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A primer is an introduction to and foundation for a larger conversation, a place to begin critical investigation. In *Philanthropy, Hidden Strategy, and Collective Resistance: A Primer for Concerned Educators*, authors deMarrais and colleagues offer a point of entry for understanding how philanthropic persons have systematically created a foundation to influence education politics and policy to benefit their self-interest. The authors use historical timelines and case studies to highlight important individuals and groups that have helped shape the narrative for the need for education reform. They make an explicit link between the political strategies set forth in the 1960s, the funding that supported these strategies, and how that investment in those strategies has influenced politics and policy of education. Furthermore, the authors center neoliberalism (e.g., market-driven policies) and conservatism as the driving forces behind the education reform movement.

PHILANTHROPY, HIDDEN STRATEGY, AND COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

A Primer for Concerned Educators

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The text begins with a discussion of neoliberalism and conservatism, grounding the text in these ideological traditions. The authors then provide a chapter-by-chapter discussion of the multi-levelled approach to the dismantling of public education. The book concludes on a more positive note with evidence of community-centered education philanthropy and a discussion of additional resources and ideas for collective action and resistance. Each chapter, except the first, offers practical suggestions for collective action to help bring attention to and possibly thwart the neoliberal dismantling of public education. The book is centered around three interrelated themes: ideology, foundation, and multiplicity. The authors weave a narrative that incorporates one or more of the themes to guide the reader towards an understanding of the depths and severity of the problems at hand.

The theme of ideology is central to the book, as noted specifically in chapter one and referenced *ad nauseum* throughout the book. As noted, neoliberalism is a market-based ideology grounded in capitalist ideals. The authors focus on the tenets of neoliberalism broadly and show how these tenets impacted, and continue to impact, the education reform movement. Specifically, it is made clear that “capitalism defines all aspects of everyday life, including education” (p. 3). Ideology also appears in discussions of individualism and meritocracy, both of which are fundamental to the neoliberal ideological assumptions of the American dream. This ideological framing is used by both conservatives and liberals in the justification of education reform, particularly in the K-12 school system. The justification for vouchers and school choice is rooted in individualism. For liberal-leaning individuals interested in public education, this reality is important to understand. The authors make it plain that some left-leaning individuals have bought into the ideology that, first, the public school system is failing, and second, that market-driven reforms based on meritocracy

and individualism are the solution to education reform. The book makes it plain that liberal-leaning individuals and organizations have taken the easy way out in the efforts to equitably support public education.

Conservatism as ideology is also central to the book. While neoliberalism centers capitalism, conservatism centers nationalism, and as such, the tenets of nationalism (adherence to morality and tradition). In general, ideology is also seen in the discussion of the strict adherence to the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, with an underlying conservative implication that strict adherence occurs only when it benefits the tenets of conservatism. The authors also highlight ideology in their discussion of Myrdal’s “American Creed,” providing evidence that they, too, believe in the “ideals of liberty, justice, and equality” as an assertion of American ideology and custom. Furthermore, additional evidence is provided in the discussion of the Jeffersonian principles promoted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) as well as the assumptions of capitalism as the American system of government and business.

The theme of foundation is also central to this text. In multiple chapters, the authors make it clear that the foundation for the agenda of the education reform movement is grounded in neoliberal and conservative ideologies. The agenda, according to the authors, started with the Powell Manifesto (a foundational document from the 1970s), a centralized and foundational purpose, and a foundation of consistent donors that believed in the purpose. As an example, the authors note that the coordinated and systematic process by which the agenda was established laid a foundation. Additionally, the theme of foundation comes to light in the multiple discussions of resources. The authors make specific note that resources, particularly monetary donations, were and are continuously targeted to create and support an infrastructure that leads to coordinated efforts

to influence policy at the local, state, and national levels.

The authors discuss these foundational measures through an examination of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the philanthropic efforts of the Koch Foundation on college campuses. ALEC is the foundation or base of conservative state legislative change. Furthermore, ALEC provides the infrastructure where members draft plug-n-play conservative legislation that can be introduced seamlessly in any state as if state legislators were ordering their legislation from a menu. The establishment of ALEC was ingenious, as it centralized and coordinated the efforts of the conservative movement. It also provided conservative philanthropic foundations a one-stop-shop through which to direct resources that could influence policy in state governments. On college campuses, the theme of foundation is exemplified with the establishment of research centers, places of legitimacy for the agenda. Resources are used to establish footholds on college campuses in the form of research centers, fund graduate student education, and support undergraduate student conservative organizations. The research centers, in turn, provide a foundation for legitimization.

