

The Rouge Forum News

Working Papers, Critical Analysis, and Grassroots News

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Connecting Reason to Power

www.rougeforum.org

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FROM THE EDITOR

“At some point quantitative changes lead to qualitative shifts and we need to take seriously the idea that we may be at exactly such an inflexion point in the history of capitalism”
(David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, p. 217)

As the sun set over the Pacific, the moon rose over the San Francisco hills to the east, as if attached, one at each end, to a lever. Up and down Ocean beach, fires became more visible, like flashlights poking up out of the sand, casting their light deep into the Milky Way. Crashing ocean waves were occasionally heard amidst the crackling kindling. The warmth of the fire met the gathering breeze.

Fire – water. Sand – sky. Hot – cold. Sun – moon.

Oh, and wine.

And, so we’ve made the big move. This autumn, we find ourselves on the west coast, taking in the sites, culture, and vibe of the bay area. We do note that we’ve brought the chill of the east with us, though. The bay area has been experiencing unseasonably cool temperatures this fall, so we’re glad we had packed the space heaters—which get a nightly workout.

I’ve left the academy for now, finding a space in the urban K-12 classroom and teaching math once again. This time I’ve opted for 9th grade Algebra in a unique public school in San Francisco. During these first few months back on the front lines of the educational endeavor, I can feel myself pulled between similar sorts of poles noted above: fire – water, sand – sky, freedom – discipline, improvisation – standardization, etc., recognizing that a distant conclusion will resolve in some sort of heretofore unknown synthesis.

In my classroom, I search for the intersection of liberation, curriculum, and student experience (comprised of individual traumas, structural oppression, nine years of schooling, varying levels of confidence and skill, etc.). Sometimes, I feel like I’m circling a cul-de-sac.

Our incoming students have preposterously low standardized test scores; the lowest in the city. Yet, on average, three quarters of them will find their way out of *our* school to four-year colleges and stay there; the highest rate in the city among non-selective public schools. This fact prompted a San Francisco chronicle reporter to come to our school a couple of weeks ago with one question: Why do people think the June Jordan School for Equity is such a good school when it has such low standardized test scores?

Really?

Of course the reporter’s story got it mostly wrong (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/09/20/MN131FGFBO.DTL>), what with little understanding of education and a neoliberal agenda caging her consciousness. No superman in our building, just great teachers, great support staff, and evermore committed students. Not the story she wanted to tell.

Yeah, but what about the test scores?

What about them?

We're trying to teach them community, social justice, independent thinking (www.jjise.org). Those are not on the test.

But, sure, I have an algebra curriculum; one that I create. Daily. One that considers what they should know as a citizen, trying to get by in the reality of capitalism. One that catches them up on many missing skills. One that will eventually tether them to one another, helping them realize their interdependence and shed the glitzy lie of individualism. They are not individuals. They are being taught by the media, by religion, by the infiltrators among them to be sheep: believe in mysticism (your preacher/priest won't lead you astray), listen to your I-pods (they will set you free listening to mass-manufactured, misogynist music), text on your cell phones as often as possible (your so-called friends are more informative than your teachers), buy the most fashion-conscious clothes you can (they will individualize you while you look like everyone else), etc.

But, who can blame them. Many know they have already been left behind. And, this race is not intended for them.

Researching zip codes in the 46 sq. mile city of San Francisco in my Algebra class, students realized that families living in the Presidio (mostly white) make twice as much their families living in Bayview, Visitacion Valley, and the Excelsior. What could their families do with twice the income?

Later in this issue, I'll supply a little more about the school and the curriculum I am constructing there. But, suffice to say, the move away from the university has been well worth it. And, I am learning a lot.

This issue of the *Rouge Forum News*, like Issue 14, is dedicated to a few of the papers from the recent Rouge Forum conference, held in Williams Bay, WI in August. Faith and Craig orchestrated a wonderful retreat-like experience for the attendees at George Williams College, right on the banks of Geneva Lake. In this issue we are fortunate to have one of the keynote addresses from Richard Brosio, as well as a paper from Blanca Caldas Chumbes, which she delivered at the conference. As well, we've included some follow-up thinking regarding our attempt to formulate a Rouge Forum teacher education program. You'll find the minutes from our meeting at the 2010 Rouge Forum conference as well as a paper Faith Agostinone-Wilson delivered at the Critical Questions in Education conference in November. Finally, Rich Gibson contributes an insightful essay arguing for why things are the way they are.

This topic of digging into why things are as they are seemed off-limits at the recent statewide conference held at San Francisco State. As a follow-up to and continuation of the demonstrations and occupations last fall in California, as well as the March 4 demonstrations earlier this year, this conference was premised upon what we should do next, predicting that fee hikes were right around the corner (since the conference 8% fee hikes have been passed by the Board of Regents, piggy-backing on the 32% fee hike last year). Further austerity measures are sure to follow, which will further choke off spending on education in favor of bilking the poor and working classes to pay for their own mis-education.

A few of us from the Rouge Forum, as well as some friends of the Rouge Forum, attended the meeting and were disappointed at the lack of discourse surrounding the current circumstances. While it was invigorating to gather with other activists for social justice, and the meeting organizers did a fairly good job of facilitating a complex undertaking, the utter *lack* of discussion regarding what has led us to the current moment was notable. You can read a more balanced and

nuanced account of our experience at the conference, co-written by Jack Gerson, Rich Gibson, and me (<http://www.substanceneeds.net/articles.php?page=1768§ion=Article>).

If we are to understand our current inflexion point, which Harvey suggests in my opening citation, then we need a rigorous discussion of what is happening and why. (1) The imperial project is going awry (lost in Iraq, losing if not lost in Afghanistan) though the project does not seem to be on the wane. Perhaps the latest installation of the imperial moment hasn't been about winning, but testing new technologies—surveillance, drones, and otherwise. Oh, and whipping up fear. Full body scanner, anyone? (2) Jobs continue to be hard to come by while the more elite classes decide on whether or not to extend tax cuts for themselves and the capitalists who pay for their seats in the government. (3) What little health care rights, however watered down, have been able to be won are under assault from the new more conservative Congress—while they enjoy socialized medicine at our expense. (4) The race to the top continues while children continue to get left behind. And, we wait for superman. Pure poppy-cock. (5) ICE raids escalate while Arizona helps line the pockets of the private prison industry by locking up undocumented workers.

The list could continue. I'll let Richard Brosio and Rich Gibson extend the list and provide their keen analysis. Of course, for the Rouge Forum, our answer is at least in part a pedagogical one. David Harvey concludes his latest text, *The Enigma of Capital*, arguing that we need some sort of animating vision for this 'radical circumstance' grounded in a 'rigorous application of logic' that helps create new mental conceptions of our world. Thus, the Rouge Forum hopes to offer a space for such an application and a location for working out the possibilities. Since many of us find ourselves in classrooms, we also offer a couple of essays in this issue that highlight what this might look like day-to-day as we continue to deepen and radicalize our mental conceptions of the world.

As well, we consider the potential of a teacher education program, foundationalized in dialectical materialism, which will help teachers daily apply reason to unreasonable circumstances and rational rejoinders to irrational demands. We see this as only the beginning of the conversation.

We invite you to be a part of it. We encourage your feedback to the *Rouge Forum News* as well as your attendance at the upcoming Rouge Forum conference at Lewis University in Chicago, May 20-22. Stay tuned for the call for papers.

Adam Renner, Oakland, CA
adamrenner70@gmail.com

WHAT IS THE ROUGE FORUM?

The *Rouge Forum* is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach--or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community which understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless.

We hope to demonstrate that the power necessary to win greater democracy will likely rise out of an organization that unites people in new ways—across union boundaries, across community lines, across the fences of race and sex/gender. We believe that good humor and friendships are a vital part of building this kind of organization, as important as theoretical clarity. Friendships allow us to understand that action always reveals errors--the key way we learn. We chose Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch.

We had modest success in defeating the standardized test, the MEAP, in Michigan. We work in faculty organizations and unions to deal with the racism and sexism in academia. We try to press forward questions of class size, curricular freedom, anti-racist pedagogy, real inclusion, and a just tax system. As part of the *Whole Schooling Consortium*, we have sponsored forums in the U.S., uniting hundreds of people for democracy and equality. (Excerpted from the Rouge Forum website: www.rougeforum.org.)

WHY DO YOU CALL IT THE ROUGE FORUM?

The River Rouge runs throughout the Detroit area—where the Rouge Forum was founded in 1998. Once a beautiful river bounteous with fish and plant life, it supported wetlands throughout southeast Michigan. Before industrialization, it was one of three rivers running through what is now the metropolitan area. Today the Rouge meanders through some of the most industrially polluted areas in the United States, past some of the poorest and most segregated areas of North American, only to lead some tributaries to one of the richest cities in the U.S.: Birmingham. The Rouge cares nothing for boundaries. The other two Detroit rivers were paved, early in the life of the city, and now serve as enclosed running sewers. Of the three, the Rouge is the survivor.

The Ford Rouge Plant was built before and during World War I. By 1920, it was the world's largest industrial complex. Everything that went into a Ford car was manufactured at the Rouge. It was one of the world's largest iron foundries and one of the top steel producers. Early on, Henry Ford sought to control every aspect of a worker's life, mind and body, in the plant and out.

Using a goon squad recruited from Michigan prisons led by the infamous Harry Bennett, Ford instituted a code of silence. He systematically divided workers along lines of national origin, sex, race, and language groupings—and set up segregated housing for the work force. Ford owned Dearborn and its politicians. He designed a sociology department, a group of social workers who demanded entry into workers' homes to discover "appropriate" family relations and to ensure the people ate Ford-approved food, like soybeans, voted right, and went to church. While Ford did introduce the "Five Dollar Day," in fact only a small segment of the employees ever got it, and those who did saw their wages cut quickly when economic downturns, and the depression, eroded Ford profits.

The Rouge is the site that defined "Fordism." Ford ran the line mercilessly. Fordism which centered on conveyor production, single-purpose machines, mass consumption, and mass marketing, seeks to heighten productivity via technique. The processes are designed to strip workers of potentially valuable faculties, like their expertise, to speed production, expand markets, and ultimately to drive down wages. These processes seek to make workers into replaceable machines themselves, but machines also capable of consumption.

Contrary to trendy analysis focused on globalization and the technique of production, Ford was carrying on just-in-time practices at the Rouge in the early 1930's. Ford was and is an international carmaker, in the mid 1970's one of Europe's largest sellers. In 1970, Ford recognized the need to shift to smaller cars, and built them, outside the U.S., importing the parts for assembly—early globalism.

Ford was a fascist. He contributed intellectually and materially to fascism. His anti-Semitic works inspired Hitler. Ford accepted the German equivalent of the Medal of Honor from Hitler, and his factories continued to operate in Germany, untouched by allied bombs, throughout WWII.

At its height, more than 100,000 workers held jobs at the Rouge. Nineteen trains ran on 85 miles of track, mostly in huge caverns under the plant. It was the nation's largest computer center, the third largest producer of glass. It was also the worst polluter. The Environmental Protection Agency, in 1970, charged the Rouge with nearly 150 violations. Today there are 9,000 workers, most of them working in the now Japanese owned iron foundry. Ford ruthlessly battled worker organizing at the Rouge.

His Dearborn cops and goon squad killed hunger marchers during the depression, leading to massive street demonstrations. In the Battle of Overpass Ford unleashed his armed goons on UAW leaders, a maneuver which led to the battle for collective bargaining at Ford, and was the founding monument to what was once the largest UAW local in the world, Local 600, led by radical organizers for years.

On 1 February 1999, the boilers at the aging Rouge plant blew up, killing six workers. The plant, according to workers, had repeatedly failed safety inspections. UAW local president made a statement saying how sorry he was for the families of the deceased--and for William Clay Ford, "who is having one of the worst days of his life." Papers and the electronic press presented the workers' deaths as a tough day for the young Ford who inherited the presidency of the company after a stint as the top Ford manager in Europe.

The steam went out of Local 600 long ago. The leaders now refer to themselves as "UAW-FORD," proof that they have inherited the fascist views of the company founder.

When environmentalist volunteers tried to clean the rouge in June 1999, they were ordered out of the water. It was too polluted to clean.

So, why the Rouge Forum? The Rouge is both nature and work. The Rouge has never quit; it moves with the resilience of the necessity for labor to rise out of nature itself. The river and the plant followed the path of industrial life throughout the world. The technological advances created at the Rouge, in some ways, led to better lives. In other ways, technology was used to forge the privilege of the few, at the expense of most--and the ecosystems, which brought it to life. The Rouge is a good place to consider a conversation, education, and social action.

That is why.

(Excerpted from the Rouge Forum Conference site: www.rougeforumconference.org.)

Marxist Thought: Still *Primus Inter Pares* for Understanding and Opposing the Capitalist System

Richard A. Brosio

This contribution to *Neo-liberalism, Education and the Politics of Inequality* is part of my long-term attempt to examine Marx's humanist commitment, and with it a belief in human volition – or agency (Brosio 1985, *passim*). Collective agency is necessary for attempts to rescue society and its schools from the latest, namely neo-liberal, capitalist attack on working people and the possibilities for our achieving deep and inclusive democracy. This work consists of yet another series of arguments that Marx's ideas and actions (he was involved politically his whole adult life), as well as the Marxists and others who have understood his work well, provide not only some of the best ways to understand our conditions, but also to organize in ways to make possible a resolution of the historical human crisis. I have written elsewhere:

Marx laid out a series of questions, based upon certain assumptions, which were labored over for the rest of his life. The *Grundrisse* of 1859 and *Das Kapital* 1867 cannot be understood separately from the work done before. In the early work, accomplished through the revolutions of 1848-49, Marx made it clear that he believed in the individual (and collective) actors' ability to be a historically effective agent; in fact, it is the very nature of men and women to be makers of history (1985, pp. 82-3).

John Sanbonmatsu's *The Postmodern Prince* (2004) provides powerful theoretical, historical, and pragmatic support for my claim that Marxist thought is still *primus inter pares* for analyzing and combating today's neo-liberal capitalism. Considering what the neo-liberal phase of capitalism fundamentally consists of – the ultra but historical penetration of market ideas and realities into civil society in increasingly up-close and personal ways - the most effective societal and educational inquiries must be radical. By this I mean getting to the roots and complexities of what is being examined. I contend further that were one to understand how Marx and the best Marxists conducted/conduct their inquiries it would be warranted to assert that they deserve careful attention - if not replication. Not only have Marxist inquiries sought to analyse and describe the nature of the whole historical society, their authors offered suggestions for what should be done! Many of these accomplishments are classics, although not in the sense that conservatives and reactionaries claim classic stature. Marx's inquiry method is open-ended and provides us with the opportunity to revise, reconstruct and improve upon it. Not only the opportunity but the demand by Marx himself to go beyond what he had accomplished. Marx was enough of a secularist to realize that future generations should not attempt to consider his work as sacrosanct in any way.

I, along with Sanbonmatsu, am interested in what still remains of the former powerful socialist, communist, and other “red” ideas, movements, and organizations.ⁱ Are the many opponents of these leftist forces correct when they triumphantly boast that capitalism and some forms of “democracy” are the only possibilities for good government and a productive economy? Are the neo-liberals advertising agents to be trusted when they insist that we reject the so-called democratic state's responsibility for the common welfare, and instead turn to market outcomes for everyone? Similarly, are the intellectual scaffoldings for the great “red” threats to capitalism and its various forms of class-states also relics of the past and safely deposited in the dustbin of history? It is evident to some that many intellectuals, working people, members of minority groups and others who see themselves as oppressed have formulated specific critiques and demonstrations against the so-called Washington consensus that has dominated the neo-liberal attempt to take advantage of the Soviet Union's implosion. It is not clear, how or if, these resisters

have considered precedents from red ideas and accomplishments.ⁱⁱ The most recent “gales of creative destruction” began before 1989; in fact, the capitalist accumulation crisis was a main – if not the main – cause for the “gales” in their neo-liberal garb. This being said, it is obvious that the realizations of and actions against the Washington consensus have not been as coordinated as they might be. Consequentially, these actions have failed to stop or even slow down the overall attempt by capital’s many agents to turn every place in the world – and now parts of “outer space” – as well as every person into the market’s grasp so that we all become dependent on market outcomes alone.

Príncipe/Principéssa: Gramsci and Marx

What can be retrieved from the “red” past (which posed the greatest threat to the capitalist system) that can assist us in our efforts to theorize, hypothesize, and act collectively in order to possibly overcome actually existing capitalism – in its resurgent imperialist khakis?ⁱⁱⁱ As was stated above, learning about the past and its liberatory phases does not mean that we should hold sacred what was done and who did it. The errors of the past are many, but perhaps when we consider the conditions faced by our forbears we will not be so quick to condemn. Sanbonmatsu asks if we can invent a new “form”^{iv} with which to help unify the many actions against the US led attempt to impose capitalism and various forms of empire on the whole world. Furthermore, he and I ask if a united left can arise around the Marxist belief that the whole can be identified, understood, and changed. His use of the modifier “postmodern” for the noun “prince” was alarming to me at first glance; however, upon further inspection I learnt that Sanbonmatsu’s prince is compatible with mine. He seeks to convince his readers that the work of Gramsci, specifically in the latter’s development of the prince concept, is as necessary as it was in Machiavelli and Gramsci’s lifetimes. The latter realized the necessity for a “party” that could lead in the redevelopment of Italian civil society, through struggle against developing capitalist hegemony that was assisted and enforced by the class-state.

Machiavelli’s project centred upon a strong ruler who would inspire Italians to unite against foreign enemies. Gramsci’s Italy was already somewhat unified as a result of the nineteenth-century Risorgimento. However, Gramsci, among many others, were not satisfied with the results of reunification. For those readers who may be wary about the resuscitation of a central organization/party as a motor for overcoming the capitalist system, be assured that both Sanbonmatsu and I are aware of the dangers and excesses connected to the wrong kind of centralization and what some call elitism or avant-gardism.

Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 187) offers Octavio Ocampo’s painting of Cesar Chavez as a symbol that suggests unity and plurality in leadership.

Looking closely at ... [the] painting, one sees ... that Chavez’s visage is ... an illusion: his face, shoulders, and chest are composed entirely of hundreds of farm workers ... all marching together. His hair is made of plowed fields, his lips of doves, the highlights on his face, protest banners. The farm workers’ movement is depicted diachronically: marchers stream into the present from the past.... Skulls lining the left side of the painting are really figures of women and children burying the dead – victims of poverty and pesticide poisoning.... Ocampo sought to capture the complex morphology of mass counter-power. Chavez the individual, like Machiavelli’s *Prince*, is thus portrayed as a transitional figure, one whose form briefly serves as a vehicle through which a collective will manifests itself. Rather than being a hindrance to unity, diversity turns out to be the precondition.

