

## Against Racism and Irrationalism: Toward an Integrated Movement of Class Struggle in Schools and Out

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There are two times for making money, one on the up-building of a country, and the other in its destruction.

—Rhett Butler, *Gone with the Wind*

We had been dealing with, had been made and mangled by, another machinery altogether. It had never been in our interest to overthrow it. It had been necessary to make the machinery work for our benefit and the possibility of its doing so had been so to speak, built in.

—James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*

In most cases it is not enough for revolution that the lower classes should not want to live in the old way. It is also necessary that the upper classes should be unable to rule and govern in the old way.

—Vladimir Lenin (1913) ◀EDQ1

### THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF RACISM AND EDUCATION

I assume my audience has some grasp of the venomous nature of racism and the existence of segregation and, to one degree or another, acknowledge and oppose it. Others, please stop here.

This chapter is especially directed toward education workers, students, parents, and community people who hope to oppose racism and schooling

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for inequality but avoid consciously addressing the common origins of racism and school inequality, their impetus, and the future. These honest people therefore cannot or do not create properly reasoned paths to overcome systematic injustice.

Unable to locate racism and unjust education historically—that is, unable to abstract the role of racism and schooling within the whole of the world's social system, capitalism, as it develops—liberal analysts and agents for change are unable to see how it is people might be able to unravel why things are as they are, locate themselves as change agents, and act. They mystify capitalism, tamper with its parts, and misdirect change strategies while empowering inequitable schooling and racism, perhaps in new forms. Treating repeated and necessary social tendencies as flukes, focusing myopically on what is seen as aberrations in society, liberalism clinically expunges the reasoned, passionate rage requisite to transcend inequality.

I assume, as well, that the reader knows something about the depth of racist oppression (shorter life spans, incarceration, massive unemployment, constant danger and surveillance, the double life of the oppressed) and that schools are segregated as much as they were in 1954. The methods of teaching and the substance of the curricula are segregated.<sup>1</sup>

I assume the reader is aware that we live in an era of crises—the internationalization of not trade but permanent war economies, each eyeing the other for a slim advantage in the relentless search for markets, raw materials, and labor. Dominant ideas, flowing from elites, and resistant ideas, flowing from the oppressed, compete in this context, the former usually overriding the latter. This is the backdrop of educational work today.

I assume the reader is somewhat aware the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, the result of twenty-five years of maneuvering by elites—including the leaders of both major teacher's unions—is a method of social control to regulate what children know and how they come to know it while making the division of society by class and race seem not political but scientific. That this is going on is clear enough and proved in depth elsewhere. At issue to me is: Why and what to do, or not do?

My message is simple: School workers do not have to be missionaries for the ideology of capitalism or its sword and shield (racism), although taking the chance to transcend our current conditions is risky business. The risk is worth it; it gives meaning to the privilege of time on the planet. There is urgency to my message. Inside a powerful nation promising perpetual war to the world in the midst of rising inequality, segregation, racism, imperialism, and nationalism, time is short.

Herein, I ask radical, to-the-root questions and try to answer them:

1. What is capitalism? What is racism? Why have school?
2. What is the relationship of capitalism, schools, and racism?
3. What is the liberal, or postmodern, answer to capitalism, racism, and schooling?
4. What has been done in the past?
5. What can school workers, individually and collectively, do now?

Capitalism is the world system, the whole. It is dynamic; incomplete; a system in constant flux, upending community, trust, and every aspect of daily life; and offering the narrowest edge to each participant (subject) and throngs of examples of what happens to miscreants born without capital, especially those of color. Recognizing capital as the whole is key to getting at its parts and to social change.

The concept of totality makes it possible to override notions of interests, advantages, or beliefs (sentiments) when applied to the question of racism. White people as a whole have more opportunities and live in less danger than Black people in the United States, and at the same time, it is true that some White people, if they choose to find ways to overcome their advantages of Whiteness, can to one degree or another split what is a thin advantage from a belief system—even when that sentiment must run counter to a powerful view that racism is correct.

With a concept of totality, one can also adopt a reasoned utopian vision of what could be, fashioned from what is.

White privilege is no myth. It appears as a 250 percent better chance to survive at birth, inherited wealth, softened surveillance, more mobility, better medical care, and the blithe acceptance of the face in the mirror as normal. But the focus on White privilege ignores the human and social loss that these petty bribes offer. Too often, the blaming stance of White privilege compels appeals to guilt—hardly a stable motivator for change—and excuses dead-end separatism. Moralizing and separatism, each of the two hands, form blinders over the chance to see a larger picture, that is, life beyond capitalism where all would gain from all.

Historian and sociologist Ted Allen says White people lose, do not win, from racism.<sup>2</sup> Paralleling his argument but not overlaying it, it may be that White people in the United States gain momentarily from racist activity. But in the long run, even in less than a lifetime, it is clear that White people lose from racism and gain advantages from antiracist action. In schools for example, it

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was the racism of a mostly White and suburban workforce that allowed city (Black and Hispanic) school systems to be assaulted first by curricula regulations, harsh measures applied to high-stakes test results, and subsequent school closings and layoffs. An injury to one, though, only preceded an injury to all, as the same measures were applied to suburban districts later.

So a vision of the whole—which offers the possibility of a world that has transcended the limits of capital and gone beyond divide-and-rule methods into a world where all win from all—then sets up the possibility of rightly locating specific struggles against racism, that is, the necessity of taking leadership from Black teachers, students, and parents who are going to be hurt first and worst by attacks on schooling and life.

Capitalism is not the highest stage of human development. Things change, sometimes because of technological advances, sometimes because of the connection of ideas and strife.

Capitalism is the nest of schools and racism today. Each flows into the other, but home base is capital itself. Reluctance to name the capitalist system may come from honest misanalysis, timidity, opportunism, a wise assessment of one's ability to survive, or ignorance. The social relations capital demands must be identified to grapple with the problems of education and racism, as capital routinely changes and updates racism and its domination of education, often behind a cloak woven of claims to democracy, freedom, and equality.

The same social relations that create racism outside schools also create racism inside schools. The crux of the matter is altering those social conditions, outside and in. Class struggle, the relentless battles that capital requires, as well as action to overcome the deadly results of racism is the combat zone of schooling. Class struggle is the air for educators and organizers.

Racism is a practical and pedagogical problem. Neither theory nor social practice alone can eclipse it. As Jean Anyon has famously said, "doing school reform without doing social and economic reform is like washing the air on one side of a screen door; it just won't work."<sup>3</sup> The challenge is to locate education and racism within the whole of society and to see what each of us, individually and collectively, can do to transform it. Where are we and how might we act? And, after all, just who is "we?"

Capitalist society is rooted in the irrational exploitation of people by other people, the many by the few. Capitalism and socialism (capitalism with a benevolent party in charge) are failed systems that no longer make sense, offering the world endless war and inequality.

Still, capitalism has a litany of dodges—some based on the facts of its advances in science and political life, others in cultural spectacles—and its

promise that anyone can make it if they just participate, as in the lottery slogan, "Someone must win: why not you?" You participate. They profit. Daily life within capital's walls, the struggle to survive and the immediate experiences capital offers, disguises its role by appearing to privatize daily life, isolating people and their problems when all human life is truly social. Most of the problems of daily life inside an authoritarian system divided by the violence inherent in the split of rich and poor can be traced back to the economy, though the tracing can be complex, convoluted, and not necessarily a straight line—a broad tendency.

The revolutions capital fomented in science, technology, communications, production, distribution, and exchange—and in advanced areas public education—offer the possibility for a united world, where everyone could live reasonably well in ecological harmony. In this sense, capitalism has socialized the world.

The production of capital itself also thrusts everyone apart into a desperate search for work, profits, cheap labor, raw materials, and markets, or they risk living with idleness, the chief occupation of the third world. United in fact, masses of people are divided by irrational, senseless, forces of nation, religion, race, sex, and gender required by the world economic system: capitalism. What truly divides people is social class. This does not equate the rest with illusion; it calls to question the necessity of irrationalism. Within this study of real yet unreasonable life, there is a way out beyond capital.<sup>4</sup>

Public education follows capital's path: It is hardly public or educational. Public schooling exists, but it is in fact tax-supported schooling segregated by class and race, as are the curricula and methods of teaching: unity and separation at the same time. Corporations that demand tax breaks and shift the tax burden onto the working class use the public schools as a massive free daycare system, warehousing children.

There is no single public education system in the United States; there are five or six: premedicine and law, preteacher and social worker, pre-skilled worker, prelaborer, premilitary, preprison. The truly rich and truly poor opt out of public education; the rich attend private academies, the poor drop out early. Each system of schooling is divided by class, then race. In a decaying economy offering few meaningful jobs with health benefits attached, teachers are tasked to tamp down the kids' expectations, making a lower horizon normal.

The substance of education overrides its methods. To the point, it is good that people learn to read in public school, but literacy and humane character have only coincidence in common. The perverse unity of form and substance in much of schooling is demonstrated in the lies taught to kids

using methods that obscure the intellectual processes that can reveal lies.<sup>5</sup> This is the main thrust of capitalist education.

### WHAT IS RACISM? THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM

Racism is a set of ideas, connected to power, that treats external appearances (skin color, hair texture, facial features, eye color, language, etc.) as fundamental differences that cannot be changed and is transferred by inheritance (blood), making the object of racism less than human: ready for extermination. Racism is distinct from bigotry. A Christian bigot may well allow a Jew to convert. A racist would not.

Race itself is a myth, counter to biological fact. People are far more alike than different. Intermingling mostly with pleasure over 100,000 years ruined the racist science of distinguishing levels of intelligence, or humanity, by tracking race-based gene banks. Nevertheless, fear of a malignant gene leads to an influential series of fantasies about sexuality that permeate most societies. Rapes become a form of political revenge.

