

WORKS AND DAYS

61/62

in collaboration with
Cultural Logic

**Education for
Revolution**

Edited by

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Editorial Policy

Works and Days provides a scholarly forum for the exploration of problems in cultural studies, pedagogy, institutional critique, and critical university studies. Each issue of the journal is organized around specific inquiries conducted as shared disciplinary or postdisciplinary research projects.

Works and Days aims to serve not only as a forum for collaborative research and teaching, but also as an environment in which mutual inquiries may flourish. Thus, we are eager to hear from collaborators who are already at work on projects suitable for publication in *Works and Days*. We also encourage proposals for joint projects and will assist in their formation.

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Foreword to the Revolution

David B. Downing
Nicholas P. Katsiadas
Tracy J. Lassiter
Reza Parchizadeh

The DPS is a synecdoche for education in the United States. DPS, of course, stands for Detroit Public Schools, and the facts paint the picture of a nation, not just a city, truly at risk: not long ago, as Rich Gibson explains in his lead essay to this volume, the DPS was “once heralded as the finest urban school system in the U.S., serving more than 299,000 students.” By 2013, enrollment in the DPS had plummeted to 55,000 students (and another 55,000 can be found in charter schools, although funded at government expense). Even as recently as 2003, the teachers union, the Detroit Federation of Teachers, had 12,000 members; now that figure has dwindled to about 4,000. Since 2005, Detroit has shut down more than 100 schools. The numbers might not be quite so dispiriting in some urban areas, although the most recent federal Education Department data show that in the United States 1.2 million school-age children are homeless. How can we understand these numbers outside of the massive attack on public education orchestrated by privatization and austerity—the two main wings of neoliberal capitalism?

This volume, another collaborative publication linking *Works and Days* (print) and *Cultural Logic* (online), presents a striking set of essays that illuminate in profound ways how the wide-angle historical frames provided by Marxist theory help us to understand the embedded details of local educational contexts such as what has happened to the DPS. Circumstances this dire, outrage so palpable as an attack on human dignity for any student or teacher being reduced to the relentless rigors of profit at all costs, propels many people to organize for alternative and revolutionary possibilities. All of us at *Works and Days* have come to appreciate how each of the contributors to this volume asks us, in their very individual ways but with compelling solidarity, to experience deeply, theorize carefully, and organize actively.

The sculpted punch on the front cover of this journal registers a sense of the anger and the outrage when so many lives have been so devastated by levels of racialized poverty that even the general

term “education” evokes more cynicism than joy in light of what is actually happening in many inner city schools across the country. As Jonathan Kozol phrased it some years ago in the title of his book: *“The Shame of the Nation”* is *“The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America.”* Mickey Champion’s photograph of the famous sculpture, called “The Fist,” dramatizes the power of Joe Louis’s famous right hook, and all eight thousand pounds of the giant bronze sculpture hangs from a 24-foot high steel pyramid in Detroit’s Hart Plaza, the heart of the city. It was commissioned in 1986, and completed by the Mexican American sculptor, Robert Graham. Joe Louis grew up in the east Detroit neighborhood then called “Black Bottom,” and his rise in 1938 to become a national hero in boxing signaled a fighting challenge to the privileges of the dominant white world. The sculpture of his fist is, therefore, a sign of the punch against racism, and, in the context of this journal, a punch against all those forces that have shattered the educational hopes of many people, in Detroit and elsewhere. Would that Joe could fight for this revolution, for a better life, and for a better education than the one remaining to most citizens of the region and the nation. In the same vein, the images scattered throughout this volume document the abandoned ruins of once-flourishing schools in Detroit, and the pictures themselves haunt the entire project of imagining education for revolution since they serve as a visible reminder of the violent debris left behind after the regimes of endless accumulation have had their way.

As Wayne Ross (the editor of this volume) and his co-author, Kevin Vinson, put it in their essay, current educational policies and practices are slowly taking away autonomy and human agency in the classroom, often quite directly by way of “threats” to teachers disseminating oppositional ideologies. Standardized testing and banking educational models serve the capitalist economy, not the needs of students and teachers. As a concrete example, consider the essay by Julie Gorlewski and Brad Porfilio. They demonstrate the revolutionary possibilities for combating the regimes of standardization by focusing on urban education environments, Beat Nation, and Hip-Hop. They position this pedagogy as an antidote to neoliberal policies that disengage and alienate “at the expense of social justice.”

