

**Introduction to:  
Hoosier School Heist How Corporations & Theocrats  
Stole Democracy From Public Education**



Dr. Martin 765-505-9896 [MARTINZWA@aol.com](mailto:MARTINZWA@aol.com).  
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**INTRODUCTION: MYTHS, MINIONS, MISINFORMATION, AND TORTURE**

*Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?*  
~ Tecumseh, addressed to William Henry Harrison

*The idea that American schools are now failing the nation is a Big Lie. And like all Big Lies, it has created a great deal of mischief and unhappiness for hard-working citizens and educators who deserved better from America's political leaders, industrialists, media figures, and others responsible for creating and spreading the Manufactured Crisis.*  
~ David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*, 1995.

ON SEPTEMBER 21, 1976, ECONOMIST ORLANDO LETELIER, working for the Institute for Policy Studies, was dismembered and murdered by a remote-controlled bomb planted in the car he was driving in Washington, DC by hit-men the CIA allowed to slip into the country. Less than a month earlier in "The Chicago Boys in Chile,"<sup>1</sup> Letelier had condemned economist Milton Friedman for training Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's chief economists who helped Pinochet carry out the starving, torturing, and killing of civilians standing in the way of unregulated and out-of-control capitalism. In Chicago, Friedman had not-only prepared foreign economists to initiate programs with brutal regimes in Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, but he had even flown to meet Pinochet after the US-aided coup overthrew the democratically elected Salvador Allende. During Pinochet's reign of terror, up to 150,000 people were tortured and thousands killed, as the Chicago-trained economists locked in place a free-market privatizing scheme of the public infra-structure which led to massive unemployment, disastrous poverty, and school vouchers.<sup>2</sup>

Today in Chile, where only 45% of high schoolers attend traditional public schools, the blood still pours as protestors rebel against Friedman's school vouchers that Pinochet first used to replace the Chilean public school system. In August 2011, 600,000 students, parents, teachers, and workers from eighty labor groups marched in the Chilean streets, demanding a true public and free education from K-college. Thousands were jailed, and one of them, a sixteen year-old boy, was shot dead.<sup>3</sup>

Pinochet and Friedman's crimes against humanity are not whispered when so-called school choice gets discussed in America today, and the fact that school vouchers were first applied as a weapon of racial segregation even earlier in Virginia is never mentioned. In 1955, Friedman wrote "The Role of Government in Education,"<sup>4</sup> which first promoted school vouchers, and shortly after Virginia established the first modern US school voucher law. As a way to duck the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling, Virginia's arrangement subsidized white kids' enrollment in private schools, away from black students. Other southern states followed with school vouchers for white children until vouchers were ruled unconstitutional, as they violated the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

Now the school voucher push is invading America, with Friedman's original goal of defunding public schools and transferring taxpayer money, without any accountability, into private hands. Even though, as Rachel Tabachnick notes, children in the longest running US voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland perform well below their counterparts in the public schools,<sup>5</sup> voucher advocates don't believe in holding private schools answerable to the same flawed demands like standardized testing they shove at public schools, because vouchers are not about better educating kids. Academic progress is irrelevant to voucher supporters, for the goal is not to improve schools through competition, as they claim, but to completely dismantle traditional public schools altogether. In fact, those calling for school privatization don't want to hold anyone with profit motives accountable, as Florida has proven. There Jeb Bush's voucher program has shelled out millions of taxpayer dollars to kidnappers, burglars, and sociopaths running private schools for kids with special needs, where students are hoarded in classes above liquor stores and beaten and deprived in environments free from state intervention, in what *Miami New Times'* Gus Garcia-Roberts has referred to as "a perverse science experiment, using disabled school kids as lab rats and funded by nine figures in taxpayer cash."<sup>6</sup> With the largest school voucher program in the country, Indiana lawmakers also have opened up this "lab" for business, expanding vouchers for special education kids. As we will see in chapter 2, the racism behind school vouchers in the 1950s is still very much alive today, as is the desire for profit.

School vouchers wed the free-marketers, the theocracy seeking Religious Right, the Catholics, and higher-income families. As they have succeeded in using vouchers to "get the government out of the business of building and owning public housing, operating job-training programs and day-care centers, collecting garbage, and running hospitals and clinics," corporatists and their mouthpieces like the libertarian Cato Institute's Joseph L. Bast and David Harmer "see vouchers as a major step toward the complete privatization of schooling ....the **only** way to dismantle the current socialist regime."<sup>7</sup> Religious Right school leaders are thrilled to acquire public money to teach creationism in their schools, and Catholic school officials, having less funding because sex abuse lawsuits against the US church have sent people with their money running,<sup>8</sup> are eager for a taxpayer bailout for their private schools which pick the best students they can pull in. Low-income parents can't afford the tuition the voucher does not cover at non-religious private schools; well-off parents can. Vouchers delight the anti-government Religious Right, the Catholics, and the affluent parents sending their kids to elite private

schools, but more importantly they drain money from public schools. It is no coincidence that this shortage of funding places these public schools in a bad position-with fewer teachers, aides, and resources so for-profit education management companies can take them over with temporary teachers or justify starting charter schools by deeming the neighborhood schools as "failing."