It is important as well as fair to admit that so many leftist movements have been contested by the Western capitalist powers. Moreover, internal reactionaries were and are supported by these armed powers. This may not excuse what some find dangerous in centralized lefts; however, it helps to explain actions that have been taken by the revolutionaries in the face of overwhelming force that threatened to obliterate the movement and kill those who supported it. Important changes need to be made with regard to centralization (when necessary) but this does not mean that parties such as Gramsci's *Partito comunista italiano (PCI)* have little or nothing to offer us. Marx and the best Marxist thinkers had to be their own revisionists while writing and acting. They unsparingly and even "ruthlessly" scrutinized their work as they went along. We must join in the kind of critique that our forbears began.^v

There is evidence that Marx, Engels, and many of their comrades were more democratic than most people think. Let us begin with Michael Löwy (2005, p. 21):

Contrary to the ideologists of the "Savior" or the supporters of conspiratorial societies, for whom the separation between "the general interest" and masses is institutionalized, because people are [allegedly] necessarily particularist, corrupt, or ignorant, Marx refuses to dig a ditch between the communists and the proletariat, because their separation is provisional, because the proletariat tends towards the totality [and organizational form], towards communism ...[and] revolution. The bourgeois doctrinaire alienates the "totality" in an individual or an institution because he regards civil society as essentially particularistic. The conspirator sees in a secret sect the only bearer of the "totality" because the working-class mass seems to him to be doomed by obscurantism so long as the capitalist regime survives. Marx sees his role and that of the communists as an instrument of self-liberation of the masses, because he is witnessing the birth of an independent labor movement, and he believes this to be capable of attaining consciousness of its historic task.

Löwy's chapter three is called: "The Theory of the Party (1846-1848)." It is instructive to learn what he has to say about Marxism and democrats. He informs us they were struggling with how to help German communism to advance beyond its lack of form. They asked how this could be achieved. Of course these communist pioneers' goal was to eventually internationalize the movement and party. Marx explained how the process should occur: from the base to the summit and from the periphery to the center. Engels wrote, "democracy nowadays is communism." According to Löwy (2005, p 133):

Engels describes the changing of the rules [of the League of the Just to the Communist League] as the transition from an organization "hankering after conspiracy, which requires dictatorship" to one that is "thoroughly democratic, with elective and removable authorities."

There is no space here to discuss the famous "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), except to say its authors and supporters were convinced that before authentic/bona fide democracy could be established, capitalism as a system, its rulers and main beneficiaries would have to be overcome. Those who continue to rule the politics of the so-called capitalist democracies would or should understand what the Marxist communists meant. Their treatment of everyone and every organization that opposed and opposes the capitalist dispensation over which they sit and benefit from is a necessary – if not sufficient – point to make herein!

The Marxist traditions of inquiry and potential action stress the need to discover contradictions and crises within the systems being interrogated. Many democratic leftists think that the present neo-liberal phase is characterized by these conditions resulting in significant opportunities to act. There is no consensus about this moment of real opportunity because, in part, there is no united democratic left. It may be that there has never been a perfect union of agreement in the past; however, with Sanbonmatsu I believe that there must be a Marxist democratic “form” that can act with an open hand, so that the fingers can feel out what is happening, and then become a strong hand grasp, or closed fist when needed. According to Sanbonmatsu, the scattered forces that act against what ails us most at this time do not add up to a centralized entity whose members can take advantage of the weakest places in the capitalist system and its outed imperial reality. It is clear that the anti-capitalist/imperial struggles have not even been very effective at maintaining the social democracies that were the targets of the “gales of creative destruction” starting in the 1970s. There are important exceptions, but nothing like a direct and powerful threat to the capitalist system that has been so strengthened during the last forty years. The revanchist right(s) appear to have benefited most from crises that its agents have been most responsible for creating in the first place. An important school example is the neo-liberal attempt to discredit K-12 public schools in the US because of their alleged failures. The “gales” have destroyed many “family wage” jobs and ruined inner cities, inhabited mainly by people of color, where all too many of these “failed” schools exist.

The neo-liberal agents have tried also to shore up patriarchy, racial hierarchies, and of course greater class stratification, as part of a “seamless world order” impervious to dissent and revolutionary action. The disconnect between the great historical threats facing the world’s working people, and the mostly ad hoc responses (patching things up but not removing what caused the need to oppose in the first place), may be getting worse as the leaders of the US and its “coalition of the willing” appear to be contemplating even more reckless policies and actions. I first wrote this in July 2006, a time when the Israelis were conducting a war against its enemies in Lebanon and the Palestinians. The Bush Administration’s announced policy was to let the Israeli armed forces pound their foes until they give into superior force and accept the status quo that favors America’s ally. The Arab fighters are labeled terrorists: therefore there is allegedly little need to look carefully at the issues.

The powers that be, those who constructed and defend the undemocratic system that prevails over most of the world in its current neo-liberal dispensation, have an important advantage. This totalistic hegemony is total in the sense that it speaks to so much of what all of us encounter in our daily lives. The rightist alliance’s logic and force is at work in shopping malls, schools, places of worship, the armed forces, the songs we hear, the words we read, the pictures we see, the spectator sports-world, the hunting and fishing community (in the US at least), what passes for certain kind kinds of humor and jokes, and throughout all the rest, the very texture, of the society and culture. It is a hyper-materialistic society and this phenomenon is wrapped in the husk of culture that is dominated by those who are most responsible for these dialectically related constructions.

This is not to say that resistances are absent; however, few if any strike at the heart of the system. I think that Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri (*Empire*, 2000) would consider my use of the word “heart” naive, because they see empire as everywhere with no central command post. At most they see “empire” being comprised of the strongest capitalist nations, led by the most powerful one, the US, and the various global organizations set up by the great powers. Hardt argues that the US, although most powerful, cannot be imperialist in the older sense of the term. However, the US and UK do not need an official governor, national flags, and other old colonial paraphernalia within colonized countries that depend on the global economy in order to survive. Even more

striking is the Bush debacle in Iraq. Old style colonial armed forces are at work in that ruined country. The occupiers may not be able to return home until Iraq becomes neo-liberalized. This means that the people will be occupied by low wage work, consumerism, and banal circus-like entertainment; although there may not be enough bread!

In order to counter the advantages cited above the opposition must have what Sanbonmatsu calls “perceptible form”. He claims that movements per se are not adequate to the task of seriously challenging the global capitalist system. Moreover, without a body in the temporal world, movements are ghost-like.^{vi} Marx and Gramsci’s favored example of “perceptible form” was a communist party. This is not to suggest that the name communist would be accepted presently because of many reasons. To make this term more concrete, it means that people must have a tangible place to go – to hang out, make good talk, tend to what concerns them – and this is what the parties on the red left provided. It is not surprising that the Fascist squads first attacked the union headquarters, houses of labor, socialist and then communist party offices and meeting places. Obviously the squads did not stop at destroying the buildings alone. Furthermore, the parties of the red left had seats in the Italian parliament. Gramsci was arrested while he was a member of this body!

Babel, Language, and Unity

Sanbonmatsu makes a convincing case that socialism, of various kinds, provided the shape and form for much of the world’s left. The Marxist communists grew out of earlier socialist traditions and organizations. In Central and South America opponents of neo-liberalism and empire have succeeded in some countries to establish various kinds of form. The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and earlier movements such as the Castro revolution in Cuba, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua are examples. The systematic attempts by the Monroe Doctrine assisted US governments to smash these organizations demonstrates the dangers confronting people who and countries that seek to make their own histories in their own ways.

The socialists provided versions of utopianism - imaginaries that taped into religious visions of recuperation. Sanbonmatsu informs us that this recuperative effort was dependent on some earlier forms of unity; however, not guided by deities of any kind. The attempt to construct an archetypical tower ends, as we know, in failure.

Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 12) explains:

The moral of the Babel story is that unity cannot be won on this earth through human effort, that we must not imagine that we can invent whatever we can conceive in our minds. If we dream that we are capable of creation, our hubris will destroy us. Better, in short, to think locally (or tribally), not globally.

Socialism and communism are both about, to some extent, building a tower without god, namely to construct a just society on earth. It is important to understand the various reds’ ties to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, including the one of 1848. Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 12) adds:

In the dreams of modern reason, from the Encyclopedists and Jacobins in the eighteenth century to the socialists and anarchists of the nineteenth and twentieth, the Tower of Babel would be rebuilt, the whole restored. From the bricks and mortar of what is, human beings would construct a unified structure [form] capable of bridging the vast difference to what ought to be.

I have written elsewhere:

Carl Becker, in his classic work, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* [1932], writes of the link between the *philosophes* and Marx, between the French and Russian Revolutions. “Supplied with the dialectic of Hegel and the evolutionary theories of Darwin, Marx formulated in *Das Kapital*, the creed of the communist faith which was to replace, for the discontented, the democratic faith of the eighteenth century. The new faith ... does not look back to a golden age ... or Garden of Eden.... It does not look forward to the regeneration of humanity by the pleasant specific of enlightenment [alone].... It sees in the past a ruthless and impersonal conflict of material forces; a conflict functioning through the economic class interests of men [sic], which, as it created the landowning aristocratic régime of the Middle Ages and then destroyed it in the interest of the bourgeois-capitalist régime of the nineteenth century, will in turn destroy the bourgeois-capitalist régime in the interest of the proletariat” (Brosio 1994a, pp. 111-112).

The “will in turn” does not mean inevitability. Marx thought that history is open, made by people in conflict and perhaps someday in harmony.

Marx sought to develop a form of common language for politics so that the scattered and disunited working-class people could understand their plight and make common cause in solidarity to overcome their oppressors. This emphasis did not include belief in divine intervention, at Babel or elsewhere. He understood the damage that capitalism had done to workers **and the environment** in which they, and many others, inhabited. Despite keeping focused on the destruction that capitalism caused, he saw its demonic power as a giant broom that swept away many forms of imposed differences that were regressive. Feudalism is a good example. Marx held that the drive toward an admitted dangerous leveling and homogenizing of certain processes and institutions also had a positive side to it. Bluntly said: it laid the groundwork, in his view, for a more common universal playing field – a site that could then be taken over by the proletarian revolution.

According to Meghnad Desai (2002, p. 7) central to Marx’s theory is that

any particular mode of production disappeared only after its full potential had been exhausted.... With mature capitalism came a mature, organized [not inevitably] working class capable of autonomous collective action. The full chain of links was never specified, but it would be [done by] ... workers.

Desai (2002, p. 10) continues, Marx

did not see capitalism as eternal, but nor did he see it as incapable of change.... The limits to capitalism have to be sought in the weakness of ... [its] strongest points.... It will be in the daily practice of the people working the machinery of capitalism that its limits will be felt, and it will be overcome by them.

Marshal Berman (1999, p. 264) concurs:

Marx sees the modern working class as an immense worldwide community waiting to happen. Such large possibilities give the story of organizing a permanent gravity and grandeur. The process of creating unions is not just an item in interest-group

politics, but a vital part of ... “the education of the human race.” And it is not just educational but existential: the process of people, individually and collectively, discovering who they are [I would say: “we”]. As they learn who they are, they will come to see that they need one another to be themselves. They will see, because workers are smart, bourgeois society has forced them to be in order to survive its constant upheavals. Marx knows they will get it by and by.

Berman points out that during the 1990s Marx was considered dead, by some, and that big ideas were no longer necessary. However, in the early twenty-first century, these postmodernist, neo-liberal, and neo-conservative boasts and claims look rather dated! We “find ourselves in a dynamic global society ever more unified [in some ways] by downsizing, deskilling, and dread – just like the old man said” (Berman 1998, p. 16). It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that official schooling in almost every country does not expose students to what Marx and the Marxists actually said – and then tried to accomplish.

Differences Can Be Worked Out

Sanbonmatsu does not agree with poststructuralists, postmodernists, and others who support Foucault and Nietzsche’s insistence on difference being the sine qua non of our condition. He, like Marx, seeks to construct consensus among people who arguably have much in common, in spite of obvious and important differences. Marx belongs to a tradition whose members see differences among us and other phenomena as mostly “appearances”, rather than “essences”. I am not using these two words in a Platonic sense, wherein they are generally viewed as starkly dichotomous, or in other ways that conflict with Marx’s well-known critique of so many philosophers who came before him. His dialectical materialist inquiries speak to the nuances and relationships within the human-natural world. On a more mundane level, Marx understood that differences could be worked out. He rejected the idea that differences trumped what we all have –or develop - in common. In the market-saturated societies we now live in its agents’ attempt to trap us into the acceptance of a narcissism featuring very small differences. I, perhaps surprisingly, turn to Isaiah Berlin (2004, p. 26) for further support:

What ... do I mean by saying that men [sic] do have a common nature ... I think that common ground between human beings must exist if there is to be any meaning in the concept of human being at all. I think ... there are certain basic needs, for example – food, shelter, security, and if we accept Herder, for belonging to a group of one’s own.... These are only the most basic properties; one might ... add the need for a certain minimum of liberty, for the opportunity to pursue happiness or the realization of one’s potentialities for self-expression, for creation ... for love.... [Also] for some means of conceiving and describing themselves, perhaps in highly symbolic and mythological forms [as well as] their own relationship to the environment natural and human.... Unless there is that communication between human beings ... within a society, let alone understanding what others have wished to communicate in other ages and cultures, [humanism] would become impossible. I believe in the permanent possibility of change, modification, [and] variety ... but there must be enough in common between individuals and groups who are going through various modifications for communication to be possible.

I am among those who see Marx as a humanist. This does not conflict with his scientific inquiries. Non-positivist science and humanism are compatible in many ways.^{vii}

Liberalism does not own humanism. The word itself, like history, suggests problems in terms of nomenclature; namely inserting “man” and “his”. In addition to this gender insensitivity there are also social class, race, ethnic, sexual orientation, and other examples of non-inclusion. Marx admired liberal “culture” and “civilization” because it replaced the older feudal, aristocratic, church, and royal order. The early benefits enjoyed by the bourgeoisie did enhance many liberties for various persons and groups. However, Marx understood that the terrible shortcoming of this improvement was its non-inclusion of the working class. He realized that the surging bourgeois-liberal order was based much more on capitalism than Enlightenment. It became clear that the main benefits accrued to those who owned the means of production.

One of the putative great strengths of liberalism/humanism is its vaunted support of pluralism. Marx and Marxists have been criticised for not accepting this important feature of a good and just society. John Gray (2006, p. 20) has written, in reference to Isaiah Berlin’s “achievement” concerning what the latter was against:

[Specifically], all genuine values must be combinable in a harmonious whole. In this view conflicts of values are symptoms of error that in principle can always be resolved: if human values come into conflict that is only because our understanding of them is imperfect, or some contending values are spurious; where such conflicts appear there is a single right answer that – if only they can find it – all reasonable people are bound to accept. In opposition to this view Berlin maintained that conflicts of values are real and inescapable, with some having no satisfactory solutions.... Conflicts of value go with being human.

I contend that Marx’s use of the dialectical method of inquiry provides ways to resolve certain crises, thorny problems, and disagreements. He paints a societal picture in the *Manuscripts* of 1844 that signify “true” and “ultimate” freedom.

Sympathetic critics have called it a society of artists who work harmoniously [Berlin may argue against this]. Men [sic] would find freedom and happiness in work, in the same way that Marx believed artists worked. There would be no rules imposed from outside the work process, according to Marx’s artistic vision. Eugene Kamenka thinks Marx’s position is that “art ... knows no authorities and no discipline except ... [that of] art itself.... [This], every artist accepts freely and consciously; it is in this ... alone that makes him [her] an artist”(Brosio 1985, p. 78).

Marx remained loyal to his early and continuing humanist vision and hopes.

What Has Really Gone Awry

We are constantly reminded that many leftist, and specifically red, achievements have gone awry. However, this did not occur in a vacuum, as Gramsci’s imprisonment and bad treatment exemplify. Rosa Luxemburg was imprisoned during World War I in Germany and murdered in that country in 1919. She, whose work speaks to the need for a deeper form of democracy, a socialist democracy grounded in a humanist outlook, free of both authoritarianism and the claim that any attempt to go beyond the narrow horizons of capitalist democracy will necessarily end in authoritarianism (Hudis and Anderson 2004, 30).

It must be realized that the red lefts have been savagely defeated in many places since the red flag was raised against capitalism. It is important to consider what might have happened if these revolutionary beginnings would have been able to be developed further without the police, military, and other interventions that forced the revolutionaries to be consumed by the need to defend the revolution and themselves. Reagan's military support of the "Contras" in Nicaragua against the people's revolution is yet another example of what those who struggle against capital and empire have endured. Furthermore, these past achievements have been forgotten, and/or abandoned, by those who have much to gain from remembering what was accomplished. These successes can be used critically now as precedents – if not roadmaps. An important way of imagining politics has been smashed by, its opponents, and forgotten by most people during the early twenty-first century. Carl Boggs (2000) calls this a retreat from politics. However, some theorists and activists are trying to reinvigorate the public sphere with a vision of participatory democracy and universal human rights, and ... of the need to create a coherent, unified movement to contain and represent the aspirations of all [democratic leftist] movements. Without such a unified approach, Lydia Sargent argued, the separate movements of the left would never "exist as a collective project..." Rather than "growing interactively, each benefiting from the rest," today's scattered movements "exist at best side by side, often ... competitively ... Without organization and strategy, there is nothing to work for and no way to evaluate what we've done." Yet within academic critical theory, a strong theoretical bias had developed that was ...allergic to any discussion of the need for a new *synthesis* of theory and practice. Postmodernists, in particular, had taken to advocating not unity but rather the deconstruction of the *discourse* of unity, and not solidarity but "difference" (Sanbonmatsu 2004, pp. 13-14).

Sanbonmatsu claims that the "bias" against unity in theory – and one can assume practice – can be importantly attributed to the events that occurred in Paris in 1968, seemingly as a culmination of what the new leftists had done in the US, France, Italy, Germany, and elsewhere. Sanbonmatsu fingers Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Michele Foucault and Gilles Deleuze as primary suspects. Nietzsche may be the arch-suspect! Sanbonmatsu argues that all too many leftists abandoned the socialist-communist commitment to rebuilding the Babel project as they turned to poststructuralist images of "speaking in tongues." This phenomenon is connected to the emphasis on "feeling" so common among many new leftists. Sanbonmatsu laments the victory of "expressivism" over the earlier leftist focus on strategy. These developments are causal in reference to the decline of social movements and a widening gap between theory and practice [resulting in leaving] left critical theory vulnerable to changes in the political economy of knowledge production in the 1980s and 1990s [via] (the rationalization of the university) (2004, p. 14).

Let us fast forward to May 2006. Ignacio Ramonet (2006, p. 1) writes:

Once again during the recent revolt against the First Employment Contract [a threat to discontinue French workers' protection against being fired], the enthusiasm and dynamism evident on French streets were in marked contrast with the disconcerting silence of French thinkers. The same was true during the November [2005] riots in the *banlieues* [places where unemployed youth whose parents came to France from her former colonies live]. There was a lot of chattering, but few, other than such rare figures as Jean Baudrillard and John Berger, were able to read the events, uncover their deeper significance and suggest what they might portend. With no relevant or encouraging diagnosis forthcoming, society was left in the dark about its symptoms and in danger of succumbing to further crises.

