

The Rouge Forum News

**Working Papers, Critical Analysis, and Grassroots News
Issue #13**



Connecting Reason to Power

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From the Editor

“Those unrepenting buzzards want your lives” (The Shins)

The economy continues its descent. Runaway capitalism slides off its rails. The results of deregulation rear their hydra-like head(s). Tax cuts illustrate what applying leeches to a patient who is bleeding to death must feel like. The numbers can no longer be faked, massaged, or hidden (as con-artists are—finally—being plucked up by the SEC). Most CEOs, though, (and the economists and the conservative news outlets) are given a free pass while blue collar workers must fight (sit-in, resist, etc.) for their lives. Needless to say, we are faced with a financial crisis we have not seen for some time. Few groups/publications have had the courage to maintain their voice, keeping the critique of capitalism in the forefront of the struggle (even when the markets and the aforementioned free market hawks suggested otherwise).

Alongside folks at the *Monthly Review*, the *International Socialist Review*, and a few alternative news sites, **educators in the Rouge Forum have also continued to keep their voices strong**, consistently providing links between runaway capital, the rabid and rapid standardization of curriculum, the co-optation of our unions, the militarization of our youth, and the creep of irrationalism in our schools.

The Rouge Forum continues to spearhead a mass movement of conscious educators, parents, and students toward **connecting reason with power**. Despite the overwhelming power of the opposition, the Rouge Forum, like only a few others, has chosen to continue to struggle--by meeting, by writing, by organizing, by *sharing* the struggle. Toward this end, and in order to try to make better sense of how we arrived at this economic moment, the Rouge Forum has reinstated the *RF News*.

We at the Rouge Forum have enthusiastically embraced the possibility of getting print in your hands for reflection, dialogue, and dissemination. With over 4000 members on the Rouge Forum listserv, we hope to make the conversation as wide and as constructive as possible, offering a space for working papers, critical analysis, and grassroots news. To that end, we have also created the Rouge Forum blog: www.rougeforum.blogspot.com. This edition of the *RF News* will be posted there. Please feel free to provide your feedback and join the conversation.

This 13th edition tackles a wide range of issues and may challenge us deeply as a new administration takes over at the close of the first decade of the new millennium. Kevin Vinson and E. Wayne Ross consider the position in which

schools have often been placed during times of both turmoil and prosperity. Let's just say they never come out looking very good. Kevin and Wayne, therefore, have some suggestions for President Obama and Secretary Duncan. Rich Gibson provides an incisive analysis of the "Obamagogue" and draws some harrowing historical comparisons to the 1930s. War was proposed as the answer then (to overcome our economic woes); and it looks like it is being proposed again (as the amped up war in Afghanistan portends). Tom Suber laments the recent actions of the anti-war coalition, United for Peace and Justice, wondering where the anti-war movement has gone and/or worse that the movement has succumbed to the Obama movement within the Democratic Party. Bob Apter, in his essay on the United Auto Workers, keeps in focus our union watch and (unfortunate, but predictable) continuing concessions. Mindy Carter and Mary Ann Chacko, in our spotlight on curriculum, bring us a ray of hope and possibility through their work on math, democracy, and the arts. I also weigh in with an evolved essay on the illusion of education, an essay I began last summer as a result of reflections on another few weeks of work in the Global South with educators and social service providers I've partnered with since 1998. In order to clarify our struggle, Alan Spector offers his critical essay for Rouge Forum readers. Alan urges a more real hope that overcomes cynicism and moves beyond naïve optimism. We conclude our *RF News* restart with some verses from Michael Simpson and David Centorbi. We hope they provoke you as they did us.

So, we arrive at a genesis, a turning point in the offing. The first decade of the new millennium has been peppered with shocks to our consciousness and to justice: the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, the genocide in Darfur, NCLB, and the amplification of neoliberal globalization. A new administration has taken over with a wave of fervor and self-congratulations. A *new* decade dawns. Or, does it? This will depend on us—those willing to dig deep, take a (world-wide) class analysis, and make the historical, if inconvenient, connections. Even as capitalism is reaping its self-sown seeds of destruction or, as Subcommandante Marcos more recently updated Marx's thesis, as the child eats the father, it continues to dehumanize and to destroy lives, globally—"those unrepenting buzzards want your lives." We can create something new. We can generate something more hopeful as the turning points reveal themselves and are won. But, we will have to work for it. The long view will have to be taken. The path of least resistance will have to be rejected. Let the conversation begin.

Adam Renner, Louisville, KY

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.)

Blame the Schools

Kevin D. Vinson

E. Wayne Ross

The current economic debacle has provoked an enormous amount of commentary regarding blame, bailouts, and big-shot-banker-bad apples. The issue, apparently, is one of faultfinding. Why? Who knows? The answer is clear. Blame the schools. It's got to be their fault. Always is, of course. Always has been.

How do we know this? Look at history.

In 1957 the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. The USSR beat the United States. Schools were blamed; they needed reform. This “confirmed” Admiral Hyman Rickover’s description of U.S. schools as “educational wastelands.” National security was in peril because of teachers’ failure to teach.

But when the Cold War ended and the U.S. “won,” American public schools got their fair share of the credit.

Just kidding.

In 1983 the government published *A Nation at Risk*. It argued that U.S. schools—referred to as a “rising tide of mediocrity”—were threatening the ability of the economy to compete, to wallop the economies of our allies Japan and Germany, globally.

But during the late 1980s and through the 1990s the American economy generally grew even as the Japanese economy wallowed in recession. Political and economic leaders in the United States praised the accomplishments and contributions of American schools.

Just kidding.

Evidently, in these instances the fundamentals of the economy were strong, just not those of schools. Economic and school problems were caused by the schools. Economic and school successes were caused by political and corporate managers. The answer, therefore, was to run schools more like corporations. Or like schools in Japan and Germany.

Go figure.

This logic is mindboggling. When the economy fails, when society experiences any setback, schools and teachers garner the blame. When the economy

flourishes, when society experiences any triumph, economic and political leaders demand the credit. Even then schools are reproached for something; something must be their fault. And so it goes.

But today we truly are a nation at risk. Contra John McCain, U.S. fiscal fundamentals are not strong. Increasingly families face decisions about whether to make mortgage payments or buy healthcare or send their kids to college, and nobody is bailing them out (“compassionate” conservatism?). So, blame the schools; it’s only a matter of time.

Perhaps it was easy, if unjust, to attack U.S. schools in the 1950s and 1980s for “life adjustment” education, progressive education, self-esteem education or some other “flaw” and to acclaim the USSR for “really” teaching math and science. Perhaps it was equally easy then to scapegoat the schools in the face of perceived security and economic threats. Elites have always found reasons to promote their own ideological brands of school “reform.”

The difference today, though, is that our schools are doing exactly what they were told to do.

President Bush entered office with a “vision” for a “successful,” deregulated market economy to be sustained by a plan for schooling based on a scheme first concocted in Texas by Rod Paige, President Bush’s first Secretary of Education and former Houston schools superintendent. That plan, the No Child Left Behind Act, requires as its centerpiece a singular focus on state-determined, one-size-fits-all curricula and high-stakes testing. NCLB, recall, was a bipartisan “success” story somehow necessitated by the global marketplace.

Now when the American economy tanks even while American schools are doing just what our leaders asked, what sense can we make of education and the economy?

Following the logic of the conservative 1950’s and 1980’s, at least three conclusions are possible. First, NCLB caused the present economic mess. This, of course, is absurd. But is it any more absurd than claiming that U.S. schooling was responsible for Sputnik or the past economic achievements of Japan and Germany?

Second, we could leave schooling to educators, parents and students and the economy to politicians and economists. At least that way schools and teachers wouldn’t take the heat for the effects of corporate greed, corruption, tax cuts for the wealthy and predatory credit. The economy might still flounder but the blame could be more appropriately focused.

Third, we could recognize that the economy has at least as much influence on public schooling as public schooling does on the economy. Instead of using schools to “fix” the economy, we could ask the economy to “fix” the schools. A radical proposal.

We, however, suggest a more modest one; let’s really reform the economy. And let’s really reform schools. Are you listening president-elect Obama? Secretary-designate Duncan?

Or we could just blame the schools. It’s probably their fault. We could run them like corporations. At least they’d be eligible for a bailout.

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The Obamagogue and Capital Vs. the People

Rich Gibson



19 million US homes stand vacant today. 600,000 people lost jobs in December, 2 million in all of 2008. The layoff rate only accelerates. Soon, public services will founder and homes will be re-valued, taxes unpaid. Every bit of this is coded with the sharpest end of many sticks aimed at those who were born with the least—but encompassing everyone who must work to live. It's a whirlwind that is not going to end soon. In schools, we will see more and more kids homeless or moved by foreclosures, more hungry, sleepy kids, more incoherent delinquency, made reasonable only by a grasp of social circumstances.

The One who I named The Obamagogue seeks to use Keynesian measures to solve the waterfall of economic collapse and lost wars. Keynes was an elitist and an active racist who despised working people, who thought only the most favored should rule, but he sought to save capitalism. The myth is that he did.

He didn't. Henry Morgenthau, Roosevelt's Secretary of the Treasury recognized that in the late thirties when he wrote that all that Keynesian spending had done little or nothing.

