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IMPLEMENTING NEOLIBERAL IDEAS: NEW ORLEANS EDUCATIONAL REFORM FOLLOWING KATRINA

Marijana Musladin – Monika Cverlin*

ABSTRACT

After the hurricane Katrina, New Orleans schools went through a major change in education. Seeing catastrophe as a mean to reshape education, the neoliberal think tanks used hurricane Katrina to implement neoliberal ideas in a form of charter schools and vouchers. This article dealt with the theory of neoliberalism and its educational reform which was implemented after Katrina. It has also summarized the timeline of the implementation of the reform in USA system. The goal of the article was to indicate the rigorous change of the expansion of the charter schools, together with vouchers, in New Orleans right after hurricane Katrina. By analysing previous literature and data by the various authors, it was argued that the sudden change in schooling was not accepted positively by the people (especially low-income families) of New Orleans, who were struggling with the major catastrophe on their own and that community, especially Africa-American, suffered most from it.

Key words: neoliberalism, educational reform, New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina, African-American

Introduction

Education was always rather interesting topic in U.S. where, according to the research conducted by The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, parents and private foundations spend more money than other developed nations on its students' education each year (OECD, 2013). In New Orleans, however, public schools were a main source of education before

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hurricane Katrina.¹After disaster, neoliberal right think-tanks representatives such as **Richard Baker**, declared: “*We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did.*” Also **Mike Pence**, who was the chairman of Republican Study Committee, just 15 days after Katrina, came with the list of “Pro-Free-Market Ideas for Responding to Hurricane Katrina and High Gas Prices” (Klein, 2017). **Cecil Picard**, Louisiana State superintendent, said that it was once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and called it “*the silver lining in the storm clouds.*” (Saltman, 2008, pp. 12) **Naomi Klein** used the term “*the shock doctrine*” to describe this tactic of using public disasters to push radical ideas. (Klein, 2008) Not only her, but also **J.Akers** (2012) said that opening of public education to the market has left the residents of New Orleans separate and unequal.

The subject matter of this article is the implementation of neoliberal policies in the education system in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina. Our main research question is whether the neoliberal policy which was mainly conducted via charter schools, standardized testing and vouchers was positively accepted by community of people and teachers in New Orleans who were most affected by the hurricane Katrina. Using scientific inductive research and by analysing books by various authors (Saltman, 2007), (Hursh, 2007), (Klein, 2008) (Lipman, 2004), documents, archive records and interviews we will research the case of New Orleans and try to establish whether the sudden neoliberal educational reform implemented in New Orleans after Katrina made African-American residents unequal. The first part of the paper consists of theory and brief history of Neoliberalism and continues to introduce the history of neoliberal educational reform and the main ideas behind it. Second part of the paper deals with the case of New Orleans where the effects of charter schools and vouchers will be analysed, making the point that this kind of reform is not something that students, parents and all teaching community should look up to.

1 Neoliberalism- short introduction

Neoliberalism² has a broad number of definitions. Since it was it open, plural

¹ Hurricane Katrina was a deadly tropical, category 5 cyclone that struck the Gulf Coast in August, 2005. The hurricane took more than 1,800 lives, and it ranked as the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history. (Britannica, 2008)

² It was founded 1930s by society called Mont Pèlerin (MPS). Everything started with Lippmann's book Good Society, where French philosopher Louis Rougier organized a meeting titled Walter Lippmann Colloquium (WLC) discussing the neoliberal ideas. It celebrated liberalism and rejected

and adjustable from the beginning (Lovačić, 2014) it's not easy to determine one single definition. For some, neoliberalism is a broad and general concept that manifests itself as a set of public policies in D-L-P formula: **Deregulation** (of the economy), **Liberalization** (of trade and industry) and **Privatization** (of state owned enterprises). These policies include big tax cuts; reduction of social service and welfare programs; the downsizing of government; removal of controls on global financial and trade flows; regional and global integration of national economies; and creations of new political institutions and practices to recreate the neoliberal paradigm. (Steger, Manfred, 2010). Even though the concept suggests its own definition, i.e. neoliberalism as a modified liberalism, some authors, like **Thorsen and Lie** (2016) claim that neoliberalism is not a recent revival of liberalism. For the Oxford English Dictionary (1989), liberalism³

