

Dismantling Public Education: Turning Ideology into Gold

By Alex Molnar

MAR 1, 2017 | INCOME & WEALTH | HUMAN CAPITAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY | INSTITUTIONS, POLICY & POLITICS | PHILOSOPHY



Policies based on faith in the “market” as a principle of social organization have wrought havoc with a founding principle of American democracy

Introduction

Nowhere is the toxic effect of privatization on America’s public wellbeing more evident than in the sphere of education. Today, politicians in thrall to neoliberal ideology seek to subordinate the democratic mission of public education to a theory of market-driven economic development and social organization. The phantasmagorical belief in neutral “scientific” expertise as the primary basis for policymaking has, therefore, profoundly antihuman as well as antidemocratic implications.

The major education reforms of the past 35 years —education vouchers, charter schools, tuition tax credits, and education savings accounts — all seek to remove public schools from the control of elected bodies; to subject them to the “laws” of the “market”; and to put them at the service of the economic elite.

Who does privatization serve?

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. ...The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.[1] Frederick Douglass

On January 15, 2017 the Green Bay Packers defeated the Dallas Cowboys to win the National Football

League NFC divisional playoff game. I live in Wisconsin and I'm a Packers fan, so I read the *New York Times* account of that victory with great pleasure. What really caught my attention, however, were the many comments posted by readers highlighting the ownership structure of the Packers. Here are some unedited samples that capture the tenor of multiple posts.[2]

- *I became a Packers fan because they are owned by the people and not some entitled billionaire!*
- *Let's hear it for the PUBLIC OWNED gb packers. as a part owner (2 shares) i take immense pride in knowing that a team that doesn't have to suffer an obnoxious, cynical billionaire in the owners' box can do these great things. overall aaron rodgers is a better quarterback than tom brady. and the packer franchise is better than the rest of them, not threatening to move every time a one-percenters gets a greedy itch. let's talk them ALL public, get rid of the racist nicknames and have a truly democratic sports network in this country.*
- *During the TV broadcast, the camera cut to the sky booth of the billionaire owner of the Cowboys, Jerry Jones, as he celebrated his team advancing. However, there was no camera shot of the Packers' owners during Aaron Rodgers' magic or Mason Crosby's kick—because you have to do a satellite shot of the entire state of Wisconsin celebrating. And that's why the Packers are truly America's Team—they are owned by your everyday Joe and Jill, not a greedy billionaire.*

These are not the kind of sentiments generally expressed on the sports pages, yet many Packers fans hailed the victory as a triumph for public ownership and a negation of the values that rationalize the systematic exploitation of the majority for the benefit of the few. In the case of the National Football League, many wealthy owners enrich themselves in part by leveraging their exemption from anti-monopoly statutes to demand taxpayer subsidies under threat of moving their teams to a different city. As a result, sports stadiums now claim billions of tax dollars in cities across the U.S., even as public services and needed infrastructure repairs and improvements languish for lack of funding.

To understand why privatization is a regressive policy, it is helpful to consider that despite the growth in national wealth in recent decades, less and less money is available for purposes that benefit the public. Understanding this dynamic requires cutting through the ideological fog to locate privatization within the framework of beliefs, values, and assumptions that have made it appear rational, necessary, and inevitable. Fortunately, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, you don't need an economist to figure out where the money goes (and how it gets there).[3]

Nowhere is the toxic effect of privatization on America's public wellbeing more evident than in the sphere of education.

The historical development of public education in the U.S. resulted in an egalitarian institution that was redistributive in its effects. The American public school ideal is thus the antithesis of neoliberal ideology. As a result, public education provides a useful lens through which the transformations sought and achieved by three decades of privatization may be viewed.

