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**NEW REGIMES OF EXPULSION: SHEDDING LIGHT  
ON THE VIOLENCE OF DISPLACEMENT  
REBEL CITY OR RACIAL DEMOCRACY?  
THE BLACK URBAN REGIME AND EXPELLING PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS FROM NEWARK, NEW JERSEY**

**JAY ARENA**

## **NEW REGIMES OF EXPULSION: SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE VIOLENCE OF DISPLACEMENT**

### **REBEL CITY OR RACIAL DEMOCRACY?**

**the black urban regime and expelling public schools from newark, new jersey**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The mass closing of public schools and sell-off of public school properties, busting teacher unions, and mass firings of teachers has been a cornerstone of the new “regimes of expulsions” in U.S. cities. This paper analyzes the introduction of this agenda, and conflict it has generated, and later acquiescence, in Newark, New Jersey a “majority-minority” city ruled by a “black urban regime” form of municipal government. Beginning under the mayoralty of Cory Booker, a contentious movement opposing the neoliberal makeover of the city’s public schools emerged and grew. His successor, Ras Baraka, who rose to power trumpeting and receiving the backing of this movement, has overseen the winding down of protests while continuing, for the most part, the same neoliberal agenda for public schools as his predecessor. The answer to this paradox lies in Baraka’s effective wielding of a “racial democracy” ideology and political practice that has allowed him to appear progressive to his popular base, and yet still adhere to a public school regime of expulsion agenda required by his corporate governing partners. The power of Racial Democracy is rooted in its class vacuousness that has allowed Baraka to simultaneously confront a “racist” state power structure denying “self-determination” to a “Black and Brown” community, while continuing the political-economy of state-driven, rent-intensifying real estate development that drives public school privatization and dispossess much of the “community” he claims to defend.

**KEYWORDS:** Newark, Black Urban Regime, Neoliberalism, Racial Democracy, Public Schools

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We need a mayor that's radical.

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, inauguration address, July 1, 2014

We feel like the mayor could be a little bit more like the radical mayor that he promised he would be.

Roberto Cabañas, Communities United New Jersey organizer, November 3, 2015

On the gorgeous Spring day of May 22, 2015 students in Newark, New Jersey took their classrooms to the streets. From Weequahic High School in the South Ward to East Side High School in the Ironbound section of the state's largest city, as well as every other comprehensive and magnet public high school, thousands of students defied administrators as they flung open the double doors of their schools, flooded the streets, and converged midday on Newark's City Hall. "We didn't come here to play a game" Newark Student Union (NSU) leader, and Science High senior, Kristin Towkaniuk belted out on her bullhorn to the throng of students assembled on the steps of Newark's city hall. Towkaniuk and a train of other students spoke passionately about their grievances and advanced their demands: firing of school superintendent Cami Anderson, local control of schools, "full funding" of Newark schools by the State of New Jersey, termination of the hated "One Newark" enrollment system, and an end to school closures, "turnarounds", and charter school expansion. The fired up crowd then decided, as student leader Jose Leonardo explained, "to shut down the highway... black lives matter is doing it, why can't we", as they proceeded to march to the nearby Peter Rodino federal building and then onto McCarter Highway, a major thoroughfare in the city. There, students and community supporters began a half-hour long sit down that blocked traffic.

The May 22<sup>nd</sup> action was the high point of a cycle protest that first emerged in 2010 after newly-elected Republican Governor Christie began instituting drastic cuts to public education, part of a national austerity drive. Newark Mayor Cory Booker—the poster-child of the model neoliberal black urban Democrat—simultaneously forged a bipartisan alliance with Christie to massively and rapidly expand charter schools and close public schools. The shock therapy plan led students, along with teachers and parents, to begin taking to the streets and denouncing the initiative at raucous school board meetings. The agenda and authoritarian rule of the superintendent Christie and Booker tapped to implement their plan—Cami Anderson, a former official with Teach For America and NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Department of Education—was causing so much strife that a conservative minister warned the Governor of the outbreak of "civil unrest" (Russakoff 2015).