socialism, fascism and conservatism. Economic leaders such as the Nobel Peace Prize winner Friedrich von Hayek, the first general secretary of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation Roberto Marjolina, De Gaulle's financial adviser Jacques Rueff, Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises, Wilhelm Ropke and many others attended the meeting. (Cverlin, 2017) Their fundamental agenda was that „only the mechanism by which prices are determined by the free market allows the optimal organization of the means of production and leads to the maximal satisfaction of human needs.“ (Memehunter, 2012) The WLC Society led to the creation of a "Society for the Restoration of Liberalism" which, after the war, was defeated and in 1947 under the leadership of Von Hayek, Misa and Ropke, MPS was formed (Memehunter, 2012). One of the most famous members of MPS was Milton Friedman. After World War II, the world needed new economic order, and the leaders agreed on the Keynesian system. Although it was successful for whole 20 years, in 1970s there was an oil crisis and the neoliberalists found its way to enter in system. Stiglitz (2010) mentioned in his work Kindleberger's statement that in 400 years, economic crisis performed every ten years, except in years after Second World War. Still, oil crisis was a tool for neoliberal ideas to enter in the system. After this, global institutions were using neoliberal politics

³ Ryan was writing about how liberalism has become a nebulous concept where authors are facing with questions whether they are dealing with liberalism or liberalisms. He said that different liberal parties, politicians and political philosophers have often put forward differing opinions of what the 'true' meaning of liberalism actually is. One frequent separation is a classical and modern liberalism. (Thorsen, 2009) For classical liberalism, role of state is minimal which means that practically everything except armed forces, law enforcement and other 'non-excludable goods' ought to be left to the unregulated dealings of its citizens, and the organizations and corporations they spontaneously choose to establish and take part in. They also favor laissez-faire economic policies, whereas modern liberalism is characterized by a willingness to let the state become an active participant in the economy. This has often issued in a pronounced tendency to regulate the marketplace, and to have the state supply essential goods and services to everyone. With that, 'classical' or 'economic' liberals favor laissez-faire economic policies because it is thought that they lead to more freedom or real democracy, modern liberals tend to claim that this analysis is

is a political ideology which is “favourable to constitutional changes and legal or administrative reforms tending in the direction of freedom or democracy”. The same dictionary describes also neoliberalism, which is said to be “a modified or revived form of traditional liberalism, especially one based on belief in free market capitalism and the rights of the individual” (in Thorsen, 2009, pp. 3) It is the fact that no one is against freedom or democracy which are, by the definition, the main values for the liberalism, therefore neoliberalism can hardly be identified as a recovery of the lost tradition. (Thorsen, 2009, pp. 4) For **David Harvey** (2005) neoliberalism is a political economic practice that suggests that human well-being can best progress by liberating entrepreneurial freedom and skills inside an institutional framework, characterized by free markets and free trade. It could be argued that there is a mixture of terms while trying to define it, but as **Saad-Filho** and **Johnston** stated, “it’s impossible to define neoliberalism purely theoretically” (Thorsen, 2009, pp. 8)

1.1 Neoliberal ideas in education

How does education relate with neoliberalism? As **Hill** said: “*education as a social institution has been subordinated to international market goals.*” In neoliberalism, the language of education has been replaced by the language of the market, where lecturers “deliver the product”, within a regime of “quality management and enhancement,” where students have become “customers” and “skill development” at universities has become more important than the development of critical thought. (Hill, 2012) Education was a means to create an effective labour force and the easiest way to do so was to privatize schools. **Milton Friedman**, one of the biggest neoliberal advocates criticized education and said that *educational system needs to be radically reconstructed.* (Friedman, 1995, pp.339) He also stated that because of nationalization good schools are in high-income neighbourhoods, which poor cannot afford. De-nationalization, on the other hand, is preferable because:

- parents will take their children to schools of their choice;
- it equalizes the social and private costs of having children, therefore promotes better distribution of family sizes;
- reduces possibility of government administrating schools. (Friedman, 1962)

inadequate and misleading, and that the state must play a significant role in the economy. (Thorsen, 2009, pp. 5-6)