What ended the Great Depression was WW 2. Capitalism loves outright destruction—thrives on that kind of chaos, and as an utterly fickle system, goes off and lets who ever wins at a given moment ride it.

What The Obamagogue's spending will do is to bring out the lowest forms of opportunism in every sector of society which will, in effect, be saying, "what about ME!" That is why we see, right now, the AFL-CIO backing the most reactionary of the bailout measures, US protectionism.

It is also why we see the California Teachers Association leadership demanding a 1% sales tax hike, the most regressive of all taxes which will hit poor people hard, abandoning school workers' most valuable allies, parents of children who need those educators the most.

So far, depending on which source one likes, maybe a trillion dollars has been doled out or will be doled out to the banksters by their procurers, the politicians.

That number will double, and another one or two trillion will go to the wars, which the US is going to lose (Afghans drove 300,000 Soviet troops out of their country, with help from the US---are we to think the Russians and Chinese don't remember?).

There is, as Chalmers Johnson (author of *Nemesis*) insists, a relationship between imperialist expenditures and the economic collapse, something that few economists are willing to recognize, just as few Obamagogueites in education are not willing to admit that schools and capitalism exist in a relationship.

Arne Duncan is no mistake. He will intensify the three pronged project of most schooling: more curricula regimentation to regulate what is taught and how it is taught, to use high stakes tests to sort kids, and to deepen the militarization of schools. Where privatization is serviceable, Duncan will back privatization. Where he can get the working class to pay, through their taxes, for the mis-education of our children, he will do that. Arne Duncan leads, not public schools, but capitalist schools. Those who did not foresee this before The Obamagogue came to power should see it now, and say so.

Those who now claim The Obamagogue "betrayed them," after a year of supporting his demagogic campaign and contributing to what only can be called national hysteria, should own up to the fact that their entire method of analysis was wrong, that they betrayed hundreds, maybe thousands of people themselves, and issue a self criticism about exactly why they got things completely wrong.

Is it not odd that nobody in power suggests that the way to halt foreclosures and keep the economy afloat is to just direct-pay people's mortgages for a time certain, if they can prove they cannot pay?

But that is not how capitalist democracy, which is not democracy but an executive committee of the rich ruling behind populist rhetoric, bearing the same connection to democracy that the Pope does to, "do unto others," works. Such a mortgage program would send up howls about "personal responsibility," "welfare queens," "socialism," that were not sent up when the banksters began the robbery that continues today behind capital's new sword and shield: The Obamagogue.

In education, a similar ploy might work. If we are to measure kids' worth by test scores, and thus the wealth and health of the nation, why not just give the kids the test on the first day of school and simply work on it the rest of the year until everyone passes? But that would be cheating, eh?

But, beyond tongue in cheek measures, what is needed is a mass movement of resistance, rank and filers throwing off the bogus mis-leaders who steer struggle away from direct action, real resisters promoting test boycotts and freedom schools, and driving the Empire's recruiters from campuses; in communities moving families right back into homes they are evicted from, at work places---no concessions, none, not one step back, in fact we want MORE and we will fight to get it, seizing plants, schools and properties; in the military, simply standing down, walking away from the wars for oil and profits; in sum, against the system of capital itself as it has obviously failed miserably everywhere in the world.

If we do not fight back, we will only see sharpened depression and war. Indeed the depth of that will be determined by the amount of resistance. Besides, the only way to be a truly whole person today, to be more than a loyal servant of Empire, is to protest and to join with like-minded people who, organized, can form a movement to win.

Rich Gibson is a Professor Emeritus at San Diego State University and a co-founder of the Rouge Forum.

Wither the Anti-War Movement?

Tom Suber

The anti-war coalition United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) held its annual assembly December 12-14 in Chicago, Illinois with 248 attendees. The assembly was smaller than the previous year reflecting the continuation of the bankrupt policy of the UFPJ leadership in steering anti-war activity away from mass actions into mere electoral support of Democratic Party politicians, following the line of the dominant group in UFPJ, the Communist Party USA and its spin-offs. In doing so, the UFPJ has shown itself as not only incapable of building an anti-war movement but also an obstacle to real mass struggle.

UFPJ has been unwilling to call for a mass demonstration in over two years and has failed in mobilizing for a mass demonstration in nearly twice that time.

Instead, UFPJ spent the past four years primarily campaigning for Democratic Party candidates and especially Barack Obama. Obama has only promised to retain tens of thousands of U.S. Troops and private mercenaries after “withdrawal” from Iraq to “provide security.” Obama promises to expand the war in Afghanistan, and win, in a region that not so long ago drove 300,000 Soviet troops from their soil.

With the election of Obama the UFPJ will, now, spend the remaining years of occupation making excuses (while claiming they “apply pressure”) for Obama’s failure to leave Iraq despite his publicly stated policy of doing no such thing.

The leadership of UFPJ sought to retreat from the demand for immediate withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan by focusing not on this demand but instead on a diffuse laundry list of issues including economic justice, racism and climate change, among a host of other matters. This is a conscious retreat from the core mission and reason for the existence of the coalition. Moreover, it is yet another clear effort to halt even a discussion about the nature of capitalism and its birthmother, imperialism.

If there were any doubts about this it is made clear by the UFPJ’s post election decision to renege on its commitment of support for an antiwar mobilization during the week of the anniversary of the Iraq war. Another antiwar formation, the National Assembly that met in Cleveland this past summer, put out a call to all antiwar groups for a national demonstration on March 21 in Washington, D.C., the anniversary of the invasion.

The UFPJ back-peddled on the mass anti-war mobilization so as not to embarrass and/or appear to be in opposition to the policy of the Democratic Party of leaving combat troops in and around Iraq and spearheading a wider war in Afghanistan. The UFPJ claims that an antiwar demonstration directed against the war policies of Obama would alienate the black community. Nonsense.

And, in order to defuse and dilute further the mass anti-war movement, UFPJ mis-leadership called for an alternative mass demonstration not in Washington D.C., but in New York, to be held not on the anniversary of the Iraq War but on April 4 around a face saving slogan, "Yes we can...End the war"--but will emphasize instead a broad range of issues, such as corporate crime on Wall Street, the financial crisis, health care and environmental justice, among other issues organized as a Martin Luther King memorial action commemorating King's changing political agenda from civil rights, to poor people, and finally to anti-Vietnam War in April 1967.

In April 1967, King broke his silence on the U.S. war on Vietnam and called for protest against the administration of Lyndon Johnson. King made the argument that the war was the primary issue that had to be addressed before the hopes of the poor peoples march could be realized.

UFPJ leadership is turning King's realization of the primacy of war protest on its head by using his name to make a broad number of other issues primary in order to deflect attention from the Democrat's endless war plans.

You might ask why the UFPJ is such a flawed vehicle incapable of making change. The answer is both structural and ideological.

UFPJ is a small group of "leaders" of constituent organizations and is not a mass membership organization. In fact, its national assembly is not open to the public --attendance is retarded by a relatively high priced subscription. This is a serious structural flaw. Mass organization and movement is best facilitated by allowing masses of people in the door.

But the fatal defect of UFPJ is in its inability to develop effective strategy and tactics and, beyond that, to teach others how to develop strategy and tactics in their home communities. This is directly related to the fact that the leadership and most of the representative assembly do not understand how things work. Any effective ideological approach to change must begin with an understanding of capitalism. Without a Marxist analysis, talk of change is both flawed and futile.

You have to view UFPJ hero Tom Hayden's reference to ". . . the truly radical promises of the Obama Presidency" as a preposterous contention if you have any idea of the current reality and how things change.

Obama is not a radical but a centrist politician committed to the interests of the American institutions of capital. In this regard he is much like Franklin Roosevelt, supporting Capital while deflecting workers from revolutionary upheaval.

We are in the process of witnessing the largest transfer of wealth from the public sector to the coffers of the private sector in world history. Never did the 19th century Robber Barons ever attempt the legalized theft of so much wealth. The image of Obama lining the pockets of the banking, insurance, and the auto industry at the public expense on a scale, heretofore unknown, all while conducting war abroad would bring shame even to the politicians of the old Tammany Hall. The bottom line is that things are about as bad as they can get and Capitalism is the cause. War and economic crisis are endemic within the system of capital. The greed of Capitalism knows no end and recognizes not the pain of the working class caused by the avarice of Capital.

The contending electoral parties are simply the flip sides of the same coin of Capital. Importantly, UFPJ also failed to teach people the reality of capitalist democracy: the government is an executive committee and armed weapon of the rich, and little else. Surely oil wars and banker bailouts make that abundantly clear.

Any strategy for change must necessarily involve a fundamental change in the economic system—toward an egalitarian world. To argue that the Democratic Party will bring real change and that petitions to Congress and the president will bring an end to war is laughable and it is preposterous to lurch from one tactic to another, with no clear long term goal—like using a compass with no destination in mind, and no idea of what "north" means.

If we follow UFPJ we chase our tails. Their strategy, which parallels the outlook of the utterly failed CPUSA, leads to the continued withering of the anti-movement.

In sum, UFPJ fails structurally, pedagogically (what do people need to know and how do we need to learn it in order to get beyond imperialist war), strategically, and tactically. There is a reason there is no real anti-war movement in the US, and it's not UFPJ alone, but UFPJ surely makes a good personification.

