

Public or Private: How neoliberal corporatization & privatization is destroying public schools & the “Commons” - Roberta Ahlquist, Professor at San Jose State University -Humanist Forum, Palo Alto, Ca - February 2013

*The law locks up the man or woman who steals the goose from the common, but leaves the greater villain loose who steals the common from the goose.*

- *The law demands that we atone when we take things we do not own. but leaves the lords and ladies fine who take things that are yours and mine.*
- *The law locks up the man or woman who steals the goose from off the common and geese will still a common lack ‘til they go and steal it back.*

---Anon. 17<sup>th</sup> Century England

**Schooling is the last institution in this country to be privatized- a major profit-driven coup for textbook companies, testing companies, etc.**

**– Focus of this presentation: What is happening to public schooling, why, and what can be done to save and improve public schools**

# The state of neocolonialism: The 'Empire' strikes back via a neoliberal agenda

***We cannot readily sort through and discard the colonially tainted understanding we carry, without devoting attention to how our view of the world has been shaped by imperialism's educational projects, which included fostering a science and geography of race, renaming a good part of the world in homage to its adventurers homesick sense of place, and imposing language and literature on the colonized in an effort to teach them why they were subservient to a born-to-rule civilization-***

- John Willinsky (1998)pp3-4) *Learning to Divide the World- Education at Empire's End*
- ***The only way to make a major improvement in our educational system is through privatization to the point at which a substantial fraction of all educational service is rendered to individuals by private enterprises. Nothing else will destroy or even greatly weaken the power of the educational establishment—a necessary pre-condition for radical improvement in our educational system. ...[In addition,] the privatization of schooling would produce a new, highly active and profitable industry.*** --Milton Friedman 1995

# Extreme Capitalism- Steven Miller:

- The new era is one we are getting to know all too well – Extreme Capitalism. The predatory mortgage is its banner, rampant on the field of a burning glass of water, the result of fracking. This is not your Daddy’s capitalism. It is a new animal, capitalism transmogrified – a harsh, naked capitalism, lean and mean, hungry for profits, predatory in the extreme, aided and abetted by the government, deliberately sacrificing people and even cities to guarantee corporate profit. Extreme Capitalism is both unstable and dangerous.
- Far more than a viable system with a few rough edges (a common pre-Meltdown belief) capitalism today is aggressively on the make. It uses Austerity to drain every form of public wealth into profits for the financial system by privatizing everything from roads to schools to police power. With corporations in the position of control, public functions are then financialized to make them fodder for financial speculation that transfers the wealth from the public to private corporations.
- There’s an important principle here: Once everything is privatized, you can’t vote it out any more. This process is just getting started.
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# What is neoliberalism?

- Privatization of the public good—fire, police, parks, schools, roads, etc – now the US Postal Service is to be privatized—Goal: getting rid of livable wages, unions, pensions, health care provisions, privatizing the ‘public good’ for profit
- For schools: The uncontested acceptance of ‘high stakes’ testing as reliable and valid measures of teacher and student excellence. Eliminating the concept of the “public good” or community for individualist acts

The resurgence of cultural deficit ideology (some kids are ‘less than’ others, i.e. poor kids, kids of color, English Language Learner kids)

Militarism- maintain U.S. superpower status globally

Cutting public expenditures for nearly all social services

- Neoliberalism = the ‘rule of the market place’ now morphed into
- ‘Extreme Capitalism’ corporations merging with the state (See Steve Miller, [www.dailycensored.com/extreme-capitalism-corporations-merging-with-the-state/](http://www.dailycensored.com/extreme-capitalism-corporations-merging-with-the-state/))

See “The myth of charter schools”:  
Diane Ravitch’s article in the *NYT Review of Books*  
November 11, 2010