De-nationalization is often seen as charter school reform where the “strongest” charter laws are those that assure maximum deregulation (e.g., blanket exceptions to state laws and local policies), allow private and for-profit schools to become charters, and call for multiple charter-granting agencies (Wells, Slayton and Scott, 2002). With de-nationalization, one of the ways to make transition easier was through vouchers. They are means used to finance private education and use the public money to pay for private schools. „*Vouchers are not an end in themselves; they are a means to make a transition from a government to market system.*“ (Friedman 1995, 344) On the other hand, according to **Saltman** (2007), making parents to “shop” for school will take federal resources away from public school most in need of them:

- vouchers have been used to maintain or worsen racial segregation,
- vouchers undermine universal public schooling by redefining a public good as a private commodity
- vouchers undermine the constitutional separation of church and state

Pastrana saw two categories as concepts used to promote and legitimate neoliberal reform:

- Economic concern: “efficiency/decentralization” (linked to privatization as an option to attain efficiency), “accountability” (most easily tracked using standardized measures of ‘excellence’), and “competition” (linked in interesting ways to the following point, but using market means with which to achieve desired results).
- Public or popular concern: Often articulated in terms of individual rights, and/or freedom to choose and control private interests, i.e., „local control,” “choice,” etc. Within the scope of these concepts, economic reforms such as excellence through competition, and the power of choice in the free market, have found fertile ground in their translation into the realm of education. (Pastrana, 2008, pp. 92)

In the words of **Giroux** :“*At the level of policy, the assault is driven by an aggressive attempt to disinvest in public schools, replace them with charter schools, and remove state and federal governments completely from public education in order to allow education to be organized and administered by a variety of privatizing, market-driven forces and for-profit corporations*”(2014, pp. 8).

2 USA, the rise of neoliberalism and educational reform

During Great Depression president **Roosevelt** implemented government spending and welfare policies to rebuild the country. He called for a Second Bill of rights and argued that the freedom demanded individuals to be provided with basic human needs such as useful jobs, a decent home, medical care, good education and social security. Post-War decades were a compromise between capital and labour, but due to the deficit spending by general government, corporate profits began to fall. Wanting to restore higher rates of profit, USA implemented neoliberal policies which supported corporations over workers. (Hursh, 2007) With **Ronald Reagan** on a power, neoliberal ideas spread. Reagan's 1981 Program for Economic Recovery which had four major policy objectives: (1) *reduce the growth of government spending*, (2) *reduce the marginal tax rates on income from both labour and capital*, (3) *reduce regulation*, and (4) *reduce inflation by controlling the growth of the money supply*. These major policy changes, in turn, were expected to *increase saving and investment, increase economic growth, balance the budget, restore healthy financial markets, and reduce inflation and interest rates* (Niskanen, 1981). This program brought a change. Part of that change was the Economic Recovery Tax Act,⁴ where, according to the report (Toder et.al., 1986), the benefits from the major changes in the definition of the tax base went primarily to taxpayers in the upper part of the income distribution. When level and distribution of income was measured in 1983, the relative position of taxpayers in the bottom half of the income distribution worsened between 1980 and 1983, while the position of taxpayers in the top 1 percent of the income distribution improved the most. For neoliberal thinkers, ideas like deregulation, decentralization and privatization should be integrated in society. Therefore, education would be the first step in achieving them.

For **Paulinne Lipman** (2011) neoliberalization of public education is also ideological project which redefines the purpose of education and what means to teach and learn. In neoliberal framework, teaching is driven by standardized tests and performance outcome. Education, which should be public good, transforms into a private good. The criticism of educational system in USA

⁴ Congress lowered the top marginal tax rate on individual income from 70 to 50 percent, reduced other marginal tax rates by 23 percent over a three-year period, and enacted a number of other provisions that reduced individual tax payments and lowered taxes on the business income of both individuals and corporations. (Toder et.al, 1986)