There is an answer. We must begin with resistance and class struggle. Ending these wars is serious business that is long and difficult demanding personal and collective sacrifice.

But it is possible to be victorious if we remember that this is a class struggle and the ruling class will not respond to pleas for peace or petitions. We must take to the streets and the barricades as needed. Moreover, we need to take the fight to our workplaces and communities, to strike and demonstrate against the wars and their results—one of them being the current depression-in-the-making which will, invariably sharpen social and economic attacks on all working people, the poorest hit first and worst, but the rest to follow suit.

The most exciting and thrilling anti-war demonstration during the Vietnam War was in 1969 at the Pentagon when tens of thousands of people tore down the barricades and fences of the ruling class set up around the Pentagon and confronted armed troops, many of which were newly home from Vietnam. Some of these working class youth, when confronted with using their guns on young people like themselves, said “enough” and threw down their guns. I saw this happen more than once that day and night.

If we are not equally ready to confront the war machine with our bodies then no peace is possible. We chose either class struggle or constant war. There is nothing in between. I choose to fight back. The corrupting view of the leadership of the UFPJ is that you should beg your oppressors for a better deal. Do you really believe they are going to give us a better deal by the goodness of their hearts when confronted by reason and pleas for justice? History proves UFPJ wrong. For my part, I will join the National Assembly in Washington, D.C. on the anniversary of the war and hope you will too! The hell with the UFPJ and their fake “leaders.” Let us build a real movement that can actually take up the question of a just world, by fighting for it.

UAW in a Route: Secrecy and the Sellout

Bob Apter

What we get in the news is a glimpse of the continuing sellout of US autoworkers (which will impact on all workers, including school workers, for years to come) by the United Auto Workers Union. What will follow in the days to come, disastrous as it will be, will only be the tip of the iceberg that will remain submerged from view until the fine print is exposed as has happened time and again with UAW contracts. The members rarely see the real contract, only voting on the talking points the union bosses circulate. It is also interesting to note that it was the Democrats in Washington who demanded all these givebacks or Congress would refuse to give the Big 3 the bailouts requested, although this in no way excuses the UAW's culpability in not launching a fight back against attacks like this for more than 30 years. Indeed, the Democrats built into the bailout a demand that the UAW abandon altogether the strike weapon, not that the UAW used it in 30 years.

From the newspapers it is reported: The UAW deal with Detroit's autoworkers will limit overtime, change work rules, cut lump-sum cash bonuses and get rid of cost-of-living pay raises to help reduce the company's labor costs. (The UAW president states that the wage package he has agreed to will allow the Big 3 to be competitive with all other auto workers, which would mean equivalency with the low wage Toyota and Honda plants for example. The rush to the bottom goes on.). Supposedly basic wages will remain the same (a smaller and smaller number of auto workers make \$28 an hour while more, more make \$14 an hour) but the deal limits supplemental pay that laid-off workers receive while they collect unemployment benefits. (The job banks that guaranteed nearly full pay while unemployed are gone - the new supplement is only for 2 years.)

The biggest shoe yet to drop is the deal regarding VEBA, the retirement and benefits package that was touted in 2007 contract negotiations with the Big 3 that was to give the UAW millions of dollars to administer the program and would save the Big 3 millions. At Washington's insistence - The Big 3 are to provide the UAW with half of what was promised in stock. (Two and one half years ago GM stock was \$44 and more a share and today it is less than \$2 a share, a 74 year low.....it's basically worthless!)

The union knows that if it takes too much stock it won't be able to pay benefits for the 800,000 retirees and their spouses. If it doesn't make a deal the threat is that GM and Chrysler will go bankrupt and the workers will then get nothing. The UAW has yet to make public the deal it did make.

The UAW president in concluding his deal said: “The changes will help these companies face the extraordinary difficult economic climate in which they operate.” He didn’t say anything about the tens of thousands of workers that have and will continue to lose their jobs or the conditions that those that still have a job will face based on these latest concessions.

And for all of this GM will get a total of \$30 billion dollars and Chrysler \$9 billion. GM will lay off another 47,000 (20,000 in the US) and close an additional 14 plants by 2012. (The UAW at its peak had about 1.5 million members, today it has less than half a million.)

And to add insult to injury GM announced that it just might need an additional \$7.5 billion should the US market remain depressed longer than expected. What do you guess is going to happen? More bailouts and more concessions.

Bob Apter spent 15 years as a UAW Local 6000 Rep (state workers) in Michigan, 4 years as a temporary UAW organizer of adjunct faculty in New York, and 3 years with UAW Local 7902 (the adjunct faculty union representing NYU and the New School).

Math, democracy, and the arts: Performing mathematics for democratic education

Mindy R. Carter

Mary Ann Chacko

Mathematics classrooms have been, many a time, the most elitist, exclusionary, and undemocratic of settings, leaving indelible scars on those perceived as mathematically incompetent. Can all students be successful with mathematics and should this be the aim of a democratic mathematics classroom? How is 'success' perceived in mathematics classrooms invaded by high-stakes assessment, accountability, test-driven curricula, and a technical attitude where teachers and students are looked upon as service providers and clients, respectively? Is democracy a viable option in the face of corporatization of education? Or are 'democracy' and 'mathematics education', to borrow Dr. Johnson's uncomplimentary description of metaphysical poetry, merely two heterogeneous ideas yoked together by violence? These are some of the foreboding thoughts that distressed us as we engaged in the pursuit of linking mathematics education and democracy.

In this paper we explore the classroom practices of the first author to analyze how drama and the visual arts in mathematics classrooms might promote the cultivation of democratic teaching and learning practices and also highlight some of the challenges faced on this journey. Carter was involved as a Learning through the Arts drama specialist in an elementary classroom in Ontario and later as a high school teacher employing arts-based techniques in a special needs mathematics classroom in Quebec.

Mathematics Education and Democracy

Bill Pinar (2004) is disillusioned with the ongoing buzz in the academe on the relationship between education and democracy and dismisses them as mere patriotic rhetoric. According to William Robinson (1996) what struts about in the guise of democracy is "polyarchy." "Polyarchy is neither dictatorship nor democracy. It refers to a system in which a small group actually rules, on behalf of capital, and participation in decision making by the majority is confined to choosing among competing elites in tightly controlled electoral processes" (Robinson, p.20-21). Both Pinar and Robinson argue that what exists now is not democratic participation but a form of oppression or consensual domination by capitalism and neo-liberal ideologies that control society and life in countries such as Canada and the United States. Education too has become mired in a democratic discourse informed by neo-liberal interests and is being re-structured for economic purposes. Schools are expected to develop and promote skills and "lifelong learning" for an economy that no longer requires one single set of life skills from its members (Hare & Portelli, 2001).

Teachers of mathematics, however, underscore the potential of the subject, particularly in the ways in which it is taught, to nurture democratic values and provide the groundwork for democratic citizenship (Ball, Goffney, & Bas, 2005). We opine that overcoming the hypocrisy of teaching about democracy in profoundly undemocratic institutions (Cook & Westheimer, 2006) and establishing democratic practices in mathematics classrooms will largely depend on how we define academic competence in general and mathematics competence in particular. Is our definition of competence based solely on the performance of students in the achievement arena or is it also informed by the participation of students as individuals and members of a mathematical community? Here we might be charged of confounding cognitive and social competencies like the young children in Stipek & Mac Iver (1989) but let us not forget that democratic citizenship, despite a history tarnished by the exclusion of the marginalized whether in ancient Greece or a younger Canada, is primarily a participatory ideal. In fact, Rousseau (1762, in Skosmose, 1998) argues that democracy is viable only in small communities because being 'a rule of the people' it should allow for the direct participation of the people in the governing process. In this sense a school or a classroom as a microcosm of the larger society would provide a fertile soil to model democratic participation.

Democratization of schools, their curriculum, instructional approaches, choice of subject matter and the ethos of the classroom are regarded as essential for establishing a democratic society (Ball, Geoffrey, & Bas, 2005; Cook & Westheimer, 2006). In this paper we specifically examine how drama and visual art can be used in a mathematics classroom to promote the development of democratic citizens through various aspects of drama and art such as active class participation, collaborative work and its aural, visual, and kinesthetic appeal which caters to the learning styles of a wide range of students (Holden, 2002).

Drama in education

At the very outset it is important to distinguish between 'process' drama and theatre as tools for classroom teaching. While making this distinction, it is crucial to note that drama does not focus on performance or final product. Instead the focus is on a collaborative relationship between teacher and students (actors and audience) pointing them in the same direction as they work through a particular narrative-driven situation towards an outcome or collective resolution (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Courtney, 1980; Holden, 2002). When executed skillfully by the teacher or drama specialist, drama within an educational setting has the effect of providing students with a safe structure within which to engage in their own curricular explorations (Fels & Belliveau, 2008). Dramatic games, activities and scenarios which require

that students practice the skills of listening, dialoguing, "...group trust, focusing attention, (the development of) self-esteem, being open to criticism, having a willingness to discuss with integrity and a respect for others opinions" (Bolton, 1984, p.152) foster not only a nurturing classroom environment but also the principles of genuine democratic learning (Hare & Portelli, 2001).