The failure of so many theorists, other intellectuals, and putative intellectuals who write and speak in the “mainstream” media to provide the needed diagnoses of what the effects of today’s global capitalism has been is of great significance. For example, newspaper columnist and author Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*, is called a liberal; although he is a cheerleader for the war in Iraq. Moreover, his “liberalism” is characterized by the belief that marketization is the sine qua non of democracy. Perhaps more serious is that many who claim to be postmodernist/poststructural “critical” theorists seldom look at and condemn the ravages of contemporary capitalism’s drive to beat down wageworkers. These theorists do not look deeply enough into the structural changes that have occurred, as the agents of capital have sought to solve the accumulation crisis that began in the 1970s. Perhaps these “critical” post commentators do not believe that structure is a real phenomenon – or, at least, cannot be described or found.

Richard Vogel has written an article in the *Monthly Review* that demonstrates how important it is to inquire into the structural changes and how they affect workers – those who have little or no say about the conditions of their labor. He focuses on neo-liberal capitalism’s “relentless search for cheap labor” and how it has materially affected workers in the US and Mexico. He begins by explaining that the de-industrialization of the US and the reliance on cheap goods from East Asia have resulted in making the US west coast cities the largest ports in the nation. The dockworkers in Los Angeles and Long Beach were very busy in part because their comrades in other jobs had become unemployed as factory workers. The stevedores may have thought their jobs could not be off-shored; however, they had not considered an end run by the capitalist planners.

Current transportation trends are proving labor’s assumptions dead wrong. Sparked by organized resistance and wildcat actions by workers against falling wages and deteriorating working conditions at America’s ports and on the nation’s highways, the flow of container traffic is being shifted to a south-north orientation [rather than west-east]. By leveraging both the US and Mexican governments and taking advantage of the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), big capital is developing container terminals in Mexico and using that country as a land bridge and labor pool to deliver shipping containers to destinations in the US at discount prices (Vogel 2006, pp. 16-17).

This “achievement” is called the Lázaro Cárdenas-Kansas City Transportation Corridor. The maritime distance between Shanghai and Los Angeles is 2,000 miles less than from Shanghai to Lázaro Cárdenas. Although, the land distances between Los Angeles to Kansas City and the former to Lázaro Cárdenas are roughly the same. This distance does not prevent the owners to choose an end run rather than come to terms with workers in *Alta* California ports. Furthermore the class states of the US and Mexico aid and abet such anti-organized labor policy. Those who are authentically Critical rather than critical do criticise strategies such as these; whereas the “small-c theorists” usually write that these events are unavoidable as capitalism marches on and the workers must then bend to the “inevitable.”^{viii} Vogel ends his article with a reminder that what he has presented is best understood within the context of global capital’s attacks on labor throughout the world. Furthermore, he provides this advice: keep our eyes on the dialectic of, or between, capital’s war from above and labor’s responses.

In contrast to the clear analysis by Vogel and most contributors to *Monthly Review* I present Sanbonmatsu’s dislike (2004, p. 15) of the “baroque” or superficial formal density of postmodernist texts ... [that] represents the extension of *commodity* logics into the previously protected sphere of critical [I would use an upper case C] thought.

I invite interested persons to read the *Monthly Review* journal and the books they publish because of the very clear concrete language used. This experience can be juxtaposed with all too many *baroque* postmodernist writings. The latter are not adequate for attempting to reach out beyond a very small circle of readers. What can be considered *baroque* is of little or no danger to the actually existing capitalist world order (or dis-order).^{ix}

Vogel's contribution can educate us about the structural realities that often remain hidden when concentration is limited to the cultural body around the structural skeleton. His work helps to demonstrate that Marxist thought deserves to be considered: still *Primus Inter Pares*. Many readers may counter that capitalism is not identified as the main cause for what liberals, progressives, and other "leftists" are very concerned about in the world today. However, Marxists insist that neo-liberal policies are part of the historical efforts of capitalist thinkers and activists to control our lives as much as possible. Those who do not agree with capitalist causality limit their horizons to resuscitating some kind of New Deal or social democracy.

The End of Rational Capitalism

John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review's* editor, analyses what he calls the end of rational capitalism. He explains how John Maynard Keynes, and to some extent Joseph Schumpeter, developed a defence of capitalism – a system that just had endured some very bad times, for example, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. Many Marxists have argued that the capitalism system was very causal for all these events. Because of the Soviet Union's survival and the communist victory in China, capitalism was confronted by powers that refused to enter the capitalist global system. Foster explains that Keynes's response was to lay out a way to make capitalism rational and competitive with the socialist bloc. Keynes was insightful and bold enough to admit that capitalism was not self-regulating. He endorsed state intervention in the capitalist economies. His work helped make possible social democracy and the welfare states within the US-led capitalist bloc. The key to it was political compromise between capital and labor. Schumpeter added that monopolies were dangerous to and for capitalism because the system's real strength was the so-called rational entrepreneur. He viewed capitalism's problems as sociological rather than inherently structural. Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976) helps explain the sociological causes to which Schumpeter referred. As I have written elsewhere (1994a, pp. 18-19):

Bell asserts that unrestrained economic impulses were held in check by Puritan restraint, and/or the Protestant ethic. However, capitalism undermined this restraint when the old religious sanctions were "sundered from bourgeois society" and we were left with hedonism. The cultural justification of capitalism has become hedonism ... the pursuit of pleasure as a way of life.

The cultural contradiction could be stated as: capitalism demands that people be "straight" and hard working by day, but "swingers" at night and during consumer-driven holidays. Moreover, frenzied consumerism occurs almost every day in the US, and in some of the countries that seek to emulate the only "superpower." The business media bombards consumers as they seek to entice everyone to make shopping and buying the central parts of our lives.

Both Keynes and Schumpeter thought that capitalism had to be protected from its own logic – one that had and would lead again to disaster. The US position of dominance over a world ravaged by war allowed a kind of seeming benevolence toward working people in some of the leading capitalist countries, but it was not all benevolence. The Cold War was not without millions of casualties

around the world, a great percentage of them caused by the Western Powers' wars against rebelling subaltern people. As Foster (2005, p. 5) claims:

Not all economists succumbed to the idea of a new rational capitalism. At the height of the golden age of post-Second World War capitalism in 1966, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy's *Monopoly Capitalism* was published, which argued that far from being a reflection of a more rational more organized capitalism, the prosperity of ... [that time] was a transitory product of special development factors to be ... [understood] in the larger historical environment.

Foster explains that for Baran and Sweezy the new regime of accumulation did not resemble the myth about rational capitalism. The last chapter of their book is called an "irrational system." In contrast to Keynes and Schumpeter's models the realities were militarism and imperialism (albeit some without traditional colonies); furthermore, these phenomena were "built into the very fiber" of how the really existing capitalism operated.^x In fact, as Foster explains:

The welfare state celebrated by Keynesians and social democrats was undeveloped in the most developed, most stable capitalist state – the US – blocked by vested interests. What were viewed as successes in economic growth and stability were the product of fortuitous historical circumstances and artificial economic stimulants.... The limited quid pro quo of capitalism – its idealized system of equal exchange – had broken down almost completely under monopolistic pricing and output arrangements.... Wage exploitation ... was becoming more severe. Meanwhile leisure itself became just another form of exploitation – "passively absorbable amusement" – designed to reinforce an economic system that while encompassing a vast production capacity was unable to allow for a meaningful transformation of human existence.... At the center of Baran and Sweezy's analysis was the view that the monopoly capitalist system, despite all of the massive, irrational means [for example, the constant warfare] being used to shore it up, could not continue crisis free (2005, p. 7).

This situation is in many ways the same during Bush junior's presidency – if not worse. The conditions in Western Europe may not be as bad, because of many reasons, although there is no immunity from neo-liberal totalitarianism.

Keynesianism was not played out in rational ways. Even if it had, there were too many people left out of its benefits in order to work. The events of the late 1950s and the next two decades made clear that those at the bottom and even those doing a bit better did not think that they were living in a rational system. The eruptions of democracy caused by many organized workers, people of colour, women, anti-war activists, and others made it difficult for the powers that be to do anything but exercise repression. The absence of profound reform as the New Deal petered out demonstrated that vaunted Keynesianism was unable to resist the capitalist imperatives as soon as its agents realized that their bottom lines needed to be rescued. Foster argues:

What quickly emerged was a supply-side discourse that reflected capitalism's attempt to purify its accumulation logic, abandoning all previous attempts to rein in and regulate the system.... The principles of a no-holds-barred capitalism took over (2005, p. 8).

The “gloves off” version of capitalism did not work as well as the system had during the so-called Golden Years right after 1945 – a period when it was restrained to some extent by countervailing forces led by organized labor. The strategy and tactics became more exploitative as the accumulation crisis got worse as politicians like Thatcher and Reagan came into power. This only added to the crisis faced by the irrational system. However, it “succeeded” in enhancing the wealth at the top - in prodigious and even criminal hoggish ways. Foster connects all of these developments to explain how the US and its key allies acted after the fall of the Soviet Union.

If for Schumpeter imperialism was a byproduct of a war machine and monopolization rather than the intrinsic properties of capitalism, reality today suggests this distinction is either irrelevant or false. The most powerful state of the global capitalist system and the one claiming to best represent its logic, the US, has openly adopted a strategy of retaining its political and economic hegemony through military means – and went so far as to announce this to the entire world (2005, p. 9).

Miliband’s Divided Societies

I turn next to Ralph Miliband, an excellent Marxist analyst, in order to strengthen my claim that Marxist thought is of great importance – even *primus inter pares* - in these times. Because of Marx’s unique understanding of capitalism it is justifiable to turn to a person who worked within the main lines and foci that Marx began. As we have seen, there are scholars, media persons, and others who declare that Marxist analyses no longer apply. Many of them claim that the capitalist system is not what Marx claimed when he was alive, let alone under the changed “post” conditions. I maintain that although things change, there are historical and institutional consistencies. How post is capitalism in the early twenty-first century? How post are imperialism, racism, misogyny, poverty, religious fundamentalism, war, torture, and governmental oppression? In historical perspective – even of centuries that are called short by some and long by others – things look quite different from what those who have a “presentist” point of view provide.^{xi} Of course it is necessary to divide the stream of history into temporal units in order to further understand what has occurred and the reasons why; however, there must be room for many people to help decide what these units are and/or should be.

Miliband’s book *Divided Societies* was published in 1989, a very important year marker for historians and many other people, although the author began thinking systematically about these issues in 1982 and reporting his findings via lectures. His purposes for giving the lectures were: 1. to clarify what the “notion” of class conflict meant in the “advanced” capitalism of that time, and 2. to seek to convince his readers that class conflict was still the most important, indeed the absolutely central fact in the life of advanced capitalist societies Also ...the work I have done for the book has strongly confirmed my belief that class struggle ... is the key phenomenon for the understanding of the societies [Britain and the US] in question (Miliband 1989, p. v).

It is not surprising that Miliband was under fire from many writers who branded him as passé and worse. This was a time when Reagan and Thatcher had succeeded in using their respective governments to forward capitalism’s no holds barred strategies.

Miliband’s point of departure is Marx’s model of class struggle. He does this unapologetically, although explaining that Marx’s model is a point of departure – not a point of arrival. Marxists such as Miliband and myself are aware of the fact that Marx died in 1883 and while he was alive never claimed he had discovered a Rosetta Stone that could serve as tool with which to arrive at certainty. However, Miliband does claim that Marx had the “essence” of the matter correct! Important modifications are always in order when dealing with messy realities. Miliband takes

this into consideration as he develops a comparative study of Britain and the US. His justification for studying these two is that both are highly developed in industrial and technological ways. Both of their economies are predominantly under private ownership and control; moreover, both have had comparable political regimes since World War II, namely “democracies” – although he hastens to add that the more correct term is: “capitalist democracy.” These characteristics are in contrast to communist societies of that time and those in the “third world.” He concludes the preface with:

My ... purpose has not been to add to the empirical material [an enormous amount exists], but rather to “theorize” class struggle in ways which seem ... appropriate to the understanding of social reality, and which are not on the whole to be found in the relevant literature (1989, p. viii).

In the book’s last chapter Miliband speaks to the future of class struggle in capitalist societies. I suggest that an objective and learned reader might think that what Miliband presents in 1989 is just about “essentially” correct with regard to what we know presently. The author speaks of the dizzying changes that occurred during the 1980s and how they have profoundly changed the terrains upon which class wars occurred. Specifically, the “radical recomposition of the working class;” the weakening of leftist political parties; the emergence of the “new” social movements based mostly on “identities,” in relationship with deep cultural changes; the crisis of socialism itself, let alone communism; and other related phenomena that have already been presented in the work before you.

Miliband agrees with the empirical data, but not with all or even many of the interpretations about their significance, and what could be done. He is adamant in rejecting that the left’s entire history of accomplishment should, or must be rejected, or disowned. Miliband argues that what is really in question, but not often mentioned by supporters of capitalism’s “inevitability” and “end of history” claims, is whether or not actually existing capitalism will become ultimately different and/or better for more people. Have these admitted changes, during the “gales of creative destruction” really altered the “character” of the system? If so, what will a more relevant socialism look like? How should the left conduct class struggle after the grave defeats suffered? According to Miliband (1989, p. 204): in spite of a

torrent of propaganda to the contrary, advanced capitalist societies are now and will remain highly structured and hierarchical class societies. The precise composition of the different classes will no doubt undergo further and considerable modifications, but the social structure itself, with the patterns of domination and exploitation ... may be expected to endure... Consumption patterns are somewhat less class-specific than they were in the past; and the trend may become even more pronounced... But the substance of life experience for everyone in these societies remains utterly shaped by the fact of class and class inequality.

He should see us now after the market’s serious troubles and six years of the Bush Jr. Administration, servile Congress, rightist Supreme Court and lapdog mainstream media. The Congressional victories by the Democratic Party in November 2006 are important, but it remains to be seen what the “second party of capitalism and empire” will do with the mess we face. The US and all too many of its citizens – and non-citizens – are deeply in debt and the poverty is beginning to show through the facades erected. Of course the brutal facts about poverty in the world’s richest country have been well known by those who respect socio-economic facts. I know less about Britain, although it’s reasonable to assert that most of the wealth accumulation in that country has been enjoyed by a rather small part of the population. Part of this elite group includes some

who did come from “humble” beginnings. However, during this time of rising incomes and better positions for some women, racial minorities, and others, the counter phenomenon is that subaltern people who have not been deemed “qualified” by the power elites have seen their relations with the current capitalist economy result in hard times for most of them – especially when a government that allegedly “looks more like America” seems to have little will or power to overcome socioeconomic injustices (Brosio 2000a, p. 404).

Miliband foresaw that the distribution of power in the advanced capitalist countries would become worse, more unequal. The reference above, looking more like America, is what the victorious Clintonions said after they won the presidential election in 1992 and put together a cabinet that featured more diversity than Bush Sr.’s. However, Clinton could not stop the growing inequalities during his two terms. It is not clear that this was his goal. It does seem that governments in the US and possibly in other advanced capitalist democracies cannot or will not use their power to arrest the exacerbation of social class stratification. Clinton may have had more compassion for ordinary people than his predecessor and his successor, but his politics could not be seriously called compassionate as he helped the Republicans end “welfare as we know it.” Corporate welfare continued to grow significantly during his presidency. This growth is exponential during Bush Jr.’s time in the White House, with no end in sight. Blair’s record as prime minister is comparable in some ways. Labour’s historical domestic record in Britain has not been supported since he came to power. The country is richer; however, all too many people have not been included – similar to the situation in the US. Blair has announced that he will resign in June 2007.

Miliband (1989, p. 204) warned it should be clear that a concentration of economic power surely results in a parallel centralization in the entangled political realm.

However, strident the rhetoric of democracy and popular sovereignty may be, and despite the “populist” overtones which politics must now incorporate, the trend is toward ever-greater appropriation at the top.

The presidency of Bush Jr. demonstrates savagely what Miliband predicted based on his studies from a Marxist perspective. One could argue that the Blair government is somewhat similar in its appropriation of power. See the decision to go to war against Iraq in 2003 as Bush’s junior partner, despite opposition by many Britons.

Miliband was not fooled by title inflation and distortions by capital and its agents. He realized that in the near future (from 1989) most people would still be in the working class – having nothing but their labor to offer the market. In fact, as capitalism became increasingly global the number of people in a proletarian position is greater than ever before. He argued that what will be decisive is how the working class will react to the constant pressure from their capitalist bosses and politicians. His scenario – based on Critical reflective studying – permitted him to extrapolate from the evidence in 1989, and long before, to offer us what follows. He thought that class struggle would continue among private and state workers against their respective supervisors; however, it would be “sporadic, limited, and specific and well contained and routinized within a tight web of legal and political constraints” (1989, p. 204). He predicted that these actions would have less affect than the pressures brought to bear on the powers that be by the new social groups based on identities, peace and environmental activists and others. Organized labor would be seen by many as just another “special interest.” In a word, another era of “business unionism.” So-called socialist politicians and governments in the capitalist democracies would be limited to some versions of ameliorative politics. The very thought of making a fundamental assault on the capitalist system would seem ludicrous, or more likely not even cross their minds.

However, this scenario includes a realization that the demise of socialism would not result in complete pacification of the working class! Conflict would continue here and there; although, these challenging acts would not be a serious threat to the system and its social order. Working people would act to achieve remedies for specific grievances and problems, some of which would be addressed by their bosses and others that would not. Some concessions would serve to satisfy the complainers and keep them from digging deeper in order to understand the systems of oppression and how to combat them more seriously and effectively. With few exceptions most people would accept the "what is" of their lives without asking the dangerous question: What could/should be? This attitude, caused in part by "manufactured consent", would not allow most people to question the reality of private ownership and control! Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) helps explain this unfortunate phenomenon and is still very relevant.

The People/Workers Could "Get It" Eventually

However, Miliband (1989, p. 206) offers a second scenario of the future beyond 1989.

Advanced capitalism will inevitably generate further and more acute class struggle from below ... [some being] over ... aspirations involving the achievement of deep "structural" transformations ... in the direction of socialism. This alternative scenario does not involve a revolutionary upheaval ... leading to a revolutionary government, on the pattern of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Miliband does not say how class war from below will turn out, only that eventually capitalism will create severe contradictions and sufferings that are likely to result in people having to push back as the class war from above is incessantly assailing them – us! From the vantage point of spring 2007 (as I reread my original manuscript) it is not clear to me which of the scenarios provided by Miliband we are experiencing. Perhaps it is a time of moving from the end of the first scenario to the beginning of the second – more optimistic – one. As we have seen above, Marshal Berman (1999b, p. 264) was convinced that Marx was correct: the people/workers would "get it" eventually. I shall argue below that warranted optimism depends upon what Sanbonmatsu calls the prince, as movement and form.