began with the report of Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education conducted in 1983 called *Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. It proclaimed that K-12⁵ U.S. educational achievement was descending and that American technological and economical domination was compromised. The report further claimed that only by elevating education achievement could the United States avoid subordinating itself to its educational superiors and economic competitors (Guthrie and Springer, 2004). Report also used market language (e.g., terms such as efficiency, performance, accountability, and choice) (Klaw and Kwan, 2010). It was interesting how president **Reagan** campaigned for the presidency in 1980 with favouritism of legislation that would provide vouchers and tax subsidies for parents who wanted to remove their children from public schools and place them in private schools, but named **Terrel Bell** to be Secretary of Education, who, although republican, was a strong believer in public education. A report intended to promote an anti-public education agenda. Instead, it embraced the role of public education but declared the present system a failure (Guthrie and Springer, 2004). Recent decades have seen a shift in American educational policy, away from a unified public school system, particularly in urban school districts. Education as a public good has fallen within the realm of more complex public/private partnerships and relationships, with new interests and individuals having a bigger role and more power within the public education landscape (Beselovic, 2014). Those ideas were described in the educational reform signed by President **George W. Bush** on 2002 called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Hursh, 2007). It increased the federal role in holding schools responsible for the academic progress of all students. Its definition states that it puts a focus on ensuring that states and schools boost the performance of certain groups of students, such as English-language learners, students in special education, and poor and minority children, whose achievement, on average, trails their peers. Under the NCLB law, states must test students in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. They had to report the results, for the student population as a whole and for particular "subgroups" of students, including English-learners and students in special education, racial minorities, and children from low-income families (Klein 2015). In Educational reform stated that objective of NCLB was to improve the quality of education for all students and to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged/minority students. It

⁵ Primary and secondary education in USA.

had four main elements: (1) stronger accountability for results, (2) expanded flexibility and local control, (3) expanded options for parents, and (4) an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (Klaf and Kwan, 2010). NCLB intentions were to heighten local control by providing greater flexibility at state and local levels. Both states and local school districts got more flexibility in allocating their federal funds to intervene in schools needing improvement. Districts and schools were supposed to utilize effective teaching methods that are “scientifically proven” and employ “highly qualified” teachers. If some schools did not perform well, they would be identified as in “need of improvement”. That only meant more options which included: public school choice, allowing students to transfer to better-performing public or charter schools; supplemental educational services, including tutoring, after school services, and summer school programs; and charter schools, giving parents, educators, and interested community leaders greater opportunities to create new charter schools (Klaf and Kwan, 2010).

Did this Act actually improve education? **Hursh** (2007) stated it did not improve students’ learning and it did not close the achievement gap. He gave example on “Living Environments” exam where students only needed 39% of correct answers to earn 55% passing grade. Also, The June 2003 Regents “Math A” exam was so badly constructed that it had to be cancelled. Only 37% of the students passed it (Hursh, 2007). The teachers in schools are forced to prepare students not to develop critical literacy but to teach them the skills that will be tested. In her work, **Lipman** (2004, pp. 109) cited **Freire** who described “*critical literacy as a process, a set of cultural practices toward liberation. For Freire, literacy never is limited to simply decoding text (reading the word, in his terms) but implies a deep understanding of the social, political, historical, cultural, and economic reality of the reader (reading the world).*” She also documented on how is the only goal to prepare and improve test scores. One of the teachers said that classroom is a place where you get better test scores, you learn to get better test scores instead of learning. “*I have seen children who used to just love learning, love reading, love dance, love science and math run up to me now and they are in 5th and 6th grade and say “I got better test scores.” And that is the first thing out of their mouth and I will say, “Are you feeling smarter these days? Have you read any good books lately? What have you done in your community to improve things? Do you have any new goals in your life?” They sort of look at me, “wow nobody has asked me that in a long time or nobody has talked about that or focused on that in a long time.*”(Lipman,

2004, pp. 81) Also, one of the controversies with these tests is while pressuring to raise test scores, they force weak students out. **Haney** made a study about education in Texas and New York and came to conclusion that in Texas in 1996-97 only 57.57% African American and 52.11% of Hispanic American retained in 9th grade and in New York dropouts have increased from 7,2% in 1996 to 9,2% in 2001(Hursh, 2007). Also, another study has been done in New York where students were pushed out of New York City's school system and classified under bureaucratic categories that hide their failure to graduate. According to a report by Hyman's group and the city's public advocate, using statistics reported to the city by each high school, the New York City schools discharged more than 55,000 high school students during the school year 2000/2001, which was far higher than that year's graduating class of fewer than 34,000. (Levin, Medina, 2003) Study made by researchers at Boston College (Haney et.al, 2004) suggested that state policies that require schools to retain students in grade or deny them high school diplomas on the basis of test scores alone are likely to drop out before graduating (Orfield, Lossen and Wald, 2004).