Learning through the Arts (LTTA)

Ontario's Learning through the Arts (LTTA) is a program primarily funded by the Royal Conservatory of Music, in conjunction with the support of local School Boards. It connects a professional artist from the local community with an elementary classroom. This artist-educator is called upon to teach a core subject to a particular class using forms of art chosen by the students. They thus participate actively and meaningfully in the learning process as they create art that focuses on a particular subject and theme.

As an actor and children's theatre stage manager well known in the local community, the coordinators of the LTTA program approached Carter and offered her a position with LTTA. She took it up and over the next year and a half was part of over ten classroom projects that spanned several grades and curricular programs. This particular snapshot of her LTTA experiences focuses on one grade 3 mathematics classroom.

Pre-classroom preparation

Part of this position required that the artist-educators meet with the classroom teachers in a workshop setting at the district school board. The workshop was attended by 30-40 teachers who had been released by their schools for the purpose. The first part of the workshop was led by the LTTA coordinators who introduced the teachers to the program. This general introduction ran for about two hours and then a break was given. After the break, the teachers were divided into smaller groups consisting of six to eight classroom teachers who then went and spent another hour and a half with one of the five LTTA artist-educators. In these workshops an overview of the artist's background was provided, his/her schedule was coordinated with the teachers' classroom timetable and a variety of drama activities led by the artist were shared. Teachers were then encouraged to share their concerns, ask questions and discuss the subject area that they wished the artist to cover in their classes.

Once a particular grade and subject was specified, the artist proceeded to design a series of 3 lessons that were one and a half hours each. These lessons were scheduled within a single week or across a few months. Finally the artist made a follow up phone call to confirm the time of the initial visit. After this particular workshop, Carter was scheduled to work with three

different classrooms. Two teachers requested that language arts units be linked with drama while the third teacher asked for it to be linked with a math unit on measurement. These particular classes ranged in size between 18 and 32 students per class. The schools in which the classes were located were all in lower-middle class and/or middle class areas. All but one of the classrooms that Carter taught in was 'typical' classrooms, that is, students had classes in rooms that had four walls and a door to enter/exit and sat in chairs behind their own personal desk. The exception was the "open-concept" classroom where Carter's math intervention took place. The school board in Northwestern Ontario that Carter worked with had only one public school board. The names of schools, students and teachers have not been mentioned to respect their privacy.

Grade 3: Measurement & Drama

The first LTTA session led by the first author involved teaching a grade three-mathematics unit on measurement. The content included concepts such as a second, a minute, an interval of five minutes and the measurement of selected items without standard units of measure. There were 24 students in the class. The school situated in Northwestern Ontario, catered primarily to students belonging to lower middle class families and was affiliated to the public school board. It was an open-concept school (there were no walls between classes and groups of five to six students sat on a single desk. For this reason, the LTTA sessions took place in the closed music room (an empty space with carpets). Ultimately, the focus of the drama activities was to provide a series of kinesthetically based games/movements that took place over various periods of time and related to the learning of specific units of measure such as one minute and five minute intervals. This took place so that students would have exposure to embodying/gaining a sense memory for the concepts of the time periods being considered. The artist did not have to observe the students and make assessments regarding the acquisition of mathematical concepts.

Artist Classroom Visit(s): Setting the atmosphere

Each of the three classroom sessions began with a circle sharing time in order to ensure that all involved were ready to work with one another. This usually meant that the physical space of the classroom had to be manipulated (i.e.- desks moved aside) so that students had room to move about. By the third visit this moving of the desks and putting away of books became a shared ritual or time for preparation and transition into the drama space. In this vein, care was taken to ensure that students would be safe and considerate of not only everyone else's work and the use of shared space but of themselves. The 'magic freeze' (where if everyone's attention was quickly necessary to obtain or if an activity had to be stopped FREEZE would be called by Carter and the rest of the class would respond by immediately

freezing in whichever position they were in), is an improvisational technique that proved to be a quick, fun and effective classroom management trick.

This preparation time set the pace, focused students' attention and ultimately enabled the subsequent pedagogical learning experiences to proceed smoothly. It also allowed students to ask questions and raise their own concerns. The classroom teacher was also invited to participate during each of the sessions. When this did happen, the students responded positively. However, more often than not, the teacher absented herself/himself from the room (to do other work) or stood by the sidelines and acted as 'disciplinarian' for the 'difficult students'. As a first time LTTA artist in the classroom, Carter assumed that the teacher would be involved with the lessons. Since this was not the case, it was occasionally challenging to collaborate with the classroom teacher to hear his/her response or to discuss how he/she envisioned the sessions. Discussing this issue with the co-ordinators helped to assure Carter that this situation was not uncommon and that despite anticipating that all teachers would be interested in incorporating drama into their lessons this was not always the case.

In addition to the circle sharing time, creating an open space for the drama activities and using FREEZE as a way to get the students attention when necessary, the sessions all had: 1- a warm up activity (such as zip-zap-zop or bippity-bippity-bop); 2-a main lesson which focused on one of the particular Ontario curricular objectives for the math unit on measurement; 3- a sharing time (where students could show their work to one another and 4- a debriefing (where the artist discussed with students what was covered and learnt in the session.

Teaching measurement through drama activities

In order to convey the mathematical measurement content of the passing of 1- and 5-minute intervals, a drama game involving a series of props (a sombrero, feather scarf, a magic wand) were used. This required small groups of students to create a situation using the items. Students then chose a card from a hat which had "past, present or future" written on it. This meant that using the prop students then had to create a scene: that was happening in the present; had happened 'in the past'; or that would occur in the future. Groups were then given 5 minutes of preparation time to think through or discuss their ideas for performance. Structuring their preparation time into 5-minute intervals was meant to help students embody through experience a sense knowing of this period of time. With one minute to perform their skit before the class, and one minute of improv-based work after each scene, the one-minute time interval was reinforced. Variations such as replacing one of the actors in a scene before it was finished and changing the time period

being used added variety to the activities and kept students constantly engaged in what was happening.

De-briefing the activities

Time to discuss the activities and what had been learnt at the end of each session began as an artist led activity where Carter asked the students about their mini-skits and what worked or was difficult for them as ‘actors’ and ‘mathematicians’. However, by the final session, students did not find these prompts necessary to evaluate and discuss their own experiences. In fact, within the small groups, students were actually observed sharing their feedback with one another (both constructive and in praise) based upon previous work in the LTTA sessions.

Teacher feedback

Though the teacher in this particular session did not participate in the LTTA activities with the students, her observations about the over all performance of her class, which were shared at the final session with the artist, were of note. Of particular significance were comments about how the class was working together as a more cohesive unit within other classroom activities since the commencement of the LTTA sessions. The teacher noted that more students in the class were discussing some of their questions and problems with each other before coming to her to mediate disagreements.

Links to democracy

To pave the way for participation in a democratic society planned for equal participation of its members must be practiced and the virtues of the society must be understood (Dewey, 1986; Hare & Portelli, 2001; Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2001; Sharp, 1991). Drama, which places collaboration and shared experiences or problems that must be worked through practically and experientially using dialogue and discourse, is a logical way to bring democracy into the classroom. By integrating drama or any art based practice in the mathematics classroom where students work on mathematical problems in groups disrupts the traditional mathematical paradigm.

Challenges

Specific challenges to using drama in the math classroom must also be considered. The strategy of taking students to the edge of chaos in order to enable creation to occur (Fels, 2002) must be done in such a way as to give students the imaginative freedom to explore their subject matter while ensuring the presence of clearly defined parameters. This is crucial so that all feel they have a safe environment within which to explore while not stepping past the boundaries designated by the classroom. Additionally, in order to ensure that the dramatic work being done is directly related to the planned

for mathematical findings, debriefing of the drama/math activity in order to assess and evaluate learning must take place.

It must also be noted that all students are not comfortable in the environment created during dramatic activities and that all students do not participate in the same way. While some individuals may speak a lot, others may be reluctant to share or participate in both discussions and activities. If a classroom is truly democratic, we would suggest that a space and place for silence as acceptable must be conveyed to participants. For instance, a space for silence means that during circle activities or debriefing sessions, not all student should be expected to speak if they are not comfortable doing so. In order to allow for everyone to reflect on their learning, time and opportunity to engage with other activities such as writing in a journal or drawing a picture in response to their experience (in lieu of speaking) is necessary.

Grade 8 math class - Montreal, QC

The classroom environment

As a grade 8-math teacher in a school for special needs students (who were given adaptations and Individual Education Plans to enable them to complete standardized provincial assessments in order to eventually attend CEGEP) in Montreal, QC, Carter, along with most of the staff, endeavored to employ pedagogical approaches which appealed to the wide range of learning needs of the students. This project took place in two classes which each had 16 students in them. Learning exceptionalities in each class included students with autistic tendencies, ADHD, asperser's syndrome, Tourette's syndrome, Kawasaki disease and other emotional and behavioral challenges.

Linking Visual-Arts Based Mathematics and History

One particular project that took place in two of Carter's grade eight math classrooms focused on a unit about enlarging and shrinking triangles. While the project emerged in the math class, it evolved to link visual arts-based mathematics and history. This inevitably fostered collaborative participation not only between the students but also between the teachers of these subject areas. As Carter had previously taught the grade eight-history program, she was also aware of the unit on Egypt and the pyramids. Hence she approached the History teacher and they decided to collaborate on a joint project whereby the students would have the opportunity to create from a small one dimensional paper cut stencil of a pyramid, their own model of a pyramid and decorate it.