Yet, by the start of the new school year, in the Fall of 2015, Newark school officials were enjoying an unexpected calm rather than unrest. In late June, a month after the massive May 22<sup>nd</sup> mobilization, Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, the son of the late famed poet and Black radical activist Amiri Baraka, signed an agreement with Governor Christie to remove school superintendent Cami Andersen. Then, with Baraka's assent, Christie replaced Anderson with Christopher Cerf, who was even more connected than his predecessor to charter backers and had hired and fully backed Anderson's agenda while he served as state education commissioner. In addition, the agreement established a nine-member "Newark Education Success Board", with five governor-appointees and four by the mayor, to oversee a gradual—the timeline was not specified—transition of the school district from the state, which has controlled the district since 1995, to the local school board. Baraka, who had come to power in 2014 on the coattails of the movement to defend public schools and roundly criticizing "outsiders" dictating the city's education policy, then began to increasingly accommodate to his erstwhile opponents' agenda. This new cooperation has

included the mayor giving the green light to zoning changes for expanding charter schools, to running a slate of school board candidates in alliance with pro-charter school forces funded by Gates and other national foundations promoting privatization. Yet, despite this departure from the rhetoric of his campaign, Baraka's popular base in the public school movement and beyond have not publically objected. A movement, as Newark education blogger Bob Braun noted, that was "building and unified" (3 July 2015) in opposition to state control and the privatization agenda, has now become splintered and quiescent following the accord.

The purpose of this book is to address how and why this political transformation took place, and more broadly what this can tell us about post-civil rights black and urban politics and the opportunities and obstacles for mounting challenges to contemporary capitalist urban revanchism. In her acclaimed book on corporate-style school reform in Newark--*The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools*--author Dale Russakoff indicts Governor Christie, Mayor Booker, Philanthropist Mark Zuckerberg, and school officials such as Cami Anderson for failing to generate "buy-in", consent, for their neoliberal reform agenda. Russakoff is in basic agreement with privatization, but argues the reformers failed to effectively bring teachers, parents and students into the process. But this is only half the picture. We need to also bring in the ideas, perspectives and actions taken by those upon whom reforms were being implanted to fully understand why the best efforts at "buy-in" by elites were so ineffectual.

In contrast to this one sided approach, I employ a dialectical analysis that examine not only what elite reformers were doing, but of teachers, students, parents and community members as well. This combined top-down and bottom up analysis is used to address the paradox we confront in Newark: Why was Cory Booker, and his powerful corporate school reform allies, so unsuccessful in generating consent to their agenda in Newark New Jersey? Conversely, how and why has Booker's successor, Ras Baraka, been far more successful in generating consent to an agenda that does not differ markedly from the reformers that he railed against in his campaign? From the other side of the dyad, how and why did a powerful movement emerge and grow under the hostile climate of Mayor Cory Booker and yet fade under the apparently more favorable leadership of his successor, Ras Baraka?

I argue the answer to this conundrum lies in the power of a "black urban regime" headed by Ras Baraka, and the wielding of what political scientist Preston Smith (2012) calls a "racial democracy" (RD) ideology and political practice. As Smith demonstrates in his analysis of struggles by black Americans to secure housing in pre and post-war black Chicago, a RD housing agenda to combat the common discriminatory housing barriers and disparities faced by the "black community"--of a unitary black subject--in practice served the interests of more affluent layers. Instead, Smith argues, a competing "social democratic" ideology and program that struggled to dismantle racial discrimination *and* de-commodify housing through state provision was essential for adequately housing the black working class majority. Despite its racial packaging, RD was, in practice, a petty bourgeois led and dominated *class* agenda. This ideology, wielded by the black elite, undermined and derailed efforts to confront the capitalist political economy of housing that both poorly housed most African American and fueled racist violence by equating housing values with racial homogeneity.

Likewise, in Newark, over a half century later, RD discourse and practice remains a powerful tool that has allowed Baraka--at least for now--to appear progressive to his popular base while still delivering on the key demands of real estate and other corporate interests to which Baraka is allied. Denouncing "neo colonialism" and demanding "local control" and "self-determination" for "Black and Brown communities" allowed Baraka and

his allies—in part thanks to many activists groups who also embraced this ideology—to walk a political tightrope. He could simultaneously denounce the racist white governor and white-dominated legislature controlling a local district of Black and Brown students; he could posture as an anti-racist ally of the public school movement while avoid confronting the political-economy of state-driven, rent-intensifying real estate development that drives public school privatization and other forms of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005; Reed 2015). A frontal attack on this political economy was impossible since Baraka courted real estate and other investor during his campaign and his entire development agenda rests, like his predecessors, on using state power and resources to increase land values. Therefore, he deployed RD politics that, in the name of defending “the community”, has successfully, for now, derailed a “rebel city” movement challenging the displacement and dispossession at the heart of the capitalist urban process (Harvey 2012, 18). In the end, as Cedric Johnson argues, RD and its focus on group oppression, is “a move that avoids facing the class contradictions within black life, and the tough political challenge of organizing a viable social movement suited to our own times” (2015, 185).