Rémy Herrera has written about the "French Revolts" of May and October-November 2005 as well as what occurred in April 2006. Herrera seeks to convince readers that these "moments of French revolt" can be seen as a "single dialectical movement – full of contradictions and hidden potentials (Herrera 2006, p. 13). His interpretation of these "moments" and significance is based on the no vote against the European Union Constitution; the uprising of the *cités* of the suburbs; and the mobilization against the attack on the employment security of the youngest workers first hiring contracts (*contrat première embauche*). All of these represent meaningful social class recognition of what neo-liberalism is doing to the French version of the "welfare" state or system that has been constructed by generations of working people. The French leftist parties and unions are neither as strong nor radical as they once were; therefore, they were not able to help direct the activists who made the "moments" of which Herrera writes. It is because of this reality that I think his article is relevant to what Sanbonmatsu has sought to convey. What follows is an example of how persons can organize – albeit imperfectly around class issues – and how those who are already protected by the remnants of the party and union based welfare state/system must reach out in solidarity to those who are not!^{xii}

If one views the word proletariat as those who have nothing to offer, and/or to rely on, except their labor – laboring under conditions not of their own choosing within the so-called free labor contract with those who own the means of production - then it is possible to argue that the number of

proletarians is greater presently than ever - not just in total numbers, but arguably in terms of percentages. This is due to the greater intensity of capitalist penetration into places and populations during the current neo-liberal phase of capitalist power. Our understanding of the proletariat can be understood more effectively if viewed historically. There has always been a proletariat since capitalism's inception; however, the quasi-total reach of capitalism beyond its area of inception has resulted in complexities and pluralisms beyond the "making of the English working class" and Gramsci's metallurgy workers in northern Italy.

Without getting into who is and who is not a member of the proletariat in an attempted definitive, manner, it is necessary to consider some obvious candidates for inclusion. Herrera explains that there is too little awareness by most people of the resistances against the capitalist system and the class-state among those who do not have steady jobs, or are mostly unemployed (and perhaps unemployable). Referring to many of those who have rebelled during the recent "moments," Herrera (2006, p. 20) argues that the French left must express its solidarity with regard to this overexploited sub-proletariat. The disadvantaged youth of the suburbs certainly do not constitute the whole of the left's social base, but without them, the left will never be truly popular – that is, of the people.

Herrera describes the "popular classes" as: "the economically disadvantaged, unemployed, homeless, undocumented, and those without rights" (2006, p. 20). He believes that opportunities exist in France for building class alliances with those who are most vulnerable and that some people could be convinced that broad inclusive solidarity is the only way that their exploitation and marginalization can be addressed. This pertains also to the conditions in the US, especially in reference to those who entered and continue to enter across the country's southern border. Obviously those who have more protection against the "gales of creative destruction" have historically not been easily talked into allying with those below. Gramsci's project – clearly and incisively presented by Sanbonmatsu – offers useful ideas with regard to how this "coming together" may be achieved.

Back To, and Forward, with the Princess/Prince

The modern prince was Gramsci's concrete "myth" or symbol of a new historical form that could catalyze the collective will of the proletariat and their allied classes. He hypothesized that an albeit imperfect, collective could unfold, or develop – although not teleologically, but through human action in "overlapping phases." Gramsci thought it was possible for a class to arrive at a high form of consciousness that allowed what might be called transcendental solidarity. This would allow getting beyond our own comparatively narrow social class interests and see how these justifiable individual and group interests can and should be broadened to include other subordinate classes. More specifically

for Gramsci, as for Machiavelli, the question of unity, of how to construct a collective will, capable of leading society was paramount. The socialist movement would have to assume form as a "modern" prince if it hoped to win consent of the working class, and its allied classes, in leading them in the construction of a new democratic order [*ordine nuovo*]. "The modern prince" ... Gramsci wrote "cannot be a real person... It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will ... has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begin[ing] to take concrete form" (Sanbonmatsu 2004, p. 17).

I realize that many persons today are uncomfortable with words such as collective. Collective will may be beyond uncomfortable for some. However, I think that this is a dangerous condition for

leftists and radicals who authentically wish to bring about profound change. There are many examples of collective wills and actions that have been responsible for some of the greatest forward movements in history. The civil rights movement during the 1960s in the US is a good example. The various leftists are fighting with one hand behind their (our) backs against opponents who have been able to act collectively – based mostly on very simple criteria and objectives. This is not to claim that agreement on every issue is necessary, nor to claim leftists are constituted similarly to their rightist opponents. It is justifiable to recognize difference; however, all too often division makes the left vulnerable to rightist onslaughts – resulting in an order that is based on punishing various “others.” The fear of collectivity and unity is understandable and must be worked out by all of us who are concerned with the dangers involved in too much collectivity and *unum*. A historical example is the various lefts’ divisions over where to place Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the political continuum. I have addressed this problem in a chapter called “Schumpeter’s Apologia Contrasted to Rousseau’s and Marx’s Radical Democracy” (Brosio 1994a, pp. 179-208). Perhaps this will provide a context within which readers can address this issue further?

Sanbonmatsu’s Gramsci advised us to build a political and cultural programme in dialectical conversations with the people (*il pòpolo*). Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 17) gets to the heart of the issue – at least for the logic of the work before you. The prince or the feminine equal is the new collective subject which must gather up the myriad dispersed movements of oppositional practice and culture in the *form* of a single movement whose outward expansion establishes a genuinely democratic and ethical human ... [society]. Only in cohering into a unified identity and worldview can the dispersed remnants of the left place them[our]selves in a position, at least potentially, to respond meaningfully to the legitimation crisis of the state and the colonization of the life world by the commodity.

Sanbonmatsu and I argue that even if some call the present, postmodern, we must rebuff so-called postmodernists who claim that the politics we embrace, and hope to convince the many others of, are passé. If modernism, capitalism, and Marxist thought/action came upon the historical stage at roughly the same time, then there can be no post-Marxism until capitalism is *kaput!*

Conclusion

I conclude this chapter with a brief summary and postscript. The capitalist system has penetrated beyond the sites of production; therefore it is necessary to organize people everywhere into the realization of this totalism. However, we must understand that some forms of exploitation are more salient than others – or more possible to combat. Moreover, although it may seem frivolous to add, some people are super exploited by not being included in the capitalist system! In other words, those left behind – for now – may not even be able to stay alive because of their separation and alienation from the modern world; therefore being susceptible to genocidal policies. Furthermore, these “superfluous/redundant/useless” people will not have the opportunity to learn how to resist a system that has no use for them. It could be argued that some people in the US ghettos, and other places of confinement, are trapped into this category, as are many so-called “primitive” people who have only their land and other resources to offer. Experiences have taught us that understanding things holistically is difficult, and organizing around Marxist ideas and calls for solidarity have never been easy. There are so many “identities” thought to be more important and easier to recognize and rally around than class. However, this has resulted in spotty ameliorative progress at best, improvements that were and are mostly at the mercy of what those who direct the capitalist system believe is necessary for their own advantage presently and in the future. There have been unjust systems before capitalism; however, this system, in all its complexities, is the most powerful secular system in the world today; furthermore, those who suffer, directly and indirectly, must understand how it works in order to oppose it. Marx and the

Marxists have been our most informative teachers on this subject; therefore, it is within and around the best of this intellectual-activist tradition that promises the best results.

Postscript: As the reader knows, I have not specifically addressed the well-established correspondences between social class membership and school achievement in the so-called advanced societies in this chapter. However, there is much evidence to support my claim that societies which are honoured by being referred to, by some, as democracies, but do not allow politics to really affect the economic systems they feature, can hardly be expected to favor and support democratically empowering schooling-education. I have addressed some of these issues via many other publications during the last thirty years. My *Philosophic Scaffolding for the Construction of Critical Democratic Education* (2000b) is a good example of these publications.

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Notes

ⁱ Michael Löwy (2005, pp. 63-4) has explained that according to Engels: socialists were those, in mid-19th century, who were outside the working class and appealed to the “educated classes” for assistance. In contrast the communists already insisted on a radical reconstruction of society beyond political revolution. Furthermore, and most important, the communists believed that the emancipation of the working class must be accomplished by the workers!

ⁱⁱ The *Socialist Register* series is a good source to study this question/issue. Two examples are: *Working Classes; Global Realities* 2001, and *A World Of Contradictions* 2002. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys are the editors: London: Merlin.

ⁱⁱⁱ The following books speak to current forms of imperialism. They are arranged alphabetically by author. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (2005), Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* (2003), Michael Parenti, *Against Empire* (1995), Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person's Guide To Empire* (2004), and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire Of Capital* (2005). Michel Hardt (2006) offers a version of empire that is critical of some leftist theorists, perhaps including – although not by name – some listed in this endnote.

^{iv} I wish to clarify my use of “form.” First, it means form/organization as opposed to its opposites. Second, form in the context of this chapter is synonymous with an organized political party. Furthermore, one could see form as the seeming opposite of particulars as offered by Plato and Aristotle. Form in philosophical terms means the structure or essence of a thing, rather than its matter. However, form and content may be viewed as dialectically connected rather than starkly dichotomous. This choice allows one to see form as a projection of content/matter. See Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form* (1971). The Italian Communist Party that Gramsci helped form/organize was to be representative of its inner logic: the working class's need to organize around issues that were experienced and understood better with the help of Marxist theory, and resulting in contestations against those who oppressed them.

^v Douglas Kellner (1995, p. 26) speaks to what I have written above. “Wither then Marxism? Certainly not the master theory and narrative, as it appeared in its classical forms.... [I]t continues to be an important method of social research and set of theoretical perspectives, concepts, and values that can still be used for critical social theory and radical politics today. We continue to live in a capitalist society, and as long as we do, Marxism will continue to be relevant. A reconstructed [once again] Marxism ... one without guarantees, teleology, and foundations, will be more open, tolerant, skeptical, and modest than previous versions. A Marxism for the twenty-first century could help promote democracy, freedom, justice, and equality ... [as well as] counterattack conservative ideologies that ... promote the interests of the rich and powerful.... Marxism will disappear either when the nightmare of capitalism is finally over or when a democratic and free society emerges that will produce its own philosophy and way of life. If

Marxism has inspired such a project, then the doctrine can pass on to a happy obsolescence and the sufferings and struggles of those in the Marxian tradition can be redeemed [I choose a non-theocratic definition of the word].”

^{vi} Derrida (1994, pp. 100-2) writes: “The specter [ghost] that Marx was talking about [in the *Manifesto*] ... communism, was there, without being there [yet] When, in 1847-48, Marx names the specter of communism, he inscribes it in historical perspective.... [He] announces and calls for a presence to come. He seems to predict and prescribe: What for the moment figures only as a specter in the ideological representation of old Europe must become, in the future, a present reality.... The *Manifesto* calls ... for this presentation of the living reality: we must see to it that in the future this specter – and first of all an association of workers forced to remain secret until about 1848 – becomes a reality ... This real life must show itself and manifest itself ... in the universal dimension of an International. But it must also manifest itself in the form ... of a party.... the motor of the revolution.

^{vii} I have long argued that in Marx’s philosophical and economic inquiries he sought to ascertain what the objective barriers were with regard to human freedom. “There is only one Marx, and his contributions ... belong to the mainstream of Western thought.... Marx’s philosophy is rooted within the humanist tradition that is anchored in Greek rationalism, Spinoza, the Enlightenment ... German idealism and romanticism, French socialism, and British political economy (Brosio 1985, p. 74). Of course Marx created something new from all these elements. This is why he is a great thinker! Louis Althusser’s *Lenin And Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), including a new introduction by Fredric Jameson, may cause readers to conclude that Althusser’s arguments against Marx remaining a “humanist” cast serious doubts concerning my interpretive position.

^{viii} Perhaps what follows will clarify better my use of C/c. I use the upper case letters to indicate that Critical Theory in its authentic Marxist sense is different in many important ways from the current uses of the words. This is not to claim that some of those I identify in the lower case – critical – and/or critical theory(ies) are without usefulness. In fact, there are some similarities among those I refer to as CT and ct. However, I do maintain that those who are Critical in the tradition of Marx and the Marxists – including the Frankfurt School members – are better equipped than their critical counterparts.

^{ix} Here is a preview of Sanbonmatsu’s baroque indictment. “Coterminous with these macroeconomic policies, which arose in direct response to profitability crises in capitalism, a “postmodern” culture took shape in which the commodity came to stand in for every possibility of ... lived human experience. Suffice it to say, in such a pervasive context of cultural corruption, it would ... have been remarkable had critical knowledge escaped unscathed.... The general decline and disarray of left social movements in the West after the 1970s led to a decoupling of theory from practice.... As theory became vulnerable to spatio-temporal rhythms and relations of the new regime ... less and less engaged in the problems of human society, it became more heteronomous [differences in quality] in its determinations and correspondingly less *truthful*. In content, theory became idealist; in form ... it became *baroque* (Sanbonmatsu 2004, pp. 71-72).

^x Harry Magdoff’s *Imperialism Without Colonies* (2003) is instructive with regard to the “without colonies” factor. This concept is explained further by David Harvey (2003, pp. vii-viii) in his reaction to 9/11/01 and the American War on Iraq that began in 2003. “I set out ... to identify the underlying forces at work within the chaos of surface appearances.... To this end, I constructed a general framework for thinking that I hoped would be strong enough to survive the contingencies and uncertainties of actual outcomes.... Readers can – by constructing their own versions of how the relation between territorial and capitalist logics of power works; of the particular form of the US imperial tradition; of the ‘inner-outer dialectic’ of US society; of the role of predatory practice; of the distinctions between neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics; and of the strengths,

strategies, and tactics of oppositional movements – arrive at their own particular interpretations and draw conclusions that may be quite different from mine. That is as it should be”.

^{xi} Eric Hobsbawm (1994, p. ix) famously wrote: “I think it is now possible to see the Short Twentieth Century from 1914 to the end of the Soviet era”. According to Giovanni Arrighi (1994, p. 324): “Thus while the party for the Third and Second Worlds were over [in the late 1980s and early ‘90s when the Soviet Union collapsed] the bourgeoisie of the West came to enjoy a *belle époque* in many ways reminiscent of the ‘wonderful moment’ of the European bourgeoisie eighty years earlier. The most striking similarity between the two *belles époques* has been the almost complete lack of realization on the part of their beneficiaries that the sudden and unprecedented prosperity that they had come to enjoy did not rest on the resolution of the crisis of accumulation that had preceded the beautiful times. On the contrary, the newly found prosperity rested on a shift of the crisis from one set of relations to another. It was only a question of time before the crisis would re-emerge in more troublesome forms”. This speaks to Arrighi’s long century.

^{xii} I offer the following with regard to class and various identities. “The unwillingness on the part of antidemocrats to allow the construction of a politics that intervenes into macroeconomic decision-making so that a society based on democratic citizens’ rights, economic justice, racial and gender fairness could emerge has led to an understandable politics of identity instead of one characterized by the citizen-worker as the key human category [I should have articulated in 1994 that those who have been prevented from becoming or being citizens deserve to be included]. The failure to build a bona fide social democracy that features economic justice has resulted in the continued existence of “playing fields” that are not level, but instead wildly mountainous terrains with happy valleys for those who score well on social class, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual choice/orientation hierarchies.... The antidemocratic drive toward capitalist globalism and totalism has challenged and frightened many people who have experienced the melting of formerly solid institutions, habits, and sign-posts; consequently many of them have looked to religious ... [and other choices/memberships to rally around] (Brosio, 1994b, pp. 1-2). This passage is representative of what comes after in this 48 pp. article.

Richard Brosio is Professor Emeritus at Ball State University as well as a Lecturer and Visiting Scholar at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. Rouge Forum members may be interested in a just published volume: Handbook of Research In The Social Foundations of Education, edited by Steve Tozer, et al., Routledge, 2011. Brosio’s contribution is entitled: “The Radical Nature of Social Foundations of Education: Attempts to Understand the Crisis of School and Society,” pp. 165-178.

Education Versus Schooling as a Commodity Fetish

Rich Gibson

“...a schoolmaster is a productive labourer when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory, does not alter the relation.”ⁱ

By way of softening up, or seduction, I begin with six very quick stories:

1. I work with quite a few whole language professionals, people who see literacy as a quest for meaning, who oppose the disconnected-from-life habits of “phonics-first,” and high-stakes standardized exams.

Over the years, the whole language crowd led the good fight for education, literacy in particular.

Two things trouble me. First, they routinely split education from the sources of social inequality and war: capitalism and imperialism—exploitation and the quest for territory.

In this sense, they adopt a view similar to one of their arch-enemies, Michelle Rhee, the school overseer in the failed District of Columbia system whose reign of fear is well-documented. Here is Rhee speaking to an assembly of principals, scaring them:

“Our responsibility is to deliver the goods, no matter what the situations our students are in. The reform is in the schoolhouse. You are here because we believe you are the right people to deliver this reform. The election is not our concern, the election is not your concern. Go hard or go home!”ⁱⁱ

In this context, most whole language professionals cling to the view that schooling and literacy are prime keys to the common good, that literacy and today’s schools are inseparable; rejecting out of hand a radical analysis of why things are as they are, or, to the side, why it is that doing school reform without social and economic reform makes no sense. Setting aside that German Nazis and Japanese fascists were literate, this view, which suggests liberal support for public schools, marches them straight into voting booths, seeking shelter from reactionary moves on the schools.ⁱⁱⁱ

Moreover, most members of what is called the Whole Language Umbrella (WLU) embraced the vacillating reactionary Diane Ravitch who, for more than a decade, fought to destroy the careers of WLU members and now, appearing to switch sides, adopts the form of WLU’s views, opposing the same high-stakes exams she created and fought for—seated beside the likes of Central Intelligence Agency operatives in the White House—but only to bolster her nationalist project in not-so-new ways. At issue is not so much whether the other side, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) cum Race to the Top (RaTT) backers, would hug a double-crosser seeking entry to the upper echelons of whole language educators as is the question: why are whole language supporters so partial to segmented people and analysis?^{iv}

2. At the July 2010 representative assembly of the largest union in the U.S., the National Education Association, 9,000 delegates representing 3.5 million members, overwhelmingly and systematically rejected, refused to discuss, motions against the U.S. empire’s wars on the grounds that they were “out of focus,” “off point,” “not relevant,” popularly silencing any real debate about what I see as the abundantly obvious fact that, today, the education agenda is a war agenda—a class war and imperialist war agenda—and has been for some time. When NEA delegates voted

down a motion that objected to connecting war funding and school funding, in effect they told elites that school workers are willing to take a bribe in exchange for silence and collaboration about the very ventures that are looting school funding.^v

3. On March 4th, 2010, k-12 and college students, professors and teachers, joined community activists in the most massive strike and action since the immigration rights marches on Mayday, 2006.

