Rahm continued to push for the extension of the school day. Parents started to become skeptical of Mayor Rahm's new plan considering the fact that he used the elimination of standardize test as a platform to get elected. As new charter schools started to form and more schools began to shut down, this concern continued to grow amongst parents. According to an article, "This Is Why Chicago Teachers Are Fed Up With The Mayor" published by *Think Progress*, the change in support from black voters may have been tied to the closure of schools in predominantly black neighborhoods, a practice that many education equity advocates called racist and classist, as well as a lack of response to violent crime,<sup>53</sup> Stephanie Banchemo staff reporter of the *Chicago Tribune* states that, "dispersing hundreds of teenagers to crosstown, violence has invaded the hallways and spilled across campus. Student morale has plummeted. And racial tensions -- already simmering under the surface have bubbled over."<sup>54</sup> Parents started to get a glimpse of

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<sup>53</sup> Quinlann, Casey, ed. "This Is Why Chicago Teachers Are Fed Up With The Mayor."  
[http://thinkprogress.org/education/2015/12/17/3732963/  
 chicago-teachers-strike-impending/.](http://thinkprogress.org/education/2015/12/17/3732963/chicago-teachers-strike-impending/)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.,

both sides and saw how the building of new charter schools had a huge effect on their kids by making them travel to new schools after the closure of their previous school, the continuation of standardized test, and the push for a longer school day. Parents started to fear that people like business owners and politicians who knew nothing about education should not in fact be making decisions about their kid's education and that maybe they misjudged the role which the Teacher Union plays when it comes to improving Chicago's education system.

The Union capitalized upon this shift by portraying itself as a representative of the parents and children in these debates:

When the CUT presented itself publicly as an organization actively and uncompromisingly opposed to such reforms in an explicit way that had not been done by previous leadership and made the case for why they hurt students, Chicago Public School parents began to back down.<sup>55</sup> In the public battle over who actually represented the interests of poor and working-class school children, the Union ultimately won out over the education reformers.<sup>56</sup> The Chicago Teachers Union proved to parents that corporations do not represent the people and corporate executives use their positions to overtly enrich themselves while exploiting the poor. In an election to strike for those in favor of striking prior to the Chicago Teachers Union strike shows the 30,000 educators standing strong to put business in its place: out of our schools.<sup>57</sup> Still, President of The Chicago's Teachers Union Karen Lewis conceded that trust remains "a big issue" between school bureaucrats and teachers,

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<sup>55</sup> Uetrict, "Strike For America.,49

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>57</sup> Brecher, Jeremy. *Strike!* Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014.

and said she hoped the mayor a man she had previously classified as a bully carries out this contract in “good faith.”<sup>58</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Despite the Chicago School Board making strides toward the privatization of education by looking to charter school as a solution to the failure of their education system they still have a long way to go. The Chicago School Board failure to acknowledge the demands of the Chicago Teachers Union is what caused the Union to fight back against the local government. The Chicago Teachers Union positioned themselves in a way that would guarantee them to come out on top against the Chicago School Board. By arguing that they were representing not just individual teachers but the community as a whole, and so gaining the trust of parents and many others, the Chicago Teachers Union was able to show that they stood together and represented the community as well as themselves. Although the Union was not able to get everything they demanded they were able to win over the public and force the Chicago School Board to comprise and modify the plans they had planned for the rise of charter schools and what that meant for the teachers who taught in failing public schools.

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<sup>58</sup> Lutz, BJ, ed. "Chicago's Teacher Strike Ends; Classes Resume Wednesday." Last modified September 18, 2012. Accessed March 23, 2016.  
<http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-teachers-union-delegates-strike-vote-169651286.html>.



### Chapter Three: New Orleans:

As New Orleans celebrated the 10 year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on August 29<sup>th</sup> 2015, much had changed in the City. Not only have the lives of its population been drastically altered due to the effects of nature, but Katrina had also upturned the infrastructure of service provision in the city. In the chaos after Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana opted to completely overhaul the city's failing public schools by putting them on the open market. Before the storm, the majority of schools in the city were public. However post-Katrina only four remained public under the control of Orleans Parish School Board with the majority now charter, which prompts questions as to how this huge transition occurred. Why was this huge transition carried out in such a short amount of time? Why then and why charter?

In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein argues that catastrophes often lead to disaster capitalism. As defined by Naomi Klein, disaster capitalism is taking advantage of a major disaster to adopt liberal economic policies that the population would be less likely to accept under normal circumstances.<sup>59</sup> Klein's argument is suggestive in the case of New Orleans school reform; one can see similar patterns in the rebuilding of New Orleans, and more specifically the transition in the New Orleans public schools system immediately after the storm. At a superficial level, the argument claims that after Katrina wiped away everything away, an opportunity for privatization was presented, but there seems to be more to the story. Importantly those directly affected by this change suggest that the influence of race in the public school system is an important consideration when the majority of teachers and students being affected by the switch in the education system

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<sup>59</sup> Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007.

are African Americans. By using authors like Klein this chapter will investigate the question, how was the New Orleans public school system affected by Katrina?

This chapter will introduce the primary actors who contributed to the systematic changes of the New Orleans Public School System prior to and post Hurricane Katrina. The Orleans Parish School Board, which was the first school board to be created for the Orleans Parish, and the Recovery School District. Both districts were created as an attempt to ensure success amongst public schools in New Orleans. However there is the United Teachers Union of New Orleans who were supportive of the Orleans Parish School Board until Hurricane Katrina hit and the Orleans Parish School Board had to pass their rights over to the Recovery School District. Although all of those actors were important, it was the creation of independent charter schools throughout the city while the victims of Hurricane Katrina were still displaced that formed a vital component for such a huge transition to happen so fast.

### *Leading up to Hurricane Katrina*

Since the mid-1960s, the New Orleans education system has captured the nation's attention. At that time, it became a focal point with regard to the integration of schools and specifically the role of Ruby Bridges in the reformation of the city's education system. Ruby Bridges was a young African-American girl who attended William Franz Elementary School and became the first African American child to attend a formerly all-white public school in New Orleans. Integration was not welcomed by many in the South, mostly by parents who opposed such reforms and who boycotted integration by removing their children from the schools. As more schools throughout the city started to integrate,

racial dynamics continued to rapidly shift in schools such as these. New Orleans implemented integration plans, but as schools moved towards integration the city experienced the phenomenon that has come to be known as white flight. The demographics of New Orleans continued to shift and struggle as a consequence of racial migration.<sup>60</sup> When the civil rights movement integrated public elementary and secondary schools, the flight of the white middle class to the suburbs accelerated both residential and educational segregation and set in motion the social forces that contributed to the city's population loss after 1960.<sup>61</sup> White flight had a major effect on the New Orleans public school system, causing many of schools to become segregated once again and can also be looked to as one of the factors of a failing education system. White flight caused white student enrollment to drop precipitously, while black enrollment stayed generally constant. By 1981, black students made up 84 percent of the public school population, which was also disproportionately poor.<sup>62</sup> In addition to academic struggles, as the years went by the public schools began to face financial issues.