## **2. THE BLACK URBAN REGIME**

The black urban regime (BUR), conceived as a geographically and historically specific local apparatus of the U.S. state, emerged out of a long historical process over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The structural origins of the regime are found in the mechanization of southern agriculture that “pushed” and “pulled” displaced black peasants to the city, de-industrialization fueled by manufacturers search for cheaper land and more tractable labor outside urban confines, and, critically, racialized housing policies of the real estate/construction/banking industries. These housing policies, financed and facilitated by the federal government, forged a predominantly white, subsidized suburbia, while African Americans were relegated and segregated-into redlined, inner city neighborhoods, cut-off from loans or, at other times, destroyed through “urban renewal” projects. The cities most detrimentally affected by de-industrialization, government-subsidized white relocation efforts, and racist redlining--generally concentrated in the Northeast, Midwest, and sections of the Deep South--began to face, by the 1960s, chronic fiscal problems fueled by declining jobs, population, and tax revenue. These trends, combined with the political empowerment and élan generated by the civil rights and black power movements, set the demographic, economic, social, and political context that gave rise, beginning in the 1970s, to a number of “black urban regimes”--majority, or near majority black cities, with a predominately black city government, with the regime’s mass political base rooted in the city’s black working class.

Newark is a prime, indeed possibly quintessential example of, these changes. Newark’s population declined from its height in 1950, when it had 438,776 inhabitants, making it the 21st largest city in the US (down from 14<sup>th</sup> in 1910), to 275,221 in 1990 (56<sup>th</sup> nationally), where it has since stabilized, and has in fact increased by a few thousand over the last two decades. The African American proportion of the population increased from 17% in 1950 to over half by 1970, from 45,760 black residents in 1940 to 207,458 in 1970 (Mumford 2007, 3). Today Newark is a majority-minority city, with approximately 54% being black, 25% to 30% Hispanic (Puerto Rican, Brazilian, Ecuadorian, Dominican, Colombian, Peruvian), and the remainder white, mainly Portuguese. The city’s South, West and Central wards are predominantly black, including increasing numbers of African and Haitian immigrants, while the East and North wards are predominately Latino.

The city, formerly an industrial center, has been decimated by deindustrialization. Two-hundred and fifty manufacturers left in the 1950s alone. Between 1950 and 1967, at the time of the Newark rebellion, Newark had lost 20,000 manufacturing jobs, or nearly 25%

of its workforce (Tuttle 2009, 14). Urban renewal and highways gutted, in particular, black neighborhoods, which was one of the central grievances, in addition to police terror and struggles over the public schools, that ignited the 1967 Newark rebellion. After years of redlining, Newark homeowners were targeted by subprime lenders in the 1990s and 2000s that has stripped wealth from homeowners and led to a wave of home foreclosures (Newman 2012). Fiscal crises have deepened, with a state's "Local Finance Board" now overseeing the city's finances after providing a \$10 million aid package, while bond agencies have downgraded some of the city's debt to junk bond status (Sherman, 5-21 2015; Ivers, 10-9-2015)

### **2.1 The Contradictions of the Black Urban Regime: The Newark Case**

Ken Gibson, an engineer who was born in Alabama in 1932 and immigrated with his family to Newark in 1940, first ran for mayor, unsuccessfully, in 1966. In 1970, with the national and local organizing efforts of Amiri Baraka playing a central role, he became the city's first black mayor. The Gibson election comprised part of the first wave of black mayors, with his ascension preceded a few years earlier by Carl Stokes in Cleveland and Richard Hatcher in Gary, Indiana, and followed by Coleman Young in Detroit (1973), Maynard Jackson in Atlanta (1973) and Ernest Morial (1977) in New Orleans, among others. By the mid-1980s there were thirteen US cities defined as black urban regimes, nineteen by 2001, and the number had risen to twenty-four by 2013 (Reed 1999:254; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 2013).

Despite the excitement and great expectations that followed their elections, political scientist Adolph Reed, who first developed the theory of the BUR, underscored how deeply constrained these leaders, and regimes they headed, were in delivering material gains for their black working class electoral base. The same long-term demographic and economic transformation that laid the basis for the BUR's emergence, along with federal government retrenchment that took root in the 1970s, limited the measures they could undertake. A further constraint was that the black professional managerial class from which the new black leadership class emerged from, and the way they were incorporated into local politics by federal programs, made them amenable to the pro-growth, counter-Keynesian development agenda advocated by the local corporate elite politics (Reed 1999, 99). The new black political elite that managed the local state embraced the agenda of their corporate governing partners as simply "common sense".