Initiated in California, the March 4th Movement engaged tens of thousands of people in radical action and critique: seizing buildings, shutting down campus entrances, walkouts, teach-ins, rallies, marches, demonstrations all coupled to a consistent, connected, radical analysis that commonly tied together capitalism, racism, imperialist war, inequality, school cuts—as well as the form and substance of schooling.

The California leadership then chose to call for another, similar, action on October 7th. In the summer of 2010, however, radical students went home. The movement was commandeered by a collection of politicians, union bosses, competing sects and what was the March 4th call to “Educate! Agitate! Organize! Occupy! Strike! Teach-in!” and “Stop the Wars and Bailouts! Fund the People!” became a call for a “Day of Action to Defend Public Education,” preceded by a series of well-regulated conferences led by the Democratic Party and its union camp followers, and other sects, replete with “Get out the vote” tables.

The March 4th hijackers decided not to mention capitalism, imperialism, and war in the call for October 7th action. We shall see what happens when the students return. I have high hopes.

4. This disconnection demonstrates that literacy does not mean literacy. The New Yorker spent a page of expertise explaining that being literate does not translate into financial literacy, “most Americans cannot explain what compound interest is...(almost half surveyed) couldn’t answer questions about inflation and interest rates correctly....the less people know, the more they run into trouble.” To invert Paulo Freire’s notion, reading the word does not mean reading the world. Or, further back, Thoreau: “Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not be cheated in trade, but of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know little or nothing.”^{vi}

5. Then, another twist. Teaching in a community college as a joyful retirement discipline, I have a lot of Marines and other military personnel in my classes. Remarkably, we get along very well. We all gain from their classroom comments as well as loans of military magazines. What is striking in the military texts is the officer corps’ profound concern about Afghan illiteracy, lack of time-discipline, and inability to read maps. This means the Afghan Army, which the U.S. empire pretends is key to success, fails a lot. Well-educated imperial U.S. soldiers are extraordinarily frustrated by both their illiterate Taliban opposition, which is winning, and their equally illiterate allies, who are not winning.^{vii}

Why these disconnections, paradoxes, or in the case of the military, interesting inversion?

Is it only the military that connects schooling to society? Why?

6. Last of the stories: I wrote an article for Counterpunch arguing that public schools are not public all, but segregated schooling within what is now an emerging corporate state, that the

education agenda is a war agenda; a class war and empire's war agenda. In the article, I described in detail why it is that the empire is not a democracy, that the schools are capital's schools, not ours, and that the call to "Defend Public Education" is not only to defend a myth, but to defend what is going on in those schools (high-stakes exams, merit pay, etc) and to, worse, empower the corporate state even more. I argued for mass, class-conscious resistance inside a society dedicated to war and exploitation.^{viii}

I got dozens of congratulatory emails. Of those, all but five thanked me for opening their eyes about needing to defend public education and, importantly, their jobs. Gad.

I know reason alone does not change minds, nor does plucking away one veil of mystification pluck away all veils. However, with stories as seduction, let's look through the veil of normalcy that makes it so easy to split school and society. Why does this happen?

Because education, really schooling, has become a divine fetish in a way similar to how Marx describes commodity fetishism, that is, as an icon that masks real social relations, a disguise to obscure the core issues of our times.

What are these issues?

The core issues of our times are the real promise of perpetual war coupled with accelerating color-coded social and economic inequality met, as noted above, by the potential of mass class conscious activism.

If that is true, what is the role of education, or school, in de-industrialized America?

Schools are the centripetal organizing point of de-industrialized North American life, and much of life elsewhere. Evidence: School workers, not industrialized workers, are by far the most unionized people in the USA, more than 3.5 million union members. School unions are growing, if slowly, while industrial unions collapse, evaporate, because, in part, industry evaporates, and because industrial union leaders abandoned the heart of unionism—the contradictory interests of workers and employers. There are about 56 million kids in US schools. Nearly one-half of the youth in high school today will be draft-eligible in the next seven years.^{ix}

School involves far more people than the military—a ratio of, directly, about 49 to 1; more than the tax system; more than welfare—school is the center of many family's lives.

In some instances, school is the only safe and stable place a child has. Kids, community people get food and medical care in schools. This is more true now, indicative of social and economic collapses (the family, homelessness, cruel and punishing welfare programs), the harshest elements reserved for those who arrive with the least, women and children, people of color, with razor sharp precision. I am acutely aware of the pathos of one good teacher providing the only safety, shelter, kindness, and in a few cases, food, that a child gets. That, however, only sharpens my point of the relationship of schools, as central organizing points in a decaying society, to social structures.

How shall we theorize what is now the real centripetal role of school or education today, and what shall we do about it?

As I puzzled about the problems my stories above present, it struck me that to make a metaphorical parallel to Marx's analysis of capital's processes and expanding his take on commodity fetishism might be helpful.

Consider education (enlightenment, "to lead out") as something people needed to survive for tens of thousands of years. Think of education as a use value, something that has intrinsic value, like labor or a shovel.

Then, think of school as an exchange value, that value which allows education to be commodified through exploitation, as with the exploitation of people or production of shovels for profit.

Over time, producing the shovel (school) as a use value is overwhelmed by producing many shovels for profits: exchange values. What had an intrinsic value, the shovel (education), becomes an exploitative relationship (school).

Education and school, I say, are different, related but related in a contradictory way. Education is one thing—school another. School is akin to a religious icon designed to conceal real, significant, social relations where, for example, what is actually socially constructed (education) purportedly for the common good, is privately appropriated for selfish ends (school).

So, we have this:

<u>Education</u>	<u>School</u>
Use Value	Exchange Value

Education, a use value, exists without school. School, an exchange value, does not exist without debasing or altering education. School creates a pretense of education while, in fact, producing a mystified form of superficial, anti-radical, knowledge in service to a society rooted in war (class war and imperialist war) and exploitation.

There are, assuredly, countervailing forces. Real educators, as well as school workers, teach people important and worthy things in schools, which are, still, more free than most work places. Moreover, the key product of schools is human, not a widget or shovel, coupled with ideas—different from chasing the line in a shovel factory. But at issue is: which side of this contradiction typically, mainly, dominates? I propose that the dominant side in schools is the exchange value side.

For example, take the claim that the No Child Left Behind Act, or now the Race to the Top (RaTT) will create social justice by treating all school children equally. Real educators would see, right off, that the equitable treatment of people set up in inequitable social situations, as with parental income and race, will only create deeper inequality—but most of the debate in school circles accepts the bogus premise and moves on from there—splitting school and society. Even more bizarre, the same people who profit from inequality and exploitation, like Bill Gates, are those who claim they can fashion equality via schooling.

Other examples of schools as commodity fetishes? Let me count the ways.

1. Schools create a simulation of "Public" Education when, in fact, schools are segregated by class and race—serve as organs of the capitalist state. Nevertheless, school workers, many students, and the public, have an idolatrous vision of what school is, confuse it with education—although, again,

education and school are necessarily related. Yes, indeed, it is good to teach people to read, and to radically read to discover why things are as they are—and what to do. But the form of literacy is lost in substantive reality. History, for example, is largely eradicated in school, abolished to the point that historian and political scientist Chalmers Johnson says “Americans cannot connect cause and effect.”^x

A gentle fog, however, settled over the difference between education and schooling. Now, most people see them as one in the same. The school industry, following Marx’s metaphorical turn into the mystical world, are missions for capitalism and school workers its missionaries. The deeply held idea that there is an “education family,” in which all are together in the same boat with all, helps create pacified areas where people become willing, if unwitting, instruments of their own oppression.

2. Behind a haze of school boards, bond issues, votes, etc., schools give the capitalist state, today an armed weapon and executive committee of diverse wings of the ruling classes, a veneer of legitimacy, neutrality (note the bank bailouts, the auto bailouts, the endless wars for empire where children of the poor fight other children of the poor on behalf of the rich in their homelands). It is not to their credit that most teachers unthinkingly see themselves as agents as that government, don’t even feel the ambivalence of serving the obvious needs of the children in front of them against the demands of the state (this has not always been so; not everywhere—as with Russian teachers who played important roles in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions—but, sad to say, it has been largely true over time as with German and Japanese fascist volunteer teachers).^{xi}

3. Schools seem to be a natural, a-historical, form of human existence when they are utterly unnatural and serve, for example, to strip children of what David Harvey sees as their inherent sense of dialectics.^{xii}

4. As instruments of the demands of the system of capital, schools fashion command over time so successfully that students and teachers internalize that subservience to another’s clock.

5. Schools and teachers refashion the next generation of workers and warriors, all reproducing, for the most part, their birth-station in life. Tragically, most of today’s students won’t do as well as their parents—the arrows of the economy point down, despite the individualist mantra of schooling: “anyone can make it.” In this context, schools forge, consistently, specious views of common interest, ideas that say, “we are all in this together” (school spirit, nationalism, corporate/boss loyalty, etc.) when one thing is glaringly true: we are NOT all in this together. Some work. Others profit. Some order. Others obey—or not. Some strategize. Others die. Capital needs workers and warriors who are flexible and technologically adept, but whose hopes are tamped down, who are philosophically unobservant: clever, not wise.

6. It follows that teachers, who are not mainly educators in the sense of making use value, but who are school workers who are both exploited and exploiters, create enormous surplus value—the coming generations of employees and fighters, but as with any worker, to be productive is not a glory, but a misfortune (Marx).^{xiii}

In other words, the more school workers engage in the alienating daily life of schooling, neither controlling the processes (curriculum, textbooks, high-stakes exams) nor products of their work, the less human those teachers become and, from the other angle, the more they enrich those who exploit them—as the path from high stakes standardized exams to merit pay and the loss of tenure

easily shows. In addition, the production of results on high-stakes exams split school workers from their best potential allies: students and parents. Students don't have to be taught that test-drilling is drudgery. In fact, in a few districts, some heroic students upended the exams with the slogan "Be a Hero—Take A Zero" and they did it, demonstrating perfect test-taking knowledge; screwing their bosses. Parents, however, have been easily manipulated by administrators and executives, whipsawed against teachers. In Boston, parents are now demanding to be part of the collective bargaining process to guarantee that test scores will be tied to merit pay.^{xiv}

High-stakes exams are but a deep version of the conspicuous kinds of surveillance that plague schools today: security guards, cameras, unrelenting adult supervision. What little of recess remains is overseen by adults who cannot seem to understand that children will organize their own play, creatively.

Surely, some courageous real educators have resisted, fought back in often creative ways, from direct confrontation to circumventing the many powers of hierarchy, keeping their ideals and still teaching. Those educators in the U.S., however, have been far too few. Indeed, I think I can name most of them—out of a 3.5 million person force.

7. Behind the commodity fetish of school, as with any commodity from oil to computers to shovels and laborers, is coercion. Teachers must join the preposterous war of all on all, simply to win jobs, while student truants face arrest, parental penalties, death-by-drop-out, etc. Fear and violence of all forms are counter-critical elements of school's icon.

8. Competition plays a key role, sorting people behind feigned test-fetish science, which is not science, but occultism. That would be shown true in, for example, the relationship of real estate values and student test scores. Market-based competition leads to fraud and corruption. Test cheating is rampant, as is administrative and staff theft from schools. The market-in-schools, then, recreates the society's pyramid structure of inequality.^{xv}

9. Schooling as a fetishist icon de-skills and diminishes, in the main, nearly all concerned, rationalizing and dividing the processes of learning, splitting mental and manual labor, more and more following a factory model where the boss seeks to replace the mind of the worker with the boss' mind—and values too. Labor in schools becomes an alien will and intelligence.^{xvi}

10. Fetishist schooling utilizes technology, not to humanize and make life better, but to defeat labor and focus critical thought on form over substance. The drive for computers and flashy smart boards, for example, ignores the reality that those who have a "why" to learn can work with nearly any "how," no matter what their physical circumstances, especially if the "Why" actually makes sense, can be tested in life.

11. Today, voodoo schooling is as segregated by race and class as at the time of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, in the mid-50's, forming five or six levels of capitalist schooling, funded by an unjust tax system, teaching different "facts," using different methods, while the ruling classes send their children to private, super-capitalist, schools which, if one accepts their outlooks and goals, can be seen as authentic education centers for the rich. These are not, truly, public schools.^{xvii}

12. In capitalist schools and colleges of education, teaching methods still dominate substantive knowledge, an un-dialectical separation, while under the false flag of social justice, the thousand forms of selfishness that keep capitalism afloat are reinforced every day and opportunism, placing

the common good second, abounds—glaringly true in, for example, colleges of education where ignorance, cowardice, racism, and opportunism rule the day. Consider the absence of all professors, but notably college of education profs, in the recent massive protests against imperialist wars and educational cuts on March 4th, 2010, throughout the US.^{xviii}

13. Iconicized schooling pretends to prepare people for the “real world,” when, in essence, the most vital issues of human life, labor, rational knowledge, love and sexual pleasure, and the relentless struggle to be free of exploitation and tyranny, are mostly banned; illegal and/or never practiced. Taken apiece: meaty study of labor is illegal in most states as to do it is to study Marx and Marxist social movements. Rational knowledge is banned. How many classroom teachers, or professors for that matter, are willing to say, “people make gods; gods don’t make people?” Sexuality must be taught in connection with fear, STD’s, pregnancy horrors. Not: it feels good.

Freedom or the critique of tyranny is not there because freedom cannot be practiced and radical criticism is usually an absentee.^{xix}

What results is a daily reproduction of quasi-science (we can get to the moon but cannot erase capital’s need for racism as an ideology and profitable practice) and incoherence. The fetish of schooling produces, successfully, students so bored by the tedium of not learning under the guise of learning, that they learn not to like the struggle for knowledge. Students learn to kill their own curiosity and to lie about their own true proficiencies. As bad, they learn to split the word and the deed when students pretend to study and teachers pretend to teach—a daily taxi dance that dulls all on the floor. Students learn indifference, worse than hate, the opposite of love.

14. Schools reify, make normal, the divisions of science and art, history and math, disconnect experience and the intellect.

15. There are, in a secret underworld that nobody but the ruling class and its denizens notice, dangerous, lumpen, school systems, virtual holding pens like much of Detroit, where the children of the permanently stagnant section of the reserve army of the unemployed are located and controlled—or not controlled. These are veritable hothouses for barbarism where teaching and administration is seen, too often, as a job bank for the gatekeepers of this hell, and students are prepared for a life impossible to enter the work force over the long term: cannon fodder, Walmart employees, or prisoners feeding the endless growth of the jail industry.

16. Schools are huge markets (consider the property values, architects, buildings, book suppliers, lawyers, labor costs, busses, etc.). All inside are necessarily commodified. That is how the system works. In California, for example, each student is worth about \$26 a day, based on Average Daily Attendance. Hence, absence is as much a cost factor as a loss of knowledge, indeed more-so. Inversely, Michigan’s Education Department fought to extend the school year on the premise that being schooled for more days would make kids smarter, or more to the point, successful on the state test, the MEAP, which at the time was administered by the state’s Treasury Department and scored by Standard and Poors. The best laid plan was stymied, however, when the collapsing tourism industry intervened, forcing the start of school back after the long, lucrative, Labor Day holiday.^{xx}

17. Commodified schooling shrouds an immense tax funded babysitting arena serving employers of, often, single parents, employers who dodge the cost of raising the next, oncoming, multiplication of workers.

18. Inside the market system, schools mirror the contradictory affective/emotional make up of the market. Trust (property law pretending to be the Rule of Law) and Faith (endless growth, accumulation, and expansion) meet greed and fear (panic after panic after panic). Given the test score hoodoo, fear is the prime emotional background of schooling today.

19. Schools obliterate the reality of capitalism and its relationship to real people. Schools promote the idea that democracy dominates capitalism (bourgeoisie political science enacted in sandbox student councils), when it does not. Iconicized schooling wipes out not only the fact of class warfare, and hatred of tyranny, and, worse still, the history of successful resistance and revolution that connects directly to the daily life of students and real educators.

Despite the fetishist denials of most self-proclaimed Mother Superiors and Cardinals of mainstream education, there is a direct line from the avowedly capitalist economy to schooling is made clear by recent statements from the White House:

Rahm Emanuel: “Schools are a conveyor belt for the economy.”

Obama: “Schools are the core of our economic growth.”

Or, the appointed (anointed) Paul Vallas, former saboteur of the Chicago school system and now the overseer of the ruins in New Orleans: “I would happily have a teaching force made up of 50% recent grads from prestigious colleges who only commit for a couple of years and 50% of experienced teachers.”

20. Iconicized, fetishist, capitalist schooling befogs, denies, ignores, deflects, the emergence of national socialism in the USA, the corporate state—and the relation of that crisis to, for example, demands for a national curriculum, the militarization of schooling, the set up of national service as a siphon for to head off middle class resistance to a draft. That pairs with the true financial and imperial crises in the U.S. and the parallel attacks on teachers’ wages, benefits, and tenure—assaulting the last people in the working class who have these benefits. Teachers who bought the icon, however, have for too long accepted the bribe to abuse children behind the NCLB and RaTT, now find themselves without allies in the working class and, again, bamboozled by the latest demagogue, Obama, and his union boss supporters who, themselves, live very well on the empire’s bribes.^{xxi}

Working people in the past fought for their children’s education. When they got schooling, they resisted as back in the day when unions fought vocational education programs in order to control their own trades. Now, as capital solidified its domination of democracy and schooling, we need to take another look at the resistance.^{xxii}

Resistance and the Unionite Fetish With A Dash of Education Resistance Too

“Nothing can emerge at the end of the process which did not appear as a presupposition and precondition at the beginning. But, on the other hand, everything also has to come out. Thus, if at the end of the process of production, which was begun with the presuppositions of capital, capital appears to have vanished as a formal relation, then this can have taken place only because the invisible threads which draw it through the process have been overlooked.”^{xxiii}

21. Schools overcome fetishization when they are met by resistance from within and without. Last March 4th, led by notably integrated masses of students, colleges and universities and many

k12 schools were shut down by civil strife: walkouts, strikes, demonstrations, teach-ins, and occupations. These actions moving out centrifugally from school-icons into communities, became vast educational centers where people gained and tested knowledge in an atmosphere made free, yet facing down the force, the iron fist, inside the velvet glove of iconicized schooling.

22. Resistance, however, is sabotaged by the traditional organizations for redress: the school unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the, much larger, National Education Association.

Both unions not only accept the division of labor that schooling fetishizes, but their leaders deny the very reason most people join unions: the contradictory interests of employers and workers.

Instead, the union tops promote what former NEA president Bob Chase called “New Unionism,” that is, the unity of government bosses, corporate leaders, and union Quislings, “in the national interest.” Denying the reality of class struggle, the union leaders routinely recreate the hierarchies of the education industry in mirror-like fashion, then betray the real interests of their own members, in order to preserve the national good, that is, class rule. In this sense, unions themselves are a form of fetish. Most people believe they, unions, are unions. They are, instead, systems of disunity (dividing people by job, race, industry, etc). Unionism, then, is not unionism, but a fantasy of what might or should be, a la school and education.