NCLB reform claimed that standardized tests and privatized education would increase student's abilities and close the achievement gap between students, but as shown, that's not the case. The point of the education should not be about boosting the numbers, but helping a young person to think critically. The quality of reform should not be measured with the proficiency of the tests, as **Jennings and Sohn** (2014, pp. 126) declared: „*Students', teachers', schools', and parents' future educational decisions may be affected by high-stakes test scores, and policy makers may use these data to shape and legitimate future educational policies.*“ These strategies - from vouchers, charter and experimental schools had to increase the number of assessments they administer and were penalized or rewarded according to student performance (Brathwaite, 2016). For **Saltman** (2007, pp. 146) “*this neoliberal view of education dangerously eradicates the role of democratic participation and the role of public schools in preparing public democratic citizens with the intellectual and critical tools for meaningful and participatory self-governance.*”

3 New Orleans- Educational reform aftermath hurricane Katrina

Situation with the public schools in New Orleans was not thrilling. The state legislature took actions in 2003 to gain more control over Orleans Parish School

Board (OPSB). Mandated by NCLB, Louisiana monitored public schools' achievement with standardized tests, student attendance and dropout rates. The results were not satisfying. 47% were rated academically unacceptable and 70% of Louisiana's seventy-nine academically unacceptable schools were in New Orleans (Burns, Thomas, 2016). All of those problems lead to the creation of Louisiana Legislative Act 9 (LA 9) in 2003. They established Recovery School District (RSD), state-run school district that would take over failed schools⁶ (Dixson, 2011). From that moment, New Orleans public schools were governed by OPSB and RSD. In the 2004/2005 school year, NOPSs ranked 67th out of 68 Louisiana districts in math and reading test scores. The graduation rate was 56%, at least 10% points below the state average (Harris, 2015). **Saltman** (2007) also said that The New Orleans public schools were considered the most neglected in U.S., suffering from dilapidated buildings, insufficient resources, fatal poverty with deferred maintenance of jobs, health care and public and private services. In 2004, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued indictments against 11 people for criminal offenses against the district related to financial mismanagement. This combined with the socioeconomic background of city residents-contributed to the poor academic results. Spending per-pupil in New Orleans as of 1997 was 26% below the national average (Harris, 2015). **Lipman** described that because of the bad situation students from public schools had to bring their own supplies to school (2004). It was obvious that the program needed a change. After the election of reformers to the school board in 2004, the OPSB gave financial control to private actors. New board indicated that New Orleans voters endorsed change and provided local support for the transformation of city schools (Burns, Thomas, 2015). Indeed, they found the way to transform them.

In the morning of August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the southern United States. It splintered houses, flung vehicles and burst the levees holding back the gulf from the low-lying part of New Orleans (Saltman, 2007) **Kates** et al.(2006) described the catastrophe where one quarter of New

⁶ LA 9 identified four criteria for determinate a failed school:

1. does not present a plan to reconstitute the failed school to the state board, as required pursuant to such an accountability program,
2. presents a reconstitution plan that is unacceptable to the state board
3. fails to comply with the terms of the reconstitution plan approved by the state board
4. the school has been labeled an academically unacceptable school for four consecutive years (Dixson, 2011, pp. 134)

Orleans residents were unable to leave. They took refuge in the Superdome, hospitals, nursing homes, on elevated highways, or died during the week before full post storm evacuation could be completed. Lots of residents were moved to other cities. The most unfortunate were African-American, poor, aged and infirm members of the population. Four months after, the population was estimated at 158,353, only 37% of pre-Katrina number. The richest, mostly white residents were able to return to their neighbourhoods less impacted by the storm. Numerous commentators have claimed that Katrina was the worst urban disaster in U.S. history. (Saltman, 2007) Seeing this as a way to “improve” education, **Clint Bolick**, who was an advocate on vouchers, said: “*if there could be a silver lining to this tragedy, it would be that children, who previously had few prospects for a high-quality education, now would they expanded options.*” They first singled the Legislated Act 35 (LA 35), even though eleven out of twenty representatives from OPSB voted against it, (Dixson, 2011) which:

- Expanded the state’s authority to take over “failing” schools;
- Redefined “failing” to include may New Orleans public school that, at first, did not fit this category;
- Expanded a state-run RSD that operates with the district overseen by OPSB. RSD took over the majority of New Orleans public schools. (Klein, 2006)