Thus, Reed argues, the black urban regime is a deeply contradictory formation, "caught between the expectations of its principally black electoral constituency, which implies downward redistribution, and those of its governing coalition, which converge around the use of public policy as a mechanism for upward redistribution" (1999: 109). While this class contradiction is a structural feature of all forms of capitalist politics--especially for parties that purport to represent working class interests such as the Democrats in the U.S. and social democratic parties in Europe--the tension between the governing and electoral coalitions is particularly sharp under the BUR. As Reed argues, the BURs

are more likely than others to be beset with a chronic tension between satisfying the expectations of their governing and electoral constituencies. Their tension is greater ... because 1) they govern in cities whose populations include relatively greater proportion of citizens most likely to be adversely affected by pro-growth politics, 2) those citizens are most likely to be black or Hispanic and 3) the regimes tend to validate themselves to minority electoral constituencies by invoking an image of progressive redistribution, whereas pro-growth politics is grounded in a more regressive principle.

Thus, managing the class contradictions of the BUR is particularly difficult in the transition from what Harvey (1989) terms the "managerialist" city of the Keynesian era, when "urban

governance”, [was] less consistent with rules of capital accumulation” to the era of “neoliberal entrepreneurial” regimes, such as the BUR, where “urban governance”, due to increased inter-urban competition, “has moved more rather than less into line with the naked requirements of capital accumulation”(cited in Peck and Tickwell 2002, 396). Yet, as Peck and Tickwell (2002) emphasize, the new capitalist logic does not simply “call forth” a neoliberal regime; rather it has

to be engineered through explicit forms of political management and intervention and new modes of institution-building designed to extend the neoliberal project, to manage its contradictions, and to secure its ongoing legitimacy (396)

Reed, informed by Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, argues that the key to managing the central contradiction of the BUR has been the use of a racial democracy discourse in which symbolic gains of the race stand in for material ones. That is, black mayors attempt to move

policy debate away from substantive [material] concerns with potential outcomes and toward protection of racial image and status, as embodied in the idiosyncratic agenda of the black officials. In this way it becomes possible for black officials to maintain support from both their black constituents and the development elites that systematically disadvantage them (1999, 176).

Gibson’s reign in Newark (1970-1986)—as well as others of his cohort—pursued, for the most part, the downtown-focused, pro-growth development model predicted by Reed. In the face of declining federal government support, continued loss of industry, declining population, and opposition from remaining white (Italian) political leadership, Gibson pursued an orthodox development model of using local state authority and resources to make the city as favorable an investment as possible. His “there is no alternative (TINA)” agenda, which was not much different from his white predecessor and not what his radical backers had promised, led to predictable conflicts and splits with his mass base. The most dramatic was with radical Black Nationalist Amiri Baraka, who publically broke with and denounced Gibson in 1974 for the first black mayor’s failure to support his Afro-centric Kawaida Housing development planned for the Italian North ward and other initiatives (Woodward 1999). Black mayors in other cities pursued similar economic development models, all of which inevitably led to political betrayals. A prime example was Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson firing striking black municipal sanitation workers in 1977—the same workers he walked the picket line with in 1970. In a successful attempt to manage this contradiction, Jackson portrayed the strike as a racist attack by the white-led union on the first black mayor. The case underscored the black mayor’s “hegemonic control of the idea of black interest”, Reed argued, that allowed him “to subvert and co-opt the moral force of racial populism even in opposition to a militant insurgency by one of the most vulnerable, conspicuously ‘grassroots’ elements of the black population” (1999, 5). Gibson—with support from Baraka—similarly portrayed the 1971 public school teacher strike as a racist one against the black community to undermine support (Golin 2002).