The mythology of race is a powerful reality, a key divide-and-conquer tool used with extraordinary success by elites everywhere. Coupled with continued wage differentials between people of color and Whites, racism is profitable.<sup>6</sup>

There is nothing necessarily logical about racist thinking, except to understand it as a method of domination. One method of domination is to convince the oppressed that domination does not exist. As Baldwin put it, "there are no workers, only candidates for the bosses' daughter."<sup>7</sup>

◀ EDQ2

Religious irrationalism (bigotry) has shifted in its prejudices over time, depending on historical circumstances, potential threats or rewards, desire, and the thinnest forms of perception. Religious and ethnic tolerance can dissolve fast; the former Yugoslavia is a good example. Similarly, racism tricked itself into believing, for example, that Native American women were potential wives, whereas Indian men were to be exterminated.

Starting from a defective premise, racism makes no rational sense until it is connected to power. The pope in the Vatican during the Nazi era was willing to, at the very least, allow the German fascists to exterminate the Jews, whereas his cardinals in Italy (a society which enjoyed a long history of integration of Jews and Christians and secularism—as well as a fairly large communist movement) frequently sheltered Jews, openly dismissed German exterminationist anti-Semitism as absurd. The key for the pope was defeating communism, routinely linked to Judaism.<sup>8</sup>

Racism is a relatively new irrational idea. When and why the idea of race, rather than tribe, nation, religion, language, and so on became consequential is a matter of dispute among historians. Some, like Theodore Allen and Alexander Saxton (addressing the nineteenth century), trace racism to the origins of capitalist expansion and early imperialism. Others suggest that racism rises up from religious irrationalism—Spanish conquistadors saw indigenous people more as heathens than as an inferior race and typically considered converts potential partners.<sup>9</sup>

Georg Lukacs warned about irrationalism in this way:

Now irrationalism always begins with this (necessary, irrevocable, but always relative) discrepancy between the intellectual reflection and the objective original. The source of the discrepancy lies in the fact that the tasks directly presented to thought in a given instance, as long as they are still tasks, still unresolved problems, appear in a form which at first gives the impression that thought, the forming of concepts, breaks down in the face of reality, that the reality confronting thought represents an area beyond reason (the rationality of the category system of the conceptual method used so far)... Hegel... analyzed a... real road to a resolution of these difficulties... What if (however) a virtue is made of... the inability to comprehend the world intellectually? That if a virtue is made of this necessity and the inability to comprehend the world intellectually is presented as a 'higher perception as faith, intuition, and so on? Clearly this problem will crop up at every stage of knowledge and social development, i.e., each time that social evolution and hence science and philosophy are forced to make a leap forward in order to answer the real questions arising... It is not chiefly intellectual and philosophical considerations which decide a thinker's choice between the old and the new, but class allegiance... (which is often) halted at the threshold of knowledge and turned round and fled in the opposite direction.<sup>10</sup>

We never know all there is to know about anything. The movement in knowledge from what appears to be to a greater understanding of what actually is (appearance to essence) is a perpetual process. At base, if it is true that things change (and it is), it follows that our experiments on reality will always give results that trail behind the changes in that reality.

To decide that the gap between what is known and what is not known is holy, and to turn around and worship that gap—and those who will interpret it—is a very dangerous move. All forms of irrationalism—mysticism, religion, racism, ethnic rivalry—are inherently intolerant and at the same time, improvable.

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They talk funny, smell bad, eat strange food, are ugly, different, cannot do the job, deserve to be where they are, are sexually potent, seductive, large, lazy but mule-like, are tricky but stupid, hold all the wealth or are inherently poor, listen to lousy music, worship an evil god, want to get into your family's precious gene bank, and so on. Nobody on Earth has failed to encounter racism or to be part of it. Racism envelops the world.

White supremacy is the most common, but hardly the only type of racism. Japanese expansionist racism made the massacres in China and Indonesia during World War II possible. White racism coupled with nationalism made the U.S. internment of Japanese people possible as well.<sup>11</sup>

It is possible for a few members of a dominated group to both benefit and suffer from racism: the corrupt mayor of Detroit, Kwame Kilpatrick, looting the public coffers for private gain; or the prime minister of Grenada, Keith Mitchell, lording over a fleet of SUVs while holding the last prisoners of the cold war, the Grenada Seventeen, in a seventeenth-century jail since 1983—long after the United States-imposed sentences have been served. Both Mitchell and Kilpatrick suffer from racism. They are, after all, Black. At the same time, they use their positions mainly for personal gain. They live contradictory lives as oppressors and the oppressed, but the primary aspect of that contradiction is their role as oppressors.<sup>12</sup> Teachers in schools can oppress children, their role being a matter of choice. They are, after all, what they do.

Racism can be directly tied to the economic interests of people who are not elites. Germans moved into the vacated homes of Jews forced into the ghettos, as did Poles. Small businesspeople as well as major grocery chains profited from the Japanese internment of World War II.<sup>13</sup> Racist wars or imprisonment can mean jobs for contractors, laborers, and guards. Teachers in White, wealthy school districts have routinely done nothing while their colleagues and children in poor districts have suffered the collapse of their school system with cuts in everything from low-cost lunches to wages and benefits.

Millions of people in the world today live in poverty and have neither education nor hope. Although education is no guarantee of enlightenment (educated German elites were, proportionally, far more likely to be fascists), a combination of no education, poverty, and hopelessness can quickly turn people to irrational explanations of their circumstances and ways to solve them: religion, nationalism, racism, pogroms, or war.<sup>14</sup>

Ethnicity is a similar but not equivalent idea. Ethnicity also confuses matters of likeness and difference and sometimes tracks inheritance (through blood or property), but the borders of ethnicity can take many forms, such



as geography, language, culture, and so forth, in each instance claiming commonality along any line but class. No one thinks of the working class as an ethnic group—even though, for example, a teacher in the United States and a teacher in the United Kingdom have more in common with each other than they do with George Bush or Tony Blair. The mythology of ethnicity is sufficiently close to the lore of racism that, for the sake of brevity, I only address the latter.

Racism, like every form of irrationalism, is a fatal idea, so it is never merely an idea. But it is not an idea that occurs to people at birth. Racism is learned, and within a society divided into rich and poor but ruled by the rich, learning is often a method of deception. Such is the nature of capitalist schools where, as often as not, teachers willingly or unwillingly teach lies to children, using methods of constructing knowledge that make decoding lies nearly impossible.<sup>15</sup>

As the world's wars intensified in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the vast majority of teachers in the United States and their unions allowed themselves to be motivated mostly by racism, cowardice, ignorance, and opportunism. Leaders of school worker unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, allied themselves with corporate interests like the U.S. Chambers of Commerce and the Business Roundtable and the bipartisan actions of the U.S. government in support of anti-working-class, racist curricula regulations and high-stakes testing—all cloaked in talk about the national interest. It was rare to see rank-and-file teachers mounting any notable resistance, although pockets of opposition did appear—as in the Detroit teacher wildcat strike of 1999.<sup>16</sup>

At some point, history judges people by what they do. As teachers' wages and benefits are connected to test results, it may be that there will be more resistance, but school workers acquiescence to date only contributes to the growing gap of rich and poor, Black and White, in the United States so far. Judgment is still out on the school workforce, but time is not limitless.

Hitler's Germany had to construct exterminationist, racist anti-Semitism. First Judaism, a religion, had to be set up as a matter of race, in the blood. Elaborate systems were created to track down Jewish blood. At the same time, Jews had to be seen as subspecies, a lower race (though worrisomely mighty), and hence a threat to the human gene bank. This required even more propaganda. It followed that the German Aryans had to eliminate the threat to humanity, so they set about it (and sought to conquer the world) with the support of the sizable section, perhaps a vast majority, of the population of what may have been the most literate and cultured society of its time—especially the educated and gentry classes.<sup>17</sup>

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Teachers in Germany, overwhelmingly, did not resist fascism. Indeed, most were early volunteers in the Nazi Party. By 1937, 97 percent of the teaching force were Nazis, and Jews were thrown out of the profession with barely a whimper from their colleagues.<sup>18</sup> In Italy, there was some resistance from teachers and religious instructors. However, fascist volunteers dominated the teaching force there, too, almost totally by 1934.<sup>19</sup> In Germany teachers watched their Jewish colleagues become segregated, then exterminated. Although that horror of fascism is hard to imagine, so is the day-to-day school life in which, for example, teachers deliberately demanded that Jewish elementary children join other kids in milk and snack lines, then as the Jewish kids approached with empty cups raised, the teachers told them, "Run along, Jewess, next please." This went on day after day.<sup>20</sup>

German anti-Semites had considerable support from research that traced genetic bases for intelligence conducted in the United States, particularly at prestigious California universities where the knowledge produced was used to sterilize thousands of women and the research used to buttress fascist thinking. California scientists believed they could define intelligence, link it to genes, and improve human genetics by stamping out poisoned inheritances. German scientists used the U.S. research as a defense during the Nuremberg trials. Once the decision that some identifiable group is less than human is made, the last step of the irrational turn, the killing, is sure to follow.<sup>21</sup> This demonstrates the direct link of education, racism, violence, and death.

In the United States, racism seems obvious to those with the conscious lens to notice it. Geographic racism is sometimes easy to see, as the notorious 8 Mile Road divider in Detroit. Racism sometimes goes nearly unnoticed, as is the wall at the Mexican border in San Diego—San Diegans routinely insist on the diverse nature of their community. But wealthy San Diego, where less than 15 percent of the population can afford to buy a home, keeps its poor in Mexico, letting them in and out according to the need for cheap labor.

As noted, racism can offer privileges to members of a majority, or dominant, caste. Over time, those privileges can become invisible to all but the victims and the conscious profiteers. In one San Diego County elementary school I visited, the assembled teachers put it quite clearly: "We don't have a problem with racism here; we're all White." This is racism reified.

