

10 *Introduction*

state-controlled schooling can be positively transformative for Black people in large cities, especially those relegated to underresourced schools in districts controlled by market-driven, neoliberal ideologies, policies, and practices. This book believes in traditional public schools but is not anticharter schools. Indeed, charter schools have offered Black students, families, and educators opportunities for small amounts of autonomy and sanctity at a time when traditional public schools have been places of violence inflicted by faculty, staff, and curriculum. However, this book questions the effectiveness of charter school chains equipped with marketing strategies that obscure the harm they sometimes cause and the destabilization they often bring with them as they are planted in various cities across the nation with few insights about local context and without mass buy-in. This book examines who benefited from the school reforms implemented over fifty years and what the politics of these reforms cost Black educators and Black communities in Philadelphia. This book seeks to challenge how school reforms advance and/or transform Black educators and Black communities. School reforms happen in the context of racial politics. Cultural and political contexts—who tells the stories, who controls the narratives of reform, and what people believe about those at the helm of reforms and behind them—matter. This book is decidedly not objective. I seek to offer critiques of school reform without demonizing or lionizing the Black educators who dealt with and, at times, implemented these reforms. I hope readers are informed and intrigued by this examination of school reform over time, and I hope readers leave with more questions about what types of schooling—and politics of school governance and leadership—will yield students, educators, communities, and society that are more just, more free, and more committed to collective improvement, not just advancement for a few. I hope this book honors Black Philly educators inside the system and on the margins, ancestors, elders, and contemporaries who fought and fight for public schooling to meet Black children at their highest aspirations, who worked and are working to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy perpetuated throughout school systems and in classrooms, who dream of the kind of schooling that centers Black strength, joy, and possibility, and then who work to create just that.