### *2.1.1 The New Black Urban Regime?*

Political scientist Cedric Johnson, in a recent panel at the Urban Affairs Association on the contributions of Reed’s work to understanding Race, Class, and Urban Political Economy under Neoliberalism, holds that Reed’s theory of the BUR captured the conditions and dynamics of the first wave of black mayors. But, he argues by the time their successors took office the conditions that led to the rise of the BUR had changed—in part, thanks to the BUR itself. One significant change was black political demobilization (reflecting broader patterns in the US) and growing conservatism and individualism as exemplified in the popularity of the “prosperity gospel” ministers. In addition, the growth and further

incorporation of the black professional managerial class (BPMC) into the regime, also contributed to reducing, or least made more manageable, the class contradiction at the heart of the BUR. Thus, the second round of black mayors, such as Sharpe James in Newark, Andrew Young in Atlanta and Sidney Barthelemy in New Orleans, continued the pro-growth agenda of their predecessors while attempting to reduce the appearance of being hostile to business interests that their predecessors had to feign as part of appearing progressive to their mass base. The 1990s and into the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the rise of “third wave” gentrification in which corporate developers played an increasingly central role, combined with deepening of urban neoliberalism under the Clinton administration, marked the increasing consolidation of a “multiracial local ruling class” committed to, and indeed embracing, a neoliberal urban development model (Johnson 2015, 187). Another contributing factor to this political change included a greater representation of black real estate and other corporate investors among the corporate wing of the regime, which contrasted with the largely black public wing and white corporate side of the regime partnership wing outlined by Reed (see Hyra on Washington, D.C., *forthcoming*).

A further significant change was that the demographic background and social networks of the new black political elite increasingly mirrored those of their white counterparts, with a prime example being Newark’s third black mayor, Cory Booker (2006-2013). Gibson and his successor, Sharpe James, were both products of the “Great Migration” having been born to poor families who immigrated just before WW II to Newark from the Deep South (Florida for James), attended local public schools, graduated from public universities, gained employment in the public sector, and were incorporated into local politics through Great Society programs. In contrast, Cory Booker’s parents were middle class professionals who raised their family in a white affluent suburb twenty miles north of Newark. Following a trajectory similar to Barack Obama, Booker studied at prestigious Stanford University and then at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, and finally obtained a law degree from Yale University before moving to Newark in 1997.

## **2.2 Cory Booker: The Model Neoliberal Black Mayor**

Booker’s first job in Newark, reflecting the changed political dynamics, was with a foundation-funded non-profit legal advocacy program, which he used to develop a popular local base combatting drug trafficking, violence, and poor housing issues faced by, especially, public housing residents. Employing what political scientist Andrea Gillespie calls a “Black political entrepreneur” strategy, Booker compensated for this lack of a base among traditional black political organizations, officials, churches, and labor unions by drawing on wealthy backers, many of whom he had gone to school with, and relying on the “media to portray him in sympathetic light” and disparage his opponent (Gillespie 2012, 17). Discourse wise, Booker deployed “racially transcendent appeals” (17, 222), or what political scientist Jonathan Wharton terms a “post-racial” discourse advocating an “idealistic cultural pluralism... [that]...went beyond White and Black politics” (2013, 58), in his 2002 and 2006 mayoral campaigns. He won the latter campaign after Sharpe James—who defeated Booker in 2002-- dropped out a month before the election.

Demographic changes also altered the politics that had undergirded the BUR, with Booker winning in 2006 with overwhelming support among the growing Hispanic and Brazilian communities, while garnering some 40% of black voters. Programmatic wise, Booker continued, like his predecessors, to use all the power of the local state to attract real estate and other investors. The effectiveness of his booster role was assisted by his national fame and connections with celebrities and wealthy investors. Consistent with an entrepreneurial regime—which the BUR is one variant—Booker, like his predecessors, promoted what



geographer Gordon McLeod (2002, 64) calls a “political economy of place rather than territory,” in which “the benefits of flagship projects like convention centers and festival are often more readily experienced by those, like tourists and place mobile capitalists, who live beyond the immediate locality.” A prime example was the opening of the Prudential Center sports complex under his watch—though begun under his predecessor—that served mainly white suburbanites. Symbolizing the exclusionary essence of the facility and larger economic development agenda was the lack of an entrance, simply a concrete wall, on the side of the center that fronted a major transit and shopping thoroughfare for local working class residents (see Peck and Tickwell 2002, 393; Harvey 1989).