When pulled over by a state trooper, most White male youth need not worry about being murdered. White women rarely worry about being trailed by store detectives or about being White—which most see as simply their normal state of being. Black people must be conscious of Blackness, as a matter of life and death. White people live much longer than, say, Black people. White people get better hospital treatment, live in less polluted areas,

and suffer less stress, whereas centuries of slavery still lay heavily on the Black population. White people inherit much more wealth, getting a running start. Imperialist adventures, such as the U.S. invasions of Vietnam, Grenada, and the Middle East, are commonly fabricated with racist overtones. Conrad's "exterminate all the brutes,"<sup>22</sup> still plays well today, as does the missionary view of setting out to repair inferior societies (common among educators as well). On the other side of the coin, employers who systematically segregate workforces and pit one group against another can lay no claim to innocence.<sup>23</sup>

Good schools are usually seen today as segregated schools with higher test scores. Segregated schools are not necessarily better for White people than people of color. Segregated White schools do typically have more books, supplies, lower class size, and so on, whereas schools serving Black children are denied heat, light, playgrounds, libraries, and so forth. But the main lesson of segregated schooling is segregation: in service only to elites, hurting most kids—Black, White, and brown.

All masters want to replace the mind of the slaves with the mind of the master. When achieved, that consciousness is the victory of Taylorism—one of the reasons for house slaves—and the history of most religions. Refusing to participate in the process—that is, a sit-down strike, or teaching other slaves to read a compass, or leaving the priesthood—all that can be terrifying to those who have enjoyed the occasional smile of the master. In the relationship of the haves and have-nots, no one is innocent. Teachers teeter on this balance beam, choosing moment to moment whose interests they serve. But like victims of racism, however, educators do not necessarily see the system of domination racism serves, just as many prisoners cannot see beyond the walls.

Standardized curricula and textbooks seek to interrupt the teacher-student relationship, creating a publisher (profiteer)-consumer relationship, and, in the case of poorly educated or submissive students and teachers, publishers find eager victims.

Walls of domination are constructed by an absence of analysis of the workings of history, of class struggle. Racism is not merely a set of bad ideas that float about, incidentally passed from generation to generation. Racism is a material force that has a history, a coming to being over time, a present, and a future. Connected to divide-and-rule profitability, racism is joined to many forms of the accumulation of capital: Those who start with more capital usually live a bit better. Each instance is specific, however, and Whiteness and large hope chests do not necessarily connect.

Racism makes war palatable. The struggle for cheap labor, markets, and raw materials make war necessary. Degrading the enemy to the level of a

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nonhuman makes murder considerably easier. The language of racism sets up the possibility of seeing another human as an animal. Gook. Frog. Raghead. Gerry. Jap. Greaser. Camel rider. Slant. Infidel. Even with the traditional marine training choral response, "Kill! Kill! Kill!," killing is somewhat less heartfelt, more tolerable, when any respect for the humanity of the enemy is eliminated.

Blindness on the part of those who witlessly enjoy modest privileges makes sense of Hegel's thought: The truth of the master is in the slave.<sup>24</sup> Those at the short end of the stick often have the best understanding of the whole of domination. But people with petty privileges can wake up to the overriding domination and unite with oppressed minorities for thorough social change. Historically, communists, socialists, and anarchists have taken the lead in this struggle because they have, to one degree or another, recognized the relationship of exploitation and racism and joined out of solidarity, not evangelizing.<sup>25</sup>

The real minority group is those who hold wealth, but they have little concern about their minority status and prefer it is not noticed. To the contrary, the international majority group, poor and working people, rarely recognize their real status as people who could overturn their circumstances. Although history is largely the result of their struggles, truly international outbursts against oppression are relatively rare. Even so, mass integrated movements like the early stages of the civil rights movement, the Industrial Workers of the World at the turn of the twentieth century, and the Congress for Industrial Organization in the 1930s, or the not-so-mass but turning-point raid of John Brown before the Civil War have been key to society and social change. It is equally clear that racist divisions in social movements were useful to elites—an Achilles heel of the working-class unions or the movement against the war in Vietnam. At issue, in these cases, are class and class-consciousness, including antiracist consciousness, that does not necessarily develop, but that can develop and grow deepened by theory, as a long view of history demonstrates.

Because elites depend on racism, and as every exploitive relationship is a form of violence, it follows that racism will not be overcome solely through education for caring, diversity, or love—nor even history. The U.S. Civil War, the Armenian genocide, the Nazi Holocaust, the U.S. war on Vietnam, the Rwanda genocide—all witness the willingness of elites to kill millions of people to retain their privileges. Racism will only be overcome through mass integrated struggles directed to its source. Even so, consciousness—what people know, and how they come to know it—is a vital political and pedagogical question. Absent consciousness, there is no learning from struggles

that are likely to occur—must occur—because people throughout the world are now positioned so that they must fight to live and love.

Separatist movements like the Nation of Islam, Marcus Garvey, and others have not been mass movements and have not been successful, perhaps because most members of minority groups realize that separatism creates the conditions for extermination. The Black nationalist claims of the past, even coming from self-described Marxists, now seem almost quaint. Although it is clear that Black people in the United States will necessarily lead resistance, as they must at some point fight to live, it is equally clear that Black revolutionary power alone, or the election of Black mayors, will not succeed.<sup>26</sup> Uprisings like the 1992 Los Angeles riots demonstrate that even spontaneous insurgency can be integrated.

Trendy postmodernist pretexts for nation/culture/sex/gender-based identity groups, in which the narrowest interest is elevated to a pivotal role, follow the same path, disconnecting social change from history and the future (suggesting that this moment is utterly new, and completely encapsulated). Postmodernists, divorcing the past, present, and future and disengaging class struggle from the processes of the world, become unintelligible (so their prolix writing often cannot be read), or they insist that the crux of the matter is an individual identity, splitting the dialectic of likeness and difference, leaving current antiwar protest movements, for example, fragmented and ineffective.<sup>27</sup>

Racism does have a psychology and is part of the construction of the identity of, probably, everyone. Psychology—character analysis—is often taken apart from the infinitely complex interacting causes of all events. This view “captures a particularly impoverished shadow of the actual social relations in the world, concerning itself only with the projections.”<sup>28</sup> Psychology is part of the story of racism but not the whole of it. Identity formation and class structure create and re-create each other and, because nothing comes from nothing, demands to pinpoint an exact origin will probably go unmet. Economic and psychological formation is congruent. Addressing the part without seeing the bigger picture, the individual within the whole of social relations, leads to blind canyons of resistance.<sup>29</sup> It is not sufficient to fight racism inside one’s mind, nor even inside many minds. It is collective action that can offer the lessons to show the way to overcome racism and the control of capital.

As a part of identity, a form of profit, a divide-and-conquer tool, an extension of irrationalism that makes supremacy and inferiority seem natural or sets up a particular group as an example to others for just how bad things might get, racism is a method of class rule. The key form of oppression

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(sexism, ableism, nationalism, agism, etc.) may switch or intermix from moment to moment under changing social conditions, but the crux of the issue is class domination, formed from the struggle for cheap labor, raw materials, markets, and sheer power: capitalism.

Racism will live long after what I think will be mass struggles to overturn the rule of capital and place society in the hands of the masses of people, probably proving that ideology can exert its own forms of power, but there is no getting rid of racism without recognizing its importance to capital's personifications.

When racism becomes so pervasive that it goes unnoticed by many people, it helps elites deny the continued existence of overarching master-slave relationships. Defeating racism is essential to any social movement for equality and justice, just as is discovering and taking leadership from minority group members, whose understanding of oppression may be more profound. This is not to say that criticism comes to an end, or that people think with their skin and deserve elevated treatment because of it. It is simply to say, if nothing else, that it will take a mass integrated movement with minority leadership directed at the rule of capital itself to overcome the crises we face now: Within a world united more than ever by systems of exchange, production, technology, and transportation, there is an international war of the rich on the poor, intensified inequality, deepening segregation of all aspects of life, witless nationalism, and an explosion of evangelical irrationalism.

To miss this point, or to ignore it, leads masses of people up dangerous avenues, my next key argument. There is nothing magical in daily life or even the resistance that workers must mount to survive that reveals the role of class rule in society or what to do about it. The deepest failure of socialism, the failure to forge a mass of class-conscious people who could defend what they had won, demonstrates this point rather clearly. Grasping class rule as a matter of reality and seeking to transform it in ways beyond missionaryism, is a matter of social action, imagination, and teaching, addressed next.

Twentieth-century history suggests that only leftists (communists, socialists, anarchists) with their view of transforming the whole of capitalist relations have consistently fought racism, in every form, as was true in Germany, Austria, China, South Africa, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and the United States. To say their positions were always wise—never tainted with opportunism, nationalism, or subservience (as in the Communist Party USA's eagerness to take direction from the Soviet Union)—or that they were fully successful is not the case. But it is correct to say that they fought back consistently, and their organizations made their resistance powerful.<sup>30</sup>

Ignoring (or denying, or labeling as reductionist) the interplay of race and class—one influencing and rebounding back on the other from moment to moment, a slippery relationship that can change with circumstances—is common among sociologists, multiculturalists, and postmodernists. From this error comes many others, like identifying the nation as an area of overarching commonality (the “salad bowl” having replaced the “melting pot”; pluralism under prolix banners as a substitute for integrated class struggle) and therefore relying on the nation-state (government) and its ideological premises to resolve problems of domination, when the state and its ideology exists to enforce domination.<sup>31</sup> It follows that mass resistance is outside the scope of those who refuse to see the interaction of race and class, and this myopia causes them to not only misperceive the processes of the world but offer faulty compasses for leading change. They seek to resolve questions of race and class by ignoring class. They disarm those who follow them into the hands of elites.