### *The Orleans Parish School Board*

In the early 2000s the Orleans Parish School Board was faced with accusations of both fraud and corruption including stealing money and taking bribes, and faced significant financial challenges.<sup>63</sup> As the Board sought tried to get back on track after

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<sup>60</sup> Fussell, Elizabeth. "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans." *Journal of American History*, 94 Dec. 2007:, 846–55

<sup>61</sup> Fussell, Elizabeth. "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans." *Journal of American History*, 94 Dec. 2007:, 846–55

<sup>62</sup> Perry, Andre. "Reviewing Key Reforms After Hurricane Katrina." Last modified August 2010. Accessed April 4, 2016. [http://cis.uchicago.edu/oldsite/outreach/summerinstitute/2013/documents/sti2013\\_perry\\_thetransformationofneworleanspubliceducation.pdf](http://cis.uchicago.edu/oldsite/outreach/summerinstitute/2013/documents/sti2013_perry_thetransformationofneworleanspubliceducation.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Hill, Paul, and Jane Hannaway. "The Future of Public Education in New Orleans."

many financial losses, the Orleans Parish School Board determined that they could not fix the financial problems on their own and so decided to seek help. In late May of 2005, the Orleans Parish School Board hired the “financial turnaround” firm of Alvarez & Marsh (A&M) to take control of hiring, firing and contracting in the central office.<sup>64</sup> A&M would report directly to the state superintendent and have the authority to appoint the district’s top financial officers.<sup>65</sup> A&M would provide monthly updates on the Board’s financial situation. When A&M prepared its monthly report in July, it suggested that it could not do much to solve the Board’s financial crisis. The Orleans Parish School Board had dug itself into a deep hole putting them in a deficit that was estimated to about 20 to 30 million dollars. Former Superintendent Anthony Amato announced that the system faces a multimillion-dollar deficit, partly the result of theft and corruption.<sup>66</sup> A&M came to the conclusion that The Orleans Parish School Board would run out of money by September. Following the revelation that millions of dollars were missing, the Board, school teachers and administrators were put under investigation by the FBI. More than a dozen people had already plead guilty, or agreed to do so, on charges of fraud and bribery in various schemes that bled millions from the city's school system, considered one of the country's worst school systems.<sup>67</sup> The wrongdoing eroded public trust in the school system. As a result of the corruption and due mostly to financial and academic problems, the Orleans Parish School Board had come close to triggering a state takeover in the

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Last modified January 2006. Accessed April 7, 2016. <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/900913-The-Future-of-Public-Education-in-New-Orleans.PDF>.

<sup>64</sup> Newmark, Kathryn, and Verinique De Ruyg. "Hope after Katrina." Education Next. Last modified 2006. Accessed April 7, 2016. <http://educationnext.org/hope-after-katrina/>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>66</sup> Kovacich, Gerald L. *Fighting Fraud: How to Establish and Manage an Anti-fraud Program*. Amsterdam: Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Kovacich, Gerald L. *Fighting Fraud*. 139

years before Hurricane Katrina hit.

### *The Recovery School District*

In response to New Orleans being one of the worst public systems in the country, Louisiana passed legislation in 2003 granting the Louisiana Recovery School District the legal right to take over chronically low-performing schools. The creation of the Recovery School District was directly aimed at New Orleans and became the vehicle for the radical change in the city's public education system.<sup>68</sup> The Recovery School District's main goal was to take low performing schools and transform them into effective schools. According to the state a failing school was defined as school that has performing score of 60% and had to be deemed academically unacceptable for four consecutive years. Once a school had failed it would be overseen by the Recovery School District. Prior to Hurricane Katrina there were a total 124 schools operating in New Orleans. Of these schools, 117 were controlled by the Orleans Parish School Board, 5 were taken over by the Recovery School District and 2 by Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.<sup>69</sup>

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast leaving the city New Orleans completely devastated, displacing thousands of the city's residents. The city was a complete disaster, leaving many of its citizens wondering if and when they would return home. The flooding of the entire city wiped out its infrastructure and left it what

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<sup>65</sup> Vaughan, Debra, and Laura Mogg. "Transforming Public Education in New Orleans:." Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.coweninstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/History-of-the-RSD-Report-2011.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Sullivan, Elizabeth, and Damielka Morgan. "Pushed Out Harsh Discipline in Louisiana Schools Denies the Right to Education." Last modified 2010. Accessed April 9, 2016. <https://www.nesri.org/sites/default/files/>

people referred to as a “blank slate.” The aftermath of the hurricane created an opportunity for the city to completely start from scratch. As New Orleans began to rebuild its city one piece at a time they were faced with issues, one of which was school placement for the returning citizens. Katrina washed away almost everything from the city and the school system by far was Katrina’s biggest victim having a major effect on parents, students, teachers, and educators throughout the city. As a result of Hurricane Katrina 110 out of New Orleans’s 124 public schools were completely destroyed.<sup>70</sup> The state feared that too many of the New Orleans residents would return at once and there would not be enough schools to educate them.

In response to this and the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, Kathleen Blanco called a special legislative session. This was the occasion for passing Act 35, which changed the definition of a “failing” school from a performance score of 60 (on a scale of 200) to 87.4, just below the state average. This allowed the state-run Recovery School District to assume control of 107 of 124 public schools in Orleans Parish, enabling charter expansion on a scale never before attempted in Louisiana or elsewhere. More than half of New Orleans physical infrastructure was damaged beyond repair, and its tax base was displaced.<sup>71</sup> Between September and October of 2005, the Recovery School District, who was in charge of city schools, fired more than 7,000 unionized school employees, including the entire teaching force.<sup>72</sup> As a consequence of termination and the Recovery

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<sup>70</sup> Klein, Rebecca, ed. "These Are The Schools That Hurricane Katrina Destroyed." Huffington Post. Last modified August 26, 2015. Accessed April 4, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/new-orleans-schools-hurricane-katrina\\_us\\_55cba766e4b0f73b20bb9a13](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/new-orleans-schools-hurricane-katrina_us_55cba766e4b0f73b20bb9a13).