Booker continued, in collaboration with the Bush and Obama administrations, the demolition of public housing that had begun and progressed under Mayor James and the Clinton administration. The qualitative new advance Booker made in the pro-corporate agenda was the privatization of public schools. As Pauline Lipman underscores in her study of Chicago, the privatization of public schools and housing are interconnected since both these initiatives are central to restructuring urban labor markets and space, to “gentrification, dispossession of working class communities of color, and the reproduction of a stratified labor force” (2011, 4). Initially a backer of school vouchers (Wharton 2013, 37), Booker later, reflecting national political shifts, became a major backer of charter schools by the mid-2000s. Before and after taking office in 2006 he helped form a number of organizations, with backing from his close ally, then-NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg and national pro-charter foundations, to advance school corporate-style school reform. A subsequent partnership forged with newly elected Republican Governor Chris Christie in 2009, and the garnering of a \$100 million grant from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg the following year, laid the ground for implementing a massive and rapid shock-treatment style neoliberal restructuring of the city’s schools. Yet, as pointed out above, the top-down school reform unleashed a torrent of protest. The problem, from the perspective of the sympathetic observers of his rule in general, and attempt to privatize education in particular—exemplified in studies Gillespie, Wharton and Russakof—was his failure to generate much popular consent to his reforms. Wharton, for example, lauds Booker for the diverse electoral coalition he assembled but laments his inability to forge, after election day, what he calls “sustainable coalition politics”, an “effective and sustainable community building” effort to generate consent to his agenda (2013, 5; Gillespie 2012, 109). In Gramscian terms, Booker failed to construct a hegemonic politics.

Thus in the face of mounting protest to his school agenda, as well as opposition to a sell-off the city’s water system, Booker moved to the U.S. Senate in October of 2013. Booker, a rising national star in the Democratic Party before even Barack Obama, intended, according to most observers, to bide his time for the Governorship. His deteriorating position in Newark forced his hand. Therefore, with the death of long time U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg—and assistance from Republican Governor Chris Christie in the scheduling of the election—Booker seized the opportunity to exit city hall for the U.S. Senate.

### **2.3 The Return of the Repressed: Ras Baraka**

By the time of Booker’s exit, the 2014 race for mayor was already in high gear, and among the leading candidates was the South Ward city councilman, Ras Baraka. Although only a year apart in age—with the outgoing Mayor born in 1969 and the incoming a year later—Baraka had a distinctly different background and political trajectory. Born and raised in Newark as the third of five children (Amiri Jr, Obalaji, Ahi and Shani) of Mina and Amiri Baraka—the latter who died in January of 2014, in the midst of the campaign—Baraka was literally brought up in the movement by his activist parents. After graduating from a local

magnet High School, Baraka attended the famed, historically Black, Howard University in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where he founded the student group *Black Nia Force*. The group gained national attention in 1989 for leading an occupation of the University's administration building, with their principal demand being the removal of Republican strategist Lee Atwater from the board of trustees (NYT, Ayres, 1989 March 16). After graduation he returned to Newark where he became a public school teacher and later a high school principal, while simultaneously organizing and engaging with antipolice brutality and other local protests (NYT, Smothers 1997, Sept. 3). Baraka also ran for local office, was appointed a vice-mayor under Sharpe James and, after several failed attempts, won a city council seat in 2010. While in office, he continued to work as a high school principal as well as launched, in a step back from the confrontational antipolice brutality organizing of his earlier years, the "Newark Anti-Violence coalition" to draw attention to murders in the city.

In the midst of the rising movement against the neoliberal makeover of the public school system and Booker's moves to the exit door, Baraka entered the race in March of 2013. "Taking back the schools" was at the center of his message. In contrast to his predecessor and the thoroughly neoliberal-embracing, post-millennial crop of African American mayors, Baraka revived the racial populist message associated with the first wave of black mayors. This was typified by his message at a January 2014 memorial for his late father, Amiri Baraka, which was attended by over a thousand local residents and addressed by scores of the elder Baraka's friends, comrades and adversaries, from celebrities like Danny Glover and Cornel West, to Congressman Donald Payne Jr. In an obvious reference to his predecessor Cory Booker and, in particular, his public school agenda, Baraka warned that

They use Fredrick Douglass' words to close public schools....They take a few of us and teach them privilege and give them degrees in exchange for their humanity and send them back to further dismantle all that is left in our community.