Nationalism is the idea that we are all in this together, probably through coincidence of geography or ethnic accident. Nationalism implies difference, even superiority. Rising inequality everywhere graphically demonstrates that we are not all in this together in one nation—not in the courts, not at work, not at the ballot box, nor in the schools. What rightly divides the world is social class. The false belief that everyone in a given geographic location has something unaccountable unifying them (and thus setting them apart from others) has been every bit as popular as racism, and sometimes stands well above it. Racism and nationalism appear together so often, they can be considered twins. But multiculturalists and others typically rely on nationalism to figure ways out of the issue of racism, an impossible twist that because of rising inequality, will only strengthen those who profit from the racist divide.<sup>32</sup>

Class rule and racism will not be defeated by education alone, though antiracists must turn to education as a way to solve the problem.

Racism, in limited ways, may have existed prior to the rule of capital, under feudalism, but capitalist science gave racism its pretense today. Capitalism requires racism. Hence, antiracist educational action attacks the Achilles heel of capitalism.

Racism is now mediated through the system of capital, as form of irrationalism, and as a material force, chronic among masses of people addicted by daily experience as workers and consumers to a color-coded war of all on all. Individual and institutional racism buttress one another, their impact set by power. Individual racists with no capital or organization have little impact. Organized racists, such as the Ku Klux Klan or similar gangs or institutional racists who reject affirmative action, have power and influence.

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Institutional (corporate) racists can make use of individual and organized racists.

Like racism, education has existed to one degree or another for centuries, much of it rising out of churches and religious education. As capitalism advanced, so did its schools, resulting in the slightly varying forms of education in the world today, each mainly using teachers as missionaries for capital in its church: school.

Capitalist schooling as a mystifier and church schooling is good metaphor. Under capital, private property is simply assumed, its origins never interrogated, just as gods are proved by faith. In church, faith is rooted in love but is usually overmatched by fear of hell. Labor under capital is supposedly free, although all work within the system is coercive, under surveillance—work or starve. In schools, learning to build curiosity is replaced by learning for the test, and later, just as labor under capital becomes the resentment of labor, the resentment of learning becomes a bedrock of life. Capitalist schools and church schooling are designed to convince participants, rightly or wrongly, that they have an interest in eternalizing their systems.

The suspension of criticism is a centerpiece of capitalism, its schools, and the church. Questioning that goes to the root of issues, like, “Why are some people so rich, and others so poor?” or “Why must we pay someone to interpret God for us?” or “How do we know God is not evil?” are rarely posed in schools or church.

The nineteenth-century Native American schools, churches, and government created in the name of civilization and fairness—really hubris and greed (the toxicity of benevolence)—demonstrate the relationship of capital and mysticism. Church pedagogical kidnaping of Native American youth in the United States followed an illuminating path: send the troops and seize the land; send the missionaries (teachers) to civilize the kids’ institutionally aberrant behavior using carrot-and-stick methods and curricula to reform their identities and demolish their substandard culture; and win over a few of the brighter ones and turn them back on what was once their people. Sometimes the Native American kids ran away, burned their schools, or died. Some resisted. Many fit in. The parallels to the education of working-class kids today are striking.<sup>33</sup>

Capitalism and racism reverberate back and forth on one another. Each is rooted in exploitation, alienation, the battle for surplus value, commodity fetishism, reification, the state, and the human psyche formed within this context, particularly within the authoritarian family. Work, the family, humane interactions, and intellectualism are now disintegrating to one degree



or another—liquefying. These aspects of capitalism are described briefly later in to set the stage to discuss racism and education.

## IMPERIAL EXPLOITATION, RACISM, AND SCHOOL

### Exploitation and Violence

Value is created by human labor. Most value is possessed by people who did not produce it. Possession in this form means violence. The system of capital, subordinating humane desires for freedom and creativity, necessitates exploitation. Some own, others do not. Those who own typically seek to do the thinking and expect others to dig, a division of mental and manual labor. Those who do the work do not hold the reins.

The earliest significant forms of capital were won through imperialist robbery.<sup>34</sup> The surpluses of capital made available from invasions, slavery, and forced labor created accumulations that could be reinvested in machines, factories, and so on. Racism helped make forced labor and mass murder acceptable, civilizing the savages.

Capital, like religion, must expand or die. Microsoft eats Netscape, despite antimonopoly laws. Packard, Hudson, Studebaker, Kmart, even Chrysler (now owned by Daimler) no longer exist. Capitalists war with other capitalists. To exploit labor and compete, capital needs violence.

The twentieth century promises of the end of the cold war, peace and prosperity, could not stand. Capitalism means war, as its hundreds of years of rule demonstrates. Those who hold capital require nation-based armies to protect themselves from other capitalists and the people who work for them. Capital, though, which cares nothing about who rides it, knows no borders and operates nationally and internationally at the same time (as the battles over the Chinese purchase of U.S. oil companies demonstrates). Although capital operates internationally, its personifications, bound by their own history, cannot.

Ownership, codified by law and sheer force, means that the few are able to expropriate much of the value created by the many. This value, called *surplus value* by Marx, can be called *profits*—the amount beyond that spent to re-create the working class, to maintain and produce equipment, taxes, and so on—kept by the owner. Surplus value is the giant sucking pump of capital that moves the whole system. Capital's great secrets are its shrouded existence and surplus value.<sup>35</sup>

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In capital's intrinsically master-and-slave relationship, a victory of the master is to convince the slave that slavery is freedom, that labor is justly rewarded, that there is no master-slave relationship at all. Or slaves might be convinced they have an interest in maintaining slim privileges within a system that has been so successful with equating a dime with privilege. Capitalist education serves this purpose—forms of voluntary submission—while at the same time offering masses of students the tools and some information to think otherwise, if they can see beyond the walls. Capitalism must have nuclear physicists who do not worry about bombs, but many physicists do just that.

Exploitation compels alienation, the separation of people from people. Those who do not own significant amounts of capital (which can separate people dollar by dollar, color by color, shade by shade, sex by sex), oppose each other for a limited number of jobs. At the same time, these people form a multiracial class—workers, people who do not hold a lot of capital. Thus, workers and owners are classes pitted against each other and, taken uncritically, workers are pitted against workers and bosses are also pitted against bosses (because only those who grab the most surplus value win). History suggests that owners are far more likely than employees to recognize their commonality when faced with a united challenge.

### Why Have School? Educators as Workers

Educators are, mostly, workers, although when they are called on to spend an average of \$1,200 of their own money for school supplies each year, they are reminded of their professionalism.<sup>36</sup> There are 49 million children in public schools in the United States and more than 3.4 million teachers and school workers. The overwhelming majority of students are future workers or soldiers. Youth, not school workers, are the prime target of schooling, though the actions of school workers can be very influential and can send youth up better paths than to become targets.<sup>37</sup>

Capital's schools are huge markets that involve not only students and educators but tens of thousands of others. Consider the school buses, textbooks, lunches, grounds-keepers, architects, guard companies, test manufacturers, advertisers, and clothing manufacturers. School is a multibillion-dollar business, not a think tank distinct from the crude workings of the world. Follow the money.

The rule of business, profits, grinds on while simultaneously the problems of business arise—cheating, chicanery, and sexual exploitation of those who hold less power. Developers cheat on contracts, suppliers bait and

switch supplies, and most of school work is done by women, whereas most of education's top bosses are men.

Because schools are home to developing sexuality yet are tasked with repressing sexuality through demands for splitting pleasure and reproduction (abstinence education), it follows that schools are also sensual places, where desire can overwhelm a geometry lesson. Repressed desire, the line from advertiser to purchaser, can underpin an obsequious personality or an authoritarian one. The lure of freedom, contradicted by habitually repressed yearning, shapes subjects who can dream of freedom but will not fight for it.<sup>38</sup>

School workers produce value in capital's markets. When educators and kids arrive in school, they confront a billion-dollar business, more powerful than unorganized kids and teachers. This is part of the answer to the critical question that is rarely asked: Why have school? Educators shape the next generation of workers and labor power, and they generate hope, real or false—a linchpin of social order.<sup>39</sup>

Hope, accumulated over generations of teachers' hard work, is the reason parents send their kids to school—to strangers. In addition to skill training and some restricted intellectual activity, schools also promote nationalism, warehouse kids (a huge free daycare system supplementing corporations that insist the main tax burden should be on the working class), and commercialize sports—schools' promise of hope is now more myth than reality. What hope exists comes from those rarities who swim against the tide. Government funds come primarily from the exploitation of other workers, and the valuable labor of school workers is exploited—that is, they are not paid for the full value of their labor—which is both ideological and practical, and they do not control the processes nor the products of their work.

Teachers do not set their own hours, wages, or working conditions. They do not control the curriculum or the pedagogical methods to be employed. Powerful corporate interests control textbook publishing, for example, and seek to replace the critical and human relationships of a particular teacher meeting a unique child in a classroom with the standardized curricula and techniques (policed by high-stakes examinations that measure little but race and class) that serve those who hold power. The less educators (workers) resist this subservient alienating relationship, the more they enrich both those who own and capitalism itself. So although teachers may think of themselves as more professionals than workers, they are more workers than professionals. The more they uncritically pursue surplus value, the less free and creative they are, and the more oppressed the kids are.<sup>40</sup>

### Alienation

In schools, educators are alienated (separated, estranged) from students (grading, tests, class size), the curriculum (textbooks, regulated curricula), parents, administrators, and each other (competition for jobs and wages). Teachers are alienated from their own education and creativity as regimented curricula and tests replace the mind of the educator with the mind of the test-prep company, that is, the mind of capital. Counselors are replaced by test-score chart, and librarians by clerks (or the libraries closed).

Kids, the focus or product of schools, are particularly alienated. They are segregated by capital's geography of money and power, by race, by tracking within schools, by ability and disability, and even in some public schools, by sex. They are set apart from school workers and administrators in a boss-worker relationship. Kids are distanced from meaningful struggles for what is true and its foundation, freedom, the day-to-day realities and significance of labor, democracy, equality, and sensuality as a source of responsible pleasure.

