

SITE OF EXCLUSION? PRACTICING SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP AND TRANSFORMING
URBAN SPACE THROUGH THE CREATION OF A CHARTER SCHOOL

by

KATHERINE BRINTON HANKINS

(Under the Direction of Deborah G. Martin)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the new subjects and spaces created through the institutional framework of charter schools, which is part of the neoliberalization of public education in the United States. Neoliberal ideology suggests a retrenchment of the state, where free-market mechanisms and individual freedoms are viewed as the ideal solution for the distribution of resources. Charter schools, as neoliberal institutions, are exemplars of new state-citizen relations in that many charter schools have intensely local governance structures, where the schools are managed by private individuals. As such, charter schools provide spaces for new social citizenship rights to be practiced, with the potential to reconfigure sociospatial relations. Using the case study of the creation of the Neighborhood Charter School in an intown neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia, I examine both new practices of citizenship and the way in which charter schools have the potential to transform neighborhoods and cities.

The analysis of the formation of the Neighborhood Charter School in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods of Atlanta, which included an examination of archival sources, interviews, participant observation, and a survey, points to three conceptual findings that contribute to theoretical understandings of neoliberalism, citizenship, and socio-spatial relations.

First, charter schools illustrate a neoliberalizing *and hybridizing* state. The state is both present and transformed in the charter-school framework as compared to traditional public-school structures. Second, the state has changed the provision of social citizenship, by asking citizens to perform activities previously conducted by the state. Connected to the shifting meanings of social citizenship is the construction of subject-citizens, who are tasked to perform community. Third, this research further demonstrates how new institutions such as charter schools are instrumental to the reorganization of spatial relations at the urban and neighborhood scales. I find that charter schools function as local institutions, but their impact has the potential to extend to broader urban areas through their connection to urban regimes. Charter schools, then, by reshaping the activities of citizens in public education, illustrate the new subjects and spaces constructed by a neoliberalizing, yet still supervising, state. As such, charter schools bring into question the coherency of the neoliberal project.

INDEX WORDS: neoliberalism, citizenship, charter schools, urban space, neighborhoods, community

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Jeremy, for your love, support, and wisdom, and to Adeline, for giving me the most beautiful and inspirational reason to finish it.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On a sunny, summer morning, I sat on the patio of a coffee shop and talked with the president of the Grant Park Neighborhood Association about my research. I told him that I was interested in how the neighborhood supported both a traditional public school and a charter school. He replied, “An elementary school is the cornerstone of any community.” His statement reflects a kind of idealism about his neighborhood and the role that an institution, such as a school, can have in a neighborhood.

For me, the term neighborhood conjures up visions of houses with front porches, sidewalks, and tree-lined streets. Attached to this physical description of a neighborhood is a suggestion of social interaction—that the people in those houses form a kind of community around those same porches and sidewalks. Important in this brief description of a neighborhood are the kinds of institutions that provide reasons for social interaction and places for social interaction to occur. For example, a park might provide recreational facilities for neighborhood residents to walk, for children to play, and, importantly, a park provides a place for neighborhood residents to interact. Many institutions, such as city parks, sidewalks, and schools, are public goods. They have no intrinsic market value, and, therefore, their provision requires a collective mechanism in the form of city (or otherwise local) government. Many neighborhood residents rely on the spaces that city governments provide. When there are changes in how public goods are provided, questions arise as to how the relationship between residents and their neighborhood also changes.

There is a sense in this country that people are increasingly disconnected from their families, their neighbors, and their communities (as asserted in Robert Putnam’s best-selling book *Bowling Alone*). It seems to me that what is at the heart of this disconnection is the decreasing number of places where active social and public life can take place. The provision of public goods, such as sidewalks and parks, is less and less of a priority for many local governments. Many scholars refer to this as a result of neoliberalism, where individualism and freedom from government intrusion takes precedence over the common good and social justice (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). This research examines the ways in which a social institution can contribute to—or detract from—this move towards individualism. The community “cornerstone” I investigate is the school.

Since public schools were established in the mid-nineteenth century, an ideal of public education in the United States has been to teach citizenship and to promote democracy (Dewey, 1924 in Mitchell, 2002; Ravitch and Viteritti, 2001). In order to form a democratic nation-state, public schools have been seen as having the potential to be the “great equalizer” of social inequalities by being available to rich and poor children alike (Cremin, 1957). Known as the “common school,” the first public-school model was funded by local property taxes and was tuition-free to all white students. The common schools were governed by local school committees and were subject to minimal state regulation (Kaestle, 2001). They were seen as “a microcosm of the larger society,” with emphasis on both the local community and the greater goals of uniting a citizenry (Holmes, 2001). Common schools, then, represented a federal resource to teach citizenship and yet they were administered and conceptualized at the local scale.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the common school-model of public education, where students attended a local school, has given way to experimental forms of public education, where students are increasingly allowed to choose their public school. Charter schools are one experiment that offers many families not only a choice in public education but the opportunity to design and manage their own school.

Charter schools are public schools that are granted charters by state or local school districts. They are funded with taxpayer money on a per-pupil basis. Charter schools can be established as start-up schools, where private corporations or private citizens design and manage them. Educators and policymakers see them as a strategy to involve local communities in the education of their children (Finn et. al, 2002; Matthews, 1996).

The potential for non-student, community and parental involvement in charter schools suggests that the relationship between citizenship and education is changing. Schools are no longer simply the site where civic virtues are taught, but they represent a new kind of institution where individuals themselves may assert citizenship rights and responsibilities by starting schools in their local communities. In many ways, charter schools echo the ideals embodied in the first common schools: locally-based schools that provide families with a free education.

Given the local nature of schools, the scale at which citizens act to form and maintain charter schools is often at the level of the neighborhood. In effect, individuals are given the opportunity to create a neighborhood institution. As Marston (1988: 418) points out, neighborhood institutions “[play] a powerful role in mediating the structural relation between those who [control] access to economic and political resources and those who [do] not.” Although her study is based on the historical formation of an Irish ethnic identity vis-à-vis community institutions in Lowell, Massachusetts, her assertion that local institutions are often

most salient in forming political and social identity is an important point. As such, local institutions have the potential to reproduce social relations in particular ways and to transform the experience of local places. Given their governance structure, where local individuals can design and manage schools, charter schools in particular exaggerate that potential.

As the Grant Park neighborhood-association president expressed, schools can be at the heart of a community. But what if a charter school is not the only such institution in its neighborhood? Where there is a charter school and a traditional public school serving the same neighborhood region, one can ask questions about the dynamics of a new institution coexisting with an old one. This research examines such a circumstance. I am interested in understanding the role of a locally-designed and managed charter school as a new institutional framework in a neighborhood that is also served by a traditional public school.

The Case Study Neighborhood

The creation of the Neighborhood Charter School in an intown neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia, provides a compelling case study to examine issues of citizenship practice and neighborhood identity. I first learned about the Neighborhood Charter School in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which featured an article about the effort by Grant Park residents to renovate an historic school to house their new charter school. The newspaper coverage celebrated the community effort that parents in the Grant Park neighborhood put forth in repainting and cleaning out the historic Slaton Elementary School in preparation for its fall opening. At the time, I was formulating my research about the role schools, as social institutions that have ties to both the politics of the state and to the politics of local places, play in communities. When I read about the Neighborhood Charter School, it became clear that charter schools provide an even more complex way of examining the relationship between a changing

state and local citizens and spaces. The more I learned about the Neighborhood Charter School, the more I saw an opportunity to explore both the macro-level processes of new forms of education and citizen-involvement, and the micro-level processes of designing and managing a neighborhood institution. With its apparent emphasis on “neighborhood,” the school also offered me an opportunity to investigate how the organizers of the school conceptualized their neighborhood.

Based on my anecdotal knowledge of the Grant Park neighborhood, I knew that it had a reputation as a gentrifying area of Atlanta. The neighborhood has a diverse population, with significant percentages of whites and African-Americans, and it hosts a range of income levels, with the newer residents solidly middle-class. It also has a reputation of having a large number of gays in proportion to the city as a whole. What I knew of the neighborhood made it a perfect stage on which to examine the complexities of citizen activities related to the charter school. Furthermore, I discovered that the neighborhood is also served by a traditional public school, which is located less than a mile from the newly formed Neighborhood Charter School. This case study of the dynamics within the charter school and in relation to its traditional public-school counterpart, offers a window on the kinds of citizenship opportunities each school provides a socially diverse neighborhood, and how these opportunities in turn affect the social space of the neighborhood.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation follows a common structure, where I begin by exploring several bodies of literature to lay the groundwork for my explorations of and contributions to our understanding of citizenship and social space in an era of neoliberalism. In particular, in the next chapter I set out my framework of examining new forms of local institutions in light of shifting rights and

responsibilities for citizens (under neoliberalism). I explore conceptualizations of citizenship to understand the differences between a legal opportunity and a social opportunity in the design and management of charter schools. That is, the concept of citizenship provides a way of understanding the complex relationship between the state and a society in which different social groups have de facto unequal access to the full set of legal entitlements granted by the state. Furthermore, I examine conceptualizations of space to understand how changes in state-society relationships can fundamentally change the experience of everyday places, such as schools and neighborhoods.

In chapter three I provide a sketch of the history of Atlanta and its public school system in order to provide a context for the social and spatial changes that have led to the opening of the Neighborhood Charter School. Chapter three also includes a description of the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the region served by the charter school, which allows for a richer analysis of the neighborhood-school dynamics.

In chapter four, I outline my methodological approach to this research, which centers on a case study of the Neighborhood Charter School. I also explain my epistemological position that this research should address concern for social justice and difference. In addition I outline my research methods, which include both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The remaining chapters present my empirical investigation into the formal and substantive elements of (neoliberal) citizenship surrounding the Neighborhood Charter School in Grant Park.

In order to understand how opportunities to practice citizenship have changed in recent decades in the United States, in chapter five, I explore the possibilities for practicing citizenship in a charter school. I review the legislation at a variety of scales that provides the legal right to start charter schools in Atlanta, drawing out themes in the legislation that point to a dual system

of public education. Also in this chapter I explore the opportunities for citizenship practice for Grant Park residents in the charter school and in the traditional public school. It becomes clear that not only are there differential requirements for practicing citizenship in charter schools and traditional public schools, but that the ability to engage in such activities is contingent on having the resources to do so.

In chapters six and seven, I examine two conceptions of the local that charter schools serve: the citywide and neighborhood scales. Specifically turning to the citywide scale, in chapter six, I examine how charter schools are portrayed in the local newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, in order to understand how they become instrumental for the city itself. I also explore the ways in which the newspaper is sympathetic in its representation of the Neighborhood Charter School, which reinforces the notion that the charter schools—or this charter school in particular—serve the interests of more than just the families with children attending them.

Finally, in chapter seven, I examine the ways in which the concepts of “community” and “neighborhood” are deployed in the charter-school organizing, focusing on the physical and social meanings as expressed by neighborhood residents. The case of the Neighborhood Charter School provides a rich case to explore how neighborhood identity—indeed, the very scale of the neighborhood—is contingent on both territorial boundaries and social interactions. This brings my exploration of the case of a charter school from the formal, legal opportunities to the ways in which actions by individuals—in designing and managing a school—can shape the experiences and geographies of everyday life. It demonstrates the interconnections of state policy, citizenship, social institutions, and place. Furthermore, it extends our understanding about the new kinds of spaces and subjects that new institutional frameworks under neoliberalism create.

To start, I turn to the scholarly literature for an examination of how social institutions provide a link between changing conceptualizations of citizenship, space, and schools in an era of the neoliberal transformation of the state.

CHAPTER 2: PLACING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP, SPACE, AND SCHOOLS UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

In order to investigate how charter schools provide opportunities for citizenship practice in the local spaces of neighborhoods, and how these practices in turn impact the experience of local spaces, I draw on several bodies of literature, including studies of neoliberalism, citizenship, space, and schools. The literature on neoliberalism provides a theoretical framework for understanding changes in the role of the state that have occurred in arenas such as healthcare, welfare, and education in the United States since the 1980s. With its emphasis on individual (and private) participation in the provision of state services, neoliberalism opens up possibilities for citizen action, or new forms of citizenship. Questions arise as to who is acting, how they are acting, and the activities that citizens are engaging in to meet social needs. I draw on the citizenship literature to examine the changing relationship between individuals and state structures and new kinds of opportunities for citizens to take on state-like roles. Furthermore, neoliberal transformations of the U.S. political economy suggest that spaces from the nation-state to the neighborhood are reorganized to foster market-based institutional frameworks. The geographical literature provides important ways of thinking about space, from its role in capitalist relations to the every day experience of neighborhoods. I use the research on schools to bring together an analysis of neoliberal shifts in education with citizen activism in local spaces. What follows is an exploration of the literatures on neoliberalism, citizenship, space, and schools, as I examine their importance for understanding new state-society-space relationships.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism refers to the restructuring of the political economy with an emphasis on enabling markets to correct the inefficiencies of the state at a variety of scales. Neoliberalism is based on an ideology in which unregulated market competition represents the ultimate key to economic development. Furthermore, in neoliberal ideology, free markets provide society with the most efficient distribution of resources. The state is only necessary to provide basic legal and social security to protect individuals' property and political stability (Watts, 1998).

The role of the state, or more broadly theories of the state, are at the center of analysis in much contemporary political geography (Clark and Dear, 1984; Wolch, 1990; Brown, 1997).

According to the *Dictionary of Human Geography*, the state is

...a set of institutions for the protection and maintenance of society. These institutions include government, politics, the judiciary, armed forces, etc., and guarantee the reproduction of social relations in a way that is beyond the capability, or commonly the opposition, of any individual or single social group (Dear, 1998: 789).

As Dear (1998) asserts, political geographers often draw a distinction among state form, function, and apparatus. State form involves “how a specific state structure is constituted by, and evolves within, a given social formation. (A capitalist society should, in principle, give rise to a distinctively capitalist state)” (Dear, 1998: 789). The function of a state involves the kinds of activities the state engages in, and the mechanisms through which the state functions is the state apparatus. For example, under a welfare state (a popular post-World War II model for western, industrialized countries), the function of the state is to redistribute resources to poorer income groups through institutions such as public housing and public education.² In contrast, the role of

² Although, as Johnston (1998) points out, many benefits of the welfare state, such as education and healthcare, are enjoyed by affluent members.

the state in neoliberalism is to guarantee the continued functioning of the free market system. As Brenner and Theodore (2002) assert, this guarantee often means the transformation of a state's apparatus rather than the retrenchment or disappearance of the state as a whole. New economic policies and institutional frameworks are the expression of a changing state apparatus.

Neoliberal policies and institutional frameworks emerged in most western, industrialized countries beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s and spread, via organizations such as the World Bank and IMF, to peripheral countries. Indeed, as Brenner and Theodore (2002: 350) assert, by the mid-1980s, neoliberalism had become “the dominant political and ideological form of capitalist globalization.” Neoliberalism is a global phenomenon, and yet its social and geographic effects can be highly localized and embedded “within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 351). The evidence of neoliberalism is complicated by preexisting social, political, and economic dynamics.

Neoliberalism, or neoliberalization, as Peck and Tickell (2002) name it, is the process of capital restructuring and a reworking of state-society relations. Neoliberalization is understood “as a historically specific, ongoing, and internally contradictory process of market-driven sociospatial transformation, rather than as a fully actualized policy regime, ideological form, or regulatory framework” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 353). By conceptualizing neoliberalization as a process, Peck and Tickell (2002) have opened up analysts to consider the on-going transformations of socio-political and economic geographies.

Scholars are increasingly exploring evidence of “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), which includes the uneven social and geographic effects of neoliberal policies and institutional frameworks. Much of this research is geared towards

understanding the role of neoliberalism and its creation of transnational organizations and transnational subjects (Laurie et al, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Mitchell, 2004). Indeed, neoliberalism is viewed as the ideological and economic transformation of policies at the scale of the nation-state and beyond. Few empirical studies have offered insight into the kinds of economic, political, and social transformations that neoliberal policies and institutions bring about at the local scale. An exception to this has been the recent concern with the transformation of urban areas in light of neoliberalization (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Weber, 2002; Smith, 2002; Jessop, 2002).

As Brenner and Theodore (2002) point out, there have been dysfunctional effects of neoliberal approaches to capital restructuring that have resulted in persistent economic stagnation, intensifying inequality, and “generalized social insecurity” (352). For example, Weber (2002) recounts the dismantling of federal programs that subsidized urban renewal efforts and the increase in cities’ reliance on the private real estate market for redevelopment projects. Because of their dependence on the whims of the market, Weber argues that the fiscal health of cities is at risk. In his grim portrayal of events in New York City at the end of the 1990s, from the state subsidy for the New York Stock Exchange (a “geobribe” to “elite capitalists”) to the police brutality against Haitian immigrant Abner Luima, Smith (2002) articulates the transformation of the urban scale from one of ensuring social reproduction to ensuring capitalist production. In both of these papers, Weber (2002) and Smith (2002) articulate the multiple layers of social insecurity that results from the transformation of urban areas under neoliberalism. These characterizations leave out the (perhaps unintended) consequences of neoliberal policies that actually enable more radical—or perhaps just more hopeful—politics. In

particular, these studies do not reflect on what neoliberal policies mean for the citizen-subjects of transformed urban spaces. How do citizens use new spaces—or scales—of neoliberalism?

Mitchell (2001) opens up some of these questions in her study of transnational immigrants in Canada. She is less concerned with the deleterious effects of neoliberalism and instead investigates the way in which neoliberalism, as rhetoric and policy, gains political purchase and becomes entrenched in everyday life. Mitchell examines Canadian immigration policy from the 1980s that welcomed “entrepreneur” and “investor” immigrants in an attempt to foster economic development in Canada. Many wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong came to Canadian cities, where they impacted local economies, while maintaining ties to Hong Kong. While the immigrant population grew, the provision of social services for immigrants declined. In the case of Vancouver, the shift prompted wealthy immigrants to donate time and money to various Vancouver institutions that provided social services to the Chinese immigrant population. Mitchell (2001) asserts that these two developments—the pro-economic (and transnational) immigration policy and the rise of voluntary institutions with a simultaneous retrenchment of state services are evidence of a neoliberalizing state. Mitchell (2001) points to the implications of these developments for new state-society relations and new concepts of citizenship, but she focuses on the construction of transnational subjects.

As is currently conceptualized, neoliberalism is linked to geoeconomic subjects, who participate in neoliberal transformations. That is, as Mitchell (2001) recounts, Canadian immigration policy encourages the immigration of wealthy “entrepreneurs” or “investors” to make rational, economically-motivated investments in the Canadian economy with little or no assistance from the state. As my discussion of liberal individualism below reflects, the subject is autonomous, rational, and in pursuit of the maximization of profit (or well-being). Neoliberalism

complicates this construction of the subject by relying on geoeconomic subjects *and* on notions of “community,” or, as Jessop (2002: 454-455) asserts, “some plurality of self-organizing communities as a flanking, compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of the market mechanism.” “Communities,” through social or geographical ties, are able to leverage economic and social resources and to provide a kind of state apparatus that is inefficient for the market to bear. Thus the subject becomes complicated by the need for neoliberalism to both maintain the ideological subject as a rational actor with equal opportunity to participate in free markets and the need for individuals to form “communities” to supplement the shortcomings of those markets. Understanding how individual and community actions operate under neoliberalism (or in general), I turn to conceptualizations of citizenship. Citizenship explains how the relationship between the state and individuals is conceptualized and operationalized.

Citizenship

Scholarship on citizenship takes many forms and draws on a variety of theoretical frameworks. Citizenship has traditionally been defined as the set of rights and obligations of members of a political community (Marston and Staeheli, 1994). It is understood as legal standing, or status, and alternately, as practiced through asserting citizenship rights and responsibilities (Shklar, 1989; Marston, 1990; Staeheli, 1999). Much research in citizenship studies acknowledges that there is a tremendous imbalance in formal versus substantive citizenship—both in terms of status and practice (Marston, 1990; Staeheli, 1994; Marston and Staeheli, 1994; Pincetl, 1994). Formal citizenship recognizes the relationship between the state and the individual and is conferred by birthright or by naturalization. It is a kind of contract that assumes the individual is entitled to a set of rights and responsibilities. Substantive citizenship, on the other hand, suggests that basic needs are *available* to individuals and that citizenship

rights may be *practiced*. That is, opportunities to receive a decent education or medical care may, in some cases, theoretically be available, yet social obstacles keep information about goods and services from being available to all citizens.

Citizenship is an important conceptual tool for understanding both the abstract demands of the nation-state in the form of allegiances and obligations and the protections and privileges granted to individuals by the state. As framed by T.H. Marshall (1963), citizenship can be distinguished among three elements of citizenship rights, which he identifies as civil, political, and social. Civil rights, which emerged in the eighteenth century in Great Britain, include the collection of rights necessary for individual freedom. Civil rights are seen as contractual in nature, where individuals are free from intrusion by the state. Political rights, a nineteenth century development, guarantee participation in political institutions in the form of voting and holding political office. In the twentieth century, Marshall suggests that social rights of citizenship emerged in Great Britain, allowing individuals “to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society” (Marshall, 1963 in Shafir, 1998: 14). Social citizenship rights were intended to mitigate the inequalities among different social groups.

Although Marshall’s work focused on citizenship rights as they unfolded in Great Britain, he provides an important theoretical tool for understanding the contradictions embedded in the guarantee of civil, political, and social rights. At its most basic level, the guarantee of civil and political rights is designed for atomistic individuals who are equal under the laws of the state (the ultimate neoliberal subject). Social citizenship rights, on the other hand, are designed to mitigate the unevenness that different social groups experience in obtaining social services. The concept

of social citizenship itself highlights that the subjects of the state are seen as being simultaneously equal and unequal.

Theories of citizenship

Much of the theoretical engagement with citizenship by political theorists, philosophers, and sociologists has concerned the formation of the subject in relation to society or the state. The role of the subject is an important element to understanding different discourses of citizenship, as the relationship between the subject and community or society can change over time (and over space). Two dominant theories suggest different ontological positions of the subject: liberal individualism posits that the subject exists as an individual agent prior to a relationship with “community” or society; whereas, the civic republican approach contends that the subject exists only in relationship to community. These political theories and the ways in which they conceive of the relationship between the individual and society suggest how discourses about charter schools become constructed as focused on the individual (and choice) versus community, or the common good.

Liberal individualism, a dominant ideology in Western political thought and practice, conceives of the individual as sovereign and moral. The individual, or subject, has ontological and epistemological priority over relationships with other individuals or society. This fundamental position of the subject as existing prior to social relations frames citizenship in particular ways: citizenship is the bundle of rights and entitlements given to individual, morally autonomous agents. Rights are seen as inherent in individuals, because individuals are logically prior to society and the state (Oldfield, 1994). According to Oldfield (1994: 190), rights “can be seen as ‘needs’, because they are necessary for agency.” Thus the individual with an ontological status apart from society is the starting point for liberal individualism.

As Oldfield (1998:77) points out, liberal individualism does not purport one conception of the good life with its rights-based emphasis, instead “it advocates the procedures and rules, and the maintenance of an institutional framework, within which individuals--with their given or chosen interests and purposes--pursue their own versions of the good life for themselves.” Implicit in this “neutrality” is that individual citizens are their own responsible moral agents. Furthermore, their duties to their community or social life do not go beyond maintaining a state structure through activities, such as voting and paying taxes.

For liberal individualism, then, citizenship is seen as a ‘status’, which is granted by the state but should not be interfered with by the state. The social bonds between individuals in society or the state are voluntary and based on contracts (Oldfield, 1994)³. This reliance on contracts “neither creates nor sustains any social solidarity or cohesion, or any sense of common purpose” (Oldfield, 1994: 190). Essentially, liberal individualism points to a private conception of citizenship (Oldfield, 1994).

In liberal individualism, social citizenship is seen as less important than civil or political citizenship rights. In the liberal individualist ideal, there would be no need for social citizenship rights, because all subjects are viewed as having equal status in relationship to the state. Civil rights would be emphasized, given the contractual nature of the relationship between the subject and the state.

The civic republican tradition (which has also been used interchangeably with communitarianism) offers a conceptualization of individuals in which the self, or the subject is constituted *from* community rather than existing separate from or *a priori* to society. It advocates an understanding of the subject within a structure of community—not apart from it.

³ Fraser and Gordon (1998) discuss the prevalence of the contract imaginary in contemporary discussions of social welfare in the United States.

Oldfield (1994) asserts that in civic republicanism, citizenship is not a status but requires a practice or activity. By fulfilling citizenship duties—by attending public school or by volunteering at a food bank—individuals act to benefit society.

In a neoliberal utopia, the subjects would essentially be independent and autonomous (following liberal individualism); however, as Jessop (2002) point out, neoliberalism also relies on the construction of communities to supplement the inadequacies of a purely market-based society. This contradiction is illustrated by the kinds of rights citizens are granted in neoliberalism and the opportunities for action that these rights promise.

Practicing citizenship

It is helpful to consider the *practice of citizenship* and the possibilities for such activities associated with Marshall's civil, political, and social citizenship elements. Political and social citizenship can be practiced, or acted upon by citizens or non-citizens, whereas civil citizenship is a status where the state is responsible for the protection of individual rights. In the case of political citizenship rights, the act of voting or being a representative in a political body can be seen as the practice of citizenship. Practicing social citizenship, however, entails receiving aid or common privileges, "while maintaining status as full members of society entitled to 'equal respect'" and sharing "a common set of institutions and services designed for all citizens..." (Fraser and Gordon, 1998: 113). In sum, political citizenship entails the actions of citizens in creating and participating in the state; civil citizenship entails the actions of the state towards its citizens in guaranteeing rights; and social citizenship is the two-way relationship of the state providing services and institutions that are used, or practiced, by its citizens. These services and institutions include public facilities such as schools and parks. Thus, by attending and participating in state-provided public schools that follow federal and state (and local) educational

and social standards, students (and parents) exercise social citizenship rights. Likewise, by joining a local library or participating in computer training class at a community center, individuals can practice social citizenship.

Citizenship does not have to be practiced by legal citizens, rather it is the performance of citizenship rights and obligations—not the legal standing of citizens—that gives meaning to the practice of social citizenship. Clark (1994), for instance, examines the case of residents living in housing cooperatives who build on a multiplicity of identities of gender, race, and “lifeworlds,” to form social networks in which they assert and practice their citizenship rights in order to maintain control of their housing cooperatives. Pincetl (1994), on the other hand, explores the practice of citizenship by noncitizens. She examines three cases of undocumented Latino workers organizing and protesting for workers’ rights in Los Angeles. Her work refines the definition of the practice of citizenship to include the performance of citizenship identity by individuals who are not granted formal political citizenship rights. Nonetheless, they seek social citizenship rights in the sphere of work, addressing pay and work conditions.

In civic republicanism, then, citizenship—whether or not a formal status—entails community. Individuals have duties “associated with their very identification of themselves as citizens” (Oldfield, 1994: 192), and they risk their very citizenship if they do not share in the responsibility for the continuity of their political community. In civic republicanism, there is no such thing as the private citizen. It is not that an individual has no private life; it is rather that “to be a citizen is to be politically active, and political activity takes place in the public domain” (Oldfield, 1998: 81). Thus, unlike the liberal individualism approach, the community defines the meaning of citizenship. The citizen in civic republicanism is a public citizen acting in the interests of the greater public.

These underlying theoretical approaches to citizenship are instructive in understanding fundamental disagreements or clashes among groups who articulate citizenship in different ways. Furthermore, the activities associated with asserting citizenship identity are not always “voluntary” actions that arise from political activism, as in the case studies of Clark (1994) and Pincetl (1994). The state can also encourage—or even require—that individual citizens take over certain forms of state activity under neoliberal regimes. For example, in the late 1980s, the Thatcher government began discussing the concept of the ‘active citizen’ in Great Britain. ‘Active citizenship’ is where citizens are to be engaged more fully in local governance, taking on more responsibilities as a “moral” imperative (Kearns, 1995). ‘Active citizens’ should be compelled to volunteer their wealth and their skills in the service of others, while funding for state services is subsequently reduced. The ‘Citizen’s Charter’, a formal expression of the ‘active citizen’ discourse, was published in 1991. The Charter outlined citizen responsibilities and entitlements in Great Britain, generating discussion about the meaning of citizenship in a changing social, political, and economic climate.

Fyfe (1995) examines the effects of citizenship and the ‘Citizen’s Charter’ in Great Britain on the relationship between individual citizens and the state. He finds that lines are redrawn between the “private” and the “public,” as particular law and order policies “[create] spaces within which responsibility for the prevention of crime and the maintenance of order shifts from the state to civil society,…” (Fyfe, 1995:178). The most common forms of ‘active citizenship’ in policing crimes is the formation of neighborhood-watch programs and membership in the “Special Constabulary,” a volunteer organization in which participants undertake activities such as routine patrols and crowd control (Fyfe, 1995). By examining the law and order legislation passed by the British government, Fyfe (1995) argues that the meaning

of citizenship becomes redefined away from social democratic ideals towards liberal individualist consumerism. In the language of Marshall, emphasis shifted toward civil and political citizenship and away from social citizenship.

Citizenship and neoliberalism

The changes in social citizenship undergone in Britain and the United States (and elsewhere) reflect a broader shift towards an economic logic driving all aspects of state policies, as discussed above (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Indeed, many state functions have been contracted out to more “efficient” private groups. Wolch (1990) terms the devolution of state responsibilities to subcontracted agencies the “shadow state.” She argues that the welfare state, which had emerged in most Western capitalist countries by the mid-twentieth century, began “to seek new approaches to the provision of human services” in the 1970s and 1980s (Wolch, 1990: 4). Volunteer agencies and for-profit institutions began filling roles left vacant by a shrinking state. Private firms and private citizens are now providing state-funded care in the arenas of healthcare, housing, community development, and education.

The retrenchment of the state is commonly associated with neoliberal policies, but in many cases, the state does not disappear. The case of social citizenship rights in a neoliberal state challenges the retrenchment thesis. Indeed, social citizenship holds a peculiar place in a neoliberalizing state, because it is inherently contradictory to neoliberalism. Social citizenship suggests that markets are imperfect for ensuring the social reproduction of the labor force/citizens. Citizens themselves have to demand those rights or act in some way to obtain those rights. Institutions, such as healthcare and public education, which are linked to social citizenship rights, have undergone a transformation to more market-based systems; however, in such transformations the state does not disappear. In many cases, its apparatus hybridizes,

offering both “standard” institutions and market-based or otherwise transformed institutions. For example, returning to Mitchell’s (2001) example of the development of voluntary social service institutions for Chinese immigrants, the Canadian state devolved itself of the federal provision of social-service institutions. However, instead of disappearing altogether, the federal government offered grants to private and voluntary community institutions to provide social services to immigrants. This example highlights that the state, through neoliberalization, shifted scales. Instead of providing welfare benefits at the federal level, the state shifts to a loose set of guidelines and grants for local states (or provinces) and cities to administer. This transformation of the state changes the scale at which the provision of benefits and services are manifest and the subjects that interact with those benefits and services.

Scales of citizenship

Scholars are increasingly questioning the importance of analyzing citizenship rights at the scale of the nation-state (Marston and Staeheli, 1994; Staeheli, 1994; Staeheli, 1999; Brown, 1997). For instance, Staeheli (1999) argues that the arenas in which citizens act are often not at the scale of the nation-state but in local political and institutional structures. This is attributed to a variety of factors, such as “the inability (or unwillingness) of nation-states to guarantee social and economic rights” due to processes of globalization (Staeheli, 1999: 60). In order to realize citizenship rights, Staeheli (1999) argues, citizens must look beyond the scale of the nation-state. Furthermore, Marston and Staeheli (1994) call for the examination of the “local arena” in which citizenship rights and responsibilities are practiced in response to the restructuring of political and economic conditions. In fact, an increasing number of scholars have begun to pay attention to the local scales of citizenship (Staeheli, 1994; Brown, 1994, 1997).

This shift toward examining local scales is concurrent with the observation made by scholars that the traditional welfare state is changing (M.K. Brown, 1986 in Brown, 1997; Wolch, 1990) as neoliberal policies transform the delivery of social services (Brown, 1997; Brennan and Theodore, 2002). In his ethnography of AIDS organization volunteers and state workers in Vancouver, for example, Brown (1997) traces the multiple identities of government worker, volunteer, friend, and caregiver that shape the citizenship experience and the subsequent scales at which these volunteers and state workers act. The home, the “community” and the state are all important scales at which AIDS work is experienced. Brown (1997: 19) argues that shifts in the state, which have enabled new AIDS care-giving strategies, complicate “any simple geography of the state.” That is, the state is salient at a variety of scales and places, despite the national scale of formal citizenship rights. Citizens practice social citizenship, in particular, at quite local scales. With a renewed interest in the local scales of citizenship, scholars are increasingly examining the new forms of citizenship as expressed at the scale of the urban (Brown, 1994; 1997; Fyfe, 1995). The urban scale is particularly salient under neoliberalism because cities play “a strategic role... in the contemporary remaking of political-economic space” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 349). The way in which citizens participate in this remaking of space is important to examine.

The urban scale of citizenship and urban governance

At a very basic level, the scale of the urban is most salient for many inhabitants of industrialized countries, as it is the location where the majority of people live and work. It is yet another scale at which to practice citizenship, in the form of voting for City Councils (practicing political citizenship) or enjoying city parks (exercising social citizenship rights). As in the case

with national citizenship rights, opportunities for the practice of citizenship in urban governance vary over time and with different purpose.

Hall and Hubbard (1996: 153) suggest that there has been an important shift in the way in which cities are governed in recent decades. Urban governance has been reoriented away from the provision of services to increasing efforts at local economic development (a result of neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002)). Even the provision of social services has echoed the discourse of the market, making individual cities more “entrepreneurial” (Harvey, 1989). According to Hall and Hubbard (1996), the shift towards entrepreneurialism can be understood in terms of the urban elites responding to competitive pressures of limited capital in a restructuring global economy. That is, urban areas are competing with each other to capture highly mobile capital (or rather capital that is perceived as highly mobile (Cox, 1993)). For example, the city of Atlanta has aggressively sought multinational and national high-tech firms, touting its large, international airport, inexpensive land prices, and highly trained labor force (Rutheiser, 1996; Stone, 1989). This dynamic is mediated by intra-urban power structures: urban regimes. Urban regimes are public-private coalitions that govern cities (Stone, 1989).

Regime theory is part of a larger body of work in urban governance that assumes that the process of governance is more complex than simply understanding government (Painter, 1997). According to Painter (1997:128), “Successful governance, whether of a city, a nation-state, international relations, or economic processes almost always depends on the availability and mobilization of resources and actors beyond those that are formally part of government.” Furthermore, Stone (1989:3) argues that, “what makes governance...effective is not the formal machinery of government, but rather the informal partnerships between City Hall and the downtown business elite.” Regime theory provides an opening to consider how “access to local

politics is uneven, so that certain groups enjoy more favorable terms” (Peck, 1995 in Hall and Hubbard, 1996: 156).

Urban regimes have a vested interest in maintaining a healthy, vibrant city. To this end, Cox and Mair (1988) suggest that in order for local businesses (and cities) to survive, the local elites must create the conditions for local capital to stay in place. Local elites include those who control social and economic capital, such as business leaders, party functionaries, officers in nonprofit foundations, and church leaders (Stone, 1989). They also include newspaper companies. These elites are locally dependent in that they rely on the viability of a particular territory—the social networks, labor markets, and consumer markets that constitute cities. As Cox and Mair (1988: 309) argue,

The local newspaper company, dependent on the brand loyalty of readers and advertisers and operating in a set territory, is one of the clearest cases of a firm that is locally dependent as a result of geographically limited and non-substitutable commodity exchanges.

A local newspaper reports on local events with a local readership and is thus locally dependent on a particular place. Thus, in conjunction with business leaders and community leaders, newspaper companies have a strong interest in developing the conditions for an economically successful city.

In order to encourage economic development, local elites support the provision of career opportunities, cultural facilities, good schools, and the like in order to build “community” (Cox and Mair, 1988). Cox and Mair (1988: 320) argue that the “idea of a local community is of a highly instrumental nature” in order to create the conditions for a pacified, *local* middle class. A happy middle class represents a necessary labor market and consumer market for the local elite.

Urban regimes reflect two important aspects of changing state-society relations. First, they are evidence of a changing state, where private-public partnerships are lauded as the

solution to a failing state (Brown, 1999; Mitchell, 2001). They illustrate the increasing role of private citizens and businesses in governance, a step towards the neoliberal fantasy of correcting state bureaucracies with market mechanisms. Secondly, they point to the way in which citizens, depending on their access to social and economic capital, are positioned differently vis-à-vis the state. Local business leaders, party functionaries, officers in nonprofit foundations, and the like have a central role in governing cities. Their interactions with the traditional state (elected officials) can have profound influence on legislative agendas and the distribution of state resources. It is therefore critical to examine the multiple axes of privilege and resources that constitute urban regimes and, just as importantly, the myriad ways in which subjects of the state are denied such access to governance. I turn to a discussion of the social groups that are most disadvantaged by the unevenness of access to power and to social institutions.

Categories of Difference

Categories of difference include the ways in which people identify themselves or are identified with others. An important starting point for understanding identity categories is the recognition that identities are processual, they are performed, and they are unstable (Pratt, 1998). Individuals simultaneously “belong” to different kinds of communities that are influenced by their experiences of such categories as class, race, gender, and sexuality. These different categories are reinforced and naturalized through material social relations and symbolic representations of different groups (McDowell, 1999). As such, different identity categories are mapped onto shifting power relations, such that social groups have differential access to power (Anderson, 1999).

In the context of urban regimes, powerful actors include those who have attained social and economic status. In Atlanta, the original case study for Stone’s (1989) urban regime thesis,

categories of race and class structured the degree to which different actors were able to join the elite and the kinds of roles they played within it. For example, middle-class, African-American elected officials joined wealthy, white business owners in directing economic development schemes for the city (e.g., the 1996 Olympics). Likewise, categories of race and class also structure the absence of individuals from power, such as the lack of lower-income African-Americans in Atlanta's urban governance. Thus, categories of difference, such as race and class, influence the degree to which individuals may occupy positions of power—whether in the arena of the market or the neoliberalizing state.

Race is a socially-constructed categorization of human difference that has been historically (and erroneously) linked to biological differences. As Anderson (1999: 20) notes, “racial classifications have been cultural ascriptions, but their history reveals that they have also assuredly been political phenomena.” She argues that race is not “just another social construction” but has been used to maintain historically situated power relations. Indeed, Anderson (1999:20) asserts that “Like many categories of human cognition, racial representations have to do much less with ‘truth’ (a one-to-one correspondence with what is ‘out there’) than with faith and material interests.” Indeed, the racialization of individuals has been linked to underlying capitalist processes, where a racialized group is required to enable cheap labor in the workings of capitalism. Nonetheless, racial identities are often salient experiences for those who are racialized. In the case of social (and spatial) struggle in Atlanta, for example, categories of “black” and “white” have long been part of the cultural and material experiences of residents, as chapter three describes.

In the United States, class is a slightly more difficult identity category to articulate. Bourdieu (1987) provides dimensions to the social powers associated with class difference. He

articulates the kinds of capital that individuals possess, including economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital resources, where economic capital is the possession of monetary power, cultural capital is the possession of information, social capital includes resources based on social networks and group membership, and symbolic capital is the “form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu, 1987: 4). Class differences revolve around differential access to these kinds of capital. Bourdieu (1987) notes that occupation is generally a good indicator of the kinds of class position individuals have, given that occupations are usually associated with different incomes, informational skills, and social networks.

A rigid class structure, based on different configurations of capital that individuals can possess, has not developed in the United States, because, according to Hartz (1955 in Marston, 1988), the country’s history lacks feudalism, aristocracy, or a repressive state. Whatever the reason, barring pockets of working-class resistance, such as the union organizing movements of the early twentieth century, class identity in the United States has been less explicit than race in terms of a self-identified category of difference. Nonetheless, many scholars argue that class is *the* fundamental category of difference that is *experienced* and that motivates the kind of symbolic differences constructed around race and gender (Harvey, 1989, 1996). The divisions in social groups predicated on race and gender are often more fundamentally about maintaining a distracted working class that will not challenge the social (and economic) unevenness of the capitalist system.

Categories of difference, whether performed or imposed, are about an individual’s positionality with respect to social power. Such differential access to power contrasts with neoliberalism’s ideal subject: the autonomous, rational actor who can participate freely in the

market. Indeed, the discourse on neoliberalism encourages the empowerment of citizens and the reduction (or transformation) of the traditional welfare state. But it is the welfare state—or the social institutions therein—that recognizes and provides opportunities for oppressed groups to obtain social services. A neoliberalizing state raises questions about the way in which difference complicates the subject-citizen.

Difference and citizenship

As mentioned previously, Marshall's conceptualization of social citizenship is directly linked to the need for marginalized groups to overcome the assumption that all members in a political community are equal in the eyes of the state. Individuals, because of their experience of multiple identities, often have a complex positionality with regard to asserting social citizenship rights. For example, an African-American, middle-class woman may own her own home (a civil right to own private property given the economic means) yet experience the racialization and feel excluded from her largely white neighborhood association (a social institution). As this example reflects, axes of identity and difference, such as race and class, are rooted in individual and collective social experiences *in certain places*. Indeed, experiences of race and class shape and are shaped by social institutions and social (and spatial) boundaries (Pratt, 1998).

Social Institutions

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, an institution is defined as “a significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture” and “an established organization or corporation especially of a public character” (“Institution,” 1998: 606). Nagar and Leitner (1998) point out that institutions can be powerful markers that configure struggles over identity and difference. Institutions, such as schools, community organizations, and churches, often represent a material expression of the inclusion of particular groups and the exclusion of others.

Thus control over institutions can reflect particular struggles over identity and difference. In their examination of identity and community activism in Dar es Salaam, Nagar and Leitner (1998) explore identity categories such as religion, caste, and language and their relationship to institutions that define and enable identity and community activism by Asians in Tanzania. They argue that the control over the material spaces of community halls and schools is paramount to the active construction and assertion of identity. Communal places are significant as “sites of struggles and negotiations over social identities/boundaries and power relations within and between communities” (Nagar and Leitner, 1998: 231). Nagar and Leitner’s (1998) study is instructive in understanding the importance of social institutions—such as schools—in constructing or reifying identities.

In addition, social institutions are integral to the exercise of citizenship rights. As Barbalet (1988) points out, Marshall’s important contribution to theorizing citizenship was not so much in identifying elements of citizenship (and their contradictions) but by linking these elements to different institutional bases. In fact, the development of social institutions enabled civil, political, and social rights to be exercised. The institution associated with civil rights includes the rule of law and a system of courts (Barbalet, 1988). A court system provides citizens and the state with an outlet to enforce contracts. The development of parliamentary institutions is a reflection of political rights, as Marshall conceptualizes them. Parliamentary institutions provide individuals with the framework to participate in the political process by voting and electing public officers. Finally, social services and the educational system are the institutions that enable the provision of social citizenship (Barbalet, 1988). They allow individuals to assert citizenship rights by enjoying social benefits outside the realm of the

market. That is, individuals do not have to engage in the market economy for basic needs such as healthcare and education.

As indicated earlier, neoliberalism has transformed the framework of social institutions in the contemporary United States. Given over to more of private, or market-based and *local* management, social institutions at the beginning of the twenty-first century are highly embedded in the complexities of local social relations and the particularities of certain places. The availability of social citizenship rights through social institutions is complicated by a changing institutional framework. The purpose of this research is to examine public education as a social institution that is made more complex by the existence of different social groups (for whom social citizenship rights are ultimately designed) who are part of the politics of local places.

Social institutions are part of a broader social and material experience of space and place. Examining the cultural and class differences within places, such as neighborhoods, is crucial to understanding how difference is produced (Jackson, 2000) and how citizenship rights are negotiated in a neoliberalizing state.

Social Theory and Space

Geographers have long claimed “space” as a defining feature of the discipline. There are many ways in which space has been considered in the field: as regional differentiation, as mathematical space, as abstract space versus relative space, and, more recently, as a product of social relations and practices (Harvey, 1989; Massey, 1991, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991). Smith (1983: 72) identifies this shift as one from the concept of space as one of “steady abstraction” to the idea of space in “dialectical development.” From the ‘space as social product’ lens, there are two dominant epistemological stances on space. One is derived from the historical materialist reading of space as a product of capitalist social relations (Harvey, 1989, Lefebvre, 1991;

Merrifield, 1993). The other reflects the frustration that some scholars have with the emphasis on class and capitalism; they call for consideration of space as the result of the negotiation of cultural practices and identity politics, a poststructuralist approach (Massey, 1991; 1992; Anderson, 1991; Cope, 1996). Following Marston (1988) I argue that space is produced by the forces of capitalist class relations yet understood and experienced as more of a negotiation of cultural—including class and racial—identities.

Lefebvre (1991), credited with articulating space as socially produced, traces the notions of space from Cartesian space to Kantian space to mathematical space. He critiques these descriptive notions of space and instead seeks to provide theorizations of the production of space. For Lefebvre, social space is not a thing but a set of social relations, which are contingent upon changing modes of production. Lefebvre wants to unify theories of physical space, mental space, and social space in his argument that (social) space is a (social) product. He proposes a conceptual triad of space (1991: 33): spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Purcell (2000: 188) articulates Lefebvre's triad a little differently as material space, conceptual space, and lived space. Material space refers to concrete spatial relations in the material world; conceptual space refers to imagined space; and lived space is the space people experience in everyday life, which includes the interplay of material space and conceptual space. Lurking in Lefebvre's conceptualization (although less so in Purcell's) is the idea that it is capitalism and capitalist social processes that drive the production of these different experiences of space. For example, the dominance of capitalism in western countries has produced "abstract space," which is characterized by social fragmentation.

Similarly, Harvey (1989, 2000) argues for an understanding of space as the product of the social relations of capitalism. He argues that, "[t]ime and space both get defined through the

organization of social practices fundamental to commodity production” (Harvey, 1989: 239). That is, space is produced through the social relations required of capitalist processes. Likewise, for Smith (1983), space is both a commodity and an obstacle in capitalism, a tension that produces uneven development, or differences in geographical space. That is, space, such as property, can be bought and sold as a commodity in the capitalist system. Like other commodities, it is subject to overinvestment and a subsequent decline in value. For example, spaces that are valued at one time for investment and development will later decline and suffer disinvestment as other locations offer new opportunities for development. Thus, for these geographers space is produced by the logic of capitalist social relations, where cycles of capital accumulation require new spaces that eventually play out in the creative destruction of the physical (and social) landscape.

Massey (1992) argues that it is necessary to conceptualize space as socially constructed and the social as spatially constructed. She asserts that space needs to be conceptualized as “constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global” (80). Her main concern is that the many definitions of space that are offered (or absent) often deprive space of politics and the possibility of politics.⁴ Like Harvey, Massey sees space as “integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics” (Massey, 1992: 84).

Citizenship and space

Conceptually, how people can act politically in space brings geographic notions of space together with political themes of citizenship. Furthermore, citizenship rights are changing in a neoliberalizing state, which impacts the kinds of spaces and the scales at which citizenship rights may be exercised. In this section, I describe how geographers have made contributions to

⁴ Her essay was written in response to Laclau’s (1990) conceptualization of space in [New Reflections of Our Time](#).

problematizing the kinds of spaces that theories of citizenship suggest. In particular, I trace the kinds of spaces that liberal individualist and civic republican approaches imply. In addition, I suggest that we can think of spatial tensions as struggles over political and social citizenship rights.

There have been two main conceptualizations of the geographies of citizenship, one based on politico-territorial limits, the other on individual actors and practices. The first is the importance of space or territory (associated with nation-states) in informing understandings of citizenship. That is, there are territorial limits associated with particular states, what Painter and Philo (1995: 112) call “the bounded space of citizenship.” This characterization has largely been associated with citizenship as a legal status (such as citizenship rights associated with a particular nation-state, such as the United States--or civil citizenship in Marshall’s terms). Painter and Philo (1995) discuss the problem with the first conception of space as a bounded territory. Specifically, this conception “cannot be straightforwardly inclusionary because some of the people resident within the territorial limits [of a state] are not properly regarded [as citizens]” (112). Kofman (1995), for instance, examines these spaces of citizenship that include the invisible immigrants in contemporary Europe and the possibilities for their inclusion into formal citizenship, such as North African immigrants in France. Likewise, Pincetl’s (1994) case includes “invisible” citizens (Mexican workers) asserting citizenship identity beyond the territory of their nation-state. This concern with the territory of citizenship and citizenship status centers on civil citizenship space, or the recognition of citizenship as status in a particular territory.

The second conceptualization of citizenship is the space of participation, or the space of social and political citizenship practice, in which citizens are given both the material and metaphorical space to participate fully (either out of desire or due to the retraction of state

services). This includes both the physical infrastructure of participation, such as the existence of sidewalks or plazas for public protest, and the availability of those spaces to enact citizenship rights. As Staeheli (1999) notes, this space is often at the scale of the local. This conceptualization of space recognizes the kinds of spaces that have enabled activism by citizens (or noncitizens).

Spaces of civil citizenship, where particular rights are contractually agreed upon and based on territory, are different from the spaces of social and political citizenship practice. The latter is contingent on the availability of such institutions as voting booths and public schools. Such spaces are required for the two-way relationship between the state and individuals. That is, if the state provides opportunities for individuals to become part of the political process and to enjoy social benefits, then it must provide spaces in which these practices may take place.

Another analytical distinction among space and citizenship centers on the theoretical underpinnings of how citizenship is conceptualized. The concepts of space implicit in the liberal individualist approach to citizenship suggest a largely privatized society in which there are limited “public” arenas in which to conduct state responsibilities, such as voting. The liberal individualist tradition offers an emphasis on neutrality in the public arena. Public space is a space “within which autonomous individuals can pursue and develop various conceptions of the good life” (Benhabib, 1992: 83). It is a space in which many different agendas are put forth but none are viewed as superior or morally better. The emphasis here is on atomistic individuals who neither threaten the state nor other individuals. Otherwise, space is considered in the sphere of the private, where private property rights are protected from the state.

In contrast, to operationalize civic republicanism, Oldfield (1994) argues that political tasks must be decentralized to focus on community. Young (1990: 48) sees the civic republican

model of “the good society” as composed of “decentralized, economically self-sufficient, face-to-face communities as autonomous political entities” (of which she is highly critical). The civic republican approach, then, offers a different understanding of the relationship between citizenship and space. There is no distinction between private and public spaces--the public is the private, as the citizen is constituted by the community. However, in both Oldfield’s and Young’s characterization of what this community-based society would look like, they both see a decentralized organization of small communities⁵. This conceptualization of the relationship of citizenship to space suggests that the “local” space is the most important to exercising and maintaining citizenship in social life. Thus, there becomes a hierarchy of space, where the local is seen as most salient scale in which citizenship should be practiced (over the national or global, for instance)⁶. The emphasis on the local scale underscores the goals of neoliberalism, which is to reduce the role of the state and to give citizens local control of their resources.