By invoking a racial populist version of what Kevin Cox (1999) calls a "territorial ideology" that "postulates interest at a local level" that marginalizes those of class and gender (and in this version accentuates those of race), Baraka clearly took aim at Booker and his neoliberal school agenda. A few months later, in May 2014, Baraka soundly defeated Shavar Jeffries, his well-funded opponent, and all but anointed successor of Cory Booker. The election was widely seen, as the *New York Times* reported, "as a referendum on Booker's tenure and a defining moment of the [city's] future." More broadly, Baraka's triumph, along with the election of longtime activist Chokwe Lumumba as mayor of Jackson Mississippi the year prior, and the 2010 defeat of Washington D.C. Adrian Fenty, a major champion of charter schools, signified a wider backlash against the neoliberal embracing third wave black mayors. Yet, as I have argued above, over the nearly two years of his tenure, Baraka has increasingly accommodated to the same neoliberal school agenda he campaigned against. "[H]is doubters... had predicted he would be anti-business and anti-police", as the *New York Times* noted in a review of his first year in office, but he is now "winning praise from largely white leaders of the city's businesses and institutions downtown." (NYT, Zernike, 30 August 2015). I now turn to examine what we mean by neoliberalism to specify the terrain in which corporate school reform was not only introduced from above but contested from below in Newark over the last decade.

### **3. NEOLIBERAL URBANISM AND CLASS STRUGGLE: THE TERRAIN OF THE BLACK URBAN REGIME**

In this study I conceptualize neoliberalism, or what Les Leopold, in his book *Runaway Inequality* terms the "Better Business Climate Model", as an ideological, political, economic, and cultural project launched in the 1970s by political and economic elites in the face of the

increasing challenges to capitalist rule and profitability (also see Harvey 2005, 19; Kotz 2015). That is, as Jason Hackworth argues, this class project is both an ideology and mode of governance that encompasses the “roll back” of the previous Keynesian or “Liberal Egalitarian” regulatory regime and “roll out” of the neoliberal regime. The entire project is legitimated—although not always carried out in practice-- in the name of the core principles of individual choice, unfettered markets, and non-interventionist state (Hackworth 2007, 4-5; Brenner and Theodore 2002, 350). While the process began in the 1970s and progressed through different phases since then, critical scholars emphasize the “geographically and historically contingent forms” that neoliberalism has taken (Peck and Tickwell 2002, 396; Hackworth 2007, 12; Wilson 2004). Neoliberalism, they hold, is best conceived as a *process*, what Peck and Tickwell term “*neoliberalization*”, that “is neither monolithic in form nor universal in effect” (381).

The contingent and uneven nature is due, in large part, to the resistance that these class attacks generate. As Alan Sears argues, in his study of what he calls the “lean state,” the transformation from the Keynesian welfare state to the neoliberal “lean” version is not pre-determined, but rather “the extent to which the transition occurs is mediated by the class struggle and the overall ideological climate” (1999, 92). Sears’ point underscores that an adequate account of the process of neoliberalization in Newark and other contexts, and the potential and obstacles to mounting a counter-hegemonic challenges, requires attention to the popular forms of resistance that have emerged.

A key factor impacting the extent and effectiveness of challenges to neoliberal reforms--and thus the unevenness of neoliberal “roll back” and “roll out”--is the form and resolution of the ensemble of class compromises of the preceding Keynesian regulatory regime. As geographers Brenner and Theodore emphasize in their study, “neoliberal restructuring projects...have been produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices and political struggles” (2002, 349). For example, public housing in the U.S. has been especially vulnerable due to the hegemonic post-war capitalist “spatial fix”--backed and promoted by powerful banking, construction and real estate interests--based on suburbanization and private homeownership that limited the program to the most vulnerable sections of the working class. The limited coverage, along with the program’s local rather than national administration, undermined the ability of public housing residents to successfully challenge the budget cut backs of late 1970s and 1980s and the mass demolition and roll out of the new privatized “mixed income” development in the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast, social security, as a universal rather than “means tested” program like public housing (and welfare), has been much less vulnerable—for now.

In the case of public education, the defeat of legal challenges to force the federal government to equalize public education funding across districts and the retreat from the limited racial desegregation efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, made urban public schools particularly vulnerable to the neoliberal reformers. The mass union organizing among teachers in the late 1960s and 1970s—part of a national insurgency among public sector workers--did increase teachers’ power and led to improved pay and working conditions. Today teacher unions—and teachers—have become a central target of the reformers because of the political obstacle they present to a neoliberal makeover, including the opening up the \$750 billion “education market” to profit making. Yet, the teacher unions forged out of the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s tended to be of a “bread and butter” variety--in part due to the driving out of communists and socialists during the post-war purges of the Left--that often ignored or at worst openly opposed the demands of students and families. The failure to address the class and race inequities of public education, combined with the political narrowness of many teacher unions, opened the door for the

reformers. As Tom Pedroni (2007) demonstrates in his study of neoliberal education reform in Milwaukee, the privatizers have been able to cultivate some level of consent among families, particularly African American working class parents who have often not been well served by public schools. Unsurprisingly, urban centers, particularly African American neighborhoods, such as Newark and its heavily black South Ward, is where the greatest inroads of charter schools have been made.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Class Struggle from Above and Below