<sup>71</sup> Au, Wayne, and Joseph J. Ferrare. *Mapping Corporate Education Reform: Power and Policy Networks in the Neoliberal State*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Landau, Micah, ed. "The destruction of New Orleans’ public school system." United Federation of Teachers. Last modified June 26, 2014. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.uft.org/public-ed-under-attack/>

School District now being in charge, the teachers' union lost its collective-bargaining right and the state seized control of schools. According to Leslie Jacobs former member of both the Orleans Parish School Board and the Recovery School District,

We did a different model in New Orleans. We decided to take the failing schools away from the school district and in doing that, the local policies go away, the collective bargaining agreement goes away. So outcomes the building, the students, and the money and a fresh start. There are still people in the minority community angry that we took over the schools and that we disenfranchised them.<sup>73</sup>

Without the Union able to exercise their collective bargaining rights the Recovery School District no longer had to take their demands into consideration and this allowed the Recovery School District to replace old teachers with new ones. The state of Louisiana then collaborated with corporate education reformers in the most expansive overhaul ever seen in the history of public education.<sup>74</sup> With the vast majority of the city's schools being placed in the state-run Recovery School District, a sizeable portion of the school system quickly began to replace existing schools with charters.<sup>75</sup> Corporate reformers saw in the devastation an opportunity. Noted education historian and policy expert Diane Ravitch described their formula: eliminate public schools, replace with privately managed charters, fire the teachers, replace with Teach for America recruits, eliminate the union.<sup>76</sup>

### *The United Teachers Union*

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destruction-new-orleans-public-school-system.

<sup>73</sup> Buras, Kristen. "Race, Charter Schools, and Conscious Capitalism: On the Spatial Politics of Whiteness as Property (and the Unconscionable Assault on Black New Orleans)."

<sup>74</sup> Kimmett, Colleen, ed. "10 Years After Katrina, New Orleans' All-Charter School System Has Proven a Failure." Last modified August 28, 2015. Accessed April 9, 2015. <http://inthesetimes.com/article/18352/>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>76</sup> Ravitch, Diane. "Public Education: Who Are the Corporate Reformers?" Last modified March 28, 2014. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://billmoyers.com/2014/03/28/public-education-who-are-the-corporate-reformers/>.

The United Teachers Union was founded in 1937; they have been a part of the New Orleans labor movement for over 75 years. During the Civil Rights Movement the United Teachers Union fought for and won equal pay and benefits for all employees regardless of race or gender; becoming the first integrated local in the South. The United Teachers Union was the first to win a collective bargaining agreement in the state without the protection of a state employees collective bargaining law.<sup>77</sup> This win was huge for the Union paving the way for so many in the educational field in New Orleans. Although the United Teachers Union was a part of history and became prominent as they secured a spot within the Orleans Parish School Board, their role soon came to an end as if history was deleted when Hurricane Katrina struck and the Recovery School District took total control over the district.

As both the Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board were figuring out what schools it would open for the 2005-2006 school, they had already begun firing teachers who had not returned. In December 2005, the Orleans Parish School Board, with few schools and little money in its control, passed a resolution firing 7,500 school employees, who at that time had been on “disaster leave without pay.”<sup>78</sup> Notices were delivered to teachers' old addresses, sometimes to houses that no longer existed, and they directed teachers wanting to appeal the layoff to come to the School Board's building, which Katrina had destroyed. The 7,000-plus educators were initially

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<sup>77</sup> Noblit, George W., and William T. Pink. *Education, Equity, Economy: Crafting a New Intersection*. Cham: Springer, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Robertson, Cambell. "Louisiana Illegally Fired 7,500 Teachers, Judge Says." Last modified June 2012. Accessed April 5, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/education/louisiana-illegally-fired-7500-teachers-judge-rules.html?r=0>.



placed on "disaster leave without pay" then terminated, a decision that was made final on March 24, 2006.<sup>79</sup>

With employees left in complete confusion to why they had been fired, the United Teachers Union as a whole decided to respond. Initially they started a petition when several employees were denied an opportunity to work at new charter schools.<sup>80</sup> Then the Union decided to take it a step further and take the State to court with some initial success. As reported, "Civil District Judge Ethel Simms Julien had awarded more than \$1 million to seven people, but that ruling also made more than 7,000 others eligible to seek damages because it came in a class-action suit."<sup>81</sup> However the Union wanted more as they felt liked they should have been the first to be hired once schools reopened in New Orleans. If they were not hired then they should have been given top consideration for jobs in the new education system that emerged in New Orleans in the years after the storm. Most of them wanted their jobs back.

This desire was complicated by the existence of conflicting pension arrangements. Because the State had a different obligation from independent charters, the veteran teachers would risk losing their pension if they returned to work in a new charter school, but there was not enough public schools left to meet the demand of teachers that had been recently fired. Charter school operators often offered private retirement plans instead of

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<sup>79</sup> Noblit, George W., and William T. Pink. *Education, Equity, Economy*:

<sup>80</sup> Decker, Geoff, ed. "After union bid, fired charter school teachers allege retaliation." Last modified July 12, 2011. Accessed April 4, 2016.  
<http://ny.chalkbeat.org/2011/07/12/after-union-bid-teachers-fired-by-a-charter-school-allege-retaliation/#.Vw3Ly8cyIhY>.

<sup>81</sup> McGill, Kevin. "La. Supreme Court rules against Orleans teachers fired after Katrina." Last modified October 31, 2014. Accessed April 5, 2016.  
<http://legacy.wlwtv.com/story/news/local/orleans/2014/10/31/louisiana-supreme-court/18261311/>.

the state pension fund, which can discourage veteran teachers who have years invested in the state plan.<sup>82</sup>

As the years went by the voice of the union continued to fade out. In October of 2014 The United Teachers Union's Lawyer Willie Zanders asked the Supreme Court to review the case. Zanders argued that "the takeover of the New Orleans Public Schools when students, parents, teachers and voters were under a mandatory evacuation due to Hurricane Katrina was unconstitutional, immoral, and un-American."<sup>83</sup> He claimed the voice of the people mattered when making this decision and the board didn't even take them into consideration. Zanders then went on to say that "The Orleans Parish School Board had the legal obligation to establish a "recall list" that would allow permanent or tenured employees the opportunity to return if jobs were available. They did not do so."<sup>84</sup> Although his argument may hold some truth, the Court ruled that in the Orleans Parish School Board giving over its rights, it also gave up the rights of the Union allowing the Recovery School District to make the decision on whether or not it wanted to renew the Union's contract. Even though the lower courts sided with Union in the first procedures of its lawsuit, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled against the lawsuit that was brought up by the Union.<sup>85</sup> The Court did not agree that the fired employees' due-process rights were violated. The Court also believed the issues had been dealt with in a separate lawsuit

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<sup>82</sup>Pierce, Charles. "Teachers Get A Major Win in New Orleans." Last modified January 17, 2014. Accessed April 6, 2016. <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/a26869/new-orleans-school-decision-011714/>.