Practicing citizenship at the local scale, such as voting (exercising political citizenship rights) or organizing a neighborhood association (exercising social citizenship rights), often occurs in public spaces. Indeed different conceptualizations of citizenship imply different configurations of public and private spaces. Before exploring the ways in which geographers have contemplated ‘spaces of citizenship’ with a consideration of fluid identities (and fluid state structures, for that matter), I consider how geographers have added to debates about public and private spaces (following the liberal individualist approach dominant in the U.S. political arena).

Mitchell (1996, 1997) is concerned with understanding how public space comes to be defined--both in terms of its legal construction and its social construction. He argues that the “regulation of public space necessarily regulates the nature of public debate: the sorts of actions

⁵ Although Oldfield (1998: 84) does argue that community should be emphasized in terms of function rather than with an emphasis on the fixity of place.

⁶ This contrasts with Marshall’s emphasis of citizenship at the scale of the nation-state.

and practices that can be considered legitimate, the role of various groups as members of a legitimate public, etc” (Mitchell, 1997: 320). Furthermore, legal frameworks construct public spaces in particular ways. Mitchell analyzes recent legislation by the Supreme Court as maintaining liberal notions of democracy, where the Court writes “rules for public space... that will make dissent possible, but only if it can be shown to be entirely free of ‘force’ or ‘violence’” (Mitchell, 1996: 153). That is, the rules governing public space ensure that protest is gentle—or absent a serious challenge to the dominant order. In fact, according to the U.S. Supreme Court’s public forum doctrine, public spaces must be “orderly and rational” for them to “work” as places where protest and dissent may take place (Mitchell, 1996: 155). Public spaces according to U.S. law are conceptualized under the liberal individualist framework, where no one version of the “good life” can win out, as articulated by Benhabib (1992).

Given the neoliberal state, where private actors are filling state-like roles alongside traditional state institutions, the distinction between public and private persons and spaces becomes complicated. For instance, in his discussion of queer citizenship, Bell (1995) argues that the public-private dichotomy is an unstable construct. That is, it is not fixed. Events that happen in private spaces can be manipulated as public, when the interest of the “public” is served. Bell (1995) discusses a case where police officers confiscate a private video of gay males engaging in sexual behavior and prosecute the men on assault charges. Normally, activities that take place in the space of the home, such as sexual activity, are considered private, and therefore outside of regulation or scrutiny by police officers. But in the case that Bell discusses, the police officers construct the private activities as a public nuisance. The men are convicted on assault charges for the content of the video. On the flip side, as Brown (1994) notes, oftentimes problems or conflicts that are deemed “private” are then marginalized as not

political (or not important) and therefore not taken up by “public” interests. For example, domestic violence is often designated as a private concern and therefore not investigated by the police. Likewise, Brown (1997) argues that public and private identities become blurred as state (public) workers are employed in the (private) space of the home as with health services for AIDS patients. These examples focus on the way in which identity politics and state structures blur the meaning of “public” and “private” practices and spaces.

The distinction between private and public places, although problematic (and fluid), is also tremendously important. Without public spaces, even those that are restricted, the very constitution of a “public” is at risk. That is, if there were no spaces to interact freely, without the expectation of commerce, for instance, then a public identity—indeed the existence of civil society and ultimately the state—would erode. Public spaces are vital to the exchange of ideas and to the recognition (and resolution) of social problems. For example, if middle-class residents never leave their gated communities or their automobiles to walk on public sidewalks, they will likely have little interaction with people who are unlike them. They will have little idea of how other social groups live and work. Consequently, they will have little interest in protecting the social citizenship rights of people who are not middle class and who do not live in gated housing developments. Public spaces and public institutions are vital to maintaining the existence of social citizenship rights and social citizenship institutions in a democratic state.

At its most basic conception, citizenship is a set of rights and obligations of members in a political community. As such, the practice of citizenship must take place *somewhere*, be it the voting booth, city hall, or the neighborhood meeting. Additionally, as Purcell (2001) points out, sometimes political action is *about* space.

Politics of space

The practice of citizenship, be it political or social, does not just have salience at particular scales, such as the scale of the urban or the home, but it is often about the configuration of the city or the neighborhood. Using Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as material, conceptual, and lived, Purcell (2001) explores political activism as a politics of space. He investigates the activism of homeowners in suburban Los Angeles and argues that homeowners think about their agenda in terms of a spatial vision, such as homes on tree-lined, little-trafficked streets. He suggests that homeowners try to overcome the "spatial mismatch" of their idealized vision of a suburban Los Angeles neighborhood with the material reality of that neighborhood. This mismatch is what spurred homeowners to organize. In particular, the homeowners objected to multi-family and commercial development in their neighborhood, because it did not represent to them what a suburban Los Angeles neighborhood ought to look like. They saw multi-family housing and commercial structures as an intrusion on their goal of maintaining a quiet single-family residential area. Thus, homeowner activism as described by Purcell (2001) is a kind of practice of citizenship over a politics of space.

One dimension of Lefebvre's triad of space that operates in a politics of space is the conceptual, where individuals have some ideal vision of how their space ought to be experienced; a spatial imaginary. A spatial imaginary represents an individual's idealized vision of what a space ought to be in terms of social interactions and/or material space. Purcell (2001) argues that homeowners organize and act around spatial imaginaries, or what he terms a politics of space, rather than a particular identity category such as class, race, gender, or nationalism. Although he acknowledges the importance of categories of difference in forming the suburban ideal in the first place, he asserts that what motivates homeowners to organize politically is a

shared vision of *space* and the desire to maintain or transform the every day space they experience.

The way in which the components of a particular spatial vision, such as manicured lawns, garages, and single-family homes, are influenced by expectations of space with particular gendered, racialized, classed, or sexualized undertones receives little attention in his study. That is, for a middle-class individual, a spatial imaginary may include a neighborhood of renovated historic homes with little consideration of the availability of grocery stores nearby. On the other hand, a single mother may seek out a neighborhood with convenient access to daycare or a school. The details of a spatial imaginary are contingent upon the needs and desires of different social groups. This conceptualization of space opens up a way of considering the motivations that individuals have for practicing citizenship in particular ways and in particular places. That is, different social groups pursue political action around different ideals of space. It also assumes a local setting for spatial politics to emerge.

Neighborhoods

The scale of the neighborhood has long been a focus of urban geography (and sociology) studies. The meaning of the term ‘neighborhood’ is unclear, however. Neighborhoods are often conflated with notions of community, they are considered as a basis for political action, they are a site of social reproduction, and they are the stage upon which processes of gentrification unfold. These elements are instructive in understanding how neighborhoods are experienced as a place and how they are the result of larger socioeconomic and political processes.

The term “neighborhood” itself is fraught with imprecision in terms of its meaning as a territory or place, a medium of social interactions, and a scale that is the focus of local citizenship practice. Classically, neighborhoods have been defined as continuous residential

areas that contain a park and a school. More formally, neighborhoods have become territorialized and codified in city and regional planning initiatives (such as the Neighborhood Planning Units in Atlanta, which are discussed in chapter three).

Along with the territorial designation of a place as a neighborhood, the term “neighborhood” implies a particular social interaction among residents. As Martin (2003: 365) notes, “Neighborhoods derive their meaning or salience from individual and group values and attachments, which develop through daily life habits and interactions.” These values and attachments are often associated with interactions that are territorially-delimited by the activity space of the home (Martin, 2003). This meaning of neighborhood has an implicit link to family and social reproduction (Castells, 1977).

Neighborhoods have been seen as an important site of social reproduction (Castells, 1977; Markusen, 1981). Social reproduction involves the conditions and services that enable a productive labor force. It includes “the direct provision of the conditions of physical and mental health, cooked meals, personal services, education, maintenance of living conditions, and childcare” Markusen (1981: 22), which relate to the space of the home or neighborhood.

Neighborhoods also gain meaning not just through their physical characteristics, such as homes, schools, and parks, but through political practices. In her study of land-use conflicts, Martin (2003) argues that activism by individuals actively creates and delineates neighborhoods. In opposition to proposed land use changes, for example, organizers in two neighborhoods in Athens, Georgia, engage in a process of defining their territorial boundaries and their visions for their neighborhoods. Using these case studies, Martin (2003) calls for attention to be paid to the “practice of neighborhood: the social and political actions of people that define and constitute neighborhoods” (380). A problem arises, however, when there is disagreement on how

representative “neighborhood” activists are in portraying or formulating their vision of a neighborhood. For some neighborhood activists and organizers, the notion of neighborhood can have a specific, potentially controversial meaning—a meaning that can become enshrined in institutions, such as schools. This research examines the consequences for the meaning of “neighborhood” when the political practice of neighborhood organizers *shapes* the conceptual and material space in the neighborhood.

Neighborhoods are not only impacted by localized social (and spatial) politics. They are also subject to larger socioeconomic and political forces related to changes in capitalism and governance structures. An important strand of research in urban geography associated with the economic improvement (and social displacement) of neighborhoods focuses on gentrification, which provides a context for understanding struggles among social groups in a neighborhood.

Gentrification generally refers to the replacement of lower income residents in a neighborhood with higher income inhabitants who have interests in upgrading residences. The process often takes place in several stages, with initial in-migrants having different socioeconomic and demographic characteristics from the existing residents and from each other (Rose, 1984). The first wave of in-migrants are often single white-collar workers, middle-class, single-parents, unemployed but educated young people, self-employed but economically marginal young people, etc (Gottlieb, M. 1982 cited in Rose, 1984). Properties generally change hands more than once at a capital gain to the seller. In the last waves of the gentrification process, the neighborhood attains a degree of socioeconomic and cultural homogeneity, with middle-class residents dominating ownership of renovated properties.

According to Marxian thinkers and feminist poststructuralists, there is both an economic logic and cultural nostalgia that drives gentrification (see Rose (1984) for a review of

gentrification debates in geography). The economic logic focuses on the cycles of investment and disinvestment in the built environment—that once properties reach a devalued state—they become ripe for reinvestment thus relieving the overaccumulation of capital elsewhere in the built environment, which illustrates Smith's (1983) discussion about the production of space in capitalist societies. This structuralist analysis has been critiqued on several grounds. First, it leaves little room for analysis of the gentrifiers—the potential cultural and economic reasons for the urban “pioneers” and subsequent middle-class residents who participate in such gentrification waves (see Bondi (1998) for an exception). Furthermore, following the work of Castells (1977), many see the role of revitalized neighborhoods as crucial to the reproduction not just of labor power (in the broad social reproduction argument) but of the middle class (Hayden, 1981, McDowell, 1983, Markusen, 1981, Rose 1984). In his more recent work, Smith (2002) sees gentrification as a global economic strategy under neoliberalism—not merely as a localized phenomenon. These understandings of gentrification provide ways of thinking about the impetus for the mobility of social groups in urban neighborhoods. What this work on gentrification leaves out (but points to in a variety of ways) is the importance of social institutions in the gentrification process.

As previously discussed, social institutions can be the site of identity struggle and contestation (Marston, 1990; Nagar and Leitner, 1998). As Nagar and Leitner (1998) point out, the control over the material spaces of social institutions reflect power relations within and between communities. As such, social institutions in gentrifying neighborhoods represent significant sites where class and cultural relations can be reproduced, effectively entrenching the transformation of urban neighborhoods into middle-class arenas. This is particularly true in light of the neoliberalizing state, where institutions are increasingly guided by public-private

partnerships at local neighborhood scales. A key social institution that is undergoing a neoliberal transformation is the public school.

Schools

Public schools have a particular function in democratic societies, which is to educate children. The provision of schools and public education has been linked to the very formation of the democratic nation-state through the teaching of citizenship (and the very construction of citizens) (Dewey, 1924 and Greene, 1988 in Mitchell, 2002). As Mitchell (2002) asserts, the transnational flows of people and capital has challenged the degree to which subjects are created as citizens of nation-states through public schools. To demonstrate the fragility of the relationship of schools to the construction of national citizens, she uses the case of Canadian immigrants from Hong Kong and their struggle to create schools to promote global citizenship rather than national citizenship. Likewise, Laurie et al (2003) examine the role of education in producing particular kinds of ethnic identities within a nation-state. Against the backdrop of transnational, neoliberal policies, they examine the role of higher education in producing ethnic subjects in Latin America and the educational spaces that are available for “indigenous professionalization.” What these studies demonstrate is the importance of educational institutions in constructing and challenging the formation of both national and transnational subjects. These works fail to consider the kinds of subjects that neoliberal educational policies produce at the scale of the urban or neighborhood.

The degree to which schools are democratic institutions themselves—or institutions that offer equal opportunities to different social groups—has been contested (Bourdieu, 1990; Rist, 1973). In fact, schools have been linked to the perpetuation of inequality among social groups (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Rist, 1973). Reproduction theorists assert that the capitalist

system relies on inequality in education systems to produce a working class (Apple 1995 in Clark-Ibanez, 2003). More hopeful scholars see school reform as the solution to a system that produces uneven educational achievement (Finn et. al, 2002).

The neoliberalization of public education is changing the institutional expression of public schools. Market-based models of choice and competition, such as alternative schools, magnet schools, school vouchers, and charter schools coexist alongside traditional public schools. Educational policies, such as *No Child Left Behind*, with its emphasis on allowing students of “failing schools” to relocate has complicated intra-district competition and the distribution of federal resources (see Thiem (2003) for a discussion of *No Child Left Behind* as a neoliberal policy). This new institutional framework has important consequences for the kinds of subjects and spaces that are created by such reform. This research focuses on one new institution: the charter school.

Charter schools

Charter schools are publicly-funded, independent schools whose founders can operate semi-autonomously from their state’s education code and regulatory framework. Charters can be granted to parents, community activists, or clusters of educators and corporate entrepreneurs. Charter schools are generally funded on a per-pupil basis, and the charter school’s local board or executive committee is in charge of hiring and firing the administrative and teaching staff. Charters are granted by the state or the school district and generally extend for a time period of one to five years, subject to renewal at the end of the initial period.

The first legal mechanism permitting charter schools in the United States was framed in the Minnesota legislature in 1991, with California following in 1992. Several years later, charter schools were on the federal agenda, culminating in President Clinton’s Charter School

Expansion Act of 1998. It was also in 1998 that the Georgia General Assembly passed the Georgia Charter Schools Act, allowing “conversion” and “start up” charter schools to operate. By 2004, more than 2600 charter schools were operating nationwide (“Overview”, US Charter Schools website, 2004).

Since their creation, charter schools have generated debate among conservative and liberal policy makers and educators in terms of the potential benefits and detriments of charter schools and their relationship to citizenship. The debates over the merits of charter schools are structured around many of the same terms as debates over citizenship. Parallels to liberal individualism in schools discussions include the freedom of choice and the specter of consumerism. Likewise, schools are also discussed in terms of civic republicanism, with emphasis on the importance of community.

Reflecting a liberal individualist approach, the contractual nature of charter schools and the potential for individual choice that charter schools allow have been celebrated by education and policy scholars (Matthews, 1996; Finn, et al, 2002). As a contract, the charter provides clear expectations and guarantees between charter-school educators and staff and the role of parents and local communities (Matthews, 1996). It is a legal document that outlines rights and obligations between schools and families.

Because charter schools often operate in school districts with traditional public schools, they are seen as providing choice for parents and communities. For example, Wells et al. (2002) point out that supporters of charter schools have celebrated the opportunity for “democracy” in allowing parents to choose their child’s school. In this interpretation of democracy and public education, the parents’ liberty of free choice is protected. Others argue that the citizen is often seen as the *consumer* of education, a conflation of democratic principles of free education with

market principles of consumer choice (Wells, et al., 2002; Frank, 2000; Lubienski, 2001; Saltman, 2000). This liberal individualist approach has been critiqued on several grounds. For instance, Lubienski (2001) questions the meaning of “public” in public education, arguing that proponents of charter schools have essentially redefined the meaning of public in public education away from concerns with the public good towards concerns with consumer goods.

Reflecting a civic republican approach, ideals about community are also present in discussions of charter schools. Furman (1994) asserts that schools in general have increasingly been alienated from local communities due to bureaucratic and centralized governance of the schools and changes in community structure.⁷ This assertion has led residents in many school districts to pursue different strategies to re-engage communities in their schools. Adult education and community education programs have been seen as effective tools to assert the importance of schools in communities (Brooks, 1995 in Matthews, 1996); and community school boards and advisory councils have been proposed (Mathews, 1996; Finn et al. 2002). Finn et al. (2002) argue that charter schools offer the opportunity for citizens to build their own community through their participation in charter schools. This move towards generating community involvement in public education reflects a particular ideology or ideal about the level of involvement of parents in public education. It is an ideal in which parents and not the “bureaucracy of the state” have control over local decisionmaking. The subsequent normative vision is one in which schools are locally-controlled and therefore responsive to local needs. But “local” control begs the questions of who consists of the “local” and how the “local” becomes defined, questions that have surrounded debates over charter schools.

⁷ Indeed, the role of schools in neighborhoods has been examined in education and policy literature; however much of the education literature uses the term “community” rather than neighborhood when dealing with the residents that the schools serve.

These approaches to charter schools suggest different theoretical understandings of the importance of public education, how a “public” is defined, and, importantly, how the role of the parent-citizen is conceived in public education. In the case of charter schools, a paradox emerges with the transformation of state support and the subsequent potential for increased citizen involvement in charter schools (Fuller, 2000). This paradox reflects the neoliberalization of public education, where more political rights are granted to private citizens in the governance of schools. It also suggests a refocusing of opportunities for social citizenship practice.

If social citizenship rights include the provision of social goods and services in order to mitigate inequalities among individuals, then the institutions that provide such goods and services are the medium through which social inequalities are mitigated. As recounted above, traditional public schools, based on the common schools of the nineteenth century, are social institutions that (ideally) provide equal opportunities to children who come from unequal circumstances. Charter schools, however, challenge the provision of social citizenship rights available to all social groups. Their governance structure, where individuals are given the legal right to design and manage schools, has the potential to exclude social groups who do not have the resources to engage in charter-school activities. At the same time, given the flexibility of curricula and the ability of individuals to participate in schools, charter schools also open up possibilities for radical pedagogical practice.

Research on public education and its transformation (under neoliberal policies) has generally focused on the quantification of student performance (Lin, 2001), or on the role of charter schools as serving students who have not succeeded in traditional public schools (Rofes, 1996 in Wells et al, 2002). Little research, if any, has considered the construction of the parent-citizen, who is granted social citizenship rights to provide education to other citizens (and non-

citizens). With the participation of private individuals, charter schools represent a new institutional framework that is flexible. Importantly, charter schools can look quite different from one another, as they are subject to individual state and school-district rules and regulations. They can allow new kinds of citizen participation and curricula, where schools focus on topics ranging from conservation ecology to high-tech skills and business preparation. Furthermore, the actions that individuals are legally permitted to pursue vis-à-vis charter schools suggests that there are new spaces where parent-citizens are constructed in a neoliberalizing public education system.

Conclusion

The literature on neoliberalism, citizenship, space, and schools that I have examined here informs this research on new kinds of state-society relationships and subsequent relationships individuals have to their neighborhoods vis-à-vis schools. The literature on neoliberalism provides the broad theoretical backdrop upon which this research hangs. The neoliberalization of the state has created new institutions in public education, which in turn, complicates the construction of the citizen-subject. The literature on citizenship clarifies different dimensions of citizenship, distinguishing between rights conferred by the state and those rights that are essentially latent unless practiced. Also important are Marshall's distinctions among the elements of citizenship rights, including the civil, political, and social rights that present contradictory or impossible promises in a democratic society with people differentiated by a host of social categories, including legal citizenship status itself, but also race, class, gender and sexuality. The way in which citizenship rights become operationalized is through the existence of particular social institutions. These social institutions provide an undertheorized link between the practice of citizenship and the spatial organization of society. The geographical literature on

space provides a way of understanding how social relations are highly spatial (and how space is social) and how particular spaces become the site and subject of political action. In combining the insights of these literatures, I ask how neoliberalizing social institutions—such as charter schools—mediate state-society relations with consequences for the construction of new subject-citizens and new spaces.

In understanding neoliberalism, Brenner and Theodore (2002: 362) call for an examination of the simultaneous

...destruction of extant institutional arrangements and political compromises through market-oriented reform initiatives; and the (tendential) creation of new infrastructure for market-oriented economic growth, commodification, and the rule of capital (emphasis original).

That is, the neoliberalization as a transformative process is not simply one that closes down the state apparatus but it suggests a variety of social, political, and economic shifts in the organization of social institutions. Indeed, this research project examines the neoliberalization of a state institution (public education), which is the reconfiguration of traditional public schools and the creation of new institutions, such as charter schools. In this process, the traditional state (traditional public schools) does not disappear, rather it coexists with new institutional forms (charter schools). This research specifically examines the highly localized consequences of a charter school as a new institutional framework that is embedded in the complexities of pre-existing social and political regimes.

To grapple with the broad issues about the interrelations among citizenship, space, and schools in a neoliberalizing state, I identify three objectives of this research. *The first is to investigate the practice of citizenship in charter schools.* To do so, I examine the legal entitlements that individuals have to design and manage a charter school. In addition, I explore the specific activities that individuals engage in to get a sense of what the broader social

requirements are for individuals to effectively organize a charter school. These formal and substantive social citizenship rights point to complicated state-society relationships that are based on liberal individualist ideals on the one hand and an emphasis on community on the other. Consequently, charter-school legislation and practice suggest a reconceptualization of private and public citizens, and by extension private and public spaces, where private citizens and privatized public spaces are complicated by these new practices.

The second research objective is to examine the role that charter schools have at the urban scale. Neoliberalism and the transformation of social institutions have made the local scale particularly salient for the delivery of social services. Within this scaling down of the state, charter schools have the potential to rescale schools and citizens in relationship to urban municipalities and neighborhoods. Furthermore, different political and economic interests, such as urban regimes, find charter schools appealing for their role in fostering a sense of local community (and a stable middle class). To explore this dynamic, I examine the representation of charter schools in an urban newspaper to get a sense of how charter schools become important social institutions for the local elites.

My third objective is to analyze the role of a charter school as an instrument in the transformation of urban neighborhoods and a dynamic within spatial politics. To do so, I ask how ideals of community and neighborhood are articulated by charter-school organizers and to what degree these ideals become enshrined in a charter school. I also assess the role of the school in changing an urban neighborhood and complicating the social (and territorial) construction of a neighborhood identity. This research extends our understanding of the neoliberal subject, the spaces neoliberalism produces, and the scale at which new (neoliberal)

citizenship rights are practiced. The empirical case study I examine to explore evidence of “actually existing neoliberalism” is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: AN INTRODUCTION TO ATLANTA, ITS NEIGHBORHOODS, AND ITS SCHOOLS

The previous chapter highlighted the tensions between social citizenship rights and practices, particularly at the local scale. It pointed to the importance of schools as local, social institutions that situate and mediate state-social citizenship dynamics. My research examines these relations in a case study of a charter school. The way in which I want to shed light on questions about neoliberalism, citizenship, and space is to examine a specific empirical case of a start-up charter school in an intown neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. The Neighborhood Charter School opened in 2002 about a mile from a traditional public school in the Grant Park neighborhood, which is a demographically and socio-economically mixed neighborhood. The fact that two schools serve the same neighborhood provides a rich terrain in which to examine both opportunities for citizenship and the ways in which the schools shape and are shaped by local social and spatial politics.

The Neighborhood Charter School in the Grant Park neighborhood provides a compelling case study with which to examine questions about new forms of citizenship and changes in urban space. In this chapter, I provide the context for that assertion. This chapter will detail the “story” of the Grant Park neighborhood and the Neighborhood Charter School. First, I provide a sketch of the socioeconomic and demographic landscape of Atlanta through the twentieth century, including a discussion of the legacy of racial desegregation, “white flight” and class and geographic stratification, which provides a background for the charter-school organizing that occurred in the Grant Park neighborhood in the late 1990s. Then I include the more specific recent history of the neighborhoods of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and North Ormewood Park,

highlighting socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods. This information offers a detailed illustration of the degree of diversity in the neighborhoods.

Following this description of Atlanta and the neighborhoods, I examine the role of schools in the region. I examine Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and district-wide policies that led to the adoption of charter school legislation. In addition, I provide a discussion about the schools that have historically served the Grant Park-Ormewood Park-North Ormewood neighborhoods in order to provide background to the changing definition of “neighborhood schools” that frustrated the Neighborhood Charter School organizers. I trace the development and opening of both the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary to set the stage for my analysis of the opportunities to practice social citizenship in the schools.

The Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary both draw students from the neighborhoods of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and North Ormewood Park (figure 3.1). Their attendance zones overlap substantially (figures 3.2). Given the small size (and infrequent reference in school and neighborhood literature), I will refer to this region as the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods, leaving out explicit reference to the North Ormewood neighborhood beyond an initial description of it.

Atlanta

Atlanta provides an interesting stage on which to examine school reform in light of the city’s complex history of race, class, and urban space, much of which is brought to bear by developments in the public school system. That is, in recent history the Atlanta public school system has been the flashpoint around which race, class, politics, and patterns of residential settlement have hinged.

Atlanta was founded as “Terminus,” at the intersection of the Western and Atlantic Railroad and the Georgia Railroad in the 1840s (“History of Atlanta”, 2003). Peachtree Street, springing from the railroad depot, became the major trade thoroughfare which served as Atlanta’s central business district. In the early twentieth century, streetcars allowed access to spaces beyond the central downtown, and suburbs began to develop several miles outside of the downtown area (including the neighborhoods of Grant Park and Ormewood Park). In the 1940s, Mayor William Hartsfield pushed the development of interstate highways, and Atlanta became the intersection of three major interstate highways, I-75, I-85, and I-20 (“Moving Beyond Sprawl”, 2000). This is an important development in Atlanta’s growth, as it enabled tremendous expansion of the metropolitan region. For example, in 1940, the Atlanta region had a population of approximately 620,000, which was comparable to the size of Birmingham, Alabama (Atlanta Region Population, 2001). Following World War II and the completion of the highways, Atlanta experienced tremendous growth in the northern suburbs. Its population was over 3.3 million by 2000 (Atlanta Region Population, 1900-2000, 2001) in contrast to Birmingham’s population, which was still under one million by 2002. Atlanta’s growth was undergirded by spatial divisions of social groups along the lines of race and class.

Atlanta has been sharply divided in recent decades by its sprawling northern suburbs, which are mostly white, and its intown, southern neighborhoods, which are mostly poor and African-American¹. This division roughly follows Interstate 20, which bisects the city. According to Keating (2001: 7), the tremendous growth between World War II and the 1990s in the northern suburbs was “underwritten by subsidies for expressways, owner-occupied housing, and schools” which was overtly racial. He points out that “affluent whites moved to the northern

¹ In recent years, the southern suburbs have experienced a surge in population, centering around the airport in the southwest and Henry and Clayton counties in the south and southeast.

suburbs to live at a distance from the city's blacks, whom segregation had concentrated in the south side" (Keating, 2001: 7). Indeed, in most parts of Atlanta there is a dramatic segregation in housing among whites and blacks, which revolves around inequality in income between whites and blacks, discrimination by lending institutions for blacks trying to obtain mortgages, deliberate attempts by the real estate industry to restrict blacks' entry into largely white housing areas, and local government policies, such as zoning and legal barriers to building smaller, affordable housing (Keating, 2001; "Moving Beyond Sprawl," 2000). Even the fact that street names changed at the "color barrier," Ponce de Leon Avenue, indicated a separation between predominantly white neighborhoods and predominantly black ones. There are a few racially mixed neighborhoods, and many are the result of recent gentrification of intown neighborhoods.

Atlanta was nicknamed "the city too busy to hate" during the Civil rights era; however, its deep history of racial discrimination is responsible for the kinds of racial segregation that the city continues to experience (Pomerantz, 1996; Sjoquist, 2000). In terms of racial segregation, the post-World War II era saw the systematic attack on the Jim Crow system, a system in which blacks were excluded from many jobs, allowed no position of authority over whites, barred from restaurants, hotels, and other public accommodations, sent to the back of the bus or separate rail cars in public transportation, and subjected to abuse and brutality by police officers, among other social injustices (Stone, 1989). Beginning in the 1940s when Georgia's all-white primary system was declared unconstitutional, legal and political battles began to shape the fight for racial equality; however, full desegregation of public and private establishments and equal opportunity in employment and social opportunities were vigorously contested in ensuing decades.

In addition to racial divisions, Atlanta has been shaped by a class hierarchy. Wealthy white business owners and members of the elite (white) society maintained control over most

aspects of Atlanta development for decades (Keating, 2001; Pomerantz, 1996). It was not until Atlanta had to confront a changing political and legal climate of racial integration that the power structure in Atlanta shifted to include non-white members. However, as Keating (2001) argues, in the 1970s as African-Americans gained electoral and political clout (and positions in city government), most were part of a developing middle-class African-American population. Lower-class whites and African-Americans were often left out of centers of decisionmaking.

Atlanta's governance

Atlanta's governance structure over the past half-century has been characterized by strategic partnerships between the downtown business elite and elected officials (Stone, 1986; Pomerantz, 1996; Keating, 2001; Allen, 1996). Stone (1989) identifies this partnership as an urban regime, in which most governance decisions are made by a coalition of a few people with economic and political power. Atlanta's recent history of regime governance has also been inflected with racial overtones: many of the business elites are white and the elected officials are majority African-American. Mayor Maynard Jackson, elected in 1974, was Atlanta's first black mayor. His tenure was followed by several decades of African-American leadership in the mayor's office. Likewise, City Hall has been largely in the hands of African-American representatives in the past few decades. Yet businesses have traditionally been owned by white entrepreneurs (Allen, 1996; Keating, 2001). A prime example of the partnership between mostly white businesses and mostly African-American city government is the 1996 Olympics. Initiated by local business leaders, the bid for the Olympics received the endorsement by African-American mayor Andrew Young. In the years leading up to the Olympics, millions of dollars in infrastructure improvements in Atlanta were financed with public and private dollars (Allen, 1996).

This alliance among African-American elected officials and the white business leaders has not necessarily signaled improvement for many African-Americans in the city (Keating, 2001). In fact, Sjoquist (2000) articulates the dramatic difference of extreme racial and economic inequality as the “Atlanta paradox.” The paradox is the existence of “abject poverty in a region of tremendous wealth, of a poor and economically declining city population in the face of dramatic growth, and of a black mecca in a ‘city too busy to hate’ confronting a highly racially segregated population” (Sjoquist, 2000: 2).

Although only a snapshot of the recent history of Atlanta, this characterization of the racial and class struggles in Atlanta provides a window on the complex dynamics that are revealed more explicitly by conflicts over public education in the city. Indeed, both residential housing patterns and the governance structure of the city have much to do with the way in which decisions about public schools are made. Before exploring the recent history of Atlanta Public Schools and the case of the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary, I examine the Grant-Ormewood Park-North Ormewood neighborhoods in more detail.

Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and North Ormewood Park

The neighborhoods of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and North Ormewood Park are located within the city limits of Atlanta to the southeast of the Central Business District. I examine the physical landscape of the neighborhoods and the neighborhoods’ history (combining Ormewood Park and North Ormewood Park), and then the socioeconomic and demographic picture of the neighborhoods.

Grant Park

A description of the physical characteristics of the three neighborhoods reveals subtle differences in architectural style and neighborhood “centers,” a fact which was highlighted by

some residents in interviews (see chapter seven). Grant Park, which has been designated a historic district, hosts historic houses and a range of neighborhood institutions. The western edge of the Grant Park neighborhood borders the traditionally black neighborhoods of Peoplestown and Summerhill, the latter two of which have undergone substantial change in recent years, as host to the former Fulton County Stadium (which was torn down in the early 1990s) and then to Turner Stadium, which was constructed for the 1996 Olympics (see Keating, 2001 and Keating, 1999). For the most part, the houses on the western side of Grant Park (a 131.5 acre park, Atlanta's second largest) are Victorian and bungalow style (figures 3.3 and 3.4). Several large Queen Anne mansions also dot the western side of Grant Park (figure 3.5). There are several churches on the western side of the park, the largest of which is St. Paul's Methodist (figure 3.6). There are also a few commercial areas, notably at the intersection of Cherokee and Glenwood, where there are two locally-owned restaurants, a real estate office, a hair salon, and a credit union (figures 3.7 and 3.8). A mile to the south, also on Cherokee is a "neighborhood" grocery, which is located at the southern end of the park. Recently, an ice-cream shop opened in a previously vacant storefront building along Cherokee. The region was previously serviced by a neighborhood grocery for over 20 years, which was located on Sydney Street (and now houses the Grant Park Conservancy). There is a community center, the Georgia-Hill Community Facility, located near the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Hill Street, which hosts a small branch of the Atlanta public library system in addition to other community-organization offices (figure 3.9). Grant Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA) meetings take place in the Georgia-Hill facility.

The northern portions of the Grant Park neighborhood were bisected by Interstate-20 in the 1960s, but it has retained much of its architectural character with several blocks of densely

settled Victorian and bungalow houses. There is also a substantial commercial node along Memorial Avenue, which hosts numerous restaurants, a car-repair shop, and several factories. The Oakland Cemetery, a historic cemetery in Atlanta's history, forms the northwestern border of the Grant Park neighborhood.

On the eastern side of Grant Park are more blocks of Victorian and bungalow homes. According to my interview participants, the eastern side of the park is seen as more working class than the western side. Along Boulevard is a commercial district, with a gas station, a fire station, and a Mexican grocery store, among other establishments (figure 3.10). Boulevard is one of the exits from I-20; Boulevard is a four-lane road that provides a thoroughfare to southern neighborhoods and to the Grant Park visitor's center and Zoo Atlanta parking. There are several apartment complexes on the eastern side of the park, one of which is a state-subsidized-housing complex. There is also a sand and gravel quarry near the eastern edge of the neighborhood. The old Georgia railroad line forms the southern and eastern borders of the Grant Park neighborhood. This sketch reveals a neighborhood that encompasses a large city park, a variety of commercial centers, and many blocks of housing stock, ranging from Victorian mansions to state-subsidized apartment complexes. To the east of this neighborhood are the Ormewood Park and North Ormewood Park neighborhoods.

Ormewood Park

Ormewood Park has a mix of older and newer homes. For the most part, they are more modest in size and architectural flourish than many houses in the Grant Park neighborhood. Nonetheless, in much of the neighborhood, there is a similar feeling of densely placed older homes, sidewalks, and small yards. There are several streets that act as thoroughfares through the neighborhood, including East Confederate, which is the southern border of the neighborhood

and which connects Boulevard to Moreland Avenue (figure 3.11). Several churches dot the neighborhood. Close to the geographic center is the Ormewood Park Presbyterian Church, located on Delaware Avenue, where the SAND (South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development) organization holds its monthly neighborhood association meetings.

North Ormewood Park

The North Ormewood Park neighborhood is the small region north of Berne street and south of Interstate-20 (figure 3.12). It has mostly smaller homes, many of which were built in the post-World War II era. In addition, it hosts several apartment complexes. One apartment complex, located near the northern edge of the neighborhood, is geared towards lower income families; its property is adjacent to a newly-opened gated community of townhomes, where prices range from \$150,000 to over \$200,000.

Moreland Avenue forms the eastern boundary of both North Ormewood Park and Ormewood Park. Moreland is a busy commercial area, where most original old homes have been converted into commercial establishments. Beyond Moreland Avenue is the neighborhood known as East Atlanta, which has become a trendy area with a rapidly developing old downtown district that hosts an eclectic mix of bars, clothing shops, and a coffee shop.

Grant Park's history

The history of the Grant Park neighborhood is one of an ebb and flow of affluence. The western edge of the Grant Park neighborhood of Atlanta is located approximately 1.2 miles south and east of the central business district of Atlanta. The neighborhood surrounds Grant Park, which was deeded to the City of Atlanta by Colonel L.P. Grant in 1883. In 1889, the Atlanta Zoo was founded in the park, where it has remained (it is now called Zoo Atlanta) (figure 3.13). The neighborhood began to solidify around the Park during the 1890s, as upper-middle and

middle-class families moved into the area. The neighborhood was an original intown “suburb” of the city, when Atlanta began to expand at the turn of the twentieth century. Most houses are Victorian and bungalow styles homes that were built between 1890 and 1920 (“A Brief Overview,” 2003). The area was a typical urban neighborhood in the 1920s and 1930s, much like the nearby neighborhoods of Inman Park and Candler Park.

Along with other intown neighborhoods, the area experienced decline in the 1950s and 1960s, when the suburban areas of Atlanta expanded and white families left the area to avoid school desegregation. In the 1960s, Interstate-20 bisected the northern portion of the neighborhood, and housing values continued to decline through the early 1970s. Many houses were rental properties, and the area, like many intown neighborhoods of Atlanta, had a growing African-American population. By the 1980s, the neighborhood began to experience an economic rebirth, with suburbanites moving back into the city. This gentrification continued into the 1990s. By the end of the decade, the area was racially mixed with an increasing gay population. In the late 1990s, the neighborhood was established as an Historic District. Thus the neighborhood experienced a dramatic shift in its demographic and economic character—one of urban decline in the 1960s and 1970s to a gentrified neighborhood by the 1990s.

The history of Ormewood Park and North Ormewood Park

Although sharing a border with the Grant Park neighborhood, the neighborhoods of Ormewood Park and North Ormewood Park have experienced a slightly different recent history. The neighborhoods were originally dairy farmland until the mid-19th century, when several farms were developed into building lots. In the early 1900s, an Atlanta Electric Light and Trolley Company official named Aquilla J. Orme extended the trolley line downtown to East Confederate Avenue, and the region became attractive for development as a streetcar suburb

(SAND directory, 2003). The area's boom occurred after World War I when many Craftsman bungalows and brick cottages were built amidst the existing Victorian homes (figure 3.14). In 1922 the City of Atlanta annexed the property. The neighborhoods also experienced growth following World War II, when many frame cottages and ranch homes were built between older residences. In the past few decades, the Ormewood-North Ormewood Park neighborhoods have had the reputation as consisting of largely working class families. Indeed, table 3.1 reflects the different racial and economic makeup of the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods, as well as educational attainment and residential mobility. The combined population statistics from 2000 Census data provides a more comprehensive description of the study region as a whole.²

A Census description

In the study region, which is comprised of seven Census block groups shown in figure 3.15, there are approximately 8,700 people, 57.4% of whom are white; 37.2% of whom are African American, 0.9% are Asian, and the remainder of whom are self-identified as some other race³. There are approximately 3,782 households in this region, and of these households, 51.6% reported living in a different house in 1995. This reflects a rather mobile population and a neighborhood region undergoing somewhat of a change in residents. Furthermore 62.5% of households are owner-occupied, whereas the remainder are rented homes and apartments.

The median household income as reflected in the 2000 U.S. Census paints a slightly different picture than does the data in table 3.1. The median household income for 1999 ranged between \$32,218 to \$63,875 for the seven block groups (table 3.2). The average median income was \$44,361 for the study region. To provide a more detailed look at income, however, requires

² The census tracts and census block groups do not match up with the boundaries of the overlapping attendance zones. Instead, the census tracts encompass a slightly greater population and more households than this study area. For the purpose of the demographic and socioeconomic "snapshot" of the region, the Census data suffice.

³ The U.S. Census considers Latino/Hispanic as an ethnicity not a race.

pulling apart the averages. Table 3.3 indicates the percentage of households that make within particular income brackets. Thus, 10.6% of households reported an income of less than \$10,000. In aggregate, 22.3 % reported incomes of less than \$20,000; 36.6% reported incomes between \$20,000 and \$50,000; 17.8% had incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000; and 23.4% reported incomes over \$75,000. This reflects a rather stratified population in terms of economic means.

There are differences in terms of median household income by race. Table 3.4 reflects a tremendous disparity in some of the block groups between the median income of whites and African-Americans, whereas the difference is more subtle in other block groups. The differences are most striking in Census tract 52, block group 5 (the middle portion of Ormewood Park) and Census tract 53, block group 4 (the western portion of Grant Park), where differences in median income are over \$45,000 between white households and African-American households. Furthermore, in terms of absolute numbers, in Census tract 52, block group 5 (the southern portion of Ormewood Park) and Census tract 53, block group 1 (the eastern portion of Grant Park), the average median income for whites is between \$47,000 and \$60,000; whereas for African-American households, the median income ranges between \$14,423 and \$19,519. Regardless of the degree, there is a clear discrepancy in median income between white and African-American households in all census block groups.

To get a better sense of class differences in the neighborhoods, educational attainment is useful to examine. Table 3.5 reveals educational attainment for the population of the seven census blocks according to race/ethnicity--for whites, African-Americans and Latinos. As the table indicates, of the 402 residents with less than a 9th grade education, 22.1% are white, 62.4% are African-American, and 15.4% Latino. This represents a disproportionate number of minorities with lower educational attainment than whites. Furthermore, of the 1,872 residents

with a bachelor degree, 84.4% are white, 12% are African-American, and 3.6% are Latino, demonstrating a strong gap in educational attainment among blacks, whites, and Latinos.

In order to get a sense of the importance of schools in the neighborhood, it is necessary first to know the extent of the school-age population of the neighborhood region. According to the 2000 Census, the number of school-age children in the neighborhood is 1,148 (table 3.6). Nearly twelve percent of these were attending private school in 2000, compared to almost 10 percent private-school attendance in metro Atlanta as a whole. Of these students, it is interesting to note the racial disparity in the number of students going to private and public schools. Table 3.7 displays the trends. The numbers in the table reflect a larger elementary-age population attending public and private schools, and an increasing gap in those attending private school in the older grades. Of white students in grades one through eight, 34% attend private school, compared to just 4.7% of African-American children⁴. To understand the educational options in this neighborhood region, it is important to examine the Atlanta public school system.

Atlanta Public Schools

The Atlanta Public School System was established by the Atlanta City Council in 1872. It opened with two high schools and five grammar schools. Of the schools, two grammar schools, Stoops Grammar and Summerhill Grammar, were for African-American children (both of which were housed in old train boxcars) (Loving, 1999). Once the schools opened, it became clear that Atlanta needed more schools for African-American children, but it was not until 52 years later, in 1924, that the first high school for African Americans in Atlanta opened (Loving, 1999).

⁴ This compares to less than 5% of African-American children attending private school in Atlanta as a whole, and over 12% of white children attending private school in metro Atlanta.

Between 1872 and 1960, the public schools in Atlanta were divided by race. Even the school directories labeled “Schools for Whites” or “Schools for Coloreds.” Some time after 1900 the label “Schools for Whites” was dropped, and “Schools for Coloreds” became “Negro Schools”, which remained the labels until 1960 (Loving, 1999). According to the Atlanta Public Schools historian, not only were the names of the schools segregated but the department chairs and the staff were as well (Loving, 1999).

Even though the United States Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in public schools in May of 1954 with its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, it was not until 1961 that the first African-American students entered white schools in Atlanta.⁵ The announcement of the Supreme Court decision sent political waves throughout Atlanta. Many white politicians viewed the decision as federal intrusion into a state matter (Pomerantz, 1996). For example, Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge charged that the court “has reduced our Constitution to a mere scrap of paper” (Pomerantz, 1996: 212). Pomerantz (1996: 212) captures the sentiments expressed in Georgia newspapers:

Instead of benefitting the Southern Negro, it will hurt him,” *The Savannah Morning News* wrote. *The Macon Telegraph*: “Georgia and the South today are not ready, nor able, to abolish segregation in schools, and until the time when we are, the principle pronounced by the court will remain in abstract.” *The Atlanta Constitution*: “The decision--however much we may deplore it as individuals--becomes the law of the land... [However] as our experience with prohibition proves, law without the force of public opinion behind it is not easily enforced.

The new governor of Georgia, Ernest Vandiver was elected in 1958 with promises to maintain segregation in schools. Vandiver gave assurance that “No, Not One!” white child would be forced to attend a desegregated school (Pomerantz, 1996: 223). Also in 1958, a federal district court agreed to hear a class-action suit filed by several black parents in Atlanta to end segregated

⁵ The decision did not end segregation immediately; it provided a grace period for seventeen southern states, including Georgia, where statutory segregation was in place.

schools in the city. The court advised that the suit *Calhoun v. Latimer* would be decided in 1959, raising the prospect that schools would be ordered to desegregate for the 1959-60 school year (Pomerantz, 1996).

The result of the impending federal legislation was heightened tensions among white and black residents in the city. White families made a rush to send their children to private schools to avoid placing their children in the same classroom as African-Americans (Pomerantz, 1996).

In an attempt to figure out how to best comply with the federal legislation, Georgia's Governor established a School Study Commission in the spring of 1960. All nineteen members of the committee were white, and the commission was headed by John Sibley, a well-connected Atlanta business elite (Pomerantz, 1996). The School Study Commission (also known as the Sibley Commission) held ten hearings during March of 1960 to figure out how to proceed with the public education system. Up for debate was whether Georgians wanted a private school system in which students would receive state vouchers to attend school, or an integrated school system. According to state law, if one school was integrated, the entire district would be closed (Pomerantz, 1996). In April, the Commission recommended that the state adopt a constitutional amendment to allow public schools to stay open in integrated districts. The desegregation of schools was scheduled to begin on August 30, 1961. On that day, nine black students entered previously all-white schools, including Northside, Murphy, Brown and Grady high schools, seven years after *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The desegregation of the public schools propelled a change in the racial composition of residential housing patterns in Atlanta. During the 1960s, sixty-thousand whites moved from the city, many leaving so their children would not have to attend integrated schools (Pomerantz,

1996). Also during that decade, seventy thousand blacks had moved into the city, effectively becoming a majority in the city during the 1964-65 school year (Pomerantz, 1996).

A more complete integration of Atlanta schools took years to accomplish. In fact, some would argue that integration was never fully achieved in more than a handful of schools, given that students shifted from a majority white to a majority black in Atlanta's public schools in a matter of a decade. During the 1972-73 school year, when whites comprised 23 percent of the student population of Atlanta's school system, a black activist pushed for the desegregation of the city school system's administrative staff, including the appointment of the system's first black superintendent (Pomerantz, 1996).

In chronicling the interactions of two of Atlanta's prominent families, one African-American and one white, Pomerantz (1996: 442) offers an insightful vignette on the attitudes of white families in the face of school integration:

In the fall of 1974, when most white families on the north side had removed their children from public schools rather than face court-ordered integration, the Allens sent their son, Ivan IV, to the Warren T. Jackson Elementary School, a public school that attracted children from some of the city's noted black families. Eleven-year old Ivan IV was joined at the school the following year by seven-year-old Brooke Jackson, the [African-American] mayor's daughter, though they were in different classes.... But when the city discussed adding a new dimension to its desegregation scheme, pairing schools in white districts with those in black districts, it opened the possibility that six-year-old Amanda Allen, younger sister of Ivan IV, would be bused across town to the predominantly black West Manor Elementary School.

'We were all for public education but we were for public education in our own neighborhood,' Margaret [Allen] recalls. 'We weren't ready to send a six-year-old on a bus.'

This story captures both the timid willingness of white parents to send their children to integrated schools *with conditions*--that they not attend a majority black school. Using the excuse of wanting to send their children to the "neighborhood school" rather than on a bus, only lightly veils the deep-seated distrust of school integration.

The recent history of Atlanta Public Schools (APS) is intertwined with issues of politics, race, and class. These dynamics have been complexified by new forms of public education, such as charter schools, as the opening of the Neighborhood Charter School reveals. Before relaying the story of the Neighborhood Charter School, first I provide a sketch of the public schools that serve the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods.

APS Elementary Schools in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park Neighborhoods, 1970s-2004

The idea of a “neighborhood school” is more of an ideal than a reality for the traditional public schools in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods. Indeed, as Ed Shaw, Operations Assistant to the Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools in the 1990s asserts, the concept of neighborhood is important for APS in drawing attendance zones, but it is complicated by juggling enrollments and facilities. A description of the existing public schools in the southeast Atlanta neighborhoods reflects a complex public school landscape.

For the 2003-2004 school year, three traditional public elementary schools serve the Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and North Ormewood Park neighborhoods (excluding the Neighborhood Charter School). Cook Elementary serves the portion of the Grant Park neighborhood that is north of Interstate-20; D.H. Stanton serves portions of Grant Park and Ormewood Park to the south of Atlanta Avenue; and Parkside Elementary encompasses most of the three neighborhoods--in addition to the smaller neighborhoods of Woodland Hills and McDonough Guice (figure 3.16). As noted previously, of particular concern to this research are the portions of the neighborhoods that both Parkside Elementary and the Neighborhood Charter School serve (figure 3.2). To understand how these attendance zones came into being, however, it is first necessary to examine the recent history of attendance zones in the neighborhoods.

Furthermore, this history reflects the kind of juggling among population numbers (and residential mobility) and facilities management that requires changing attendance zones.

During the 1970-71 school year⁶, the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods were served by eight schools (primary through elementary): Cook Elementary, Gordon Elementary, Grant Park Elementary, Grant Park Primary⁷, Jerome Jones Elementary, Slaton Elementary, Stanton Elementary, and West Elementary. By 1979-80, the attendance zones were reconfigured to accommodate shifting populations and to maintain the correct number of children per school. At that time the region was served by seven schools: Cook, Gordon, Grant Park Elementary, Jerome Jones, Slaton, Stanton, and West. Grant Park Primary was no longer open--instead students who attended K-2 at Grant Park Primary were zoned to their appropriate elementary schools, which all hosted grades K-5. By the 1987-88, a few of the attendance zones had yet again been reconfigured. In particular, Slaton Elementary no longer comprised most of the western side of the Grant Park neighborhood; instead it included portions of the western side and the northern portion--from Connally Street at the western edge to the Atlanta and West Point railroad to the east. Likewise, Stanton Elementary expanded its attendance zone to include students in the southwestern portion of the Grant Park neighborhood (in addition to the neighborhood of Peopletown) east to the Atlanta and West Point railroad. This attendance history reflects a shifting population of school-age children and requirements by Atlanta Public Schools to maintain a certain number of children per school.

By the 1993-94 school year, attendance zones in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods again changed. At this time, Gordon Elementary drew students from North Ormewood Park and Ormewood Park, while Hubert drew students from the northern portions of

⁶ This is one of the first school years for which data were collected in attendance zone books compiled by Atlanta Public Schools.

⁷ At the time, Grant Park Primary housed kindergarten through second grade.

Grant Park. Slaton Elementary drew its students from the western and northeastern reaches of the Grant Park neighborhood, while Stanton continued to pick up students from the southern parts of Grant Park and from Peoplestown. West Elementary continued to serve the majority of the Ormewood Park neighborhood. By the 1995-96 school year, West Elementary picked up students from North Ormewood Park (who had previously attended Gordon Elementary). At this point, the attendance zones of their neighborhood schools corresponded less and less with the neighborhood boundaries of Grant Park and Ormewood Park. In fact, when parents from the Grant Park neighborhood began to explore the Atlanta Public Schools options for public elementary schools in their region in 1997, they discovered that their neighborhood alone was zoned to five schools (Slaton, Stanton, Cook, Gordon, and West. Figure 3.17). Slaton Elementary, located in a historic building on the western side of Grant Park had a decreasing school population in the last year of its operation. Tables 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10 offer a snapshot of the school enrollment and population of Slaton.