The two interrelated phases of “roll back” and “roll out”, and the attendant four levels outlined by Hackworth (2007), is useful for conceptualizing and analyzing neoliberal school reform (see Table 1 below). But the weakness of the model, particularly for my study on the challenge to school reform in Newark, is the failure to incorporate resistance into the model. The danger of “keeping neoliberalism at the center of critical analysis”, Leitner (2007) and his colleagues argue, is that it “can reify its ubiquity and power, even when the intent is critique” (5). The Newark case on school reform, and the significant challenges it has generated in other cities, such as Chicago, highlights the need to include this resistance to both better understand the process of neoliberalization in the context of black urban regime and to “imagine and create alternative urban futures” (Leitner et al 2007, 2).

**Table 1: The Terrains of Neoliberal School Reform Implementation and Challenges**

Keynesian	Rollback	Rollout	Accommodation/Push Back/Alternatives
Artifacts	Public schools	Charter schools, vouchers	Community Schools
Policies	Elimination of public monopoly for provision of public education, state takeover	Testing evaluation regime—‘failing’ teacher and schools, school choice & ‘one app’ ; state takeover	Opt-out, defense of tenure; neighborhood schools
Institutions	Labor unions; Local School Board	Employment at will; Limited power and coverage	Defensive Business Unionism vs Social Movement Unionism; NEW insurgent challenge to NTU; UCORE; NSU
Agreements	state equalization (Abbott), career employment	NCLB, RTT, Merit Pay, New state funding formulas, short term tenures (TFA model), public-private partnership	Full Funding; Status quo, Mass Public works program

**Source:** Elaborated by the autor.

<sup>1</sup> For an examination of how charter school have been constructed to cater to affluent families in newly gentrifying cities, see Vollman Makris (2015) privatization. On how working class dissatisfaction with the Keynesian welfare state opened the door for neoliberal reform, see Leitner et al (2007, 7) and (Adams 2013)

To address this weakness I incorporate, in column four of Table 1, various forms of resistance that have emerged in the Newark school case. The incorporation of resistance, and the actors that produce it, highlights that “roll back” and “roll out” challenges to the Keynesian model are not limited to neoliberal elites. In some cases there is accommodation to the neoliberal “reforms”, in others defensive efforts are mounted, while in others, such as the attempts to forge new “social movement unions”, there are working class alternatives being forged out of the ruins of the Keynesian class compromise. The varying responses underscores that an adequate analysis of contemporary urban neoliberalism requires what Miliband (1989) termed a “class struggle analysis”, one that incorporates both inter- and *intra*- class levels. As sociologists Maurice Zeitlin and Judith Stepan-Norris emphasizes regarding the latter,

The process of self-organization of a class . . . involves concrete political struggles within it—and within its organizations—over what its class interests are and who should organize and lead it. (1989, 504)

Therefore, to fully grasp the politics of neoliberalism—both the introduction of neoliberal reforms as well as the rise of “neoliberal pushback” and alternatives to both Keynesianism and Neoliberalism—we have to be attentive to the struggle and debates within the organizations and movements of the opposition.

In addition, a critical component of evaluating the resistance that has been mounted—and how it might be strengthened—is evaluating the extent to which it has been able to “scale up” and move beyond the local. Local resistance, as Peck and Tickwell emphasize, is a necessary but insufficient for mounting successful challenges to the various local expressions of neoliberal roll back and roll out. The “strategic objectives for opponents of neoliberalism must include,” they argue, “the reform of macroinstitutional priorities and the remaking of extralocal rule systems in fields like trade, finance, environmental, antipoverty, education, and labor policy” (2002, 401). Because of the spatial and regulatory neoliberal restructuring at the macro institutional level, “progressive local alternatives are persistently vulnerable, in this turbulent and marketized environment, to social undercutting, institutional overloading, and regulatory dumping.” (401). Thus, in the end,

It will continue to be premature to anticipate an era of “pushback” neoliberalism, let alone the installation of a more progressive regulatory settlement, until extralocal rule regimes are remade in ways that contain and challenge the forces of marketization and commodification—until there is a far-reaching deliberalization of spatial relations. (401)

## **Methodology and Chapter Outlines**

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