The teachers introduced the project to the students explaining the parameters of the project as well as the specific links between mathematics and history in relation to the project. The students were asked to select their

own groups of four to work in and were taught the lesson on enlarging/reducing triangles. The students were then given time to work together in their groups to plan and discuss their ideas for their final pyramid project. The following class, Carter brought in a variety of art materials for the students to use. This included a number of cardboard boxes (since the pyramids would eventually have to stand upright without being propped up), markers, paint, string, tape, colored paper, stickers, sparkles and magazines. While the project was intended to be completed in one class period, it eventually turned into a three-lesson exercise as the students' blueprints for their projects ranged from the tabletop sized pyramid with elaborate inner decorations to life-size pyramids big enough to contain all the four students.

Findings

This project took place part way through the second term of the school year. Since project based and collaborative learning models were often used within this particular school setting, the students were quite comfortable. The challenge for Carter was that each math class had students who traditionally had both very successful and very unsuccessful results in the math classroom (i.e- one class had 11 of the 16 students who had math tutors while the remaining 5 students consistently achieved over 95% on tests). In addition to the particular learning exceptionalities of the students, this resulted in a generally challenging teaching environment. While in the first term of the year, Carter had tried placing students in math groups (where stronger and weaker students were placed together), these formulations generally did not work well because of the distinct student personality clashes which existed (often, students who did exceptionally well in math had difficulty engaging socially with other students and those who may have benefited from the help of the strong math students did not want to work with the 'socially abnormal' students). This meant that generally, lessons (which highlighted the particular math concept to be mastered) were taught in a teacher directed manner and students were then given problems to do individually.

Links to democracy

What captured the teacher's interest and fascination was the way in which the students engrossed and invested in the project. They even voiced their alternative ideas to one another and subsequent disagreements resulted. Usually when such occasions arose, the teacher's first impulse was to intervene and facilitate solving the problem. During this project, however, she found herself stepping back and allowing the students to work through their issues and come to their own compromises and consensus around the planning and construction of pyramids. This paved the way for a participatory democratic environment in the classroom.

Another interesting observation was the way in which students who are ‘poor performers’ in mathematics and thus were ‘invisible’ in the classroom took on a leadership role in this project as they were gifted in art or were skilled at organizing and leading a group. It was truly a delightful experience to see these students in a math class smiling and acknowledging one another’s various strengths in a variety of areas in order to complete their work together. This new found confidence in the math classroom (for particular individuals) transferred into subsequent math lessons where a sharing of questions between ‘math colleagues’ continued even after this project was completed.

Challenges

Many of the challenges that were faced during this project were related to the various learning differences that existed among the students. For instance, some students with shorter attention spans than others often found it difficult to stay focused on the project over three classes; while other participants, such as students with asbergers syndrome, found it hard to connect with other group members so as to complete the project. Such realities, however, were small hurdles to overcome when compared to the benefits of this work.

Conclusion

Establishing democratic practices in the classroom can be challenging, however, its fruits, as evident from Carter’s experience, is rewarding for all concerned. At the same time it needs to be underscored that democratic principles are not techniques of teaching to be mastered like ‘best practices’. Instead they are a culture, a way of life to be developed and cultivated and thus brought to pervade every aspect of an academic institution. Deploying drama and visual arts to teach mathematics, as we have delineated, are not meant to be treated as ends in themselves but as providing contexts (Holden, 2002) for processes of teaching and learning that can undermine the traditional power relations in the classroom and thus set the stage for democracy.

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The Illusion of Education

Adam Renner

Genocide doesn't mean only bombs (Vietnam Addenda, Lorde)

*One day / the apolitical / intellectuals
of my country / will be interrogated / by the simplest / of our people
They will be asked / what they did / when their nation died out / slowly,
like a sweet fire, / small and alone (Apolitical Intellectuals, Castillo)*

Education, the social institution known more precisely as ‘schooling’, is not real. It is an illusion. Of course, bricks and mortar exist (in the schools that aren’t falling down); teachers talk in the front of classrooms; and, there is a corpus of material to teach we call, charitably, curriculum. These things *seem* real. But, they are not. They are *not* real to the degree that education *does not* accomplish the rhetoric popularly ascribed to it: (critical) knowledge, (democratic) citizenship, equality of opportunity, etc. In the way that rhetoric does not match reality, then, it is an illusion.

In an attempted move of negation I argue not only that education is an illusion, but that any acceptance of this present illusion is literally killing our kids: intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and, sometimes, physically: “Genocide doesn’t mean only bombs.” The acceptance of this illusion is enabled by a silent citizenship (loading the gun) and bipartisan legislative support (pulling the trigger). Bang.

Before moving beyond this provocative, if cynical-sounding introduction, I acknowledge that some individuals demonstrate great resistance to the system toward which many/most do not. Some continue to create the possibility of liberatory spaces in their classrooms (see Carter and Chacko, this issue) despite the obstacles. I position myself and several others in the category of resistance, though I also uncritically participate in the systems of oppression I seek to eradicate. This dispatch is not intended to diminish the real courage often demonstrated (by lambs among wolves as Rich Gibson might suggest), nor the strides gained. Yet, it is not a stretch to argue that we/these resisters, especially where the resistance has real impact, represent exceptions to the rule. These remarks, then, represent a constructive critique for those educators—and other cultural workers who teach through their work—who actively engage their consciousness and challenge their socialization in order to seek liberation and humanization. As well, this analysis is offered in a revolutionary spirit, signaling the need for a transformative sea-change toward this liberation and humanization. I critique, ultimately, with hope.

Education can help make the kind of change we desire; it can be an important arm of a revolution (of consciousness, of society, etc.). However, it must change drastically for this to be accomplished. The time for a schooling enema has long since passed. We teachers can choose to be on a path toward part of that change. Or, we can choose the path of least resistance and remain part of the obstruction. To this dilemma, Mark Slouka, an educator writing the Notebook section of the February, 2009 *Harper's* offers the following lament,

Although the guard at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. has indisputably changed, although the new boss is not the same as the old boss, I'm less certain about us. I'd like to believe that we're different people now; that we're more educated, more skeptical, more tough-minded than we were when we gave the outgoing gang of criminals enough votes to steal the presidential election, twice, but it's hard work; actual human beings keep getting in the way [...] A voice from outside the ether cone keeps whispering that we haven't changed at all, that we're as dangerous as we've ever been, and that the relative closeness of the popular vote in this last election proves it [...] What we need to talk about . . . is our ever-deepening ignorance (of politics, of foreign languages, of history, of science, of current affairs, of pretty much everything) and not just our ignorance, but our complacency in the face of it, our growing fondness for it [...] Ignorance give us a sense of community; it confers citizenship; our representatives either share it or bow down to it or risk our wrath (p. 9).

Along these lines of ignorance and automated behavior, Peter McLaren, in a February, 2009 interview with Ravi Khumar (<http://radicalnotes.com/content/view/88/39/>), offers, "The election could be likened to a media virus programming its own retransmission via a well-worn template that has no entrance for the critic and no exit for the cynic. And, no substance whatsoever." Continuing, "[A]fter all, who is there to listen except the already insane. The unwitting victims, the popular majorities, have once again fallen prey to a contagion of manipulation, of an endless circularity of mutual determinations that spreads like a bacilli in a fetid swamp disguised as a golden pond that sports at its centre a shining marble fountain spurting audacious hope like a geyser of yellow ink, Obama's fountain of national renewal."

With this introduction, then, I rehearse a critical summary of what is happening in schools that helps breed such ignorance and instills a lack of agency in our students. Consequently, as an antidote, I position teachers and other cultural workers as a central point of resistance (agreeing with Gibson and others), outlining their struggle for consciousness and the possibilities they portend for the liberation and humanization of their students and society writ large.

Schools reproduce economic inequality through tracking and standardized testing

We need not dig far beneath the surface to see what schools produce/sell. It is hidden in plain sight. The desired outcomes of schooling since the dawn of the Cold War and the launching of Sputnik in 1957 have revolved around the economic and the nationalistic. (A legitimate argument could also be made that these purposes were in place well before this.) That is, the purpose of going to school is built around the capitalistic prospect of future employability and consumption. And, while in school, students/consumers are indoctrinated with the great American narrative intended to produce relatively obedient, uncritical, flag-waving patriots.

Schools are socially-reproductive mechanisms that help to replicate current socioeconomic discrepancies. If one starts school poor, they will probably end up seeking out jobs at the bottom end of the economic ladder. If one starts school rich, a job at the upper end of the economic ladder will probably find them. And, middle class kids will find work in Paul Kivel's (2000) "buffer zone" on a rung somewhere in between the upper and lower end—work that keeps the lower end as distant as possible from the upper end by "taking care" of the relative disenfranchised (e.g., social workers, nurses), "keeping hope alive" for the relative marginalized (e.g., teachers), and "controlling" the relative oppressed (e.g., police officers, military personnel). Schools do this through methods of 'academic' tracking. Turns out that 'academic' closely mirrors other social indicators like race and class. Relatively poor kids and a majority of kids of color end up in comprehensive tracks, vocational education (where it still exists), and special education. Relatively wealthy kids end up in college prep, honors, and AP tracks. In a rapid return to "deficit theory," this stratification is sized-up as differences in 'intelligence', 'discipline', 'hard-work', (or whatever else helps the privileged class sleep better). Of course, what informs the perception of these 'concepts' is socially conditioned, and their 'reality' is based more on structural constraints rather than individual achievement/effort/ability.