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, OPSB operated 128 public schools and was the only district in the state with that many schools. As a result of LA 35 RSD was able to take over 112 of the 128 schools run by OPSB. In addition, two executive orders were signed that expanded chartering options. The first executive order removed timelines of when the RSD could take over a school. The second executive order lifted the requirement that parents and teachers approve of the charter. (Dixson, 2011) As she said: *For many stakeholders, especially teachers and UTNO, it appeared that LA 35 was designed to target OPSB and create the conditions that led to the firing of the entire teaching force in OPSB and effectively dismantle the teachers’ union.* (Dixson, 2011, pp. 135)

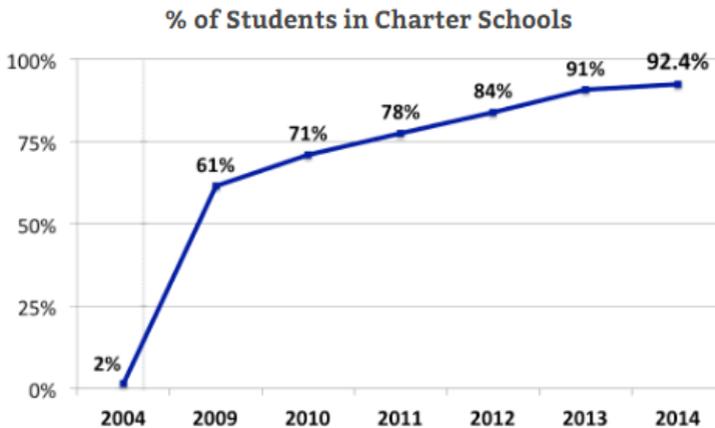
3.1 Louisiana charter school program

After the LA 35, charter schools⁷ have become popular in New Orleans.

⁷ Charter schools are schools that are publicly funded but operated by independent groups. Charter schools do not have to follow the same regulations from states, municipalities and school districts as traditional public schools. They have more flexibility to set curriculum and school hours and rules

Saltman said that: *“these schools are being constructed by those without background in education, are literally taking over public education buildings, and operated to a major extent by corporations like Edison and Knowledge is Power Program.”*(cited in Perez, Canella, 2011, pp. 59). Less than a month after hurricane, the U.S Department of Education gave the state of Louisiana \$20.9 million to reopen charter schools and open new ones. Nine months after, they provided \$23.9 million more for charter schools in New Orleans (Lipman, 2011). It effectually created two separate and unequal school systems: one filled with high-performing, more diverse public schools that have remained open and stable; and another with below average, nearly 100% African American schools that soon after transfer to RSD were closed or chartered (Journey for Justice Alliance, 2014). Prior to Hurricane Katrina, there were eight charter schools in New Orleans (Fraizer-Anderson, 2008). Of the 55 schools opened in New Orleans in 2006/2007, 31 were public charter schools. In 2010, out of 88 public schools, 61 were charter schools (Lipmann, 2011). The enrolment has increased in each year (Chart 1) as well as the number of charter schools.

Chart 1:



Source: Jacobs, 2015

than traditional public schools. Both are "public" schools because they are funded with taxpayer money, do not charge tuition and are required to take any student who wants to enroll. But while a neighborhood public school is governed by a school district and its school board, charter schools are operated by independent groups, which can be either nonprofit or for-profit. (Nelson, 2014)

Also, one of the concerns following this reform was the sudden switch in a board membership. **Dixon, Buras and Jeffers** (2015) stated that in 2008 Orleans Parish School Board became mainly white, which has not happened in 20 years. In the year prior to Hurricane Katrina (the 2004–2005), black educators comprised approximately 34 % of administrators and 25 % of teachers in Louisiana (approximately 66 % of administrators and 74 % of teachers were white). During the same year in the New Orleans Public Schools black educators comprised 73 % of teachers and 89 % of administrators, while 11 % of administrators and 25 % of teachers were white. After Hurricane Katrina, OPSB fired around 7,500 school employees⁸. With the mass dismissal of educators in the first full school year after Katrina, the black teaching force was cut by more than half, from 2,759 teachers in 2004/2005, to 801 in the 2006/2007 (Cook, 2011). As **Cook** stated: “*the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina resulted in the single largest displacement of African American teachers since school desegregation*” (Cook, 2016, pp. 122) What is also important to notice is that before Katrina, only 9.7% teachers had less than one year teaching experience and nearly 30% had 25 or more years of experience. After Katrina, in 2007/2008, 36.7% teachers had less than one year teaching experience and only 11.6% had more than 25. (Moskowitz, 2017)