At the time of the U.S. Revolutionary War, the colonial population was already well educated by the global standards of the day. After the revolution, the new nation's leaders were explicit about public education serving as a "bulwark" of democracy. Educating the population was considered essential because a "mob" of ill-educated, impoverished citizens would be easy prey for demagoguery. Intended as a cornerstone of U.S. democracy, then, the system of public education evolved out of the nation's founding political principles. The fledgling U.S. democracy stood in contrast to Europe, where the ruling elites regarded education above one's station as a threat to elite economic, political, and, so-

cial power. In Report Number 12 of the Massachusetts School Board (1848) by Horace Mann, a key architect of the “common school,” wrote that “the establishment of a republican government, without well-appointed and efficient means for the universal education of the people, is the most rash and fool-hardy experiment ever tried by man.” [4]

Mann saw public education as key to his state’s (and the nation’s) wellbeing, writing:

“The people of Massachusetts have, in some degree, appreciated the truth, that the unexampled prosperity of the State, — its comfort, its competence, its general intelligence and virtue, — is attributable to the education, more or less perfect, which all its people have received; but are they sensible of a fact equally important? — namely, that it is to this same education that two thirds of the people are indebted for not being, to-day, the vassals of as severe a tyranny, in the form of capital, as the lower classes of Europe are bound to in the form of brute force.”

Public education in the United States has from its earliest days been structured to embody and strengthen representative democracy by inculcating democratic values and by providing the knowledge necessary to secure economic wellbeing. As wave after wave of immigrants entered the U.S., public education was one of the principle mechanisms by which they were to be “Americanized.”

Under the U.S. Constitution, education is not a power vested in the federal government; therefore, it falls to the states to organize and fund public schools. The right to a free public education is enshrined in every state constitution. In practice, states have delegated a great deal of their authority to local school boards to make policy for the community’s schools and to levy local taxes to support those schools. From the inception of U.S. public education, the nation’s public schools and the content of their curriculum have been embroiled in controversy. These conflicts reflect disagreements over the character of U.S. democracy — battles over public education are struggles over how society should be organized.

‘There is No Such Thing as Society’

Today, politicians in thrall to neoliberal ideology seek to subordinate the democratic mission of public education to a theory of market-driven economic development and social organization. Policy deliberations are now dominated by of econometric modeling and production function research. This modeling and research is often used, inappropriately, to make decisions about the value of education reforms. The mathematical models used by researchers are made to “work” only by assuming away much of the real world in which people live and students learn. The phantasmagorical belief in neutral “scientific” expertise as the primary basis for policymaking has, therefore, profoundly antihuman as well as antidemocratic implications — a topic Sheila Dow takes up in “People Have Had Enough of Experts.”[5]

The major education reforms of the past 35 years — education vouchers, charter schools, tuition tax credits, and education savings accounts — all seek to remove public schools from the control of elected bodies; to subject them to the “laws” of the “market”; and to put them at the service of the economic elite. The world being called into existence is based on the belief that anyone, but not everyone, can succeed—a world of winners and losers, each of whom has earned his or her fate. Thus, as British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, one of neoliberalism’s foremost champions, proclaimed:

“There is no such thing as society. There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our

own efforts those who are unfortunate.”[6]

This is a world in which the poor must be judged by the rich to be “deserving” of private charity rather than one that allows collective action through the democratic political process to secure the common welfare.

My life illustrates the trajectory of the transformation of Franklin Roosevelt’s world into Margaret Thatcher’s. My parents had each immigrated to the U.S. following the First World War. I was born in Chicago in 1946, which makes me a charter member of the so-called baby-boom generation. The country into which I was born possessed political, economic, and military power unprecedented in world history. From the time I entered elementary school until I was awarded my Ph.D. 21 years later, every school I attended was under construction. Public investment in schools was booming. Even for students who dropped out of school or who didn’t go to college, well-paying jobs were plentiful. When my father died in 1955, Social Security Survivor’s Benefits provided cash to my mother to help care for me. My first two years at a publicly funded city junior college cost me \$30.00, while my further education was highly subsidized by scholarships and cheap government loans under the aegis of the “National Defense Education Act.” The name reveals how tightly schools and education were tied to the nation’s understanding of its national security interests. I was born into and grew up in a world dominated by New Deal redistributive social policies, and by the economic advantages of being a citizen of the dominant economic, political, and military power on the planet.