The foundational elements of the agenda are consistently supported with capital resources. All the while, the foundational message, grounded in neoliberal and conservative ideologies, is consistently spread through multiple media outlets, including social media.

The last theme discussed here is the idea of multiple, or multiplicity. In this case, multiple refers to the diversification of people, places, and things that made up the discussed strategies. The authors organize the book according to multiple levels, mirroring how the education reform agenda is implemented. From individuals to state legislatures to the Supreme Court, the agenda is implemented at multiple levels where it can be influenced.

Furthermore, the concept of multiplicity is inherent in how the strategy was tiered. The authors made it evident that systematic organization at multiple levels was necessary for long-standing and sustained change. Multiple actors and foundations, situated in multiple spaces, from the federal government to state governments to philanthropic foundations that support education reform, support the cause, through multiple forms of communication.

Additionally, there are also multiple entry points of implementation of the agenda. For example, consider college campuses. The authors point out how the Koch brothers gain access to college administrators with their direct philanthropy, fund research centers that support professors and graduate students, and also fund conservative undergraduate student organizations through their affiliation with Turning Point USA. There are also multiple higher education institutions that have received Koch money, with approximately 10% of all higher education institutions receiving money. In addition to the multiple levels of access and influence within a university, monies donated to institutions may contain multiple stipulations in order to receive the money. Research and policy briefs from faculty research centers that are legitimized by being on college campuses, messages pushed out by groups like Turning Point USA, conservative television and radio, and social media are all used. The college campus is but one example of how the strategy for education reform is executed at multiple levels and disseminated by multiple sources.

For the good that deMarrais and colleagues do, this text is not above critique. The authors critically examine neoliberalism but focus on income inequality and the impact on the poor. Given the structure of neoliberal ideology in the U.S. context, one could question, is neoliberalism inherently anti-Black? The authors had numerous opportunities to address critically the

systematic impact of neoliberalism on all members of marginalized communities, not just the poor. In chapter 1, they miss the chance to engage with neoliberalism, the ideals of a strong state, and the whiteness of American imperialism. In chapter 4, the authors argue that democracy in the United States relies on belief in a system, the “ideals of liberty, justice, and equality” (p. 126) but fail to critique the foundation on which the belief was created. This could have been a place to engage with additional critical theories that center race and class in understanding the nuances of systems (see Dixson & Rousseau-Anderson, 2016; Feagin, 2013). Furthermore, the call for thinking and civic courage lacks teeth without a discussion of the history of racism in the United States. For example, in chapter 7, the authors focus on income inequality without discussing the systemic racism embedded in the education system. A critical race lens could provide a more nuanced explanation as to why the left-leaning organizations share a bed with ALEC and the Koch Foundation.

For those concerned about public education, the text provides a foundation for understanding how philanthropists have and continue to influence education policy. Furthermore, this text shines a spotlight on the systematic undergirding of the political right, steeped in a history of neoliberal rhetoric and policy making. The education philanthropy literature has focused on the relative impact of philanthropy in K-12 education (Hess, 2005), the history of philanthropy in education (Sears, 1990; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014), and, relatively recently, the influence of venture philanthropy in education (Hess & Henig, 2015; Saltman, 2009, 2020; Zeichner & Pena-Sandoval, 2015). The work of these authors enters this conversation by centering neoliberal ideology

as the foundation on which the political right has worked to influence public education and define the education reform movement. The political right are ruthless and organized, are in it for the long game, and are anti-poor and anti-Black.

The focus on infrastructure has provided long-term stability and the ability to influence multiple levels of policy in ways that have long-standing impacts. And the ideological impact started with and ends with substantial investments. On the other hand, the political and ideological left are less organized, in general, compared to the political right. Instead of funding infrastructure, left-leaning philanthropic organizations fund projects. Instead of driving or supporting policy that strengthens public education, foundations like Broad and Gates are less organized as they fund neoliberally ideological improvement projects (e.g., market-driven reforms). What could happen if this group of philanthropists took the lead from their political counterparts on the right and support efforts and build infrastructure that reinforces the values of public education? Maybe philanthropies like foundry10 that work directly with teachers, schools, and districts to fund and support community-centered projects could provide a model to follow while also building collective resistance against those that push neoliberal ideologies in education.

Philanthropy, Hidden Strategies, and Collective Resistance draws attention to the decades-long campaign of the political right to shape education through a neoliberal ideology and the philanthropic entities that funded it. In doing so, deMarras and co-authors add to the conversation on venture philanthropy in education, placing the political right at the center of the education reform movement while not absolving the political left of their complicity and dereliction of duty.

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