<sup>83</sup>Harden, Kari, ed. "7,500 fired teachers take their case to U.S. Supreme Court." Last modified March 16, 2015. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/7500-fired-teachers-take-their-case-to-u-s-supreme-court/>.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.,

bought by the New Orleans teachers' union.<sup>86</sup> Going up to the higher court was the Union's last chance to strike a blow against the state. In losing this decision the Union suffered a huge loss. While some teachers went back into education in the state many decided to either retire or work in a different field besides education.

Larry Carter, the president of the United Teachers of New Orleans, said the decimation of the teachers union was critical for privatization to proceed. Few people were actually present in New Orleans during the time of the reform and those that were present were occupied with the rebuilding of their own homes and dealing with the stresses of post-Katrina life. Few people had the emotional energy to stand up against what was happening. Carter goes on to say, "The model used in New Orleans was to decentralize public education as well as to get rid of the union and get rid of its influence in education and politics."<sup>87</sup>

### *The Creation and Consequences of Charter Schools*

Education Secretary Arne Duncan celebrated the system's transformation in a notorious 2010 gaffe: "The best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina."<sup>88</sup> Instead of a single school district overseen at the city level, New Orleans now has a system of individual charter schools and charter

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>87</sup> Landau, Micah, ed. "The destruction of New Orleans' public school system." United Federation of Teachers. Last modified June 26, 2014. Accessed April 4, 2016. <http://www.uft.org/public-ed-under-attack/destruction-new-orleans-public-school-system>

<sup>88</sup> Anderson, Nick. "Education Secretary Duncan calls Hurricane Katrina good for New Orleans schools." Washington post. Last modified January 30, 2010. Accessed April 8, 2016. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/29/AR2010012903259.html>.quoted.

management organizations.<sup>89</sup> Because the schools were independently run, with each school its own district and each principal its own superintendent, that there was no oversight. Schools became disconnected and autonomous; purely independent businesses free to hire and fire at will.

Although there wasn't much thought given to trying to stop the privatization of education in New Orleans, most New Orleanians welcomed the idea of new charter schools. It may have been a desperate cry for help considering the fact that charters have money and it was one of the fastest ways for schools to be rebuilt. However, in subsequent recovery efforts, there was little to no space for community input as the federal government and venture philanthropists provided money for the development of charter schools with no comparable sum offered to rebuild traditional public schools.<sup>90</sup> As more schools began to fail while under the jurisdiction of the Recovery School District, charter organizations jumped at the opportunity of creating new schools. Not everyone was pleased with the effects of the new independent schools. According to Alex Kotch who wrote "*Proceed with Caution*,"

The mass firing after Katrina left a total of 8,600 teachers and other school employees without jobs, many of whom were African-American women with extensive teaching experience. In the 2004-2005 school year, 71 percent of New Orleans' teachers were African-American; by 2013-2014 that number was down to 49 percent.<sup>91</sup>

When examining the population of public schools in New Orleans, the majority of students are African American or students of color, so one can start to understand the argument of race and why it matters and the difference that it makes. The article goes on

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<sup>89</sup> Sondel, Beth, ed. "No Excuses in New Orleans." Accessed April 13, 2016.  
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/07/no-excuses-in-new-orleans/>

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>91</sup> Kotch, Alex. "Proceed with caution: Lessons from New Orleans' charter school takeover." Last modified August 27, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2016.  
<http://www.southernstudies.org/2015/08/proceed-with-caution-lessons-from-new-orleans-char.html>.

to say that Following the mass firing there was an influx of young, white, inexperienced teachers, many of them from teacher placement programs such as Teach for America and the New Teacher Project.<sup>92</sup>

While the lawsuit against the state was pending, the Recovery School District was authorizing new charters to begin all over the city and an influx of people from around the country came to New Orleans for a new opportunity. Unfortunately, what to some was a chance for educational entrepreneurship was for native New Orleanians a brave new world that looked nothing like the city they lived in before the storm.

The dominance of the charter schools had consequences for the provision of education in the city beyond ownership. One of the main arguments made against the rising of charters in New Orleans was that charters allowed for qualified trained teachers to be replaced by those who had never stepped foot in a classroom before. The Teach For America organization became a popular staffing source for charters since its novice teachers were both inexpensive and less likely to challenge charter operators' instructional ideas and flooded the city with mostly white teachers.<sup>93</sup>

Other problems also arose with the transition to charter schools. Charters had the ability to operate freely and were allowed to make their own curriculum. Once they gained complete control, all the rules that both the Orleans Parish School Board and Recovery District operated under were thrown out, with a key example being neighborhood schools. Before the charter expansion students were required to attend the school that was in the neighborhood or nearby. Charters schools created the option of school choice, by which students could attend any school in the city no matter where they

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>93</sup> Greene, Peter, ed. "What Went Wrong Teach For America." Accessed April 7, 2016.  
<http://www.progressive.org/pss/what-went-wrong-teach-america>.

lived. This further allowed students to be displaced all over the city because students were no longer required or sometimes not given the option to attend their neighborhood school. This caused students to sometimes have to attend a school in another city or town. Students often have to get up and be at the bus stops when it is still dark in the morning and face bus rides of upwards of an hour long each way. On the other side, the schools were responsible for exorbitantly expensive transportation costs to pay to shuffle students back and forth across the city daily. Though the Recovery School District opened schools as charters because of the need to quickly reopen schools in the face of limited financial resources, they ultimately produced unforeseen issues.

Critics argue that the logic of neoliberal educational reform in New Orleans and across the country seeks to provide simple and convenient solutions instead of directly addressing the much more complex issues of poverty and historical inequality in American society. Mike Deshotels, a retired educator, wrote “After more than eight years of state takeover and conversion of public schools in Louisiana into privately run charter schools, even the most ardent promoters of this radical privatization experiment can no longer hide its spectacular failure.”<sup>94</sup> In the “new” New Orleans, students are denied the opportunity to develop the skills and dispositions of engaged citizenship, and parents and communities are denied the opportunity to democratically engage in the governance of their public institutions.<sup>95</sup> When the decision to move to charter schools was being made there was no input from those outside the administration of education policy, whether it was parents or teachers. They were not there as a result of the displacement of many residents, so there was no interaction between the Recovery School District and the

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<sup>94</sup> Landau, Micah, ed. "The destruction of New Orleans' public school system."