Milton Friedman played a role in launching the profitable charter school movement in America, too. At 93 years old and on his deathbed, Friedman kicked off New Orleans' charter school groundswell after Hurricane Katrina. In a Wall Street Journal op-ed three months after the hurricane, Friedman wrote that it was the perfect time to demolish what was left of the New Orleans school system and turn its keys over to the well-to-do to make money, <sup>9</sup> Naomi Klein responds to Friedman's school privatization push in *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*:

In sharp contrast to the glacial pace with which the levees were repaired and the electricity grid brought back online, the auctioning-off of New Orleans' school system took place with military speed and precision. Within 19 months, with most of the city's poor residents still in exile, New Orleans' public school system had been almost completely replaced by privately run charter schools.

The Friedmanite American Enterprise Institute enthused that "Katrina accomplished in a day ... what Louisiana school reformers couldn't do after years of trying." Public school teachers, meanwhile, were calling Friedman's plan "an educational land grab." I call these orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, "disaster capitalism." **10**

Making money from disasters is a Wall Street specialty, and investors have jumped on the opportunity for school privatization. Besides generating tax-exempt bonds, stocks, and other shady financial gimmicks, school privatization allows big bank CEOs, private equity firm honchos, and hedge fund managers to collect interest on loans to non-unionized charter schools which employ a temporary teacher workforce. The mega-wealthy subsidizing charter schools also receive new markets tax credits from the US Department of Treasury's Community Development Financial institution Fund to write off their donations, dollar for dollar, on their taxes. As *New York Daily News*' Juan Gonzalez first noticed, by using the new markets tax credits, investors can double their money in no time. In an interview with *Democracy Now*'s Amy Goodman, Gonzalez details how these schemes have worked in Albany, New York:

The investors who put up the money to build the charter schools get to basically virtually double their money in seven years through a 39% tax credit from the federal government. In addition, this is a tax credit on money that they're lending, so they're collecting interest on the loans, as well as getting the 39% tax credit. They piggyback the tax credit on other kinds of federal tax credits, like historic preservation or job creation or Brownfields credits. The result is, you can put in \$10 million and in seven years double your money.

And the problem is that the charter schools end up paying in rents the debt service on these loans. And so, now a lot of the charter schools in Albany are straining paying their debt--their rent has gone up from \$170,000 to \$500,000 in a year, or huge increases in their rents, as they strain to payoff these loans, these construction loans. And the rents are eating up huge portions of their total cost. And, of course, the money is coming from the state.

So, one of the big issues is that so many of these charter schools are not being audited. No one knows who are the people' making these huge windfall profits as the investors. And often there are interlocking relationships between the charter school boards and the nonprofit groups that organize and syndicate the loans. **11**

Gonzalez is right. Unlike traditional public school boards, charter school boards are unelected, undemocratic, and cloaked in mystery. Their conflicts of interest enable schemes like high rent to waste public education money. Information in the charter school tax records is very limited. Moreover, when researchers have filed freedom of information act requests with charter schools, the CEOs and boards either completely disregarded the requests or only released select financial material about these schools. Hedge fund managers especially like this lack of transparency. Their inner workings on Wall Street, likewise, are almost impossible for the public to access.

Hedge fund managers working to eliminate veteran teachers from the schools have already been making money from these teachers' pensions. As Matt Taibbi notices in *Rolling Stone*, Paul Tudor Jones--a mega-rich charter school investor in New York City--"manages \$15.7 million from the School Employees' Retirement System of Ohio." Jones' friend Dan Loeb already oversees money invested from a whole slew of various state employees' pensions in his hedge fund, including ones in Ohio. Loeb--who gifted former Indiana superintendent of schools Tony Bennett \$25,000 for his re-election campaign--spoke at an event in April 2013 held by the Council of Institutional Investors (CII), "an umbrella group that represents the institutions who manage the retirement and benefit funds of public and-corporate employees all over America--from bricklayers to Teamsters to teachers." The event's moderator was none other than Anne Sheehan, the director of corporate governance for the California State Teachers' Retirement System. It was obvious Loeb was courting CII a chance to "manage" its money. Both Loeb and Jones sit on the board of Students First New York, run by corporate school veteran Michelle Rhee, which is calling for states to end teachers' defined benefit pension funds around the country "in favor of defined contribution plans, where the benefits are not guaranteed." What is more, since Wall Street crashed the economy in 2008, many states, including Ohio where Loeb manages some of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System's funds, are now advocating for or have passed laws for higher retirement ages for teachers and more contributions from workers, since the state governments either don't have the money to payout for pensions or are lying about not having it. As Taibbi writes: "In other words, Loeb has been soliciting the retirement money of public workers, then turning right around and lobbying for those same workers to lose their benefits. He's essentially asking workers to pay for their own disenfranchisement." Hedge fund managers like Loeb want their hands on teachers' pensions (and more financial contributions from teachers) and to pocket what they don't payout, at the same time, getting their "two-and-twenty cut, or whatever obscene percentage of their retirement monies" the managers get as a fee to manage the money. **12**

