

The War **AGAINST OUR SCHOOLS**

Defending Public Education in Puerto Rico

Viewing Guide

In Collaboration





Questions for self reflection:

1. The student-activist Claudia Santos Suárez explains the privatization of schools in the following way: “privatization turns rights into privileges.”. Consider your own experiences related to education and whether you, your communities, your family, and your contexts tend to see education as a right or as a luxury.
2. In what ways have you witnessed racial inequality when it comes to access to education? How have you seen racial inequality connected to the division between public and private education?
3. Reflect on your own educational and communal experiences. We typically think of schools as providing education and other spaces as providing community. How did your school foster a sense of community? What other organizations/spaces fed your knowledge?

Questions about the film:

1. In *War Against Our Schools*, we learn of 500+ school closures in Puerto Rico, many of which were primary and elementary schools. These young children were forced to leave their local schools to attend others that were further from their homes. Based on the film, imagine and comment on how these children's lives and their families have been impacted.
2. A school closure represents the loss of a service and a right. Yet, so much more is also lost. What do school closures mean for a community's identity, sense of belonging, and future?
3. As the film describes, Puerto Ricans have a long history of defending public education and they constantly confront what Mercedes Martinez describes as "a political system that doesn't care about education." Why was post-hurricane María the moment that the government began implementing a privatization agenda that included charter schools?
4. Ashana Bigard explains that "one of the best things that came out of Hurricane Katrina is that "if you were confused, it let you know real quick—you're a third class citizen in this country". mapenzi chibale nonó, speaking about Carolina, Puerto Rico, comments on how her community has responded to the government's multilayered abandonment: "our community has shown an incredible resilience to face the process of systemic racism.". How does this film demonstrate the intersection between disaster capitalism and structural racism, both in Puerto Rico and New Orleans?



5. War Against Our Schools highlights 3 different organizations and groups that rescue schools: CAM Las Carolinas, La Conde, and MARES. What motivates people from the community to come together to reclaim these spaces? How do these rescued schools provide material, social, and spiritual needs to the community?
6. How did MARES and their rescue of Escuela Lorencita Ramírez de Arellano exemplify a democratic process?
7. mapenzi chibale nonó states that La Conde “seeks to promote an education relevant to the community, with the values and needs of the community, taking into account that the needs of the Black community are particular.”

How does La Conde’s philosophy challenge or revise normative teaching methods as well as the traditional content taught in schools?

8. Enclosure, the process of taking lands, spaces, and public goods that are shared by a community and privatizing them for the use of only a few, is a crucial part of colonialism. What do efforts to re-open schools mean in a context and history of colonial enclosure? How do these efforts create a different understanding of land and ownership?
9. A crucial part of capitalism is the creation of scarcity; that is, the idea that there are not enough resources for everyone and that those who have them worked hard for them and/or deserve them. In the context of colonial debt and austerity, how do these communities create abundance?



10. In the film, Jesús Lasanta reflects on what the empowerment and autosuficiencia of school rescues mean in a colonial context. He states:

“We made this possible without the help of the government, without FEMA, without the capitalists. In fact, without open doors, we have had to live independently.”

“You don’t have to be independent to be free.”

What kinds of ideas about sovereignty do these statements reflect?



11. Miguel Rosario states that critical thinking is necessary, “not only to question ourselves, but also, to question the decisions of the government.” How do the organizations and groups depicted in the film expand the definition of “education?” What does education encompass? How does it take place? How does it empower? How does it feel?
12. How does War Against Our Schools--as a film, a documentary, a story-telling device-- expand a sense of how education and learning can take place?
13. Did these stories inspire you in any way? For instance, did they activate you to form part of an organization, empower you to take over public space, make you question educational practices and policies, make you interested in learning more about disaster capitalism, foster a defense of public education? If you identify with one of these, what moment or aspect of the story or quality of the storyteller inspired you?



ACTIVITY

*As a group, agree upon the boundaries of the region or community that you're all inhabiting. After these boundaries are determined, co-create a mental map of this location's infrastructural landscape. **Are there abandoned spaces or buildings in your community? How are these spaces inhabited or viewed by community members?** If it's helpful, draw out a map on a whiteboard, signaling the abandoned spaces that come up during the discussion. Take turns imagining different ways and purposes to rescue these spaces. If it's pertinent, consider their particular geographical location within the community. **What communities would they serve? What needs or absences would they fill?***

A photograph of a building with a teal sign that reads "ESCUELA DE LA COMUNIDAD". The sign is mounted on a teal-painted structure. The building has a window with horizontal blinds visible below the sign. The sky is a clear, bright blue.