Although there are many kinds of segregated unpublic miseducation, depending mostly on the parental incomes on which the school feeds, the main message of school to most students is that learning itself is an alien, generally meaningless task. There is school work and real life. It is rare for capitalism—the role of social classes and where students and school workers are located in this system—to be discussed in schools. The questions, “Who are we?” “Who do I fit as part of *we*?” “Who shall we say is *we*, and them?” “Why are we here?” “Why should we do this?” “Who decides?” and “Who gains?” are often too dangerous to raise in schools. Much of public schooling is wasted time—soldiering, getting through the day to get to the next day—work-life preparation.

Racist alienation is structured into the history of public schools. In the United States, more than 90 percent of the teaching force is White and self-described as middle class, facing a child population that is now mostly poor kids of color. Race and class set not only school boundaries but the structures of the teachers' unions, organized mostly along occupational lines—mostly White teachers and degreed workers in one unit, other support personnel in other units. Because they do not pay dues—capitalist unions' bottom line—students and parents do not vote in and are rarely invited to education union meetings, though students and parents are key to organizing power for school workers.

Racism in education appears in the curriculum (textbooks and tests), discipline and graduation rates, the differing facilities like school buildings,

supplies, and libraries, overcrowding and noise, language and cultural clashes between White middle-class educators and kids and parents of color, administrators' willingness to demonstrate and use force, the seizure of entire city (read: "of color") school systems by state or corporate interests, and the No Child Left Behind act, which uses high-stakes tests (designed to deepen regulation of what children are taught, and the ways they are taught) that truly measure little more than class and race and divide kids along those lines, falsely using science as capital's sword and shield.

### Commodity Fetishism

Capitalism propelled, in part, by the sale of commodities to realize surplus value causes, over time, both workers and the employer classes to relate more to things than they do to other people. Money appears to beget money, machines seem to create value. A workers' daily life, indeed the activity that sets up nearly all other of her life interactions, is measured by a boss in terms of added value.

When scientific forms of management are successfully employed, measuring and regulating each worker's every movement, labor seems to vanish, as do top bosses. Teachers' good judgement about a particular kid gets replaced by scripted curricula, tests, and standardized measurements for ability or disability. Educators are supervised by a growing body of overseers holding clipboards and charts, making sure all are on task, that is, within bounds. Some schools script so carefully, overseers expect to walk into any classroom at any time and rightly predict the activity.

The script or the test becomes the purpose of school, not human interactions in an authentic struggle for what is true. The regulated curricula and tests grow into fetishes that rule people, rather than the inverse. Test scores become real estate values. The human potential of children is shoved aside as educators are ordered to cheat on tests, drive out likely low-scorers, target kids on the cusp of passing, and abandon creativity.

Commodity fetishism causes people to measure self-worth by merchandise, especially the chief commodity, money, which in many instances becomes an item of worship. Businesses no longer focus on making, say, steel for use, but on making money for profits. Schools (where the prime commodity is also money) do not concentrate on authentic learning but on test scores as measures of human value. At the same time, as self-discipline and motivation is overwhelmed by extrinsic punish and reward systems, history—the discipline that helps people discover who they are, why they are there, that things change, and gives hints for what to do—is erased from the

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curricula, untested. Social studies teachers then demand tests, not so much to resurrect history but because No Test = No Job.<sup>41</sup>

People who must sell their labor and their lives become commodities themselves and often view themselves and their own children that way, as do their employers. People begin to see what are really relations between people as relations between things (every human relationship mainly an economic one).

In schools, children have been routinely commodified, sold to companies like McGraw-Hill (textbooks) and Coca-Cola. This process has accelerated in the past decade. In schools that serve poor and working-class communities, commodification grows severe as kids are sold to Channel One, Nike, and others to gain vital school supplies, whereas schools serving wealthier parents can count on the inequitable distribution of taxes and private donations to offer a wide range of opportunities from swimming pools to art classes. The message to impecunious kids of color sitting in bad school facilities with no libraries: You are worth less.

Commodity fetishism creates an inverted world: The more you have, the more you are. In schools, the higher the test scores, the better the school. The inversion: The higher the test score, the more rich, White, and yet subservient you are. The more you have, the more you are controlled by it.

### Reification

Human relations among people disguised as the relations between things become so habitual that it seems natural. Things people produce govern peoples' lives. Natural laws, really inventions of people, replace real analytical abilities in U.S. curricula. The economy's invisible hand is credited with doing this or that, unquestioned as to whose economy is doing what to whom. Supply and demand, or scarcity and choice, are seen as the core of economics rather than seeing economics as the story of the social relations people create over time in their struggle with nature to produce and reproduce life, or in political science, discussing democracy as if it had nothing to do with social inequality. All of these devices strip people of their own ability to locate themselves within the changing nature of history, to abstract their social positions and see the commonalities of what appear to be individual problems but are truly social problems, and hence to exert control over their own lives.

Normalcy in capitalist countries is really fabricated assent to exploitation masked as liberty: hegemony. Racist segregation is routinely posed as a matter of choice. High-stakes testing is conditioned into the culture, seen as

the key to educational assessment, when all the data say that multiple forms of assessment are necessary for validity. As fetishes, test scores are good examples of reification in school. Curricula standardization and high-stakes test results are used as proof for false promises to make schooling more equitable, when in fact they are simply harsher measures for social control. Test scores are worshiped uncritically, influencing peoples' lives far beyond their real value, affecting real estate values, for example. The uncritical view of capital's processes as normalcy is reification.

### Crises, Resistance, Change, Racism, and Schools

Marx's analysis said that the workings of capital above are riddled with crises, feed on them.<sup>42</sup> These crises are interrelated, but to take them in parts:

- a. Overproduction: Because over time capital uses technology, speed-up, wage cuts, and so on to drive down wages and raise the levels of surplus value, at a certain point, the mass of workers can no longer afford to buy the products they produce.
- b. Declining rate of profits: Because labor creates all value and at the same time employers must invest heavily in technological improvements to keep ahead of competitors, value stored up in the means of production comes to outweigh value in what Marx called variable (or more profitable) capital, that is, the workers. So although the workers become impoverished by overproduction, the bosses are driven toward other ways to increase surplus value beyond technological advances. Rising inequality appears in schools in the form of hungry kids, collapsed families, the lack of books and supplies, and attacks on teacher health care, benefits and retirement funds.
- c. War: Every continent is now either the home of a war or sending participants to a war, and it has been like this for more than 100 years. That should be proof enough of the capital = war axiom. Nationalist war (not class war) marches directly into classrooms, into the curricula.
- d. Change: The multitude of crises may lead to social change. World War I gave birth to the Russian revolution, World War II to the Chinese revolution. Revolutions are usually made by the young.

At a certain point in capitalism's development, finance and monopoly capital (banking interests with big fish always eating little fish, etc.) dominate even manufacturing capital. Facing similar pressures of the earliest capitalists, financiers must seek new markets, cheap labor, and raw materials at a

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frantic pace, a tempo that the centrality of money and technology makes possible and necessary.

Capital has always accumulated land, resources, and surplus labor from all over the world. Today's intensified imperialism, typified now by oil wars, was born within and along with nations and relies on national armies for a good part of its strength; the battle for resources frequently becomes imperialist war (as in World War I, Vietnam, Iraq, etc.) between nations, each ruling class claiming ethical high ground. Marx said workers in imperialist armies "do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies."<sup>43</sup>

Imperialist wars were the logical and necessary culmination of capitalist development. Although wars were an indication of the weaknesses of capitalists (and would lead to revolutions as happened later in the Soviet Union and China), capital does not die because of crises but thrives in the destruction. Still, the processes of capitalism, of which war is a part, also draw people together in unprecedented ways, offering them intellectual and material possibilities to live in new ways, if they so choose.

Crisis does not produce or sustain real change. Human critical consciousness, the falsely proclaimed product of education, is the only factor that animates and preserves fundamental social change.

Love, work, knowledge (the struggle for what is true), and the struggle for freedom, equality, and creativity are the motivating forces of history, the heart of resistance and revolution. People resist because they must to live. From this daily struggle, in the midst of crises, real change can be won.

Schools, like any workplace, are disputed territory where people resist in struggles to be more creative, knowledgeable, free, connected with others, and better paid. For example, it is cheaper to expand class size in schools rather than hire enough teachers so an ideal number of about twelve kids would be in each class. School workers have historically resisted the expansion of class size and tried to reduce it for decades, just as the struggle for the shorter work week typifies the history of the working class.

Resistance to capital's crises and wars can reasonably be expected to come first from the people who arrived in life shortchanged (without capital, poor people of color), and it is fair to say that the wisdom of poor people of color, seen by most academics as an object to be repaired, is likely to be deeper than those whose inheritance is hubris.

Resistance, however, is not necessarily transformation (a complete overcoming). Resistance can merely re-create oppression in new ways. In schools, kids can resist by refusing to learn anything at all, rejecting the struggle for knowledge, joining racist gangs, choosing self-destruction. They fail to see that



authentic education is revolutionary: The struggle for what is true. Teachers can win class size limits for a few, as California schools limited kindergarten through grade three class size. But, over time, this victory simply created a mass divide in the work force, when the struggle for caps on all of kindergarten through grade twelve was abandoned by the unions.

Education, always simultaneously individual and social, presupposes change—quantities of work turn into qualitative difference, as in many forms of literacy practice forging a literate person. At issue remains what it is that people need to know and, significantly, how do they need to come to know it to get beyond capital, or “How might working people break out of what is really a vast company store, an international casino?” Ideas and pedagogy would seem to be a key product of schools—as would a full examination of the role of racism as a prop for injustice.