Slaton Elementary had a substantial decrease in its student population in the last year of operation (likely due to the announcement that the school was going to close). Furthermore, this decrease is reflective of an overall decrease in the number of students attending APS elementary schools in the 2000-2001 school year. In terms of race, Slaton had a relatively high percentage of African-American students (compared to the demographic makeup of the attendance zone) and a surprisingly large number of Hispanic and Asian students, which is particularly incongruous with the demographic makeup of the neighborhood. Furthermore, 87% of Slaton's students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, also incongruous with the economic picture of the surrounding neighborhoods (table 3.3). By the 2000-2001 school year, it seems clear that Slaton Elementary was no longer acting as a neighborhood school. To meet its population

requirements, Atlanta Public Schools had rewritten the attendance zones so many times that the historic school was no longer acting as a social institution linked to a particular territory.

Anne E West Elementary, also closed after the 2000-2001 school year, which drew the bulk of its students from the Ormewood Park neighborhood, had a similar pattern of decreasing enrollment and incongruous racial makeup (compared to the racial makeup of the neighborhoods it served) (tables 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13). Like Slaton Elementary, the school declined in the number of students enrolled. Likewise, the racial makeup of the school nor the percentage of students eligible to receive free or reduced lunch mirrors that of the neighborhoods as a whole.

These schools, in addition to Guice Elementary (with 259 students in 2000-2001, which were 92% African-American, 3% white, and 3% Latino; 97% of whom were eligible to receive free lunch), were closed after the 2000-2001 school year, and most of the students were zoned to Parkside Elementary, a newly-constructed school located on Mercer Street in the Grant Park neighborhood.⁸ For the 2001-2002 school year, Parkside Elementary had a total enrollment of 492 students, 76% of whom are African-American, 12% white, 7% Latino, and 3% Asian (“Parkside Elementary School Statistics,” 2002). Ninety percent of the students were eligible to receive free or reduced lunch for the year.

APS Zoning and BuildSmart

As mentioned above, zoning decisions are based on the number of school-age children in a district and the school districts’ facilities plans. In the case of Atlanta Public Schools, ideal school sizes are considered, shifting populations, and the feasibility of maintaining school facilities (interview with Ed Shaw, 2003). According to the Planning, Design & Construction division of APS Facilities, under the direction of APS Construction Management, the system

⁸ According to Ed Shaw, the land containing the proposed school site was originally zoned to Stanton Elementary. The first rezoning of the attendance zone included annexing some of Stanton’s attendance zone so that the schoolhouse would be in its own zone!

accelerated building and renovation projects between 1995 and 2000 (“Instructional Facilities Summary,” April 26, 2000). Over 34 projects were completed between 1995 and 2000, including the construction of new schools and the renovation of others. The completion of Parkside was designed to in part fulfill the goals of the APS strategic plan: “to reduce ongoing operations and maintenance expenses through more efficient use of existing and proposed facilities” (“Instructional Facilities Summary, April 26, 2000). Thus, the consolidation of three elementary schools to create one new, much larger one, was an attempt to provide a new school for children and to reduce the costs associated with operating three schools.

BuildSmart Program.

More recently, APS has formalized its strategic plan into what it calls the BuildSmart Program. The BuildSmart Program is a five-year plan that outlines the overall goals of Atlanta Public Schools and specific goals for each school. According to APS, the BuildSmart system is guided by the mission to “provide neighborhood based elementary schools, small classes and small schools...” (“Instructional Facilities Summary,” April 26, 2000). Of particular interest is the policy’s claim to focus on neighborhood-based elementary schools. According to the Atlanta Public Schools Facilities BuildSmart policies, elementary schools should ideally be between 450 and 600 students. Middle schools should contain between 750-900 students, and high schools should have between 1200 and 2000 students (APS facilities, Policy Page 1, BuildSmart Program). According to the policy, “Neighborhood limits as defined by the [Neighborhood Planning Unit] limits and geographic boundaries, where available, will be used to create school attendance zones” (APS Facilities, Policy Page 3, BuildSmart Program). This stated policy does not seem to match the reality of the attendance zones—particularly for Parkside Elementary,

which encompasses several neighborhoods (figure 3.18). Furthermore, school attendance zones in southeast Atlanta do not follow the Neighborhood Planning Unit W (figure 3.19).

School choice

Atlanta Public Schools offers an administrative transfer program, which is offered to students on a first come first served basis according to school availability. According to APS Facilities BuildSmart policy, “students have a right to attend neighborhood school. Where capacity exists [students] can apply for ‘administrative transfers’ to another school [if] they provide transportation” (APS Facilities, “General Questions”, BuildSmart Program). Thus school choice is an option for parents of children in Atlanta Public Schools. However, fewer schools can now offer such choice due to the recent *No Child Left Behind* bill that was passed in 2001, which gives administrative transfer priorities to students who are zoned to “failing” schools⁹.

Following its BuildSmart Program (and the urging of Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents), the new Parkside Elementary school was opened, replacing Slaton Elementary, West Elementary, and Guice Elementary (which traditionally served the McDonough/Guice and Woodland Hills neighborhoods). These attendance zones were consolidated into one zone, and Parkside Elementary opened in 2001-2002 to accommodate the students from these zones. Another public school in this general attendance zone is the Neighborhood Charter School, one of seven charter schools in the APS district.

⁹ President Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* legislation created another layer of school choice for parents of children in “failing” schools. That is, parents of schools that have not met “Adequate Yearly Progress” are legally entitled to send their children to another school that has met its yearly progress goals. This has caused quite a bit of confusion, as the list of “Needs Improvement” schools was released just a few weeks before the 2003-2004 school year began. Parents whose children were attending a school identified as “Needs Improvement” were sent a letter on August 12, 2003 and had until August 22, 2003 to request a transfer to a different school.

APS's charter schools

As mentioned in chapter two, charter schools can be designed and managed by private corporations or by groups of parents and other neighborhood residents. Atlanta Public Schools has seven charter schools, which operate with different management structures and curriculum themes.

(1) The Charles R. Drew Charter School, which opened in 2000, hosts kindergarten through 8th grade. The school was formed by a partnership of parents in the East Lake neighborhood, the East Lake Community Foundation (a private, non-profit foundation), representatives from Atlanta Public Schools, and Edison Schools, Inc., a private corporation that manages charter schools across the country.

(2) University Community Academy, which opened in 2002, serves kindergarten through sixth grade with 260 students. University Community Academy was formed in partnership with the Atlanta University Center institutions (Clark Atlanta University, Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College and Morehouse School of Medicine, Spelman College, and Morris Brown College), members of the West End neighborhood, Atlanta Public Schools, and EdFutures, Inc., a private educational management company.

(3) The School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIA Tech), which opened in 2002, is a charter school that operates in association with the Atlanta Job Corps, a U.S. Department of Labor-funded organization to help troubled teens develop job skills. The Atlanta Job Corps itself is managed by a private corporation, Management & Training Corporation.

(4) The Metro Atlanta Respite and Developmental Services Charter School was formed in association with the Metro Atlanta Respite and Developmental Services, a private, non-profit

organization that has served individuals with developmental delays and at-risk children.¹⁰ The school opened in 2001, and as of 2004 served approximately sixty students.

(5 and 6) Two Kipp Academy charter schools opened for the 2003-2004 school year: Kipp Achieve Academy, which serves 85 fifth graders in southwest Atlanta, and Kipp West Atlanta Young Scholars (WAYS) Academy, which also opened to serve 85 fifth graders in West Atlanta. Both of these schools, managed by the Kipp organization which has schools across the country, intend to add a grade per year (and 85-90 students per grade) through the eighth grade. Students at Kipp charter schools attend longer school days in addition to attending two Saturdays per month.

(7) The Neighborhood Charter School opened in 2002 with grades kindergarten through third with approximately 105 students. For the 2003-2004 school year, it added 4th grade and 40 additional students. The Neighborhood Charter School was founded by parents in the neighborhoods of Grant Park and Ormewood Park. It is managed by its own private, non-profit organization called the Neighborhood Charter School, Inc., which is comprised of the school's board members and its principal.

The Neighborhood Charter School

The Neighborhood Charter School is the product of several years' worth of organizing by parents and residents in the Grant Park neighborhood. What began as a series of informal discussions turned into hours of meetings, coordinated events, school tours, the hiring of consultants, and the writing of a charter petition, which was submitted to Atlanta Public Schools. The following provides a narrative of the events and activities that the parents and residents engaged in to open the school.

¹⁰ According to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the school will likely lose its charter at the end of the 2003-2004 school year (Donsky, P., 2003. "City Board Opts to End Pact with Charter School." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 19, 2003, Atlanta/South Metro). According to Atlanta Public Schools, MARDS serves too few students.

According to one of the founders of the school, the Neighborhood Charter School emerged out of a series of discussions that several Grant Park residents had about educational opportunities in the neighborhood (C.N.). A real estate agent in the neighborhood gave a couple in the neighborhood a list of people in the area who were pregnant or had small children. The couple then sent invitations to the parents on the list to join them on their porch one afternoon in 1997. From this informal porch conversation, several organizations formed. One was the Grant Park Parent Network, which is a non-political, informal organization of parents in the Grant Park Neighborhood. The GPPN organizes different events for children and maintains a list of parents with children in the neighborhood (it now numbers over 200 families). Also from the porch discussion emerged what the group called a school committee: “our purpose was really to explore options, to figure out what options there might be for our community, because we didn’t want to have to move¹¹ (C.N.). The group initially talked about getting more involved at the current Slaton Elementary School, “which was deteriorated physically and really not utilized by a lot of families” (C.N.). They talked about how they could make the school a “community school” (C.N.). “But... that was not feasible, and the school board told us emphatically that the school would be closed and that it would not stay open as a public school, and so we could just forget about making anything happen in that direction” (C.N.).

In order to figure out what other parents in the neighborhood wanted in terms of a school, the school committee sent a survey out to about 50 families in the neighborhood. “What we found was that priorities for people were a quality education, public schools, and something in the community” (C.N.). The school committee toured private and public schools in the area; they talked to principals of other schools “to see what they did that we liked and didn’t like and

¹¹ As I discuss in chapter seven, many residents of Grant Park and Ormewood Park expressed the inevitability of moving to another attendance zone rather than sending their children to their local APS elementary school.

through that exploration process, we stumbled upon charter schools” (C.N.). An advocate for charter schools and a neighborhood-association member who was also interested in charter schools made a presentation to the school committee, and “that’s when we thought that that was a really good merging or compromise for all of the different things we were trying to accomplish. That is was a means to the ends that we wanted, because we wanted a public education but we also wanted a lot more control than you get in a traditional school setting” (C.N.).

Following their decision to pursue a charter school, the group went to the Grant Park Neighborhood Association for an endorsement of creating a Grant Park Charter School. According to one school-committee member, it was a unanimous decision to support the group. “...One of the reasons the neighborhood association was so supportive of us is because one of the other things that was critical to us when we started looking at charter was that we wanted the ability to effect the attendance zone, so that all of Grant Park could attend the same school” (C.N.). The group received money from GPNA to incorporate as a nonprofit and to hire a consultant for the charter-writing process.

Following the GPNA endorsement, the group conducted several “door-to-door campaigns” in which they put together fliers in both English and Spanish and “literally delivered them to every household in the neighborhood of Grant Park” (C.N.). The group divided up into teams of two and “knocked on every door to try and talk to people about what we were doing” (C.N.). The fliers were to invite people to an informational meeting about the school committee’s plans to develop a charter school. According to one of the organizers, the meeting advertised in the flier was not very well attended. Following the meeting, the group decided to target specific sections of the neighborhood “that we didn’t feel were being reflected in our

group” (C.N.). The committee distributed a Spanish flier “in the area that has a lot of Hispanic families” and another flier south of Atlanta Avenue, “because... we realized people were confused about [the attendance zone]” (C.N.).

During the process of distributing fliers and attempting to generate support for the charter-school idea, the group attended Atlanta Public School Board meetings. “We had people assigned, probably for about two years, somebody from our group would be at every one of those meetings... And their job was to go up after the meeting and make sure that our representative saw us—somebody else from the board saw that we were there” (C.N.). In addition, the group assigned representatives to attend Slaton PTA meetings and Anne E West PTA meetings.

During this process, the location of a potential charter school became a “concrete issue” that the group discussed. They were told that Slaton Elementary would be closed, “so there goes having a traditional public school” (C.N.). Furthermore, according to one member, the group was told by the school board that “there was no way in hell that [APS] would let you lease that building from us. It’s an old building, we can’t keep children in old buildings, it’s falling apart, and we cannot invest money in rehabbing it, you cannot have that building” (C.N.). Meanwhile, the neighborhood had been promised a new school “for about ten years” (C.N.). “Someone had a letter from the school board from like eight years ago saying when the school was going to be built. It was supposed to be built years and years ago... And so, we began working with Brenda Muhammad [the district’s school board representative] to try and get that built” (C.N.). The group attended the design meetings for the school. At one point, the Board was going to withdraw the funds to build the school, and so the school committee “had a big group of people go [to the board meeting]. You have to have the school built. It’s been promised...and so they did. They built the school” (C.N.).

The group then decided that they should try to open the new school (later named Parkside) as a charter school. According to one organizer, the school board indicated that they would consider granting a charter for Parkside. The decision to submit a charter for Parkside was a “huge” debate in the group, however: “It didn’t have a lot of the things we wanted. Primarily being size. We wanted a smaller school” (C.N.). The group voted whether to pursue a charter at Parkside, and all agreed that they should. Deciding to open Parkside as a charter, however, created a new set of issues for the school committee. Because it was a substantially larger school (up to 600 children), the group would have to extend its desired attendance zone to include more neighborhoods.

Therefore, the school committee had to recruit people from other neighborhoods that were going to be affected by the new school. The group also had to get support from other neighborhoods to support the charter school effort. The neighborhoods they had to extend their efforts to included Ormewood Park and McDonough-Guice.

The group made presentations at SAND, South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development, which is the neighborhood organization for Ormewood Park and McDonough-Guice. They received support from the neighborhood association; however, several members who joined the group from Ormewood Park did not feel that they were included in the process.

In the midst of this recruitment effort, Atlanta Public Schools announced the attendance zone for Parkside, which included only people who lived east of Confederate Avenue, excluding 75% of the people on the school committee. The group called the Grant Park Neighborhood Association president and convened a meeting in his living room. It was decided that the group would attend the upcoming APS Board community meeting. The GPNA president printed signs that said “Grant Park United,” which school committee members held up at the meeting. They

also organized presentations for eight couples to make to the Board. According to one school-committee member, there were “at least fifty people there... all just sitting quietly, holding their signs up that say Grant Park United” (C.N.). Following the meeting, the APS board reconsidered and added Grant Park to the attendance zone for Parkside.

Once the group received word that Grant Park would again be included in the attendance zone, they began organizing to write the charter to make Parkside a charter school. During this time, the school committee received a letter via certified mail from a group of Ormewood Park residents. The Ormewood Park residents outlined their list of grievances with the process, stating that they were concerned about not being included in the process, there was not diversity on the school committee, and there was no teacher representation. The Ormewood Park residents proposed formal mediation with the school committee, which took place in the following weeks. At the mediation, the groups agreed to restructure how the group was organized and how it would function.

Following the mediation, the group began “aggressively” writing the charter: “we had a number of different teachers writing different pieces, different parents writing different pieces, I was writing something, everybody was writing something. [The chair] was compiling it all, editing it all, and... he did the communicating with APS back and forth” (C.N.). Meanwhile, the group met with Zoo Atlanta to form a partnership, “because obviously they’re our neighbor. The park, the conservancy being formed in the park, the whole conservation ecology theme was just a really natural thing we were drawn to” (C.N.). At this time the group was meeting weekly to finish the charter, which they submitted in September of 2000.

The charter was initially rejected by the Atlanta Public School Board. According to one organizer: “we’re told off the record it’s the location. We cannot have it at Parkside. You need

to resubmit at Slaton. We're like oh my gosh. You know you feel like Brer Rabbit. This is what we have wanted all along, and this is what you want us to do" (C.N.)¹². The group received the charter back from APS. The evaluation of the charter is based on a point system, in which each section is worth a certain number of points. The total number of points must meet a certain minimum, or the charter is denied. And so the group received counsel from the APS representative on how to increase the number of points in each section to reach the minimum score for having a charter approved. "So we add all this stuff, we go back and change it to Slaton, which of course then, cuts out some neighborhoods, so we have to rework our attendance zone. So we have to change our attendance zone to be Grant Park and Ormewood Park" (C.N.). At this point, the group comes up with the idea of a primary, secondary, and tertiary zone. The primary zone includes all of grant Park and all of Ormewood Park, and the secondary zone includes the rest of NPU-W. The tertiary zone is all students zoned to Atlanta Public Schools.

The charter was approved in December of 2001. Atlanta Public Schools agreed to lease the Slaton building to the newly formed Neighborhood Charter School, Inc. group for \$500 per month. The lease is for fifteen years, pending renewal of the five-year charter.

Following the approval of the charter, the group began hiring the administrative and teaching staff. The first hire was Dr. Jackie Rosswurm, who was employed to be the executive director of the nonprofit organization and the principal of the school. In addition, teachers were hired to teach kindergarten through third grade for the 2002-2003 school year.

As soon as the school was turned over to Neighborhood Charter School, Inc., the group began renovating the historic Slaton Elementary. Many volunteer hours and days later (see chapter five), the school opened with 105 students in August of 2003. The opening day

¹² No formal reason is given for APS's decision to allow the charter-school organizers to open a school at Slaton instead of Parkside.

ceremony was attended by Governor Roy Barnes in addition to local business leaders and elected officials. The school continued to build its curriculum and improve the facilities.

On February 8, 2003, a Saturday, the Slaton building caught fire and burned. The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but was later attributed to the wiring system in the second-floor lights. Several of the Neighborhood Charter School Board members met the evening of the fire and decided to hold a Board meeting the following day at the Carter Center. The group decided to hold school on Monday, and elected to take up St. Paul's United Methodist Church on their offer of classroom space. The students met on Monday at St. Paul's in the classroom annex and continued to meet at the church while other housing options were explored. The group ultimately decided to rent mobile classroom units and to locate them on the grounds of the Slaton building. Following the school's spring break in April of 2003, the staff and students began meeting in modular units on the lower playing field of their previous school (see discussions of the school space in chapter seven).

During the spring and summer months, the Neighborhood Charter School, Inc. began negotiating with its insurance company to rebuild the Slaton building. Atlanta Public Schools also had an insurance policy covering the building. The dual coverage resulted in confusion and even accusations that the Neighborhood Charter School, Inc. deliberately underinsured the building. (See chapter six for a discussion of how the media portrayed the struggle). Eventually, the insurance was worked out, the school was deemed salvageable by a construction firm, and the rebuilding efforts began in September of 2003.

In August of 2003, the school expanded to include two more first grade class and a fourth grade class, adding 60 additional students to its roles. According to the Neighborhood Charter School website, the student body for the 2002-2003 school year was 50% African-American,

37% Caucasian, 9% multi-racial, 2% Asian, and 2% Hispanic. Twenty percent of the students from the 2002-2003 school year received free or reduced lunch. Thus, the goal of including a diverse student body that was “representative of the neighborhood” was largely achieved.

The above narrative reflects several years of hard work by parents and residents in the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods. The struggles with the attendance zone, with Atlanta Public Schools, and the devastation of the fire hint at the complexity of events that surround the Neighborhood Charter School. Also buried in the narrative, which the ensuing chapters will explore, are the complexities associated with a largely middle-class and politically-connected group of parents and residents opening a school in a socio-economically and demographically diverse neighborhood. That the parents had the legal right and the economic and social wherewithal to open the school is the subject of chapter five. Chapter six explores the way in which the charter schools are portrayed in a major Atlanta newspaper—with specific attention to how the Neighborhood Charter School became the darling of the staff and editors of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Finally, chapter seven explores the importance of neighborhood as articulated by the Neighborhood Charter School organizers—and the importance of the school to the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhood at large.

Table 3.1: Comparison of Populations of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and All Atlanta Neighborhoods

Category	Grant Park	Ormewood Park
Median household income	\$38,578	\$28,101
Median financial assets*	\$29,255	\$14,455
White	56%	51%
Black	38%	43%
Hispanic	5%	5%
Median Age	35	35
Have at least a bachelor's degree	20%	15%
Have children under 18	38%	43%
Singles	35%	37%
At present address for 5+ years	40%	48%
Browsed Internet last 30 days	41%	30%

Source: "Metro Atlanta neighborhood profiles", Atlanta Journal-Constitution, ajc.com, October 28, 2003, data provided by TargetPro.

*Financial assets include: transaction accounts, CDs, savings bonds, bonds, mutual funds, retirement accounts, cash value of life insurance and other financial assets. It does not include real estate investments, business assets and vehicles.

Table 3.2: Median Household Income for 1999

	Census tract 50, block group 1	Census tract 52, block group 1	Census tract 52, block group 3	Census tract 52, block group 5	Census tract 53, block group 1	Census tract 53, block group 4	Census tract 49, block group 4
Average median income	39,531	32,218	50,682	41,719	40,556	41,944	63,875

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

Table 3.3: Percentage of Population in Different Household-Income Brackets

Income	Percentage of total (N=3782)
Less than \$10,000	9.4
\$10,000 to \$19,999	11.3
\$20,000 to \$29,999	13.8
\$30,000 to \$39,999	11.7
\$40,000 to \$49,999	9.0
\$50,000 to \$59,999	6.2
\$60,000 to \$74,999	12.4
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11.4
\$100,000 to \$124,999	8.0
\$125,000 to \$199,999	5.6
\$200,000 or more	1.1

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

Table 3.4: Household Median Income in 1999 by Race

	Census tract 50, block group 1	Census tract 52, block group 1	Census tract 52, block group 3	Census tract 52, block group 5	Census tract 53, block group 1	Census tract 53, block group 4	Census tract 49, block group 4
white	39,963	46,696	55,156	60,000	47,000	73,750	65,500
African-American	34,118	23,611	45,750	14,423	19,519	24,875	57,917

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

Table 3.5: Educational Attainment by Race/Ethnicity

Educational attainment	White	African-American	Latino	Total
Less than 9th grade	89	251	62	402
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	251	410	45	706
High school graduate	596	436	63	1095
Some college, no degree	697	405	40	1142
Associate degree	196	52	12	260
Bachelor degree	1580	224	68	1872
Graduate or professional degree	802	141	32	975
Total	4211	1919	322	6452

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

Table 3.6: Enrollment of School-Age Children in Private and Public Schools

Enrollment of students	Number enrolled
Enrolled in kindergarten to grade 4	480
Public school	426
Private school	54
Enrolled in grade 5 to grade 8	349
Public school	292
Private school	57
Enrolled in grade 9 to grade 12	319
Public school	295
Private school	26

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

Table 3.7: Comparison of African-American and White Students Enrolled in Public and Private Schools

Enrollment by school type	African-Americans	Whites
Enrolled in kindergarten	29	8
<i>Public school</i>	29	8
<i>Private school</i>	0	0
Enrolled in grade 1 to grade 8	465	262
<i>Public school</i>	443	173
<i>Private school</i>	22	89
Enrolled in grade 9 to grade 12	206	96
<i>Public school</i>	206	77
<i>Private school</i>	0	19

Source: 2000 U.S. Census data

Table 3.8: Slaton Elementary School Enrollment: Comparison for 1998-2001

Level	1999-2000	2000-2001
Slaton Elementary	257	194
All APS Elementary	32,335	30,408

Source: Slaton Elementary School Statistics, Atlanta Public Schools, Department of Research Planning and Accountability, December 2001

Table 3.9: Slaton Elementary School Population by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Level	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Male	Female
Slaton Elementary	60%	11%	16%	12%	1%	58%	42%
All APS Elementary	88%	8%	4%	1%	0	51%	49%

Source: Slaton Elementary School Statistics, Atlanta Public Schools, Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability, December 2001

Table 3.10: Slaton Elementary School Students Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced Lunch, 2000-2001

Level	Number	Percent
Slaton Elementary School	169	87
All Elementary	24,463	80

Source: Slaton Elementary School Statistics, Atlanta Public Schools, Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability, December 2001

Table 3.11: Anne E West School Enrollment: Comparison for 1998-2001

Level	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
West Elementary	261	250	195

Source: Anne E West Elementary School Statistics, Atlanta Public Schools, Department of Research Planning and Accountability, December 2001

Table 3.12: Anne E West School Population by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Level	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Other	Male	Female
West Elementary	70%	24%	2%	1%	1%	2%	47%	53%

Source: Anne E West Elementary School Statistics, Atlanta Public Schools, Department of Research Planning and Accountability, December 2001

Table 3.13: Anne E. West Elementary School Students Eligible to Receive Free/Reduced Lunch, 2000-2001

Level	Number	Percent
West Elementary School	152	78

Source: Anne E West Elementary School Statistics, Atlanta Public Schools, Department of Research Planning and Accountability, December 2001

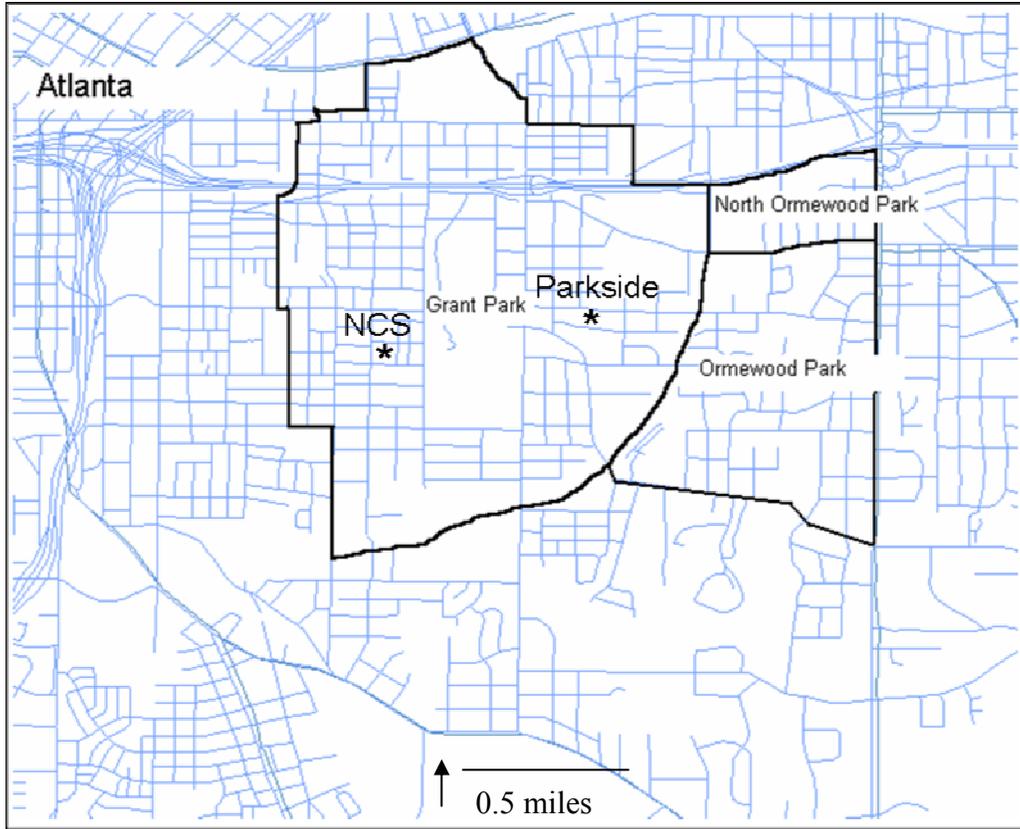


Figure 3.1: Map of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and North Ormewood Park

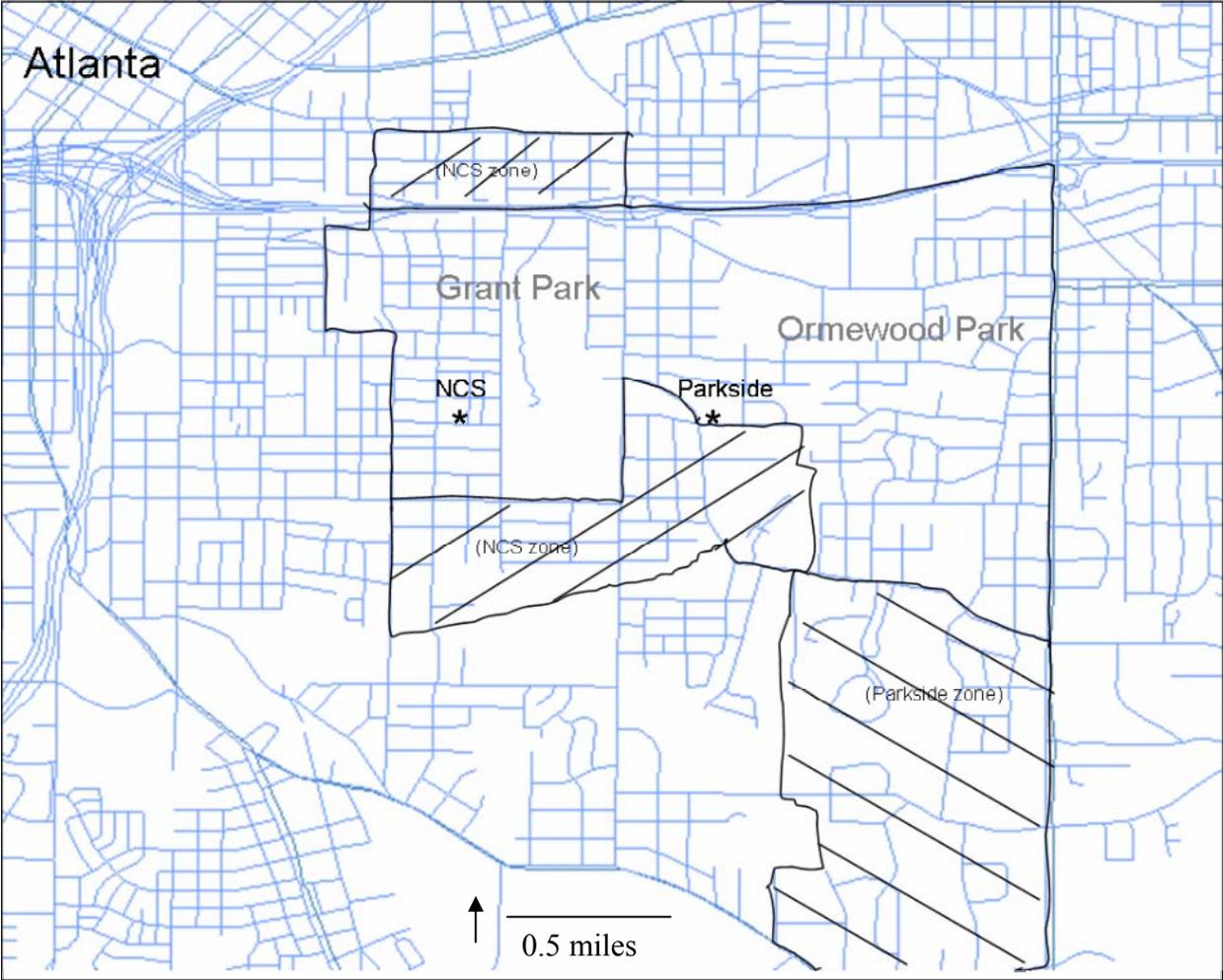


Figure 3.2: Map of NCS and Parkside Attendance Zones



Figure 3.3: Houses in the Grant Park Neighborhood



Figure 3.4: More Houses in the Grant Park Neighborhood



Figure 3.5: Queen Anne Mansion in the Grant Park Neighborhood



Figure 3.6: St. Paul's United Methodist Church



Figure 3.7: Eastern Side of Cherokee at Glenwood



Figure 3.8: Western Side of Cherokee at Glenwood



Figure 3.9: Georgia-Hill Neighborhood Facility



Figure 3.10: Boulevard near Interstate-20

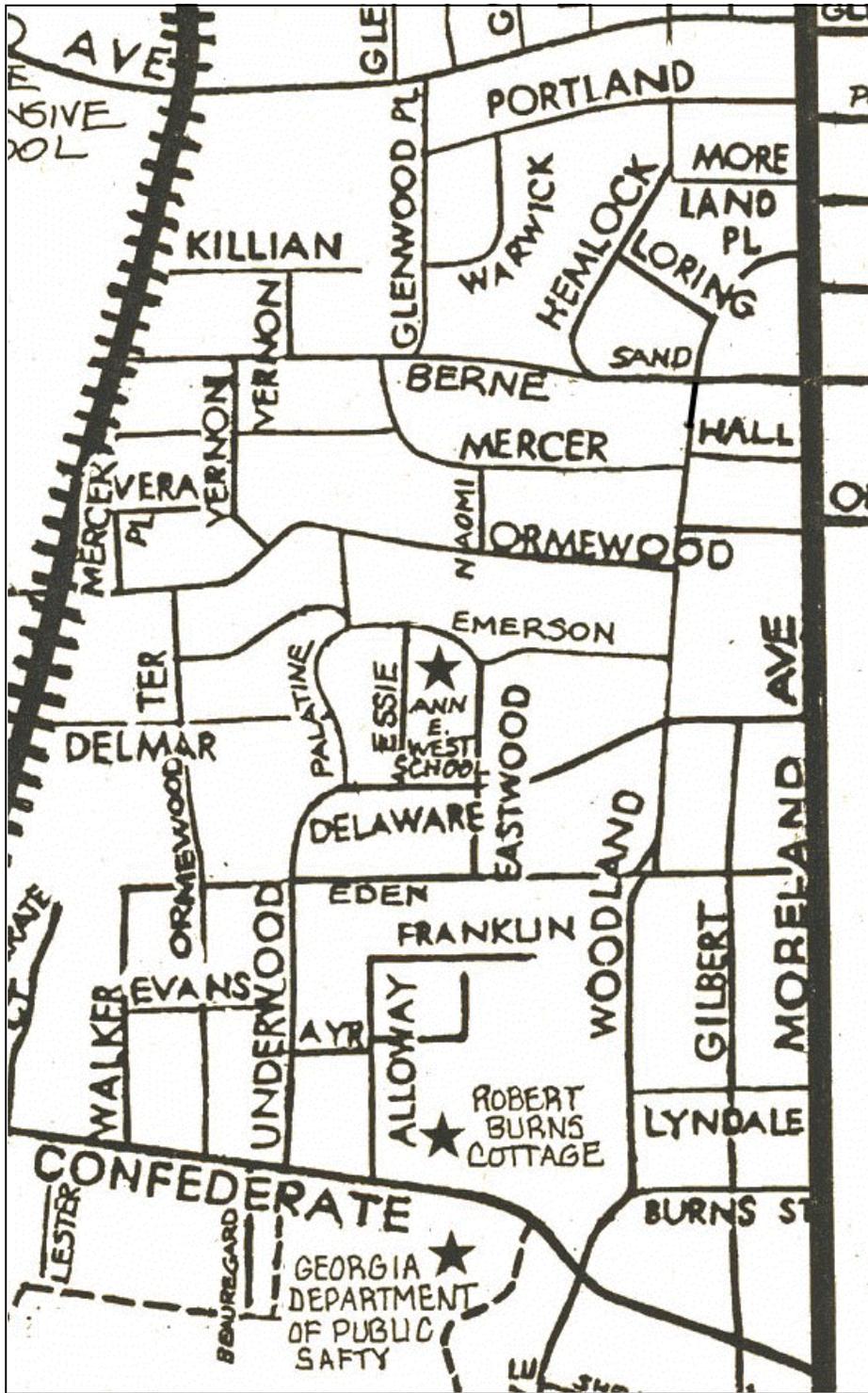


Figure 3.11: Ormewood Park Map

Source: South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development website

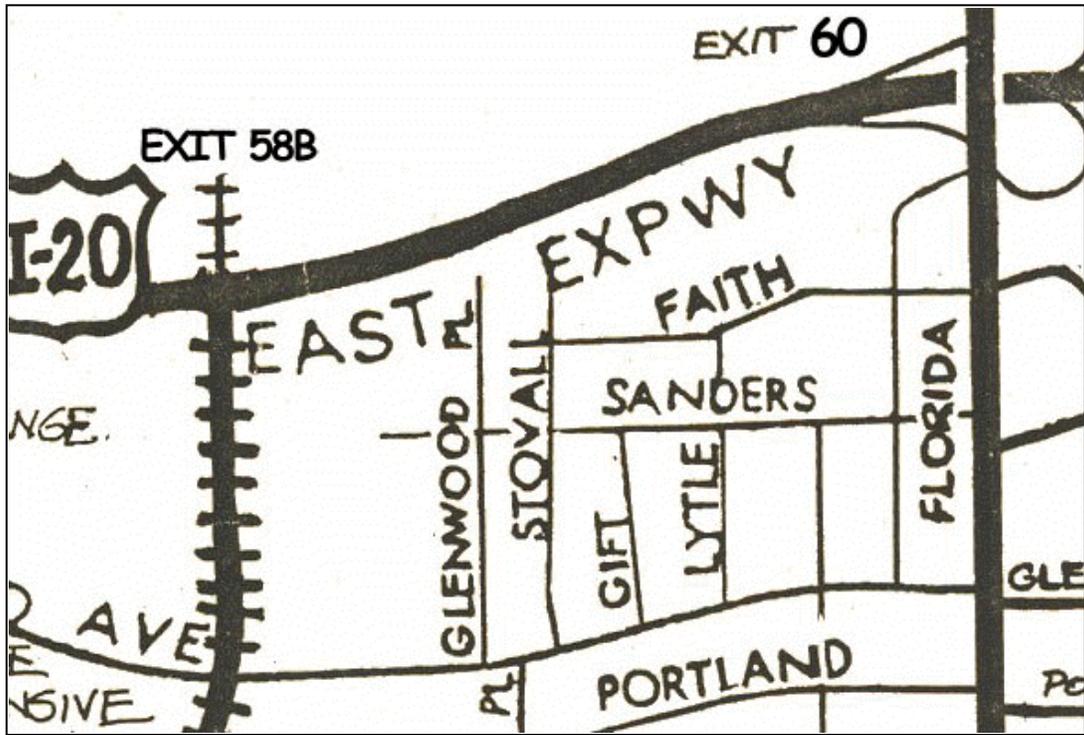


Figure 3.12: North Ormewood Park Map

Source: South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development website



Figure 3.13: Entrance to Grant Park



Figure 3.14: Victorian House near Brick Ranch in Ormewood Park

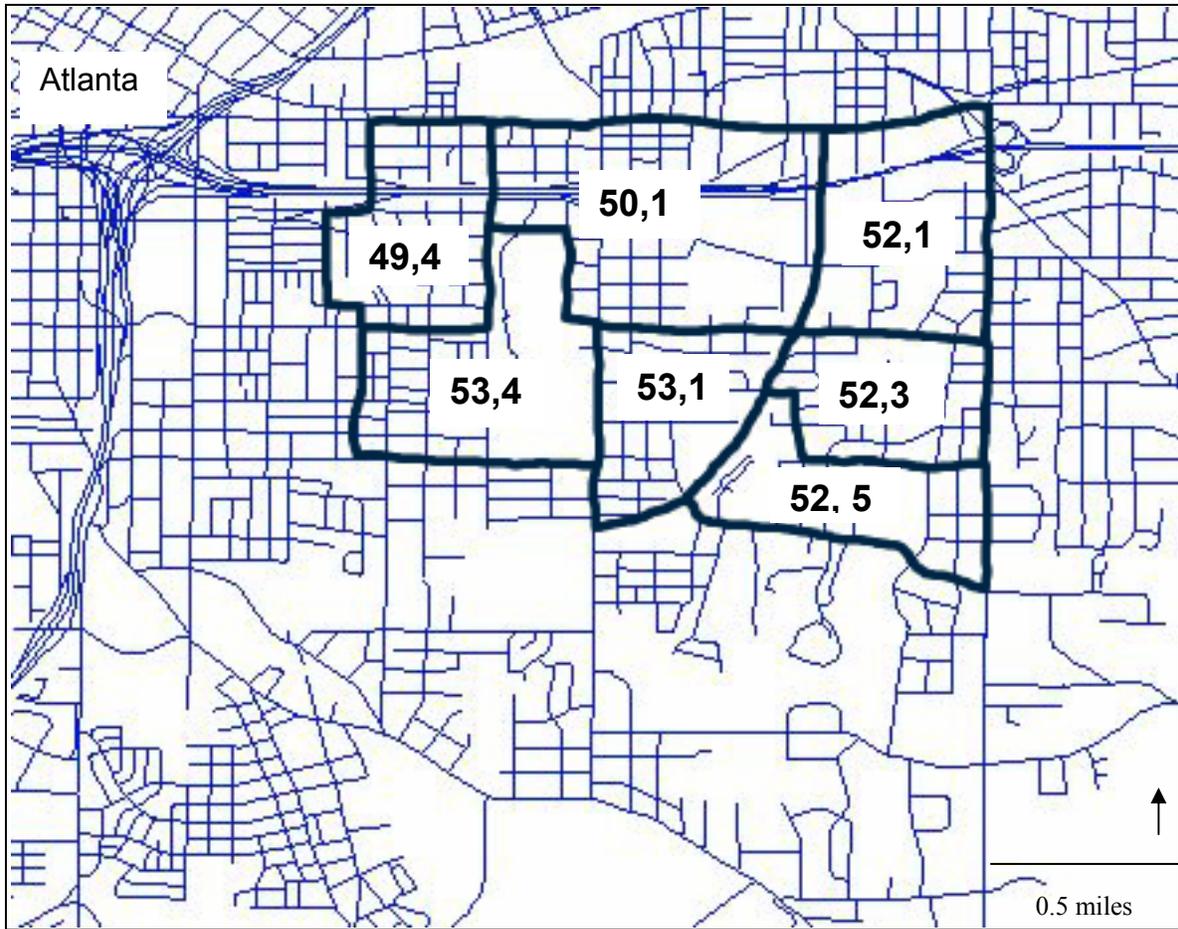


Figure 3.15: Census Tracts and Block Groups in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park Neighborhoods (Tract number, block group number)

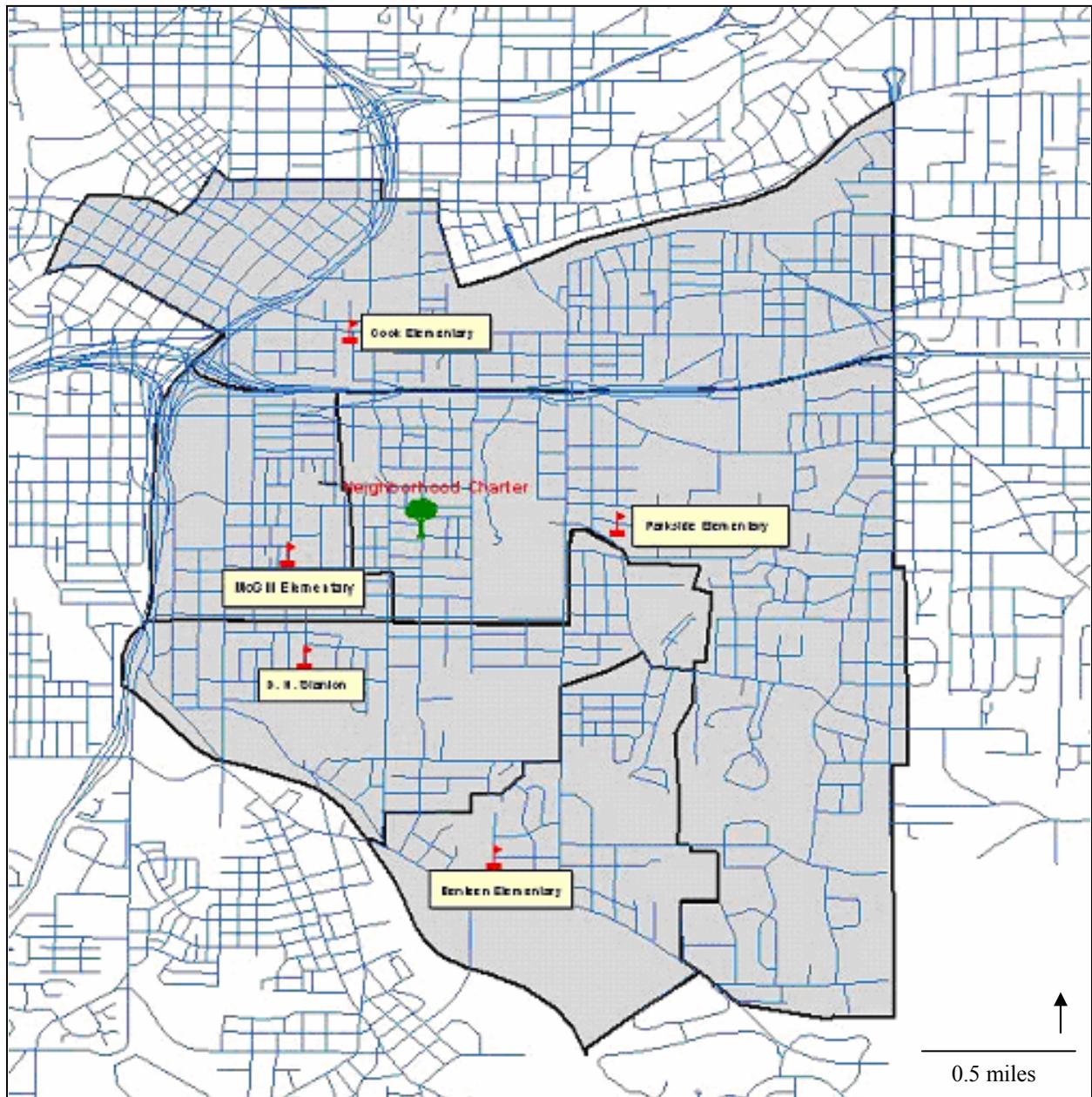


Figure 3.16: Map showing Cook, McGill, D.H.Stanton, Benten, Parkside, and the Neighborhood Charter School

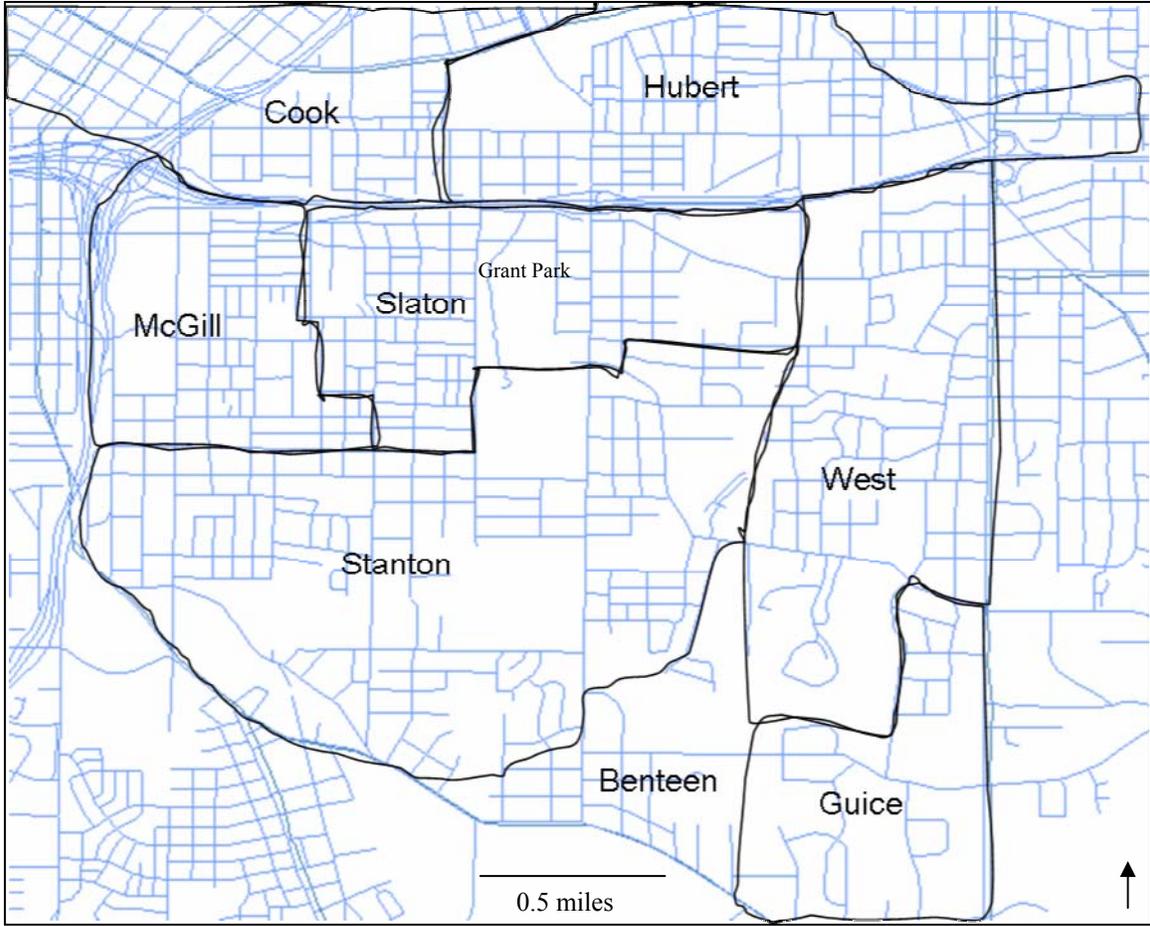


Figure 3.17: Map of School Zones in the mid-1990s

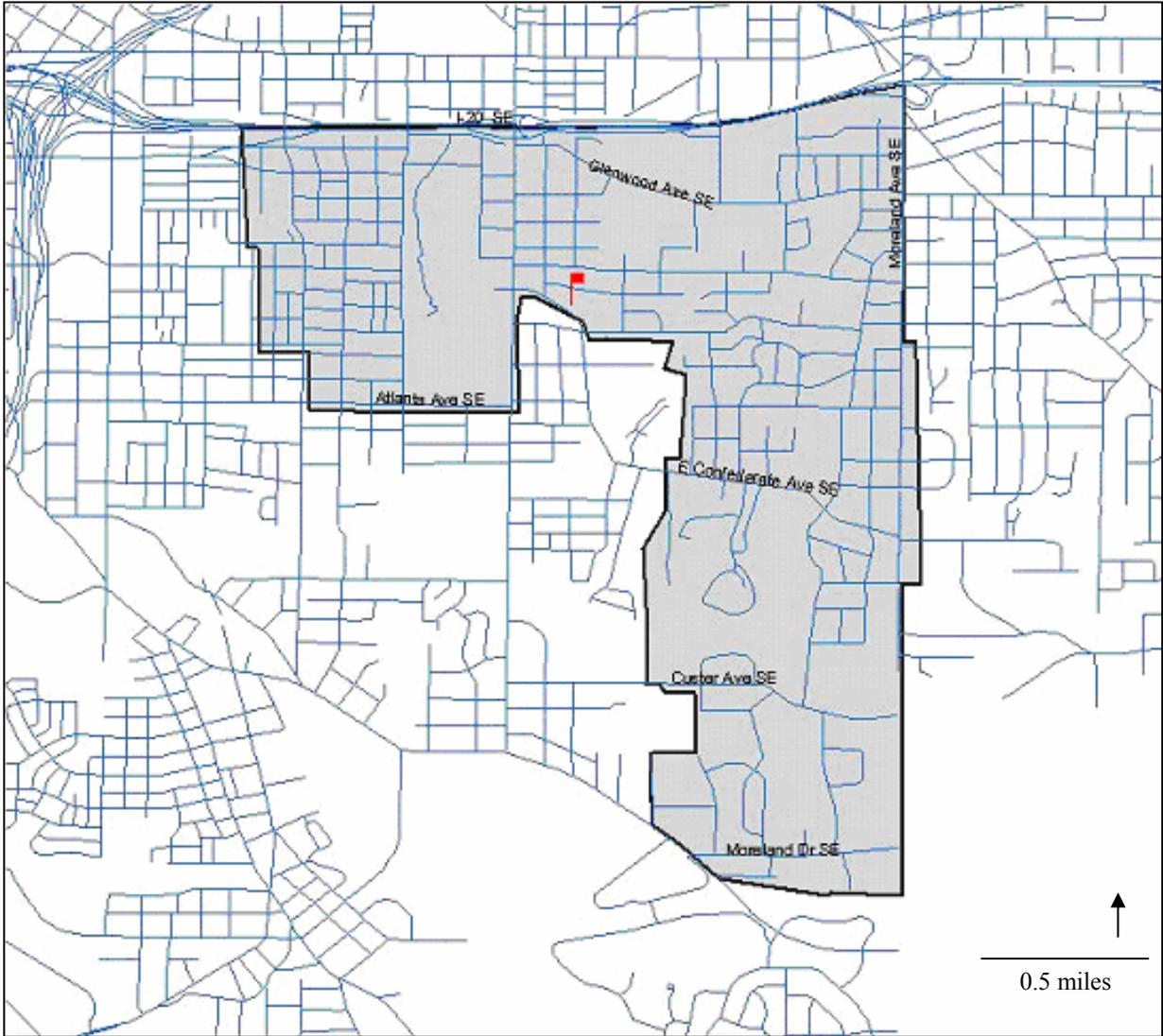


Figure 3.18: Parkside Elementary's Attendance Zone

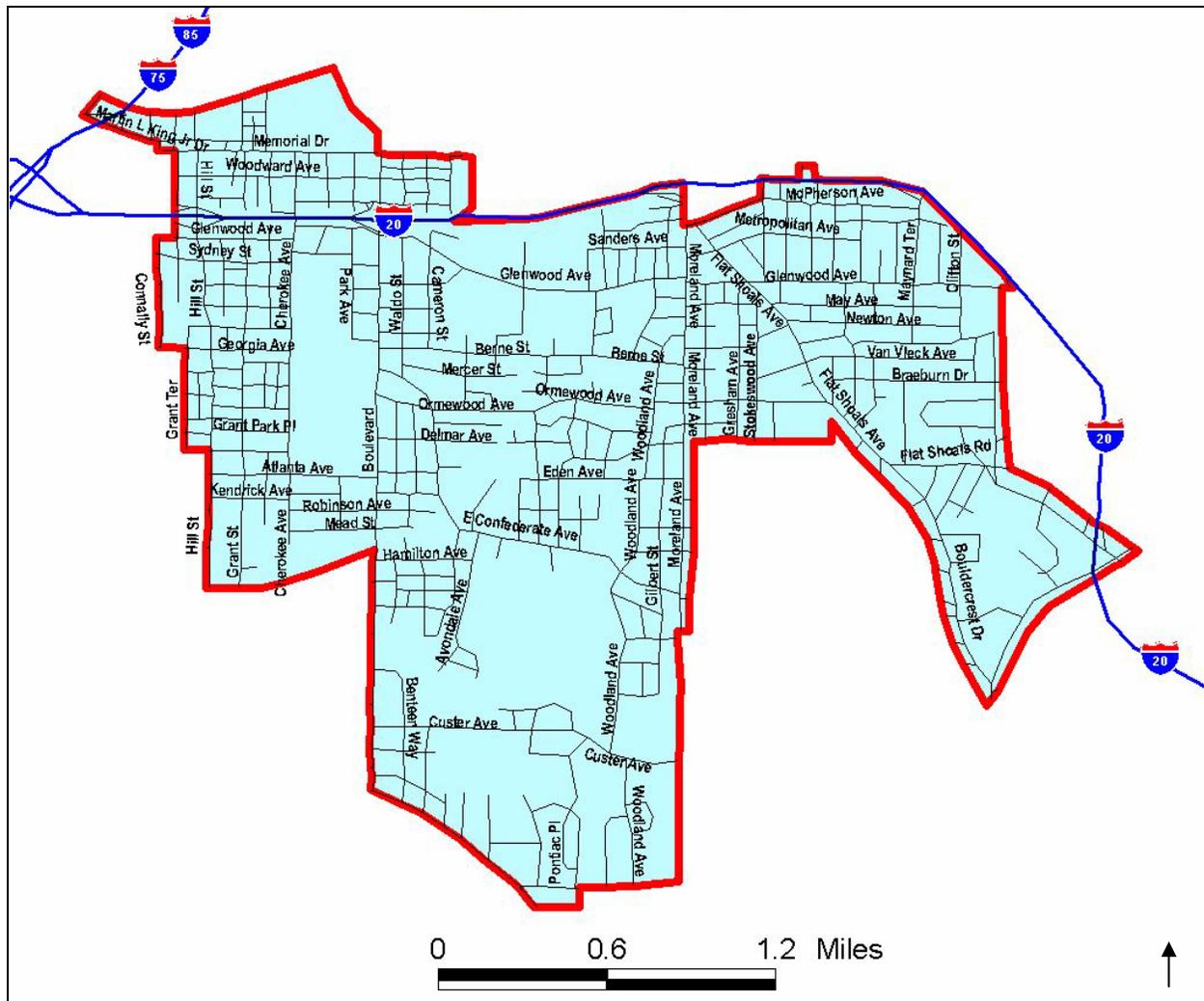


Figure 3.19: Map of NPU-W

Source: DAPA: Data and Policy Analysis at Georgia Tech,
<http://www.arch.gatech.edu/~dapa/reports/atneighchg/page-Images/npuw-m.html>

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter I provided a descriptive account of the history of Atlanta and the Grant-Ormewood Park neighborhoods and the schools that have served the region in order to provide a context for the formation of the Neighborhood Charter School. In this chapter I explain my epistemological approach to knowledge production, describe and explore the successes and limitations of the extended case method in examining the Neighborhood Charter School, and provide a description of the steps I took in conducting this research project, including the details of my multi-method data collection. I approach the production of knowledge as a process that involves a recognition of the social construction of knowledge, the multi-faceted positionality of the researcher and the research participants, and the importance of research as a political project. I use the extended case method to apply an exploration of a charter school to understanding new relations between citizens and the state.