<sup>95</sup> Sondel, Beth, ed. "No Excuses in New Orleans."

parents. Charter schools are independently run there are no elections for an elected school board or ways that parents can be more involved when it comes to the decisions that charter schools make. By the time schools were able to open up and parents and students returned home, the United Teachers Union of New Orleans had already been stripped of their power while many of the members were still displaced as well.

As a result of these policies New Orleans became the first city to create an entire school district of charter schools. Ten years later, cities and states around the country have embarked on their own charter-school experiments and are watching New Orleans closely, focused on outcomes.<sup>96</sup> Kristen Buras states, “although market-based educational reforms in New Orleans are presented by policy makers as innovative and democratic, they are nonetheless premised on the criminal dispossession of black working-class communities and the teachers and students who have contributed to the city’s culture and history.”<sup>97</sup> An all-charter district signals the dismantling of the central school bureaucracy and a shift of power to dozens of independent school operators allowing the freedom of choice. Beth Sondel argues, with the “reforms of the post-Katrina era losing their novelty and credibility, there’s an opportunity to critically re-evaluate the ideology and power dynamics upon which these reforms have been based.”<sup>98</sup>

Ten years later the nation cities states and even parents in the city of New Orleans have started to pay more attention to what has happened in the city of New Orleans. The expansion of charter school came at such a time when the city was in complete turmoil

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<sup>96</sup> Kimmett, Colleen, ed. "10 Years After Katrina, New Orleans' All-Charter School .

<sup>97</sup> Buras, Kristen. "Race, Charter Schools, and Conscious Capitalism: On the Spatial Politics of Whiteness as Property (and the Unconscionable Assault on Black New Orleans)." Last modified 2011. Accessed April 6, 2015.  
<http://tagboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Buras-K-Race-Charter-Schools-and-Conscious-Capitalism-2011-copy.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Sondel, Beth, ed. "No Excuses in New Orleans."

such that the people did not have time to react or pay attention to what was happening at the time. By the time people started to realize the effects of charter schools legislation had already been put into place and it was too late to overturn the decision. While some of the members of the United Teachers Union were aware of the things that were taking place, they were so caught up in winning their jobs back that they forgot to include the ones who would be affected the most by the rise of charters which was the parents and the students. As a consequence of their individually focused actions they lost their jobs and the charters are now spread out though out the city.



## Chapter Four: Analysis

*“Whether created by parents and teachers or community and civic leaders, charter schools serve as incubators of innovation in neighborhoods across our country.”*<sup>99</sup>

In this chapter I plan to examine the distinctions between New Orleans and Chicago that prompted different outcomes in each city. This chapter will first note the similarities in situation faced by the two cities as a result of federal legislation, the role of politicians like Arne Duncan, and the effects of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Following the comparison will be an analysis of each city that points out important moments that will be crucial when trying to figure out what happened in each city regarding the push for charter schools.

### *The Backdrop to Reforms in New Orleans and Chicago*

Chicago and New Orleans both embarked on radical reforms of their education system. These reforms can be seen as a response to several different pressures. One such pressure has been the expanding role of the federal government in education policy. Both cities have seen change on the federal level dating all the way back to *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the desegregation of public schools. The United States during the era of Jim Crow is something that is familiar to this generation through history books. In the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court overturned the idea of separate but equal (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) and declared it to be unconstitutional. While this Supreme Court decision had a major impact on both black and white, urging the desegregation of schools in America, comparing this case to

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<sup>99</sup> Obama, Barack. "Presidential Proclamation -- National Charter Schools Week, 2012." The White House. 2012. Accessed April 16, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/07/presidential-proclamation-national-charter-schools-week-2012>.

modern day education, it seems that its long term effects were limited. As the Supreme Court reneged on its promise to desegregate the nation's public schools, there was a simultaneous return to segregated schools. The rise of charter schools, which mainly have an effect on African Americans, is a reminder of how history has shaped what is happening in both Chicago and New Orleans, and out of all the awful things that Jim Crow instilled was born something that is still prevalent today in public schools. Furthermore American schools are more segregated by race and class today than they were on day Martin Luther King Jr. was killed 43 years ago.<sup>100</sup>

Highlighting the link between federal regulation and the civil rights era, former secretary of education Arne Duncan used Martin Luther King Jr. as a justification for more recent pressure to privatization of education:

Dr. King would have been angered to see that too often we underinvest in disadvantaged students, that they still have fewer opportunities to take rigorous college prep courses, that many black and brown and low-income students are still languishing in aging facilities<sup>101</sup>

As Secretary of Education, Duncan was a huge advocate for the charter expansion and voiced his opinion on both the local and federal level. Arne Duncan, as a former chief of Chicago public schools and now a former secretary of education, has been present in both cities' education journey. Working under the Obama administration, Duncan was able to cajole and convince states to adopt his favored policies by taking advantage of the two powerful tools: competitive federal grants known as "Race to the Top" and waivers that excused states from the requirements of No Child Left Behind, a federal law disliked by

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<sup>100</sup> Rosenborg, Sarah. "American Institutes for Research." Blog (EdSector Archive). November 07, 2011. Accessed April 17, 2016. <http://educationpolicy.air.org/edsector-archives/blog/high-stakes-wake-county-runoff-election>.

<sup>101</sup> "Secretary Of Education: MLK Would Be Disheartened By Current "Segregated Schools"." News One Secretary Of Education MLK Would Be Disheartened By Current Segregated Schools Comments. 2010. Accessed April 16, 2016. <http://newsone.com/791895/secretary-of->

states.<sup>102</sup> However while Duncan may have offered a solution to the problems that are present today, the corruption that has plagued both cities is something that was happening before Duncan's time and is something that is out of his control.

When it comes to the expansion of charters, financial issues also seem to be the underlying foundation for the spark of charters. Charter schools were a solution to the money problems that both the Chicago Public School Board and the Orleans Parish School Board faced, and which could not be solved by seeking help from their respective States. In *Battling of corruption in America's public schools*, Lydia Segal argues, "the federal government pushed power up from the local school boards into central bureaucracies, professionalized staff, and established top down accountability mechanisms designed to enforce compliance with rules and regulation."<sup>103</sup> So this shift in power only allowed for the state to push its hidden agenda for more charters as a response holding schools accountable. By holding schools accountable under the new legislation, more schools were considered failing ones and they were taken away by the state or replaced by charter schools.