Beyond tracking, standardized testing (a multi-billion dollar profit-making machine) helps assure the economic hierarchy is not upset since funding is often contingent upon 'success' on these exams. Moreover, surveillance of teachers and students is made much easier under the guise of 'accountability'. Since students' performance on the standardized tests is most closely correlated with parental income, it is easy to predict which kids win and which kids lose this cruel game. Given that funding is tied to success on the tests, schools who teach relatively poor students and/or schools comprised of a majority of kids of color are resigned to teaching to the test—that is, teaching disconnected parts rather than a contextualized whole. Relegated to this kind of teaching in lower tracks, graduates (supposing they

weren't pushed out somewhere along the way) are prepared for little else than low wage employment, if they are lucky to find work at all. As well, fairly convincing evidence exists that link these kids with a future in the military (becoming front line fodder for perpetual wars: see Faith Wilson's, as well as Gibson's, work on this linkage at www.rougeforum.org). We also know these kids are disproportionately represented in our prison population as adults. And, finally, connected to a prison-like metaphor, performance of our kids is more easily monitored (cynically, for future stratification purposes) and teacher freedom constrained since our work is surveilled through the mechanisms of testing and 'results'.

We also reproduce economic inequality in the curriculum

Acknowledging that there may be *something* worth learning in school, the hidden curriculum—the softening-up of our youth (deference to authority, punctuality, putting up with boredom, social control)—is the *primary* purpose of schooling, which enables the desired economic and nationalistic outcomes. Of course, this hidden curriculum changes depending upon social class or race, most easily differentiated by tracking. Upper class kids, while still controlled, receive a vastly different curriculum than kids from urban ghettos or rural wastelands. Beyond learning to read and performing particular mathematical functions, is there any *content* that is absolutely necessary in school? There are *processes* that are important—procedures (like argument, dialogue, deliberation, experimentation) that apply and/or interrogate content, but it is fairly evident that standardized testing and much of teaching evaluates regurgitation of content, not process.

Returning to the hidden curriculum, there is one set of curricula that we all learn regardless of our social class (and for which school does little to help us resist): *how to be consumers*. The media, family/community, church, and school all teach us to consume (rather uncritically). The messages and the evidence are everywhere. Advertising has polluted nearly every public space. Moreover, the competition moves in from all sides—whether it is for our brand loyalty (soda, toothpaste, green beans, etc.), our favorite professional sports team, our particular religion (or shade of religion), our college/university, etc. We are taught to consume, to consume well, and to consume often, ultimately, to our own peril.

This type of consumption and competition for our consumer identities is central to the project of capitalism. In capitalism, everything is for sale. Everything is a commodity. In a fall 2000 article in *Cultural Logic*, “A Marxist Reading of Reading Instruction,” Patrick Shannon provides some of the most coherent and comprehensive definitions of Marxist terms aimed at critiquing capitalism and schooling. Shannon, outlining three central terms—rationalization, alienation, and fetishism of commodities—argues,

“Rationalization, then, treats human beings as variables to be manipulated along with materials, time, and space to ensure predictable products and profits from material, ideational or social manufacturing.” Providing a nice connection to standardized testing and scripted curricula noted above, he further asserts,

The conditions of life in contemporary elementary schools provide an example of this rationalization process. The justification for scripted lessons and high stakes testing is the logic of production. Scripts provide the division of function with teachers becoming factors in the implementation of the curricular designs of others; they fix the actions of teachers across classroom, schools, and districts; and they synchronize the actions of teachers and students toward the abstracted exchange value of student test scores. These scores now define teachers' success, become students' cultural capital, legitimize administrators' plans, and raise property values in communities. Using science as the objective and impersonal logic behind the rationalization of reading instruction in elementary schools, the entire process appears natural and inevitable. Inside the logic of rationalized reading programs it makes sense to follow the scripts in order to increase the chances of higher test scores, and few inside or outside of elementary schools object to the rationalization of reading instruction. Those that do object are dismissed as irrational or political.

McLaren, from the aforementioned interview, might add to this, “Exploitation is normalized institutionally when a small minority [the exam agencies, the textbook publishers] monopolize the means of production [the flow of ideas], and workers [students] must rely on wage labour [successful matriculation through the educational system—grades, recommendations, etc.] at the behest of the capitalists” (my comments in brackets).

This rationalized process of exploitation is not naturally accomplished. It takes mechanisms to pit us against each other, to divide ourselves, to believe our labor is a commodity for someone else's profit/consumption, to desire things that can bring us ultimately no pleasure, no joy. This process is called **alienation**. It is worth quoting Shannon once again,

Alienation is the process of separation between people and some quality assumed to be related to them in natural circumstances. This process can be consciously recognized (subjective alienation) or be beyond the control of the individual (objective alienation). If you begin with the assumption that reading, teaching and learning are human processes, which are natural qualities of teachers and students, then, the rationalization of reading instruction requires both types of alienation. The script's standardization of teachers' actions requires that the totality of teaching someone to read is "divided, fixated and synchronized," objectively separating teachers from teaching reading. The definition of learning as test scores separates students from the totality of their learning. Reducing teachers and students to factors in the scripted system of test score production requires that they lose, at least officially, emotional, cultural, and social attachments to the process of

teaching and learning and to each other. Such detachments demand a subjective separation of teachers from teaching and students from learning. This does not mean that alienated teachers are uncaring or that alienated students lack engagement. Rather it means that the nature of that engagement is subsumed under the process of rationalization and the possibilities of teaching and learning are artificially directed and severely restricted.

All workers in a capitalist system experience this alienation—where our work is less about intrinsic meaning for ourselves, but profit for someone else. We seek competitive advantages (those of us that can) through specialization (which further disconnects us as we lose site of the whole as we get more particular). Additionally, this specialization often creates efficiency (i.e., more profit for the ruling party). We also experience a subsequent loss of agency, becoming convinced that nothing can be done to change the system since we know little about it (given the focus on our specializations). Since the world can't be changed, then, and our work provides little meaning for our lives, we need something to replace that power and meaning. Reenter commodities. Marx called it the **fetishism of commodities**. Shannon, expounding on Marx, says, “We lose sight of the social character of commodities and act as if the physical properties of the commodity command a price. Many, even some economists, believe that the thing itself has the power to establish an object's price and to be productive, and not the human labor or the social construction of exchange value. . . .Capitalism's moral character is based on this fetishism of commodities -- this distortion of reality to make profit off of the work of others.”

Michael Lebowitz, further nuancing this concept of consumption, argues in the February, 2009 *Monthly Review*, “Because the worker has sold his creative power to the capitalist, that power now ‘establishes itself as the power of capital, as an alien power confronting him.’ [...] Producing is a process of ‘complete emptying out,’ ‘total alienation,’ the ‘sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external world.’ And, what is the result of this emptying out, this impoverishment in the process of producing? We try to fill the vacuum of our lives with *things*—we are driven to consume” (p. 51).

So, our labor and the products we create are fashioned as commodities to be priced, sold, and bought. Our labor is specialized and disconnected, distancing ourselves from the final product and any sense of intrinsic value in what we do. Our work lives are rendered valueless in the process. So, to replace human value, we replace this with ‘things’ that some ‘other’ has created and for which some ‘one’ has profited. This is the system and logic of capitalism. This is the dehumanizing game we play. And, we learn to play the game, first, in school. Thus, what role do school workers play? What is our role in the “complete emptying out” or “total alienation?” How might we (however unconsciously) sacrifice the “human/(student) end-in-itself?” What

is left of the creative power of the teacher? How can our labor be reconceptualized?

To conclude this rather lengthy section, I am reminded of a provocative example offered by Lebowitz in his 2006 text, *Build it now: Socialism for the 21st century*. He describes the continued distancing of producer and consumer as a way of explaining why it is so easy for injustice to roll on: "The coat's price comes from its history, the history of all the people involved in making it and selling it and all they particular relationships they had. And, if we buy the coat we, too, form relationships with all those people, and yet we hide those relationships from our awareness by pretending we live in a world where coats have no history but just fall down from heaven with prices marked inside." What would happen if we created much more evolved consumer identities that linked ours and others production with our consumption? What would happen if we connected our work (and the purpose for our work) with our lives (and the lives of others)? Bringing it now full circle and back to school, what would happen if we connected what we learned in school to the reality of the world outside of school? What would happen if we connected learning to liberation? To the reengineering of our humanity? To a critique of capital? To figuring out how we can take charge of our own labor?

Schools of education are problematic

Though capitalism, generally, is the most obvious impediment, I want to argue more particularly (as a teacher educator) that schools of education are one of the main reproductive mechanisms of the status quo and do little (if anything) to train teachers for how to change society (i.e., overcome capitalism). This is not surprising since teacher educators are no more trained in how to change society (which would begin with a critique of capitalism) than anyone else. As well, teacher education is often an under-resourced, lower-esteemed element in the university hierarchy, training a female-dominated workforce in a patriarchal society. In many ways, of course, we become a convenient scapegoat.