In chapter two, I outlined the theoretical concerns that guide this research, which include extending our understanding of neoliberalism to consider newly-constructed subjects and spaces. To examine this broad-scale dynamic, I turn to understanding new citizenship practices in and the spatial effects of charter schools, a new institution shaping state-citizen relations. My two main research goals are to examine

- What are new forms and scales of citizenship in charter schools?
- How do charter schools affect neighborhood space?

The way in which I shed light on these questions is to examine the formation of the Neighborhood Charter School. As described in the previous chapter, the Neighborhood Charter School opened in 2002 about a mile from a traditional public school in the Grant Park

neighborhood, which is a demographically and socio-economically mixed neighborhood. The fact that two schools serve the same neighborhood provides a rich terrain in which to examine both opportunities for citizenship and the ways in which the schools shape and are shaped by the neighborhood's social groups and their spatial imaginaries.

The Extended Case Study Method

Yin (1994: 13) defines a case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” That is, when a researcher is interested in the phenomenon and the *context* of the phenomenon, then the case study method is appropriate. Furthermore, Buroway (1991) asserts that an “extended” case method is a way to examine “macro” processes in “micro” settings; a way to illustrate and understand the materiality of abstract processes. In my research, I am interested in broad sociopolitical changes, such as the neoliberalization of public education and new citizenship opportunities in charter schools, and the effects of such changes on the material and imagined spaces of urban neighborhoods. To that end, I ask the following more detailed set of research questions to address my two main research goals:

What are new forms and scales of citizenship in charter schools?

- What are the formal opportunities to design and manage a charter school in Atlanta, and how do these reflect the practice of social citizenship?
 - What is the legal framework guiding the practice of citizenship in charter schools in Atlanta?
 - What are the activities associated with designing and managing a charter school in Atlanta?
 - What did the citizens who founded the Neighborhood Charter School do in creating the school?
 - To what extent do other neighborhood residents feel welcome to participate in the management of the Neighborhood Charter School?

How do charter schools affect neighborhood space?

- What role do charter schools play at the urban scale?
 - What is the relationship between charter schools and the Atlanta urban regime?
 - How are charter schools portrayed in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*?
- How does the Neighborhood Charter School characterize the broader community?
 - How do organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School define the neighborhood they want to serve?
 - How have those involved in the Neighborhood Charter School articulated their vision of the school in the neighborhood?
 - What role does the school play in a broader neighborhood imaginary or identity?
 - How does the role of the Neighborhood Charter School differ from Parkside Elementary in the Grant Park neighborhood?

These detailed questions offer insights into different elements for understanding new subjects and spaces of neoliberalism. Questions about charter-school legislation and citizenship rights reflect new ways in which citizens are being asked to participate in social institutions. The way in which they actually participate suggests the degree to which individuals can act upon latent citizenship rights. The rights and actions, then, suggest what kinds of new subjects are created vis-à-vis charter school activism. The way in which charter schools are bound up in existing local social and economic relationships, such as urban regimes, suggests the importance of local scales and spaces under neoliberalism. Furthermore, particular spaces, such as schools, form the basis for the exercise of social citizenship rights. Finally, the very local spatial politics in which charter schools operate suggests how the material experience of local neighborhoods can be altered by a neoliberalizing state.

Epistemological Position

An epistemology is “any theory of what constitutes valid knowledge” (Johnston, et. al, 2000). It is the *way* in which knowledge can be known versus ontology, which is fundamentally *what* can be known. In recent decades, several epistemologies have been prominent in social science research, including postmodernism, poststructuralism, feminism, and Marxism. I briefly

review these epistemologies to explain how they have influenced my approach to knowledge production.

A postmodern epistemology is characterized by a rejection of the metanarrative or grand theory of modernity¹ (Ley, 2000; Lyotard, 1984). Instead the observer and the observed are regarded as socially constituted, and as such a plurality of viewpoints and knowledge claims are valid. More fundamentally, it rejects the “objectivity” of the subject-object relationship. A neutral observer (or subject) would be impossible in postmodernism, for subjects are constituted by social relations. That is, social relations produce particular kinds of meaning for researchers. In seeking to understand how neoliberalism creates new forms of public education that impact neighborhood space, I regard both schools and neighborhoods as the product of social relations—and it is the complexity of these social (and spatial) relations that I want to examine.

Poststructuralism, ushered in by the work of Foucault and others (and under the “umbrella” of postmodernism), is characterized by a rejection of structuralists’ formalism and claims of the subject. Poststructuralists see language as a medium for defining and contesting social organization and subjectivity (Pratt, 2000). Furthermore, they reject the omnipotent, rational subject in favor of an interpretation of subjectivity that is fluid and continually dynamic. The importance of a postmodernist epistemology broadly and poststructuralism more specifically is that they challenge dominant forms of knowledge and seek to expose multiple scales or “layers” of knowledge. In rejecting a metanarrative of social relations, such as ideas of “progress,” these epistemologies leave room for many different notions of progressive politics.² In fact, as Dixon and Jones (1998: 259) argue, within poststructuralism,

¹ Modernity, loosely defined, is an Eurocentric era of “enlightened” progress through humankind’s rationality and reason. In modernity, the rational human (subject) can change society, developmental trajectories, or the world around him or her (the object) by taking logical steps towards “progress.”

² Some would argue that they leave no room for emancipatory politics (Harvey, 1989).

the stability of concepts... upon which interpretations of ‘progressive‘ politics have been constructed [can no longer be presumed], including those such as ‘public‘, ‘citizen‘, and ‘democracy‘. And yet, in recognizing all of these as contextually defined categories, there emerge new opportunities for politics.

As such, concepts such as “citizenship” and “community” require attention, both for their potential to hide and to reveal opportunities for politics.

Considering opportunities for politics is an important starting point for this research, in that I want to examine the ways in which different actors—including the state, charter-school activists, and neighborhood residents—discursively produce and materially experience a charter school. In addition, I want to be mindful of the multiple axes of difference that individual and collective groups express in relationship to the charter school. The shifts in the state that produce new institutional frameworks such as charter schools allow opportunities for a variety of politics. I do, however, want to borrow from the emancipatory potential of both feminist and Marxist epistemologies.

Related to poststructuralism and the decentering of the subject, feminism has been an important epistemology for geographers. Feminism seeks to expose multiple forms of oppression--not only to do with gender but with race, class, and region (Peet, 1998). Oppression is seen not only in social experiences but in the kinds of knowledge or “science” that is privileged. That is, particular kinds of “truths” can work to maintain uneven power relations among social groups. This can be seen in the naturalizing of discourses or in the creation of a social common sense. For example, Foucault (1995) is concerned with how discourses surrounding about crime become naturalized into everyday practices to where certain behaviors are assumed to be criminal acts. In the case of charter schools, discourses about “competition” and “choice” are widely seen in newspaper media, as this research reveals. Linking charter

schools to market metaphors can have a particular power in devaluing traditional state institutions.

One dimension of oppression that became clear in initial research is class differences between participants in the charter school versus the traditional public school. An examination of the realist epistemology of Marxism helps analyze the class relations in the study region. A Marxist approach to knowledge is based on the body of theory developed by Karl Marx in the 19th century. Marx sought to theorize the mechanisms of capitalism and to understand the social relations inherent in a capitalist system. Marx's interest in the economic system of capitalism was to understand its operation. His political (and social) project was to incite an awareness of the inherent perpetuation of the dual class system: that of capitalists and laborers. Marx argued that the capitalist system perpetuated the dual class system until the working class revolted against the capitalists, at which time socialism would be the new social system.

For the most part, a Marxist approach falls within a realist epistemology. In realism, there is a clear subject-object relationship and an objective world “out there” to be examined. The subject can conduct research and produce knowledge by examining, measuring, and understanding phenomena that occur in the world that is independent of the object. This subject-object relationship is a legacy of Enlightenment-era thinkers.³ Contemporary Marxism, although contested in a myriad of interpretations, is more concerned with understanding the mechanisms of the capitalist system and the potential oppressions inherent in it. What is useful for this research project—and seemingly contradictory given my position on postmodernism—is the epistemological underpinnings of Marxism: that society is a social reality and that it is structured by class hierarchy. I do believe that the *experience* of society for many is a reality that is highly structured by class inequality. But that this is not the only experience of inequality

³ Although positivism is a more direct legacy.

that requires attention. Furthermore, also borrowing from Marxian and feminist projects, I do believe that progressive politics cannot be left alone to dissipate in the nonspecificity of postmodernism and poststructuralism. As scholars, we need to dig beneath dominant power structures to uncover multiple truths, but we also need to acknowledge the political project of our work.

Thus, by combining both postmodern and poststructuralist epistemologies (that knowledge is socially constructed) with the political project of feminism (alleviating multiple axes of differences) and Marxism (exposing a system of class inequality), this research both acknowledges the fluid nature of knowledge production and the importance of making research count towards political and social justice. In the next section I provide a description of my research design and the data I use to examine the role of the Neighborhood Charter School in the Grant Park neighborhood.

Research Approach: Quantitative and Qualitative Data

By using an extended case method to understand both macro and micro processes of citizen involvement in public education and the changing dynamics of neighborhood space, it is important for me to gain both a general sense and very detailed impressions of how the Neighborhood Charter School operates in the Grant Park neighborhood. To this end, I employed a mixed-method approach, including both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Here I review the specific steps I took to answer my research questions, and in the next section I discuss these methods in more detail.

My first detailed set of questions asks:

- What are the formal opportunities to design and manage a charter school in Atlanta, and how do these reflect the practice of social citizenship?
 - What is the legal framework guiding the practice of citizenship in charter schools in Atlanta?

- What are the activities associated with designing and managing a charter school in Atlanta?
- What did the citizens who founded the Neighborhood Charter School do in creating the school?
- To what extent do other neighborhood residents feel welcome to participate in the management of the Neighborhood Charter School?

To understand what the formal opportunities are to design and manage a charter school in Atlanta, I conducted an archival study of national, state, and local school district legislation on charter schools. This included an analysis of federal and Georgia legislation and Atlanta Public Schools charter schools rules and regulations. This spells out the particular rights that citizens have around education. In order to answer my question about the kinds of activities Neighborhood Charter School organizers engaged in to open their school (and thus to understand what it means to practice citizenship), I interviewed original founders and those associated with the initial organizational effort. I asked participants what kinds of activities they engaged in, how much time they spent on the school effort, and what kind of expertise they brought to the charter-school effort. To address the question of how neighborhood residents responded to the Neighborhood Charter School, I interviewed residents, and I conducted a survey of households in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods (see Appendix B).

My second detailed set of questions asks:

- What role do charter schools play at the urban scale?
 - What is the relationship between charter schools and the Atlanta urban regime?
 - How are charter schools portrayed in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*?

To understand the role of charter schools at the urban scale, I chose to focus on the links between the Neighborhood Charter School organizers and to members of Atlanta's urban regime. In particular, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the way in which charter schools were portrayed in the Atlanta newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

In my final detailed set of questions, I ask:

- How does the Neighborhood Charter School characterize the broader community?
 - How do organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School define the neighborhood they want to serve?
 - How have those involved in the Neighborhood Charter School articulated their vision of the school in the neighborhood?
 - What role does the school play in a broader neighborhood imaginary or identity?
 - How does the role of the Neighborhood Charter School differ from Parkside Elementary in the Grant Park neighborhood?

To understand how the Neighborhood Charter School characterizes “community,” I turned to two sources of data. First, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the Neighborhood Charter School charter petition, which articulated community in a number of different ways. In addition, in semi-structured interviews I asked NCS organizers how they viewed their school in the broader community. Related to questions about the community, I asked organizers how they defined the neighborhood they wanted to serve and what their visions were for the school as a space in Grant Park. In addition I attended meetings at the Neighborhood Charter School, the Grant Park Neighborhood Association, and the South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development. These data give more of a picture of how the charter school relates to other institutions in the neighborhood, and how neighborhood residents perceive the Neighborhood Charter School. In order to answer questions about how the school functions differently from Parkside Elementary, I both interviewed residents and included questions about the two schools on the neighborhood survey I distributed to 400 households. Details about each of these processes follow.

Methods of Information Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

Archival research and qualitative content analysis

Given that I wanted to examine the way in which federal and state legislation and local school districts construct the possibilities for citizen-involvement in public education, I first

turned to examining these formal sources of discourse. I conducted a qualitative content analysis of federal, state, and school district legislation in order to understand the terms of new citizenship rights in public education. Qualitative content analysis involves recognizing several elements of how topics are written about. These elements include the frequency of certain words, the context in which particular words or topics are written about, and the tone that written content elicits. In the case of legislation, I examined the ways in which private and public citizens were constructed and the kinds of “choice” and “competition” language that was used to describe the charter-school movement. This elicits whether and to what extent the neoliberal agenda has pervaded charter-school legislation.

In addition, I examined the discourse on Atlanta Public Schools and charter schools with specific regard to the Neighborhood Charter School as it was covered in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, including the editorial pages and readers’ comments. This was to understand how the charter school movement in Atlanta has been written about in the larger Atlanta region. I examined the ways in which charter schools were conceptualized either implicitly or explicitly in terms of citizenship. In particular, I was looking for references to “choice” and “rights,” which are part of liberal individualist discourse (a theoretical approach to citizenship). Likewise, I looked for references to community, reflecting a civic republican approach to citizenship and social institutions. Also, I examined the kinds of articles on charter schools and their tone (favorable versus unfavorable) to understand the editorial position of the newspapers themselves. As discussed in chapter two, newspaper companies, as part of local elites, have a strong interest in promoting local places as desirable. Thus, I reviewed the coverage of charter schools in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* to examine the local elite’s perspective on charter schools as local institutions.

Participant observation

To gain a sense of how individuals and groups expressed ideals about citizen participation in charter schools and about neighborhood space, I attended a variety of meetings as a participant observer. I maintained a role as an overt researcher, in that I gained informal permission to attend meetings in some cases, and I received formal invitations to attend meetings of other groups. Specifically, I attended eight Neighborhood Charter School Board meetings in February, and every month from April through October during 2003. In addition, I attended two Neighborhood Charter School Parent-Teacher-Community Association (PTCA) meetings. I attended these meetings to get a sense of how the charter school operates and the issues that were discussed at Board meetings and at PTCA meetings. In particular, I was interested in the social make-up of the group, including the roles that women, African-Americans, single-parents, and full-time workers (outside of the school) played in the functioning of the school. I also wanted to see how Board members discussed the space of the school (particularly following the fire) and the role of the school in the larger Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods.

In my discussions with several neighborhood residents, I learned that there was a middle school charter school effort underway by parents in the neighborhood. I was invited to attend the group's monthly meetings, and I was added to the group's email listserv, the primary method by which the group communicated. I attended four of these meetings to get a glimpse of the early organizational efforts of forming a charter school with a specific eye to how the group discussed "community outreach" and how to locate an appropriate space for the potential school. Through my role as a participant observer, I was able to see the ways in which charter-school participants and residents acted on their rights to practice citizenship under the charter-school legislative framework.

To understand the ways in which the Neighborhood Charter School and other traditional Atlanta public schools were discussed in the neighborhood more broadly, I attended the Grant Park Neighborhood Association monthly meetings, from April through September during 2003. I also attended a South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development (SAND) meeting. Finally, in order to get a sense of the citizen involvement in the traditional public school Parkside Elementary, I attended a PTA meeting at the school.⁴

Interviews

Interviews were one of the most important sources of data for answering questions about the practice of citizenship and the transformation of neighborhood space. I began by interviewing the founding members of the Neighborhood Charter School, the NCS principal, and NCS Board members. From many of these participants, I generated a list of other people to interview. These included people in the neighborhood who at some point had involvement with the Neighborhood Charter School, but who did not necessarily remain involved in (or even in support of) the school. In addition, I interviewed “at-large” neighborhood members, including the president of the Grant Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA) (also a member of the middle school charter school effort), the Director of the Grant Park Conservancy (also a GPNA officer), an assistant to the Atlanta City Council Representative (also the former PTA president at Parkside Elementary), the current Parkside Elementary PTA president (who was previously involved at the Neighborhood Charter School). I also interviewed the former Atlanta Public Schools’ Operations Assistant to the Superintendent, who designed attendance zones and managed zone records for Atlanta Public Schools from the 1970s through the mid-1990s.

⁴ PTA meetings were not conducted during the summer (June through August) nor were they scheduled regularly. Meeting times were not published on-line or in the neighborhood newspaper in advance. Therefore, I had a difficult time pinning down meeting times. This deficiency affects the degree to which I can analyze the citizenship practices in the traditional public school; however, I utilized other methods to assess this, including extensive conversations with the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 PTA presidents, and phone calls to the school.

Of the thirty-one interviews I conducted, 23 participants were white⁶, eight were African-American; 21 were women, and 10 were men. Professions of the research participants included law, health care, journalism, small-business ownership, city government, technology consulting, and education. Only one participant indicated that she worked in a low-skilled position as a waitress. Thus, based on the educational backgrounds and professions of the interview participants, I assessed that most were middle-class residents.

Through utilizing the social networks and social institutions that existed in the neighborhood through the workings of the Neighborhood Charter School and the Grant Park Neighborhood Association and to a lesser extent Parkside Elementary, I had little trouble setting up interviews with largely middle-class residents of the Grant Park Neighborhood. I think this willingness is due to three reasons. First, the people with whom I spoke are voluntarily involved in their school or neighborhood association. I would argue that they implicitly value the social networks inherent in such neighborhood activism and are thus willing to extend their time to a researcher who has been introduced via their social network. Secondly, it seems that many middle-class residents who likely have post-high school educations value or understand social science research and are thus willing to participate in a research project. In fact in the course of conversation, several of the interview participants discussed their experience in graduate school struggling to define and to get approval for their own research projects. Finally, my own position as a researcher (and by extension likely middle-class) probably aided the ease with which I could gain access to the Neighborhood Charter School organizers and parents.

Of interest in conducting interviews were the places in which interview participants suggested (or agreed) to meet me for interviews. Following Elwood and Martin (2000), the

⁶ Two of these were in mixed-race marriages.

locations of the interviews gave me a sense of the kinds of social space available in the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods (and in East Atlanta). In particular, many interviews took place in one of three locations: at Grant Central Pizza, a pizza shop located in the Grant Park neighborhood, which is co-owned by a member of the Board of the Neighborhood Charter School; Ria's Bluebird Café, also in the Grant Park neighborhood (where I was once informed the top Atlanta Public School officials were dining at the next table); and Joe's Coffee Shop, a coffee shop in the East Atlanta Village (a neighborhood bordering the Grant Park neighborhood). The other popular interview location was in participants' homes. All of these places gave me a sense of the "microgeography" of social space in the Grant Park and nearby neighborhoods.

Indeed, as Elwood and Martin (2000: 653) argue

The sites available for interviews—as identified by both the researcher and participants—and the choices that a group of participants make about where they want to be interviewed may offer useful clues about important community institutions, highlight a lack of such institutions, and provide greater understandings of social and spatial divisions in a community.

Given that I largely interviewed participants at eateries or in their homes, it was interesting to note that all of these places were privately-owned⁷. There are several public institutions in the Grant Park neighborhood, including the Georgia-Hill Community Center and the park itself, but all interview participants suggested private spaces—leading me to consider the degree to which homes or private spaces are important places for people in the neighborhood.

Survey

In addition to interviewing members of the Grant Park, North Ormewood, and Ormewood Park neighborhoods, I conducted a survey to 400 households to understand how neighborhood residents who might not be actively involved in schools understand or use social

⁷ The three restaurant meeting places were moderately priced, and regularly had a mixed clientele of white and African-American, middle-income and lower-income patrons.

space in their neighborhood and how they view the Neighborhood Charter School and nearby Parkside Elementary. I also asked research participants to include demographic information about themselves, including race/ethnicity, household size, and household income, to gain a sense of whether there are class or race-based distinctions that inform different attitudes about the schools.

Historically survey methods were linked to programs of social reform (Tonkiss, 1998). For example, in the United Kingdom, surveys were conducted to gain an understanding of problems and sources of urban poverty (Tonkiss, 1998). Social constructionists have critiqued surveys as not just reflecting social relations but constituting them (Tonkiss, 1998). In my research, a survey was used to offer a descriptive snapshot of different attitudes towards social space and towards the schools in the neighborhood. It was not intended to be explanatory. Indeed, as Tonkiss (1998) argues, surveys (and other quantitative techniques) have been critiqued because of their assumed neutrality and their “tendency to impose categories of meaning on aspects of social experience“ (Tonkiss, 1998: 69). In order to mitigate this risk, the survey I conducted included both fixed-choice and write-in questions. Respondents had ample opportunity to write in answers to open-ended questions.

In conducting the survey, I used a mixed sampling technique. I distributed the survey randomly to 275 households in the section of overlapping attendance zones of the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary (figure 4.1). Based on U.S. Census data, there are between 2500 and 3000 households in this region.⁸ A survey was distributed to approximately every 10th house in this region. Houses that appeared abandoned, under construction, or for which there was little accessibility did not receive a survey. Surveys were in large envelopes

⁸ Block group divisions with population counts for the region do not correspond with the Atlanta Public Schools attendance zone divisions.

that were folded and left on doorsteps, on gates, or near mailboxes. Each survey packet contained a four-page survey (including informed consent disclosure), a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey, and a self-addressed, stamped postcard for participants to volunteer to be interviewed.

In addition to the random distribution of surveys, a disproportionate stratified sampling of surveys was conducted to four targeted groups. Fifty surveys were distributed to Neighborhood Charter School parents; 25 surveys were distributed to Parkside Elementary parents at a PTA meeting; 25 surveys were distributed to neighborhood residents who attended the South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development (SAND) September meeting; and 25 surveys were distributed to neighborhood residents who attended the Grant Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA) September meeting. These different groups were targeted for several reasons. First, given that the survey asks respondents about their attitudes towards the two schools in the neighborhood, it made sense to distribute the survey to respondents who are necessarily familiar with the schools (Parkside and NCS parents).⁹ Furthermore, the neighborhood associations represented a geographically appropriate group from whom to glean opinions.

Response rates. Of the 400 surveys that were distributed, 85 were returned, which is a return rate of approximately 21%. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the return rate by different samples and by self-identified ethnic groups. This ethnic “complexion“ does not reflect the same proportion of African-Americans or other minorities as the picture the U.S. Census Bureau data paint. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, the block groups that (loosely) encompass the Grant Park-Ormewood-North Ormewood neighborhoods are approximately 55% white, 38% African-

⁹ The discrepancy in the number of surveys distributed to NCS and Parkside parents (50 versus 25) was based on information provided by the NCS PTCA president about the attendance at NCS PTCA meetings (where the survey was intended to be distributed) and information about attendance at Parkside PTA meetings, provided by the PTA president.

American, and 7% Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Part of the reasoning behind the disproportionate stratified sampling was to capture not only a representative sampling of the members of the neighborhood, but also to capture different ethnic backgrounds. For example, the student body of the Neighborhood Charter School is more than 50% African-American, yet only one of the 14 respondents from the NCS sample was African-American. The majority of the participants at the Parkside PTA, where the survey was distributed are African-Americans, followed by whites and Latinos¹⁰; however, only four Parkside parents responded to the survey, all of whom are African-American.

Differences in income levels among respondents did not reflect the proportion of residents in different income groups in the neighborhood. As in the case with interviewing, those who responded to the survey were largely middle class residents (assuming income reflects social class). Table 4.3 reflects the income categories of the survey respondents. There was a less clear correlation of the distribution type (neighborhood association, school, or random) than I expected to see (although the sample size for each group was rather small). For example, of the six respondents who reported an average income of less than \$20,000, two were from the Neighborhood Charter School, one from Parkside, two from the random distribution, and two from SAND. On the other category extreme, 23 respondents from the random distribution reported income over \$80,000, as did three respondents from GPNA, four from the Neighborhood Charter School, and three from SAND. The random distribution, which I hoped would capture the spread of income levels in the neighborhood (as reflected by the Census data), included more respondents from the higher income brackets than is proportionate to the

¹⁰ According to the 2001 Parkside School Report, published by Atlanta Public Schools, 76% of students in the school are African-American, 12% are white, 7% are Latino, and 3% are Asian (the remainder are “other”).

neighborhood. Table 4.4 shows a comparison of the respondents' average household income and the average household income of the total population of the seven Census block groups.

Based on the demographics of the neighborhood and the response rate, residents from higher income brackets were more likely to complete and return the survey.

The very process of distributing the survey was interesting. With the assistance of a colleague, I either walked the blocks of the neighborhood or drove my car while the other person got out of the car and left a survey near the doorstep or mailbox of every tenth residence. Two encounters with residents were particularly noteworthy. On one occasion, my colleague interrupted what looked to be a drug sale on the porch of a house in the neighborhood. Several older men were exchanging money and what appeared to be drugs. My colleague dropped off the survey and left the porch, just as startled as the men appeared to be. On another occasion at what appeared to be a lower-income apartment complex, a woman came out of her apartment and asked if we were giving away free stuff. When I said that no, we were distributing a survey, she seemed disappointed and walked back into her apartment without accepting a survey. These two incidents contrasted sharply with the many waves and smiles we received from other residents walking their dogs and pushing strollers along the sidewalks. This contrast further reinforced my impression of the tremendous diversity of the Grant Park neighborhood.

Conclusion

In sum, I approach the process of knowledge production as one that is part of a larger political project. Ideally, research can reveal oppressive structures and point to ways to achieve social justice. In this research, I examine the evidence of “actually existing neoliberalism”

through the legislative framework, activism, and discourse surrounding the creation of the Neighborhood Charter School. I ask questions about new practices of citizenship and the potential for charter schools to change the spatial organization of urban space. Because my research questions seek answers to different dimensions of the role of citizens in charter schools and the role of charter schools in neighborhoods, the emphasis on an extended case study and the diversity of data-collection methods employed offer a window on the main goal of this research: to examine how new subjects and citizens are created in a neoliberalizing state. From these data, issues of uneven access to social citizenship and complex discourses of “citizenship,” “community,” and “neighborhood” emerge, which form the basis of the analysis in the chapters that follow.

Table 4.1: Return Rate by Sample

Sample	Number returned	Out of	Percentage response
Random	51	275	18.5
Parkside	4	25	16
NCS	15	50	30
SAND	9	25	36
GPNA	6	25	24
TOTAL	85	275	21.25

Table 4.2: Number and Percentage of Total Surveys Returned by Self-Identified Ethnic Group

White	African-American	Cuban	Mixed	Asian Indian	No Answer
73 (85.9%)	7 (8.2%)	1 (1.2%)	1 (1.2%)	1 (1.2%)	1 (1.2%)

Table 4.3: Average Household Income of Survey Participants

< \$20K	\$20K - \$50K	\$50K - \$80K	>\$80K	no answer
6 (7%)	15 (18%)	26 (31%)	33 (39%)	5 (6%)

Table 4.4: Average Household Income Levels of Grant Park Residents and Survey Participants

Income	Total population	Survey respondents (n = 50)
Income less than \$20,000	21%	4%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	35%	18%
\$50,000 to \$80,000 ¹²	19%	32%
Income greater than \$80,000	26%	46%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census and Survey

¹² The aggregated U.S. Census income level is between \$50,000 and \$74,999, whereas the next income bracket is between \$75,000 and \$99,999; thus, for purposes of comparison with the survey I conducted, I am including the \$50,000 to \$74,999 as an approximation of the percentage of residents who have an average household income of \$50,000 to \$80,000.

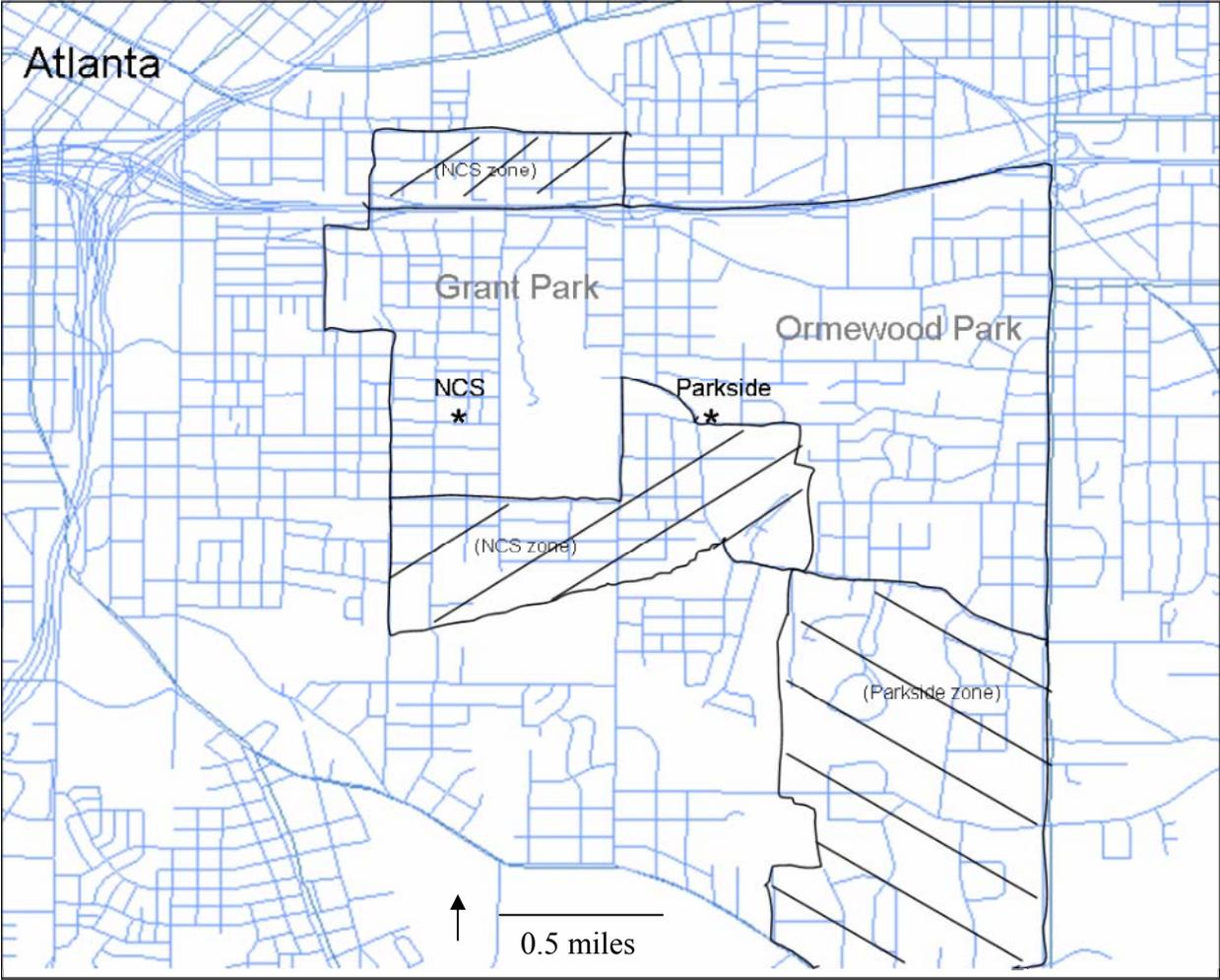


Figure 4.1: Map of the Overlapping Attendance Zones of the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary

CHAPTER 5: REDESIGNING CITIZENSHIP: PRIVILEGING THE PRIVATE

As I asserted in the last chapter, the formation of the Neighborhood Charter School in the Grant Park neighborhood provides a compelling case study with which to examine questions about new forms of citizenship and changes in urban space under neoliberalism. In this chapter, I examine the details of how a group of parents in the neighborhoods of Grant Park-Ormewood Park is empowered to start its own school. The enabling factors include both the changes in legislation that open up new roles for private citizens in public education and the *ability* of private groups to act on their desires to design and manage a school.

This chapter consists of two major sections. In the first section, I provide a qualitative content analysis of legislation at the federal, state, and local scales to explore how citizenship is complicated by the distinctions made between public and private citizens and the implication this distinction has for the institutions of traditional public schools and charter schools. The qualitative content analysis entails reviewing documents and assessing the characterization of private involvement, both in terms of new citizenship rights and the tone of the legislation. The texts I use for analysis in this chapter include U.S. and Georgia legislation that directly addresses the design and management of charter schools. In addition I review Georgia's State Board of Education rules and regulations concerning the management of charter schools in Georgia. Given that the Neighborhood Charter School received its charter approval from Atlanta Public Schools, I also analyze Atlanta Public Schools's evaluation criteria for charter petitions, and the Neighborhood Charter School's charter petition itself. With the latter text, I pay particular attention to how NCS organizers chose to involve private citizens and the community in their

school, a legislative mandate in the Atlanta Public Schools system. From these texts, I argue that a dual system of public education is created, which raises questions about the kind of social citizenship that is available to communities that are served by a charter school and a traditional public school. It also illustrates a hybrid state, one where state institutions (traditional public schools) operate alongside new institutional frameworks (charter schools).

In the second section, I reflect on what Staeheli (1999) calls the substantive elements of citizenship. That is, I review the ways in which parents in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods are able to start their own school—and to act on their identities as private citizens in a state-like arena. For this section, I draw upon the analysis of legislation from the previous section, as well as my attendance at NCS Governing Board meetings and interviews with charter-school organizers and parents. This empirical examination sheds light on the kinds of citizen-subjects that are fostered in the neoliberalization of public education. In particular, I focus on the degree of private involvement in terms of volunteer labor and the reliance on private funding sources for the charter school. To make my case about a dual public school system, I compare the level of private resources utilized at Parkside Elementary, the nearby traditional public school.

Formal citizenship

As I discussed in chapter two, the concepts of formal and substantive citizenship recognize two elements of citizenship rights. Formal citizenship is a status where an individual is given a set of rights that are protected by the state. The right to a basic education, for example, is part of formal citizenship. Substantive citizenship, on the other hand, suggests that citizens have the ability to exercise their rights. Charter schools are one relatively recent arena of education in which citizens are granted substantive citizenship to complement or enhance formal

citizenship rights. The right to practice citizenship in charter schools is spelled out in federal, state, and local school district legislation. These different levels of legislation highlight the roles and responsibilities that private individuals may take on to start their own school. They provide guidelines and procedures for starting charter schools. In the process, the legislation discursively creates a distinction between the private citizen and a public one, and the legislation creates *spaces* in which the identities of actors are linked to public and private functions.

At first glance this distinction seems to be a simple one—either an individual is in the private sector or he or she works for the state. But an individual can both be employed by the state from 9 to 5 and then return to a private, non-state home. To avoid the fixed duality, then, it is more useful to consider the public-private citizen as a duality of an individual's *identity*, which is fluid and changes across time and space¹. A public citizen, then, is a person who has an identity that is part of the formal state apparatus, such as a legislator, a police officer, or a public-school teacher in public arenas (such as City Hall, the police station, or a public school). A person acting as a public citizen implicitly has the role of offering a public good or maintaining public order—fulfilling the guarantees of the state. A private citizen, on the other hand, has an identity of a non-state actor, such as a person employed in the private sector (or not employed at all) and who remains in private spaces. Unlike a public citizen, a private citizen only has an obligation to maintain his or her personal needs. A public citizen may assume that identity only while at work, then at other times and in other spaces act as a private citizen. There may be times, however, when the status of a public citizen, while not at work, may be in question, such as a police officer or a public official.

¹ See my discussion of identities and difference in chapter two.

Legislation

Federal, state, and school district legislation highlight the different roles that the federal, state, and local school-district governing bodies have with regard to public education. Federal legislation, for instance, requires public schools to meet federal laws, such as the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974, which provides that no state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin. State legislation guides the details of charter-school design and management, and school districts outline specific charter-granting procedures that further refine the requirements of the state. What all of these levels of charter-school legislation have in common is that they privilege the private citizen over the public one.

Federal legislation. The federal legislation that gave momentum—a legal framework and funding—to the charter school movement was the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998, signed into law by President Clinton. The purpose of the Act was to “amend title VI and X of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to improve and expand charter schools” (Charter School Expansion Act of 1998). The Act includes provisions that ensure that “each charter school in the State receives the charter school’s commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year...” (Charter School Expansion Act of 1998). Furthermore, the Act specifies that charter schools must comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The only explicit language in the federal legislation that addresses the role of citizens in public charter schools is in section 10301, in which Congress finds that

(1) enhancement of parent and student choices among public schools can assist in promoting comprehensive educational reform and give more students the opportunity to learn, challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards, if sufficiently diverse and high-quality choices, and genuine opportunities to take advantage of such choices, are available to all students;... (section 10301 of ESEA,

Title X, Part C: Public Charter Schools, as amended by the Charter Schools Expansion Act of 1998).

Thus, the Act articulates the school-choice aspect of charter schools and the changes in the possibilities for citizen involvement in public charter schools. It expresses the potential for local control in the design and management of new charter schools and the conversion of existing traditional public schools into charter schools. The language in the legislation emphasizes the rights of parents to choose their child's school.

One optimistic element of the Act asserts that choice is beneficial for students “if sufficiently diverse and high-quality choices, and genuine opportunities to take advantage of such choices, are available to all students” (section 10301 of ESEA, Title X, Part C). This assertion echoes the “perfect information” assumption in neoclassical economics (and neoliberalism), where all of those involved in free market transactions have perfect information and perfect opportunity to choose (Weintraub, 2002). The logic is that given this perfect information, the free market, through competition and the elimination of inefficiencies, will offer the best product at the least cost to consumers (Weintraub, 2002). As Well, et al. (2002) and Lubienski (2001) argue, in this choice discourse, the citizen is often seen as the *consumer* of education, a conflation of democratic principles of free education with market principles of consumer choice.

Federal legislation does not guide the general structure or day-to-day management of charter schools; instead, it provides a loose set of guidelines for their creation². Furthermore, the Charter School Expansion Act earmarked public school funds for charter schools. In 1995, the U.S. Department of Education offered \$4 million in federal grants specifically for states' charter schools. The Charter School Expansion Act designated funds for federal grants in fiscal years

² Although charter schools operate outside of the traditional-public school framework, they remain subject to federal laws.

1999, 2000, and 2001. In 2002, President Bush called for \$200 million to support charter schools (“Overview of Charter Schools” USCS website, 2004). The federal legislation highlights the possibilities charter schools offer for improving public education, and it has created subsequent funding provides opportunities for the creation of charter schools. We have to look at individual states to understand the specific rights and privileges granted to citizens to be involved in charter schools.

State legislation. Individual state legislation outlines the rules that govern the design and management of charter schools. As of 2004, 41 states and the District of Columbia had passed charter school laws (“Overview”, 2004). According to the U.S. Charter School organization, most state charter school legislation is characterized by seven basic policy areas, which include charter development (who may propose a charter, how charters are granted, etc.), school governance, funding requirements and types, student admissions requirements, staffing and labor requirements, instructional goals and practices, and accountability or student performance assessment methods (“Overview of Charter Schools”, US Charter Schools website, 2004). Since my case study location is Atlanta, I focus on the charter school legislation in Georgia.

Georgia legislation. The legislative framework guiding charter schools in Georgia is outlined in the Georgia General Assembly House Bill 353, which became Article 31 of the Georgia Constitution, also known as the “Charter Schools Act of 1998”. The intent of this legislation is

...to provide a means whereby:... private individuals, private organizations, or state or local public entities (excluding home study programs or schools; sectarian or religious schools; private for profit schools; private educational institutions not established, operated, or governed by the State of Georgia; and existing private schools) may establish a local school which is subject to an academic or vocational performance based contract... called a charter, which exempts the local school from state and local rules, regulations, policies, and procedures (House Bill 353).

The legislation explicitly gives private actors the authority to design a charter school or to convert an existing public school to a charter school. Like the federal legislation, Georgia allows a dual public education system, where private actors are exempt from state and local rules in their design and management of a charter school as compared to traditional public schools.

Georgia legislation is specific as to the level of involvement of private citizens in charter schools. The Charter Schools Act of 1998 requires that charter petitioners (private individuals, private organizations, or state or local public entities) include in their charters several important elements that require the involvement of private citizens in the governance structure of charter schools. Furthermore, the Georgia legislation requires that charter petitioners involve the “community” in their development and management process. Specifically, the legislation states that charter petitioners must

describe how parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school, as well as the faculty, instructional staff, and the broader community, were and will be directly and substantially involved in developing the petition, developing and implementing the improvement plan, and identifying academic or vocational performance based criteria;... (House Bill, 353, p. 5).

Petitioners must also “describe how the concerns of parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school, faculty, instructional staff, and the broader community will be solicited and addressed in evaluating the effectiveness of the improvement plan” (House Bill 353, p. 5). Thus, not only are private citizens given the opportunity to design and manage a publicly-funded school, but in the state of Georgia, the petitioners must demonstrate that other private individuals have had substantial input into the need for and support of a charter school.

One of the defining features of charter schools is their governance structure. In Georgia, charter schools must be subject to the control and management of the local

board of the local school system in which the proposed charter will be located. It is the governing body of the charter school that ensures that the terms of the charter are carried out. In the governing body of the charter school itself, a majority of the members must be parents or guardians of students enrolled in the charter school who are not employed by the school or by the local school system in which the charter school is located (House Bill 353, p.5). Explicitly, then, state or “public” actors may not hold the majority of the seats on the governing board of a charter school; instead it must be parents or guardians of students--private actors. Here again the emphasis is on private control.

The Georgia Charter Schools Act of 1998 also specifies the role of private actors in the approval process of charters. The local school board votes on the approval of charters only after the charter has been “freely agreed to by a majority of parents or guardians present at a public meeting called with two weeks’ advance notice for the purpose of deciding whether to submit the petition to the local board for its approval” (House Bill 353, p. 6). Likewise, the terms of charters can be amended with the approval of the local board, the state board, and a majority of the governing body of the charter school. The Act also requires that charter schools provide an annual report to parents or guardians, the community, the local board, and the state board that indicates the charter school’s progress in implementing its improvement plan (House Bill 353, p. 11).

Within each state, state boards of education make state-wide education decisions. The Georgia State Board of Education maintains its own set of rules about the approval of charter schools. According to the Georgia Board of Education Charter School Rules, for start-up charter schools, petitioners must “describe how parents, members of the community and other interested parties were directly and substantially involved in developing the petition” and they must

“describe how parents, members of the community and other interested parties will be involved in the school” (Georgia State Board of Education Charter School Rule 160-4-9-.04, 2002). Reflecting the Georgia legislation, the State Board of Education clearly requires private involvement in charter schools³.

Charter schools in the state of Georgia require a substantial amount of time and energy by non-state actors, which are clearly outlined in the state legislation and the state Board of Education rules. However, there is no parallel legislation that requires non-state actors to be involved in traditional public schools. The emphasis on private actors in charter-school legislation effectively further hollows out the “role of the state” in public education by discursively creating a dichotomy between a charter school and a traditional school, where the charter school requires local, “private” input and the traditional school, by a *lack* of legislation, does not. Furthermore, this legislation reifies (or creates) a public-private divide, where charter schools become associated with activities of private actors, while traditional public schools somehow remain in the domain of a lifeless public. That is, public actors are seen within these legislative guidelines as having little agency or capacity for action in the traditional public education system.

At the same time, the charter school legislation highlights an underexamined actor in public education: the parent. Throughout the federal, state, and school board policies are references to parents who are given a particular citizenship status in public education. The parent is implicitly somehow more knowledgeable or trustworthy to design educational institutions such as charter schools, as evidenced by the requirement that a majority of the governing boards of charter schools in the state of Georgia consist of

³ Other states, such as Arizona, allow public actors, such as school teachers, to run charter schools. Georgia, however, requires some involvement of private individuals in start-up charter schools.

parents or guardians. The non-parent, then, is not given the same kind of citizenship status in charter schools. And the parent is not given the same kinds of rights and responsibilities in traditional public education. Thus, the “private” actors in public education become further stratified into parent-citizens involved in charter schools versus parent-citizens of traditional public education⁴.