At the time I was awarded my Ph.D. in 1972 and took my first academic position as an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction, few realized that American economic hegemony was cresting. Being blissfully unaware of what lay before us, forward-thinking educators in the early 1970s took up the topic of “leisure education.” Not being economists allowed us to naively imagine that since humankind had, for the first time in history, the productive capacity to eliminate material deprivation and the means to do so with ever fewer hours of labor, it would be necessary to develop education programs and curricula to help large numbers of people figure out how to best make use of their new-found leisure time. As the Swedish doctor and statistician Hans Rosling was reportedly fond of saying:

“My mother explained the magic with this [washing] machine the very, very first day... She said: ‘Now Hans, we have loaded the laundry. The machine will make the work. And now we can go to the library.’ Because this is the magic: You load the laundry, and what do you get out of the machine? You get books out of the machines, children’s books. And Mother got time to read to me.

“Thank you, industrialization... Thank you, steel mill. And thank you, chemical processing industry that gave us time to read books.”[7]

Rosling’s anecdote is set in the post-war years in Sweden, a small, economically developed country that emerged from World War II relatively unscathed. Unfortunately, today, washing machines (to use Rosling’s example) no longer produce the leisure time to read books that they once did — not for the people who make them, or for the people who use them. How do we explain the contemporary reality that in the U.S. more and more people are working more and more hours for less and less money, and are doing so with less and less economic security in a world that is vastly richer than the world in which I grew up? This reality is revealed in the data on income and wealth inequality that Thomas Piketty amassed in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.^[8]

I’m not an economist, so I might be forgiven for failing to grasp when I started my career that the period from 1945–1970 had been a historical anomaly. I might also be forgiven for not foreseeing

that once other countries were capable of creating powerful modern economies, they would lay claim to an expanding share of the world's economic pie. I could not imagine that to preserve their power and wealth, the moneyed elites would seek to dismantle redistributionist New Deal policies. The New Deal was built on a system of progressive taxation and public investment. If U.S. elites were to retain their relative wealth and power as the rest of world began to compete with the U.S. economically, then the progressive edifice that Roosevelt had constructed would have to be set aside, taxes on wealth and profits reduced, wages suppressed, and a greater share of government costs shifted to the working class. The problem faced by the elite powerbrokers was how to do this under the noses of a population whose interests were very much in opposition to those of the moneyed classes. As John D. Rockefeller's propagandist Ivy Lee would have framed it, the neoliberal "story" needed to get "believed." [9]

The American propagandist Edward Bernays, regarded as the father of the U.S. public relations industry, argued that "engineering consent" was at the heart of democratic social control. He makes his case in the 1928 book *Propaganda*:

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute the invisible government, which is the true ruling power of our country." [10]

*"...economic power tends to draw after it political power...the industrial revolution shows how that power passed from the king to the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. **Universal suffrage and universal schooling** (emphasis mine) reinforced this tendency, and at last even the bourgeoisie stood in fear of the common people. For the masses promised to become King. Today, however, a reaction has set in. The minority has discovered a powerful help in influencing majorities. It has been found possible so to mold the mind of the masses that they will throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction."* [11]

The election of Ronald Reagan marks a reasonably good starting point for understanding how neoliberal political and economic strategy was used to shape public opinion to accept a market-based system of public education. A system that, to appropriate Hirschman's terms, replaced the citizen's democratic right to a "voice" in shaping their public schools with a consumer's choice to "exit" schools. [12] Under the banner of "school choice," public education would thus be removed from democratic control and reformulated as a commodity to be "chosen." Engineering this transformation would be no easy task, because although public schools were always controversial, they were also very popular.

By 1984, the U.S. had moved past the recession of Reagan's first two years. The economic and policy trends were clear enough, however, for Walter Mondale, the Democratic nominee for president, to declare in his acceptance speech:

"Four years ago, many of you voted for Mr. Reagan because he promised you'd be better off. And today, the rich are better off. But working Americans are worse off, and the middle class is standing on a trap door." [13]

Mondale was right; nevertheless, he lost by a landslide.

With the economy seemingly recovered from the recession of the early 1980's, a confection termed "supply side economics" ("Reaganomics" in the vernacular) was ascendant. State and federal policy began to shift the tax burden from corporations and wealthy individuals to lower and middle class working people. At the state level this meant that school financing relied more and more heavily on

real estate taxes paid by people whose incomes were stagnant or declining, and whose pensions and job security were disappearing. For the next two and a half decades, the hollowing out of the U.S. working class was obscured by continued government spending in spite of tax-cut-fueled deficits; the entry of large numbers of women into the labor force; the explosion in the availability of consumer credit; and successive financial, technology, and real estate bubbles culminating in the catastrophic global financial collapse of 2008. It was against this backdrop of regressive economic policy that the war on public education began in earnest.