To legitimize the privatization of schools so hedge fund managers and wealthy investors could cash in, the government and billionaires first had to manufacture a crisis. This manufactured crisis is rooted in early twentieth century America when the business sector attempted to place Taylorism in the public schools to spit out students as interchangeable parts in factory-line production to better its bottom line. The recent school crisis myth has circulated since Sputnik and was carried over into the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 hyperbolic *A Nation at Risk* report, followed by the 1989 Business Roundtable (which now sponsors Indiana's Education Roundtable) guidelines to bust teachers unions, deskill teachers, destroy students' critical thinking, and give companies cover for job out-sourcing. As David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle's *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* proves, cronies working for policymakers and corporatists today have merely updated the propaganda first used during the Reagan years, as they did for Bill Clinton's Goals 2000 and George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind, the latter which required all schools where 100% of students were not performing proficiently on standardized tests be restructured by 2014, priming them for privatization. Barack Obama is continuing the manufactured crisis by pressing for charter school expansion, using Recovery Act money to fund 700 charter schools, **13** and calling for teacher evaluations based on faulty test score measurements for states to qualify for Race to the Top funding. The manufactured crisis paints students as unprepared for future jobs and public schools are failing to carry out the privatization agenda. **14**

One can't flick on a TV or open a newspaper without hearing the myth that public schools are not preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Despite constant rants about STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), America has too many trained scientists, as Harvard labor economist Richard Freeman and others have remarked. **15** Actually, one recent study suggests that America needs more plumbers and carpenters, not scientists. **16** Besides giving cover to companies who outsource jobs, the STEM hype ignores studies like Indiana University's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy's recent report, which shows that in math and science "Indiana 8<sup>th</sup> graders outperformed most of the world and scored ahead of the U.S. average, continuing a trend for the state. **17** The lack of jobs for engineers in Indiana is the untold story. An August 2012 IU Indiana Business Research Center report notes that since Wall Street collapsed the economy Indiana college graduates with engineering degrees now have one of the "highest probabilities of becoming unemployed," compared to students graduating with other degrees. **18** Peter Cappelli, director of Wharton's Center for Human Resources at the University of Pennsylvania, says US students are doing just fine; it's the companies' hiring practices that are at fault. Corporations do not want to take the time and money to train workers. In surveys,

companies hardly ever mention job applicants lacking academic skills. According to Cappelli there is no skills gap in America. **19**

This workforce readiness meme is just one of many repeated constantly by Indiana newspapers and TV stations which advertise corporate school talking points, portray front group spokespeople as "experts," and seldom, if ever, question the profit motives and rigged research behind the corporate-sponsored statements that our schools are failing. Some reporters and editors are undoubtedly clueless, but many con the audience because their papers are owned by corporations. Some, like *Indianapolis Star's* Scott Elliott, lead organizations funded by many out to privatize public schools.

Fort Wayne's *Journal Gazette* thankfully is an exception to the rule of newspapers hyping the school privatizing agenda. In a *Journal Gazette* piece, Tracy Warner ridicules school privatization public relations campaigns by comparing schools and teachers to police departments and the police. With tongue in cheek, Warner writes that crime is up, so we should permit charter police departments to remove funding from local police stations because crime rate reflects how terrible Indiana police departments have become with their overpaid officers who only care about bloated pensions. Officers' salaries, Warner joshes, should be based on how many crimes occur in their neighborhoods. Indiana, Warner says, could even authorize universities like Ivy Tech to sponsor charter police departments. **20**

Warner's spoof would be funny if it didn't so brilliantly peg the school privatizers' absurd talking points, and one can expose a few more myths. First off, all legitimate studies confirm that charter schools either perform no better or worse than traditional public schools. **21** In fact, most Indiana schools (and those in other states) are not "failing." After examining 23 years of data, Dr. Vic Smith notes that Indiana schools are "currently performing at or near their historic high. **22** If charter schools were held to the same accountability standards as traditional public schools in Indiana and elsewhere, a good majority of them would be closed down. In Indiana, as we will witness in Ch. 3, charter schools with dismal records are kept open (and their leaders able to lease or buy a closed-down traditional public school building for merely one dollar a year) because of political ties.