### *Lessons From Chicago*

In an article "Disaster Capitalism in Chicago Schools," Kenzo Shibata offers the rhetorical question that as there aren't any hurricanes in the Midwest, how can proponents of privatization like Mayor Rahm Emanuel sell off schools to the highest

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<sup>102</sup> Eliperin, Juliet, ed. "Education U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan to step down at end of year." The Washington Post. Last modified October 2, 2015. Accessed April 17, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2015/10/02/education-secretary-arne-duncan-reportedly-will-step-down-at-end-of-year/>.

<sup>103</sup> Segal, Lydia G. *Battling Corruption in America's Public Schools*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.

bidder?<sup>104</sup> One would think there is no answer since natural disasters are not man made, but Shibata goes on to say that the answer is that Chicago created a disaster.

It is important to describe the agenda in which Duncan is complicit, Two powerful, interconnected forces drive education policy in the city: 1) Mayor Daley, who was given official authority over Chicago Public School by the Illinois State Legislature in 1995 and who appoints the CEO and the Board of Education, and 2) powerful financial and corporate interests.<sup>105</sup>

In fact Chicago created a disaster: as a response to the federal legislation No Child Left Behind, Chicago put into effect Ren'10 which caused many schools to be closed down, resulted in the firing of teachers, and implemented charters as one of the goals for reform. Opening new innovative schools was only half of the Renaissance 2010 strategy. In the article "When Hurricane Katrina Hit Chicago" Jason Porter states "since mayoral control of Chicago's public schools began in 1995, Mayor Richard Daley and Rahm Emanuel unleashed a tsunami of charter schools and school closings upon the city with devastating results."<sup>106</sup> Closing the lowest performers was the other half and it created more disruption to the city's educational landscape by forcing children out of their neighborhoods to attend other schools that were far way. City leaders promised to close the worst schools and open 100 innovative ones that would look to private sectors for ideas, funding and management. Central to the plan was an increase in charter schools, which receive tax dollars but are run by private groups free from many bureaucratic constraints.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Shibata, Kenzo. "Disaster Capitalism in Chicago Schools." - In These Times. March 3, 2013. Accessed April 16, 2016. [http://inthesetimes.com/article/14647/disaster\\_capitalism\\_in\\_chicago\\_schools](http://inthesetimes.com/article/14647/disaster_capitalism_in_chicago_schools).

<sup>105</sup> Brown, Jitu. "Arne Duncan and the Chicago Success Story: Myth or Reality?" Common Dreams. May 29, 2009. Accessed April 15, 2016. <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2009/05/29/arne-duncan-and-chicago-success-story-myth-or-reality>.

<sup>106</sup> Potter, Jack. "When Hurricane Katrina Hit Chicago." Last modified September 24, 2015. Accessed April 7, 2016. <http://ajustchicago.org/2015/09/when-hurricane-katrina-hit-chicago/>.

<sup>107</sup> Banchemo, Stephanie, ed. "Daley school plan fails to make grade." Chicago

What makes Chicago special is that there were so many actors who fought for what they believed was children's right to a good education. Although these actors were in opposition to one another, there may have been this common belief that some form of change had to happen in order for Chicago's public schools to become successful. The events that took place in Chicago were a great example of how Unions can push for change on a local level. One of the main criticisms of Renaissance 2010 was that it did not complete its original goal. Six years after Mayor Richard Daley launched a bold initiative to close down and remake failing schools, Renaissance 2010 has done little to improve the educational performance of the city's school system, according to a Tribune analysis of 2009 state test data.<sup>108</sup>

The failure of the new schools was only a piece to the puzzle, and was to become significant as the Chicago's Teachers Union stood their ground and were not willing to back down. The Teachers Union as a collective agreed that politicians should not be making decisions about the classroom when they are not the ones in the classroom teaching. The biggest threat to finally achieving equitable and quality education in Chicago's low-income African American and Latino/a schools is not the individual who carries out the policy but a system of mayoral control and corporate power that locks out democracy.<sup>109</sup> The Chicago Public School Board - on Duncan's recommendation - consistently voted unanimously to close schools. This has prompted a revitalized effort by community members who are parents of the children and organizations like the

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Tribune. Last modified January 17, 2010. Accessed April 16, 2016.  
[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-01-17/news/1001160276\\_1\\_charter-schools-chicago-reform-urban-education](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-01-17/news/1001160276_1_charter-schools-chicago-reform-urban-education).

<sup>108</sup> Herbert, Bob. *Losing Our Way: An Intimate Portrait of a Troubled America*. New York: Doubleday, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Elliott, Shanti. *Teaching and Learning on the Verge: Democratic Education in Action*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2015.

Chicago Teachers Union to remove the mayor's authority to appoint the CEO and the school board and move towards an elected school board.<sup>110</sup>

However instead of the Chicago's Teachers Union trying to work around the politicians, they decided to target politicians like Mayor Rahm as a focal point for mobilization on broader political debates over education, ultimately forcing the Mayor to listen and comprise to the demands of both the parents and the Chicago Teacher Union. In the words of John Lyons, author of *Teachers and Reform*, "Using political action, public relations campaigns, and community alliances, the Chicago's Teachers Union successfully raised members' salaries and benefits, increased school budgets, influenced school curricula, and campaigned for greater equality."<sup>111</sup> The Chicago Teachers Union across the city, for the past several years, was at every hearing Chicago Public School had organized. They mobilized the community to turn out to fight not for school choice and Renaissance 2010 schools, but for quality schools with qualified, conscious, caring teachers and adequate resources, in the existing school buildings in their neighborhood.<sup>112</sup> Every time CPS proposes closing a neighborhood school, Chicago parents, teachers, and students organize, resist, and fight hard. As one parent of a child in a closing school said, "when you close a school, you kill the heart of the community."<sup>113</sup>

In *Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation*, Jeff Bale makes the argument that, "the mayor is operating from a larger blueprint to make Chicago a "world-class city" of global finance and business services, real estate

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<sup>110</sup> Brown, Jitu. "Arne Duncan and the Chicago Success Story: Myth or Reality?" Common Dreams. May 29, 2009. Accessed April 15, 2016. <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2009/05/29/arne-duncan-and-chicago-success-story-myth-or-reality>.