- Naomi Klein: *Shock Doctrine Capitalism (2007)*: In *THE SHOCK DOCTRINE*, Klein “explodes the myth that the global free market triumphed democratically. Exposing the thinking, the money trail and the puppet strings behind the world-changing crises and wars of the last four decades, *The Shock Doctrine* is the gripping story of how America’s “free market” policies have come to dominate the world-- through the exploitation of disaster-shocked people and countries”.
- EX: Katrina and Public Schools in New Orleans, LA
- Some of the bigger players in these major education reform decisions:
- *Business Round Table*, 350 CEO’s of the largest corporations , ALEC, American Legislative Executive Council, Koch Brothers, Eli Broad Foundation
- –Common Core Standards –driven by the Gates Foundation
- Locally: East Palo Alto: More charter schools than ever before-control in hands of CEO, often not an educator
- *A corporate view: in Waiting for Superman*, schooling for job preparation
- A parent’s view: *Race to Nowhere*,
- See *TED’S Sir Ken Robinson*, purposes of schooling, 3 R’s, plus play, creativity, theatre, music, physical activity, cooperative play, equity, critical thinking, decisions making, problem solving, civic responsibility, social justice
- *FINLAND: TOP SCORES IN WORLD: EQUITY IS NUMBER 1 PRIORITY*

# Naomi Klein on *Shock Doctrine Capitalism*

- Naomi Klein wrote The Shock Doctrine five years ago in 2007, before the Meltdown and before Obama's election. We can only imagine how this has continued since then-big business and big government merge:
- “The emergence of this parallel privatized infrastructure reaches far beyond policing. When the contracting infrastructure built up during the Bush years is looked at as a whole, what is seen is a fully articulated state-within-a-state that is as muscular and capable as the actual state is frail and feeble. This corporate shadow state has been built almost exclusively with public resources.... Including the training of its staff (overwhelmingly former civil servants, politicians and soldiers). Yet the vast infrastructure is all privately owned and controlled. The citizens who have funded it have absolutely no claim to this parallel economy or its resources.” (15)
- Klein's explanation of the context is almost prescient:
- “A more accurate term for a system that erases the boundaries between Big Government and Big Business is not liberal, conservative or capitalist but corporatist. Its main characteristics are huge transfers of public wealth to private hands, often accompanied by exploding debt, an ever-widening chasm between the dazzling rich and the disposable poor and an aggressive nationalism that justifies bottomless spending on security. For those inside the bubble of extreme wealth created by such an arrangement, there can be no more profitable way to organize a society. But because of the obvious drawbacks for the vast majority of population left outside the bubble, other features of the corporatist state tend to include aggressive surveillance (once again with government and large corporations trading favors and contracts), mass incarceration, shrinking civil liberties, and often, but not always, torture.”
- Since Klein wrote these words, torture has become legal, extraordinary rendition of US citizens on US soil is authorized in the Military Defense Appropriations Act, the police have been militarized and often privatized, the border with Mexico has become militarized, Citizens United has allowed corporations to all but privatize the elections, private prisons are a growth industry and domestic drones are the next big market. The rise of the corporate shadow national security state exists to enforce the wonders of Austerity, not protect people against them. It is not going away. Neither is it reformable.

## Why charter schools at this point in time? Who benefits, and at what cost?

- Corporate View: Public schools are too expensive for the jobs that are available after schooling (service sector) or schools aren't serving corporations well, not providing 'good workers' for corporations
- Private charter schools are exempt from State mandates, most are non-union sites with CEO/managers, rather than former teachers, thus control over teachers, a more homogenous, Eurocentric curriculum
- The curriculum becomes corporate-driven, and many students will have drill & skill 3 R's, but won't have access to the arts, music, drama, world history, creative arts, critical thinking assignments, and global, social justice education for a well-informed and ethical citizenry- Those who don't pass the high stakes standardized tests will be encouraged to leave school for non-existent jobs.
- Drop-out rates rise, poor kids, kids of color, ENG language learners suffer, are pushed out, into unemployment, school-to-prison pipeline, inequality rises, the gap between rich and poor increases
- The education industry will make billions (testing companies, texts, etc)

# Who is driving this movement & what are the origins of charter schools and common core standards? From Susan Ohanian's Blog: [susanohanian.org](http://susanohanian.org)

- Education reform as a business. Gates Foundation is the driving force for Common Core Standards- check out huge \$\$ spent- 6.8 Billion- goal is to pass high stakes, National Test.
- At the expense of a critically informed, well educated populous—teachers become technicians, teaching to the tests
- Adam Porsch, Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has classic bio for school reform: A law degree from Yale, strategy consultant with McKinsey & Company, director for performance management for the District of Columbia Public Schools, consultant at New Leaders for New Schools, and now he "works with states, districts, and charter schools throughout the United States on education efforts."

by Valerie Strauss

Did you know that the education sector now represents nearly 9 percent of the country's gross domestic product? That for-profit education is valued at \$1.3 trillion, and is one of the largest U.S. investment markets?