To sneak more politically connected for-profit charter schools into Indiana, in 2010 legislators cut \$300 million annually from the public school budget and mandated tax caps to purposely ensure the destruction of public schools. After so-called school choice bills passed in 2011, public schools lost \$38 million to private schools in 2012 alone. **23** Today school corporations are forced to ask voters, who can't pay their own property taxes because they lost jobs in the Wall Street meltdown the hedge fund managers helped create, to vote on referendums to fund the schools. In recent years, voters have only approved new school construction projects in 16 of the 40 school districts that have asked for more money. **24** Thanks to state lawmakers, school districts needing cash to pay for programs and avoid laying-off personnel must also ask for local tax referendums through special elections they sometimes have to fund themselves. Since the state controls the purse strings, Republican lawmakers have purposely bolted in place everything needed to start closing down Indiana schools and expanding for-profit charter schools.

The traditional public schools not measuring up in any shape, way, or form are in poverty-stricken areas where government money intentionally has been decreasing for years. Indiana's new "follow the student" funding formula, too, is set up to lead to a system where rich counties will win in the long run. Hammond schools, where 20% of households receive public assistance income, "will lose \$2.3 million in state funding over the next 2 years." In Hamilton County where one in every 3 households brings in over \$200,000 yearly, Carmel Clay Schools "will gain almost \$1 million." **25** The minority and 342,172 poor kids in the Hoosier state are the victims. **26** In Indiana, close to 70% of charter school students are minorities, and over 72% of charter school students live in poverty. **27** As Matthew DiCarlo writes at the Shanker Institute's blog, the state gave "a little over half" of Indiana's poverty-stricken high schools "an F or D [grade], and "of the 125 elementary and middle schools that got an F" in 2012, "100 were in the highest poverty quartile." **28** These are the ones in threat of being taken over by the state and handed to for profit companies operated by government officials' friends and campaign donors. This history of not funding schools which low-income kids attend is no coincidence. By not financing these poor schools appropriately, government officials have shaped the perfect disaster for the privileged class to profit from.

To kick off this school heist, Indiana locked in a place a confusing, Jeb Bush Florida-based system to grade its schools on test scores, so they can be deemed "failing" and given to privatizers. Standardized tests questions are geared toward upper-income level whites and discriminate against non-whites and poor students. These tests

are not used at the expensive private schools (where teachers hold advanced degrees) those working to privatize the public schools attended. Creative kids, moreover, seldom ever do well on these tests. Standardized tests are weapons of mass misinformation. Hoosier scholar Phil Harris, Joan Harris, and Bruce M. Smith detail the misuse of standardized tests in their *The Myths of Standardized Tests: Why They Don't Tell You What You Think They Do*, a must-read condemnation of George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind, Obama's testing blueprint, and former Indiana school superintendent Tony Bennett's drive for testing "drill camps." **29** Indiana spends roughly \$46 million on standardized testing and remediation yearly, instead of putting money into poorly funded schools and pre-school for all. **30**

Overusing standardized tests also has political advantages. Although a calamity for teachers and students, standardized tests aid corporate politicians like Mitch Daniels in less obvious ways. Counting on an uninformed public to vote them into office, politicians like how these tests stifle the development of critical thinking skills necessary in a truly democratic society. Many politicians have ties to the companies behind the testing. Pearson, the educational mega-corporation funding many a lawmaker, has made a killing off of standardized tests since No Child Left Behind became law, along with Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi who owned a \$453 million stake in Pearson. **31** The McGraw-Hill family, owners of the testing mega-giant holding Indiana taxpayers hostage in a \$95 million contract for ISTEP, are long-standing friends with the Bush family, **32** which is very active in promoting the corporate school model in the Hoosier state.

More importantly, in reference to this book's first chapter, standardized tests are designed to stress teachers since their jobs depend on their students passing. In this way, corporate school leaders either drive or fire well-qualified teachers out of the workforce. The more good teachers leave the public schools, the more the schools are set up for "failure." As traditional public schools are closed and more for-profit charter' schools are opened, these qualified teachers can be replaced with deskilled, low-wage, temporary teachers. These temporary teachers, if they are able to bond at all with students they have nothing in common with, disappear for high-paying careers after only a few years, leaving kids who need constant emotional connections feeling used. The kids are being used. Instead of receiving highly qualified teachers, they get five-week boot camp recruits who, for rich people seeking to dismantle the teaching workforce for profit's sake, are as disposable as the school children. This is fine with Milton Friedman disciples like Mitch Daniels and Indiana Republican lawmakers who want the privatization of public schools at any cost. It is also what makes the Indianapolis Mind Trust and its pseudo-liberal supporters tick.

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