As indicated above, the intention of most charter school legislation at the federal and state levels includes increasing opportunities for public education for students; creating choice within the public school system for parents and students; providing a system of accountability for results in education; encouraging innovative teaching practices; and encouraging community and parental involvement in public education (“Overview of Charter Schools”, 2003). These goals are received differently in different school districts within states. For example, in the metro Atlanta region, the Fulton County School System is seen as “friendly” to charter schools (MacDonald, 2004), whereas Atlanta Public Schools has a mixed reputation in its willingness to approve charter applications (see discussion of the APS-NCS relationship in the next chapter). Thus, the local expression of charter schools is highly contingent on the political climate within school districts. As such, charter schools can contribute to an uneven landscape of public education, where certain areas have more charter schools than others.

Atlanta Public Schools charter-school rules

Atlanta Public Schools follows the Charter Schools Act of 1998, and requires that charter petitioners describe how parents and the broader community are involved in

⁴ Requirements of parental involvement in traditional public schools do not appear in the Georgia State Department of Education Rules. The only reference to parents includes rules outlining parental rights to records and to participating in the assessment of students’ special-education needs (“Rules of the State Board of Education Currently in Effect,” 2004).

developing the petition and how the concerns of parents and the community are solicited and addressed in evaluating the effectiveness of the school. In addition, Atlanta Public Schools requires petitioners to demonstrate how they will “operate within the Atlanta Public Schools per pupil allocation for charter schools or supplement resources from other public and/or private sources (“Atlanta Public Schools Charter School Application,” 2002). A school’s charter may be terminated if the school fails to implement its terms or if there is “the existence of competent substantial evidence that the continued operation of the charter school would be contrary to the best interests of the students or the community” (“Atlanta Public Schools Charter School Application,” 2002). This termination clause suggests that Atlanta Public Schools maintains significant power over charter schools, in that nowhere is “competent substantial evidence” for terminating a charter defined.

Atlanta Public Schools takes a close look at the kinds of private individuals who organize charter schools. As part of the application packet, Atlanta Public Schools provides a detailed list of what the charter petition must include. In the section on the governance structure of the packet is the requirement that the petitioners describe “the organizing group of initial incorporators that is working together to apply for a charter, including the names of the organizers, their background and experiences, and references for each” (“Atlanta Public Schools Charter School Application,” 2002). The packet also states that reviewers will look for “a well-balanced group that brings together people with a range of professional skills capable of the organizational, financial, pedagogical, legal, and other tasks required to open a functioning public charter school that represents the local community” (Atlanta Public Schools Charter School Application,” 2002). This

requirement suggests that not just any private citizen who wants to start a charter school will be acceptable. For APS approval, the group of parents and residents organizing the school must have a certain level of expertise. As the section below demonstrates, the ability to design and manage a school may also demand a high socioeconomic status.

By encouraging two public education models—one charter and one traditional—the federal government and the State of Georgia essentially provide a dual system in which private citizens have a different relationship with the state in each form of public school. Implicit in this legislation, which outlines formal citizenship rights, is that all citizens have equal opportunity to assert their rights and to participate in the design and management of a charter school. The rules set forth by the Atlanta Public Schools begin to hint at the kinds of resources and expertise required of citizens to start a charter school, the substantive requirements to exercise those citizenship rights. In the next section I explore some of the social boundaries that confound citizen-participation in charter schools.

First, in order to see how the Atlanta Public School charter petition requirements are met, I examine the design of the Neighborhood Charter School, one of the seven charter schools operating in the Atlanta Public School system during the 2003-2004 school year. A close examination of the charter petition of the school reveals the extent to which the Neighborhood Charter School organizers included (or purported to include) private actors—parents and the surrounding “community”—in the design and proposed management structure of the school. It illustrates substantive citizenship: the ability of individuals to exercise their formal citizenship rights.

Substantive Citizenship

The federal, state, and school district legislation all represent an outline of what individuals are permitted to do in forming a charter school. In this section I focus on the substantive elements of citizenship—that is, the kinds of activities that individuals actually engaged in to start and manage a charter school. First, I turn to the Neighborhood Charter School’s petition to see how Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents operationalized the rules and regulations set forth by the legislation. Furthermore, I examine the availability of private resources—in the form of money, time, and professional skills—that enabled a savvy group of residents to open the Neighborhood Charter School.

The Neighborhood Charter School charter petition

The Neighborhood Charter School committee submitted its charter petition to the Board of Education of Atlanta Public Schools on October 6, 2000. The language in the charter explicitly considers the importance of the parents/guardians and community members who make up the neighborhoods that the school serves. For example, in the introduction to the charter, the Chair of the Neighborhood Charter School Committee stated that

a charter school is a commitment by a community to all of its children. This commitment is based on the belief that parents/guardians and the local community hold the primary responsibility to ensure that all children in their neighborhood school, regardless of race, economics, or culture have access to, and success in, public education. As one community, the residents of Grant Park, Ormewood Park and the surrounding neighborhoods are prepared to meet this responsibility through the establishment of the Neighborhood Charter School (NCS Charter Petition, 2000).

Furthermore, the Chair stated that “The mission of the Neighborhood Charter School is *to provide a learning environment for all students that demands high educational standards and high levels of parent/guardian involvement and responsibility*” (NCS Charter Petition, 2000, emphasis original).

The ways in which the Neighborhood Charter School proposed to involve parents/guardians and the local community include through the structure of the governing board; frequent communications and meetings with parents/guardians and the community; and a parent/guardian contract. Per the state of Georgia legislation, the governing board must include a majority of parents/guardians of school children. The Governing Board of the Neighborhood Charter School includes seven parent or guardian representatives, one Zoo Atlanta representative, three teacher/support professionals, two community representatives (one from Grant Park Neighborhood Association and one from South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development), and the school principal--an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Board. According to the charter, the Governing Board makes “collaborative decisions through a formal, public voting process” (NCS Charter Petition, 2000). A subset of the Governing Board is the executive committee, which consists of the Board Chair, Vice-Chair, Finance Chair, and Parent-Family Involvement Chair. The Executive Committee is given “the authority to handle urgent or routine issues raised by the School Principal during the period between regular monthly Board meetings” (NCS Charter Petition, 2000)⁵.

The charter petitioners proposed several mechanisms to maintain the involvement of parents and the community in their school. Upon enrolling students, all parents receive a packet of information that includes important contact numbers, key events such as parent/teacher conferences, explicit objectives for their child’s grade level, and the policies and procedures of the school (NCS Charter Petition, 2000). The school also established a parent/community volunteer program in order to “take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and skill that exists in our community” (NCS Charter Petition, 2000). The school maintains a school newsletter that is

⁵ According to several of my interviews with parents, the Governing Board voting process is not always open, as many decisions are made in a closed-session meeting of the Executive Committee.

sent to parents and available to community members. Finally, the Parental and Family Involvement Committee solicits suggestions from parents/guardians about programs such as money management and child discipline that could be offered for interested community members. These programs may not be that different from a traditional school, yet there are particular ways that these policies are linked to the school's charter status.

Upon enrolling their students, parents or guardians sign a contract with the Neighborhood Charter School that acknowledges the "unique nature of a charter school environment." The contract outlines parent/guardian rights and responsibilities in their child's learning program.

According to the charter,

the contract will ensure parents' right to an excellent education environment and that they will be welcomed as key participants in the life of the school. The contract will outline parent/guardian responsibilities in a manner designed to encourage the broadest parental involvement while acknowledging that parents must be given a variety of avenues to engage in their child's education and the work of the school (NCS Charter Petition, 2000).

The contract also specifies that parents are expected to donate ten hours (per parent) of volunteer time to the school per year. It is not just the ability to be involved (e.g., PTA) but a requirement as such. At the conclusion of each school year, the parents are given an anonymous satisfaction survey in which they may evaluate the school. Thus, the organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School created specific means to provide for and to ensure the involvement and input of parents/guardians and private actors in the design and management of their school.

Per state requirements, the Neighborhood Charter School organizers had to demonstrate that they had involved the "community" in the process of designing the school. As evidence, the petitioners noted that they had spent three years engaging and educating the involved neighborhoods about the charter school. They conducted surveys; provided "comprehensive community mailings" in both English and Spanish; public educational meetings; small group

discussions; publication of the draft of the charter for review, feedback, and input; monthly public school committee meetings; articles in the local newspaper; interviews on Spanish radio; and maintaining a public website about the school⁶ (NCS Charter Petition, 2000).

In their concluding statements, the petitioners articulated their position vis-à-vis Atlanta Public Schools and the role of the local community in education:

Our goal is not to break from Atlanta Public Schools. We seek to become a full partner with APS in a quest to ensure the highest educational attainment in an area where too often children have been underserved in the past. We believe that just as a local school system is more in tune with the needs of the constituents it serves than a state or federal agency, the community served by a school itself has the greatest concern, the most knowledge about and the biggest responsibility for the needs of a particular school, its staff, and, most importantly, its children (NCS Charter Petition, 2000).

The organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School saw (and continue to see) their school as an opportunity to involve parents and community members more heavily in school activities and by extension to improve educational opportunities for students in their Atlanta Public School attendance zone.

The charter petition outlined the intentions and goals of the organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School, but it leaves out some of the details of how the organizers were able to start their own school. In what follows I examine the private resources that were required to start and maintain the school.

The cost of the school

The Neighborhood Charter School is funded by a combination of private and public sources. The largest source of funding is Atlanta Public Schools, which pays the school a per pupil amount. For example, for fiscal year 2003, in an operating budget of just over one million dollars, APS payments to the NCS totaled \$832,710.65 (approximately \$7900 x 105 students).

⁶ As one interview participant noted, letters of support (which are non-binding) from the Grant Park Neighborhood Association and the South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development appeared to be satisfactory evidence of “community” support. I discuss this issue in greater depth in chapter seven.

Other sources include grant and foundation money (there is a school committee devoted to searching out grants and writing proposals) and fundraising efforts. In fact, the initial school-renovation project had a cost of \$70,000, with most funds coming from grants and private donations. The school has several functions a year to raise money, including an auction night, where local businesses and families donate goods and services to be sold auction-style. Private donations fluctuate throughout the year. According to the Finance chairperson, fundraising in the weeks following the fire (as of February 26, 2003) included almost \$8,000 in the “Mighty Oak community fund,” which consists of local, private donations. For the academic year 2002-2003, NCS, Inc. raised \$83,000, in addition to \$258,000 in grants (which includes the state-funded \$200,000 charter-school implementation grant).

Expenses for the school include building rent and maintenance, administrative costs, books and supplies, and the like. The largest single expense is faculty and staff compensation, which totaled \$863,000 for fiscal year 2003. The per-pupil funding provided by APS, then, does not even cover the cost of the staff. Due to its successes in fundraising and its tremendous volunteer effort (see discussion below), however, the Neighborhood Charter School carried over an estimated \$170,000 for operating expenses from the 2002-2003 school year to the 2003-2004 school year (June 11, 2003 Board meeting).

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 offer a more detailed look at the kinds of income and expenses that the Neighborhood Charter School incurs.⁷ This budget compares to the approximately \$9,417 per pupil that Atlanta Public Schools spends on students enrolled in traditional APS schools. At Parkside, for example, Atlanta Public Schools spent over 4.5 million dollars to educate 486 students (as of the 2003-2004 school year). As the numbers in the income and expense tables

⁷ These are projected for fiscal year 2004, as of April 29, 2004, the most recent figures at the conclusion of writing this chapter.

(5.1 and 5.2) reflect, the public sources of funding, which are estimated to be approximately \$1.2 million dollars, only cover a portion of the costs to operate the school. The remaining \$240,000, almost 20% of the budget, must be raised by the Neighborhood Charter School, Inc. This reflects a substantial need for fundraising and monies from private sources. Based on the fiscal year 2003 budget (~\$1.18 million) for the 2002-2003 enrollment (105), the Neighborhood Charter School spent approximately \$11,238 per student in its first year of operation. This is almost \$2,000 more per pupil than Atlanta Public Schools spent the same year (\$9,417 per student). What is interesting about this financial picture is that the NCS budget dramatically underestimates the actual costs of the school if the value of the volunteer labor is considered.

Professionalized volunteer labor force

The Neighborhood Charter School was built on the volunteer labor of its organizers and its parents. This labor ranged from formal, legal advice on the charter petition to hours of painting and cleaning the school. The time that these individuals put into the school over the course of several years represents hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of donated time. The degree to which these organizers and parents utilize their professional skills to volunteer at the school essentially comprises a professionalized volunteer labor force, which enables the charter school to maintain its cost of operations for a small school compared to traditional public elementary schools (which take advantage of economies of scale with larger elementary schools). A look at the kinds of professions and the hours spent by the organizers and by members of the governing board reveals a highly skilled and socially-connected group.

As the Atlanta Public Schools charter-school application states, the school board looks closely at the professional ability of a group of parents to start a school. As described above, Atlanta Public Schools is looking for “a well-balanced group that brings together people with a

range of professional skills capable of the organizational, financial, pedagogical, legal, and other tasks required to open a functioning public charter school that represents the local community” (“Atlanta Public Schools Charter School Application,” 2002). As evidence of their ability to meet this requirement, the organizers included in their charter petition the resumes of original charter-school organizers and resumes of members of the “steering committee,” a group of individuals who were in charge of the final writing of the charter in the fall of 2000. The steering committee, which was formed as a result of formal mediation (which is discussed in chapter seven), was comprised both of individuals who were integral to the organizational efforts of the school and individuals who apparently had little to do with the school. In fact, several interview participants noted that they received support and advice from local professionals who were never very involved in the charter-school effort. A summary of the educational and professional experience of the sixteen members of the steering committee reveals a highly educated and well-connected group of people.

Among the sixteen people for whom resumes were included, only one individual had not completed a bachelor’s degree; all others had at least a bachelor’s, and more than half had a degree beyond an undergraduate education. Three professionals who were consulted (but not very involved in the school) had PhD degrees and were professors in local universities. One of the organizers had a law degree and had worked as a lawyer for several years; another organizer was a senior asset manager at an investment firm. These individuals undoubtedly added legitimacy to the charter-school process as demonstrated by their highly-skilled professions.

Several of the original organizers had direct ties to local powerful elites. For example, one was the Atlanta Bureau Chief of a major national newspaper and had worked previously for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, while another was involved in fundraising management and

worked for the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce for several years as a project manager⁸. Several had experience with education: one was a program manager at the Georgia Department of Education, while another was a state-certified elementary school teacher. Other organizers included a licensed psychologist, a graphic designer, and a public health advisor. Members of the 2002-2003 governing board and other people directly involved in the organizational effort (but for whom resumes were not included in the charter petition) also reflect high levels of education and educational or management experience. For example, the 2002-2003 Board consists of several small-business owners, a technology consultant, and a former medical consultant.

Most of the organizers of the school stated that they had put in substantial time and energy to start the school. Of the eight to ten initial organizers, roughly half worked full-time jobs, while several others worked part-time. Several others were full-time parents, having left their professions to stay home with their children. When asked to quantify the amount of time they spent working on the developing school, many answered that they spent between fifteen and forty hours per week. One core organizer stated that she had worked about thirty hours a week over a four-year period (in addition to her part-time job). Another key organizer, who maintained a full-time job, stated that he put in about twenty hours per week for several years. Yet another individual who joined the effort during the charter-writing phase stated that he worked on charter-related issues between fifteen and sixty hours a week, averaging about 30 to 35 hours over the course of a year or more.

The tasks that the organizers worked on included many hours of brainstorming to work out the concept of the school. In addition, they attended Board of Education and neighborhood-

⁸ In chapter six I provide a more detailed analysis of the connections between this group and Atlanta's political and business elite.

association meetings (both Grant Park Neighborhood Association and the South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development), spent hours on grant-writing and soliciting funding, met with educators, and attended other schools to get a sense of what curriculum and parental-involvement models they wanted to use. Initially, the meetings started out as informal gatherings at someone's home and eventually turned into organized, advertised meetings in churches, the Georgia-Hill Community Center, or other schools, with formal minutes and a formal governance structure.

Physical labor. When the charter petition of the Neighborhood Charter School was approved and the terms of the lease of Slaton Elementary were worked out, parents, community members, and other volunteers spent many hours between January and August of 2002 renovating the historic school building. One organizer (with a full time job) stated that he worked at least 25 hours a week on restoring the old building. The school was also the site for many volunteer hours on May 10, 2002, when more than 400 members of Deloitte Consulting's Atlanta office spent the day painting, creating murals, landscaping, and upgrading the playground at the Neighborhood Charter School. Other organizations that helped that day include Bold American Food Co., Empire Liquor Distributors, Habersham Garden Nursery, the Icebox, Krispy Kreme, Porter Paint Co, and some Hilton, Marriott and Renaissance Hotels (King, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 9, 2002). The volunteer day was coordinated in over 80 cities in various parts of the world to assist in community projects. This effort by private citizens and private corporations reflects a tremendous source of non-paid, non-state provided labor to provide for the needs of the school.

Once the school opened in the fall of 2002, the Neighborhood Charter School organizers made certain to include a large number of parents in the operations of the school. Through

various committees and the Parent-Teacher-Community Association (PTCA), parents of school children enrolled in NCS donated their time.

Parent volunteers. PTCA meetings were regularly attended by 50 to 60 families, according to the PTCA President⁹. The PTCA officers maintained the “volunteer log,” in which parents documented their volunteer hours to meet the school’s ten-hour per year requirement. These hours were often in the form of workdays at the school, spending time as “classroom parents,” and participation on various committees. Workdays include providing physical labor to landscape and maintain the school grounds and assisting teachers with preparing classrooms and other student space. “Classroom parents” are parents who spend several hours in their child’s classroom, assisting the teacher by offering their skills or experiences. For example, several Spanish-speaking parents are called upon to teach children Spanish in the classroom¹⁰.

The volunteer-hour log that the parents of NCS children signed reflected over 1,500 hours of volunteer labor for the 2002-2003 school year, according to the PTCA President. She stated that 1,500 hours is a very conservative estimate of how much time parents actually spent volunteering, as parents often did not sign in when they spent time at the school--nor were the hours that went into major fundraising events counted in the log.

In addition to the ten hours of volunteer time each household gives to the school, the PTCA and the Governing Board have over ten committees, devoted to many facets of the operation of the school. For example, there is a personnel committee, which is in charge of hiring and firing the administrative and teaching staff. Included in these responsibilities are developing human resources policies and procedures, securing health and retirement benefits for employees, and making critical decisions about hiring teachers and staff. According to the first

⁹ The school had 105 students enrolled during the 2002-2003 school year.

¹⁰ Special qualifications are not necessary, but parents’ talents, such as language abilities, are utilized in classrooms if parents agree.

Chair of the Personnel committee, her first challenge was “to figure out how to hire a principal.” After consulting the headmasters and principals of local schools and with the guidance of a professor at a nearby university, the committee created a process for hiring the principal and thereafter the teaching staff. Likewise, the finance committee, chaired by a woman with a full-time job outside the home, maintained the accounting for the school.

Thus, at the Neighborhood Charter School, the governance of the school is largely in the hands of private citizens who volunteer their time and expertise to the school. This volunteer labor force assumes roles previously held by the state, in the form of a group of professionals in the fields of education, administration, finance, and human resources, to name a few. That the private actors at the Neighborhood Charter School are unpaid enables the charter school to operate with relatively low per-pupil funding (compared to traditional public schools).

The charter school provides parents and community members unprecedented levels of involvement in a public school. To see how different the involvement in a charter school can be compared to a traditional public elementary school, I provide a brief description of the governance structure and volunteer efforts at Parkside Elementary, the nearby traditional public school.

Governance and volunteerism at Parkside Elementary

As a traditional public school, Parkside Elementary cannot require any kind of parental involvement in its school. It does, however, have a voluntary Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Membership is \$5 per year, and, as of the 2003-2004 school year, Parkside’s PTA had approximately 100 members, which include parents of the school’s 470 students. The PTA is in charge of fundraising efforts for the school and communicating school issues to parents, such as Title I compacts, student enrollment in challenge programs, and spelling bee competitions.

Furthermore, Parkside Elementary--like all traditional public schools in Atlanta Public Schools--is governed by the local school board, which consists of nine elected members who manage over 100 schools and 55,000 students enrolled in Atlanta Public Schools. Parkside Elementary is represented by one APS school board member, who also represents over ten other elementary schools. There is no local governing board that requires parent/guardian representation. New for Parkside (and other APS schools) as of the 2003-2004 school year is the creation of a local advisory council, which is made up of parents, teachers, and business leaders of the school attendance zone, which acts as a liaison between the school and the community and as a partner with the PTA in fundraising efforts.

In terms of volunteer labor-hours, the 2003-2004 PTA President of Parkside indicated that in the first weeks of school, she averaged working on PTA-related projects about twenty hours per week. She worked with a small group of volunteers on organizing a teacher-appreciation dinner and school-supplies gift bags for teachers. The past PTA President said that it was consistently the same small group of parents (numbering around eight to ten) who volunteered their time to the PTA¹¹. Otherwise, committees and board positions such as those at the Neighborhood Charter School do not exist at Parkside Elementary. Most functions of Parkside, such as human resources, facilities management, and budget decisions, come from the Atlanta Public Schools, where professional employees are paid to operate the system of public schools.

The luxury that many of the parents of NCS students have to donate between fifteen and forty hours per week to the school represents a privilege enabled for the most part by middle-class salaries, skilled, part-time positions, flexible and well-paying self-employment, and two

¹¹ I tried repeatedly to contact PTA board members (besides the past and current PTA president) to get a more detailed sense of the kinds of activities and volunteer time that went into the school, but my phone calls and emails were not returned.

parent households. In fact, the founding organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School were made up of mostly middle-class professionals in two-parent households. By contrast, as reflected in the descriptive characteristics of both schools, ninety percent of students at Parkside are eligible for free or reduced lunch, which suggests a large population of low-income families¹².

What this comparison of the two schools reflects is a difference in opportunity for individuals to practice political and social citizenship. The dramatic difference in the involvement of private citizens in the governance of the Neighborhood Charter School reveals a stratified system in which charter schools require the time and energy (and money) of private individuals. Simultaneously, the ability of private citizens to be engaged in the design and management of charter schools is contingent on the social and economic opportunity to do so. Given the unevenness of income, household structure, and professional abilities among and within social groups, there is inequality in opportunities to access the social citizenship rights associated with charter schools. While, statewide charter legislation gives parents the formal right to design their own school, therefore, this right is contingent on the professional know-how, the social connections, and the time to devote to developing a charter. The substantive citizenship—the ability to act on the right to design a school—is conditional.

The emphasis on private involvement in charter schools reflects a new institutional framework in public education. By including private actors as eligible to receive public-school funding to create charter schools, the State of Georgia is, in fact, redefining the public in its public school system. That is, traditional public schools, by contrast to charter schools, are discursively produced as public institutions that do not allow or provide for the same kind of local control or experimentation as do charter schools. Legislation is silent on the involvement

¹² This compares to twenty percent eligibility for free/reduced lunch at the Neighborhood Charter School.

of the public in traditional public schools, which contrasts to the possibilities for private involvement in charter schools that are so celebrated in charter-school legislation. Thus, the public-private divide is delineated as one where the public is left with little agency, or capacity for action, whereas the private is seen as the important locus for such practices. The private involvement in schools is enhanced, and though political citizenship rights are protected, social citizenship rights have the potential to be compromised (equal access to public education).

The unevenness of political and social citizenship rights surrounding charter schools has important spatial implications. First, there is the spatial unevenness that results from the variety of ways in which state and school-district legislation is interpreted and acted upon. For states where the charter-school framework is popular (e.g. Arizona, California, and Michigan), obviously there are more charter schools compared to states where charter-school rules are stringent (or nonexistent, e.g., Maine, Vermont, and Alabama). Within states, school districts have the flexibility to approve or deny charters, leading to more charter schools in some areas that are seen as “charter-friendly.” The result of this spatial imbalance is not merely that some states and school districts have more or fewer charter schools: the geographical unevenness of charter schools constructs and reflects uneven citizenship opportunities. Indeed, charter schools construct an agent-as-private citizen, which is both geographically uneven and constitutive of distinctive hybrid public-private spaces.

Furthermore, charter schools are institutions that differ from traditional public schools. They are spaces in which private actors are given more freedoms—more rights and responsibilities—to design and manage public education than in traditional public schools. These spaces represent differentiated opportunities for citizenship, giving the shadow state a space for enacting citizenship, while closing off the traditional state as an avenue for such

activities. Private individuals who start and manage charter schools are not compensated by the state as their “public citizen” counterparts are, even though they are providing a public good. What results is that due to their governance structures and the involvement of private citizens, charter schools become privatized public institutions.

At the same time that charter schools have the potential to close opportunities for social citizenship to some already disadvantaged individuals, they also have the potential to open up new opportunities for citizenship practice that is not as bleak as the picture painted above. Indeed, in the case of the Neighborhood Charter School, the group of (mostly politically liberal) parents sought to create a school based on notions of community and social diversity (see chapters three and seven for a more detailed discussion of the group’s stated mission). Their vision was one where children from different socioeconomic and racial groups would share an elementary school in a city that has few schools with a mixed student body¹³. That vision was largely achieved in terms of the NCS student population. Thus, these parents, although advantageously situated in terms of access to resources (time, money, and social connections), were able to practice social citizenship to create a socially diverse educational environment for families in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods. Likewise, the curriculum of the school emphasizes constructivism, a philosophy of education that departs from traditional curriculum models. Although the school does not implement a radical pedagogical program, the potential for radical social citizenship practice nonetheless exists in the (potential) openness of the charter petition process.

Conclusion

This empirical examination of formal and substantive citizenship rights in the creation of the Neighborhood Charter School reveals important dimensions of changing state-society

¹³ Eight-eight percent of all APS elementary-school students are African-American.

relations. There are three main implications of this study for understanding the neoliberalizing state. First, the state itself has transformed, providing evidence not just of “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) but of a hybridized state. Second, this hybrid state creates subject-citizens in particular ways, relying on the volunteer activities of parent-citizens. Finally, the emphasis on private relationships in the management of the school constructs new kinds of privatized spaces.

As discussed in chapter two, neoliberalism is seen as the transformation of the political economy in favor of more market-oriented institutions. In many senses charter schools advance the neoliberal agenda by increasing the private involvement of individuals in the provision of public education. Charter schools incorporate active citizenship, choice, and more competition within public education, which reflects a neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, in this chapter I have shown how the legislative requirements of “active citizenship” in charter schools compared to traditional public schools discursively produces a “public” that is non-responsive. This public-without-agency further reifies the object of neoliberal transformations: to eliminate the inefficiencies of the state through privatized markets. At the same time, as this empirical case has shown, the state does not disappear.

The coexistence of charter schools alongside traditional public schools suggests that the state under neoliberalism has not disappeared or retrenched, but in fact it has hybridized. It both exists in its old form, as evidenced by schools such as Parkside, and in a new quasi-private form, such as the Neighborhood Charter School. The Atlanta Public Schools rules and regulations regarding charter schools outline the tight hold on the charter approval and regulation process that the traditional state has, which also reflects that the state has not disappeared. In fact, Atlanta Public Schools (and other local school districts) can refuse to grant charters and can

terminate charters, as described above. The state, while entertaining locally controlled charter schools, maintains an umbrella control over the very existence of charters.

This hybrid state that promotes a dual system of public education creates new citizen-subjects. In particular, the private citizen is imbued with the power to create and manage a charter school through extensive volunteer labor. New formal citizenship rights reflect the kinds of activities a private individual may engage in. At the same time, this empirical examination of the opening of the Neighborhood Charter School suggests that it is a particular kind of citizen-subject who may participate in such activities. In the case of NCS, volunteers included professionals and part-time or stay-at-home parents who had the professional expertise and time to donate to the school. These subjects are from traditional, middle-income families. Furthermore, charter schools point to the parent-citizen as a new subject of neoliberalism. The parent is given the specific right and responsibility to participate in the design and management of the schools. In the case of the Neighborhood Charter School, parents of school children are required to make up at least half of the voting members of the Governing Board. This power suggests that active parents are an ideal subject in the neoliberalization of public education because they can further extend the care and education of their children (and others) into a realm previously (or elsewhere) held by the state.

Finally, the rights granted to these new citizen-subjects suggest that the practice of citizenship has different meaning in different spaces. The traditional public school, such as Parkside Elementary, gives parents and community members limited rights and responsibilities, whereas the Neighborhood Charter School requires parents to be actively involved in the education of their children. Many of the parents of children in both schools live in the same Atlanta Public School attendance zone, yet they do not have the same legal rights and obligations

in the education of their children. The parent-citizen, then, is given differential status in the different spaces of public education. The spaces themselves become imbued with different meaning, where charter schools have the potential to become privatized public spaces—new spaces of a hybridized state.

Table 5.1: NCS Projected Income for Fiscal Year 2004

Carry-over from Fiscal Year '03		<u>168,228.00</u>
Total Carry-over		168,228.00
Income		
	Local/State Funding	
	APS Allocation (\$7650 X 165)	1,210,596.65
	Teacher Certification Special Pay	<u>9,800.00</u>
	Total Local/State Funding	1,220,396.65
	Contributions	
	Library Contributions	2,000.00
	Fundraisers/Community Donations	<u>35,000.00</u>
	Total Contributions	37,000.00
	Grants	
	Foundations/Other Grants	5,250.00
	State Implementation Grant	<u>56,532.00</u>
	Total Grants	61,782.00
	Other Income	5,528.28
	Business Interruption Insurance Proceeds	25,000.00
Total Income		<u>1,517,934.93</u>

Table 5.2: NCS Projected Expenses for the 2004 Fiscal Year

Expense	
Building Expenses	
Total Building Services	36,386.48
Building rent (August 03-July 04)	6,000.00
Total Temporary Facility	128,760.00
Total Telephone and Utilities	<u>7,190.00</u>
Total Building Expenses	178,336.48
Total Curriculum Materials & Expenses	58,740.10
Total Fundraising Expenses	5,000.00
Total Salaries and Benefits	1,065,428.37
Total Staff Development	15,332.50
Professional Services	
Accounting	5,000.00
Auditing	11,545.00
Insurance Adjustor	<u>6,990.00</u>
Total Professional Services	23,535.00
Student Services	21,000.00
Total Other Gen/Admin Expense	53,583.40
Total Books/Equipment/Furniture	39,345.03
Total Expense/Assets	1,460,300.88

CHAPTER 6: URBAN REGIMES AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

In the previous chapter, I explored the formal citizenship rights as outlined in federal and state legislation and local school district rules and regulations, which represents a new conceptualization of the private citizen's right to be directly involved in public education. In addition I examined the tremendous private resources—in terms of time, expertise, and money—required to start a charter school. I alluded to the kinds of social relationships that the organizers had with local business and political centers of power in Atlanta. In this chapter I turn to examining the importance of those relationships—and the role of schools as a public good or resource at the citywide scale.

Scholarship in economic and urban geography has focused on the increasing salience of individual places in light of the pressures of global capitalism (Harvey, 1989; Massey, 1984). Global competition for capital and the retrenchment of federal funding for economic development has cities scrambling to develop strategies—such as vying for the next German automobile plant or developing a high-tech corridor—to “ground” what is perceived to be highly mobile capital. As the authors in the special issue of *Antipode* on neoliberalism and urbanism assert, cities are increasingly the locus for capital accumulation, trumping the prominence of nation-states in securing capital investment. In order to provide the conditions for an automobile plant or a booming high-tech sector, cities must be able to provide substantial infrastructure in terms of highways and airports, and they must be able to ensure the social reproduction of a labor force in certain places (Cox and Mair, 1988). That is, cities must provide the infrastructure and services, including housing, schooling, health services, and recreational facilities, that enable favorable conditions for a happy and stable working class. And they must provide infrastructure

and services in light of a reduction in federal and state support. Cox and Mair (1988) advance the notion of local dependence—that in order for local businesses (and cities) to survive, the urban regimes must create the conditions for local capital to stay in place.

As discussed in chapter two, urban regimes, or the local elite, include those who control social and economic capital. They include elected officials, entrepreneurs and business leaders, party functionaries, officers in nonprofit foundations, and church leaders. Several businesses, such as newspaper companies in particular, are also linked to the local elite due to their heightened local dependence. Because their readership and advertising is contingent on a set territory, newspaper companies have a vested interest in maintaining an economically-successful local region (Cox and Mair, 1988). As such, newspapers can help define economic development strategies that benefit their local region.

As articulated by Cox and Mair (1988), one strategy for maintaining a labor force is by promoting social and material elements of community. That is, by promoting increased social bonds linked to a particular territory, workers may be less likely to follow mobile capital. According to Cox and Mair (1988), institutions, such as convention centers and professional sports teams, have the ability to promote community at the urban scale. Likewise, as Jessop (2002) asserts, community ties can be instrumental to a neoliberal agenda of localizing and reducing state apparatuses. Charter schools—with emphasis on local control and community—may be one way to stabilize a middle class in an urban neighborhood by encouraging local involvement.

As a locally dependent business and Atlanta's largest newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, has an interest in maintaining Atlanta as an attractive city for businesses and middle-class residents. As such, the degree to which the newspaper is supportive of charter

schools sheds light on the perceived role charter schools play in promoting and maintaining an urban middle-class, and by extension, a successful city.

In this chapter I examine the local discourses about charter schools that appear in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Atlanta's largest newspaper. I pay attention to the characterization of charter schools in the articles, the topical themes that the articles cover, and the position that the newspaper takes with respect to charter schools. In my analysis it becomes clear that charter schools are seen as an important strategy to keeping middle class families in the city. They are viewed as a development strategy that promotes community and offers individuals a stake in their local places. Overall, the tone of the news coverage is very "pro-charter school," evidenced by numerous articles and newspaper editorials. This support reflects an interest by the newspaper to promote Atlanta as a livable city for its residents.

Following the analysis of the major newspaper's coverage on charter schools generally, I then examine the specific relationship between Atlanta's powerful actors—its local elite—and members of the Neighborhood Charter School. I also explore the degree to which the Neighborhood Charter School receives favorable mention in the Atlanta newspaper. Through analysis of the newspaper and interviews with charter-school organizers, it becomes clear that individuals involved in the Neighborhood Charter School are skilled at mobilizing political and economic support through their social connections. They utilize their social capital, which is based on social networks and group membership (Bourdieu, 1987).

Research Approach

As described in chapter four, discourse is "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall, 1992: 291 as cited in Hall, 2000: 44). Media discourse

about events provides readers with a way of thinking about the meaning of an issue, which can foster particular attitudes towards that issue. Indeed, historically, newspapers have been the primary sources of information about national and local events, wielding significant influence on public opinion (Bagdikian, 1997). In the case of journalistic writing, events are reported and interpreted, which heightens the potential for newspapers to influence attitudes about events. Writers use a variety of strategies to both express the position of the writer and the position of the newspaper as a whole (Bagdikian, 1997). A writer may emphasize particular details or leave out contextual elements in order to make stories more compelling (Kielbowicz and Scherer, 1986 in Martin, 1999). A newspaper as an organization may use its editorial section to express a position on a particular controversial issue, taking itself out of a “neutral” reporting mode and taking up a more explicit political role.

In this chapter, I analyze the newspaper coverage of charter schools in metropolitan Atlanta, focusing on how charter schools are portrayed in newspaper reports and in editorials. I engage in qualitative content analysis, where I examine the topics covered and the tone of newspaper articles. I analyze the newspaper coverage of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which as of 2002 had a circulation of approximately 1.3 million readers in metro-Atlanta during the week and approximately 1.9 million on weekends (“Reader profile”, 2002). I chose the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* to examine because of its extensive readership in Atlanta (which is approximately 40% of adult readers in the metro-area during the week), and because it is the only major newspaper based in Atlanta¹.

My initial search of newspaper articles about charter schools consisted of a search in the Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe database for the mention of “charter school” in the *Atlanta*

¹ The *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* merged into the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on November 5, 2001.

Journal-Constitution from January 2002 to April 2004. I chose to focus on the most recent year-and-a-half, given that more charter schools are in operation and debates about charter schools are reaching more communities in Atlanta. The Lexis-Nexis search produced 276 articles. Of these articles I deemed 96 to be substantive articles regarding charter schools, because they included reports about charter school activities, struggles different communities had in starting charter schools, and decisions local school boards faced in granting charters. The remainder of the articles that were returned by Lexis Nexis were short “education notebook” segments that provided descriptions about events or goings on at different schools.

I focused on articles that reported on charter schools in the metro-Atlanta region (figure 6.1). Some of these articles appeared in the general “Metro” section of the newspaper, which reaches all *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* subscribers. Other daily sections that appear in all *AJC* editions that mention charter schools include the “Business” section, and the “Editorial” pages. Charter-school articles also appeared in weekly sections with topical foci, such as Monday’s “Business Horizon” and Wednesday’s “Atlanta and the World” sections. In addition regional news editions, such as “City Life Midtown,” “Fayette,” “DeKalb,” “Cobb,” “South Metro,” “Clayton/Henry,” “North Fulton,” “East Metro,” and “Coweta,” included events about charter schools. As I sorted through the articles, I noted which ones were largely focused on regional areas, such as information about the Academy of Lithonia in the “DeKalb” section or the struggle of two charter schools in Henry County that appeared in the “Clayton/Henry” section of the newspaper. Table 6.1 reflects the number of times articles about charter schools appear in the respective sections. The largest number of articles about charter schools appeared in the “Metro News” section (36), followed by the Editorial section (12). After reading the articles, I compiled a database and highlighted different themes that emerged from the texts. In total, I identified

eight themes that were repeated throughout the articles. These themes, which are discussed in more detail below, include (1) charter schools as offering school choice, (2) the bureaucracy of public school systems, (3) the relationship between school districts and charter schools, (4) the efficiency of charter schools, (5) charter schools' experimental curricula, (6) the links that charter schools have with private businesses, (7) the role of charter schools in economic development, and (8) the potential for charter schools to maintain communities.

In addition, I assessed the tone of the articles—the ways in which charter schools were characterized. That is, many articles highlighted the potential for charter schools to involve local communities, and very few outlined the problems some charter schools have had. I put each article into a category, where “positive” reflected an article that seemed to view charter schools favorably; “neutral” was more of a report on events but without qualitative quotations or summaries; “mixed” indicated the article both pointed out positive elements and drawbacks of charter schools; and “negative” which focused on challenges or the negative experiences a charter school may have had.

Analysis of News Coverage

Of these 92 articles about charter schools, I categorized 58 as supportive of charter schools, 14 as neutral, 20 articles were mixed, and three were negative. Sixty-three percent of the articles, then, were supportive of charter schools. This support ranged in language that highlighted the “freedom” of charter schools to innovate to describing parents’ frustration with local public schools. The negative coverage, or the articles that seemed critical of charter school efforts, were largely focused on the struggle of one charter school in Dekalb County, the Academy of Lithonia². This school was mired in local politics and mismanagement, which

² Of the 92 articles in the *AJC* included in this analysis, 10 were about Academy of Lithonia, 3 of which were categorized as “negative,” and seven as “mixed”.

received consistent coverage. Regardless of the tone of the piece, in nearly every article, the author provided a brief background sentence or two about the nature of charter schools.

The charter school explanation

In what I call the “charter school explanation,” writers provided a brief description of charter schools in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* articles. These explanations generally highlighted elements of choice and freedom, innovation, accountability, and compared it to the bureaucracy of traditional public education. This brief explanation is fundamental in establishing the tone for each article, for implicit in most of the descriptions is a celebration of the charter school movement.

A typical charter school explanation includes the following: “Charter schools are public schools that are funded by tax dollars but freed from some rules and regulations, giving them more room to innovate” (Donsky, 2002a). Another explanation reads, “[c]harter schools are public schools funded by tax dollars but free of many of the restrictions that govern traditional public school” (Carter, 2002). Likewise, in an article focusing on the renovation of the historic Grant Park school: “[c]harter schools are public, receiving state and local taxpayer money. They cannot charge tuition but are freed of some rules and regulations, allowing them to try innovative programs” (Donsky, 2002b). In these three explanations, charter schools are “free” from rules and have the potential to innovate, which implicitly suggests that traditional public schools are rule-bound or not innovative.

Charter schools’ independence and accountability are also themes that were recurring in the charter-school explanation: “Charter schools are funded by taxes, but they operate separately from the school district’s central office and are held accountable through a board-approved charter” (Donsky, 2003a), and “[c]harter schools are public schools that are run independently

from school districts but are funded by taxpayers” (Donsky, 2002c). The independence and accountability suggests a contrast with traditional public schools, which are implicitly seen as mired in rules and regulations and not held accountable for their actions.

These charter-school explanations reflect a particular optimism about charter schools. In particular, words describing charter schools as “free from” rules and regulations and “free to innovate” further characterizes charter schools as entrepreneurial and flexible in contrast to the inflexibility and bureaucratic nature of traditional public schools. Other themes that appeared in my analysis derive from this central idea of freedom from the state and a parallel embracing of private businesses, central goals of neoliberalism. These themes include characterizations of charter schools as offering choice, their roles in communities, and their potential in economic development schemes.

School choice

In many of the articles, the concept of school choice was presented as one of the reasons why parents or communities attempted to start charter schools. In an article recounting the approval of the University Community Academy’s charter, journalist Paul Donsky interviewed one of the board members of the school, who stated that

The school will ‘give parents in the community another opportunity to have their children educated in some other form, to look at a different way of delivering the state curriculum,’ said Trevor Turner, a professor of educational leadership at Clark Atlanta University and a board member of the charter school. It will ‘give them some kind of alternative to the public school curriculum’ (Donsky, 2002d).

In this article, the focus is offering an alternative to traditional public education—a choice in how the state curriculum is delivered. It does not contain an indictment of traditional public education, as many “pro-school-choice” articles do, but rather it presents charter schools as simply offering something “different.”

Overcrowding is another reason why charter-school organizers have articulated wanting a choice between large, public schools and smaller charter schools. For example, when asked why a parent group in Henry County, was considering opening a charter elementary school, a representative stated that:

The need for more parental choice and relief from public school crowding are among the reasons the group wants to open ACE (Academy Charter Education).

“We feel there isn’t enough choice,” [the representative] added. (Reid, 2003a).

Likewise, another charter-school group in Henry County was covered in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The group cited limited parental choices in the region:

“[The group] is touting the proposed school as a much needed alternative for parents, community members and others seeking additional educational options and escape from school overcrowding resulting from the county’s population explosion” (Reid, S.A. 2003b).

The interest that parents expressed in starting charter schools in Henry County is about providing a choice between large, overcrowded county schools and smaller, individually-focused charter schools³.

According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, for some parents, the desire to create a charter-school option has to do primarily with choice itself. For example, in Cobb County, a northwestern county of metro-Atlanta, one article reports that

Cobb parents and business leaders took the initiative to create the state’s newest charter school about three years ago.

Michael Everhart, president of the school’s board of directors, said the effort did not stem from dissatisfaction with the county school system but with a desire to add yet another strong, albeit different, school to the county’s educational landscape” (Taylor, 2003).

³ The article does not provide data on how many students are in Henry County, nor what they consider school-crowding to be.

A “different” school is implicitly not a traditional public school, for these parents are not requesting administrative transfers, a choice offered by many school systems.

Indeed, Atlanta Public Schools offers administrative transfers based on a first-come, first-served system. This system has been criticized by some, as the competition to get into a few well-performing schools has become fierce. Recounting the story of a parent waiting in line for 15 hours to secure an administrative transfer for her children, Jim Wooten, a conservative columnist whose column appears regularly in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, stated that

To get their children into a good public school, parents brave up to 20 hours in the bitter cold in a survivor’s game of will and endurance and hope. Some of the prized schools expect to have 10 or fewer slots...

There’s a message here for local school boards and the Georgia General Assembly. State Sen. Tom Price (R-Roswell), who has introduced three bills to encourage the creation of new charter schools, says, ‘there is a growing recognition that parents need to control their children’s education, and not the state.’

When 200 stand in 20-degree weather, the message is clear. Parents want choice. The mad scramble for too few slots in too few prized schools is evidence that parents need more choices (Wooten, 2002a).

Wooten then goes on to celebrate the choice that the Neighborhood Charter School is providing residents of southeast Atlanta. The implicit position of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, then, is that charter schools provide an important choice for parents to overcome the inadequacies of the public school system⁴.

Another editorial by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* staff offers a strong indictment against local school boards in Georgia that stymie charter-school efforts:

If school boards in Georgia made students their top priority, they wouldn’t regard charter schools as competition. They’d see them as inspiration.

⁴ There seems to be a contradiction in Jim Wooten’s column (and in the “choice” argument more broadly). He advocates choice but recounts the events of parents braving a long line and freezing temperatures to exercise their option to choose. This scenario reflects one of the criticisms of charter schools and school-choice, which is that in a system of choice and competition, some schools win and some lose. Wooten argues that by creating more charter schools and more choices, there will necessarily be more winners.

Instead, school boards treat charters as annoying cousins who have descended on them uninvited. They'll let them bunk in the basement, but they're not going to give them breakfast or fresh towels....

School boards eye the charters with suspicion and resentment, seeing them as indictments of the system and the status quo. And they're right. Charter schools are a response to unresponsive public schools....

If their children can't conform to traditional classrooms, most Georgia parents now have only private schools or home schooling as their alternative. Charters give them a third choice. If school boards continue to hinder charter schools, parents might demand a fourth choice--vouchers. And that would spell the end of public education. ("Our opinions," 2003).⁵

As this Editorial suggests, many parents do not see traditional public schools as an option for their children and instead see charter schools as an alternative to private school.

Traditional public schools not an option

Supporters of charter schools often eliminate the possibility of supporting local traditional schools altogether. In an article describing the renovation efforts of Grant Park volunteers, Phil Andrews, then director of the NCS effort, stated that "We pay enough in property taxes that we shouldn't have to pay extra to go to private school" (Donsky, 2002b). Andrews's statement eliminates the possibility of supporting the local public school—and instead frames school choice as between a charter school and a private school.

Indeed, for many middle class residents in metro-Atlanta, charter schools are seen as an alternative to private schools. An *AJC* article about the organizing of a charter school in Marietta, a city northwest of Atlanta, reflects this trend:

Parents who have left the public system for private schools are interested in establishing a charter school for elementary students. The idea is to form a school that offers rigorous academics, said organizer Heath Garrett, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga).

⁵ What is interesting about this quotation is that not only does the *AJC* endorse charter schools and condemn local boards of education that inhibit the formation of charter schools, but it makes a distinction between school choice and vouchers. The newspaper suggests that a voucher system would represent the end of public education. In a sense, charter schools are financed by a collection of vouchers—given that they are funded on a per-pupil basis. And, as my previous chapter suggests, charter schools do often have social barriers that make them quasi-private. Thus vouchers and charter schools raise questions about the meaning—if not the end—of public education.

The intention is not to skim the brightest students from the public system, he said, nor is it to take only white children. Charter advocates are committed to a racially and socially diverse school, Garrett said.

‘These parents who are beginning to organize it would probably have chosen private schools anyway,’ he said (MacDonald, 2002).

For Garrett, many Cobb County parents would not consider traditional public schools. That the parents would choose between private schools and a charter school suggests that they are middle-class families who could afford private school⁶. In this same article, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reports a Marietta Board of Education member as being supportive of the charter-school effort:

Board member Irene Berens, who had not spoken with Garrett, said she understood the parents would have bypassed the public school system anyway. ‘I would assume [the charter school] would only appeal to those children who would probably be attending a private school’” (MacDonald, 2002).

Thus, for parents in Marietta a charter schools is seen as the alternative to private school—not an alternative within the public school system.

This discourse of middle-class families choosing private school or charter schools is also reflected in the comments about a charter school in Kennesaw, a city northwest of Atlanta. In an *AJC* article, one parent in Kennesaw likens sending her child to a traditional public school as “feeding him to the wolves”:

Patrick and Randi Fulbright of Kennesaw spent more than a year home schooling their two children before decided to return the youngsters to a more traditional classroom setting. But they were hesitant to place Emma, 7, and Winston, 11, into public school. They were particularly worried about Winston adapting to the hectic pace of fifth grade until they learned about the new Kennesaw Charter School.

‘I didn’t want to feed him to the wolves, and I thought this would be a nice way to get him back into school, Randi Fulbright said...’” (Taylor, 2003)

⁶ The irony is that Garrett states that the parents want a racially and socially diverse school, yet the parents who are organizing it are likely to send their children to private school—explicitly *not* diverse in terms of income.

For this Kennesaw family, the option is between home schooling and a charter school. Having the time and resources to home school children also suggests that this is a middle-class family. What these articles suggest—without explicit statements—is that charter schools can be satisfactory to middle-class parents who otherwise avoid traditional public school systems. What many parents claim they object to in traditional public schools is lack of individualized attention given to students, which they see resulting from traditional public school systems' bureaucracies.

Charter schools as a remedy to large bureaucracies

Due to their governance structure, which includes parents and community members, charter schools are seen as a solution to the unresponsiveness of large school districts and their bureaucratic structure. For example, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Editorial staff criticizes the complexity of the state of Georgia's legal code regarding public schools:

The Georgia legal code governing public schools entails 600 pages. These laws, coupled with the regulations and policies of the state and local school boards, ordain what schools teach, how they teach, how much they spend and even whom they hire.

The burgeoning charter school movement in Georgia represents a protest against this mindless central office bureaucracy ("Our opinions," 2002).

This criticism of the "mindless bureaucracy" of public education in Georgia seems to be a blanket criticism of government in general. It does not provide a reasoned discussion outlining why the 600 pages of legal code are problematic.⁷ The editorial then goes on to outline the struggles that charter schools often have because of the limited state and local school district support they receive.

By eliminating not only rules but social conventions, charter schools are viewed as offering the potential to try new strategies that bureaucracies will not. For example, the *Atlanta*

⁷ In addition, this argument against bureaucracies is made as part of a broader argument for increasing accountability measures for schools (as *No Child Left Behind* claims to provide, for example). Indeed, outlining "what schools teach, how they teach, how much they spend..." seems to be a response to demands for accountability.

Journal-Constitution included an 1134-word article on the management structure of three new KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) charter schools that opened in metro-Atlanta. The average age of the principals is 26.7 years, which is a sign that the schools are interested in youth and energy:

We're looking for teachers who are frustrated with the status quo... who have the fire, that internal burning, said Jeff Rutel, who runs KIPP's instructional leadership department.

"They are frustrated with the bureaucracy. They are frustrated at having success in their classrooms, but not seeing it elsewhere in their schools," he said. "We're looking for young spirit more than young age,..." (Donsky, 2003b).

This article reflects an attitude that youth can combat the wrongs associated with an "old" and unchanging bureaucracy that make traditional public schools unresponsive.

Depictions of school board-charter school relationships

Many articles focused on the school district-charter school relationship, reporting on the struggles charter schools have had with the school districts that fund them. In one of his many indictments against publicly-managed enterprises, columnist Jim Wooten compares Atlanta's failed experimentation with privatizing its water system to the privatization of public education and the resulting relationship between the private and public entities:

...United Water's money-losing experience [in Atlanta] is a textbook example of the difficulties the private sector has in moving into the public. Its experience parallels those of charter school organizers and of private-sector companies managing public schools.