These facts were part of an advertisement for a conference for investors in for-profit education ventures, just one example of how much the profit motive has entered into the public education arena. The conference is one of two examples of how school reform has become little more than a business in some arenas (and just how removed some reformers have gotten from classrooms and the actual dynamic of teaching and learning).

If you had wanted to attend this conference for private equity investing in for-profit education companies, you missed it, (but you did save the walk-in fee of \$1,495). Featured at the conference were "20 education experts," none of whom are actually teachers.

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Obama's doublespeak in his  
2/12/13 State of the Union Speech ([in Alternet.org/authors/Laura Gottesdiener](http://Alternet.org/authors/Laura_Gottesdiener) :

- “Now at schools like P-TECH in Brooklyn, a collaboration between New York public schools and City University of New York *and IBM*, students will graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree in computers or engineering. *We need to give every American student opportunities like this,*” he said.
- “Tonight, I'm announcing a new challenge, to redesign America's high schools so they better equip graduates for the demands of a high-tech economy. *And we'll reward schools that develop new partnerships with colleges and employers,* and create classes that focus on science, technology, engineering and math, the skills today's employers are looking for to fill the jobs that are there right now and will be there in the future.”
- In other words, let's stop teaching to the standardized test--let's teach straight to IBM's computer repair manual.
- Corporate profits have skyrocketed to all-time highs, but for more than a decade, wages and incomes have barely budged,” he boomed. “Today, a full-time worker making the minimum wage earns \$14,500 a year. Even with the tax relief we've put in place, a family with two kids that earns the minimum wage still lives below the poverty line. That's wrong.”

## Why other countries are 'smarter'-- Look at the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, & particularly Finland

- Equity is the bottom line for ALL STUDENTS- what does this mean?
- Tests, when given, are used to assess where students need help, how they are progressing, what they need to focus on, not given to all, not punitively used against students or teachers, generally NOT standardized tests, but qualitative assessments, more authentic assessment
- Teachers have high salaries, high status, are at the 'table' union members
- Teachers develop & teach a diverse, equity curriculum- collaboration is key
- Schooling is viewed as a lifelong process, access for ALL STUDENTS
- In the USA, tests are being used punitively, for teachers and students, thus
- "high stakes" tests, school not viewed as lifelong or even college for everyone
- PAA Parents Across America, a group of parents organizing to keep public schools public-- students can opt out of these standardized tests
- Authentic assessment is more equitable and fair

# What can teachers, parents and concerned community members do to support public schools:

Become better informed and involved, speak up, connect up *with Parents Across America*, ([www.Parentsacrossamerica.org](http://www.Parentsacrossamerica.org)) unions, teachers, and other concerned community groups, including *Occupy Education* ([ga@lists.occupyeducationca.org](mailto:ga@lists.occupyeducationca.org))

Advocate for a social justice, critical thinking, equity and diversity curriculum, against high-stakes standardized tests, for authentic assessment, for helping students on the 'downside' of power: students of color, poor students, special needs students, English language learners

Inform administration, teachers, other parents and community members of your concerns, interests, ideas for curriculum and assessment that reflects the great and unique diversity of the students we teach.

Support teachers, opt out of the high stakes tests

## A Few Important References

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# Chris Hedges new book

- 'Empire of Illusion' by Chris Hedges Posted Sun, 04/08/2012 - 13:44 by Mehdi Journalist Chris Hedges discusses his recent book Empire of Illusion: the End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle at the New School, New York. In it, he charts the dramatic rise of a post-literate society that craves fantasy, ecstasy, and illusion. Hedges argues we now live in two societies: one, the minority, functions in a print-based, literate world and can cope with complexity and can separate illusion from truth; the other, a growing majority, is retreating from a reality-based world into one of false certainty and magic where serious film and theater, as well as newspapers and books, are being pushed to the margins.
- Chris Hedges, author of War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, is currently a senior fellow at The Nation Institute and the Anschutz Distinguished Fellow at Princeton University. He writes for many publications, including Foreign Affairs, Harpers, The New York Review of Books, Granta, and Mother Jones. He is also a columnist for Truthdig.com.