That said, it does not excuse the relative power we could exercise given our positions in universities with tenure. We may, unfortunately, embody Saul Alinsky's (1971) concept of the 'do-nothings': "[They] profess a commitment to social change for ideals of justice, equality, and opportunity, and then abstain from and discourage all effective action for change."

Similar to the dearth of what we actually learn in school (the content), schools of education often offer a menu of rather banal and vacuous course offerings that are either impractical to what actually happens in schools or, more likely, provide no roadmap or example for how to change what is

happening. From classroom management courses to curriculum to assessment to technology, little is offered that won't be relearned on the job. As well, few, if any, elements of these courses will be offered in such a way to interrupt the aforementioned status quo. Succumbing to the efficiencies, control, and surveillance of the marketplace themselves (NCATE, ETS, textbook manufacturers, etc.), teacher educators often offer a poor model—claiming their allegiance to social justice, doing little of real value about it, but encouraging others to go out and do the work.

So, let's get practical

There are people resisting this. There are teachers, if given the lower tracks, who do better by their students than simply delivering scripted curricula intended to boost standardized test scores. There are teacher educators who are becoming conscious and engaging in radical activities to subvert the status quo. There are people I work closely with in the PrESS Network, locally (www.thepressnetwork.net). There are people that travel to Jamaica with my partner and I who work tirelessly with likewise committed Jamaican teachers and social workers desiring to make real change. There is the work of the Rouge Forum.

The fact remains, though, that kids relegated to lower tracks, special education, or poor schools are simply not going to compete at a high level in the economic marketplace. Capitalism sees to it that they can't. So, while we may help one kid get ahead—that's just one more player in the game, as the late Sekou Sundiata noted in his 2007 address at the *Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed Conference*. The goal, in his mind (and mine and others) is to fundamentally change the game (i.e., change education through our understanding and critique of capitalism).

Teachers, as Gibson noted in his address at the Louisville Rouge Forum, 2008, are centripetally-located, right at the choke point of the system of capital. Schools:

- offer a multibillion dollar marketplace of profit
- provide a baby-sitting, warehousing mechanism
- fashion hope—whether real or false
- supply skill and ideological training, and
- create the next generation of the army, workforce, and, quite frankly, the prison yard [where 1 out of every 100 people is imprisoned in our country]

Glenn Rikowski, as quoted by McLaren in his interview with Khumar (2009), provides the theoretical underpinning and makes way for the resistive opening Gibson suggests above, arguing,

Labor power is the supreme value-creating power on which capital depends for its existence, and it is incorporated within labourers, who have the potential to withhold this wonderful social force (through strikes or leaving the employment of capital) or worse, to use labour-power for anti-capitalist activity and ultimately non-capitalist forms of production. Together, these features make labour-power capital's weakest link. Capital depends on it, yet has the capacity to be used by its owners against capital and to open up productive forms which capital no longer dominates.

Toward this end, McLaren (2007) suggests we *practice* a “revolutionary critical pedagogy:”

Practicing revolutionary critical pedagogy is not the same as preaching it. Revolutionary critical educators are not an apocalyptic group; they do not belong to a predicant order bent on premonising the capitalist crisis to come. Revolutionary critical pedagogy is not in the business of presaging as much as it is preparatory; it is in the business of pre-revolutionizing: preparing students to consider life outside the social universe of capital—to ‘glimpse humanity’s possible future beyond the horizon of capitalism’ (Allman, 2001, p. 219). What would such a world be like? What type of labor—should be—carried out? (p. 279).

We can really muck things up, then, if we get together around this type of pedagogy and **collectively organize**—humanization through community. What small scale organizational activities can we take up, and act upon, that may provide pre-revolutionary staging for larger organizational efforts? Or, how might our organization inspire others to organize? How can those of us with the most protection (tenure, years of experience, etc.) take the first steps to lay the path for others to follow? How can we connect our organizational efforts *with* those whom we profess to serve? What can the Rouge Forum do to help further these aims? How can coming together once/year further these aims? How might we connect more? In person? Regional chapters of the Rouge Forum? In print? The *Rouge Forum News*? The blog (<http://therougeforum.blogspot.com>)? Other outlets? Do we see our organization as a first step toward a larger, mass organization?

With organization, then, we must continue to **become conscious** (of ourselves, of our labor power, of systems of oppression, of our connection to others, etc.). We can end our collusion or unconscious complicity with the capitalist system (and other systems of patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, nationalism, etc.) by bringing a Marxist analysis to bear on the injustices and inequities we thrust on children through tracking, standardized testing, and scripted curricula. McLaren (2007) would point us toward a “critical subjectivity,” which

operates out of practical, sensuous engagement within social formations that enable rather than constrain human capacities. Here, critical pedagogy reflects the multiplicity and creativity of human engagement itself: the

identification of shared experiences and common interests; the unraveling of the threads that connect social process to individual experience; rendering transparent the concealed obviousness of everyday life; the recognition of shared positionality; unhinging the door that separates practical engagement from theoretical reflection; the changing of the world by changing one's nature (p. 278).

So, how shall we carry on this process of self-awareness, or critical subjectivity, in a system that endeavors to alienate us from ourselves? How can we endeavor to take the long view? How can we engage a revolutionary praxis, the simultaneous changing of society and self-change? How do we better connect with those tread upon by unjust systems? How do we commit to spending more time on our consciousness rather than the technical bread and circus of our corporately-controlled, consumption-driven media? What will that look like? How can we hold ourselves accountable? What should we read? How should we talk about it? How can we talk about it with others (that is, drawing the circle large enough to invite others in)?

We must **become more politicized agents** and we **need to hope**—that is, **have a voice and be visible**. At some point, we will have to muster the courage regardless of our position—as student, as teacher, as professor, as social worker—to do something. We have no choice, but to choose justice, to choose right over wrong, to choose what is moral and ethical based on consciousness. Indeed, we need a *public* education, but not the public *indoctrination* that happens in schools. Perhaps Abraham DeLeon's discussion of anarchism for education in the September/October, 2008 issue of *Educational Studies* is instructive here. Building on the work of several theorists, DeLeon defines anarchism as "a body of political thought that seeks to abolish and challenge rigid hierarchies (like the State), rethink and dismantle capitalist ideological structures, disrupt modes of forced coercion, build a society based on communist aspirations, free people's desires from historically oppressive social norms, and create organic and communal societies based on mutual aid and social justice" (p. 123). DeLeon suggests that we rethink teaching toward direct action. We should do so with a sense of urgency and with an eye toward democratizing our radical discourse in order make revolutionizing theory accessible to "those people who need to understand how systems of oppression work," (p. 137) like teachers and students.

Whether we choose this particular approach or not, we aim nonetheless toward a socialist future, built dialectically upon what exists in the present. What might our teaching look like vis-à-vis direct action? Shall we strike? Short of striking, shall we help in the movement toward freedom schools? Should we create our own schools of education for teacher training? Should we reconceptualize the entire endeavor of education? Shall we develop

liberatory and accessible curricula to share and contour to our local contexts? Some of these discussions are already underway within the Rouge Forum. What would you contribute?

All of us will have role to play. Leave our safe harbors. Struggle. Decipher the irrational from the rational. Understand the social constructedness of what is before us. It is not natural. It is designed by the ruling class and kept in place through the unconsciousness of the (waning) middle class and the oppression of the poor and working class.

Our resistance may be the most human element we have left. To this end, Gibson reminds us of four resistance ethics to keep in mind:

1. We are responsible for our own histories, if not our birthrights.
2. Solidarity: an injury to one only goes before an injury to all.
3. It is wrong to exploit other people.
4. Justice demands organization and action where it counts.

Castillo concludes *Apolitical Intellectuals* by observing, “A vulture of silence / will eat your gut. / Your own misery / will pick at your soul. / And you will be mute / in your shame.” We can stave off the vulture. But, only if we act in community, with consciousness, and with courage. We can create a new humanity. We can create a new society. Our present educational *system* does not provide the opportunity towards this. It is only an illusion, a dangerous, mind-numbing illusion.

What shall we build instead?

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On Optimism, Cynicism and Realism

Alan Spector

A major problem we face in these moments of increasing crisis is cynicism, a hopeless view that suggests that the darkness will never end. The roots of this view are not only based on the seemingly overwhelming power of the oppressors. More fundamentally, it reflects doubts about the strength and commitment of the oppressed to fight back effectively. We cannot afford the luxury of cynicism.

Let's look back at the last forty years in the USA. The mainly white campus anti-war movement of the 1960's erupted rather suddenly. The somewhat oppressive and generally passive fifties were not that far in the past. It seems like at one moment the theme song was the childish, "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window," and then there was Little Richard, "Good Golly Miss Molly, you sure like to ball!"

Just a few short years later—well, we can debate which song best expressed the 1960's, and with all due respect to the many powerful songs that Bob Dylan wrote, perhaps the song that had the deepest and broadest resonance with many young people was The Rolling Stones' "I Can't Get No – Satisfaction".

Rebellions that erupt suddenly can be inspiring, but if they are not built on systematic organizing, they often do not have staying power. However, even after the anti-war movement dissipated, many people remained committed and expressed that by taking jobs as school teachers, social workers, college teachers, union organizers, and factory workers. Many others tried, in their own ways, to raise their kids to be humanitarian in outlook. We can see the results of this today as there is a small, but real, recent bubble of activism and interest among youth on campuses and even in the unions, though, sadly, there is also a large bubble of cynicism –a sense of powerlessness and alienation among a larger percentage of the population than was the case during the 1960's.