At the core, any change in the status quo invites opposition. Just as education bureaucrats have no initial incentive to see competition succeed, water department employees have no reason to demonstrate that the private sector can do their job better or more efficiently. So the relationship, from the start, is ambivalent at best (Wooten, 2002c).

Wooten is critical of the strained nature of the relationship, arguing that charter schools should receive more support from local school districts. Charter schools are seen as a viable remedy to a closed public school system.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is generally sympathetic to the charter school when tensions between public school districts and charter schools are recounted. A long article (1359 words) in the Metro section of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* recounts the frustrations that University Community Academy, a charter elementary school in the Atlanta, has had with the “central office bureaucracy” of Atlanta Public Schools.

[The principal of University Community Academy] says APS—which funds his school and has some oversight—refused to let him buy textbooks from the district. Monthly checks from the district sometimes arrived late, forcing teachers to wait for their paychecks. Meanwhile, Atlanta official required the school, the University Community Academy, to file reams of paperwork to prove it was following certain rules and regulations.

‘We’re mired in red tape,’ [the principal] says, shaking his head. ‘Every time I turn around, there’s something new I have to give the school system’ (Donsky, 2003c).

This characterization of the relationship as strained reinforces stereotypes about publicly-managed organizations—that they are large and require too much paperwork. Left out of many of these articles are the requirements that school boards have to ensure that their schools—including charter schools—follow state and federal laws (which often require extensive paperwork). Charter schools are also characterized as offering an efficient answer to the expense of large bureaucratic school systems.

Charter schools as more efficient

Charter schools, which receive per pupil funding, are seen as a way to increase accountability by local governing boards. Furthermore, they are viewed as a strategy to increase the economic efficiency of educating children, therefore saving school districts money (given that much of the funding for charter school operations must come from private sources, as the previous chapter demonstrated). For example, a proposed charter school in Henry County was denied by the local school board specifically because it did not offer any “cost savings” to the

public school district. The board stated that “the [proposed charter] school’s opening is not in the public’s best interest” (Reid, 2003c). District officials argued that the school district cannot provide the funds for a proposed charter school “without seeing any savings in areas such as teacher hiring or impact on public school overcrowding” (Reid, 2003c). The newspaper article quoted the executive director of the charter school as countering those claims and stating that “[t]he plan we have will save [the district] money” (Reid, 2003c). The article only focused on this point of disagreement between the school district and the charter petitioners.

The structure of Atlanta Public Schools and its spending habits are often the brunt of criticism among columnists and editorials in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Colin Campbell, a frequent columnist for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, attacked Atlanta Public Schools, arguing that “Atlanta’s public schools are extremely expensive, and their performance is lousy” (Campbell, 2002). He continued:

What the city needs now is to figure out why the schools cost so much, and why test scores remain so low, and when, if ever, our property taxes will drop. For it makes no sense (in a world of charter schools, for example,...) to spend more than half of Atlanta’s total property taxes blindly and without questions... (Campbell, 2002).

In another article a year later, Campbell provided an account of the expenditures of Atlanta Public Schools.

The public schools are deeply troubled. They’re also very expensive, and their costs keep rising despite a steady fall in enrollment....

It isn’t a vote of confidence in the schools. ...

The schools’ budget... is huge. One reason is a top-heavy, close-knit bureaucracy. Another is wasting money on construction.

...Most other school systems spend around \$6,500 per pupil a year. Atlanta spends \$9,000; if you include the building budget the total soars past \$13,000 (Campbell, 2003).

Campbell's plea for an audit of Atlanta Public Schools was answered almost a year later. The tone of the article that described the results of the audit was one of skepticism, however. Paul Donsky, an *AJC* writer who covers education issues for the newspaper began his article with:

When the Atlanta school board decided to commission a performance assessment of the district, critics hoped the report would confirm their suspicion that the system spends too much money.

What they didn't know was that the study was conducted in a way that virtually guaranteed they wouldn't find out (Donsky, 2004).

Although the remainder of the report reflected the positive findings of the audit (that Atlanta Public Schools allocates its money "wisely"), it emphasized the skepticism that critics have over APS's per pupil spending:

School system critics, who say a bloated bureaucracy and wasteful spending have made Atlanta the most expensive large district in the state, were disappointed by the study.

Glen Delk, an Atlanta lawyer and charter school advocate, said the report skirted the big question: 'Is the money being spent efficiently? Are taxpayers getting the biggest bang for the buck?' (Donsky, 2004).

Implicit in this criticism of Atlanta's spending is the idea that charter schools *can be* more efficient than traditional public school systems (even though charter schools use public-school dollars). For many, the management of charter schools presents an opportunity to import business models to increase the efficiency of spending on education.

Charter schools and links to private businesses

As chapter four described, charter schools can be directly linked to private businesses. They can be managed by for-profit corporations, such as Edison Schools or Academy of America, or they can be managed by parent- or community-groups. Most of these volunteer groups form nonprofit corporations to manage the business side of charter schools. And for some, having business expertise on the governing board is extremely important. For example, a brief article about the Central Education Center, a charter school in Coweta County (a county

southwest of Atlanta) and its search for a new board chair was titled “Newnan school seeks a CEO; Background in business a major plus.” The article continued:

The board chairman of the Central Education Center said the charter school’s replacement for resigning head Mark Whitlock will likely come from the business world.

‘We’re leaving it open to all sectors,’ said Steve Stripling, CEC’s board chairman and president of the Bank of Coweta. “But there’s a strong feeling among the board [members] that the business sector probably will lead us to a strong leader like we found in Mark (Seymour, 2003).

This emphasis on ties to the business world permeated several articles on charter schools in metro-Atlanta. In a Fulton County charter school, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that Woodland Elementary Charter School signed a partnership with the Petco store nearby⁸. For reasons unspecified in the article, Petco agreed to provide each classroom with 15-gallon tanks. Furthermore, Petco plans to bring an animal to the school each month so that students may “handle the animals, ask questions of the Petco experts and study the creatures in their life sciences curriculum” (Reinolds, 2004). Ties to the business world are evident in these kinds of partnerships and in the expertise of charter school’s governing boards. Another place that ties to private businesses shows up is in the experimental curricula of many charter schools.

Experimental curricula

Charter schools range in curricula from performing-arts foci to technology. In one Atlanta charter school, the University Community Academy, a charter school with loose affiliation with the Atlanta University Center (a consortium of traditionally black colleges in Atlanta), the curriculum features “America’s Choice,” a school reform program “that emphasizes reading and writing” (Donsky, 2002c). Rather than focusing on these kinds of traditional skills, many charter schools in metro-Atlanta focus on “sexier” curricula, such as high tech course offerings and career-enhancing business courses.

⁸ Petco is a national pet-store chain with over 650 stores in the United States (“Our Stores”, 2004).

Training students for better jobs is woven into some of the charter-school curricula. In Coweta County, for instance, the curriculum at the Central Education Center is designed to prepare students for “rich choices of employment” when they graduate (Holsendolph, 2002). As the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported,

Courses are focused but cover a lot of ground. They range from computer repair, Cisco-certified networking and machine tool building to computer graphics and electronics...

The technology courses are special: In effect they are designed by county businesses, so they prepare students for jobs here and now, and many of them are taught by teachers with business and technology experience...

As a charter school, the educational center often makes its own rules.

Hands-on teachers like pre-engineering specialist Al Livingston, a military veteran, have run plants.

So not only do instructors like Livingston know what must be learned, but they also train youngsters in the ways of the shop.

‘Our students learn the needs of modern manufacturing,’ said Livingston. ‘We learn how to write proposals and make things happen. Regular high schools teach by rote, through tunnel vision; here we learn how things work, how one thing depends on another’ (Holsendolph, 2002).

The article, which is 1323 words long in the Business section of the newspaper, celebrates the kinds of job training that the Newnan charter school can offer. In another section of the article, business assignments are reported:

Kevin Pullen, county teacher of the year in 2001, is an instructor in video and graphics...

Much of the learning in his class is with business partners outside the school that want certain assignments done, Pullen said.

‘I’d like to sit around and say, ‘This is a camera, and this is a...’ but the reality is, I usually say, ‘Get ready, we have a project to complete in two weeks!’” (Holsendolph, 2002).

The article does not question the value of integrating the needs of students and private businesses. Nor does it question having students perform the work for private business as unpaid labor. Instead, the article focuses on the “progress” of the school and its curriculum.

Technology is a popular theme for charter schools. For example, in 2002 High Tech High's charter was approved by Atlanta Public Schools. The charter was granted to the Technology Association of Georgia Foundation with partial funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The school, which never opened in Atlanta, was to emphasize math, science, and engineering. Students were to be able to complete internships in "local businesses or governments" in their junior and senior years (Donsky, 2002e). Another example of an emphasis on technology is the Atlanta charter high school, School for Integrated Academics & Technologies (SIATech). Reporting on the school's opening, the reporter contrasted traditional learning environments with SIATech's:

Students don't sit at desks in rows facing a teacher. Rather, they sit at computer work stations and cover material at their own pace, using interactive computer tutorials. Teachers wander the room, assisting students either one-on-one or in small groups.

Much of the learning is project-based. For instance, students are expected to 'create' a business and write a business plan, using their math skills. In another project, students make a newsletter—using professional software programs—about a historical event or period" (Donsky, 2002f).

The implicit suggestion is that SIATech prepares students for a work environment, using computer software and completing job-related tasks—whereas many traditional public schools do not. By celebrating the high-tech training and other links to private businesses, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is implicitly suggesting that education should achieve a skilled workforce. The newspaper does not seem to be concerned about education for education's sake, but rather the training of a skilled young workforce to meet the demands of a high-tech and service-oriented economy.

Another charter school in the works—this one in Fayette County—that focuses on technology was the subject of another report in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*:

The school—which would be the county’s first charter—would serve a wide range of high school students’ needs. Under the proposal, high school students could take academic and technical courses, AP courses and foreign languages and participate in a Cisco Networking Academy—a four-semester program that gives students a basic foundation in computer networking—among other possible programs.

The high school would open early in the morning and would operate until the evening.

The charter school’s program would broaden the class options—and ultimately, career options—available to students without pulling those courses from the other high schools (Carter, 2003a).

This *AJC* article reflects optimism that charter schools can enhance the career opportunities of their students. It does not question the drawbacks of funneling money out of traditional public schools—and instead provides an implicit endorsement the proposed charter school in Fayette County. Innovative curricula and links to private businesses in many charter schools are seen as a strategy to attract students and to keep families from leaving areas of metro-Atlanta that have poor-performing schools.

Charter schools and economic development

The business and job-training curricula of many charter schools reflects a desire for many local communities to attract corporations. Indeed, the role of charter schools in explicit economic development schemes was positively portrayed in several articles and editorials.

Columnist Jim Wooten summed up the increasing trend of developers including charter schools in their plans:

Notice that every proposed new community of any size in Atlanta—the Atlanta Housing Authority’s West Highlands and developer Charles Brewer’s Green Street Properties—includes a charter school. (Wooten, 2002b).

Many articles on the redevelopment of economically depressed areas have included mention of charter schools in development plans. West Highlands, a project spearheaded by the Atlanta

Housing Authority in partnership with many private corporations, seeks to transform a previous land fill and public housing project region into a planned community:

The Atlanta Housing Authority plans to raise a massive live-play community on the former site of a crime-infested public housing complex in southwest Atlanta⁹.

An 18-hole golf course to be built atop a closed landfill is a cornerstone of the project. AHA and its private sector partners also plan to build a charter school, library, YMCA, and 2,211 housing units in a 462-acre community centered around the old Perry Homes...

'We are really talking about removing a residential brownfield,' said AHA's Executive Director Renee Glover, 'and turning that area into a wonderfully elaborate part of town' (Pendered, 2002).

The notion is that not only do housing facilities need to be constructed, but the institutions that keep people—both lower income and middle class—in those houses need to be planned as well. Thus, a charter school, a library, and a YMCA are seen as important elements of the West Highlands plan.

In an article more than a year later, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* covered a meeting Renee Glover had with more than fifty Atlanta political, business and community leaders. Glover reported on the progress of the Atlanta Housing Authority's efforts in creating West Highlands: "'We are talking about building communities,' Glover said. 'We have a lot to be proud of. We have done a lot of work, but there is a lot to be done'" (Suggs, 2003). In coverage of this project and others, such public-private partnerships are depicted as the key to the revitalization of troubled areas.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* has included several articles on the success story of one revitalization effort in East Lake, a community east of Atlanta:

Teacher Eddie Johnson bobs and weaves between the desks of his third-graders, his quick moves keeping his pupils' attention on him as he delivers their math lesson...

⁹ West Highlands is located in *northwest* Atlanta.

The classroom activities seem completely normal. Which is what makes the scene so completely noteworthy.

This is East Lake, once a violent no-man's land in Atlanta. Now its public housing project and related developments are a national model for replacing pockets of hopeless poverty with viable mixed-income communities built with public and private investments.

East Lake's turnaround could not be more dramatic....

The forlorn Drew Elementary School, a fortress with almost no windows, was razed and a shiny charter school erected. A full-service YMCA is attached to the new Drew, and an adjacent public golf course serves duffers and 700 school-age Tiger Woods wannabes... (Pendered, 2003).

The new school, which was built with the backing of a community non-profit organization, has been reported as being a model charter school (Donsky, 2002g). As with the West Highlands project, the development of a charter school, a YMCA, and a golf course—all quasi-public institutions—are seen as the key to successful neighborhood transformation.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* also reported on largely private development plans that include charter schools. The paper reported on a panel discussion on the investment potential of South Fulton County. The panel, which was organized by the Urban Land Institute's Atlanta District, offered an analysis of the region's potential for investment, citing its proximity to Hartsfield International Airport and downtown Atlanta. A drawback included its "substandard schools". One panelist argued that the "schools need to be improved to attract middle-class families who can afford to buy properties [in the region]." The article continued: "But more charter schools are planned, and a huge retail complex by North American Properties with a Barnes and Noble and a Target is coming to Camp Creek Parkway" (Yoo, 2003). In this article, charter schools are likened to retail development—as a service to realize the development potential of the region. Charter schools, like big box retailers, are seen as reasons to move into or to remain in an area.

Other articles point out the successes charter schools have had as part of larger economic development (or redevelopment) schemes. The Central Educational Center has been the topic of several economic development plans for Coweta County. In one, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported on the initial opening of the charter school:

Newnan—About seven years ago, the folks here saw the truth in sharp focus: If you plan to keep local businesses and grow them, you'd better improve the work force.

That realization, and serious pushing from businesses, led to the successful launching of Coweta County's Central Educational Center, which is so unique that educators from around the world have come to see it... (Holsendolph, 2002).

The article reported that the decision of Yamaha Motors to expand within Coweta County (where the school is located) instead of outside of it was crucial in forming elements of the curriculum (Holsendolph, 2002). Previous Georgia Governor Roy Barnes celebrated the Central Educational Center and stated that its new approach "is a way to train our people not just to compete with people across town but to compete with people in Berlin, Tokyo, Beijing and Hong Kong" (Holsendolph, 2002). The idea expressed by Governor Barnes is that the school can help "win" a competition of mobile capital by training a workforce in Coweta County.

A year-and-a-half later, the Central Educational Center was reported as being a potential savior to Georgia's once-thriving movie industry:

Some Coweta County charter school programs would move to a Senoia movie studio under a \$4.75 million, 20-year lease proposal being considered by Gov. Sonny Perdue.

The project was devised and supported by state Sen. Mitch Seabaugh (R-Sharpsburg), the Central Educational Center in Newnan and the owners of Riverwood Studios.

The objective is to educate students in the motion picture trades while boosting Georgia's struggling film industry, Seabaugh said. CEC's construction, welding and video production programs would move from Newnan to Riverwood under the proposal...

The Riverwood/CEC proposal is one of many ideas being explored to bring more film projects to the state. Georgia was one of the top movie locales in the late 1980s and early 1990s...

But other states, plus Canada, Australia and South Africa, now offer financial incentives, taking business from Georgia, said Greg Tolle, director of the Georgia Film, Video and Music Office.” (Carter, 2003b).

In both of these articles, the charter school is seen as a strategy to train a workforce that is competitive on a global scale. By imparting skills that focus on particular industries—such as high tech or the movie industry, charter schools have the potential to reign in global capital. It is in the interest of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and other locally dependent businesses to capture such capital to maintain the viability of Atlanta. This idea that neighborhoods in Georgia are competitive with Canada or Tokyo contrasts the more traditional arguments that charter-school proponents often make about keeping families in the immediate neighborhood.

Potential for charters to maintain communities

Charter-school advocates view charter schools as an opportunity for citizens to build their community through participation in the schools (Finn, et al, 2002). By volunteering together and investing time and energy in the design and maintenance of schools, the logic is that parents will be more likely to maintain a vested interest in the broader community. This linking of some notion of community and schools is evident in the names of several metro-Atlanta-area charter schools. University Community Academy, a charter school in the western part of Atlanta reflects a connection to Clark-Atlanta University, the consortium of historically black colleges in Atlanta, while evoking a sense of belonging through its use of the term ‘community’.

International Community School, which opened in Dekalb County, is a charter school that encourages enrollment by international students. In an article about the opening of the school, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that, according to the head of the school “[Parents] see an opportunity for their children to be around children from around the world,” (Bixler, 2002).

The article goes on to suggest that through exposure to international students, the school will

foster a unique sense of community and will better prepare students “for a changing world” (Bixler, 2002).

The theme of community emerged in several charter-school articles in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The most explicit discussions of the relationship between a charter school and its community were in articles about a potential charter school in Hapeville (in Clayton County) and the Neighborhood Charter School in Grant Park (see the analysis of NCS news coverage below). For the most part, the articles equated generating community support for a charter school with keeping families in the area. For example, one March 2004 article about a developing charter school in Hapeville reported:

With community support, the Hapeville [charter] petitioners hope to provide a better education for the kids, and perhaps restore some residential stability in a little city surrounded by major industry...

‘When we see our friends and neighbors moving, and they’re saying it’s education--it’s south Fulton education--you get concerned and you start to think, “How do we keep this community together?” [an organizer] said. (MacDonald, 2004).

The idea that a charter school can keep a community together is a powerful one. Indeed, keeping middle-class families in the Grant Park neighborhood is precisely how the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* has reported on the developments of the Neighborhood Charter School.

Neighborhood Charter School in the news

The Neighborhood Charter School received relatively frequent mention in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. In the 96 articles I analyzed, the Neighborhood Charter School was referenced by name in 13 articles, or in 13.5% of articles. In other articles, such as editorials, the school was referred to as the “charter school in Grant Park” (“Create lottery for desired schools,” 2002). Because the school submitted its charter in 2000, I include newspaper coverage that occurred before 2002 in my analysis of how NCS was portrayed in the *Atlanta Journal-*

Constitution. In particular, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* has covered the school's early stages of development, the group's effort to renovate the building, the recovery efforts of the fire, and ongoing struggles between the Neighborhood Charter School and Atlanta Public Schools. Throughout its coverage of the school, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* remained unambiguously supportive of the NCS efforts.

The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* praised the efforts of the Neighborhood Charter School organizers in the initial charter-approval process. An editorial in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, published shortly before the Grant Park parents submitted their charter was titled "Grant Park proposal is model for charter schools." In it, the editorial staff argued that "the intense study that the Grant Park organizers put into their impressive proposal ought to be standard in all charter school applications" ("Grant Park proposal is model for charter schools," 2000). They argued that school boards should be more forthcoming in their assistance to charter-school organizers: "The Grant Park parents lost time trying to get straight answers from the Atlanta Public Schools on such essential planning facts as attendance zones and per-pupil funding" ("Grant Park proposal is model for charter schools," 2000). The editorial staff expressed optimism about the charter school, stating that it "would both attract middle-class parents back to public education and enhance the quality of that education for all children in the four diverse neighborhoods it would cover"¹⁰ ("Grant Park proposal is model for charter schools," 2000). They concluded their editorial by urging the school board to approve the charter: "The proposal incorporates the wisdom of education experts at the state, local and national level. Equally important, it reflects the excitement and commitment of the diverse community the school would serve. It deserves board approval" ("Grant Park proposal is model

¹⁰ At the time of the comment, the group had not worked out the final details of the attendance zone. At one point, the group thought they would have to include the neighborhoods of Woodland Hills, McDonough/Guice in addition to Ormewood,-North Ormewood, and Grant Park.

for charter schools,” 2000). This is an unambiguously supportive editorial authored by the editorial staff of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. It implies that the organizers had a difficult time with the bureaucracy of Atlanta Public Schools. The editorial also asserts the importance of the school as keeping middle-class parents in the neighborhood.

What the content and the timing of this editorial also reflect are the close ties that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* had with the Neighborhood Charter School organizers. The editorial was published October 19, 2002, only thirteen days after the NCS organizers submitted their charter, and before they knew whether their charter was approved from Atlanta Public Schools. Charters are not officially public documents until they are accepted by school boards; thus, there would be no way for the newspaper to know about the details of the charter petition (or the struggles the NCS-organizers went through) if it did not have direct connections with the organizers. The timing of the editorial hints at the personal relationship between the editorial board and members of the Neighborhood Charter School, a relationship that is discussed in more detail below.

In an article about pending charter-school applications to the Atlanta Board of Education, one *AJC* staffwriter states that

Those proposing new charter schools say they want to give Atlanta parents an option to either poor-performing neighborhood schools or a private-school education.

Statistics show overall APS has some of the worst performing schools in Georgia.

Parents from four east Atlanta neighborhoods want a good neighborhood school to be an option. For years, middle-class families have moved out of the regentrified [sic] Grant Park neighborhood once they had children because of the quality of schools, said Phillip Andrews, a Grant Park father of two boys (Carter, 2000).

Again, the slant of the article is in favor of the charter-school effort, and the emphasis is on keeping middle-class families in the city.

Following Atlanta Public Schools's denial of NCS's initial charter, the newspaper published a supportive letter in its "Reader Responses" section of the newspaper. One of the advisers to the Neighborhood Charter School wrote a letter, in which he urged Atlanta Public Schools to help the NCS effort:

After hundreds of hours of meetings and consultations over two years, the steering committee developed a charter that defines high teaching and learning standards. The proposed curriculum combines the best elements of the current APS curriculum with a special feature that incorporates Zoo Atlanta. In their critique of the NCS petition, the APS complains that the plan 'lacks details of instructional materials and procedures.' Atlanta Superintendent Beverly Hall should be complimented for encouraging parent and neighborhood groups to submit charter school petitions. It is now time for the APS to help rather than hinder the best of those applicants" (DeHaan, Robert, professor at Emory University School of Medicine, in "Reader Responses" *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, December 8, 2000).

This letter urges Atlanta Public Schools to be supportive of charter schools. And, like a previous editorial, it accuses Atlanta Public Schools of being unnecessarily unsupportive of the NCS effort. The inclusion of the letter also reflects the close ties the NCS organizers have to the newspaper's editorial board.

The petition was approved in mid-December 2000. As recounted in chapter three, during 2001 and 2002, the NCS parents put together a teaching and administrative staff, and they worked on refurbishing Slaton Elementary. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported on the group's activities. In an article about the volunteer effort to refurbish Slaton Elementary to prepare for the opening of Neighborhood Charter School, journalist Paul Donsky paints a sympathetic picture of the school-renovation effort:¹¹

Like real estate speculators, the parents [involved in the Neighborhood Charter School] looked past the problems [with the Slaton building] and found a gem. The classrooms were bright and airy, with huge windows. Hardwood floors hid beneath floor tile. The main hallway was wide and tall...

¹¹ This is the article that piqued my interest in studying the school for my dissertation research.

The building, a throwback to the days when kids walked to the local school, seemed a great fit for the new Neighborhood Charter School.

“It’s what a public elementary school ought to look like, in our minds,” said parent Phil Andrews, who is renovating a nearly 100-year-old-bungalow near the school. “Maybe we’re a little nostalgic, [but] it reminds us of where we went to school when we were kids.”

Slowly the school is coming back to life. Parents and other volunteers are tearing up carpet, painting classrooms and patching walls to get the school ready for classes to start in August...

For some parents, the charter school will serve [a purpose other than a project-oriented curriculum]: a chance to raise a family in the city. For many years, middle-class couples who had helped turn around intown neighborhoods like Grant Park would eventually move to the suburbs to get away from what they perceive as poor-performing public schools.

‘We love our community,’ said parent Michelle Blackmon, a Grant Park resident. ‘We didn’t want to have to move out when our children became school-age.’

...The Neighborhood Charter parents have taken the start-up charter concept to a new level, practically building a school from scratch (Donsky, 2002b).

By describing the building as a “gem” and “coming back to life,” Donsky crafts a sympathetic narrative of the volunteer efforts of parents in Grant Park. He also credits the parents for taking the start-up charter concept “to a new level.” Donsky includes the familiar themes of keeping middle-class families in the neighborhood when they have school-age children. His only somewhat critical comment about the NCS effort is that the renovated building “stands in stark contrast to the gleaming new Parkside Elementary, which opened last August across Grant Park” (Donsky, 2002b). He then concludes the article by quoting the NCS parents as saying that they simply want to offer parents a choice. This article, featured in the “Metro” section of the newspaper, largely celebrates the renovated building and the effort put forth by residents in Grant Park. Although Donsky names Parkside, he leaves out any speculation of the (potentially negative) impacts the Neighborhood Charter School might have on the nearby traditional public school.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* only covers a few additional events in relation to the Neighborhood Charter School in 2002. In May, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported a volunteer work day at the school, where volunteers from businesses donated their time to the Slaton-renovation effort. The newspaper also reported the “celebratory mood” at the Neighborhood Charter School, when it opened on August 13, 2002 (Donsky, 2002h). Otherwise, the school was not profiled in the newspaper February 2003, when a fire caused significant damage to the NCS building.

News of the fire was mentioned on the front page of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Sunday edition. The paper reports the devastation of the parents and neighborhood residents, showing a photograph of a woman with tears in her eyes, and other residents hugging (figures 6.2 and 6.3). The article emphasized the emotional attachment that parents had to the school:

Sharon Kishbaugh shook her head in disbelief as she watched her beloved charter school in Grant Park burn Saturday afternoon...

‘I’m devastated,’ Kishbaugh said, tears welling in her eyes. ‘It was more than a school. It was a community.’...

Parents in the southeast Atlanta neighborhoods of Grant Park and Ormewood Park had spent about a year fixing up the 95-year-old Slaton building for the charter school, which opened last August with 105 students.

They restored the school room by room, turning what had been a run-down dilapidated building into their vision of what a neighborhood school should look like. Parents did most of the work themselves, volunteering on weekends.

On Saturday, parents wept and hugged on the sidewalk as the school burned.

‘We literally have so much sweat equity in this,’ said parent Elizabeth Zappa. ‘It’s the very fabric of who we are. It’s not some impersonal building where you bring your child’...’ (Donsky, 2003d).

The author focuses on the personal attachments of the residents to their school, which emphasizes the emotional loss that the fire wrought. Also apparent in this article is an explicit characterization of the school as the site of community for parents and Grant Park residents.

After the Neighborhood Charter School had temporarily settled into nearby St. Paul's United Methodist Church, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported on the progress of the school and the donations it had received. For example, the article reported that Office Depot donated \$500 in equipment, giving each student a hand held white board. In addition, the article reported more sentimental efforts:

Some donors have walked in off the street. A woman brought a peanut can full of change, which she said was all the money she could spare. A man, who said he graduated from Slaton in 1946, gave \$40 and asked for an address so he could send more.

'I've known since the day I arrived that the community support for this school is exceptional,' Rosswurm said. 'This has only reaffirmed how exceptional it is.'

'The school was fully insured, and parents are committed to rebuilding the school,' said Michelle Blackmon, chairwoman of the school's board. 'It really is a home for so many of us,' she said. The children have been especially hard hit, she said (Donsky, 2003e).

These details about a woman bringing in a peanut can full of change and the school as a lost home evoke emotional, sympathetic responses. This article also conveys a sense of community attachment that neighborhood residents have for the school.

A little over a month after the fire, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported on the possible cause of the fire. The title of the story, which appeared in the "Metro" section, was "Probe points to arson in charter school fire; burn marks on the floor raise suspicions" (Donsky, 2003f). Donsky, the journalist who wrote the story, interviewed a representative of the Atlanta Fire Department's arson unit, who stated that the department had "definitely found what appear to be pour patterns where we believe the fire started" (Donsky, 2003f). Donsky also interviewed Jackie Rosswurm, who was "stunned by the news. 'It's hard for me to imagine that anybody, for any reason, would do something like this,' she said. 'So there is a sense of sadness about it,...'" (Donsky, 2003f). Interestingly, after several more weeks of investigation, the fire department

determined the cause of the fire to be faulty wiring in the lighting system. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* did not report the correction.¹²

The fire also brought out a new set of tensions between the Neighborhood Charter School and Atlanta Public Schools. Following the fire, APS and NCS engaged in several months of negotiation to clarify the insurance policies that both groups had for the building. The conflict was captured in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in several articles. In the initial telling of the dispute, the journalist characterized the situation as complicated:

...at its core is whether the charter parents have enough insurance to cover the cost of rebuilding the school, which is required in their lease with APS.

The communication between lawyers for both sides has gotten ugly, with Rodney Moore, the school system's lawyer, suggesting that the charter school may have intentionally underinsured the Slaton building, perhaps to save money.

In a July 18 letter, Moore wrote that the school was 'in clear breach of the lease' and 'with willful disregard to the injury that it would inflict on APS... grossly underinsured the property.'

...Mike Nations, the charter school's lawyer, adamantly denied the school had done anything improper with its insurance policy. 'That's such a total distortion,' he said. 'These volunteers that have started this school from scratch have just worked so hard... They have no incentive to underinsure the building' (Donsky, 2003a).

The dispute over insurance coverage was exacerbated by threats from Atlanta Public Schools to demolish the building. According to the *AJC* article, the facilities services director for APS drove by the school and was "stunned at the state of disrepair" (Donsky, 2003a). Thereafter she recommended that the school board approve the hiring of a demolition firm to tear the school down.

The threat of demolition drew negative reactions from NCS staff and parents. The article quoted Jackie Rosswurm, the school's principal, as saying that the school was under attack by Atlanta Public Schools:

¹² I learned of the cause of the fire on the Neighborhood Charter School website, which was confirmed by members of the governing board, several weeks after the "arson" article was published.

‘They do not want to see us succeed; they look at us as a rival and a threat,’ she said. ‘I truly believe that because we are succeeding that they want to do everything and anything they can to stop us (Donsky, 2003a).

An NCS parent was also interviewed, and her comments echoed Dr. Rosswurm’s sentiments: “‘I am frustrated with APS because I just feel like they really haven’t shown us any support at all, from the point when the fire took place, and this is sort of the last straw,’” (Donsky, 2003a). For the most part, the coverage about the insurance dispute favored the Neighborhood Charter School in terms of the kinds of quotations that were included. The newspaper painted the picture of a school that was not only victimized by a fire but by the whims of an insensitive, bureaucratic Atlanta Public Schools.

Two days later, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* followed up on the dispute by reporting on a rally the Neighborhood Charter School parents and supporters organized. The article reflected a more neutral tone than earlier coverage of the school. In the article, the journalist reported that the demolition threat had been “taken off the table” by Atlanta Public Schools (Sager, 2003).

The final coverage of events involving the Neighborhood Charter School came several days later with an editorial published by the staff of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The title of the editorial, written by the staff, was “Adjust system’s attitude toward charter schools” (2003) (figure 6.4):

Atlanta Public School Superintendent Beverly Hall insists that she wants to see charter schools flourish. If so, that view is not shared by her upper-level bureaucracy, based on the near-death experience of Grant Park’s Neighborhood Charter School.

After opening a year ago in the old Slaton Elementary, the parent-founded school suffered a setback in February when a fire gutted the interior. With the same resolve that led them to raise half million dollars to win the charter in the first place, the Grant Park parents vowed to rebuild the historic, century-old building after a city building inspector deemed it salvageable.

Parents then began talking to their insurance carrier and reconstruction experts. But rather than become a partner in this effort, the school system responded with hostility....

The Grant Park school's active and influential parent body, which includes Atlanta Councilwoman Carla Smith, rallied to stall the wrecking ball. The political savvy and sheer determination of the parents probably will save Neighborhood Charter. However, there's no real happy ending to this story unless Hall takes a wrecking ball to the wall of antagonism at APS toward charter schools...

In this final editorial, the newspaper again urges Atlanta Public Schools to be more supportive of charter schools. Using a metaphor of a "wall of antagonism" between the school district and the Neighborhood Charter School, the newspaper characterizes the Neighborhood Charter School as a victim of the "hostility" of Atlanta Public Schools. Also in this editorial is a recognition of the political savvy of the parents who are involved in the school. This political savvy has involved connections with City Hall (as evidenced by the mention of Carla Smith, Atlanta Councilwoman, in the above editorial) and the Governor's mansion, and, as evidenced above, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

NCS's connection to Atlanta's power centers

The relationship between NCS organizers and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was mentioned several times in both interviews and at NCS Governing Board meetings. One founder of the charter school was employed by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and still has close ties to the staff there. Following the denial of the NCS group's charter for Parkside, one organizer stated that the group

went into media mode... Stephen¹³ used to work with the Atlanta paper and knows Cynthia Tucker [who is an editorial staff member at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*]. So Stephen calls Cynthia, who is very supportive of what we've been doing. She writes a big editorial about how APS did this to us, the next thing you know Dr. Hall [the APS Superintendent] is telling [the APS charter-school representative] to figure out how to make this happen, to work with us to

¹³ The name has been changed.

make our charter happen, and again, it's political. I don't know how, but we're very politically savvy. We've been able to work the media and the local politics. And I'd like to think it's because we're sincere. We're doing a good thing" (C.N.).

That one of the founders was an employee of the newspaper and has a friendship with the editorial page editor represents a significant connection that the Neighborhood Charter School has to power brokers in Atlanta. This link between the Neighborhood Charter School and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* may explain the frequency of editorials written by the *AJC* staff. The school, by using the clout of the only major newspaper in Atlanta, was able to put pressure on Atlanta Public Schools to approve its charter, to provide support after the fire, and to relent on its plans to demolish the school. Indeed, at an NCS Board meeting following the fire, one board member stated that the group was taking "deliberate measures" with the media to put pressure on Atlanta Public Schools (February 19th NCS Board Meeting).

Another way in which the Neighborhood Charter School has links with centers of power in Atlanta is its relationship with political actors in the region, including the Governor and Atlanta City Hall. The Neighborhood Charter School has had the attention of the Governor's office—both during Governor Roy Barnes's term and that of Sonny Perdue. For example, Governor Roy Barnes participated in the opening ceremony of the Neighborhood Charter School. Governor Sonny Perdue gave the Neighborhood Charter School a \$10,000 grant from his discretionary emergency fund following the fire that damaged the Slaton building.

Following the announcement by Atlanta Public Schools that it was considering demolishing the fire-damaged building, parents and the NCS staff quickly organized a press conference and rally to generate support for rebuilding the school. They generated awareness

about their press conference by emailing supporters and neighborhood members.¹⁴ According to one parent, between 50 and 75 people showed up for the rally on short notice. The newspaper covered the event, highlighting the presence of Carla Smith, an Atlanta City Councilwoman, whose child attends the Neighborhood Charter School. She was quoted as saying, ““Everyone is involved. We’ve got every level of government almost up to Washington DC standing here today” (Sager, 2003). The quotation suggests that the Neighborhood Charter School has greater—and more important—support than does Atlanta Public Schools. As recounted above, following the rally, the demolition plans were shelved by APS.

Conclusion

As my analysis of the articles in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* shows, charter schools are portrayed as a strategy to achieve a vibrant city. They are seen as a way to keep middle class families in the city and as an answer to the ills of urban neighborhoods—public schools. The newspaper articles implicitly suggest the formation of community around a locally-designed school. Charter schools are also seen as a tool for economic development, in terms of training a local workforce to be competitive on a global scale.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* has a straightforward motive in promoting what it perceives to be a pro-middle-class institution. As part of the business/civic coalition that constitutes the urban regime in Atlanta, it has a financial interest in maintaining a middle-class readership. This interest has as much to do with maintaining subscription sales as it does with selling advertising space. According to the “Advertising with the *AJC*” section of the newspaper’s website, the newspaper claims to “capture over 1.6 million adult readers over five

¹⁴ I received two emails—one from the Grant Park Neighborhood Association listserv encouraging all Grant Park Neighborhood Association members to join the rally, and one from a neighbor who knew I was conducting research on the school. I also received a series of telephone calls about the rally from the school-community liaison representative on the Governing Board of the school. The demolition plans were announced on a Friday and the press conference, attended by more than fifty supporters, was held on Sunday afternoon.

weekdays, or 57% of adult readers,” and over four Sundays, it “captures 72% of the adults in the 20-county Atlanta MSA” (“AJC Readership,” 2001). The website also features an “Upscale Readership” link, which claims that 61% of adults in the metropolitan Atlanta region who earn \$75,000 or more read the *AJC* over five weekdays, Monday through Friday. On weekends (or over four Sundays), the newspaper claims to reach eighty-one percent of adults who earn \$75,000 or more (“AJC Readership,” 2001). These statistics on the readership of the newspaper are important for enticing businesses—particularly local Atlanta businesses—to purchase advertising space. If they are guaranteed a certain *middle class* readership, then businesses are more likely to see the newspaper as an important method for advertising.

The local needs of the newspaper to maintain a middle-class readership (to sell ads, etc.) is part of a broader need of an urban regime to maintain a healthy city. Stone (1989: 7) argues that urban regimes, which are comprised of public bodies and private groups, have a need “to encourage business investment in order to have an economically thriving community.” Perceived disruptions to business investment, such as poor schools or a faltering infrastructure, need to be overcome in order for a city to thrive. Indeed, Stone (1989) provides a historical example of how urban regimes can function to dissipate potentially disruptive social issues that might reflect poorly on a city as a whole.

In Stone’s (1989) recounting of the forced desegregation of schools in Atlanta in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he characterizes the social and political momentum of the desegregation events as one that was mediated by Atlanta’s urban regime. Stone (1989: 49) provides an illustration of how the *Atlanta Constitution*, in conjunction with church groups, the business community, the League of Women Voters, the Board of Education, and an array of other civic organizations came together to oppose the resistance to school desegregation in 1959:

The mayor's office, the school system, and the police department acted with unity of purpose [in school desegregation]. The business community and its civic allies played an active and crucial role. The Atlanta news media... was cooperative, contributing to a climate of order and peaceable acceptance.

This example reflects a coordinated effort on the part of the public and private groups to make sure that the desegregation of schools in Atlanta did not repeat the racial clashes that occurred in Birmingham, where violence punctuated the integration of the public school system (Stone, 1989; Pomerantz, 1996). The peaceful desegregation of schools was in the best interest of the public-private partnerships that made up Atlanta's urban regime. A violent reaction to desegregation might drive away businesses and damage Atlanta's reputation as a (business-) friendly city.

Likewise, it is in the interest of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the broader business community to emphasize positive aspects of Atlanta's "public goods." Given that charter schools are seen as a strategy to promote community, and by extension to keep middle class families invested in the city, they are perceived as instrumental to the success of the city as a whole. Indeed, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* coverage of charter schools emphasizes the potential for charter schools to right the wrongs of a large public-education bureaucracy and to encourage middle-class families to remain in the city's public schools.

The interest that newspapers, such as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, have in shaping the reputation of a city can also be beneficial to groups who need the support of government institutions that are often part of the public-private urban regimes. By engaging the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in its cause, the Neighborhood Charter School was able to leverage the power of the newspaper to paint a sympathetic picture of the school and its efforts. This sympathetic portrayal, in turn, helped to put pressure on Atlanta Public Schools to approve the school's charter and to retreat from demolishing the fire-damaged building. By picking up the

telephone and calling the editors of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the Neighborhood Charter School organizers were able to utilize Atlanta's urban regime.

The relationship between urban regimes and charter schools sheds light on several dimensions of changing state-society relations. First, it suggests the importance of the urban scale for producing and consuming new institutions such as charter schools. Given that cities are important sites for capital accumulation, urban regimes are seeking new strategies to attract (and keep) capital investment. As such, they are turning to realms of social-service provision previously provided by the state in order to maintain livable cities. Charter schools, as public-private institutions with the potential to build community, are in effect part of a new approach to economic development at the urban scale. The relationship between charter schools and urban regimes is not one way, however: urban regimes can be instrumental for the success of charter schools.

Given that the design, management, and operation of a charter school requires extensive private investment in the form of volunteer labor and monetary donations (including the ability to attract public monies), charter schools are subject to greater economic insecurity than are traditional public schools. As such, charter schools often need to leverage powerful interests to ensure political favor and economic solvency. In the case of the Neighborhood Charter School, the organizers were able to connect to Atlanta's urban regime, through the direct relationship NCS members had with the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. They were able to put pressure on the state itself (Atlanta Public Schools) to elicit resources and to mitigate opposition to their charter school. The relationship between the Neighborhood Charter School and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* suggests the differential position that those in power—or who are connected to power—have for participating or practicing citizenship in charter schools.

In sum, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* portrayed charter schools—and the Neighborhood Charter School in particular—as providing middle-class families with the choice to avoid the unresponsive bureaucracy of traditional public schools. Charter schools are instrumental to the success of cities in that they offer families a reason to be invested in their local communities and neighborhoods, a claim that is investigated in more detail in the next chapter. Also in evidence is the role that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* played in keeping the Neighborhood Charter School in operation. Connections to urban regimes can be essential for the survival of charter schools.

Table 6.1: Distribution of Charter-School Articles by Section

Section	Number of articles¹⁵
Atlanta & the World	2
Business	1
Business Horizon	2
City Life Midtown	10
Clayton/Henry	9
Cobb	2
Coweta	1
Dekalb	5
East Metro	1
Editorial	12
Fayette	7
Metro News	36
News	1
North Fulton	2
South Metro	4
Total	96

¹⁵ Because there are 96 total articles, the *percentage* of articles that appear in each section is roughly equivalent to the number of articles in each section.

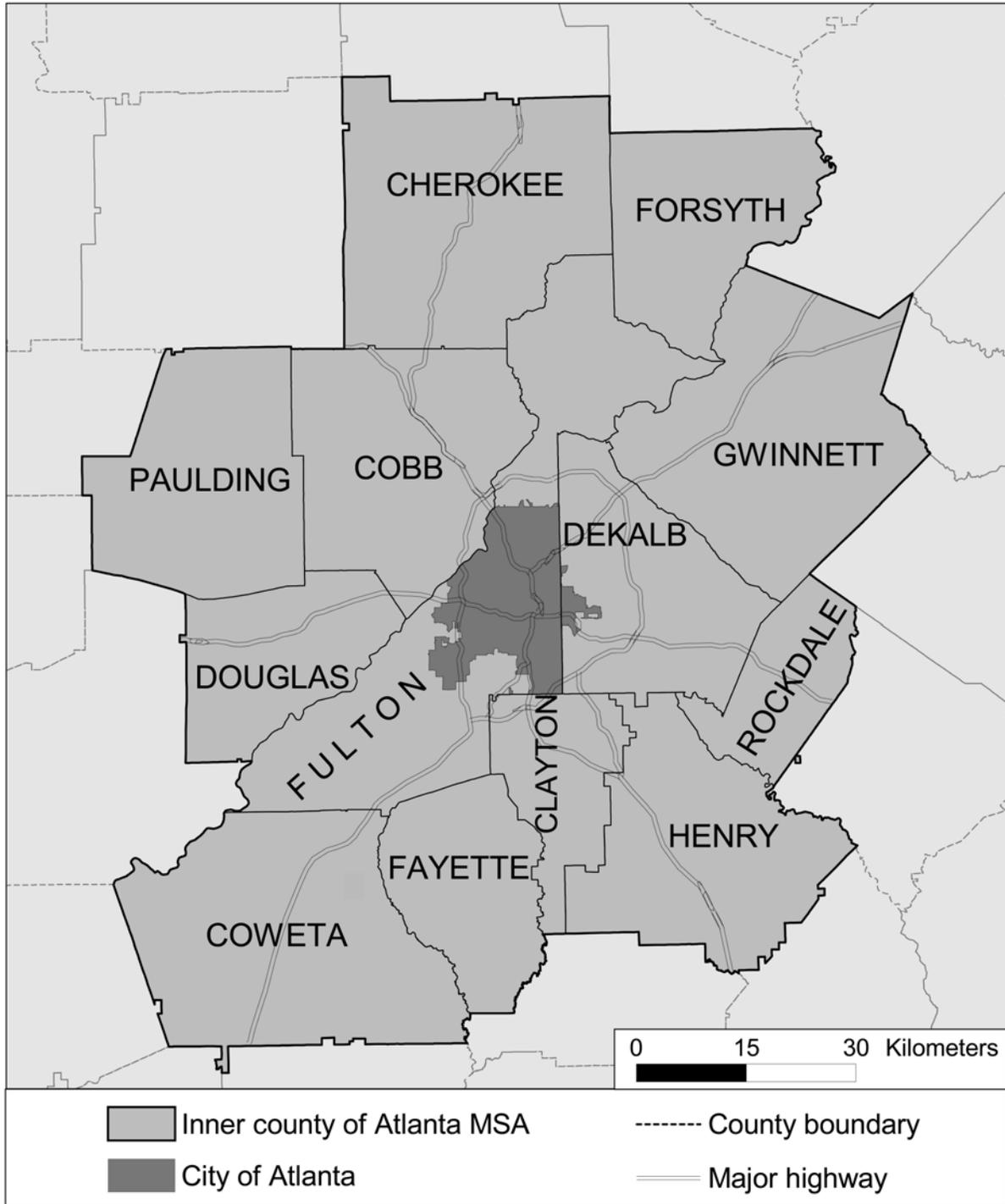


Figure 6.1: Map of Metro-Atlanta Counties

OBITUARIES INSIDE

A man made for music

Put a drum in his hands, and Bill Fry set toes tapping. A versatile musician who had a 20-year career with U.S. Army bands, he was equally adept playing big band, concert and marching music. E6



EVERY WEEK

- > **Sunday-Friday:** The Vent
- > **Monday-Saturday:** Close to Home
- > **Monday:** Spotlight Investigative Team
- > **Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday:** Colin Campbell
- > **Sunday, Wednesday, Friday:** Lane Ranger by Joey Ledford

THE WEB

> Go to ajc.com news and info Clayton, Cobb ette, north and Henry and Ros

Loss of housing funds threatens

By ADD SEYMOUR JR. aseymour@ajc.com

Eight months ago, President Bush planned to tour a new Atlanta apartment community that had risen where one of the city's worst housing projects once stood.

But Bush changed his mind and went elsewhere. He decided the Villages at Carver — a place

transformed from crime-ridden Carver Homes by an ambitious federal housing program called HOPE VI — wasn't in tune with his ideas on boosting home ownership.

Now the Bush administration has forsaken HOPE VI, which aims to decentralize poverty by creating mixed-income communities in place of the nation's most distressed public housing.

Sue Popkin, a senior researcher with the Washington-based Urban Institute, said several problems have riddled the program, but it's still too early to gauge its success.

"We don't know the whole story on HOPE VI because there's never been any systematic evaluation of the total program," she said. "But generally, HOPE VI has been a positive thing because there is a lot of

distressed housing that replaced."

Under the 10-year-old Atlanta Housing Authority's crime-infested districts including Carver Homes Clark Howell Homes and Meadows, a southeast Atlanta site so violent it was nicknamed "Vietnam." Those sites are to the Villages at Carver



Parents and neighbors console one another at Neighborhood Charter School in southeast Atlanta. A three-alarm blaze gutted the top two floors of the former Slaton Elementary on Saturday. "It was more than a school. It was a community," one parent said.

School fire devastates parents

Opened last year, Grant Park charter damaged in blaze

By PAUL DONSKY p.donsky@ajc.com

Sharon Kishbaugh shook her head in disbelief as she watched her beloved charter school in Grant Park burn Saturday afternoon.

No children were in the Neighborhood Charter School at the time, but damage to the nearly 100-year-old building appeared extensive. The fire tore two floors of the three-story brick school largely gutted, Atlanta firefighters said.

The first floor, home to classrooms, offices and auditorium, suffered water damage.

On ajc.com

> On ajc.com: Photos from the Neighborhood Charter School fire.

"I'm devastated," Kishbaugh said, tears welling in her eyes. "It was more than a school. It was a community."

Firefighters said Saturday they had not yet determined the cause of the blaze. They said the three-alarm fire, reported about 3:30 p.m., appeared to start on the third floor, an area being renovated for use as classrooms.

Parents in the southeast Atlanta neighborhoods of Grant Park and Ormeswood Park had spent about a year fixing the old Slaton Elementary building at 688 Grant St. for the charter school, which opened in August with 105 students.

> Please see NEIGHBORHOOD, E4



The cause of the blaze, which appeared to start on the third floor, had not been determined.

Figure 6.2: AJC Coverage of the Neighborhood Charter School Fire



W.A. BRIDGES JR. / Staff
Firefighters work on a blaze at Neighborhood Charter School in Grant Park on Saturday afternoon. Firefighters said there was little hope to save more than the brick walls of the building.

Neighborhood Charter burns

> Continued from E1

They restored the school room by room, turning what had been a dilapidated building into their vision of what a neighborhood school should look like. Parents did most of the work themselves, volunteering on weekends.

On Saturday, parents wept and hugged on the sidewalk as the school burned.

"We literally have so much sweat equity in this," said parent Elizabeth Zappa. "It's the very fabric of who we are. It's not some impersonal building where you bring your child."

Principal Jackie Rosswurm vowed the school would not close. She planned to meet with parents today to figure out a way to resume classes Monday. Several local churches offered to let the school use their classroom space, Rosswurm said.

"We will continue school. The building does not make the school," Rosswurm said. "It's a terrible thing, but it's not the end of Neighborhood



A fireman from Station 11 awaits water from his colleagues.

funds for building needs. Neighborhood Charter relied on grants and donations to refurbish their school.

The charter school pays Atlanta Public Schools \$500

SCHOOL FIRE

The building that once housed Slaton Elementary School burned Saturday.



MATIE ROULEY / Staff

Hispanic and 2 percent Asian, Rosswurm said.

For parents, seeing their hard work go up in flames

Figure 6.3: AJC Coverage of the Neighborhood Charter School Burning

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

@issue

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OUR OPINIONS

Adjust system's attitude toward charter schools

Atlanta Public School Superintendent Beverly Hall insists that she wants to see charter schools flourish. If so, that view is not shared by her upper-level bureaucracy, based on the near-death experience of Grant Park's Neighborhood Charter School.

After opening a year ago in the old Slaton Elementary, the parent-founded school suffered a setback in February when a fire gutted the interior. With the same resolve that led them to raise a half million dollars to win the charter in the first place, the Grant Park parents vowed to rebuild the historic, century-old building after a city building inspector deemed it salvageable.