23. The two unions, both claiming the mantle of anti-racism, include membership of teachers from a force that is about 90% white: structural racism from the outset. Rather than fight to integrate the teaching force, the unions urge more and more “education” classes, adding on expenses for students, meaning those with the least get shaved out with razor sharp precision—by class and race.^{xiv}

24. The urban AFT allowed big-city education to rot while negotiating one retreat after another, organizing decay, behind the banner that concessions would save jobs when, in fact, concessions are like giving blood to sharks—bosses only want more. Most recently, the Detroit Federation of Teachers, behind AFT president Randi Weingarten, bargained the worst contract in school history, giving up tenure, merit pay, cuts in health benefits, and \$500 per paycheck.^{xv}

Meanwhile, the mostly suburban NEA allowed the AFT to conduct its methodical disintegration but, as the old labor saw, “An injury to one only precedes an injury to all,” proved true; NEA members came under the same regimented curricula/high-stakes exams/merit pay, tenure-attack, cyclone that hit AFT years before.

25. Since the mid-1970's, union bosses supported every measure that elites used to regain control of schools, which were, in many cases, out of control. The NEA and AFT bosses today support curricular regimentation, high stakes racist exams, the militarization of schooling, merit pay, and charter schools (a key new source of dues income). In 2009, NEA celebrated the Obama election and the appointment of education-thug Arne Duncan; then in 2010 NEA leaders defended Obama's war agenda (and planned to spend millions on the next election—combined NEA and AFT are top funders of the political class). In 2010, AFT invited billionaire, school privatizer, and convicted monopolist, Bill Gates, to keynote their convention.^{xvi}

26. The education unions serve to peddle the wage labor of education workers as a commodity to employers and to guarantee labor peace. In this context, there is a direct trade off: no strikes or job

actions in exchange for guaranteed dues income, the check-off. That is precisely the historical origin of the agency shop—lost knowledge today. It is also a big reason why union bosses obey court injunctions against job actions; threats to the union’s bank account, that is, union staff salaries.

Unionism’s devotion to the bottom line should be abundantly clear. Go to a school union meeting and insist that students, who not only are school workers’ best allies but are also positioned to play key leadership roles, have a vote. Then listen to the opposition’s bottom line: “They don’t pay dues!”^{xvii}

As in schools, market forces encourage not only union hierarchy (jobs for life) but also corruption, especially true in the American Federation of Teachers where a steady stream of leaders, from Washington D.C. to Florida have been jailed for, not only looting the treasury, but child-rape.

27. School unions attack the working class as a whole. The most recent example (May 2009) of this was the support the California Teachers Association and the NEA gave to a series of ballot propositions that would have dramatically raised the taxes of poor and working people while leaving corporations and the rich off the hook, again. NEA and CTA combined spent more than \$12.2 million dollars on the campaigns, and lost overwhelmingly. CTA-NEA demonstrated to poor and working families that organized teachers are enemies—yet those same people are educators’ most important allies.

28. These are the empire’s unions. Top leaders are fully aware that a significant portion of their sky-high pay is made possible by the empires adventures. NEA and AFT bosses work with a variety of international organizations on behalf of U.S. imperialism. These adventures are frequently deadly as with the AFT’s unwavering support for both U.S. nationalism and Israeli Zionism, support for the recent oil wars, and, precisely to the point, work throughout the world with the National Endowment for Democracy, a Central Intelligence Agency front, in wrecking indigenous leftist worker movements. While the AFT has been the spearhead of U.S. imperialism inside the wholly corrupt “labor movement,” NEA has also been deeply involved. There is a long history to this, back to World War I and the AFL’s support for that horrific war. The theory behind it: US workers will do better if foreign workers do worse.

There is, however, deeper, more profound resistance. Its long term goal is a mass, class conscious movement designed to transcend the system of capital, to retain what may have been good aspects of it (science for example), abolish what was not (wars, racism, sexism, exploitation, etc), and to create a new world where people can be reasonably free, critical, creative, by sharing, each from his or her commitment to each according to need.

The last thing school and union bosses want to see is that mass class conscious movement as it would, at the least, make them irrelevant.

This movement recognizes the need to be inside capital’s schools, doing all people can to teach well, keeping their ideals, and learning well as too—in the real tradition of radical, to the root, education, distinct from schooling. This activity goes on in schools throughout the U.S. and needs to be recognized, especially for the courage and sheer perseverance of the true educators and students who do it. This is the starting point of abolishing old-style schooling, retaining what is good about it (like literacy, history, math, art, music, play, etc.) and creating something entirely new in a more equitable and democratic world.

That, of course, is revolutionary. Abolishing or hiding the necessity of revolution leaves any movement directionless, without a north star, only recreating capitalism in somewhat new ways.

The point is to not merely grasp the role of commodity fetishism in schools, but to upend the relationship of school and education.

Closed schools when matched by freedom schooling is education as a use value—humanizing, unleashing the creativity of people too long unplugged from the connection of learning and life—the revolutionary spirit may be on the land again!

Will my little stories and allegory to the fetishized world of schooling, vs. education, help those in school and out? I hope.

Up the rebels!

Good luck to us, every one.

Notes

ⁱ Karl Marx, *Capital, a Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, Lawrence Wishart edition, p477.

ⁱⁱ Rhee quoted in the Washington Post, 8/19/10 linked here:

<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/dcschools/>

ⁱⁱⁱ The proper quote from Jean Anyon is, “Doing school reform without doing social and economic reform is like washing the air on one side of a screen door; it won’t work.”

^{iv} Rich Gibson, Substance News, May 2010, Against Ravitch. Online at

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1255§ion=Article>

^v Rich Gibson, July 2010, The NEA Representative Assembly: Proof the Education Agenda is a War Agenda, Substance News, online at

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1526§ion=Article> and an expanded view

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1539§ion=Article>

^{vi} James Surowiecki, The New Yorker, August 7, 2010 online at

http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2010/07/05/100705ta_talk_surowiecki. On Freire, see

Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Thoreau is from Walden, chapter 3, online at:

[http://www.eoearth.org/article/Walden:_Chapter_03_\(historical\)](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Walden:_Chapter_03_(historical))

^{vii} The Artillery Journal (April 2010) Going Tribal, Enlisting Afghan Tribes p57.

^{viii} Rich Gibson, Counterpunch (September 2010) online at:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/gibson09072010.html>

^{ix} 56 million kids: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/index.html>

^x Chalmers Johnson (2008) *Nemesis*. Metropolitan Books, NYC, p278.

^{xi} See for example, *Russian Teachers and Peasant Revolution, The Politics of Education in 1905*, by Scott J. Seregeny, Indiana University Press, 1989.

^{xii} David Harvey, *A Companion To Marx’s Capital*, Verso, 2009. P12.

^{xiii} Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1. International Publishers, NYC. P644.

^{xiv} Education Action Group (September 9, 2010) “Boston Parents Demand Role in Contract Negotiations” online at: <http://eagfdn.org/inthenews.html>

^{xv} On test cheating, see for example “The Cheat Sheet, Under Pressure, Teachers Tamper With Tests, NY Times, 6-10-10: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/education/11cheat.html> Detroit has long been a focal point of school administrator corruption. Here is one of but a stream of similar pieces: “Former DPS Official Gets 24 Months for Payroll Fraud,” Detroit News, 9-10-10:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/education/11cheat.html>

^{xvi} It would be correct to say that Taylorist methods infected education for decades, back to the early 1900's (see Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* or F.W. Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management*) but to place the current frenzy in historical context means tracking the ruling classes' measures to recapture schooling since the uprisings of the Vietnam era, through Nation At Risk, on to NCLB, and now to the RaTT, each trumping the last.

^{xvii} Rich Gibson, *Rouge Forum Broadside: Why Have School? Education and the Resistance* (September 2010) online at <http://richgibson.com/WhyHaveSchoolSept%202010.pdf>

^{xviii} Rich Gibson, *Substance News* (3-7-10), *The March 4th Actions*, online at: <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1234§ion=Article>

^{xix} Some teacher do get away with critiquing tyranny, proof that people will resist. Here is one lesson that I hope is helpful as a starting point: <http://www.richgibson.com/masterslave.htm>

^{xx} I am aware of the invasion of schooling conducted by privateers like Bill Gates and Eli Broad. However, privatizing is a second-tier issue. It's difficult to determine the total Gates "contribution" to education year to year as the Foundation's grants are scattered to a long list of recipients. However, the total endowment is about \$33 billion. Then consider just the current education budget, at about \$160 billion (Billion), from the federal government alone. To focus solely on privatization is to, on one hand, give false support to what is capitalist education, not public education, to abandon a critique of the capitalist state and harken back to mythical good old days of public education which never existed and, on the other hand, to follow the path of those who complain bitterly about the mercenaries the US employees around the world, but are willing to ignore the fact that the capitalist state, the corporate state, pays for those mercenaries and to point back to the much more kindly and polite US military's days which never existed either. While I see the working of a corporate state, others who I respect do see privatization as key. Note Susan Ohanian citing Gates' influence on the Common Core Standards as well as Ken Saltman, here: http://www.susanohanian.org/show_commentaries.php?id=830

^{xxi} On the linkage of financial and imperial crises, see Chalmers Johnson, *Dismantling the Empire*, Metropolitan Books, 2010. On the notable pay of education union tops (\$686,949 in one year to past National Education President, Reg Weaver) see the US Labor Department site and check the LM2 reports for your own union leadership.

^{xxii} It is tempting to say that workers always wanted public education. There is a contradictory record well outlined in Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, (1976) Basic Books, NYC. Sad to say, it is very hard to find. See especially Part III.

^{xxiii} Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1973, Paladin, Suffolk, p93.

^{xxiv} US Department of Education Chart on Racial Make-up of Public School Teachers: http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/state_2004_18.asp

^{xxv} Rich Gibson. *The Detroit Federation of Teachers Contract—the Worst Ever?* *Substance News*, January 2010 online at <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1063§ion=Article>

^{xxvi} On the NEA Representative Assembly, 2009, 2010, see *Substance News* author's summary, Rich Gibson, here: <http://www.substancenews.net/authors.php?author=Rich+Gibson+>

^{xxvii} The NEA's total budget will be \$357,739,880 in 2010. Combined, NEA and AFT are the top contributors to national political campaigns.

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1539§ion=Article>

Rich Gibson is an emeritus professor at San Diego State University, a co-founder of the Rouge Forum, and a faculty advisor to the Student March 4th Movement.

Use of multicultural children' book and narratives in Teacher Preparation: Unlearning to Learn

Blanca Caldas Chumbes

Recovering our youthful purity through conscientization:

The goal of producing independent, lifelong learners requires educators to avoid inflicting damage upon younger learners through banking, and to help deskilled, older learners to reinvest their humanity in the learning process. (Bahruth, 2008, p. A-2-3)

Millions of words have extolled the benefits of multicultural children's literature to teach children. They bring to the table authenticity as historic veracity to demonstrate that multiculturalism should not be seen as Halloween (Seto, 2003). Multicultural children's narrative has "the unique ability to present simple plot lines and bipolar opposites of heroes and villains" (English, 2000, p. 15), which does not refer to characters only since a feeling or a situation can easily be antagonistic. As Collie & Slater (1987) state, children's literature creates an atmosphere that enables students to be personally involved in the story, thus increasing interest in a positive way. If literature is chosen carefully, it is not only meaningful and pleasing to read but it also an effective source of cultural knowledge with a lasting effect since "emotion is the engine of the intellect" (Graves, 2002, p. 41). Multicultural children's books give(s) each of us "a place to stand in our own small community" since "everyone has a story to tell (Graves, 2002, p. 17) and such narratives "can bring home points in ways that more abstract ways of presenting cannot" (Apple, 2008, p 241).

Multicultural children's books have also been used outside their intended target population. EFL and ESL teachers have been using them to emphasize non-threatening and friendly presentations of language in rich contexts. Laina Ho (2000) used her experience teaching English as a foreign language in China to analyze the incorporation of children's literature in the curricula for adult education and suggests the relevance of its use in classrooms. Though Ho was interested in grammatical and lexical analysis, she was surprised to discover how EFL students reacted to Geraldine McCaughrean's story *The Plate: a question of values* (1988), a story that questions the political unrest the students themselves recognized in the story treated as a metaphor:

This story symbolizes the spirit of freedom from authoritarianism ... coming from a country with centuries of historic turmoil, my students were able to comment on the allegorical reference to human rights and freedom from a simple story like "The Plate," taking the flight for freedom as a symbol for the fight of individual rights and democracy – a view that I had never considered before, having read it as a typical children's story with the usual happy ending. (p. 264-265)

Ho's point is that multicultural children's books have a transformative quality in higher education, especially to Teacher Education. The importance of multiculturalism in education plays a fundamental part in the formation of human beings. The use of multicultural children's books affords the participants in the classrooms at the university level to unlearn the biases society has planted in each individual's heads throughout history; therefore, providing future teachers the opportunity to educate a generation of citizens who are able to name the issues which contribute to the marginalization of minorities, eliminate biases and misconceptions and empower them to contribute to the transformation of society into a more just, egalitarian and empathic one.

One of the arguments against the implementation of multicultural children's books is also found in Ho's article, which states the initial reticence of her EFL student feeling towards this kind of books

at first. English (2000) claims the reason behind the unwillingness of educators in adult education to integrate multicultural children's books in class is that their presence lacks a basis in adult education theory. Knowles (1989) debunks this idea by citing the study on andragogy, which states adults learning is based on significant experience (Dewey, 1938) for the development of the self. It is also important to highlight the role authors of multicultural literature play in this so much needed transformative multicultural movement. It is time to be aware of the ways so-called multicultural children's literature reinforces the same bias authors try to expose, no matter the good intentions of some authors to take issues lightly nor the need to cater for and take advantage of a new market of less critical teachers who are contented with "nice" trade books. However, in the end what matters the most is how well prepared teachers are to raise multicultural issues and how deep they go when facilitating free exploration in the classroom.

Multicultural teachers as advocates

The struggle is inner: chicano, indio, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant latino, anglo poor, working class anglo, populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before other changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the "real world" unless it first happens in the images in our heads." (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 87)

Future teachers who have not embraced and understood the transformational power of multiculturalism have not become active advocates and are likely to perpetuate the same ideology that has created the gap between "us" and "them," excluding "them" from having a voice and preventing "them" from reaping the same benefits and enjoying the liberties of "us" (often the white christian heterosexual male). What is the value of a teacher who uses multicultural children's books with his or her first graders as if each topic was part of a "nice" diorama or a visit to a Madame Tussauds museum, just to move on to the next sculpture and pat his or her back for the good job? The use of multicultural children's books in higher education is an invitation to search for one's own biases, be conscious of the socializing mechanisms that ingrained them in one's set of beliefs— which could result in the initial acknowledgement of one's participation and/or encouragement discriminatory and prejudiced behavior. By critically analyzing one's biases, students are given the chance to eradicate them little by little from the everyday life, recognizing the moral responsibility of denouncing such behavior and the institutions that support it since "it is a waste of time hating a mirror or its reflection instead of stopping the hand that makes glass with distortions" (Lorde, 1992, p. 85).

However, it is necessary to make sure the use of multicultural children's books does not lose its critical edge and becomes part of the decorations of an innocuous multicultural education, which unfortunately is the case when used at schools and universities by teachers and professors who are unaware of its power or lack of the criticality to promote transformative education. It is also important to highlight the role authors of multicultural literature play in this so much needed transformative multicultural movement. It is time to be aware of the ways so-called multicultural children's literature reinforces the same bias authors try to expose, no matter the good intentions of some authors to take issues lightly nor the need to cater for and take advantage of a new market of less critical teachers who are contented with "nice" trade books. The paradigm shift to critical postmodernist multiculturalism (Schwartz, 1995) means the inclusion of multicultural experiences, which in a college classroom could be translated into a variety of activities inside and/or outside the classroom, such as journals, portfolios, partnership projects and so on. The "exotization" of the "other" which perpetuates the constant comparison between "we" and "they" must be avoided since it creates rejection and more prejudice (Urrieta & Quach, 2000), objectives

which differ from the postmodernist perspective. The objective of a postmodernist approach to multiculturalism is social transformation without which it is “just another form of accommodation to the larger social order” (Estrada & McLaren, 1993, p. 31) no matter the intentions of some to make things better (Apple, 2008, p. 244).

The inclusion of critical postmodern multiculturalism must be made by means of a non-threatening environment where topics about diversity are addressed critically, something that is achieved by using multicultural children’s books. Without these requisites social awareness about cultural diversity is unlikely to occur (Bahruth & Steiner, 1998). We need to bear in mind that “for older learners who have been heavily schooled and damaged by false representation of how human beings come to know and understand the world around them, humanizing education must deliberately make the effort to include the subjectivities of learners in the process.” (Bahruth, 2008, P. A-2-3). The key to learning starts in waking up the dormant feelings adults are trained to dismiss by trying to be objective. Objectivity in issues that include all kinds of “isms” cripples students by not letting them relate to issues faced by people who share the same feelings but are not part of the mainstream culture. Multicultural children’s books create the connection between the writer’s take on situations faced by minority groups and the reader’s subjectivity. As Freire stated:

There are teachers who ask the students not to illuminate the intimacy of the book, the soul of the text... They often ask students to describe a second object, society itself. The students are only to describe what they see in society, and nothing more... (not) even think to change reality. (Freire & Shor, 1987 p. 12)

English (2000) claims authors of multicultural children’s books usually write them as a catharsis in order to finally understand themselves and find the relationship of the chosen issue and their own personal history, therefore, allowing the reader to go through the same process of discovery of his or her own personal history by relating to these stories depicted first, and then, enabling the audience to jump to the larger issues derived from such stories. Paraphrasing Michael Apple (2008, P. 241) multicultural children’s books and narratives make the stories “out there” in its complexity and controversy “right here” at a more personal level. This connection can be made by using multicultural children’s books as “counterstorytelling” (Delgado, 1989) as a way to introduce the silent voices to challenge the mainstream version. Storytelling is a springboard for critical thinking, cultural awareness, analysis, problem solving and using the right words to name issues without fear. As Solorzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) highlight:

- a- They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice
- b- They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center
- c- They can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live ad to show that they are not alone in their position
- d- They can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone
- e- They can provide a context to understand and transform established beliefs (p. 327-328)

Cultural diversity classes: Multicultural awareness has to start first in the educator

Universities and colleges may be the last opportunity to provide a space for the development of social consciousness in future teachers. Erickson (1946) stated the best times to create a personal and social identity is during late adolescence and early adulthood, which involves “a persistent sameness within oneself and a persistent sharing with others,” and the formation of a philosophy of life. Social consciousness is crucial and necessary for aspiring young educators before they become responsible for children, by means of challenging their biases and stretching their points of view. Magalhaes and Perreault (2004) problematize the lack of interest in critical social awareness in teacher preparation, and the need for a screening process that localizes students incapable of being in charge of a culturally diverse class and of addressing the importance of dealing with multiculturalism and diversity critically during core classes at university. Magalhaes and Perreault conclude certifying such students would certainly be detrimental and harmful for children and would avoid reaching the goal of breaking off from a legacy of inequality and discrimination.