In its initial phase, the assault on public education relied on the myth of school failure, complemented by the argument that the U.S. economy was suffering and losing market share to foreign competitors, such as Japan, because American schools were failing to properly educate students to compete in the emerging global economy. The alleged “skills shortage” of American workers became an element of the received wisdom of U.S. policy making, and nicely complemented elite support for multinational neoliberal economic agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that in 1995 replaced the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). These agreements favored capital over labor, setting up adjudication mechanisms that restricted the ability of democratic political institutions in the signatory states to control the impact of those agreements on their laws, economies, labor practices, and the environment.

The resulting destruction of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. was characterized as an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice to promote a more vibrant and richer global economy. It was argued that these manufacturing jobs would never come back, but prosperity awaited workers with skills needed by the modern economy. The “remedy” for the economic dislocation of blue-collar workers was re-training. Future workers would need schools that trained them for success in a transformed labor market. The alleged “failure” of public education to prepare students for the high-skilled global economy was the focus of Berliner and Biddle’s *The Manufactured Crisis*.^[14] The result of their close examination of the central arguments made about the so-called education crisis and its impact on the U.S. economy is captured in the book’s title: the “crisis” had been manufactured. The school failure story was propaganda cynically deployed to obscure the reality that the specter haunting public education was poverty and inequality.

Manufacturing Consent

Irrespective of the data, the myths of a “skills shortage” and of widespread school failure became articles of faith among policy makers. This policy fantasy might be aptly termed “supply side economics in a *Field of Dreams*,” a phrase I jotted on a napkin while listening to Clinton Administration Secretary of Labor Robert Reich explain the “skills shortage.” In the movie *Field of Dreams*, a farmer is moved by hearing a voice whispering, “If you build it, he will come,”^[15] to turn a cornfield into a baseball diamond — and, sure enough, the mythic baseball player turns up. Beginning in the 1980s American policy makers argued, in effect, “If you give them the skills, the jobs will come.” For three and a half decades, retrained workers in blue-collar communities across the U.S. have waited in vain for the jobs to appear. Meanwhile the public services upon which they rely have continued to deteriorate and their communities are collapsing around them for lack of public funds to support them. For an excellent discussion of white work class support for Donald Trump see Joan C. Williams “What So Many People Don’t Get About the U.S. Working Class.”^[16]

Field of Dreams was lighthearted entertainment. The 1987 movie *Robocop* provided a dark glimpse at the privatized world at the heart of neoliberalism. Set in Detroit, the script opens:

“New technologies have left Detroit behind. In the wake of this changing economy has come pover-

ty, social decay and crime.”[17]

In *Robocop* every aspect of human life — every need, every sorrow, every hope — is an opportunity for profit in a corporate-dominated world in which even crime has been privatized. The main character, Murphy (Robocop) is literally transformed into a product to be sold. I used *Robocop* in my urban education classes in the late 1980s to discuss the future of public education in a world dominated by neoliberalism’s privatizing ideology. For many of my students, the idea of a privatized education system was, at the time, so alien that they found it difficult to see the connections I was trying to make. I doubt that would be the case today.

In the early 1980s it was not yet obvious how neoliberals would make use of the economic crisis in impoverished communities — and the argument that school failure was the leading cause of economic misery — to make their case for a radical transformation and privatization of public education. The publication of *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* in 1990 helped clarify things. The case made by authors John Chubb and Terry Moe rests on the idea that poor academic performance is a product of schools being under the direct control of democratic institutions, and that the remedy lay in a market-based approach that offered parents choice between competing school options.

Popular culture has helped “manufacture consent” for these neoliberal talking points. The Hollywood movie *Stand and Deliver* (1988) encouraged the belief that a “star” teacher who makes “no excuses” can overcome the impact of poverty, while *Waiting for Superman* (2010) and *The Lottery* (2010) touted the transformative potential of school choice.

If movies provided the sizzle, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* provided the beef, offering a concise guide to the strategic logic that steered U.S. school reform from the 1990s to the present. The solution to problem of democracy, Chubb and Moe argue, is the “creative destruction” of marketplace competition touched off by implementing voucher programs. To which we may add neo-voucher reforms such as tuition tax credits and education savings accounts, along with charter schools. Under pressure from and with the aid of charitable foundations, wealthy philanthropists, and ideologues, government policy makers have steadily shifted control of the schools from locally elected school boards to appointed governing bodies. A for-profit school sector has emerged that depends entirely on taxpayer and philanthropic funds. Accountability has been shifted from government regulatory oversight mechanisms to “market discipline.” To sell their ideas, neoliberals promise that heroic teachers and “no-excuses” principals combined with competition, technology, and high-stakes student, teacher, and school evaluations, will “disrupt” sclerotic bureaucracies, rein in unions, and liberate oppressed impoverished urban communities from “failing” schools.

Getting this myth “believed” meant new opportunities to turn tax dollars into profits — profits from, for example, paying a few teachers more and many teachers less; profits from designing standardized tests; profits from renting school facilities; profits from managing schools; profits from data management systems and test-scoring systems; and profits from selling software platforms and computing devices. Best of all, these profitmaking opportunities came with little or no government oversight to thwart self-dealing and ferret out fraud and abuse. Oversight and regulation had by this time been successfully characterized as innovation and achievement killers. Baker and Miron provide a useful introduction to some of the ways in which charter operators, for example, generate profit by running schools.[18]

Hedge funds were now at the schoolhouse door. The stage was set for what Diane Ravitch has termed the “Billionaires Boys Club”[19] to turbo-charge neoliberal education reform in the early twenty-first century. As the privatizing reforms grew in scope and gathered in intensity, the lack of evidence that

these reforms had an appreciable effect on student achievement or that they mitigated inequality[20] didn't deter the Gates, Walton, and Broad Foundations, among others, from aggressively selling their basket of favored neo-liberal reforms.

The successes of these reforms were not found in systemic improvements in educational outcomes. Instead, what these measures actually succeeded at was concealing under a veneer of idealism and public service the power relationships responsible for the misery of students in working class and impoverished communities; establishing efficient mechanisms for leveraging public capital investments in school facilities, and capturing public funding for instruction and student services; and launching a private education sector large enough to export American educational products and services to a world ready and waiting, thanks to the framework provided by the WTO agreements.

In 2001, when George W. Bush's signature "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) education legislation was passed (with the support of Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy), "disruption," "markets," "accountability," "no excuses," and "choice" were an established part of the bipartisan vocabulary of school reform. And for-profit firms dominated the expanding charter-school sector.

The NCLB legislation contained plans for a significant expansion of the privatization of public education. The law made huge investments in tutoring and other remedial services—services it prohibited local school districts from providing. It required and provided funds for standardized testing and grading schools, and mandated that schools report on the yearly progress of their students on those tests. It promoted common academic standards across schools and required "remedies" for "failing" schools—concentrated in impoverished communities of color—such as converting them to charter schools or having them run by private firms. All of these measures were justified as a way of confronting what George W. Bush was fond of calling "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

Education reform was now firmly in the hands of people for whom, doing well by doing good, was axiomatic. "Strategic philanthropy" became their *modus operandi*. I doubt the world has ever produced such a large pool of rich education "visionaries," "disruptors," and "revolutionaries." These are the people whose world is represented at the Davos World Economic Forum under a banner that reads "Committed to Improving the State of the World." The *New York Times* reported that the 2017 Davos meeting yielded insights such as the need for people to take more ownership of upgrading themselves on a continuous basis and the need to free the "animal spirits" of the market. According to the *New York Times* article, there was, however, not much interest in inequality or redistributionist policies. [21] The Davos class is fast losing even the appearance of providing a social benefit that justifies its enormous wealth. Its neoliberal ideological fig leaf is slipping. What is now on display is something more primitive and feral: avarice and greed. They do what they do simply because they can. And, they will keep doing it until they are stopped.