### Government, the State, and Schooling

Marx viewed the state and government as directly tied to the system of production in which it was born. Feudal estates and serfdom gave rise to kings and queens, whereas mass production and finance capital gave rise to bourgeoisie democracy; but each system of rule (government rooted in inequality) was or is mainly a weapon in the hands of the powerful, not a neutral force seeking justice for all, though the state can be used by the powerful to appear to resolve crises that pose a common problem.<sup>44</sup>

Schools are governmental institutions, subject to rule. Other state institutions are somewhat easier to decode. The military is clearly a hierarchical weapon of the powerful, as are the police and the tax system. The welfare system exists to regulate, not truly provide for, poor people (and why are there poor people?). The prisons are full of the poor.

Today’s schools are, above all, capitalist schools. They are not, as comfortable postmodernists have claimed, semiautonomous space or relatively autonomous areas. The only thing that is semiautonomous today is capital itself, rushing beyond conscious human control—the broom the sorcerer’s apprentice must chase.<sup>45</sup> Capital’s schools serve, mostly, capital’s interests, while at the same time, opposition occurs, as it does in any workplace.

This contradiction becomes graphic. It is no longer true that education will move one up in society because the general trajectory is down. But a critical education can save your life, perhaps keep you out of a war.<sup>46</sup> It is capital’s state, the government, that must sustain apartheid conditions in U.S. schools.

### Class Consciousness

Class consciousness is the awareness that one is

part of a social group that, through common work activity at the same time reproduces a social system and others in it who do not have the same interests regarding that system, and who do not participate in it in the same manner... it is an orientation toward political action... an awareness of others, of those who are similar and those who are different with regard to their long-term interests, and an awareness of the social structure that makes their differences real.<sup>47</sup>

Class consciousness implies antiracism and anticapitalism, as well as a vision of a better future against which today's actions can be tested. This is not to simply reduce every question of race, sex, religion, or ethnicity immediately to greed and profits, but it is to say that the war for surplus value has, at the end of the day, decisive influence in setting up all the social relations of capital.

Capital's schools, racism, nationalism, sexism, and religion all disguise social problems, problems of class, as well as problems of individual people, competing races and nations, or fate. That is, capital's schools are designed, above all, to create a veneer of limited knowledge, but to wipe out class consciousness. To date, this is succeeding.

Class consciousness has been seen as

- a. a logical and necessary result of the advance of productive forces—that is, when the world is industrialized, people will become class conscious;<sup>48</sup>
- b. an awareness of the whole picture of capital through the daily bitter experiences that capital must offer the working class and the intervention of an advanced party;<sup>49</sup>
- c. an offering to working people from organized intellectuals and dedicated activists, especially as crises arise;<sup>50</sup>
- d. workers' spontaneous response to their collective, persistent problems, because work is always alienating;<sup>51</sup> and
- e. the natural product of intellectuals produced by the working class itself, organic intellectuals whose ideas can be more easily accepted and grasped.<sup>52</sup>

None of these formulas has worked well. Class consciousness, then, is a pedagogical and practical problem that has not been resolved; it plagues the working classes of the world as crises of capital—inequality, imperialist war,

rising irrationalism, international bankruptcies, militarism, and so on—making the current situation especially menacing and urgent.

The crux of the pedagogical issue goes beyond transcending racist alienation and defeating exploitation. At the heart of the question is the view that people can overcome the master–slave relationship consciously, yet not re-create it at a new level to forge a new society, a caring community, from the rubble of the old.

### THINKING THROUGH CAPITAL, EDUCATION, AND RACISM

Capital's segregated racist schools miseducate people about how to think, the processes of knowledge won through centuries of struggle. Although the scientific method is taught in schools, it is taught in the absence of (a) abstraction—that is, what is the historical location of this, who gains, and so on?—and (b) examination of external and internal contradictions—that is, how does school relate to society, and how do issues of exploitation, alienation, commodity fetishism, reification, and change appear in school?

Few teachers I have witnessed offer “this is how I think about this, my philosophy,” because they simply have never had the chance to wonder about it. School knowledge is metaphysical. One subject is unrelated to another—mathematics without history, art without mathematics, race apart from class. In school, change is always distant, of the past, and incremental, not revolutionary. Above all, students are rarely taught that they themselves are historians and makers of history—not the objects of others but collective subjects of their own designs.<sup>53</sup>

Kids are seldom taught ways to abstract from their immediate circumstances to conduct investigations of the contradictions in their own lives: What limits me? Why am I encouraged to see social problems as individual problems, and so forth? Schooling miseducates most people to become victims of history rather than to look at a globe and think, “This is ours; how shall we choose to interact with it?”

Designed to wipe out historical understanding, NCLB—supported by both major political parties, the U.S. Chambers of Commerce, the Business Roundtable, and the major teacher unions—is a good example of the role of the state as an enforcer of alienated, commodified, reified schooling leading to crises in education.<sup>54</sup>

Teachers, mistrained in many colleges of education that value pedagogical methods over curricular substance (i.e., not seeing the two as a relationship

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but promoting a one-sided view), do not learn to search for the bigger picture, to abstract, either. Without abstracting beyond education and racism, the question, "How do education, school workers, and racism fit and function in our world today?" is only partially answered, and therefore only partially addressed.<sup>55</sup> Once abstraction is established, however, we can begin to examine its processes and how it might change.

Capital's miseducated people who cannot locate themselves as makers of history rely on others to create and preserve social change; the artifice of priests. This obliterates the possibility of a mass, informed movement of people dedicated for action on the side of reason, democracy, and equality against racism. People can make their own histories, "become the heroes of their own life," if they can grasp the circumstances that surround them.<sup>56</sup> Those who cannot grasp the whole of the social processes, capital, have no North Star. Clearly this is a pedagogical challenge.

Capitalist schools are profoundly hierarchical, and growing more so. The hierarchies can be seen in pay scales, the relationship of geography and power (who has the most space and the most desirable space?), class- and race-tracking kids, the deep split between teachers and support workers, and the differing ways that parents and kids are treated depending on their power or income.

Habituation to hierarchy deepens subservience. Even oppositionists seek to mimic their bosses, to become like them not overcome them—union hacks or Black mayors. The last century demonstrates that even profound changes in the productive forces of society and violent shifts in the ownership of production do not necessarily create the class consciousness that is vital to make and preserve social change.

NCLB will and has led to resistance, some coming from officials who feel it is underfunded, some from resisters who oppose its central goals—divide and rule. As schools are reconstituted, closed, privatized, made small, and so on, youth and school workers in poor communities will fight back, especially as war bangs louder on the schoolroom door. It is the task of educators to make sense of that resistance, to see that it is pedagogical resistance, a school better than school.

In sum, race, class, and schools within the system of capital are all designed to reinvigorate capitalism unless an organized conscious effort can be built to criticize and overturn it. Now, within a criticism of a study of racism, we will see how education workers, students, and community people are positioned to change the world.

## REFORMERS AS REACTIONARIES

### Misleading the Struggle for Truth against Racism

Though the United States's greatest historian—a young W. E. B. Du-Bois—is often approvingly quoted, “The problem of the twentieth century is the color line,” in fact, the problem of the ages is the linkage of irrationalism—the witting or unwitting suspension of critique—to exploitation (of labor, oil, places to buy and sell, the profits of deception) and power. Du-Bois, a Marxist, recognized this in saying that the way to liberation was through “systematic investigation,” overcoming ignorance.<sup>57</sup>

Investigation absent action, however, is mere library work. Social practice is key, but social practice can just re-create more and more of the same practice. At some point, when life and curiosity cause a significant problem to be posed, imagination—usually won through self-actualized freedom—must leap ahead of what is toward what might be. People must learn to fight for a way to live in which they themselves have never lived. It is possible to choose a united, caring world and make decisions about how to get there. The alternative is decades of barbarism. Curiosity, imagination, and freedom should be the bedrocks of schooling, even in the restrictive, militarized atmosphere of education today.

The transition to a communal world, “renewal,” as James Baldwin called it, is theoretical and practical; a matter of thought, life, death, and love. Abolitionist John Brown rightly saw that “moral suasion” alone would never create social change, but he also recognized that once a problem—racism and slavery—had been posed, “a settlement of this question, that must come up for settlement sooner than you think.”<sup>58</sup>

More often than not, it is civil strife built up over time—active resistance—that calls attention to the need for a settlement. Timothy Tyson, speaking about an uprising against racism in the South, puts it this way: “[They] . . . did not even consider altering the racial caste system until rocks began to fly and buildings began to burn.”<sup>59</sup>

Brown, who was reconciled with his death by his actions in life, preceded Baldwin: “One must *earn* one’s death by confronting the conundrum of life.” Renewal comes with danger. All that appears to be constant must be made transitory, from the processes of today’s economy to the challenges of daily life.<sup>60</sup> In sum, what we do counts.

Schools and racism are inextricably linked to capitalism and violence. Whereas each of us must struggle for our daily bread, schools claim to offer an opportunity to study what is, systematically, to learn and imagine what

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might be. To a degree, settled by power, schools can be held to that promise. This study of real material conditions requires freedom, which means a fight with those whose interests are tied to oppression and ignorance. That fight will be severe and engaged within specific circumstances, each of us determining how we may make the greatest contribution over time. There will be a fight. Connecting reason to power has always been dangerous, as Galileo learned. At issue is what form it will take, how the mass of people can learn from the past, and who wins.

Beyond that, I pose three questions to those who struggle for social justice: (1) how can we educators keep our integrity and survive? (2) what is it that people need to know, and how must we come to know it, to lead reasonably free, caring, connected lives? and (3) why is it that it is so easy to turn so many people into instruments of their own oppression? I don't suggest I can fully answer those questions, but I offer them to stimulate a greater understanding of what follows.