All of those situations did not stick too well with the African-American community. As a response to changes *Students at the Center* (SAC) program was cofounded by students, veterans and teachers who did everything to help

⁸ While researching, it came to the light that all of those firings did not get a big media coverage, almost nothing. After exploring, it came to a realization that all the attention went up to the non-effective response government had on the hurricane. Roberts from Hoover institution said: “Hurricane Katrina showed that by 2005 the link between political support and speedy disaster response had been severed. State and local agencies had failed to plan adequately for the transportation, housing, and security that would be needed during an extended crisis. Once the hurricane bore down on New Orleans, local officials waited too long to issue an evacuation order that failed to account for the poorest residents, and state and federal agencies were too slow to provide rescue and recovery resources. When help finally arrived, it was poorly coordinated. Most attempts to assign the blame for Katrina focus on the Bush administration or poor state and local government response.” (2006). So, while dealing with recovering and blaming government for failed response, this situation was not in the focus for the majority of New Orleans. But, in 2012, the laid-off employees’ suit charged that the Orleans Parish School Board for not following proper procedures when they fired them and that the state Recovery School District should have given them priority in hiring. Even though Louisiana Civil District Court awarding damages estimated at \$1.5 billion, the Louisiana Supreme Court overturned both lower court decisions and rejected the fired teachers’ claims (Levine, 2015).

community. When there were indications that the public schools could be closed, the community demanded answers. They did not want school to be closed, because it was a part of their history and culture. One of the alumni's of the Frederick Douglas High School stated: *"We fought for this school in 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s. We have too much history here."* Despite all the effort of the community Douglas was closed in 2010 and turned into charter school. *"The students are sick and tired of being used, discriminated against, mistreated, put out of school, disrespected, silenced and undereducated."* (Dixon, Buras, Jeffers, 2015, pp.291-292, 296) One of the SAC teachers said: *"My theory is that they're phasing out Douglas and want to turn it into a charter. They want the building. It's just like my friend says about Nigerian oil. They want the oil, but they don't want the people. They want the "earl" but they don't want the people."* (Dixon, Buras, Jeffers, 2015, pp.291)

Basically, through all the chaos that followed Hurricane Katrina, the State of Louisiana implemented a policy of educational reform that they claimed was intended to improve academic achievement for all students, but was actually designed to turn traditional public schools into charter schools at the expense of African-American students and communities (Journey for Justice Alliance, 2014). In 2014, RSD published to close or turn to charter, last five traditional public schools set to be closed or turned to charter. Usually, under Louisiana law, a school in the RSD that fails to meet performance criteria after five years "must be restructured or closed" unless the school has implemented an intervention plan that has resulted in recent score increases of at least five points. According to Louisiana's performance metric, three of the five schools scheduled to close at the end of the 2013-2014 school year received passing scores for at least two consecutive years prior to RSD's decision to close that school (Table 1). (Journey for Justice Alliance, 2014)

Table 1:

School	Total Students	% Black	% White	2009-10 Score	2010-11 Score	2011-12 Score	Change '09 to '12
Banneker ES	404	95.0%	1.2%	60.9	D+ (66.5)	F (74.7)	+13.8
A.P. Tureaud ES	246	95.5%	0%	76.3	D (77.9)	D (75.9)	-0.4
Cohen High School	502	95.6%	2%	73.4	D- (67.6)	D (81.9)	+ 8.5
Carver High School	169	100%	0%	31.9	F (44.8)	F (46.4)	+ 14.5
Sarah T. Reed HS	259	90.3%	0%	34.9	F (33.7)	F (47.6)	+ 12.7