<sup>111</sup> Lyons, "Teachers and Reform."

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>113</sup> Russo, Alexander, ed. "Catalyst Chicago independent Reporting on Urban Schools." <http://catalyst-chicago.org/2009/04/asdfasdf/>.

development, and tourism, and education is part of this plan.”<sup>114</sup> Bale claims that the improvement of schools is a smaller step to get to the bigger plan. In Bale’s theory there is an implication that the Mayor only compromised with the Chicago’s Teachers Union in order to silence them. Bale goes on to say that quality schools are essential to draw high – paid creative workers for business and finance. Though this theory may hold some truth there is no denying that what happened in Chicago is a result of what happens when the people decide to stand together. Chicago's experiences demonstrate that when people organize around their needs, victories can be won. Observations in Chicago show us that cooperation between educators and engaged communities, and connections between community wisdom and academic knowledge, can contribute to this social movement. We cannot build toward education for social justice without real partnerships in which teachers understand that their interests and those of their students' neighborhoods are fundamentally aligned and that they need to express real solidarity with the ongoing struggles of those communities.<sup>115</sup>

### *Lessons From New Orleans*

What happened in Chicago was triggered by a decision that came prior to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, which has subsequently surpassed Chicago in its charter movement. How is this the spread of charter schools on such an extreme possible? Unlike New Orleans, Chicago did not have any form of natural disaster. Naomi Klein, the author of *The Shock Doctrine*, suggests what has happened in New Orleans was nothing more than disaster capitalism, and there are many factors that suggest she may have been

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<sup>114</sup> Bale, Jeff, and Sarah Knopp. *Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Brown, Jitu. "Arne Duncan and the Chicago Success Story: Myth or Reality?" Common Dreams. May 29, 2009. Accessed April 15, 2016. <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2009/05/29/arne-duncan-and-chicago-success-story-myth-or-reality>.

correct. While New Orleans schools may have been destroyed, New Orleans had the option to use the money that was presented as a result of the storm to bail the Orleans Parish School Board out. Instead those in charge of the city during this state of emergency decided to use that money for something else and allowed independent charters to invest money into schools and rebuild them as their own. During instances where disaster capitalism is operating, rather than rebuilding what had existed prior to the disaster, those who pursue the advancement of corporate goals use “moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering.”<sup>116</sup> Klein goes even further when saying that the city of New Orleans would have never agreed to have their school system look to independent charter schools as an answer so quickly, arguing that the most basic form of capitalism has always needed disasters to advance. She suggests that “Katrina accomplished in a day what Louisiana school reformers couldn’t do after years of trying.”<sup>117</sup> Katrina was the perfect opportunity for those in favor of a market-based education system to capitalize on this disaster in a manner that would end up benefiting the investors who used the improvement of the New Orleans education system as motivation.

The decision in favor of charter schools was made on behalf of the people while the people were not there, stripping away their voices. Making this decision so quickly was what allowed for the charter expansion to happen. Kristen L Buras, who agrees with Klein’s argument by saying what happened in New Orleans was in fact conscious

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<sup>116</sup> Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007.

<sup>117</sup> Klein “The Shock Doctrine,” 6.



capitalism,<sup>118</sup> argues that those who pursued business strategies as education reform in New Orleans knew exactly what they were doing. Indeed they used language as a part of their argument, utilizing careful of word choice when pursuing their agendas. Buras states,

Educational reforms in New Orleans are not designed to respond to oppressed communities or to enhance public school performance, even if they are often couched in such language. Rather, this is a feeding frenzy, a revived Reconstruction-era blueprint for how to capitalize on public education and line the pockets of white entrepreneurs (and their black allies) who care less about working-class schoolchildren and their grandmothers and much more about obtaining public and private monies and an array of lucrative contracts.<sup>119</sup>

As the number of charter schools continued to increase throughout New Orleans and the United Teachers Union was eliminated, the argument can be made that the goal in New Orleans was to decentralize public education and it became clear that those investors were there for economic gain. Buras goes on to say, “Lawmakers and entrepreneurs framed these reforms as a socially conscious effort to advance equity and improve public schools, rather allowed the traditional profit motive to define their efforts.”<sup>120</sup> In support of both Klein and Buras is that the decision for the expansion of charter schools was already made while most hadn’t even returned to New Orleans. With the people of New Orleans occupied with the rebuilding of what Katrina had destroyed they did not have time to pay attention to what was happening behind closed doors at the state level.

Although Klein and Buras like many others suggest that what happened in New Orleans was the taking advantage of Hurricane Katrina, many cities are following in the

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<sup>118</sup> Kristen Buras, “Race, Charter Schools, and Conscious Capitalism: On the Spatial Politics of Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Educational Review* Vol. 81 No. 2 Summer 2011

<sup>119</sup> Buras, “Race, Charter Schools, and Conscious Capitalism,” 297.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*,

city's footsteps. As the support for charters continued the city of New Orleans became the first to have a school district 100% charter and has attracted the attention of those on both sides of the debate. New Orleans is still ranked as having one of the nation's worst education systems. Dr. Andre Perry, an educationalist specialist, says:

Nevertheless, education reformers look to post-Katrina New Orleans as a model to increase the percentage of charter schools, remove attendance zones, take over failing schools, close schools, dissolve teachers unions and decentralize bureaucratically thick school districts.<sup>121</sup>

Perry's statement is a prime example of what has happened to New Orleans public schools. However New Orleans did not have any model to follow and what has happened is referred to as the biggest experiment in public education.<sup>122</sup> As such there have been criticisms. Local activist Karran Harper Royal states that "creating an all-charter district takes away choice," especially for parents who can't get children placed in schools near their homes or people who don't feel charter schools are responsive to their concerns.<sup>123</sup> Parents are realizing that having inexperienced teachers who are young and white is not benefiting the African American students that they are teaching. These teachers come from all over the place and have no connection with the environment in which they teach.

In contrast to Chicago, the union played a different role in New Orleans. In the beginning no one fought for New Orleans Public Schools, while the New Orleans Teachers Union fought for themselves as they fought for their jobs and their rights as a Union. When the United Teachers Union of New Orleans decided to take their battle to

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas, PL, ed. "Endgame: Disaster Capitalism, New Orleans, and the Charter Scam." Last modified May 31, 2014. Accessed April 17, 2016.  
<http://www.truth-out.org/speakout/item/24059-endgame-disaster-capitalism-new-orleans-and-the-charter-scam>.

<sup>122</sup> Kimmet, Colleen, ed. "10 Years After Katrina, New Orleans' All-Charter School System Has Proven a Failure."