Parents then began talking to their insurance carrier and reconstruction experts. But rather than become a partner in this effort, the school system responded with hostility.

School attorney Rodney Moore threatened to terminate the charter school's 15-year lease on Slaton, citing doubts that the charter school's \$4 million insurance policy was sufficient or whether the system's own policy on Slaton would come into play.

Then, a few weeks ago, APS facilities director Valerie Thomas recommended Slaton's demolition because of safety concerns. (Her timing seems odd since the building is sturdier now than when it burned; the damaged interior had to be shored up to enable fire and insurance inspectors safe entry.)

The Grant Park school's active and influential parent body, which includes Atlanta Councilwoman Carla Smith, rallied to stall

the wrecking ball. The political savvy and sheer determination of the parents probably will save Neighborhood Charter. However, there's no real happy ending to this story unless Hall takes a wrecking ball to the wall of antagonism at APS toward charter schools.

Charter schools operate on a publicly approved, customized contract that frees them from most outside regulations. Most are started by educators, for-profit companies or universities, but a small percentage, such as Neighborhood, are created from scratch by parents dissatisfied with their local school. The public education establishment views charters and their freedom with deep suspicion, either blocking the schools entirely or keeping them few and financially starved.

Though striking successes can be documented in the fledgling charter school movement, there's a trail of expensive failures, and Atlanta has every right to monitor the academic progress of Neighborhood and its six other charters. However, the system should not undermine the schools or throw needless obstacles in their already difficult path.

Hall has not said anything publicly about the controversy and was out of town during the heat of it. From APS' softened stance, it's obvious that she is now involved and counseling a more conciliatory tone.

She has to go even further; Hall has to make her staffers understand that their first responsibility is not preserving the school system. It's educating children, whether they sit in a traditional classroom or a charter school.

Figure 6.4: AJC Editorial in Support of Charter Schools

CHAPTER 7: CREATING COMMUNITY AND RESCALING NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH A NEIGHBORHOOD INSTITUTION

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, charter schools provide a compelling institution through which to examine a variety of political, social, and economic dynamics. Charter schools are a new form of public education that provides individuals opportunities to practice social citizenship, and they are a strategy to encourage middle-class residents to remain in urban areas. A key facet of charter schools which highlights their position as sites of citizenship and community is that they can be created and managed by local residents. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which individuals created a charter school specifically to be a neighborhood institution and the impact this institution has on the social cohesion of the greater neighborhood.

‘Neighborhood’ is a term that is used by community activists, government officials, real estate agents, urban planners, and by average people. As recounted in chapter two, the term has a variety of meanings, which includes a territorial designation, a sense of social interaction, and a political unit in urban governance. Importantly, as Martin (1999, 2002, 2003) points out, the concept of neighborhood is most fundamentally rooted in the experience of place. It is a “moment” in the flows of capital (Massey, 1994, in Martin, 2002). Furthermore, it can function as a powerful social imaginary, where neighborhood suggests community (Martin, 2003). In fact, the term neighborhood is often used interchangeably with community, as data from my interviews will indicate. Yet community does not necessarily mean territory: it connotes a group of people with common interests, regardless of location.

This chapter examines how discourses of neighborhood and community are used strategically to construct the Neighborhood Charter School as a neighborhood institution. Issues of community and neighborhood scale become apparent challenges for the charter-school organizers when they are forced to include a larger territory in their definition of neighborhood. The two major sections in this chapter explore the relationship between social community and physical, geographic neighborhood. In the first section, I review meanings of community used by charter-school organizers to illustrate how vague—and yet central—this concept is in the formation of the school. Community has many different meanings for the organizers, and as such, it becomes a strategic discourse to suggest the inclusion of a range of social groups across several neighborhoods. In the second section, I discuss the different territorial bases of neighborhood that the charter-school organizers are forced to include. The rescaling of their school’s attendance zone created social conflict when the organizers attempted to broaden their social interactions to match the new neighborhood boundaries. To understand how the school functions as a neighborhood institution (with a complicated definition of neighborhood), I assess the way in which a small sample of residents of the neighborhood region respond to or “perceive” the school. What is evident is that the school does act as an important neighborhood institution for many residents of the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods—but not for all.

Research Approach

In order answer questions about how the Neighborhood Charter School affects the neighborhood dynamics of the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods, I turn to several sources of data. First, I examine the charter petition as a text that articulates the vision of the school for the organizers. To understand how the school was conceptualized as a neighborhood institution, I interviewed individuals who were among the original organizers of the school, and

members of the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 Governing Boards. In total I interviewed twelve of the original organizers (including a consultant), ten board members, three parents of NCS students, five neighborhood residents (including Parkside PTA officers, the Grant Park Neighborhood Association president, and the Grant Park Conservancy director), and the Operations Assistant for the Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools¹.

To understand the perceptions of Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods' residents broadly, I conducted a survey. I distributed the questionnaire to 400 households (see chapter four for more details of my survey method and response rate) and asked participants to identify important social spaces in their neighborhood. I also asked them to assess their impressions of the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary to ascertain whether the two schools have different roles or elicit different impressions in the neighborhood (even though they are both public schools). Finally, participants were asked to identify socioeconomic and demographic data about themselves, including their income, their race/ethnicity, whether they have children in school (and where), marital status, and how long they had lived in the neighborhood. This information was used to consider how different social groups relate to the Neighborhood Charter School.

Community and the Neighborhood Charter School

In conversation with many of the organizers and Board members about the Neighborhood Charter School, the term “community” was used quite frequently. To understand what the term community means to the organizers and how they see the relationship between “community” and the charter school, I analyzed the ways in which the word community is used in the charter petition. The petition articulates the overall vision the organizers had for the school. In addition,

¹ The person I interviewed, Ed Shaw, retired in 1995 but continued to work as a consultant on attendance-zone issues until the late 1990s.

as required by Atlanta Public Schools, the organizers included in their petition a section that discusses their efforts to maintain community support. The charter, then, explicitly addresses the meaning of community for the overall goal and day-to-day operations of the Neighborhood Charter School. Thus, I turn to these two expressions of community to understand how the organizers used and operationalized the concept.

Community in the charter petition.

The word “community” appears 122 times in the 36 pages of the main part of the charter petition (the charter includes more than 150 pages of appendices). In the document, community is used to refer to social relationships among different groups—and in some cases, it is used interchangeably with the term neighborhood. More specifically, the organizers seem to define community as a broad group of neighborhood residents, as neighborhood organizations, and as social groups defined by socioeconomic and racial/ethnic characteristics. In several instances, the term community is used to refer to NCS organizers/petition-writers who identify themselves as “the community.”

Community equals residents of Grant Park

As mentioned in chapter five, NCS organizers articulated their school as the responsibility of the community:

a charter school is a commitment by a **community** to all of its children. This commitment is based on the belief that parents/guardians and the local **community** hold the primary responsibility to ensure that all children in their neighborhood school, regardless of race, economics, or culture have access to, and success in, public education. As one **community**, the residents of Grant Park, Ormewood Park and the surrounding neighborhoods are prepared to meet this responsibility through the establishment of the Neighborhood Charter School (cover letter, Charter Petition, 2000, emphasis added).

In this opening portion of the Neighborhood Charter School’s charter petition, the organizers refer to the community both as a group of people who presumably live near children and as the

residents of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, and surrounding neighborhoods. Community refers both to a specific group of people and to a group of people in general. Furthermore, in the same paragraph the organizers claim that “as one community, the residents of Grant Park, Ormewood Park and the surrounding neighborhoods” will take on the responsibility of educating children. In this sentence, community has a different meaning. It shifts from describing a general group of people to implying that the organizers of the school are one community. Furthermore, they characterize the support of their effort as one that is by “the community”:

This has been a true grassroots effort. Three years in the making, the charter petition has survived the struggles that are inherent to a true democratic process. This charter has survived leadership changes, community tension and miscommunications. In the end, however, the community emerged united and determined to enthusiastically support this charter for the benefit of all children (charter petition, 2000).

There is an implicit suggestion that the organizers of the school constitute the community. This intentional slippage from community as “out there” to a suggestion that the organizers are the community is strategic. This slippage implies that the organizers intend for Atlanta Public Schools to view them as representative of and able to serve the neighborhood area as a socially cohesive community.

Community as neighborhood organizations

Elsewhere in the charter petition, the writers suggest community is constituted by other organizations in the neighborhood:

One of the Neighborhood Charter School’s most valuable resources is its community. Zoo Atlanta—located within walking distance from the Grant Street school site—has committed to working with the new school to develop a model partnership... The Alliance Theater [a nearby theater company] will be a critical partner in developing and meeting the artistic and creative needs of the students. The Neighborhood Charter School will actively seek additional partnerships with community organizations to address and support student, family, and community issues and concerns (charter petition, “Academic Design”, 2000).

Community is not just a group of people in these references, but it is made up of organizations and institutions. Community also includes local businesses: “The Neighborhood Charter School is about community, and consequently, the school will depend on the involvement and expertise from the business, nonprofit and community-based organizations that surround the school” (Governance and Management, charter petition, 2000). The definition of community is broadened to include businesses and other organizations.

Community as distinct social groups

Community is also used to mean different social groups, in terms of culture, race, socioeconomic status, and residence. In the following passage, which is drawn from the “School Governing Board” portion of the charter, community refers to distinct social groups:

It is the intent of NCS to ensure full representation of all communities and families in the NCS community on the Governing Board. Our goal is to have a Governing Board that is culturally, economically, geographically, and racially diverse” (“School Governing Board”, charter petition, 2000).

In this quotation, community implies both a territorial designation (the NCS community—clearly delineated by an attendance zone), and different social groups within that territory (“all communities and families”). Likewise, in the description of the educational program of the school, community is plural and refers to different social groups within the NCS region:

The diversity of these² communities includes diversity of income, family structures and health issues. The Neighborhood Charter School is committed to supporting, encouraging and helping all children faced with daily challenges beyond their control. The Neighborhood Charter School Governing Board and the Parent/Teacher/Community Association (PTCA) will investigate appropriate curriculum and learning opportunities that have proven successful in helping students in at-risk situations succeed (charter petition, “Educational Program,” 2000).

Another part of the charter also refers to community as being constituted by different groups:

“Our vision is that all the children of our community, lower-income and middle-class, African-

² The sentence begins a paragraph. There is no clear antecedent for “these”.

American and white, Asian and Hispanic, will together attend a challenging, nurturing, and egalitarian school... “ (NCS charter petition, appendix J, number 7, 2000). Here different social groups are within a singular group—”our community”.

As chapter four described, the neighborhood of Grant Park and Ormewood Park is racially and socioeconomically diverse. Of the approximately 8,700 people living in the neighborhoods, approximately 57.4% are white; 37.2% are African American, 0.9% are Asian, and the remainder are self-identified as some other race.³ In terms of income, 22.3 % reported incomes of less than \$20,000; 36.6% reported incomes between \$20,000 and \$50,000; 17.8% had incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000; and 23.4% reported incomes over \$75,000. By referencing these different groups as communities within the broader neighborhood community, the organizers are acknowledging the social diversity in the neighborhood. By asserting that these communities will be welcome in the (singular) NCS community, they are seeking to portray their representativeness of the neighborhoods’ social diversity. Again, they are using the term community strategically to market their school concept to Atlanta Public Schools.

Community as neighborhood association members

In the structure of the Governing Board, there are two “Community Representatives” elected by the Grant Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA) and the South Atlantans for Neighborhood Development (SAND). The community representatives are specifically members of neighborhood organizations. Likewise, a vote of support from a neighborhood institution is equated with community support: “A unanimous vote of support for the charter school concept was received from the community during the October 1998 meeting of the Grant Park Neighborhood Association” (Appendix J, item 7, charter petition, 2000). Interestingly, this definition of community is further specified as time-specific. Community includes those

³ The U.S. Census considers Latino/Hispanic as an ethnicity not a race.

residents who voted favorably to support the charter-school effort (in a non-binding vote) at their neighborhood association meeting in October of 1998. In both of these examples, the meaning of community is quite different from social groups or the residents of Grant Park and Ormewood Park. By including neighborhood associations in their definition of community, the organizers broaden the definition. This flexibility in the meaning of community enables the charter-petitioners to deploy the concept strategically by suggesting that the organizers are representative of (or supported by) the formal neighborhood organizations.

Community is synonymous with neighborhood

Throughout the charter document, the use of community often refers to neighborhood. In one example, community refers explicitly to the geographic neighborhoods: “The Neighborhood Charter School is the vision of four communities. Significant effort has been made to engage and educate the neighborhoods about the charter school over the past three years...” (“Length of contract, implementation timetable, and evidence of support” charter petition, 2000). In this example, the “four” communities are unambiguously synonymous with the four neighborhoods of Grant Park, Ormewood Park, North Ormewood Park, and McDonough-Guice⁴.

Community: from the city to the self.

In several instances, the organizers use community to refer to a vague scale of people or social relationships. It is used to refer to a group of people that is greater than residents of a neighborhood—but at a somewhat non-specific scale: “The Grant Park Neighborhood School will be a small, secure haven in the city guided by a governing board composed of closely involved parents. The school will rekindle the larger community’s commitment to all its

⁴ Although, as I later discuss, most organizers of the charter-school effort were from Grant Park; the remainder were from Ormewood Park.

children...” (NCS charter petition, appendix J, number 7, 2000). It is unclear if the community encompasses the City of Atlanta or some other territorial expanse.

In another section of the charter, community again suggests some broad, undefined geographic area. In the “Exemptions from state and local regulations, Support from the community” section, under “objectives for encouraging family and community involvement,” the first point reads “A Community Partnerships Committee Chair, [whose] role [is] to serve as liaison between the school, the surrounding neighborhoods and the larger community” (NCS charter petition, “Exemptions from the state and local regulations,” 2000). The larger community is some region beyond the neighborhoods of southeast Atlanta. The territorial scale of community in this example is vague.

In other passages, the scale of community shifts from one sentence to the next. In the following paragraph, community refers to a group of people across several neighborhoods:

The neighborhoods involved with this charter petition have overcome doubts, misunderstandings, miscommunication and disagreements to work together for the benefit of all children in this community. We believe that parents, guardians and the community can, and must, be active, supportive and pivotal partners in the education process. The community, as one, is ready to accept that responsibility (Conclusion, charter petition, 2000).

Within the passage, the meaning of community shifts from a multi-neighborhood group of people, who seem to be “out there” to a suggestion that the community is the author of the document (“The community, as one, is ready...”). Likewise, in the “Governance and Management” section of the petition, the organizers assert that “In drafting this document, the community sought advice and guidance from numerous educators in traditional and charter schools, as well as representatives from the Atlanta Public School, the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education” (NCS charter petition,

2000). In these examples, the word “community” is equated with the charter-school organizers. They assert themselves as the community.

The charter petition presents a complicated notion, then, of community. The word is used to refer to a group of neighborhoods, social groups within neighborhoods, formal neighborhood organizations, a broad, city-wide constituency, and the charter-school organizers themselves. The vagueness of the term allows it to be used strategically and to refer to a range of social imaginaries—from those based on social characteristics, such as race, class, and ethnicity, to those based on a geographically-specific group of people.

Also explicit in the petitioners’ discussions of community is a mutually-constitutive relationship between the school and the community. The concluding paragraphs of the charter make this quite clear:

We seek to revive the **community** and parental involvement which is at the heart of the highest traditions of public education; to develop a truly diverse neighborhood school that is open and welcoming to all; and to create an environment of high academic achievement which leverages the expertise and dedication of both Atlanta Public Schools and our energized parents and **community**. ...

We have outlined in this document our aspirations to achieve the highest levels of educational achievement; to build a rich **community** of support around the school and its educational program; to ensure that the needs of all children are met regardless of social, ethnic or racial background; and to motivate all families in our **community** to send their children to public schools...

Over the nearly three years during which we have worked to build a vision for the Neighborhood Charter School and to mobilize a **community** movement behind it, we have learned a great deal. From both our successes and our failures, we have discovered much about how to build **community** and family support among a socially and economically diverse urban population. Those lessons have molded our vision of the Neighborhood charter School, and we believe our efforts can become a model for rekindling the bonds between **communities** and their schools in Atlanta...

A charter school, by its very existence, demonstrates faith in public education, and demands greater commitment from the entire **community** it serves. The **communities** of Grant Park, Ormewood Park and the surrounding neighborhoods are prepared to shoulder that commitment (Conclusion, charter petition, 2000, emphasis added).

In this conclusion, the organizers make it clear that community is a central concept for the school. They cite a belief in parental involvement, community support, and commitment between a community and its school. Community is central to their vision, and yet has multiple (and vague) meanings. In the last paragraph alone, the meaning of community shifts from an ambiguous social group (the entire community) to the neighborhoods of Grant Park and Ormewood Park.

This shift in meaning is strategic in that it allows the charter-petition writers to both acknowledge distinct social groups and distinct geographical groups who would be served by the school and yet to present their effort as one that is endorsed by all. By becoming “the community” and asserting that the effort is from “the community,” the organizers designate themselves as representing the interests of thousands of people. The use of community is not accidental, as APS guidelines require evidence of community support for charter schools.

Demonstrating community support

As required by the state legislation and APS’s rules and regulations, charter petitioners must demonstrate that they received community support for their charter-school effort (see chapter five for a more detailed discussion). To this end, the organizers compiled Appendix J of their charter, which includes what they perceive as evidence of community support. A review of the documents they include reveals the degree to which the organizers tried to reach out to the community—but it is questionable as to how much their evidence reveals a unified support for the charter-school effort.

Appendix J, referred to as “Community engagement and education,” details the efforts of Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents to solicit impressions from other residents about public school options in their neighborhoods. It also recounts the years of conducting surveys,

attending public meetings, and consulting with school-related experts and institutions. Appendix J includes a summary of the organizers' efforts: a list of volunteers who at one time or another had been involved in the school effort; copies of letters of support from several organizations; a list of "educators community leaders, and experts" consulted; the results of several surveys the organizers conducted; the publicity efforts made by the school (copies of flyers); and press articles that mention the school. Of these, only two items seem to demonstrate that the group had support from neighbors and organizations: the letters of support and the surveys. The details of these two items raise doubts about the extent to which they are useful endorsements of the effort.

The letters of support that the organizers included in their petition were from the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness, and Emory University's Department of Behavioral Sciences and Health Education. The original charter-school concept was to focus on conservation ecology and health and well-being; thus, the organizers contacted several local organizations for potential partnerships. The partnerships they intended to establish were with the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness, which mentions proposed programs to coordinate with the school in the letter, and Emory University's Department of Behavioral Sciences and Health Education, which articulated support for the charter-school initiative. These organizations are part of a health-focused community. By the time the charter-petitioners completed the charter, health and wellness was no longer the focus of the school. Thus, it is dubious that these two organizations are representative of the school's community.

Also as evidence of their community support, the charter petitioners included the results of a survey they distributed in the spring of 1998 to families in the Grant Park neighborhood who were part of the Grant Park Parent Network. According to the summary of the results,

approximately 60 surveys were received (from an unspecified number distributed). Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards public schools, whether they intended to send their children to the new West-Slaton building, and the most important factors for their child's school (see Appendix A). The survey results do not provide explicit support for a charter school, but they point to dissatisfaction with public school options in the Grant Park neighborhood as of 1998. This survey reflects the opinions of a very specific "community"—families who live in the Grant Park neighborhood and who are part of the Grant Park Parent Network. Thus, the two items in Appendix J that suggest community support for the charter-school effort include two health-related organizations and the opinions of 60 families in Grant Park.

Throughout the charter document, the writers expressed the desire and intention that the school would involve not just parents and teachers but the broader community, including businesses, "community leaders" and other educators. In an effort to demonstrate support of these groups, the organizers listed the people and institutions they consulted. Included on their list are representatives from the Georgia Department of Education, Charter Friends, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, Metro Atlanta Chamber, Emory University Medical School's Director of Elementary Science Education Partners; Emory University's Division of Educational Studies; the Spelman College Math department, Zoo Atlanta, Cartersville School System, East Lake Charter School (Drew Charter School), New Century School, Atlanta City Council, NPU-W, Fulton County Education Foundation, Atlanta Systemic Initiative, and representatives from Atlanta Public Schools, a lawyer, a CPA, and a reverend. This list does not indicate the nature of the consultations that the organizers had with these groups—nor do they include any letters of support or endorsements from these groups.

Thus, throughout the charter-petition, community has a variety of meanings—a closely-associated group of parents organizing a charter school, neighborhood organizations, local businesses and organization, and collections of residential neighborhoods. Yet when the organizers attempt to demonstrate that they have had support for their school from the community, they only include letters of support from two health-related organizations (which are not located in Grant Park) and the results of a survey distributed to Grant Park families. This disconnect suggests that community is more of a strategic term than one that can be operationalized with evidence. Indeed the rhetoric of community suggests an ideal, which is clearly evident in the petition. Yet it also represents a political stance and a response to the language of APS requirements.

As discussed above, the term community suggests social relationships among different groups—whether those relationships are based on a shared experience of race or a school or a territory. The term neighborhood also suggests social relationships based on the activity space of the home and shared spaces in residential areas. Within these shared residential spaces are neighborhood institutions, such as schools, parks, and libraries. The degree to which a neighborhood institution can reinforce or divide a neighborhood is the focus of the next section.

The Scale of Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Charter School

Neighborhood is a territory, and as Martin (2002) notes, it often suggests a social interaction among residents. The flexibility of neighborhood as a scale contrasts to that of community, in that there is a certain degree of fixity in the territorial definition of neighborhood. As a scale of analysis (and experience), a neighborhood is clearly smaller than a city yet larger than a block of houses. The social interactions that are tied to this scale are a kind of community in place. In this section I examine the struggles that the Neighborhood Charter School organizers

faced in operationalizing a rescaled definition of their neighborhood. This rescaling involved expanding the physical territory of an attendance zone to include more than one neighborhood, and it involved opening social relationships that were initially formed over a Grant Park cause.

In terms of a neighborhood school, the attendance zone is the obvious territorial boundary that reflects the neighborhood a school serves. In the case of the Neighborhood Charter School, the attendance zone represents the initial, fundamental struggle of the parents in Grant Park in their quest to operationalize their vision for a school. In fact, it was the very impetus for the initial school-committee organizing: to change attendance zones so that all of the children in Grant Park could go to school together. But the struggle to effect that change involved discouraging interactions with Atlanta Public Schools and complicated neighborhood dynamics. It also involved a rescaling of the meaning of neighborhood, which presented challenges for the organizers.

The attendance-zone struggle

The desire to change the attendance zone was based on the perception of several Grant Park residents that the existing school, Slaton Elementary, did not adequately serve the neighborhood children. According to one organizer, the school attendance zone was a vestige of a segregated past, where the mostly white sections of neighborhoods were zoned to the same school. In the case of Slaton, the official attendance zone was for the historically “white” section of Grant Park:

[When the school committee started organizing], that was the first time that questions had been asked by anybody of anybody in decades of what is the attendance zone for Slaton Elementary, and no one at APS knew, and then literally after finally months of effort obtained it, and realized that it was still the segregationist, intended to be all white attendance zone—it was still the official attendance zone school, I mean all of these were relics of screwed up history. ...

...All of that gets into the larger fascinating byzantine history of how of that APS was never under a full-fledged court desegregation order. ...there really

never was one in reality. There was a desegregation suit and a desegregation order, but it was never under the court-supervised desegregation that there was in every other virtually every other urban area... It's a complicated, very interesting political story ... of a compromise that was struck a long time ago. But one reason for that is that there are all these vestiges of the segregated system that were never stamped out, and that you could make an argument that... it's not a clear cut case, but for sure the Atlanta system was essentially, operationally, geographically built on the basis of the segregated system. (C.E.)

As this lengthy quotation reflects, there was a perception among some of the organizers that the school attendance zone was based on segregated residential patterns of city neighborhoods. This fact essentially strengthened the case the organizers were trying to make about creating a neighborhood school that would reflect the social diversity of their entire neighborhood.

In the case of Slaton Elementary, the student body did not necessarily come from the attendance zone, as defined by Atlanta Public Schools. The school had informally become a school for English-as-a-Second-Language students for southeast Atlanta neighborhoods. Indeed, for the NCS organizers, the attendance zone did not define the neighborhood in a meaningful way in terms of where the school drew its student body in the mid- to late 1990s. One organizer stated that:

...The [Slaton] attendance zone was irrelevant, and nobody paid attention to the attendance zones any more,... it was totally out of control, and no one at Atlanta Public Schools even knew where the students were coming from.

When they finally did, coincidentally about the same time we were doing all of this, you know, they came to realize that the majority or more didn't come from the zone—an extreme majority. And that was when we began to realize the incredible irony of where Slaton was...

Leaving aside learning, the administration of the school was just so obviously lacking that it was something—there was virtually no middle class constituency for black or white, and so you have this fascinating phenomenon of these middle class [people] in the area, [who were] primarily white but by no means exclusively white, hardly anyone who was part of that wanted anything to do with Slaton.

But Slaton was, in contrast, when put up against the school offerings in the housing project on the extreme south end of Moreland Avenue—put it up against the offerings of an elementary school in any number of other neighborhoods on the south side of Atlanta, if you were a blue-collar African-American parent,

Slaton looked tremendously better than what you were facing—particularly if you had a job downtown. The idea—it was actually a preferable situation—and so that further aggravated the dislocation of the origins of the students.

So you had the school in a neighborhood—a school that had completely lost all connection to its actual community, but also had no replacement community—not even a virtual community, because its kids were coming from so many different places. The school system, ... for facilities resource reasons, had made it a designated—not technically a magnet school—but a center for non-English speaking students, so you had this really unpredictable, random, lower-income, almost all-minority, scattered southside population, and a Buford Highway immigrant, non-English speaking population kind of all thrown in together. Which had some, some value and interestingness to it in its own way, but was all completely, totally, finally, absolutely, irrevocably severed from the place where the school actually was (C.E.).

This long quotation is rich in that the organizer articulated what was at the heart of the Grant Park-parent effort: to effect an attendance zone to reestablish the significance of the school *in* the neighborhood by serving families living nearby. Indeed, the organizers plainly stated in their initial concept document that they wanted a neighborhood school with “meaningful” attendance zones: “This school will demonstrate the value of restoring meaningful attendance zones, so that the energy and goodwill of a neighborhood can be marshaled behind a community school” (NCS charter petition, Concept document, Appendix J, item 7, 2000). For the organizers, meaningful attendance zones suggest territorial proximity to the school. Initially, the vision for the school required an attendance zone that followed the boundaries of the Grant Park neighborhood.

When the organizers began their conversations about forming a neighborhood school, they initially sought to redraw the attendance zone of Slaton Elementary, which, at the time, only included a small portion of the Grant Park neighborhood. The organizers met resistance to their insistence on redrawing attendance zones by some neighborhood residents. One NCS organizer mentioned the confusion that the attendance zone issue caused:

[The attendance zone] was an interesting point of contention, because when we said [we wanted to effect the attendance zone], people who didn’t know anything about the zones immediately assumed that we were trying to come up

with a zone that would have less diversity, less you know, economic diversity, less minority—fewer minorities, when in actuality, all you have to do is look at a map to realize that we were doing the exact opposite, because the Slaton zone is the is the most gentrified section of Grant Park, so the Slaton zone, which the school board was basing things on, was actually the whitest and wealthiest section, when you extended it out to all of Grant Park, you got south of Atlanta Avenue, the part north of I-20, several highly Hispanic areas, much less gentrified areas, so it actually made it a much richer, diverse school.

But we actually got slapped around a lot for that because as soon as you say you want to effect attendance zones, people assume the worst for why you're trying to do that. (C.N.).

Regardless of the skepticism expressed by some residents, the Grant Park parents received endorsement for their school idea from the Grant Park Neighborhood Association. As one organizer stated, "...The neighborhood association obviously liked the idea of all of its families being able to be together and have more of a community school" (C.N.). Thus, through these initial efforts to change the attendance zone, the organizers were generating support for their vision of a Grant Park neighborhood school.

This initial support was relatively easy for the Grant Park parents to generate. Their vision was one of a neighborhood school that would serve residents of the neighborhood. The organizers were a relatively cohesive group of Grant Park residents, who had both the desire for a neighborhood school and the experience of living in the same residential area. At this point, the community of the organizers was territorially bound up with their physical neighborhood.

As the Grant Park parents were generating support for their vision of a neighborhood school, Atlanta Public Schools announced that it was planning to close Slaton Elementary and to consolidate two other schools to form the new Parkside Elementary. According to several organizers, the Grant Park parents were advised by Atlanta Public Schools that they would not be able to hold their charter school at Slaton Elementary. Instead they were counseled to write their charter based on Parkside, which was a larger school—and therefore required a larger attendance

zone. This caused controversy within the group, but they decided to go ahead with expanding their attendance zone to include Ormewood Park. What that also meant was that they had to expand their community involvement to residents of Ormewood Park (and initially McDonough/Guice, a small neighborhood south of Ormewood Park):

[Choosing to write the charter with Parkside] meant a huge new fight. Because it wasn't just our neighborhood anymore. We had to accept [APS's] attendance zone, and so, that then became our new focus. We had to go recruit people from other neighborhoods that were going to be affected to see if they wanted—they would have to agree that it would be a charter school. So that was primarily Ormewood Park and McDonough-Guice. So we started outreaching to those areas (C.N.).

Thus, Atlanta Public Schools, by advising the group to seek their charter at Parkside, forced the organizers to redefine not only their attendance zone (the neighborhood boundaries of their neighborhood school) but their social relationships. They had to rescale both their neighborhood and their community.

Expanding the school effort to include other neighborhoods

Because of the expanded attendance zone, the Grant Park parents had to extend their efforts to include members of other neighborhoods. This process revealed distinct neighborhood identities among Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents, which complicated the social and territorial expansion of the charter-school effort. One Grant Park parent asserted that underlying conflicts between Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents went back to decisions made by the members of the Grant Park Parent Network when it was forming:

The first sort of conflict with [the charter-school effort] was a question—of whether non-Grant Park families could become part of the [Grant Park Parent] network, and there were in some of the initial [organizers] had a very strong sense that this is a Grant Park thing, . . . , and that misjudgment on the part of those folks haunted us for a long time. . . . There is a strong instinct to see things as exclusionary whether they are or not—and so, [there were] folks who . . . had that instinct, and it was not a racial thing. . . . But there were some folks who had a much more exaggerated sense of neighborhood specificity” (C.E).

Because the charter-school effort was derived from the Grant Park Parent Network, already there was a sense among some Ormewood Park residents that the school was becoming exclusive.

Another Grant Park resident suggested that perceived differences between the neighborhoods was based on differences in prosperity:

There was this thing [between Grant Park and Ormewood Park], and [the Grant Park parents] had no idea [about it]. I mean, I almost bought a house in Ormewood Park. I never thought about it being Ormewood-Grant, [a house in Grant Park] just happened to be a better deal. Ormewood Park was actually more expensive when I bought the house [in Grant Park]. And, we had no idea [about conflict between the neighborhoods]. But I think that was an underlying tone, and, you know, ... it's hard for people...

All of a sudden Grant Park was this thriving place with children popping up everywhere, and you know, we were in *Atlanta* magazine as being the best reason for these intown neighborhoods, you know, because of the parent network... [The article] was talking about people moving back to the city, and wanting this whole intown community, little village feel, ... and it was talking about how Grant Park was the perfect example of that because it had its parent network... that had events for the children and trying to work on the public school system. And so we were being lauded as this great little group (D.H.).

This quotation reflects a historical distinction in the economic well-being of the two neighborhoods. As one Grant Park resident noted, Ormewood Park was historically a stable blue-collar neighborhood, whereas Grant Park experienced more dramatic economic cycles.

Another organizer stated that the friction that developed between Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents was based on politics and misunderstandings:

We, being new to the area, a few of us had been in this neighborhood for awhile, but we weren't privy to the neighborhood politics. And apparently, there's always been this one neighborhood thinks they're better than the other neighborhood, but it's not even that the neighborhood thinks they're better—the other neighborhood thinks that they think that way. And so, you always have this in life, whether it's neighborhoods or classes or schools (D.H.)

Another organizer speculated that the friction between the neighborhood formed out of the neighborhood associations:

[There are] apparently long term hostilities [between Grant Park and Ormewood Park]. I don't know if it went back to the neighborhood associations, I'm not sure where it all stemmed from. [The charter-school effort] certainly got caught in the crossfire of that tension (V.N.).

According to the above quotations, the friction between Grant Park and Ormewood Park existed beyond the charter-school effort, but the effort to create the school heightened the distinctions between the perceived identities of the two neighborhoods.

Previously, the Grant Park parents working together had a rather straightforward sense of their neighborhood identity, which was based on the territorial lines of the Grant Park neighborhood (figure 7.1). But the inclusion of additional neighborhoods into their efforts revealed underlying "neighborhood tribalism" as one organizer put it (C.E.). That is, Ormewood Park residents saw the school effort as territorially and socially exclusive to Grant Park. The inclusion of Ormewood Park residents into the charter-school process was further stymied because of new attendance zone issues the Grant Park parents had to address.

Uniting Grant Park

Several months after electing to write a charter for the new school, and after generating support among Ormewood Park residents, Atlanta Public Schools announced the attendance zone for Parkside Elementary (which the charter-school organizers were going to try to open as a charter school). The proposed zone only went as far west as Confederate Avenue, effectively eliminating about 75% of the Grant Park neighborhood from its attendance zone, and most of the parents involved in the initial school effort. One organizer stated that the group was devastated

... We do retreat [to deal with the attendance issue]. Because damn, all of this work we had done for all these years was about to disappear, and we were about to end up with nothing. Literally my family would have had nothing. We wouldn't have had a charter school, we wouldn't have been in the new school, we would have been stuck, worse off then we would have been before (C.N.).

In terms of this struggle with Atlanta Public Schools, the very definition of community and involved parents hinged not on their actions but on their site of residence. In an effort to protest the proposal, the Grant Park parents organized with the help of the Grant Park Neighborhood Association:

We called the neighborhood association president... at the time who was incredibly supportive of us, and we had the meeting in his living room. He's a big time gay guy, doesn't have kids, beautiful house, all of our kids are running around his house, and um, to figure out what the hell we're going to do. And there's a meeting coming up for APS, a community meeting, where you're allowed to speak, and so, [the neighborhood association president] had these signs printed that said "Grant Park United." And we wrote presentations for like eight people to make—couples. ... we had scripted what we were going to say, one after another. And so we got up.

...So, when this all came up, we sent an email out to the parent network group and the GPNA group, and told everybody to come to this meeting, so everybody comes, they have a sign, we probably had at least fifty people there. ...All just sitting quietly, holding their signs up that say "Grant Park United." And then we all took our turns making our speech, which was totally respectful of the Board, and you know, we appreciate what you're doing, however, why this is so horrendous, we can't believe this is happening, and they backed down. And they did not change the zone.

Following the meeting, the APS board reconsidered and added Grant Park to the attendance zone for Parkside. Thus, in the midst of developing a plan to include other neighborhoods in their charter school effort, Grant Park residents found themselves having to assert their identity as a one neighborhood. The group's resistance to Atlanta Public Schools heightened their sense of neighborhood cohesion. This focus on a Grant Park identity irritated Ormewood Park residents, however, which undermined the simultaneous effort by the organizers to unify a broader coalition for the Neighborhood Charter School.

Nine months after the organizers elected to include Ormewood Park (and McDonough/Guice) in their charter-school effort, residents of the surrounding neighborhood saw the school as an exclusively Grant Park effort. In May of 2000, a certified letter was mailed to

the chairperson of the charter school management team from “Concerned Members of the Guice, Slaton and West Communities.” The letter outlined concerns the group had around the failure of the Grant Park parents to include non-Grant Park members (and educators). The letter, signed by 30 mostly Ormewood Park residents, requested that the issues raised in the letter be resolved with formal mediation.

In the letter, the concerned members of the Guice, Slaton and West Communities, articulated that the primary issue that they wanted to see addressed by the charter-school organizers was the “sharing of power.” The letter stated that, “[t]he current management team represents a decision making group whose members are approximately 90% white and reside predominantly in Grant Park” (“Outline of Concerns,” 2000). The letter noted that

It is the lack of active, organized recruitment of parents from the underrepresented communities and their subsequent involvement in decision making that has resulted in the perception of the charter effort as ‘elitist’ (“Outline of Concerns,” 2000).

Furthermore, the concerned residents argued that “The current management team has not developed a process through which interested parents and educators from communities beyond the boundaries of Grant Park can be included in decision making” (“Outline of Concerns,” 2000). The complaints contained in the letter illustrate the significance of neighborhood boundaries in the perception of the area residents. Grant Park as a geographical entity clearly had meaning for those parents as a simultaneously social entity, with boundaries that were exclusive and impenetrable.

Several Grant Park organizers knew that Ormewood Park residents felt excluded. One organizer attributes the exclusion to larger neighborhood tensions:

Interesting neighborhood dynamics, that you don’t know about until you get in the middle of them. There was real resentment, initially, from the

Ormewood Park group who felt that we were not legitimately including them in the [charter-school] process,... (C.N.).

This quotation reflects that there was a lack of awareness of the initial resentment of the Ormewood Park residents. In defense of the Grant Park organizers, one organizer stated that they were not sure what they would have done differently to include the Ormewood group:

Ormewood Park did not know what was going on—, [but] I swear, we went through the channels you should—we went through the neighborhood meetings. We went to the neighborhood meeting every month—we distributed [flyers] all over our neighborhood. It was a handful, a small handful of people [who were unhappy]. (D.H.).

These quotations reflect the two important dynamics. First is the salience of the Grant Park as a territorial and social entity. The neighborhood fostered enough of a community that parents in the Grant Park neighborhood had little trouble in organizing a charter-school. There was a specific geography to the community that began organizing the school. However, when the organizers had to expand their effort to include a broader territory, they had difficulty transmitting their social community to include other people. The social bonds of the organizers prohibited a full social-territorial rescaling of the neighborhood. In turn, the Ormewood Park parents who felt excluded clearly perceived the tight connection among Grant Park parents, and , took formal measures to ensure their inclusion in the charter-school effort: they requested that the Grant Park parents participate in mediation. In doing so, they too sought to reconfigure the geography of social bonds among parents in their region.

The mediation, which was paid for by the concerned residents was held at the Atlanta Justice Center in nearby Inman Park. Representatives from Ormewood Park/McDonough-Guice and from the Grant Park neighborhood met for many hours, and with the help of a mediator, they determined a new school-management structure⁵. In an effort to address the concerns expressed

⁵ Per the terms of the mediation, participants were not permitted to disclose the details of the session.

by the Ormewood Park/McDonough-Guice residents, the new committee, termed the steering committee, was made up of a certain number of representatives from each neighborhood, and it included teachers and educators. According to one organizer, the structure of the committee addressed concerns expressed by the Ormewood Park/McDonough-Guice residents (B.Q.).

A Grant Park parent who joined the group after the mediation summed up the cause of the mediation and the changes that resulted from it:

The root cause of the mediation was that certain neighborhoods were feeling like the Grant Park neighborhood, where this all originated, was not doing enough to get them involved. A lot of folks in the Grant Park neighborhood felt like they were reaching out to these other neighborhoods but people from the other neighborhoods weren't stepping forward. So everybody wanted the same thing—everybody wanted the other neighborhoods to be more involved. ...

And one of the things that was determined was that there should be a new governance structure, because the old governance structure was pretty firmly entrenched, and some of the folks from other neighborhoods were feeling that they were having a hard time breaking into that sort of inner circle... And that there would be representatives from each of the various neighborhood groupings, a certain number of representatives on the steering committee, and, in order to lead to more balance at the top—you know in terms of people being able to volunteer and feeling comfortable volunteering (Q.B.).

According to this organizer, the Grant Park parents were open to the full participation of Ormewood Park residents, once the central points of disagreement were fully understood and addressed. The actions—or, better, lack of involvement—of some of the original organizers at the mediation, however, calls into question their willingness to fully include others.

The original Grant Park organizers were strategic in their handling of the mediation. At the mediation they were represented mostly by “outer core” organizers rather than central ones (D.H.). That is, there were two or three people who were reported to have been the driving force of the school-effort, and none of these went to the mediation session. “We sent in our second-string,” claimed one organizer (G.U.). This “second-string” move offended the Ormewood Park representatives (G.U.). Furthermore, this strategy reflects reluctance on the part of the original

organizers to open up their inner circle to the Ormewood Park residents. At various points in the organizational effort, the Grant Park parents indicated their willingness to include Ormewood Park residents, but they had an inability to overcome their commitment to their original vision and to open up their social group.

The success of the new steering committee, which had the required representation of the neighborhoods and educators, in continuing the charter-school effort was mixed. It did inspire the involvement of several new members, but for the most part, the new committee was in name only (V.N., D.H.). One organizer was skeptical of the efforts of the new steering committee:

This was definitely the worst [period of time]—in terms of community—this was not community. ... This group didn't do the work. I mean, it was the original worker bees—they may have lost their titles, but they still did all the work and they did all the pushing and the writing (V.N.).

This quotation reflects my general impression from talking to many of the organizers: that the steering committee was largely a strategy to placate the Ormewood Park group. It did not fundamentally change the close-knit social group of the original organizers—nor the manner in which they completed the charter-writing process.

The difficulty the Grant Park parents had in opening up their group suggests the significance of Grant Park as a territorially-specific community. The school that was developing out of this community was also territorially tagged as a Grant Park institution. Like the disgruntled Ormewood Park residents, several organizers and Grant Park residents saw the school as physically and socially a Grant Park institution as it was being developed. Indeed, one consultant who assisted in the charter-school effort offered her observation:

It started out as Grant Park, and I truly believe that when [the organizers] started this, that they meant, and I still think they include all of Grant Park, which would have been divided up into five schools. So Grant Park was always at the heart of it, and I still think Grant Park is the heart of it.

They invited in other neighborhoods, they invited Ormewood Park, you know, and Guice in the writing of the charter, when they were going to go for the new school, but, I think that it's one of the challenges they've had.

The core group of workers [have] all been Grant Park—or were when I was there. I think that's probably changed... but there was always that core group..., you know, it was always that core group, and they were all Grant Park, so even when they invited other groups in, in some ways it was like watching high school all over again, watching the cliques ... and then someone would want to get into the clique, and they were saying we'll let you in, but they really weren't letting you in—and it's not that they were being malicious or didn't want it, but there are neighborhood issues in East Atlanta. And Ormewood Park is different from Grant Park is different from East Atlanta... and that came through loud and clear. ... Certainly in the writing [of the charter], the battle lines were clearly drawn.

And my feeling was that this was a *Grant Park* school. It didn't matter who else went there. It was going to be known as the Grant Park school, it was in Grant Park, and I think, you know, the parents and the community members believed that would benefit the kids in Ormewood Park and Guice. But it was...certainly a clear distinction for me... (V.N.).

The impression of this observer is that regardless of the overtures the Grant Park parents made to be inclusive, the neighborhood boundaries were too socially closed to include other neighborhoods. The Grant Park neighborhood was perceived as being a gentrifying, increasingly middle-class enclave among racially and economically diverse southeast Atlanta neighborhoods.

One organizer described the social closeness of the group that worked on the charter-school effort:

...We were a freight train moving. We had been working on this for literally years, and we had, we couldn't slow down. There was no way this wasn't going to happen. And these poor folks [Ormewood Park and Guice residents] were just trying to figure out what the heck we were doing, and how they were supposed to be involved, and what they could do, and we knew each other, we had been working together, and that relationship you have after working on something, you know what the other person is going to say,... (C.N.).

This quotation reflects an admission that the social bonds of the group were difficult to penetrate.

The original group of parents had been meeting for several years at each other's houses over dinner. They had developed a social closeness that transcended the specific goal of creating a

school, and this closeness proved hard for the original organizers to open up to other people. The group's closeness was also compounded by the fact the group shared a geographically-delineated proximity. This struggle was a true socio-spatial dynamic, making it difficult for "outsiders" to overcome the mutually-constitutive social and spatial boundaries.

The mediation episode highlights the strengthening of neighborhood distinctions through the power struggle over the charter-school effort. The Ormewood Park residents felt that, because of their Ormewood Park identity, or rather because they were *not* from Grant Park, they were not allowed into the central social group that was organizing the school. Furthermore, the mediation solidified "us-them" lines in how the problems were articulated—as a Grant Park effort that was exclusive to Grant Park's needs.

The final attendance zone

As expressed above, creating an attendance zone that would serve "all of the families of Grant Park" was one of the expressed goals of the initial charter-school effort. Because the group ultimately had to include residents of Ormewood Park, they chose to create an attendance zone that followed the Neighborhood Planning Unit-W map. As one organizer stated,

... We were using the lines that were drawn by the NPU-W, the Neighborhood Planning Unit, because we were trying very carefully to use lines that a recognized, official organization had created, because we did not want to be, like I said, accused of trying to cut little pieces out, and so we used maps that were already defined. I think we took the original ones out of the *Porch Press*, which is the little community newspaper, because it used to have a map with NPU-W on it regularly, and then the one we ended up putting in the charter was from the City Council office... so it was official, official, official" (C.N.).

In the course of having to satisfy the requirements of Atlanta Public Schools, the attendance zone that was eventually adopted by NCS organizers for the old Slaton school included far more territory than the boundaries of the historic Grant Park neighborhood. This move to adopt an "official" map rather than the historic Grant Park designation reflects an attempt by the

organizers to satisfy the mandate to include more territory and to defray the pre-existing tensions along (existing) *social* boundary lines. Indeed, as the above discussion reflects, the territory for the “neighborhood school” became defined through the close social interactions of the original core group of residents. Using an “official” map was strategic in downplaying the significance of those social boundaries.

The attendance zone and associated tensions reflect that there was a conflict between the vision of the school and what actually happened. The cohesion of Grant Park parents would have made a neighborhood school that matched the social community. However, the expansion of the attendance zone challenged that social community. In many ways the extension of the community forced a new social construction of neighborhood. The change in the name of the school reflects this dynamic:

[The school] was originally called the Grant Park Charter School, which obviously that had to go when the whole [attendance zone changed], but... one of our core things, philosophies, was that this is a school for this community. This ... is more than just an educational place. This is a place where community will be welcome, where children will be embraced by their community. And it was no longer just Grant Park, but we still wanted to have that feeling of a neighborhood school. This is about the neighborhood. That you can walk your kid to school, or it's just a short ride to school. And we're all a community. All of those things that neighborhood implies—the ties that, you know, living together, sharing common things together, the diversity that you have in our neighborhoods intown, but it was the reflection of wanting that safe, safe feeling, you know, the feeling of home that the neighborhood could give (C.N.).

The new name of the school, the Neighborhood Charter School, was an attempt to broaden the territorial designation of the school and to suggest that the school embodies more general “neighborhood” qualities than those specific to Grant Park. The organizer mentions “sharing common things together” and the ability of children to walk to school as the intended meaning of the neighborhood in the school’s name. This ideal was somewhat undermined by the location of the school (in Grant Park) and qualities of the school that were important to the organizers. For

example, for many organizers, the school, located in the near century-old Slaton building, was a symbol of Grant Park's historic character.

The historic school in Grant Park.

Many of the organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School expressed a fondness for the symbolic nature of the school being located in an historic building. One organizer asserted that residents are drawn to the old houses and buildings in the neighborhood:

This is an historic neighborhood. People are into rehabilitating homes, and there's a great school at the end of the street—an old building. People in this neighborhood are attracted to that style, vintage, era, and character (Q.B.).

This organizer explicitly links the school to the historic character of Grant Park. By stating “this is a historic neighborhood,” the organizer is unambiguous about the role of the school as a symbol for the Grant Park neighborhood.

Another organizer and business-owner stated that people in the neighborhood have a “fondness for old, rickety houses. We like them to creak” (D.H.). The organizer expressed the group's enthusiasm when they started to renovate the building:

We were so excited when we first started renovating, and we discovered that the chalk boards were really slate, it was like ‘wow! This is so cool’. People walk in, and they're like, look at the floors, look at the beadboard and the chair railings. And the huge windows... (D.H.).

For this Grant Park resident, the school is part of the larger character of the neighborhood, where many recent residents have spent time and money renovating old homes in the neighborhood. In fact, one Governing Board member was in the process of renovating her third house in the neighborhood.

This interest in historic homes and buildings is part of a popular trend in gentrifying neighborhoods throughout American cities. In addition to the economic logic of refurbishing old homes and reselling at a profit (or relieving the overaccumulation of investment in the built

environment), this move reflects a cultural nostalgia. One organizer stated that she was very attached to the Slaton Building: “It [is] a school that reminded me of my kindergarten. And it was just, it was just so old-fashioned... a great building” (T.E.). The historic nature of the building is an important signifier for the Neighborhood Charter School organizers in representing the neighborhood. The location of the charter school in the historic school house reinforces its identity as a Grant Park institution.

Another quality of the neighborhood that the school was intended to embody was changing the reputation of Grant Park as a neighborhood without families. The creation of an institution to serve school-age children worked to shift the identity of the neighborhood as one of intown professionals who left when they had children to a family-oriented, village-like neighborhood.

Grant Park as family-oriented.

For some residents of Grant Park, the presence of the Neighborhood Charter School in the neighborhood signified a shift in the demographic make-up of the region. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, the charter school was intended to keep middle-class residents in the area. The organizers characterized the historic absence of families as a result of white flight and poor-performing public schools:

For three decades, families living in Grant Park commonly left the city when their children reached school age. Hundreds of families disappeared from our community, first in a cynical wave of ‘white flight.’ In later years, families grew discouraged by the deterioration of public school facilities, attendance zones which dissected the neighborhood into five different elementary school student populations, and standardized test scores among the lowest in the city. Many neighborhood leaders, middle-income families, business and community institutions simply abandoned the area’s elementary schools” (NCS charter petition, Concept document, Appendix J, item 7, 2000).

As one longtime neighborhood member stated, “There were pioneers [in the neighborhood] in the late 70s and early 80s, but if they had a family or children, many of them packed up and moved out when their kids were old enough for school” (O.D.). Another resident stated that “Traditionally in Grant Park, you moved away when your kids got to be 4 or 5 (or sent them to private school or toughed out the public schools if you had no resources to go elsewhere)” (E.M., email interview).

Another resident articulated the connection between residents staying in the neighborhood and schools: “You have this socioeconomically diverse group of people interested in staying in the neighborhood, people who enjoy doing things in the community. Why would you end that over schools? The school should galvanize the community” (Q.B.). The charter-school organizers saw it as one of their missions to change the flight of middle-class families by opening the charter school:

We, like a lot of people, didn’t want to move [when our kids were old enough for school]. And that ultimately, that was the impetus for this thing. Everyone before who had the option of moving did, once they had school-age kids. And it was hurting the neighborhood. A lot of good things were happening in the neighborhood, but the one thing that wasn’t happening was a lot of folks with kids staying in the neighborhood. And that was, we had a group of people that wanted to stay in the neighborhood and wanted all the kids to go to the same school instead of going to fifteen different private schools or get administrative transfers to [other elementary schools]. And that was really the key impetus behind all of this” (B.Q.).