### The Centrality of School

School workers in North America are well positioned to make social change. In the twenty-first century, schools, not industrial workplaces, are the focal points of social life. School work cannot be outsourced, although it can be degraded. The industrial working class, typically seen as the motor of change, has been decimated. Their jobs have gone first to the South, then farther south to Mexico, and now to China. Along the way, industrial workers, misled by their unions, became habituated to making concessions to their employers, and both industrial and teacher union leaders declared their loyalty to the bosses, partners in production.<sup>61</sup>

Educators are slightly better off than most working people today. Most educators have health benefits. But school workers' fates are directly tied to the children they teach, whose fates are, above all else, determined by birthright. This is especially true as wages and working conditions are tied to kids' test scores, which reflect little more than social economic status.<sup>62</sup> Even though modest privileges set most teachers apart from the industrial working class and many students, teachers typically carry picket signs saying, "I don't want to strike, but I will," that is, they resist because they have to resist. Youth in school will have to resist as well to fend off the draft and military recruiters, to sever the noose of test results for graduation, and even to get books. Teachers' struggles are quite likely to trail behind the struggles of poor and working-class kids and parents, especially people of color who have historically led the way because they must act first to live.

Surely the promise and reality of school is contradictory. Schools declare they work with ideas, critical thinking, and children. Hence, school work is somewhat different from most jobs where critique is undesirable, and widgets are the purpose of the work. Educators have a little more freedom than most workers, although freedom is rapidly vanishing under a wave of standardization and high-stakes testing. Regimentation is designed to strip the learning processes of connectedness (math from writing, science from history); fragment learning; coerce school workers, students, and parents; and regulate what is known and how people come to know it. High-stakes testing is a form of child abuse, violence, which lies behind all activity of the government, such as truancy laws: come here or get arrested. Whether or not educational workers continue to conduct this abuse without resistance is a test of their own analytical powers, ethics, and courage; a test of what was probably an early promise to themselves.

Schools serve capital's governments' own inhuman needs: profits, mindless workers and soldiers, and people who do not ask, "Why are things as they are?" Most teachers cannot announce themselves as serious agents of real change, but they can demonstrate the processes of struggling for what is true, even if they cannot openly pronounce it.

To reiterate, schools, mirroring and reproducing life in the United States, are more segregated than they were in 1954, before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Therefore, teaching to overcome racism in the United States today is complex. Inside a segregated box, it is hard to see out.<sup>63</sup> Research may or may not help.

### Whitewashing Class: An Academic Outlook on Racism

To illustrate the academic research, I refer to *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*, edited by seven of the most prominent intellectuals in academia today, professors in prestigious universities, sociologists, educators, economists, and winners of awards.<sup>64</sup> I choose this text because of its quality, its superior reportage of clear research, its freshness, its passionate striving to attack racism, because its outlook is shared by many educators, and because of the illustrative stance of the writers.

The authors of *Whitewashing Race* graphically address a position that pervades liberal academia, a stance I suggest is, despite the power of its analysis, wrong. Taken piece by piece (with my critique) they say:

1. *We live in an inequitable society.* Racism is so pervasive that most people do not see it, as fish are unaware of the water. But, the authors say, a lot of research has been produced that denies racist inequality, posing Black

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people as failures of merit and, beyond that, set up for failure by affirmative action programs. The authors believe that conservatives now claim there is no significant level of racism in the United States; the country has achieved a color-blind state and therefore programs like affirmative action, welfare, and entitlements not only operate inside a fiction, they actually work against White people who bear no blame for the past. Those conservatives are the target of the text, posed as a new threat.

Denial of racist inequality is akin to supporting White supremacy. Our academics argue, "White perspective is not the product of skin color but of culture and experience... the perspective of the namers, the holders of 'natural privilege,' and invisible power."<sup>65</sup>

Although the notion of White perspective has to be seen as a problem when taken apart from class perspective, there is of course nothing new about racist positions, all going back to the first race-tagged slave. Nevertheless, on the other side of the coin, it is common, even today, to look back into history and seek to judge people of the past using the standards of the past, and to conclude, for example, about Abraham Lincoln's, or Thomas Jefferson's racism that "the society was so steeped in racism, well, who knew?" The slaves knew. That is who knew.

Scientific, academic racism is not new. Bought and paid scientists at work for domination have, for more than a century, fabricated a litany of reasons for White supremacy from bad genes to bad culture, single-family homes, incompetent languages, innate illiteracy, profligacy, and so on. We can, now, simply follow the money.<sup>66</sup> And in each instance, it makes sense to witness how the money flows to and from institutions of society and the demands of a capitalist economy, the exploitation of alienated labor in which working people do not control the process or products of their work and enrich their enemies at the same time. The authors of *Whitewashing Race* are not willing to take that final, logical, italicized step and say the unprintable word: capitalism.

Enforcement of racist social inequality, say the authors, has taken a variety of paths: the sharpening segregation of Black people in the cities, disinvestment in the cities coupled with economic incentives available to Whites to leave urban areas, segregated and unequal education, the systematic imprisonment of Black people accelerated in recent decades, the eradication of civil rights laws and antiracist employment protection backed by calls for color-blind legality, and the erosion of voting rights and political equality.

2. *We live within a system of unequal schooling*. *Whitewashing Race* buttresses the case with an examination of school inequality in defense of public education—attacking what they see as an effort by elites to eliminate public schools. They go at positions taken by the authors of the notorious

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*The Bell Curve*: "A substantial difference in cognitive ability distributions separates whites from blacks. . . . Latino and black immigrants are . . . putting some downward pressure on the distribution of intelligence."<sup>67</sup>

The writers also address the more contemporary *America in Black and White*, which insists that it is an advantage to be a minority person in the color-blind United States, that affirmative action (which the *The Bell Curve* also suggests will never work—bad Black genes laying it to ruin) is, in fact, a form of discrimination that disadvantages White people.<sup>68</sup> In sum, the goals of the civil rights movement are won. Now color-coded affirmative action creates a mass injustice. Proof for these scientists is high-stakes standardized test scores, which writers of *Whitewashing Race* largely also accept as a worthy instrument.

*Whitewashing Race* counters conservative attacks on public schools with a brief history of systematic racism in the United States: slavery, the continued segregation of schools, the impoverishment of inner-city schools via shifts in the tax structure and lack of funding, and the political geography of segregation.

Although it appears the authors would understand that it is not possible to do school reform without doing economic and social reform in society, *Whitewashing Race* insists that the way to fix racist school conditions is through, "enforcing clearly defined state standards organized to achieve learning levels necessary for black students to attend four year colleges . . . raise expectations in low-income schools."<sup>69</sup>

On one hand, the state and government, which were active partners with the rich and the processes of capitalism and the changes in the tax structure, for example, are seen as a solution to the problems they helped create. On the other hand, the authors cannot see the use of capital's state standards as a method to gain greater control over what is taught and how in public schooling. Indeed, the very notion of public schooling, which is neither public (segregated along lines of class and race) nor especially educative (promoting racism, nationalism, and militarism, while denying the role of class in society) is never seen as a social problem in itself.<sup>70</sup>

School rebellions by teachers, students, and community people have taken a variety of forms in the last decade. Teachers in Tijuana seized their schools using tactics of the worldwide sit-down strikes of the 1930s.<sup>71</sup> In Detroit in 1999, a wildcat teachers' strike, with mass student and community support, was motivated by "books, supplies, and lower class size." Students have walked out of schools en masse, protesting issues from bad food to high-stakes tests to the current wars. The academic authors note none of this and clearly have no interest in supporting or fomenting it, nor do they keep an eye

on the poorest of the poor and their resistance and budding social movements, who resist because they have to resist but whose resistance could be informed by educators who have had the privilege of time to form a broader view, to abstract.

3. *Black people are jailed more often than Whites.* Black people have long been imprisoned far out of proportion to White people, but the acceleration of this process since the 1980s is remarkable. The conservative ruse is to declare the criminal justice system now holds no bias and, therefore, something untold must be amiss among Black people.

*Whitewashing Race* shows that, in every step of the system—beginning with the role of an impoverished birthright; color-coded employment practices; biased juvenile authorities; the role of the police, the judge, and the law; meeting the bondsperson; not being able to buy the lawyer or bribe the judge or prosecutor—racist discrimination guides the way.

*Whitewashing Race* goes well past much liberal analysis, which Aldoph Reed Jr. assailed in *The Nation* a decade ago: “We can trace Murray’s [*The Bell Curve*] legitimacy directly to the spinelessness, opportunism and racial bad faith of the liberals in the social policy establishment. . . . Most of those objecting to Herrnstein and Murray’s racism . . . embrace positions that are almost indistinguishable, except for the resort to biology.”<sup>72</sup> Accepting the validity of IQ testing, liberals have offered a variety of excuses: single-parent families, “lack of prenatal care . . . no breast-feeding, not enough mental stimulation for infants.” It is a false quarrel—liberals and conservatives operating from a common starting point.<sup>73</sup>

*Whitewashing Race* upgrades the debate with an examination of the processes showing “that discriminatory outcomes can be produced by actions that appear bureaucratically neutral or color-blind,” countering the notion, “that crime and poverty are not linked.”<sup>74</sup> But although *Whitewashing Race* is willing to connect criminality and the economy, the authors do not tie together crime and capitalism, the crime noted by Proudhon: “Property is robbery.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, the radical to-the-root question is not “Why do people steal?” But more to the point: “Why do impoverished people not steal more?” This radicalism is absent in *Whitewashing Race*, and, therefore, the authors are left with urging a “more serious and creative [solution] . . . of a legacy of discrimination and disinvestment in black communities.”<sup>76</sup>

This will not happen in the absence of social strife, and even then most reform efforts would seek to restore the rule of capital, veiled by a host of investigatory committees, research bodies, and welfare programs, all backed up by the force of the economy (those involved in uprisings will be fired) and the armed forces and police.<sup>77</sup>

4. *Civil rights laws have been nearly eliminated.* Today, we hear echoes of the nineteenth century, “Whites . . . maintained privileges by law, by conscious acts of discrimination, and by acts of violence.”<sup>78</sup> Economic inequality<sup>79</sup> or “white accumulation and black disaccumulation,” plays an important role in legal affairs.<sup>80</sup>