However, the lack of interest in multicultural issues is not exclusive to future teachers but within the institutions. It is impossible to advocate for diversity if the institutions “implement” it by merely “offer(ing) new courses on diversity, hir(ing) a few faculty of color, assign(ing) these faculty to cover committee assignments, work(ing) with students of color, serv(ing) as role models and offer(ing) helpful suggestions on how to be a more user-friendly institution to all students, including the ones of color” (Brayboy, 2003, p. 73) without a foundational change in itself. The responsibility for multiculturalism in undergraduate classes cannot rely solely in the hands of the ‘faculty of color.’ Doing otherwise would perpetuate the status quo since white faculty must share the load of being leaders in multiculturalism together with becoming better scholars and better teachers. Fritschler and Smith (2009) discuss the trend to hire “safe” candidates in higher education since, despite universities seeming to be populated by liberal and leftist faculty members, institutions prefer conventional faculty who tend to be cautious and afraid of negative feedback from students because of having challenged them “too much”. This is detrimental to both professors and students: for the former because of the lack of freedom to raise diversity awareness in depth due to the fear of being too political and not being able to obtain tenure and promotion, for the latter because of the anti-intellectual climate the lack of progressive multicultural professors would create, especially in white institutions.

University professors must undergo the same unlearning process in order to guide future teachers to respect, embrace and advocate for diversity equality, which unfortunately is not often the case. In a study Maruyama et al (2000) concluded that in spite of being aware of the crucial role of diversity in higher education, many professors are unwilling to adjust their praxis in class for its inclusion. What is more, only 1/3 of the 1500 professors surveyed included diversity issues in their classes. In another research among several universities in the USA about the importance placed on diversity in teacher preparation programs, Jennings (2007) concluded that the student discomfort and disinterest in being exposed to a discourse based on diversity is directly proportional to the same attitudes in the faculty, whose knowledge of the topic also play a major role in the attitudes of future teachers. Jennings describes how several universities neglect certain topics on multiculturalism—such as gender and sexual orientation— suggesting that the faculty interviewed find these topics too controversial and less relevant than race, which is the principal issue addressed in class. The exclusion of the aforementioned multicultural topics reinforces a modern paradigm of multiculturalism, which basically resides merely on race, thus forgetting to focus on other aspects of multiculturalism, (Schwartz, 1995) without giving these issues a place for critical discussion and action. “Multiethnic children’s literature is children’s literature for and

about America's four major nonwhite population" (Ramirez & Ramirez, 1994, p. 1) illustrates the definition on multicultural children's books in the modern paradigm, which is pervasive in teacher education throughout the USA. This is not the only area where certain aspects of multiculturalism are silenced. Jennings points out how homosexuality and sexual orientation is marginalized in research by stating these topics were not included until Gutierrez (2004) wrote three paragraphs on those topics in a chapter published in the Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education only five years ago.

Let me tell you a story

And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's ok... Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one.
(Cisneros, 2002, p. 1)

As an educator I have the chance to utilize multicultural children's books at university with positive results. For instance, while teaching a diversity course for undergraduate students seeking to become teachers, I used the story "Eleven", by Sandra Cisneros, which portrays a Latina 11 year-old girl humiliated in front of the class by her own teacher. At first students experienced some apprehension about reading a story they thought was meant for children but not suitable for adults. However, by discussing the ideas from the story helped them to name different issues—such as classism, racism, oppression, silencing, power—which they could clearly notice by analyzing the emotions of the different characters in the story triggered in such a way the issue becomes familiar due to the shared feeling from both the protagonist (the times when students experienced oppression) and the antagonist (when students happened to be the source of the oppression). During the semester and while using other children's books about gender issues, sexual orientation and other diversity issues, these same students had the opportunity to start service projects for different diverse communities in order to get a well-rounded experience both in and outside the classroom. The whole experience, while emotionally draining, was really rewarding for both parties. I believe students became more critical of the injustice and prejudice that seem to be normalized in every day practices; which is exactly what we need from prospective teachers: individuals who are no afraid to name inequality against minority groups and instill the same thirst for social justice in their students.

No more teachers whose jobs are compared to a "factory worker" or "police officer" since all they do is to follow a curricula, test, grade and discipline (Shuy, 1987, p. 891) are needed. What makes a person a real educator must not be foreign to future teachers in teacher preparation, which should strive for the development of their capacity to understand and relate to people whose cultural background, language and history are different and provide them with a large variety of opportunities to explore further issues they will inevitably encounter once they become teachers. Tracking back those "onion layers"—in hopes of getting to softer side of humanity within every one of us by means of fine multicultural children's books will allow people to develop the ability to pinpoint biases within both the stories and themselves. Moreover, this makes us more sensitive to the ones at the margins, the ones who need to be reached out for a mutual learning and understanding and finally, social transformation. This is the great difference between being trained to be a teacher and an "organic intellectual" (Gramsci, 1971). Becoming an eleven year old again is not a bad idea.

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Blanca Caldas Chumbes can be reached at blancacaldaschumbes@u.boisestate.edu

Plotting inequality, building resistance

Adam Renner

“This is hella-hard, Renner” Briana blasted as we finished an investigation of “Buying a home while brown or black” in our math support class. She was reacting to our engagement with Rico Gutstein’s lesson in *Rethinking Mathematics* for which we examined a *Chicago Tribune* article and entertained questions, both mathematical and analytical, regarding discrimination against home-buyers of color.

It *was* ‘hella-hard’, but the students engaged it like inquisitive investigators, trying to uncover the underlying issues and make better sense of their world.

As suggested by Gutstein, students investigated the “disparity ratio” between whites and African Americans and Latino/as, respectively, in terms of mortgage denials. Also, students considered the perspectives of the mortgage lenders and how they might respond.

Regarding the mathematics of the lesson, students discovered the mechanics behind the disparity ratio: the rate of non-white mortgage denials divided by the rate of white mortgage denials. As well, students used proportional reasoning to determine actual numbers of mortgage denials among racial groups. Louie broke down the disparity ratio for his group. Ricardo demonstrated his understanding of proportional reasoning on the moveable white board at the front of the room.

When asked what they might ask of the mortgage lender should they have a meeting, the students developed the following list of questions: “Do you consider yourself a racist?” “What color people do you hang out with?” “Have you ever dated someone of a different race?”

In his conclusion, a recent immigrant student remarked, “Seems like Jim Crow is still alive today.”

A critical mathematical literacy

This lesson is an example of my employment of a “critical mathematical literacy,” coined by Marilyn Frankenstein. Frankenstein theorizes that such a literacy is made up of four components, or ‘knowledges’: knowledge of mathematics, the mathematics of political knowledge, the politics of mathematical knowledge, and the politics of knowledge.

I used this particular lesson in my math support class as a precursor to more in-depth work I wanted to do with these same students in my Algebra class. Where I teach, San Francisco, immense wealth is on display. Simultaneously, poverty provides prominent punctuations throughout the urban landscape. It is a city characterized by a deep divide between rich and poor and a darkening disillusionment among its youth.

The June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE), where I teach, serves an underclass of students, whether based on race, class, or documented status. In fact, our public school comprises the highest share of Black and Latino/a students in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). Three-fifths of our students qualify for free- or reduced price lunch. This year (2010-2011), our incoming freshman class possessed the lowest standardized test scores in math and near bottom scores in reading. This is not unusual. What is also not unusual, though, for our school, is that these students go to college. Eighty-eight percent are qualified to attend a four-year university in California. Seventy-seven percent of the 2008 class chose a post-secondary option.

Three-quarters of them were still in enrolled in the spring 2009—the highest percentage of any non-select public school in San Francisco.

Clink, clink . . . clink went the brass knuckles falling out of Ramon’s pocket during morning advisory. “Um, sorry, Mr. Renner.” “Me, too, Ramon. Please get your things and see Mr. Smith,” I lamented.

Oh, and the lives of students at our school are characterized by a culture of violence: whether it be the gang infestation of the neighborhood where our school resides (red of the signals your ‘affiliation’); the complicated way some of our students must travel to school—not being able to travel through some neighborhoods because they emanate from a rival neighborhood; and/or the cycle of violence that exists in several of our students families—prompting suicide attempts and others to reveal harrowing tales of abuse at the hands of mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters.

Systemic oppression, standardized tests and violence, countered by community, social justice, and independent thinking goes the philosophy of the school – which leads to the possibility of college, and, better, lives of respect, integrity, courage and humility.

So, how does the math classroom play into this philosophy—this “pedagogy of liberation,” espoused by our administration? Employing this critical mathematical literacy seems to be an entry point. As the newest member of our staff, coming from teaching in higher education for a little more than a decade, I seek to stand in solidarity with my colleagues toward the development of such a liberatory pedagogy. Of course, *Rethinking Schools* is a fierce ally in the construction of this pedagogy. Gutstein’s lesson is but one of many possibilities for this year’s math classroom.

Wanting both the students and me to better understand our community, the results of systemic oppression and the irrationality of the capitalist system of accumulation, I developed a unit, entitled: “Plotting Inequality, Building Resistance.” In this unit, we would learn the skills of data mining, spreadsheet creation, scatter plot construction, and data analysis.

Zip skinny (www.zipskinny.com) offers a user-friendly website to mine data about local communities. Our students emanate from three zip codes in San Francisco, primarily: the Excelsior, Visitacion Valley, and Bayview/Hunters Point. Along with mining for data in these zip codes, I selected four other zip codes with which I wanted students to work: the Mission (an extremely eclectic neighborhood, centrally located in San Francisco), the Presidio (one of San Francisco’s wealthiest neighborhoods), and Outer Sunset and Outer Richmond (two neighborhoods that reside along San Francisco’s Pacific coast). I asked the students to record in a table the following data: median neighborhood income, percentage of high school completion or higher, percentage of bachelor’s completion and higher, unemployment rate, and percentage of non-white residency.

I had the students mine this data, independently. Then, in carefully constructed groups (bringing together students of various skill levels), I had them create scatter plots pairing each of the columns of data—e.g., X = median income, Y = high school completion or X = college completion, Y = percentage of non-white residency.

On the day after students collected the needed data, I started class with a Do Now, which asked the students what stood out to them from the data. One student, an English language learner, wrote, “What I saw is that where I live (Bayview) is the lowest one in the zip codes and that no rich

person lives there. And, there are less white people.” Thinking along that line of race, Miranda offered, “Presidio has the highest rates of whites and the median household income.” Continuing the strand, “Presidio has a lot more white people,” another female student noticed, “And it is doing good—better than the others.” And, finally, Ricardo, already drawing conclusions like the student comment before: “The more white people the higher the median income.”

While most students worked diligently on the project, we’ll recall that this is a *freshman* Algebra class. It was, indeed, necessary to monitor closely the work of the students, to assist with the plotting of some graphs (“How might we label the x-axis for unemployment, which ranged from 2.1% to 5% differently than we might label it for median income, which ranged from \$37000 to \$74000?), and to make sure we stayed on task. At the end of the plotting, I asked the students to discuss four questions. (1) Which graph seemed to have the tightest line of best of fit? What conclusion could you draw? (2) Which graph had the second tightest line of best fit? What conclusion could you draw? (3) Which line of best fit seemed to fit the worst? Why do you think that is? And, (4) How does this information make you feel? What can we do about it?

In their final analyses, student groups had the following to say: “The graphs show us that non-white residents of San Francisco have a difficult time with money and finishing high school and continuing to get their bachelor’s degrees like white students.” Lena’s group remarked that “it makes us feel like you won’t succeed in this world unless you’re white.” Seeing the correlations and the cycle, Joseph’s group concluded, “School completion has to increase in order to prevent poverty—which leads to unemployment and not completing school.” Feeling the frustration of the exercise, Sage’s group worried, “It lets us know how the incomes are, and they are really low. It makes us feel bad because we should be getting a higher income and we have no idea what to do about it.”

When treating the question about how the students feel about this directly. Responses ranged from, “Indifferent” to “We don’t care about it” to “The graphs show to us the need to start changing for the better.”

Regarding what to do, some students were equally fatalistic: “No matter what we do, it’s not going to change,” while others showed a spark of passion and indignation, “It makes you feel like there is racism in San Francisco. It makes us feel bad there are not equal rights. We should make our own city.”

As a large group we discussed the students’ findings and I showed them the graphs with the tightest correlations. To do this, I used the very excellent site, *Illuminations* (<http://illuminations.netm.org/ActivityDetail.aspx?ID=146>). Turns out, the correlation between high school completion and median income, as well as college completion and median income was a strong 0.87. The correlation between non-white residency and college completion was a perfect -1.0.

What is next?

Interestingly, one of my math colleagues, who teaches Probability and Statistics to JJSE seniors, was completing a similar exercise using spreadsheets and teaching them the various graphing and analysis functions of Microsoft Excel.

Plans are underway to bring my freshmen together with her 12 seniors in order to engage in some cross-class mentoring and jointly discuss these issues. Thus, we’ll pair 1 of her seniors with 4 or 5

of my freshmen to tackle the following: (1) Seniors will prepare a short lesson based on the data that both classes have mined and analyzed and introduce a new variable (like # of payday loan stores per neighborhood or % of divorced residents or % of residents over 60, etc.) and show how Excel can graph and analyze the data; (2) Seniors will lead a discussion with the freshman about what this means for their community and what they might do about it; (3) And, finally, we will discuss as a large group what more deliberate work should follow from their analyses—introduce local orgs to this data, develop more interdisciplinary work within in JJSE like with humanities, etc.

Social justice in the math classroom?

Of course, social justice in the math classroom. Math offers us the chance to analyze our world. It helps us make sense of what is going on around us. And, often, what is going on around us is implicated in injustice. That our students live in neighborhoods which have median incomes at 50% of other neighborhoods, that their ‘race’ is negatively correlated with college completion, and that they live with violence that others constructed for their communities over the last five decades are all indices of injustice which deserve scrutiny, deconstruction, and resistance.

That some students are indifferent or disillusioned, or are distracted by the bread and circus of apparel, cell phones and I-pods is an intended outcome of a capitalist system. They are programmed to be asleep to the causes of the injustice around them. They are programmed to believe this violence is natural or that they just make bad decisions which lead to these outcomes. Giving them the analytical tools to decipher the deluge of these messages is the goal of my math class. We can teach math skills, construct community, *and* develop the needed resistance (at first this should look like outrage and then we can channel it away from fatalism and toward coordinated resistance).

The inequality they experience is planned; it is plotted. And, so we, in turn, graph, or *plot* the(ir) inequality to build the resistance. Freire says “to study is a revolutionary duty.” So, we are learning how to study in a way that puts the student at the center of the academic experience. *We* are the curriculum.

Note: Names of all students have been changed

Adam Renner is an Algebra teacher at the June Jordan School for Equity. He is the Associate Editor of Critical Education and the Editor of the Rouge Forum News. He can be reached at adamrenner70@gmail.com.

Toward a Dialectical Materialist Approach in Education: Beginning with an Insurgent Teacher Education Program

Faith Agostinone-Wilson

With contribution from Gina Stiens and Adam Renner

This is the text of a presentation at the Critical Questions in Education Conference, delivered by Faith Agostinone-Wilson, November 8, 2010 in Chicago, IL.¹

Background

I am a member of a collective of leftist educational scholars and activists from K-12 to college settings known as the Rouge Forum. As a group with global reach, we have been around since 1998 and our members publish educational research on a variety of topics pertinent to radical analysis of schooling. Currently, there is no other organized group which consistently and deliberately connects what is happening in education with capitalism and its attendant wars, imperialism, attacks on labor, racism, sexism, and homophobia. In particular, we are bent on identifying the growing fascism within education as mirrored by the growth of reactionary movements as a whole in the United States. At the same time, we understand that schools are one of the last pivotal locations for social organizing, where the majority of the U.S. population comes together to experience something in common. Thus our latest project: formulating an insurgent teacher education program. This is in its developmental stage, but it is informed by some specific events.

What is Happening in Schools?

There are three major situations or trends that are overwhelming K-12 public education. The more one's school serves poor and minority students, the more intense the impact of these trends, with the elite schools virtually untouched and the suburban schools mostly safe- for now, able to play around with arcane notions like "critical thinking" and the like. With American education having always been segregated by race and social class, and eventually re-segregated after a brief flirtation with integration during the 1960s and 1970s, the social stratification of schools has so far created an artificial firewall around white, middle class schools. This has also made resistance against testing a virtual impossibility as more privileged teachers refuse to see their lot as in common with teachers in schools identified as "failing."

The first issue impacting K-12 education is its utter dominance by standardized tests. These tests, with their roots in the racism of the eugenics movement of the early 1900s, are now the only form of assessment with any real meaning, all calls for "authentic assessment" to the contrary. As I remind my graduate students, we are already teaching to the test, it's just a matter if we identify it as such. Currently standardized tests are tied to teacher merit pay, and eventually will be linked universally to one's job status- low test scores will mean dismissal, contributing to even more turnover and instability of the most struggling schools in low income communities. It is important to note that while many teachers are opposed to notions of merit pay, when push comes to shove they will accept it, as many schools have accepted the bribery of Race to the Top grants.

The second issue impacting K-12 as well as higher education is militarization of schools. No Child Left Behind gives recruiters carte blanche access to high school students, with parents having to search out this clause to opt out of their child's information being given out to the armed forces. High unemployment turns the military into a "career" option, probably the last one offering steady health benefits and a pension to students not necessarily college bound. Aside from compulsory displays of nationalism, education is connected to the military by the wallet. As capitalism's wars

continue, schools are starved of necessary funding. This is accelerated by more vocal segments of the public calling for a return to 19th century ‘fee based’ everything, such as the fire department in Tennessee allowing a family’s house to burn to the ground because they were delinquent on paying their yearly membership. Ruthless competition becomes the gold standard of a society enchanted with the trappings of muscular “personal responsibility” and the anarcho-Randianism “you are on your own” mythology expected to be followed by all except for the wealthy and corporations, of course. Katrina showed us that in 2005. Indeed, we cannot overlook the final option for many kids of the working class- incarceration- which is part of the military industrial complex and a money maker in its own right now that roughly 1 in 31 adults are either on probation, in jail, or prison.

The third issue impacting K-12 and higher education is the unmooring of curriculum from dialectical materialism; in other words, a belief that the world can be comprehended and understood in order to change it. This is now out the window. Foundations classes are being replaced in teacher education with assessment-based courses in order to satisfy NCATE and other accreditation bodies. While multiculturalism is included, it is unconnected to anything of relevance and no more than a loose set of calls to be “diverse” and “tolerant,” not anti-racist. I have found that teachers are often eager to hear about the origins of No Child Left Behind and what bipartisan forces shaped its creation, but it isn’t until one is in graduate school that one is likely to hear this account, if at all. Without a dialectical understanding of capitalism and its impact on educational policy, teachers are left with a vague sense of dislike of standardized testing and regimentation, but they have no effective means of resistance. Worse yet, many internalize the phony meritocracy of numeric test scores as the “best way” we have to measure student knowledge. This is remarkably similar to there being “no alternative” to capitalism, so one best adapt to it.