One organizer asserted that in fact, the benefit to the neighborhood has been “extraordinary” and “measurable”: “The way that the charter school...slowed or froze a group of people who would have been departees changed forever the dynamic of the community” (C.E.).

All of these quotations reflect the goal of the school as remedying the departure of families from Grant Park. This emphasis on the Grant Park neighborhood (and not on Ormewood Park) served to reinforce the identity of the school as an institution intended to keep

Grant Park’s families from leaving. Thus, through their vision of the Neighborhood Charter School, the organizers sought to both embody and reinforce what they saw as attributes of the neighborhood: its historic character and its middle-class families.

In the above paragraphs, I have described in great detail the intentions of the Neighborhood Charter School organizers and the strong ties they had to the Grant Park neighborhood, which came through in their characterization of the school. Their requirement to extend their attendance zone to include Ormewood Park presented a challenge to the organizers to rescale their vision of the school. In the following sections, I describe the process through which the school became a neighborhood institution for a broader community—and how it continued to push others away.

The Neighborhood Charter School as a Neighborhood Institution

As mentioned earlier, the dictionary defines an institution as “a significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture” and “an established organization or corporation especially of a public character” (“Institution,” 1998). A *neighborhood* institution suggests a social organization that serves the territorial region of the neighborhood. In this section, I describe the ways in which the charter-school organizers transformed their conversations about public school options in their neighborhood into a neighborhood institution that served a broader group of residents.

There were a series of events that transformed the discussions about the charter school from the topic of porch conversations and informal gatherings in the Grant Park neighborhood to an institution that served the broader Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods. These events included the mediation, where the initial organizers were forced to relinquish some control to other neighborhoods; the renovation of the Slaton building, which required many volunteer

hours, and the fire, which generated support beyond the initial board members and organizers. Importantly, through these events, the school took on a life beyond the social relationships that created it—and yet it acted as a medium through which social bonds continued to develop.

The mediation

The mediation requested by the Ormewood Park/Guice residents and the resulting change in the management structure changed the nature of the school effort. As recounted above, in many ways the new steering committee that resulted from mediation included members who were not very invested in the effort, but it forced the long-time conversations about the school to transform into a formal organization. Even though many of the Grant Park parents continued to drive the effort, the mediation created the formal means through which new faces and new group dynamics could contribute to the development of the school. Indeed, several Ormewood Park parents began working closely with the Grant Park group. This was important, because it changed the initial school conversations from what was perceived to be a social club in Grant Park to an organization that enabled other residents to participate.

Up until that point, a consultant for the charter-school effort noted that: “[The organizers] were very serious about [developing the school] but they were able to incorporate it as fun, you know—as part of their daily lives with each other...” (V.N.). She also articulated how she had been brought into the social circle of the organizers: “A lot of the time I spent with them was over food and in their homes. And so these were not just colleagues, these were people I spent time with. And I went to their baby showers and their Christmas parties” (V.N.). The school became a part of every day conversations and social interactions for the Grant Park parents. The mediation changed this informal, social nature of the effort. By having to include

virtual strangers into the organizational effort, the mediation forced the group to reduce the social emphasis and to increase the formality of the effort.

Importantly, as an organizer noted, it changed the geography of where those school conversations took place:

By the time [the organizers formed the new steering committee]—well, we stopped meeting at people’s houses. We’d meet at a school, at the Georgia-Hill community center. It was never personal again. That was a significant moment. But it moved it from being very clearly a neighborhood conversation project to ‘this is an organized work effort.’

We have organized meetings, we have professional minutes, we are having an agenda, we’re working through that agenda, we’re setting time limits for discussion. That’s when the change happened to that professional level.... (V.N.).

The consultant articulated that the shift needed to happen for the school:

...So to have moved to that comfortable team work, this is for the greater good, idealistic to we’ll be meeting from 7 to 9 at Clark Atlanta, and this is the agenda, and these are the votes we need to take, and these are the reports we need from everybody, and here’s the action list. It was, I think, a good shift,...

... How are people going to run this school if it’s all done over beer and wine? It was all relational up until that point. It was really built on knowing and trusting your neighbor. And you reach a point when you need to think about that schools are a business of sorts and you’ve got budget, a staff, fundraising, and grounds, ... and even though you’ve been doing all of those things—having meetings at your house and you’ve been doing it as part of a social engagement of your neighborhood. [The new steering committee] moved it to ... a professional [operation]. (V.N.).

Thus, the introduction of new members to the steering committee—members who had not been part of the charter-school conversation for the previous two years—forced the effort to become less personal and more focused on the business of organizing a school. And, as the organizer points out, that shift required a new geography of charter-school organizing: from organizers’ homes to public places.

Renovating the building

Another event that moved the charter-school effort from an abstraction to a material experience—and therefore to a neighborhood institution—was the renovation of the Slaton building. For one organizer, the task seemed “overwhelming” (E.M.). The group organized many work days at the building, scraping paint, covering asbestos, and cleaning the building. “I think some people actually needed to see progress and to have that vision [of the school] before them [to believe in the effort]” (E.M.). “It was hard to get people to rally around something so abstract, ...but once [residents] saw people working on the building—during workdays, people got more interested...” (E.M.). The organizer asserted that “working on the building—that itself gelled the community,” a community that began to include more than just Grant Park residents (E.M.). Another organizer stated that there was so much “sweat equity” that went into the school by neighborhood residents (L.N.). This sweat equity gave the original Grant Park parents and the expanding group of school-organizers a tangible product for their efforts. By having people work on transforming a material space, the school grew to have more significance as a neighborhood institution that was beyond the individual conversations of the organizers. Thus, the mediation and the renovation of the Slaton building served to open up the close group of Grant Park parents to include a broader group of Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents.

The fire

In addition to the renovation efforts, the building again brought the community together: it sustained extensive fire damage. One organizer articulated the idea that the fire illustrated for the group that the school was a larger project than a building or than the people who organized it:

The fire became another reminder—one we didn’t need—but another reminder of the strength of this effort.... It galvanized this group even further. It strengthened our resolve even more, and I didn’t think that was possible,... I

mean, things were going well. For a first year school, things were going extremely well.

And it probably served as a reminder that, you know, we're not God. We're not infallible. Things can go wrong and probably will. And you know our school burning down is a pretty big thing... a reminder to ourselves that we are extremely strong. That this school is bigger than one person, than one group, any one building. That this school in essence is the community. And that continues to be the case. If our building burns down, if teachers leave, if individuals who have been instrumental in establishing this school move—to Albuquerque, New Mexico, or to north Georgia or New York City as has happened,...

[The fire] really served as a reminder that this community is the school. It's not the building and it's not the personnel—as much as we love our personnel and our board and we have the greatest principal in the state of Georgia as far as I'm concerned, and we have the greatest staff for an elementary school in the state of Georgia as far as I'm concerned. But we're bigger than any one of those things, and that was one thing that came through very clearly" (B.Q.).

As this organizer stated, the school took on a significance beyond the building or the organizers or the teachers or staff. It became a social institution, grounded in a broader neighborhood.

The fire brought an outpouring of support from residents, in the form of donations given and volunteer time and efforts into making sure the teachers and the students were taken care of after the fire (see newspaper coverage of the fire in chapter six). This tremendous support underscored for some that the school truly had become an institution beyond the social conversations that took place on Grant Park porches:

It's like it's not my school anymore. It was my school for so long, and then I went to the board meeting after the fire...it was like,—this isn't my school anymore. It belongs to all of these people... (T.E.)

When asked if the resident approved of what had happened to the school, she responded, "Oh, yeah, absolutely." Thus, for many the fire crystallized the fact that the school belonged to a neighborhood beyond the social and territorial lines of Grant Park. The rescaling of the neighborhood as required by the expanded attendance zone was further operationalized with the tragedy of the fire.

With all of these events—the mediation, the building-renovation, and the school fire—and the everyday interactions that the school fostered, the Neighborhood Charter School became an important focal point for the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods. One organizer summed up the relationship between the Neighborhood Charter School and the neighborhoods it serves: “It has been a galvanizing focus for the entire community.” (E.M.). At the same time that the school became a neighborhood institution in its own right, it enabled social relationships to develop across and within neighborhood boundaries.

Social relationships in the neighborhoods—building community

The school became a neighborhood institution by formalizing many of its social interactions—from front porch conversations to regularly scheduled governing board meetings. But this formality enabled social relationships to be fostered in the neighborhood that might otherwise not have existed. One consultant stated that the school has been a focal point around which relationships have developed in the neighborhood:

I don't know if Laura⁶ will tell you this at all, but one of the things she said to me at some point was ‘we never would have been friends with many of these people.’ A lot of these parents she's gotten to know—people she's spent time with are not people she would have ever really associated with... you may get a sense of it... she's just very bubbly, she's a cool mom, everyone wants to play at Laura's house, she's just a wonderful human being, but there's really only a few people she'd want to spend time with.

But when you're brought together by your kids and what you want for your neighborhood and your greater community, you learn to adjust to people. You make friends.... I think that's one of the benefits of this neighborhood, of, you know... A lot of these parents wouldn't have had anything to do with each other without this project. So, it really, I think it built community. It gave them something to focus their neighborhood around” (V.N.).

The concern for children and the neighborhood school offered residents an opportunity to interact with each other. Others saw the school as important beyond the education of children but as a way to get to know neighbors:

⁶ Name has been changed.

To me [the school] was a whole unity. ... What's so great about small towns is that everybody knows everybody, you know what's going on... I'd like to know everybody [in this neighborhood] and their parents so that I feel comfortable when my kid goes home with somebody—I know them. I know where they live, I know what they do for a living, um, it's a scary world out there now. [I was just talking to someone] about church,... I have issues with organized religion, but I see why people really need it, because it's community... Because with a community, you're involved, you're involved in your community, and so, it's your relationships that's part of your life,... And living in the bigger city, ... everybody's in a rush of time—you need those relationships next door (D.H.).

Another organizer was more explicit about the way in which the school has opened up new social opportunities across several neighborhoods:

I've felt more connected with the neighborhood with involvement in the school. First of all I got to know so many more people—I'm always bumping into someone you know, in Grant Park or East Atlanta. There's not been one time when I haven't been at that new Kroger [in East Atlanta] when I haven't bumped into someone I know. Maybe that happens in a lot of neighborhoods—but I don't think so.

I grew up in LA- there's something about neighborhood here. I know my representative, I know my city council person, Carla Smith. I think there's something about neighborhood, about connectedness in Atlanta. I think with the school, it was heightened. More people to know and to bump into. ... There's something interesting about bumping into people—when we actually walk—that actually happens in these beautiful intown neighborhoods” (G.K.).

For this organizer, the school fosters a community in Grant Park and in East Atlanta. For her, the social community of the school is not exclusive to Grant Park. Another organizer, who moved away after the school opened⁷, commented that

[In addition to creating] the school we wanted I could also see the secondary benefits of the effort - we were forming a really tight community. I always told people, that to live in huge Atlanta and to have the kind of close-knit and supportive neighborhood... is such a blessing (E.M.).

It is clear from the above quotations that for many of the NCS organizers, and for some residents of Grant Park and Ormewood Park, the Neighborhood Charter School serves as an important social institution. What is less clear from the quotations included is the degree to which the

⁷ This resident moved away to live close to her family.

school is open to all residents in the greater Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods. In the next section, I examine the way in which the charter school has been a divisive institution for some residents.

Lacking diversity

The organizers of the school talked extensively about celebrating the diversity of the neighborhoods. For one organizer, her vision of the school was that it would be “racially-mixed, representative of our entire neighborhood...” (E.M.). Another highlighted other ways the school was to be diverse:

I was concerned with socio-economic status diversity, and that gay and lesbian parents felt comfortable [with the Neighborhood Charter School]....And religion... I'm Jewish and I was concerned. I'm concerned with different types of diversity—coming from different backgrounds... (G.I.).

Because of the legacy of segregated neighborhoods and schools, many organizers stated that they were sensitive to issues of race. However, one organizer argued that

...The great thing about our school is all the different layers of diversity... It's not just a race thing. In fact, that's one of the less issues—it's more the economics, single-parents, same-sex parents. You know, we've got all of those things to balance out” (C.N.).

Although the organizers defined diversity differently, they intended for the charter school to reflect the different social groups living in the southeast Atlanta neighborhoods.

Even though the organizers talked extensively about celebrating the diversity in the neighborhood, the actual group of parents who formed the school was largely white and middle class. One organizer of the school argued that “It's impossible for race not to be an issue. The [Atlanta Board of Education] is black, APS is black, most students in the public schools [in Atlanta] are black, and this effort was mostly white” (G.U.). This assertion echoes the concerns about the management team “whose members are 90% white, [which is not] in keeping with the

proposed charter school's statement of purpose" articulated by residents of Ormewood Park and Guice in their letter to the charter-school organizers. One Ormewood resident was leery of the discussion of diversity going on with the organizers: "[diversity] was being talked about, but not addressed" (N.D.). Furthermore, "other than [two people], no other people of color were participating [in the NCS effort]" (N.D.). One parent of an NCS student stated matter-of-factly that "There's definitely a racial problem [with the management of the school], which is kind of an underlying thing that no one wants to talk about" (L.M.). For some residents—and for organizers of the school—racial diversity is not achieved in the management of the school.

In terms of racial diversity, the school does reflect a racially diverse student body—but it has a largely white management and teaching staff. During the 2002-2003 school year the student body was 50% African-American, 37% Caucasian, 9% multi-racial, 2% Asian, and 2% Hispanic, which reflects a highly racially diverse group of students. Based on Census data, the attendance zone itself is 57.4% white; 37.2% African American, 0.9% Asian, and the remainder are self-identified as some other race⁸. The students, then, are reflective of the racial/ethnic diversity of the broader neighborhoods. The 2002-2003 Governing Board consisted of thirteen members, of whom three were African-American. Of these three, none chaired committees. Likewise, the teaching staff was majority white.⁹ Thus, although the student body reflects racial/ethnic diversity, in its first year, most of the management and the teaching staff of the school were white.

⁸ The U.S. Census considers Latino/Hispanic as an ethnicity not a race.

⁹ For the 2003-2004 school year, the governing board has three African-American members, one of whom is chair-elect and will head the governing board in 2004-2005. The teaching and administrative staff represents a more racially diverse group. Eight of the twenty-eight members of the faculty/staff are African-American.

Non-traditional family structure also became an issue for some residents. One parent expressed her frustration at the expectation that most families are traditional, with fathers who work and mothers who stay at home:

There's a group of people who ... think that parents—that everyone's a house wife, you know, not understanding that maybe people choose to work,... or some people work but out of their homes, ...but if you're not a quote stay-at-home mom, they just can't understand you, so they just don't bend to accommodate everyone. ... you kind of have to recognize that not everybody stays home, people do work, most people work during the day, there are people who work at night. So, [the Neighborhood Charter School] is just not very inviting and accommodating if you're not of a traditional family--meaning a stay-at-home mom with a husband who goes to work and kids, small children. And white, I would add to that, too. (L.M.).

This parent, who also spoke of the school's "racial problem," sees a problem with the expectations of the Governing Board and committee chairs in scheduling meetings and events at the school during working hours. Another parent commented that there are issues with single parents—single mothers in particular—and the expectations of the time commitments required by the school (G.M.). For some parents the diversity of the school, although espoused, does not include non-traditional families.

For other residents, the Neighborhood Charter School is seen as catering to middle-class residents. For a resident of Ormewood Park, who is a parent of a Parkside Elementary student, the Neighborhood Charter School is not the ideal neighborhood school: "when the charter school started to come together, it was evident that this wasn't going to be inclusive and embracing" (C.T.). But for her, the issue is class difference: "it's not a black and white thing. It's a class thing." She sees the school as catering to the middle class residents in the neighborhood--and excluding poorer families. Another resident and NCS board member stated that he sees the difference as being the educational background of parents. "The majority of our parents have college behind them...because they have an education and value an education--that pushed them

into finding an option that was available” (O.K.). He went on, “there usually is a correlation between education and economics” (O.K.). So, although the organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School touted diversity as a hallmark of their neighborhood school, even some of the organizers and the residents at large find that their definition of diversity is quite limited. Instead, many see the school as a product of white, middle-class residents who were dissatisfied with the existing schools that served mostly black, lower-income families.

The student body of the Neighborhood Charter School seems to reflect largely middle-class families. Approximately twenty percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch during the 2002-2003 school year, which is one of the lowest percentages in Atlanta Public Schools. As evidence of contrast, ninety percent of students at nearby Parkside Elementary were eligible for free or reduced lunch during the 2001-2002 school year.

These impressions of the school by various residents and parents hint at breaks in the social cohesiveness of the school as a neighborhood institution. The school is seen as having some social diversity among its students, but the management of the school does not reflect the same degree of diversity. As one NCS parent put it, “there is not a diversity of ideas [in the way the school is run]” (L.M.). These cracks in the social cohesiveness of the Neighborhood Charter School call into question the degree to which the school acts as a salient neighborhood institution.

NCS as a neighborhood institution? Results from the survey

The Neighborhood Charter School started out as a conversation about neighborhood schools by Grant Park parents, and it turned into a real school that serves the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods. Although the social and territorial boundaries of the effort did not always line up along the way, by the beginning of the second school year in August of 2003,

the school was successful enough to add sixty students to the 105 children already enrolled. Parkside Elementary, the traditional public school also located in Grant Park opened the same fall with almost 500 children. The coexistence of the Neighborhood Charter School with a traditional public school challenges the position of the Neighborhood Charter School as an important neighborhood institution. To assess the role of the two schools in the neighborhood, I conducted a survey of residents of the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods.

The survey was distributed to 400 households, and 85 were returned (see chapter four for a detailed discussion of the response rates). The survey asked residents to identify different elements of their neighborhood that in some way defined the neighborhood (Appendix B). In order to get a sense of how the schools function as neighborhood institutions, participants were also asked to give their impressions of both the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary. In addition, they were asked to assess whether these two public schools are an important part of their neighborhood. Tables 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 summarize the results from the survey.

For many respondents, schools were listed as an important neighborhood space. Participants were asked specifically to identify a school, park, neighborhood grocery, church, or “other” space that defines their neighborhood. Respondents could write in the name of as many schools, parks, etc. as they wished. Forty-six listed a school as an important neighborhood space. The Neighborhood Charter School was mentioned more than any other school as a defining neighborhood space. Thirty-three identified the Neighborhood Charter School as an important neighborhood space, eight respondents identified Parkside as such, five wrote in Southside High School, two listed Anne E West, and one listed Benteen, King Middle, and the Grant Park Coop. Thirty-nine people did not list a school. For more than a third of the residents

of Grant Park and Ormewood Park who responded to the survey, then, the Neighborhood Charter School is a defining institution in the neighborhood.

In order to assess the degree to which the Neighborhood Charter School acts as an important neighborhood institution, participants were asked whether they had heard of the Neighborhood Charter School and in what capacity. Of the 85 people who responded to the survey, 80 reported having heard of the school, which is 94% of respondents. Sixteen had children who attend the school; 39 wrote that they live near the school; 17 volunteered at NCS; and 16 had attended public meetings at the school. Fifty people marked that they had heard of the school some other way, including working near the school, having watched the school burn down, considering it for their children, talk around town, SAND and GPNA meetings, the *Porch Press*, having worked on forming the school, having donated money to the school, having friends with leadership roles, requesting a job at the school, and attending a festival at the school. One respondent wrote that “[the school] is a big deal in this neighborhood.” Thus, through various channels, the Neighborhood Charter School is known to many residents.

In comparison to the 80 who had heard of the Neighborhood Charter School, only 63 respondents had heard of Parkside Elementary (74% of respondents). Four participants had children who attend the school; thirty-one live near the school; three have volunteered at the school; and eight have attended public meetings at the school. Twenty-seven respondents wrote that they had heard of the school some other way, including working with APS, watching it being built, having a friend on the staff, having visited with the principal, through APS meetings, SAND, GPNA, *Porch Press*, neighbors’ children attend, the opening publicity, owning rental property near the school, having dropped off baseball fliers at the school, hearing about it from the Board of Education, and having driven by the school. Thus, although the school has been in

the neighborhood for a year longer than the Neighborhood Charter School and serves three times more children, fewer residents had heard of the school.

In addition to whether or not respondents had heard of each school (and in what capacity), participants were asked to give their impression of each school, ranging from very favorable to very unfavorable. Thirty-five respondents had a “very favorable” impression of NCS, 24 viewed the school as “favorable”, 18 were neutral, one was unfavorable, and eight did not answer. Respondents were asked to justify their answers by writing in their impressions. The “Very Favorable” and “Favorable” responses included themes about parental involvement, a sense of community, the excellence of the teachers, the historic building, and the small size of the school. One respondent wrote that he or she “would move without it.” Thus, for the most part, the respondents to the survey had a favorable impression of the Neighborhood Charter School.

In terms of the impression the participants had of Parkside, seven viewed the school as “very favorable”; twelve marked “favorable”, 43 had a “neutral” impression of the school; seven viewed it unfavorably; two viewed it unfavorably; and fourteen provided no answer. When asked to justify their impressions, the Very Favorable and Favorable responses included mention of good teachers, small classrooms, a nice facility, and a good principal. Most of those whose impression was “neutral” indicated that they did not know enough about the school. The “unfavorable” responses included comments that because it is an APS school, it is poorly run; there is a lack of family involvement; and the size of the school is too large. One participant wrote that the school is a “new building but old instructional techniques. A typical “APS” school with an enormous racial imbalance, shunning any subject that does not pertain to black history.” Another commented that he or she had heard of “great violence” at the school. These

comments reflect dramatically different impressions of the school—from a nice facility to a violent school. The school seems to function differently for different residents—there is less of a sense that it is looked on as favorably in the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods as the Neighborhood Charter School is.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether or not they agreed with the statement “Parkside is an important part of my neighborhood.” Possible answers were “strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree”. Sixteen respondents wrote that they strongly agreed with the statement; 19 marked “agree”; 34 were neutral; eight disagreed with the statement, two strongly disagreed, and six did not answer. When asked to evaluate the same statement about the Neighborhood Charter School, forty-one respondents wrote that they “strongly agree” that the school is an important part of their neighborhood; 21 marked “agree”; one wrote “agree to neutral”; 13 were neutral; three disagreed, one disagreed strongly, and five did not answer. These results reflect the general importance of schools as neighborhood institutions. At the same time, there is a clear distinction among respondents that the Neighborhood Charter School acts as a more salient neighborhood institution than does Parkside.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the concepts of community and neighborhood are both malleable and strategic. In 1997, when a few Grant Park residents became new parents, they invited other parents in Grant Park to join in their conversations about forming a neighborhood school. The original organizers had a vision of what a neighborhood school should be, and through countless dinners and meetings at each other’s houses, they formed a plan for a school based on a neighborhood community. When they were forced to expand the attendance zone of

their school, they had to confront the simultaneous rescaling of their neighborhood and their community.

The scaling up of the neighborhood boundaries presented problems for the organizers. Their social community was deeply rooted in their shared experience of Grant Park: as middle-class parents who had recently purchased an old home in the neighborhood. As such, the social boundaries of the group were not as flexible as redrawing an attendance zone on a map. Thus, the rescaling of the attendance zone involved new territory, but it also involved expanding a social community that had been criticized for being too white and middle class.

Through a series of events that required that the group formally create opportunities for other residents to join, the Grant Park effort began to transform into a larger multi-neighborhood effort. They tried to capture this evolution in the writing of their charter, where they deployed discourses of community strategically to suggest that the group submitting the charter was representative of the different social characteristics and the different territorial neighborhoods of Grant Park and Ormewood Park. Multiple meanings of community were used to construct the school as a neighborhood institution.

When the historic building was renovated and the school opened, the school began to find its place in the neighborhood(s). As a neighborhood institution, it enabled the social interaction of Grant Park and Ormewood Park residents around the education of their children and the desire to create community. The destruction of the school building in the fire crystallized for many parents the evolving larger-scale community that was developing in the school. They became cognizant of the fact that the school had developed a meaning for the community; for parents, and for passers-by who shared their sadness at the loss of the building. The opening and successful day-to-day operations of the school created a tangible neighborhood institution, and in

turn, the status of the school as a neighborhood institution enabled the rescaling of neighborhood and community—a feat that was unattainable by the original organizers. Thus, although there were tensions around the rescaling of the community of charter-school organizers, the school became a social institution. As such, it enabled the successful reinscription of new community boundaries.

Table 7.1: The Ways in Which Respondents Have Heard of the Neighborhood Charter School

16	My child(ren) attends NCS
39	I live near NCS
17	I have volunteered at NCS
16	I have attended public meetings at NCS
50	Other Answers include: Saw it burn down Considering it for child News coverage of the school Neighborhood Association meetings Read charter proposal Porch Press Neighbors talking It is a big deal in this neighborhood Interested in education and having future children Worked for about 6 years on the formation of it Have donated money and plan for my child to attend Helped with the charter Friends play leadership roles Attended a festival at the school
80	total (respondents could mark more than one answer).

Table 7.2: The Ways in Which Respondents Have Heard of Parkside Elementary

4	My child(ren) attends Parkside
31	I live near Parkside
3	I have volunteered at Parkside
8	I have attended public meetings at Parkside
27	Other Answers include: Watched it being built Visited with principal Friend is on staff Neighborhood Association Meetings Atlanta Public School meetings <i>Porch Press</i> Neighbors' children attend Opening publicity Have dropped off baseball flyers Atlanta Council of PTAs
63	total (respondents could mark more than one answer)

Table 7.3: Respondents' Impressions of the Neighborhood Charter School and Parkside Elementary

	My impression of the Neighborhood Charter School is:	My impression of Parkside Elementary is:
Very Favorable	35	7
Favorable	24	12
Neutral	17	43
Unfavorable	1	7
Very Unfavorable	0	2
No Answer	8	14
Total	85	85

Table 7.4: The Importance of the Two Schools for Survey Respondents

	Parkside is an important part of my neighborhood	The Neighborhood Charter School is an important part of my neighborhood.
Strongly Agree	16	41
Agree	19	21
Neutral	34	14
Disagree	8	3
Strongly Disagree	2	1
No Answer	6	5
Total	85	85

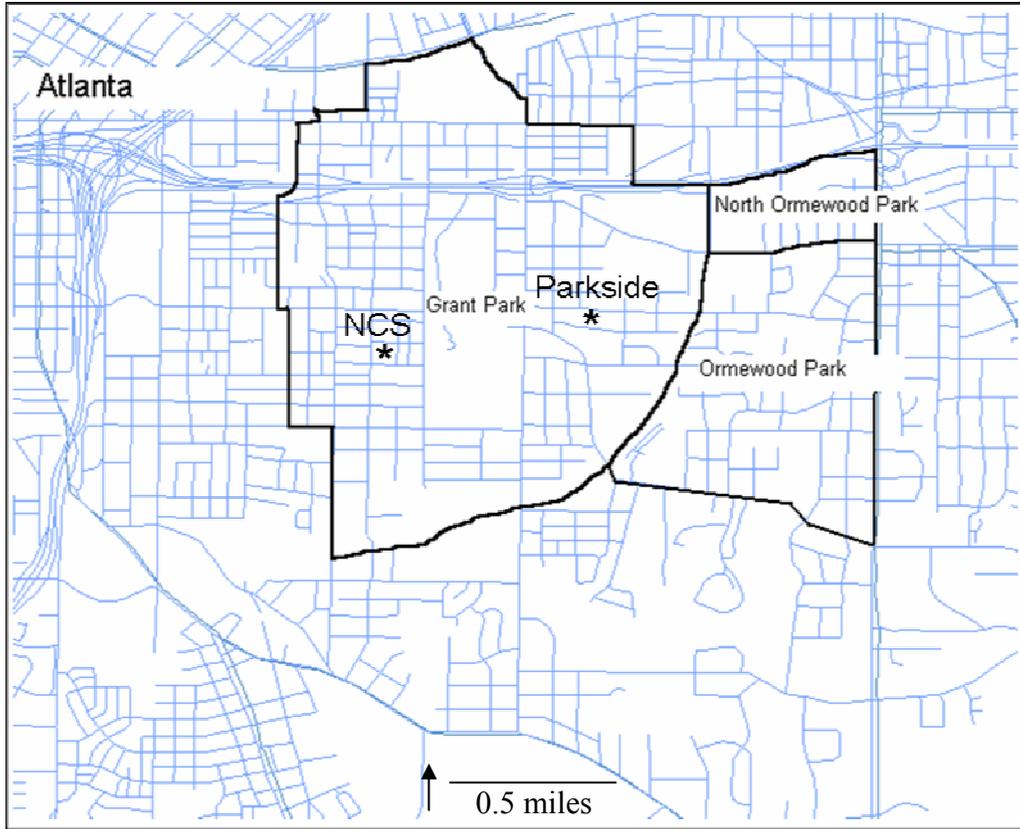


Figure 7.1: Map of Grant Park, North Ormewood Park, and Ormewood Park Boundaries

CHAPTER 8: RESCALING THE STATE: TRANSMITTING CITIZENSHIP, PERFORMING COMMUNITY, AND TRANSFORMING URBAN SPACE

At the outset of this research, I asked how charter schools, as new institutions under neoliberalism, rework notions of citizenship and shape sociospatial relations. Neoliberal ideology suggests a retrenchment of the state, where free-market mechanisms and individual freedoms are viewed as the ideal solution for the distribution of resources in society. Charter schools, as institutions that reflect the neoliberalization of public education, are exemplars of new state-citizen relations in that many charter schools have intensely local governance structures, where private individuals design and manage the schools. As such, charter schools provide spaces for new social citizenship rights to be practiced, with the potential to reconfigure sociospatial relations. The analysis of the formation of the Neighborhood Charter School in the Grant Park-Ormewood Park neighborhoods of Atlanta points to three conceptual findings that contribute to theoretical understandings of neoliberalism, citizenship, and socio-spatial relations. The first finding is the way in which charter schools illustrate a neoliberalizing *and hybridizing* state. The state is both present and transformed in the institutional arrangement of charter schools vis-à-vis traditional public-school structures. The second finding is that the state has changed the very meaning and provision of social citizenship. Connected to the shifting meanings of social citizenship and its provision is the construction of subject-citizens who perform community, as required by a neoliberalizing state. Third, this research further demonstrates how new institutions such as charter schools are instrumental to the reorganization of spatial relations at the urban and neighborhood scales. I find that charter schools function as local institutions, but their impact is not limited to the local neighborhoods they serve. In fact,

charter schools are celebrated by urban regimes as an important consumer choice for urban residents. They are seen as institutions that have the potential to attract middle-class families to urban areas.

Charter Schools in a Hybrid State

Charter schools reflect a neoliberalizing arm of public education in the United States. They are flexible institutions insofar as they may be designed and managed by non-state actors, such as private individuals or corporations. The state, by promoting “choice” and private involvement in public education through charter schools, transfers some responsibility of social-service provision to private interests in more of a market-like arena. This institutional framework suggests the state is simultaneously devolving itself of the responsibilities of public education (a neoliberalization process) *and* it is asserting its control by maintaining the ability to approve, deny, or close down charter schools. Furthermore, the coexistence of charter schools with traditional public schools reflects that the state is not simply absent or retrenching, but rather it is hybridizing. Indeed, the state exists in a traditional form alongside a new neoliberal form.

The evidence in the empirical chapters reveals the extent to which the state is an active part of controlling and guiding the charter-school process. First, the legislation outlined the rights not only of private citizens in being involved in charter schools but the rights of the school districts and states to maintain umbrella control over charters. Individual school districts may refuse charter applications (as the news coverage in chapter six recounted); refuse to renew charters; and, in the case of Atlanta Public Schools, they may close charters down if the school fails to implement its terms or if there is “the existence of competent substantial evidence that the continued operation of the charter school would be contrary to the best interests of the students

or the community” (“Atlanta Public Schools Charter School Application,” 2002). The actions of Atlanta Public Schools, as evidenced by their revolving support of the Neighborhood Charter School, from denying their initial charter to threatening to demolish the building following the fire, suggests a state that maintains some control of its neoliberalized apparatus rather than fully yielding oversight to others. The state is controlling or dictating a new relationship, but the state is not absent from that relationship. This case demonstrates that neoliberalism is not really about state devolution but about the transformation of state-citizen relations.

Although the state exists with a hybrid institutional framework, the discourse on charters as a solution to the failings of traditional state bureaucracy has the potential to undermine the traditional state apparatus. Chapter six, while focused on the role of media discourse as an instrument of urban regimes, illustrates the way in which charter schools are seen as the entrepreneurial answer to a lifeless traditional public education system. At the same time, through their unregulated pedagogical practice, charter schools can challenge neoliberal transformations. As such, charter schools operate as a unique institutional framework that both enables a neoliberalizing state and has the potential to constrain or challenge it. Charter schools are complicit in the neoliberal agenda in that they are privately-managed and provide parents with market-like competition; however, they are also “free” to challenge neoliberal ideology through community involvement and their status as public institutions. Although the NCS case does not currently demonstrate such a challenge, the possibility for it nonetheless is evident in the charter-school framework.

The neoliberal moments or extensions of the hybrid state create new opportunities for a variety of citizen actions. Through volunteering, private individuals are given the right to participate in the provision of social services, which are functions previously held by the welfare

state. As such, new citizenship rights are changing state-society relations, where individuals are increasingly challenged to provide social citizenship to others.

Transmitting Citizenship

As Marshall articulated them, social citizenship rights are “the rights to the means which will enhance the exercise of civil and political citizenship” (Barbalet, 1989: 69). Barbalet (1989: 69) explains that

In the absence of educational and economic resources required to exercise civil or legal and political rights, citizenship remains empty for all practical purposes. Social rights, as rights to social services and education, enable citizens to partake in the national community to which their status entitles them.

Public schools provide citizens with the opportunity to enjoy their citizenship rights. Charter schools take this opportunity one step further, by actively involving citizens in the design and management of the schools. Since not all schools are charters and not all parents of charter-school students are involved in the design of such schools, citizens practicing social citizenship through charter schools are, in a sense, being asked to participate in the provision of social rights to other citizens. Charter schools require active citizenship practice by some people in order to extend a school choice—a form of social citizenship—to others. People active in charter-school design and management, therefore, are essentially being asked by the state to *transmit* social citizenship, or to extend their resources to people who are disadvantaged or differently positioned and who require the benefits of social citizenship rights.

As the case of the Neighborhood Charter School reflects, the participation of private individuals in the creation of a charter school is contingent on those individuals possessing considerable economic and social capital. The group that started the Neighborhood Charter School had access to substantial resources, in the form of professional expertise, income, and the social networks that enabled high-profile, city-wide support for the school. As such, the charter-

school organizers were able to take on roles previously provided by the state, from curriculum design to hiring the school's teaching staff. Furthermore, the organizers used a combination of their own resources (time, expertise, social networks) and the state's (per-pupil funding) to extend social citizenship to other citizens, such as the Ormewood Park parents, some of whom became involved in NCS well after the initial design stages, as chapter seven describes. This new social-citizenship practice reflects an increasingly neoliberal state that looks to the private sector to provide social services. By insisting on the expanded attendance zone for the Neighborhood Charter School, the Atlanta Public School system was in effect requesting that the organized, resource-rich parents of Grant Park extend their economic and social capital, and their practice of social citizenship, to the less active, and thus more marginalized parents of Ormewood Park. The state, in a neoliberal move of devolving its responsibility, is tasking individual groups of citizens with sharing or extending social citizenship to other citizens. At the same time, through the charter-school framework, the state is bringing back those who might have educated their children in private schools. The state, then, is promoting the (quasi-) public-school institution as a viable education site for more citizens. As such, the (neoliberal) charter school is actually extending the state's power.

The case of the Neighborhood Charter School also reveals the extent to which the state itself has the potential to situate citizen action in highly localized spaces. The specific legislation and rules that guide the governance structure of charter schools in Georgia (and Atlanta, more specifically), outline new citizen actions at a sub-school-district level—a scale of hyperlocality.¹ That is, involvement in charter schools entails governance activities at the *school* level—not at traditional district-wide school boards. As such, the state scales down the provision of public

education to parents and local residents. In fact, the opportunity for practicing social citizenship in a neoliberalizing state is a highly local phenomenon, subject to interpretation and oversight by individual states and local governments.

Within this new configuration of locally-scaled citizenship rights and responsibilities, charter-school legislation and practice suggest a specific conceptualization of the subject-citizen. The subject-citizen must be capable of transmitting citizenship. As this empirical examination of the formation of the Neighborhood Charter School reflects, the ideal citizen in charter-school activism is one who is part of a middle-class, two-parent household. The subject of the neoliberal (portion of the) state is part of a traditional, well-educated family. Furthermore, by requiring the involvement of a group of people to transmit citizenship, the neoliberal state in effect asks these citizen-subjects to *perform* community.

Community: as Strategy and Performance

Neoliberalism complicates the construction of the autonomous subject by relying on notions of “community,” or, as Jessop (2002: 454-455) asserts, “some plurality of self-organizing communities as a flanking, compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of the market mechanism.” Communities serve the neoliberal agenda with their ability to leverage economic and social resources to provide a kind of state function that is inefficient for the market to bear. This research reveals the extent to which the organizers of the Neighborhood Charter School were charged with performing community and the extent to which they operationalized this challenge. Furthermore, the case exposes the ambiguities associated with the state’s own version of community.

¹ This hyperlocality is not the only scaled expression of the state vis-à-vis charter schools, however. They are also designed to be flexible institutions—they may be managed by corporations (e.g., EdFutures, Inc.) and they may institute national curricula (e.g., America’s Choice).

The NCS organizers espoused ideals about community and the role of their school in both serving and promoting local community. Likewise, Atlanta Public Schools requires proof of local community support for the approval of a charter. And yet, as reflected in the struggle of the NCS organizers to define community and to transmit citizenship beyond Grant Park, the realization of practicing citizenship can require the rescaling of community to include broader physical and social territories. By having to include other neighborhoods (as required by Atlanta Public Schools), the NCS organizers were forced to broaden their definition of local community in order to create their school (to practice social citizenship). The practice of social citizenship at this local scale relied not just upon resources and legal frameworks, but a sense of community identity that was linked to a physical space. Indeed, the Neighborhood Charter School had to perform a concept of community that was subject to state approval. That is, the territory (in the form of the attendance zone) that was supposed to be the base of the school's "community" had to be approved by Atlanta Public Schools. The kind of community that NCS organizers had to perform was in part controlled by the state.

Transforming Space

This research demonstrates how new institutional frameworks, such as charter schools, are implicated in the reorganization of space, specifically at the urban and neighborhood scales. In a material sense, the presence of charter schools is further reworking the classic one neighborhood-one school relationship. More importantly, the active involvement of individuals in creating charter schools has the potential to transform the experience of space. More abstractly, the neoliberal state is engaged in conflicting impulses, where both individual choice and the performance of community result in charter schools as spatial contradictions. That is, charter schools both indulge the notion of individual autonomous subjects who have the "right to

choose" their school and the need for those autonomous subjects to form a community (and by extension relinquish some of their individual autonomy).

In general, the material landscape of public education has changed. The highly localized nature of the charter application and approval process suggests that certain school districts have more charter schools than others (for that matter, certain states, e.g., Arizona, which had 495 charter schools as of 2004). This can lead to more (and different kinds of) public schools in an area—schools with experimental curricula that target specific student populations. Furthermore, many charter schools are located in untraditional facilities, such as old retail outlets, motels, or office complexes. Finally, many students may choose their public school, which is a departure from classic school districts, where each child is zoned to one particular public school. This flexibility in the charter school framework reflects a reorganization of the spatial expression of public education—from single, state-operated school houses to a variety of spaces in which to attend public school.

More specifically, the active citizenship involved in charter schools suggests the potential for the charter-school framework to transform urban and neighborhood spaces in particular ways. The creation of a charter school is, in a sense, necessarily bound up with politics of space. Purcell (2000) articulates politics of space as the mismatch between material space and imagined space. That is, political activism can result if the everyday experience of a neighborhood does not live up to a person's idealized vision of that neighborhood. The drive to create a charter school suggests dissatisfaction with existing public-school (or private-school) spaces. In the case of the Neighborhood Charter School, the organizers were explicitly motivated by the desire to create a neighborhood school. Their process involved social struggles to define the school, including its community inclusiveness and territorial boundaries.

At a very basic level, organizers of a charter school, be they residents of a neighborhood or executives in a charter-school corporation, must find suitable space to house a charter school. As such, they change the functionality of and everyday experience of local places (lived space), by constructing new buildings, transforming existing ones, or changing the meaning associated with traditional public school houses. For example, instead of having an empty school house in the middle of a gentrifying neighborhood, the Neighborhood Charter School organizers were able to return the Slaton building to its original educational purpose.

The degree to which a charter school serves its local neighborhood (or school district) has to do with questions about the kind of citizen activism involved in the school. As my discussion in chapter two asserts, institutions, such as schools, community organizations, and churches often represent sites of social struggle over social identities, and, I would argue, spatial identities. The NCS organizers made a concerted effort to attract non-white and non-middle class families to participate in the charter-school effort, which was largely white and middle-class. In addition, they struggled to involve residents of Ormewood Park, who had a different neighborhood identity, to join their activities. What resulted, however, was a neighborhood institution that is seen by many to have transcended the time- and place-specificity of the social groups that created it. In a sense, the NCS organizers successfully performed (or constructed) community and in the process they changed the material and experiential space of the Grant Park neighborhood. Their performance of community gave meaning to Grant Park as a neighborhood—creating an alignment between the material and perceived spaces of the NCS organizers.

This active involvement in charter-school activities also has the potential to transform space at a larger scale. As the discussion in chapter six reflects, active involvement in public

education is seen as a key to urban revitalization. That is, if people have a stake in their communities, or if they successfully perform community, as the NCS organizers did, then they are likely to remain in urban areas (which are often associated with poorly-performing schools). Indeed, urban regimes have an interest in promoting community in order to attract global capital. Charter schools, as a tool to create community through active citizenship, become part of economic development schemes, popping up in urban redevelopment projects (such as the East Lake project in Atlanta, where a private foundation renovated a golf course, constructed new housing, and opened a charter school in an effort to transform a blighted neighborhood). Instead of mixed use developments that only include a combination of housing and retail establishments, some developers are turning to charter schools to provide more attractive reasons for middle-class residents to move to or remain in urban areas. Thus, active citizenship through the performance of community has the potential to change the every day experiences of neighborhoods, which has implications for transforming whole urban areas.

Theoretically, neoliberal institutions, such as charter schools, complicate neat conceptualizations of space. They represent both the production of abstract space and the production (and consumption of) highly localized space. In the sense of advancing capitalism (by disabling state structures and enabling the exposure of more and more social arenas to market-like mechanisms), the creation of charter schools relies on conceptions of space that allow rational actors to fulfill their own educational needs. In this conception, the neoliberal spaces of charter schools are viewed as neutral and abstract—and at the same time private (in terms of being privately designed and managed). That is, charter schools are spaces where the business of education can be carried out according to individual needs without (much) interference from the state. Complicating this conception of abstract, neutral space, however, is

the need for individuals to actively perform community in order to achieve the material space of a charter school.

As described in chapter two, community implies a sense of belonging and cooperation around a particular cause or commonality, and it suggests that social differences have been overcome. Community, then, suggests that a conception of the “good life” has been negotiated and agreed upon—that the particularities of individual preference and action have been subsumed into the greater good. By performing community, individuals either coercively or democratically (or both) act on behalf of a group larger than themselves. The spaces that are produced by the performance of community contrast with the ideal spaces of neoliberalism. They are not abstract and individualized but are embedded in local political and social struggles. They are not neutral, in that they represent “what’s best for” local groups. And they are not strictly private, in that they are given over to group struggle and contestation, mediated by the local state through school-board oversight. Charter schools are a public-private amalgam, spaces where new citizenship practices—simultaneously public and private—unfold.

Charter schools are often held up as the answer to a failing bureaucratic (welfare) state. Through active citizenship in a local institution, the neoliberalizing state promotes local community at the same time that it advocates market-based individualism and choice. And yet as this research illustrates, charter schools have the potential to engage individuals more deeply with state structures and functions, which are themselves transforming. This engagement is contingent on access to social, economic, and political capital, however. This inequality in the opportunity to practice citizenship suggests that the landscape of democracy is a little more uneven than it was a little more than a decade ago, when the first charter-school legislation was passed. Practicing citizenship is both more intensely realizable for some citizens, while a little

more abstract and unavailable for others. The state, then, is changing—with both opportunities and costs for social and spatial relations.

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APPENDIX A: GRANT PARK PARENT NETWORK SCHOOL COMMITTEE SURVEY, SPRING 1998

Number of responses	Agree with the following statement
1	I intend to move once my children are school age no matter what school options are available in the neighborhood
6	I will send my child to private school no matter what public neighborhood schools are available
28	I am optimistic that I will send my children to the new school being built to combine Slaton and Annie West (sic)
23	I doubt I will send my children to the new school being built to combine Slaton and Annie West (sic)

If I am not satisfied with the neighborhood public school option, I plan to:

17	Move to another neighborhood
3	Home school my children
27	Attempt to obtain a transfer to another Atlanta Public School
36	Send my children to private school
8	Give the neighborhood public school a try even though I am not completely satisfied with this option

How important is it to you that your child attend public school?

16	Very important
32	Somewhat important
9	Not important at all

3 Factors most critical for your children's school:

48	Quality and attitude of teachers and administrators/Quality of education provided
35	Academic curriculum, enrichment programs, and extracurricular activities offered
27	Safe and appealing environment
22	Small classes, low teacher-student ratio, small school
18	Parental involvement
10	Proximity to our home/Neighborhood School
9	Diversity among students and staff
1	Cost

APPENDIX B: NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of neighborhood space by members of the Grant Park-Ormewood Park-North Ormewood Park neighborhoods. In particular, this study focuses on the role of schools in the neighborhoods.

CONSENT: By completing this survey, I agree to take part in a research study titled "Neighborhood Imaginaries and the Struggle to Define a Charter School", which is being conducted by Katherine B. Hankins, Department of Geography, University of Georgia, 706 542-2926 (or 404 378-9724) under the direction of Dr. Deborah Martin, Department of Geography, University of Georgia, 706 542-2332. I do not have to take part in this study; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty.

I will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation in this research may lead to information that could enhance understanding of the role of neighborhood space in urban neighborhoods.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to complete a survey that will take approximately fifteen minutes. I will be asked to select answers to questions, and I will be asked to write in answers to questions.

No discomfort or stress is foreseen in my participation in this study. No risks are expected. If at any time I want to discontinue filling out the survey, I understand that I may do so.

The information in this survey will not be released to any other party for any reason other than the publication of aggregate survey results. I understand that my participation in this survey will remain completely anonymous. If I choose to be contacted for a follow-up interview, I will provide my contact information on the enclosed postcard, which will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher.

I understand that upon completion of the survey I can mail the survey back to the researcher in the enclosed, stamped envelope.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 706-542-2926, or 404 378-9724, or via email at khankins@uga.edu.

By taking this survey, I indicate that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study.

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
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NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

1. What is the block number and street where you live? (for example, 400 block of Grant Street--you do not need to give your exact house number)

1a. What neighborhood do you live in? Grant Park () Ormewood Park () North Ormewood Park ()
Other _____

2. Is there a particular place where you and members of your community/neighbors gather socially?

Yes () No ()

If yes, where? _____

How often are you there? _____

How many people are generally there? _____

What do you do there? _____

3a. Are you active in any civic associations, such as your neighborhood association? Yes () No ()

If so, which one(s)? _____

On average, how many hours per month do you spend working with this/these group(s)? _____

3b. Are you involved in any religious associations or churches? Yes () No ()

If so, which one(s)? _____

On average, how many hours per month do you spend working with this group/attending church? _____

4. What are important places that define your neighborhood? (Please check ALL that apply)

() school (name: _____)

() park (name: _____)

() neighborhood grocery: (name: _____)

() church (name: _____)

() Other (describe: _____)

5. How do you find out information about issues or concerns in your neighborhood? (Please check ALL that apply)

() *Porch Press*

() neighbors

() neighborhood association meetings

() church

() other: _____

6a. Have you heard of the Neighborhood Charter School? Yes () No ()

6b. If yes, in what ways are you familiar with the school? (Please check ALL that apply)

() My child(ren) attend the school

() I live near the school

() I have volunteered at the school

() I have attended public meetings at the school

() Other. Please describe. _____

7a. Have you heard of Parkside Elementary School? Yes () No ()

7b. If yes, in what ways are you familiar with the school? (Please check ALL that apply)

- My child(ren) attend the school
- I live near the school
- I have volunteered at the school
- I have attended public meetings at the school
- Other. Please describe. _____

8. What is your impression of the Neighborhood Charter School?

Very Favorable () Favorable () Neutral () Unfavorable () Very Unfavorable ()

Please explain. _____

9. What is your impression of Parkside Elementary School?

Very Favorable () Favorable () Neutral () Unfavorable () Very Unfavorable ()

Please explain. _____

10. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

-Parkside Elementary is an important part of my neighborhood.

Strongly Agree () Agree () Neutral () Disagree () Strongly Disagree ()

-The Neighborhood Charter School is an important part of my neighborhood.

Strongly Agree () Agree () Neutral () Disagree () Strongly Disagree ()

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: *Please fill out the following information about yourself.*

11. Racial/Ethnic description:
- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African-American | <input type="checkbox"/> White |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mexican, Mex. American, Chicano | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Puerto Rican | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cuban | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

12. Primary language spoken in the home: () English () Spanish () Other (Please specify) _____

13. Number of adults in your household: _____
Number of children (under 18): _____
Number of children enrolled in elementary school _____ School: _____
Number of children enrolled in middle school _____ School: _____
Number of children enrolled in high school _____ School: _____
Total number of people in your household: _____

14. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?

- less than one year
- one to two years
- two to five years
- five to ten years
- ten to twenty years
- more than twenty years

15a. Where did you live previously? _____

15b. Why did you move to this neighborhood? _____

16a. How would you describe your marital status? () married () divorced () never been married

16b. If you are not married, do you have a domestic partner? () yes () no

17. How would you describe your total annual household income?

Under \$20,000 ()

\$20,000 - \$50,000 ()

\$50,000 - \$80,000 ()

over \$80,000 ()

18. How would you describe your employment?

Employed full time outside the home ()

Employed part time outside the home ()

Self-employed full time ()

Self-employed for less than 20 hours per week ()

Not employed ()

19. If there is another income-earner in your home, how would you describe his/her employment?

Employed full time outside the home ()

Employed part-time outside the home ()

Self-employed full time ()

Self-employed for less than 20 hours per week ()

Not employed ()

Are you willing to be interviewed based on your responses to this survey? Yes () No ()

If so, please fill out the enclosed post card.

Thank you for your time,

Katherine Hankins

If you have questions about this research, you may reach Katherine at 404 378-9724, khankins@uga.edu, or at the University of Georgia, Department of Geography, Geography/Geology Building Room 120, Athens, GA 30602.

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu