



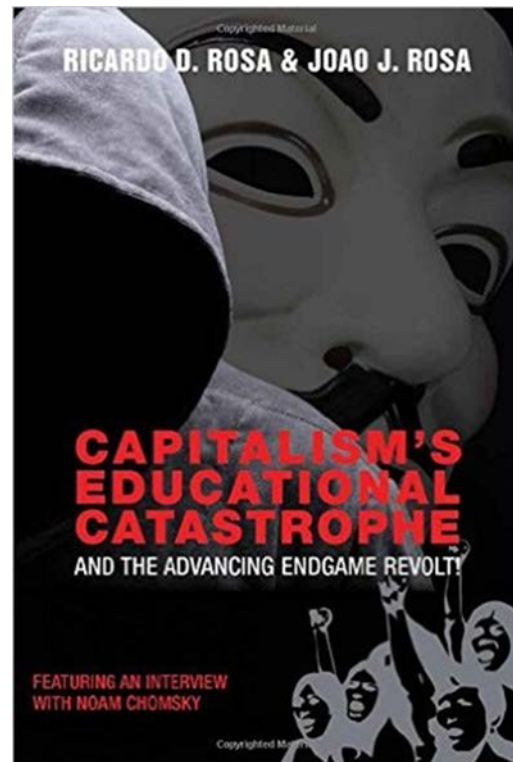
**Rosa, R.D. and Rosa, J. J. (2015). *Capitalism's education catastrophe: And the advancing endgame revolt!* New York, NY: Peter Lang.**

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Anyone that has spent any time in the education field over the last couple of decades has experienced the frustration of an increasing standardization movement and a corporatized model of schooling. Rosa and Rosa elucidate the impacts of neoliberalism on education and further indicate the interdependency of neoliberal capitalism, racialization, and classism. The authors ask an important question in their introduction: “how are we to construct a society that is anchored to both a politics of social, economic, and political equality and the normalization of a perpetual analysis of the lived realities of those who bear the greatest social cost?” (p. 3). The purpose of schools has been consistently structured around the interests of the dominant classes, and with neoliberalism, this trend continues. Rosa and Rosa offer up a voice of revolt and a spirit of



activism to counter and trouble the trends of neoliberalism. Their work is both a sobering polemic and a timely call to action for public education advocates and activists.

The opening chapter sets the stage for the authors' arguments concerning the "neoliberal nightmare" that has been unleashed upon Western society. Rosa and Rosa utilize their first chapter to define neoliberalism and to peel back the layers of this rotten onion in order to help their readers understand how the tentacles of neoliberalism infiltrate not only education, but also other public institutions. Neoliberalism acts as a commodifier of all things public and private. When examined from a Marxian theoretical perspective, neoliberalism robs the remaining surplus-value of labor from workers while at the same time privatizing all aspects of the public and the social good. This process further increases and intensifies classism and racialization. Education activists must understand that a different reality is possible when societal forces, especially critical educators, combine with a grassroots resistance movement to counter the dominant narratives and discourses of neoliberals and neoconservatives.

However, countering neoliberalism involves more than a grassroots movement to take back public education from the hands of neoliberals; it also involves a larger movement to resist unhinged, rampant, and unaccountability of capitalism. Rosa and Rosa offer up possibilities and examples of efforts to create alternative educational spaces free from the ravaging nature of neoliberal agents. As mentioned in the first chapter, "public education must be theorized to include those spaces and places outside of normative schooling capable of engendering creative interior/exterior tensions, particularly at a time when authoritarian tendencies and acquiescence run so deep in institutions" (p. 13). The clarion call for critical educators involves moving beyond a discourse of resignation, compliance, defeatism, and pessimism, and to work creatively and

aggressively with other educators to form grassroots movements and therefore, keeping the public in public education. The taking back of schools from corporatized models of over-standardization, hyper-testing, accountability, and efficiency must be accomplished in order to democratize the educational process.

A recurring theme in Rosa and Rosa's polemic is that the relentless march of capitalism to pursue expanding markets creates further traction for neoliberals in the public sphere and increases the level of corporatized colonization of society. As the authors point out, "the invasion of neoliberalism has meant a re-articulation of the social contract in favor of wanton privatization of all social fields" (p. 38). Examples of the invading, colonizing effect of neoliberalism include the exemplars of Chile and the Republic of Cape Verde. Both locations of neoliberal colonization have gone unnoticed to many except those in governments and in academia. As the authors point out, the neoliberal projects in South America and Africa have led to a "whitewashing" of education promoting the supremacy of the efforts of capitalism and the bourgeois elite. I would further add that a comparison can be made to the corporatized take-over and colonization of education in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Schools have consistently been utilized as a mode of propagating the dominant discourse in society and have been utilized to inculcate youth with the narratives supporting and maintaining the dominant political ideology. Schools have also reinforced classism, especially in areas such as South America and Africa where class position is both a barrier and an opportunity for education. Just as education is utilized to inculcate youth to the dominant regimes in colonization, it can also be used to inculcate youth into consumerism and unfettered capitalism. In essence, purveyors of neoliberalism utilize educational structures to

re-engineer society in their image, utilizing ideological infused language to secure the discourse and narratives utilized by the next generation. As the second chapter closes, the authors discuss the importance of embracing a critical pedagogical practice that allows students to examine the nature of their own realities in relation to the broader social-political-economic situations that surround them. This can only occur by silencing the neoliberal hijacking of curriculum and embracing a more democratic mode of critical pedagogy that allows students to explore, unfettered, the nature of their realities – much like the goal of the social Reconstructionists.

The authors discuss performance contracting as an anti-democratic backlash against the New Left during the 1970s. Performance contracting, in simple terms, is the contracting out of educational services to private entities for the purpose of increasing educational performance, usually in terms of higher test scores, while also re-engineering hegemony to deter any significant decision making powers on the part of the public. Rosa and Rosa propose, and I believe it to be an accurate assessment, that “performance contracting...was and remains one of the principal neoliberal illusions designed to deter democracy by keeping the public in the role of spectator” (p. 59). Stemming from the performance contract movement are multiple avenues that neoliberal and neoconservative organizations utilize to impose their will on public education. Organizations such as the Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation have supported charter schools, vouchers, and influenced resources and activities such as the practice of choice embedded within Supplemental Educational Services (SES). The authors discuss the hidden markets and agendas within education and keep a critical eye on the flow of money and what agendas are tied to that flow of money. Neoliberals continue to look at education as a relatively untapped multi-million dollar market of profit potential.

Rosa and Rosa utilize multiple resources and critical discourse analysis to examine SES in terms of “its interactional, communicative, and broader historical, social, political, economic contexts” ultimately determining that throughout its history, SES has been detrimental to the “ascendency of democratic and vibrant public schools, as it further exacerbates institutionalized structural inequalities, and it limits social change by attempting to manufacture passive atomistic individuals” (p. 61). Rosa and Rosa locate the origins of performance contracting to the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1970 where an experiment was conducted with eighteen school districts and entitled the Performance Contracting Experiment. The authors point out that at the end of this experiment, which cost millions of dollars, the private companies’ performance was no better than public schools in improving student performance. Their book includes an examination of how SES is connected to the larger socio-political conservative agenda that seems to espouse educational equality. However, as the authors have noted, SES and related programs have only further exacerbated educational inequalities and continued to stratify society by class and race. The larger take-away from the analysis offered by Rosa and Rosa is that current educational policy discourse espouses the idea of “compassionate capitalism” while at the same time utilizing the neoliberal language of accountability, efficiency, and choice as a way to create equitable education opportunities. As indicated in this book, it has only expanded inequalities within public education.

Utilizing multiple examples of people and spaces, the authors show that corporatized schooling models are further hindering subordinated classes and races from being successful and from having equal access to democratic public education. Rosa and Rosa expose the hypocrisy of neoliberal models in schooling and how “those in subordinate positions in society” are inordinately affected by “the workings of

power” and that those workings of power are evident in the practices of education (p. 98). What is more disturbing is that the workings of power are usually ignored by the dominant social class or race. Seldom are the culturally privileged forced to examine their position in comparison to the subordinate class or race, which leads to a perverted sense of some order that is accepted as natural. It is the job of educators and scholars to problematize this vision of society and to expose how conservative agendas have expanded class divisions and continue to disenfranchise and marginalize subordinated groups. Rosa and Rosa discuss how manifestations of this marginalization can often be seen in urban violence where a deep seated rage exists over the institutional racism and classism that is embedded within schooling and exacerbated by neoliberal models of education reform.

Their book culminates with dialogues from community organizers and activists working to counter the neoliberal dismantling of democratic schooling. These dialogues

specifically speak this volume’s intended audience: teacher activists, community activists and organizers, parents, and scholars interested in problematizing the corporatized take-over of public schooling. How can we counter and circumvent over-standardization, hyper-testing, the marginalization of students, and the assault on public education? Above anything else, this book underscores how neoliberal and neoconservative agendas work from positions of power and that a grassroots form of activism designed to counter this system is required. Across the country, we are beginning to witness movements to resist testing and over-standardization by teachers’ unions, coalitions of teachers and parents, and community activists. Rosa and Rosa provide a well-written, concise explanation of how public education has arrived at this tumultuous point. Their work not only contributes to the dialogue of resistance, but also to a broader examination of the history of education and education policy.

### **About the Reviewer**

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Jamie taught business education and science primarily in the high school setting for ten years. He holds a master’s degree in science education from the University of Georgia and a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Georgia Southern University. He is currently working on his doctorate degree at the University of Georgia and serves as a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice. Jamie’s emphasis area is in critical studies and he has interests in examining the broader impacts of conservative ideologies on educational policy throughout the history of education. He is also interested in enacting spaces that foster teacher solidarity and activism as well as battling racism and classism.



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