The mainly white 1960's anti-war movement took a big hit for several reasons. Mao met with Nixon. Nixon was driven out, giving people the false idea that "the people had power." The ridiculous antics of the Weather Underground sabotaged and severely damaged the radical movement. The war ended and with it a sense of urgency. The massive infusion of drugs, the severe violent repression of the anti-racist movement and especially the killings at Kent State and Jackson State all sapped the movement of its strength, on campus and off. And finally, because campuses concentrated many youth in a small area, and graduating dispersed most students, who

often then also took forty hour/week jobs -- not having lots of spare time, not being just a few minute's walk away from other activists, being physically and mentally tired from having a real job, and for some, the heavy demands of raising a family all became the external factors that pulled people away from activism. It is no accident that anti-war marches, and many anti-racist marches (such as the big NAACP march in DC some years back) seem to consist mainly of people born before 1955 and after 1975 -- the middle gap being people still dealing with family issues. (A notable exception are the largely Latino pro-immigration marches.)

As to what hit the mainly black anti-racist movement? Severe police repression, flooding the neighborhoods with drugs, massive jailing of people for possession of drugs, allowing some token black folks to become political overseers giving the illusion of "black power," physical destruction of "urban villages" partly from de-industrialization, partly from urban renewal, partly from intentional planning to disperse black people so that they could not congregate and organize, and of course even more severe police repression--something of "Shock and Awe" applied to daily life.

I would say, however, that cynicism and the sense of powerlessness, not having confidence in a vision of a better future through struggle--***that this was and is still the primary factor in the decline of all movements***, because people who do have that confidence build organizations and carry on the struggle in spite of all sorts of terrible repression. It is no accident that Samuel Huntington wrote a seminal article in the early 1970's, lamenting that the rebellions came about because grassroots people had "too much hope" and he proposed policies that would dampen people's optimism!

If we see the core of the campus anti-racist movement consisting of, say, ten or twenty thousand activists at the time (1969), then I would argue that most of them/us definitely did not "sell out" or become passive, though some did. If one chooses to include in that description of the movement the millions who ever attended any meeting or took part in any campus strike or attended any demonstration, then, yes, many, many did pull back.

But what should we have expected, given how quickly many were drawn in. They were reformist in outlook (I don't mean this as an insult, but rather a description), rather than "revolutionary," despite using militant tactics at times. One can be reformist while using militant tactics after all. We can't blame people for not understanding what we want them to understand--as in "all of history is the history of class struggle"-- nor for not being what we want them to be or doing what we want them to do, though we can criticize those who "ought to know better."

Ironically, when we succumb to cynicism, we are adopting exactly the same outlook that is the root of the passivity of others that we are criticizing!

So do we want to feel sorry for ourselves, do we mainly want to feel self-righteous? Well, imagine how an earlier generation of socialists must have felt when they watched their socialist parties line up behind their nationalist capitalists and saw workers and socialist “brothers” from France and England and Germany killing each other in WWI. Yet the Soviet Revolution was only a few years away.

Or how about those living in Central and Eastern Europe, organizing for decades and suffering through the crushing triumph of mass murdering fascist movements? And how must those folks born around 1900 or a little later, have felt when they saw so much of the world massively remade by socialist revolutions, and realized, towards the end of their lives that those revolutions, which inspired perhaps a third or half of the world in just one lifetime--that those had collapsed. Still, many carried on and passed the struggle on to the next generations.

Imagine what Ho Chi Minh was looking at when he decided he could build a movement that would fight on into infinity in order to defeat the most powerful nations in the history of the world, or the fledgling Chinese Red Army, staggering along on the Long March (look it up), fleeing and under constant attack, yet confident that tomorrow could bring a better day—as it did.

And the other side of the coin is that now, millions die each week because of capitalism. They can't afford to be cynical. Neither can we.

Cynicism won't be overcome with silly optimism, of course, whether it is of the pro-Obama variety or the mystical variety. It comes from organizing struggle and being involved in and appreciating the wisdom, courage, and strength of oppressed people oppressed, even if/when they are misled. And it means putting the struggle against racist oppression and racial-ethnic separation in the front of the struggle to liberate humankind.

Imagine the power of a movement in the 1870's if the mainly European immigrant workers who shut down all the railroads in the USA and took over Pittsburgh had been able to forge an alliance with the thousands of rebellious Native Americans, resisting being isolated-imprisoned on reservations or murdered, and they both united with the freed slaves in the South, about to experience a return to the near slavery conditions of post-Reconstruction! But it didn't happen.

Now consider today if there were solid, trusting personal-political friendships among the grassroots folks (genuine alliances rather than top down “coalitions”) who make up the nearly all “white” anti-war movement, the nearly all Latino pro-immigration movement, the nearly all black anti-racist movement (including the tens of thousands of black youth who flocked to Jena, Louisiana), the mainly Muslim movement defending that community from racist attacks, and the multi-racial labor movement. The way to fight cynicism isn’t to just say cheery things. It is to organize building real human relationships and to understand that in the short run, there will be many activities that appear to be failures, but if more people learn more lessons and deepen their commitments, then that is the victory that cannot be taken away.

It is not relying on magic to say we can look ahead to a time when the great majority of the world’s people win a society that is free of exploitation and oppression. There is nothing inevitable about the few forever ruling the many through force and lies—indeed when force is all they have left is when they are in the greatest danger.

The agriculture, science, and technology exist to provide a quality standard of living for everyone in the world as does the potential to create a culture that respects and values each person. Naïve optimism that fails to recognize the struggles that lie ahead is a very dangerous distraction. But cynicism is an even more dangerous poison that saps the hope and energy of the oppressed and often invades and immobilizes the consciousness and commitment of those who want to build a better world. It is not realistic to have optimism based on faith, but it is quite realistic to have optimism based on confidence; in fact, it is the most realistic perspective of all.

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Why we need to blame ourselves

Michael W. Simpson

It is easy to blame the rich and powerful,
and certainly we should.
It is easy to blame the system,
and certainly we must.
It is easy to blame migrants,
and we certainly should not.
It is easy to blame “them”,
and certainly the elite depend on this.
But we need to ask ourselves,
What has been my role in creating
The pain, despair, and genocide.

How much money do I spend at Wal-Mart
supporting the slave factories in China?
Is Christmas something you buy
or a secondary Christian holiday?
What is the mpg of my vehicle
since anything under 40 creates
our dependency on foreign oil?
Have I financed everything I “own”?
Isn't a 30 year mortgage, an 8 year
car loan, and credit card debt the new slavery?
Have I consistently opposed war, genocide,
and the disinvestment in our human
Resources?
Have I actively opposed mascots that
depict American Indians?
Have I done anything to make the
World a better place, or
Am I just too busy paying for the
Stuff they say I need?

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Who will fill the Cups?

David Centorbi

children have no water or milk

the starving
hidden by suburbs and oceans

we cannot hear
the clanking of their empty cups

we cannot feel their shallow breath

we cannot see the broken barren land
that each day swallows them up

we cling to our bloated
greed, desperate

in our individualism

we stink of indifference

we have forgotten
the purity of mercy
by revolution

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Upcoming...

- (1) Please join us **May 14 – 17** for the **Rouge Forum Conference** at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, MI. Keynote speakers include **Staughton Lynd** (legendary activist, historian, lawyer), **Greg Queen** (recipient of NCSS Defense of Academic Freedom Award), and EMU's own **Rebecca Martusewicz** (EcoJustice Educator and Scholar). Joe Bishop, faculty member at EMU, is our lead coordinator this year and has lined up some amazing sessions of papers, music and other art, professional development possibilities for K-12 teachers, as well as plenty of opportunities for conference attendees to gather in dialogue. Our theme this year is Education, Empire, Economy, and Ethics at a Crossroads: What do we need to know and how can we come to know it? It is not too late to register. Please consider joining us in mid-May: www.rougeforumconference.org. See final page for a printable flier to share.
- (2) In order to keep the conversation going and share as much information on the struggle for justice and resistance to capitalism, we have started the **Rouge Forum blog**. Please consider joining the conversation at www.therougeforum.blogspot.com.
- (3) Call for papers, **RF News #14**. Deadline **June 15**. We invite all conference presenters to submit their papers for publication in this fourteenth edition, a conference proceedings of sorts.
- (4) Call for papers, **RF News #15**. We are interested in work from academics, parents, teachers, and students: teachers at all levels, students in ANY grade, parents of children of any age. Something small, something big, something serious. We want to publish YOUR story in our next issue. It is the stories we get from people like you that make the *RF News* what it is. If you have a story to share, but would like to protect your identity, use a pen name. Pen names are welcome! We NEED Art! Songs! Poems! Editorial cartoons! Links to online videos or other material! Perhaps you are better at expressing yourself with art or poetry. Send it in! We are looking for narratives as well as research and the interplay between research and practice. If you have a story to tell, some research to share, a book to review, we'd love to see it (and share it). We publish material from k-12 students, parents, teachers, academics, and community people struggling for equality and democracy in schools --- writing (intended to inform/educate, or stories from your classroom, etc.), art, cartoons, photos, and poetry. Send to Adam Renner at arenner@bellarmine.edu.