Over the past two and a half decades, the poor in privatized urban schools have been successfully harnessed to the delivery of reliable profits to investors and munificent salaries to executives. At the same time, the working class has discovered that schools in their communities often cost more than they can afford to pay. The decades of wage stagnation, unemployment, and tax shifting have taken their toll. Teachers and the unions that had won them the relatively high wages, job security, and benefits that are a distant memory for many blue collar workers became a useful target for the ideologues and politicians pursuing neoliberal reforms.

The neoliberal argument is that public schools cost too much (the largest item in a school budget is for teacher salaries) and performed too poorly to justify the tax dollars they commanded. If "star" teachers could be freed from the union wage scale to earn what they were worth, the resulting competition

would create incentives for better teacher performance. Mediocre teachers would earn less, and low performing teachers would be fired. The mechanism proposed for measuring teacher performance was assessing the performance of their students on standardized tests. So began the policy embrace of “Value Added Assessment” (VAA). In the kind of methodologically sophisticated, intellectually fatuous study that has become all too common, Chetty, Friedman, and Rockoff claim to have found long-term economic benefits for students whose teachers have higher “value added” scores.[22] Their conclusions offer a glimpse at the disconnect between the neoliberal policy and research agenda and the economic reality of working class and impoverished families:

*“Each child would gain approximately \$25,000 in total (undiscounted) lifetime earnings from having this teacher instead of the median teacher. With an annual discount rate of 5%, **the parents of a classroom of average size should be willing to pool resources and pay this teacher approximately \$130,000 (\$4,600 per parent) to stay and teach their children during the next school year** (Emphasis mine).”[23]*

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I live, the median annual household income is \$37,495, for a four-person family the median annual income is \$41,050.[24] What should Milwaukee families do with a recommendation so stunningly obtuse? This is the kind of research that has understandably produced a populist democratic backlash against the unaccountable power, influence, and arrogance of experts. In “Fed’s ‘Gold Standard’ Produces Fool’s Gold” Glass discusses the consequences of “scientific” expertise run amok in education policy making.[25].

By suppressing teacher wages, and reducing their benefits and job security, the privatizing agenda creates space for profits in school budgets, shifting funds to owners. Privatizing “failing” schools rarely delivers the promised school performance gains or saves money. Mathis and Trujillo provide a useful overview of the context, the issues and the results.[26]

The neoliberal reengineering of America’s education system is not a partisan affair. Throughout the Bush and Obama presidencies, the privatization of education continued apace through school “restructuring” and charter “conversions.” In New Orleans, the Hurricane Katrina disaster provided an opportunity to privatize virtually the entire school system by creating a “recovery district.” Many urban superintendents now manage a decentralized system of “portfolio” schools, some privatized and some not.

In many ways, the “liberal” Obama administration was a more aggressive advocate of neoliberal education ideas than the “conservative” Bush administration that it succeeded. Obama’s “Race to the Top” program, for example, put heavy pressure on the states and created financial incentives to create more charter schools and push privatizing initiatives. The election of Donald Trump and his appointment of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary promises to accelerate the privatizing trend. DeVos, the sister of Erik Prince, founder of the notorious private security company Blackwater USA, is an ardent supporter of private school vouchers and charter schools.

After the U.S. Constitution had been drafted, Benjamin Franklin commented that the framers had given Americans a republic, “if you can keep it.” [27] The founders also provided the nation with a deeply democratic ideal of public education. We’re not likely to keep it. In the next decade the distinction between public and private will likely continue to blur, and ever more public tax dollars will be siphoned into private coffers. Public schools will limp along, underfunded and struggling to educate ever larger numbers of students with needs too great to be profitable. Vast amounts of student data will be collected, sliced, diced, and sold for private gain again and again. Technology, marketing, and finance will fill the pockets of a tiny minority, and their well-paid retainers and experts will continue

to obscure this reality. Or, if it can be contrived, they will celebrate the successful exploitation of public resources as the desired and virtuous triumph of talent and “vision.” Entertainments, spectacles, service jobs and manual labor will keep the masses busy and in debt. The “market” will devour partisan politics, fashioning political parties as brands and politicians as ambulatory logos. Everything will be new and nothing will change — until it does.

As Aloe Blacc sings:

...*Whatever you believe it's easy to see*

The whole world's sitting on a ticking bomb...