Source: Journey for Justice alliance, 2014

Despite pleas of local residents to return RSD schools to OPSB, RSD has never recommended any schools return to OPSB nor has it recommended any schools continue operating in RSD, even in cases where the school achieved consistent improvements in performance scores (Journey for Justice Alliance⁹, 2014). Instead, in 2019, New Orleans has become the first major American city without traditional public schools (Jewson, 2019). Right after, the protest by *Step up Louisiana*¹⁰ together with the people and the workers followed, who wanted to fight against the educational system in New Orleans. They stated that in spite of standardized test scores being generally up (Harris, 2015) since before hurricane Katrina, 35 of the city's 72 schools scored a "D" or "F" grade for 2019. And the majority of those low-scoring schools served primarily Black children. (Bentley 2019)

3.2 Louisiana voucher program

After the implementation of charter schools, the Louisiana Scholarship Program was launched in New Orleans in 2008. That was the school voucher program that provides targeted vouchers for disadvantaged Louisiana students attending low-performing public schools. It was proposed by Governor **Bobby Jindal** who also authorized expansion of the program in 2012. Through the 2011-2012, the LSP gave around 2,000 vouchers annually for attendance at roughly 40 schools, mostly located in New Orleans. By 2014, 12,000 students applied for more than 6,000 LSP vouchers to attend 126 private schools making the LSP the fifth-largest school voucher program in the USA. Vouchers were limited to students from families earning below 250% of the federal poverty line. Applicants for grades 1-12 must also have attended public schools graded C, D,

⁹ In the aftermath of those events, Journey for Justice Alliance, together with Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (Chicago, IL), Coalition for Community Schools (New Orleans, LA), Conscious Concerned Citizens Controlling Community Changes (New Orleans, LA), Vietnamese American Young Leaders of New Orleans (New Orleans, LA), New Jersey Parents Unified for Local School Education (Newark, NJ) have decided to file a civil rights complaint against the Louisiana Department of Education, Recovery School District, and Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. The complaint says that the State of Louisiana by its policy and practice of closing direct-run public schools in New Orleans discriminates against African-American students with different treatment and unjustified disparate racial impact. (Journey for Justice Alliance, 2014)

¹⁰ It's a multiracial and multigenerational membership that engages in campaigns that directly affect our lives. Organizing for economic and education justice in the South is fundamentally a fight against structural racism. The members are committed to building political power to win education and economic justice for all. (Step up Louisiana)

F or T by the Louisiana School Performance Score (SPS) ratings system in the previous year (Abdulkadiroglu, Pathak and Walters, 2015). **Jindal** wanted this program to be a success, but according to the research conducted by the State department of Education, it did not show good results. According to **Abdulkadiroglu, Pathak and Walters** (2015) the statistics showed that the LSP attracts private schools with low tuition and declining enrolment where low-quality private schools may be disproportionately likely to be an option to the LSP. Also, same research showed that private schools were inexperienced with standardized tests and unfamiliar with the needs of LSP students during this transitional period. New participating schools also had little time to adapt their curricula to match the content of state exams. This lack of experience with LSP students and state tests may have contributed to the program's negative effects. Clark wrote that the same analysis also showed that some low-performing private schools exist because of the voucher program. In two schools — McMillian's and St. Benedict the Moor in New Orleans — every student came through the voucher program, state data showed (Clark et. al, 2019). It seems like that the voucher program was not as successful as they wanted it to be and it was a way to justify the school choice program. Majority of low-income community in New Orleans considered traditional public school important part of the history and community. Not only because of historical connection, but also parents' involvement which contributed to the personal growth of a student. But as for charter, it seems to be lacking both.

Conclusion

This paper presented the way educational reform was implemented in New Orleans in a form of charter schools and vouchers after hurricane Katrina. The main goal was to acknowledge the rigorous change in education that New Orleans was going through after Katrina and also to establish whether the reform was positively accepted by Orleans community, especially low-income African-American families. Provided data have shown that African-American community, together with teachers and students were not included in any decision regarding those big changes and that the reform was not positively accepted. By not communicating with the people, reformists refused to have any reference point with the previous educators, who, in the end, embraced the cultural diversity of the New Orleans. Third part of the paper also showed some evident flaws in voucher system and in the ways traditional schools were

closing. In the end, New Orleans was not just the city with a big number of charter schools after Katrina, but it has become the first big city without single traditional public school.

This research has point out some defects in neoliberal reform. Vouchers and charter schools which were presented as a major improvement, failed to satisfy the needs of New Orleans community who should have been important part of that extensive change. Also, being able to have an equal access to education is important. And in that direction, every further study and every further enhancement should be done

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