But, really, so what? In *Whitewashing Race*, Anatole France’s famous homily, “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread,” is only tangentially taken up. Nor is the tsunami of Regan/Bush/Clinton/Bush-appointed judges, one to the right of the next, filling the courts now, discouraging even the most crusading lawyers from litigation. “Discrimination and . . . systematic disinvestment,” as causes for continuing a racist legal system dances around the point: the relationship of government and capitalism.<sup>81</sup>

5. *Voting rights laws run parallel to civil rights laws.* The result of a mass violent uprising in the Civil War, and a somewhat more peaceful uprising in the 1960s, voting rights laws, like all law, simply reflect political reality. Authors in *Whitewashing Race* recognize that voting rights minus economic opportunity and jobs are not sufficient to win justice, but the authors believe the vote was a key goal, and victory, of the civil rights movement: the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>82</sup>

In fact, voting rights were, early on, a secondary goal of the civil rights movement. At issue initially were jobs and education. Foundations encouraged a shift toward voting rights as the movement gained strength, and the movement leaders shifted their attention to the ballot box.<sup>83</sup>

That aside, *Whitewashing Race* does recognize that electoral power goes in two directions: those who have people and those who have money.<sup>84</sup> Politicians want groups of voters and donations. Recent electoral campaigns demonstrate that groups of voters in the United States can be narrowly parsed out, from evangelical Christians and antiabortionists, working down to the most base of interests to: “What’s in it for me?” Moreover, the color-blind claim of conservative electoral analyses really just masks a hidden majority rank.

The authors fail to note, though, that money buys votes, corrupts ballot counts, and rules the courts, that is, runs the show. Those who have the cash make the rules. The authors are clear, however: If a ballot count was conducted along lines that the vote has demonstrated in the most recent national elections, racists would win.

*Whitewashing Race* helps prove this case by demonstrating that there are clear voting lines between Black people and White people—more distinct than between, say, Democrats and Republicans—on questions of welfare,

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inequality, public health, and so forth. There is discernible race consciousness in the United States.

So what is to be done? The gap between what is and what ought to be is filled with dreams, “a set of principles,” in *Whitewashing Race*: Tax the rich. Promote diversity. Raise the minimum wage. Invest in public projects.<sup>85</sup> Create a fund for reparations for past injustices. Reestablish civil rights and voting rights laws more fairly, that is, change the law. Improve schools by transforming teacher seniority rights, the standardization of the curricula and teaching methods, and so on. Why should this be done? Because we all lose from racism, the nationalist’s solution.<sup>86</sup> The authors close with a quote from James Baldwin, “make American what America must become,” or we will all lose.<sup>87</sup>

Baldwin was wrong on that. Most of us will lose, and surely those who stand with their feet on the necks of others cannot move, but they do live longer, have more constitutional rights, don’t go to jail, and go to better schools where what is a lie to a working-class kid is not a lie to a wealthy scion.

The blind spots in *Whitewashing Race*, as in most liberal views of the sources and efforts to overcome racism in school and elsewhere are:

1. A failure to grasp that the state and government are not neutral observers seeking justice over time, but weapons of class violence for those in power, and, from another angle, elites are rarely if ever so overwhelmed by goodwill or evidence of suffering and injustice that they pick their own pockets and wipe out the basis of their mastery;
2. Struggles to get the state to battle racism in schools and elsewhere mean that energy will be expended in cul-de-sacs, and when there is success, it is the success of missionaries, not the ineradicable organized social movement of conscious people required to sustain any kind of change;
3. In this case, that to turn to the standardization of the curricula, for example, is to necessarily accept the twin maneuver of ruling elites all over the Western world, the Taylorization of schooling noosed by high-stakes standardized testing designed to deepen the segregation of schooling, veiled by bogus scientific measurement (the true measures being race, class, and willingness to be subservient);
4. The liberal movement disguises class domination and impoverishes potential poor and working-class movements to counter it;
5. A belief that research, discourse, and voting—state-sponsored education as opposed to direct organized action—will somehow make social change;
6. An appeal to liberal elites when it has been liberal elites from Johnson to Carter to Clinton who initiated the war on Vietnam, wiped out mental health facilities, and eradicated the welfare system; and

7. A failure to locate the urgency of this historical moment, a profound crisis of international imperialism in which the United States is no longer a power on the rise but a desperate player clearly willing to “exterminate all the brutes,” to maintain its dominion.

In sum, although research, voting, appeals to conscience, and so on are hardly harmful, they will not produce a mass movement of conscious people who can make and preserve change.

John Brown wanted social life, “to be organized on a less selfish basis, for while material interests gained something by the deification of pure selfishness, men and women lost much by it . . . all great reforms . . . were based on broad, generous, self-sacrificing principles.”<sup>88</sup> He understood that the struggle from what is to what ought to be which was his dedication, went beyond the missionary sense of benevolence to real self-sacrifice, in solidarity, not benevolence.

#### WHAT TO DO, REALLY?

Radical critique of capitalist schooling and racism must be connected with the daily life of school workers, parents, and community people and, simultaneously, affixed to the curious passion that is assassinated by most schooling. Unleashing inquisitive enthusiasm in students and educators requires freedom—always an issue settled by power.

In schools, power is won by uniting students, parents, and community people in addressing common problems and demonstrating their common sources. Unity makes resistance possible. Although many battles will be lost, as in the fights against high-stakes testing and regimented curricula, winning is better defined as assisting more and more people to be critically class conscious, so they can carry the struggle.

Overturing capital is a reasonable, rational, long-term goal but a process that will involve a great deal of destruction. Promises made by radicals in the past, promises of a quick shift to better material lives, will probably be impossible to keep. Life will not, for most people, quickly get better, particularly not as we stand at the threshold of an area of fascist barbarism.<sup>89</sup>

It follows that if change is going to happen, it is going to take a long time. The perseverance necessary to motivate people over that gulf between what is and what should be cannot be built on a vision of more goods and merchandise. It can be built, though, on a promise for a meaningful life as a

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resister, a revolutionary now, and a system of ethics that is drawn from a view of where we want to go.

Those ethics, involving inclusion, antiracism, antisexism, action-orientation, radical critique, internationalism, democracy, equality, and deep comradeship are drawn from thousands of years of history, not from a thunderclap. Ethics do not stand outside of material circumstances to be applied mechanically but creatively from a careful examination of things as they are and how they might change. And with an eye on the future, education must address human needs, desires, and dreams.

Capital, racism, and schools are of a piece today, one aiding the other. In this context, adults are likely to trail kids in social action, but adults can set the stage and the goals for kids, then learn from them.

It follows that the charge to every ethical education worker, kid, parent, and community worker is to recognize the limits set by capital and to see how, in daily life, we can go beyond them.

Close friendships over time are inherently radical today, in an era of disposable people. Close friendships make possible the reintroduction of joy into schools.

Remembering the pervasiveness of racism, and determining to notice and fight its appearances in one way or another, every day, connects theory and action. Integrate the playground, the teachers' lounge, or the cafeteria. Investigate the process of capital, from reintroducing labor as a central force in history. At the other end of capital's circuits, examine commodity prices and the geographies of power by measuring, comparing, and contrasting, playgrounds.

Organize field trips for poor kids and rich kids to exchange schools. Teach the hows and whys of having a demonstration using any example from history: the Boston Tea Party to the Boxer Rebellion, to the Paris Commune, to the civil rights or antiwar movements. We can teach that things change, that quantitative change can become qualitative change, that each of us can understand and transform the world. Restore the role of theory to schooling, in the real struggle to gain and test knowledge in the material world. Fight for the freedom to teach to a genuine connection of a unique student in a special community meeting a particular educator.

Justice, however, demands organization. New truly revolutionary organization is desperately needed—beyond reformist, divisive, nationalist, racist unionism, beyond the reformers of the past, beyond socialism. Transitional organizations may form the path of social practice that guides the way.

In schools, which I have argued are now the central organizing points of class struggle in the Americas, organization needs to unite school workers, all school workers, parents, community people, and others not only to

maximize power but to split off the opportunism and individualism that propels nearly all of academic life and go beyond schools to initiate work in the military, on the docks, and in the remaining factories. Within this, adults will need to learn from kids, White people take leadership from people of color, men take criticism from women, all sharing the joys and burdens of ethical transformation, personal and social.

It is now nearly impossible for people to openly lead truly radical organizations and stay employed, get tenure, and so on. This means that some people will need to be professional organizer-researchers, others will need to be able to join anonymously. Whatever the case, it is clear that to meet a historically well-organized, armed, ruthless opposition that holds all the powers of violence of the state, a revolutionary force must be developed that not only sets itself in opposition to capital but raises its fist as well for equality, community, all for one and one for all.

In the United States, the only school-based organization that has had the courage to name capitalism, consistently link racism and capitalism, examine the present with an eye on the future, and organize against capital through research and action has been the Rouge Forum.<sup>90</sup> Other school resister groups have entered the fray, like the people behind *Substance* edited by George Schmidt in Chicago ([www.substancenews.com](http://www.substancenews.com)), and many individual researchers (like Ohanian and Emery) have contributed to the struggle. In England, the Cole-Hill group and the *Journal for Critical Policy Studies* have played parallel roles.<sup>91</sup>

There is clear disagreement over the goals of the members of all these transitory groups. Some seek to preserve public schooling in its ideal form. Others want to make schooling ungovernable. Others still seek to foment enough strife to abolish capital's schools and create opposition freedom schools, as did the African National Congress in South Africa for nearly a decade. This debate goes directly back to the heart of the questions: Why have school? Why does racism persist? The debaters must hear Rhett Butler, quoted in the introduction but summarized by Jay Gould, "I can buy one half of the working class to kill the other half."<sup>92</sup>

Eventually, the many will not be ruled by the few. Social justice and reason will prevail, but not soon. In the interim, a reasonably sane life contributing to the common good can be won through revolutionary action and theory.

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