Other writers offer critiques of broad-based national agendas. For example, Timothy and Patrick Shannon critique the “Partnership for 21st Century Skills” (P21) program because, they argue, it merely “prepare[s] the 95 percent to feed and care for the 5 percent.” Brian Lozenski, Zachary Casey, and Shannon McManimon outline ways teachers may facilitate student identification of existing and emerging power structures by employing Critical Sociocultural Theory (CST) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Mike Cole distinguishes between schooling, on the one hand, and education on the other, with the former referring to the processes by which young people are attuned to the requirements of capitalism both in the form and the content of schooling, and the latter, a more liberatory process from birth to death, a process of human

emancipation and socialism. Curry Malott calls upon a broad-based coalition of theorists and political activists including “anarchists, feminists, critical race theorists, critical postmodernists, animal rights activists, Earth First! eco-pedagogues, critical indigenous sovereignists, orthodox Marxists, neo-Marxists, humanist Marxists, and others.” Such a combination is necessary, he argues, in order to become fully aware of how capitalist ideology has become embedded in our consciousness through schooling—and in order to challenge it.

Controversial issues addressed by the contributors also include pedagogy, world literature, the sociology of education, rising student debt, threats to democracy, SDS, and the possibilities for socialist alternatives to the current system. Deborah Kelsh exposes the ways that current pedagogical emphases on ‘affect’ can have a regressive effect on current movements for social change. Situating the pervasive emphasis on affective experience as a mechanism of the ruling class to maintain current power paradigms, this article establishes a need for explanations of “why” people feel what they feel instead of “how” people feel what they feel. John Maerhofer criticizes the World Literature movement to the extent that it often gets incorporated by the cultural dominant while “systemic critiques of globalized capitalism are relegated to the background of cultural production.” Grant Banfield critiques a common pattern in recent work in the sociology of education that tends to vacate historical materialism. He argues that the history of Marxist thought has been, and remains, a history of struggle in, and around, the problem of naturalism, and he demonstrates how the naturalist strain of historical materialism can revitalize educational transformation. David Blacker focuses on the repudiation of educational debt as a legitimate revolutionary act. As he argues, higher education is a basic human right and a public good that should be free to all who wish to benefit from it. The economic imperatives that drive so many students into college, and thus into debt, are the very same imperatives that drive the system generally.

Alan Singer argues that, more than just the military-industrial complex, the massive threats to democracy is more accurately labeled the “Education-Foundation-Political-Industrial Complex,” a giant institutional “octopus” that propels a for-profit, anti-union, and anti-government model. He calls for “a bold crew of parents, teachers, and students to hack away at the corporate octopus” currently strangling public education. Richard Brosio furthers the Marxist analysis of the ties between the global capitalist system, the destruction of democracy, and the problem of rising inequality. He especially reveals how liberal ideology often tries to cover the “beast” with rouge and fig leaves, and he outlines the potential of more radical socialist alternatives. Alan Spector offers a narrative account about his experiences in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Weatherman faction’s role in bringing down SDS’s organization. His moving story emphasizes the need for “the practice and therefore, theory, of building a movement” that results in “deep, lasting relationships with grassroots people in struggle” against inequality.

Finally, Rich Daniels' analysis of Theodor Adorno's work, namely his *Minima Moralia*, ponders whether it's possible for a "wrong life" to be "lived rightly." Daniels demonstrates the pressing "need for critical, anti-personalist, non-pious argument about the enabling conditions of ethics/morality." It is an appropriate concluding essay as it paints a big picture by encouraging us all to expand a critical philosophical discussion that confronts the harms of the current exploitive capitalist system, and that leads to a life free "from want and inequality, from needless human suffering . . . and from war." That is a good note of hope on which to end this volume, and we want to thank Wayne Ross for his vision and hard work as an editor, and all of the contributors who have invigorated Marxist theory and practice as an inspiration for our revolutionary hopes that we can create a better educational system for us all.