<sup>123</sup> "New Orleans goes all in on charter schools. Is it showing the way?" Last modified March 1, 2014. Accessed April 14, 2016.  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2014/0301/New-Orleans-goes-all-in-on-charter-schools.-Is-it-showing-the-way>.

the local courthouse only some of the members were part of the decision. At that moment the Teachers Union presented a divided front. Without all of the Union's members being present they could not make a decision as one, so individual members decided to do what was best for them individually because they no longer had their bargaining rights and the state being the Recovery School District was not in their corner. Without the Union being able to one gather all of its members to prove to the people of New Orleans that a charter expansion would have negative consequences, the Union as a whole lost resources in terms of their power and their creditability, in addition to the absence of most its members. By the time The United Teachers Union wanted to fight back even harder by going to the Louisiana Supreme Court it was far too late. Even though the Union was against the creation of charter schools they fought for their rights as teachers, while they were busy fighting for being fired illegally charter schools were still being built. Unlike in Chicago, where the Union sought to rally the community on the basis of a broad critique of education reform, in New Orleans a divided union pursued individual economic concerns. Due to the lack of action by the community in standing up to the state, key decisions were made without them.

### *Conclusion*

The difference between New Orleans and Chicago was not just a natural disaster. Both the Chicago Teachers Union and the United Teachers Union of New Orleans opposed extreme reform such as the increase in charter schools. Both the cities show that the belief that Unions are central institutions in the opposition to charter school expansion is not without basis in fact. Both unions were willing to mobilize in resisting charter schools. However, in Chicago the key difference was the role of the Union. The Chicago

Teachers Union came together with parents to fight for the students and against the expansion of charter schools, which would eventually lead to them losing their jobs. The Union also fought back so hard because they did not believe that business organizations investing in public schools were a solution. They framed their opposition in terms of the interests of the community and sought to build up support amongst the community for a strategy of resisting via political pressure. However in New Orleans, a fractured union meant an incoherent response in the fight against the rise of charter schools. Even though the members of the Teachers Union understood what was happening once they lost their battle through legal channels, the members were unable to resist and allowed the continuation of charters to happen. The people of New Orleans were occupied with rebuilding or still displaced as a consequence of the storm so they were not able to process what the state was doing. The decision to

**Conclusion:**

I remember returning home to New Orleans just a few months after Hurricane Katrina had destroyed the city in August. Much had changed, houses were completely gone, the bridges were still broken and people were still gone. All that was soon to change when I had to return to school with the others who had decided to come home. Most schools were destroyed in the storm and most teachers were gone so we had to take what we could get. I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade when I entered one of the few schools that were not a victim of Hurricane Katrina. However because people were starting to return home and kids needed to attend school, my school found itself being in some of the worst circumstances. There were not enough classrooms to fit all of the students, so instead we had to share a classroom and divide the room by grade level. The only thing that separated us was a rolling white board. This setup could not last for long as the weeks went by the classroom started to become over crowded and we were already sharing a room between three different grades. When teachers taught lessons we could hear what was happening on the other side of the board and that alone was not only a frustration, but it was a huge distraction. Teachers could not teach and we as students could not learn under those conditions. The nation's delayed action to Hurricane Katrina created the belief that the federal government had failed us and no one would rescue us from our misery. Against this backdrop, many citizens saw the emergence of charter schools in New Orleans as a welcome development.

When examining both the New Orleans and Chicago cases side by side there are many similarities that draw both cases together, yet there are key differences that are critical to the outcomes of each city. The continued rise of charter schools brings to the

fore, the question of whether the country has found a national solution to the failure of our education problem in this model? President Obama is in full support of charter schools:

These institutions give educators the freedom to cultivate new teaching models and develop creative methods to meet students' needs. This unique flexibility is matched by strong accountability and high standards, so underperforming charter schools can be closed, while those that consistently help students succeed can serve as models of reform for other public schools.<sup>124</sup>

Both the New Orleans and Chicago case study gives a glance of the effects of charter schools when such local reforms are supported and altered based upon presidential administrations. Each city lays out the possible failures that came along with reform. When comparing the two cities you notice that financial problems and a failing school system mainly because of standardized test is what prompts the cities to consider charters as an option. New Orleans and Chicago have similar results such as the elimination of school zones, the displacement of students, and the firing of staff members. Though those affects are the somewhat the same in each city, yet again their total outcomes are completely different.

A teachers union is present in both New Orleans and Chicago, but the strategy created by each union is a critical difference to pay attention to when it comes the role in which the union played when trying to resist change at a local level. In Chicago you noticed the step- by-step action that was taken place in order for the union to gain the attention of the Chicago School Board and force them to listen to their demands. On the other hand, the New Orleans case study highlights what happens when the role of the union is eliminated. New Orleans, school district becomes 100 percent charter as result

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.,

due to the absence of both the parents and the union. Although the Chicago Teachers Union may have won in a battle against the mayor and the Chicago School Board by being able to secure their benefits and jobs, The Chicago School Board continuation to allow more charter schools to be built is something to pay attention to in the future. This response shows that our nation being those who are in charge of the political system seem to think that charters are the solution to the failing education system in urban areas. The argument can be made that if those who have business backgrounds stop investing money into public education and step down then who steps up.

Hurricane Katrina was also a key difference in the two cities. Katrina had a major affect on the city of New Orleans by destroying the city's entire school system, but the closing of schools in Chicago shows that a form of disruption has to happen whether it is natural or created in order to change the system. They are building upon something that is already broken or destroyed. New Orleans disaster being Katrina was a form of nature in response people did not pay attention because they believed the system was completely destroyed so had it to be rebuilt and it had to be done fast. As a response to that the people of New Orleans did not question the decision that was being made considering the fact they were not present in the city to think about what was happening with the school system. However, in Chicago you have the people who are affected by the decisions made there in the city and because they are not rebuilding their homes, they were able to respond and fight back which is why the Chicago Teachers Union was able to come out with a victory.

Whether or not the teachers union will ever come around to the expansion of charter schools is something that will be given with time. The argument can be made that

if those who have business backgrounds stop investing money into public education and steps down then who steps up. It is clear that in both New Orleans and Chicago could not handle their financial crises themselves. School districts across the country are watching to see will in New Orleans as they continue to embark on their journey. Now that everyone is paying attention to what has happened more people are starting to speak out. Until everyone is on the same path of rebuilding or repairing the education system, it will be the students that make up both the public and charter system that will continue to suffer due to education experiment.



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