Teacher Education’s Response

How have colleges of education responded to these three major trends? Let’s consider a course I used to teach at my university in our Masters of Arts in Teaching with Certification (MATC) program, an alt cert set-up for folks from other career fields. Up until two years ago, it was called *Philosophic Foundations of Education*. Half of the 16 week course was composed of major philosophies shaping American Education, and the second half featured a historical analysis of schooling from the 1600s to today, including No Child Left Behind. As part of a restructuring of our MATC program, the course is now called *The Elementary School: Foundations and Assessment*. Apparently NCATE is uncomfortable accrediting secondary education masters degrees since a Pandora’s Box of undergraduate content area coursework would be unleashed, requiring endless portfolio production to document learning. The new assessment course’s catalogue description emphasizes the use of standards as the foundation of U.S. education, not philosophical or historical understanding. The same thing has happened in our other masters program, with the *Contemporary Issues in Education* course being viewed by some faculty as “useless “and “not practical.” I’m sure it will be the next on the chopping block.

Granted, just because a course is listed in a catalogue as foundations based doesn’t mean that the instructor is using a dialectical approach. But at least students have a chance of receiving information that schools are not shaped in a vacuum. Now they get the message that if it isn’t connected to some kind of “standard” or “course objectives,” it doesn’t exist in a real epistemological sense. Standards themselves are innocuous in their language but it’s the act of tying everything to them that is the problem. Replacing foundational knowledge with a variety of checklists contributes to an erosion of dialectical knowledge. This turns graduate classes into

glorified busy work. As I said earlier, we are already teaching to the test, it's just a matter of identifying it as such.

Reformism, Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism

Reformism, utilitarianism, and pragmatism with its endless appeals to the fable of democracy are dead ends. In his latest book *Death of the Liberal Class*, Hedges (2010) presents a stark reality of the situation we face:

We can march in Copenhagen. We can join the International Day of Climate Action and its worldwide climate projects. We can compost in our backyards and hang our laundry out to dry. We can write letters to our elected officials. We can vote for Obama and chant, "yes we can," but the corporate power elite is no longer concerned with our aspirations. Appealing to their better nature, or seeking to influence the internal levers of power, will no longer work (p.200).

Hedges goes on to warn that, "those who hold power will not act with the urgency required to protect human life and the ecosystem" (p.204). If we don't have government response to the largest oil spill in U.S. history, then why do we insist on assuming that public schools will be "saved?" We have known where the failing schools are for over 50 years, nothing new is to be discovered here. Yet no urgency really exists, only empty Horatio Alger style slogans of maintaining a "globally competitive workforce" when China is ready to walk away from the U.S. debt it is holding, ushering in eventual record level inflation and economic collapse.

What is left? Resistance, rebellion, and insurgency. Hedges launches a pointed attack against pragmatism's "whatever works" mentality, arguing that acts of rebellion are moral acts and should not be measured against if they "work" or not. In capitalism, "work" means facilitating the exploitation of workers, period. Utility alone is insufficient as an indicator of rebellion because times are dire, and there isn't much time left. People who rebel stand with the oppressed, which means supporting Chicago parents occupying a field house to prevent a public school from being turned into a private one, and not Arne Duncan's Renaissance 2010 plan. It means refusing to accept corporate or government grants if they require allegiance to standards-based, racist high stakes test laden curriculum, "school choice" based on admissions criteria and other such endeavors. It means no longer producing research to enrich a university's reputation centered on how to get people to more gently accept No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top principles. It means overturning standardized testing entirely rather than implementing value-added nonsense to make an already racist and classist testing system more palatable. It means standing up for k-adult education as a human right for all people rather than spending time and effort hand-picking "acceptable" (i.e. high scoring) minority students for your selective closed admissions private and charter schools all the while reciting the starfish parable to ease your conscience, "well, I saved the one."

As Hedges reminds us in the conclusion of his book:

The elites and their courtiers in the liberal class always condemn the rebel as impractical. They dismiss the stance of the rebel as counterproductive. They chastise the rebel for being angry. The elites and their apologists call for calm, reason, and patience. They use the hypocritical language of compromise, generosity, and understanding to argue that we must accept and work with the systems of power. The rebel, however, is beholden to a moral commitment that makes it impossible to compromise. The rebel refuses to be bought off

with foundation grants, invitations to the White House, television appearances, book contracts, academic appointments, or empty rhetoric (p.215).

How this translates to developing and implementing an insurgent teacher education program is a project that the Rouge Forum is just beginning to approach.

An Insurgent Teacher Education Program

We see the formation of an insurgent teacher education program as our contribution to the need for resistance. The early details are sketchy as we begin to lay them out. A major hurdle is deciding what format to offer the program. Graduate or undergraduate? Will it be online, hybrid, or face-to-face? Should it be independent or attached to an open-minded college or university? What about accreditation or certification? We had our first meeting at this year's Rouge Forum conference hashing out our initial impressions of these barriers. A group of roughly 20 of us, graduate students, K-12 teachers, and college professors, expressed some of our worries and fears about undertaking this kind of project. But we all saw that it has to be done. While there are social justice and multiculturally oriented teacher education programs in the United States, there are none to our knowledge that center their coursework on dialectical materialism. This makes it unlikely to be a candidate for adoption any time soon by already NCATE-beholden higher education institutions.

Most likely the program will be a graduate one along the lines of current alternative certification masters programs, though not necessarily offering certification. For example, in our MATC program, you can still graduate with a masters degree, even if you do not complete the certification paperwork, which is processed separately with the state of your choice. For this graduate program, coursework could follow the recommendations of Dave Hill (2005) who has experience with constructing curriculum along a classical Marxist line. For Hill, teacher education needs to include five important components:

1. A deep analysis of capitalism and how it functions in society, with a particular focus on imperialism, violence/warfare, and environmental impacts. This needs to be done within a Marxian framework rather than a social justice approach that stops just short of challenging capital's role in sustaining classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. Capitalism cannot be worked within any longer and Keynes is not going to be resurrected.
2. Education students need to be able to link the larger social goings on to their own life and work situations, such as understanding labor rights, sexuality rights, universal health care, housing rights, and educational rights for all students, not just the "desirable" ones. This means thinking beyond one's own union contract to supporting these rights for all of society. A history of educational policy like NCLB could go here.
3. The emphasis needs to be on reciprocity when working in an activist manner with communities who are bearing the brunt of capitalist oppression. Rather than isolated, charity-based and often paternalistic service learning projects, teacher education students would need to be engaged in direct activism within the communities they serve, offering their knowledge and skills to these communities. This goes way beyond the "touch and go" nature of most community service projects to a paradigm where graduate students can learn much more from oppressed people than they might first think. Sound qualitative and quantitative research methodologies would be taught, including research ethics. Students could do a final thesis action research project documenting their reciprocal work with these communities. Imagine a qualitative study where students interview working class and poor people to document their strategies of budgeting, household management, networks of child

care, rather than a study that points out the deficits of the “subaltern.” A large scale quantitative survey of housing conditions could be done by both students and community residents.

4. Media literacy coursework is essential. We are dealing with an entrenched complex of consolidated wealth controlling all forms of mass media: television, talk radio, satellite radio, Internet, movies, print media, newspapers, and so forth. Related to media literacy is the idea of speech and who has a right to it. This also means confronting the religio-industrial complex that serves to censor “controversial” speech.
5. Students should be exposed to different philosophical traditions to see what they might have to offer, such as adult education theories, feminisms, certain aspects of postmodernism, critical race theory, disability studies, and LGBTQ studies. By combining these theories with a classical Marxist understanding, students will have several powerful tools of analysis that will sustain their work and activism as they encounter cultural situations.

Courses could be designed within these five areas, which will be our next project. Each of the five areas would include content/methodological strategies for use in the classroom. Because this would be a graduate program, it would need to be shaped to draw on the strengths of students, such as their existing career backgrounds. Many alternative certification students are nontraditional aged adults and come from different work experiences, which could help course instructors better write curricula for these students.

This is what we have so far and will continue to present our program as we proceed further.

References

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Hill, D. (2005). Transmodernism, Marxism, and social change: Some implications for teacher education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 3(1), 92-105.

Note:

ⁱThis presentation was driven by notes recorded at the Rouge Forum Conference, August 2 – 5, 2010, in Williams Bay, WI. Notes were recorded by Gina Stiens and subsequently framed as a presentation proposal by Adam Renner.

Purpose/Objectives:

- Program that comes from this organization (RF)?
- Individual institutions we are working within or something better?
- If something better then accreditation may not be necessary
- Don't have to make money or corner the market; we aim to make a difference
- We know students are out there. Are there enough to get this started?
- Serious radical education program, online and-in person; get quality radical education program; send teachers into school with a powerful awareness of where they find themselves
- Provide a space for people to come together
- Not going to make money, maybe over time, but not why we're considering
- Not here to save urban America, avoid TFA-mafia mind-set
- Students just want to learn about radical education, but need an angle not necessarily to be teachers or needing certification

-
- Masters programs could provide already existing teachers with higher pay and more critical approach, cater to students who are already certified and teaching, less need to provide funding because already employed

Delivery:

- Need bureaucratic person to lead the online process and get started
- Do we want to do it online?
 - Benefits?
 - Must have small class sizes to have any quality
 - Free systems in place (moodle, skype) or system to track?
 - Technology barriers for students, need high speed internet access
- Hybrid style, 2 weeks in person and online the rest of the time (face-to-face and start and finish)
- Phase or stage
- Intensive summer institute as face-to-face and/or as start-up
- Professional development credit is easy, people pay a lot of money for this (can try out ideas for course development), a series of seminars could build up a larger formalized program, germination period for a couple of years with goal of full-scale program at end of series, continuous feedback from attendants
- No reason why we cannot coordinate with other institutions (AERA) to offer radical seminar day before conference, Critical Educators for Social Justice (CESJ)

Experiences:

- Induction
- Mentoring/support very intensely – to say this is not for you and how to deal with the systems they will find themselves within
- Networks of people, organizing
- Disconnect between university classroom and K-12 classroom
- Apprenticeships (connecting students with RF Teachers, regionally)
- Publishing for young scholars?
- What's missing from current teacher education programs?

Barriers and overcoming such:

- Accreditation of institution
 - 4 year program can offer degree without NCATE but need major accreditation
 - Otherwise what is the point?
 - Can be accredited and still do what we want?
 - Would allow us to be more marketable
 - How do we get an institution accredited?
- Teacher accreditation (NCATE, etc.)
 - Don't have to have a program about teaching that is necessarily linked to licensure
 - Don't need NCATE
 - Could offer what we want and have pathways for people to get into schools (i.e. alternative certification or Teach for America sort of set up)
 - Teacher accreditation is not going to last and will be out the door soon anyway
 - Can easily help students navigate other ways to obtain state certification/licensure
 - Public schools want certification, so what are we setting our students up for?
- Will it be connected to larger institution or a standalone program
- Nothing else like Teach for America, can we offer alternative as an angle

-
- TFA is turning people down because people want it
 - TFA resolves of debt (look into what and how much) so that is why people want to work there, federal government resolves
 - What states/areas require certification?
 - If students already have a degree and we are working with them to get alternative certification they wouldn't necessarily need

Outcomes:

- Create institute, offer masters only, feeds into alternative certification programs of largest states, on-line with regional people identified, get degree and set up (i.e., we provide the radical education—and the master's (?)—then we help them jump through the hoop of the alt cert paperwork to become certified in their state.
- Want base of BA in something, because not feasible to offer that many credits

To Do:

- Proposals for Summer institute courses to offer (send out broad invite/request)
- Clarify fees to charge and how divided for various costs and a cap for number of students to attend

Announcing a new text from Brad Porfilio, Rouge Forum Steering Committee member, and Michael Viola:

Peter Lang
Series Editor
Adolescence, Schools and Society
Dr. Joseph Devitis & Dr. Linda Irwin-Devitis

Hip-Hop(e): The Cultural Practice and Critical Pedagogy of International Hip-Hop

Editors:

Dr. Brad J. Porfilio
Department of Educational Leadership
Lewis University
porfilio16@aol.com

Michael Viola
UCLA
Doctoral Candidate
Graduate School of Education
Urban Schooling
mviola@ucla.edu

Overview

It has been over thirty-five years since the subjugated African American youth gathered in New York City in response to the unjust social conditions impacting their schools, families, and communities (Forman & Neal, 2004; Chang, 2005; Dimitriadis, 2001). Through various and innovative forms of cultural production - such as break dancing, graffiti art, spoken word, and song - racialized youth have offered powerful analysis and critique of their schools and social conditions (Hill & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Over the past three decades, hip-hop has become a site of contestation with a corporate music industry incredibly adept at redirecting hip-hop's social energies away from critical expressions of struggle, protest, and resistance towards messages of materialism, greed, and individualism. The music that dominates the top of the charts speaks to this shift with social messages propagating individualistic pursuits of extravagant cars, flashy jewelry, and stylish clothes. Furthermore, the hip-hop icons of today often describe themselves as successful entrepreneurs ("hustlers in the game") with their standpoint aligning more closely with the white, male, corporate executives who promote a materialistic, misogynist, homophobic, and violent 'gangsta' image' of hip-hop culture (George, 2005; Magubane, 2006; Dyson, 1996; Porfilio & Carr, 2010).

Beyond the hegemonic characterization of hip-hop, there is an emergent hip-hop culture that is radical, transformative, and international in scope. Youth across the globe have been inspired by the music and cultural work of hip-hop artists with its history intimately linked to the struggles of African Americans in the United States. As such, racialized youth from the ghettos of Western Europe, the occupied territories of the Middle East, the shantytowns of Southeast Asia, and the favelas of Latin America have utilized hip-hop as their own unique counter-space to explore

possibilities for critical inquiry, sites of historical reclamation, as well as avenues that nurture an emancipatory imagination. This emergent and more humanizing form of cultural production offers important pedagogical insights as to how youth are not only constructing and affirming their identities but also engaging in unique forms of cultural work that challenge the practices and policies of global apartheid, patriarchy, and class exploitation. Furthermore, the creators and agents of this counter-hegemonic hip-hop culture offer important lessons in crossing various borders (i.e. national, racial, ethnic, religious, etc) in their efforts to produce international solidarities for a social world that is free of hate and hostility.

Purpose

The purpose of this edited volume is to highlight emancipatory messages and cultural work generated by the organic intellectuals of global hip-hop. The contributors will employ qualitative research methods to provide the audience thick descriptions of the social realities (e.g., globalization, migration, poverty, criminalization, and racism) youth are resisting through what we recognize as a decolonial cultural politic. We describe how youth are employing hip-hop to resist and transform the historical conditions that are at the roots of their dispossession and suffering. Furthermore, we explore theories of hip hop (critical pedagogy, critical race theory, transnational feminisms, historical materialism, cultural studies, etc) to assist those who - in the words of Paulo Freire - are struggling to “read the word and the world” (Freire, 1989).

Contributors in this anthology will provide snapshots from classrooms to community centers in an effort to illustrate how hip-hop can offer counter-hegemonic expressions of democracy, justice, and dialogue. Furthermore, contributors will document how youth, teachers, and community activists are using cultural production as a means to teach against the sources of their alienation and oppression within the present historical epoch as well as the role of hip-hop in building a social world predicated on the ideals of equity, fairness, and social justice. Finally, contributors will theorize how hip-hop’s trajectory has gone from being purely an urban and African American phenomenon to a worldwide global counterculture that reflects the voices and activism of youth from around the world who are struggling to subvert the neoliberal logic of profit and exploitation inherent within the privatization of schools and social life.

Significance

The vast majority of studies on hip-hop culture within the field of education have not fairly represented the scope of hip-hop’s global reach. We believe critical educational scholarship can do much more to elucidate the theory, practice, and pedagogy of international hip-hop. To be sure, we recognize the important publications recently published that broaden our understanding of hip-hop beyond the cultural practices and communities occupied by Black urban youth (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2009; Basu & Lemelle, 2006; Asante, 2008). However, within the field of education there is a paucity of critical research and pedagogical work that has made important steps to document, theorize, and offer class curriculum that explores the international scope of hip-hop. Therefore, this volume highlights hip-hop as an important cultural practice and a global social movement. We are not aware of any comprehensive attempt within the field of education in general and the subfield of critical pedagogy in particular that engages how racialized global youth are utilizing hip-hop in practice and theory to critique asymmetrical relationships both within and beyond educational institutions. Therefore, the contributors’ research and pedagogical work will not only dereify hip-hop being as an North American “urban practice,” but also point to how youth, teachers, workers, activists, and community practitioners can utilize such cultural practice to understand and resist how various social oppressions operate within a global capitalist order (McLaren, 2005).

This collaborative project is of importance to scholars, practitioners, researchers, and youth who are interested in social justice education. Furthermore, this volume will make contributions to the current archive of multicultural education that seeks to understand the vilification of youth (of color) for the social problems created by a global system that benefits a small minority (Morrell, 2008). Finally, this project will highlight the importance of research projects that link the production of educational scholarship with the cultural activities, everyday practice, and social concerns of global youth in order to ameliorate the social, economic, and political problems that are transcending national boundaries in an age of corporate “globalization.”

Structure

We will include approximately 12-15 chapters of approximately 6000-8000 words each, plus an introduction, a preface and afterword, biographies, and an index.

Audience

The general audience includes students and educators of: education, sociology, political science, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary studies. We also expect the book to draw interest from community practitioners, policy-makers, and those concerned with central themes of cultural production, social justice, race, and education. It should be noted that this volume is not only interdisciplinary but also international in scope. Thus, it is our expectation that contributing authors will share this volume with their respective networks, classrooms, and communities. At present, this book speaks to the conditions and contradictions facing youth in the American communities of Arizona, California, and New York. Reflecting the fact that hip hop culture is a global phenomenon, this anthology will have a global audience with pieces that speak to the mobilization of hip-hop as a cultural pedagogy and a vehicle for resistance in such international contexts as the African and Philippine Diasporas as well as throughout Europe, Canada, and Latin America.

Marketing / Selling Points of Publication

This book illustrates the importance of youth culture and cultural production in understanding how schools and society function.

This book helps understand what policies and practices shape the lived experiences of subjugated youth across the globe.

This book offers educators with concrete strategies for implementing hip-hop in their curriculum and course planning.

This book sheds light on how youth are historical agents of social change and transformation, rather than passive and anti-intellectual social actors who perpetuate the status quo.

This book historicizes hip-hop culture and how it is a site of struggle in developing genuine forms of democracy, as well as emancipatory sites of learning, social organization, solidarity.

This book links the circuits between critical educational theory and cultural practice on a global scale.

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