...*And It's about to explode*[28]

* I would like to thank Barbara Lindquist and Faith Boninger for their generous assistance. Their edits, insights, and thoughtful criticisms have improved this essay immeasurably

Footnotes

- [1] Douglass, F. (1857, August 3). *West India Emancipation*. Address delivered in Canandaigua, New York. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Frederick Douglass Project. Retrieved February 16, 2017.
- [2] Macur, J. (2017, January 16). *Packers Bury the Memories of Playoff Failures*. *New York Times*. Retrieved February 17, 2017.
- [3] Dylan, B. (1965). *Subterranean homesick blues*. (Original lyric: “You don’t need a weatherman / To know which way the wind blows”)
- [4] *The Horace Mann League* (2012, November 19). *Report No. 12 of the Massachusetts School Board* (1848) Horace Mann
- [5] Sheila Dow “*People Have Had Enough of Experts*” Institute for New Economic Thinking, February 6, 2017.
- [6] *The Spectator* (2013, April 8). *Margaret Thatcher in quotes*.
- [7] Roberts, S. (2017, February 9). *Hans Rosling, Swedish Doctor and Pop-Star Statistician, Dies at 68*. *New York Times*.
- [8] Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century* (Arthur Goldhammer, trans.). Cambridge Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University.
Hear Piketty explain his work here: Piketty, T. [The Graduate Center, CUNY]. (2014, April 23). *Capital in the twenty-first Century* [video file].
- [9] Molnar, A. (2000, January 1). *Colonizing our future: The commercial transformation of America's schools*. John Dewey Memorial Lecture, presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved February 15, 2017, from
- [10] Bernays, E. (2005). *Propaganda*. New York: Horace Liveright, p. 9.
- [11] Bernays, E. (2005). *Propaganda*. New York: Horace Liveright, p. 19.
- [12] Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [13] Mondale, W. F. (1984, July 19). *Address accepting the presidential nomination at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco*. The American Presidency Project.
- [14] Berliner, D. C., & Biddle, B. J. (1995). *The manufactured crisis*, New York: Addison-Wesley (Republished by Harper Collins).

- [15] Robinson, P.A. (1988, March 9). *Field of dreams: Based on the novel by W.P. Kinsella*[[script](#)], p. 3.
- [16] Williams, Joan C., [What So Many People Don't Get About the U.S. Working Class](#), Harvard Business Review, November 10, 2016.
- [17] Neumeier, E. & Miner, M. (1986, June 10). *Robocop: The future of law enforcement* [[script](#)], p. 2.
- [18] Baker, B. & Miron, G. (2015). [The Business of Charter Schooling: Understanding the Policies that Charter Operators Use for Financial Benefit](#). Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.
- [19] Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education* (Chapter 10). New York: Basic Books.
- [20] The National Education Policy Center at the [University of Colorado Boulder Think Tank Review Project](#) has, since 2006, commissioned and published 96 third-party expert reviews of research published by think tanks related to the topics of value added assessment (7), virtual schools (7), privatization (11), charter schools (45), and vouchers (26). The expert reviewers in virtually every instance concluded that the research they reviewed offered little or no support for the claims made for these reforms.
- [21] Goodman, P.S. (2017, January 18). [Davos elite fret about inequality over vintage wine and canapés](#). New York Times.
- [22] Chetty, R., Friedman, J.N., Rockoff, J.E. (2011, December). [The long-term impacts of teachers: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood](#). National Bureau of Economic Research. Find an analysis of the work [here](#)
- [23] Chetty, R., Friedman, J.N., Rockoff, J.E. (2011, December). [The long-term impacts of teachers: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood](#), p. 51. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- [24] Advameg, Inc. (2017). [Milwaukee, Wisconsin \(WI\) income map, earnings map, and wages data](#). City-Data.com.
- [25] Glass, Gene V (2017, February 17). [“Fed’s Gold Standard Produces Fool’s Gold.”](#)
- [26] Mathis, W. J. & Trujillo, T.M. (2016). *Learning from the federal market-based reforms: Lessons for ESSA*. Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing.
- [27] McManus, J.F. (2000, November 6). [“A Republic, if You Can Keep It.”](#) *New American*.
- [28] Blacc, Aloe [AloeBlaccVEVO] (2013, November 6). Aloe Blacc - Ticking Bomb [[video file](#)].