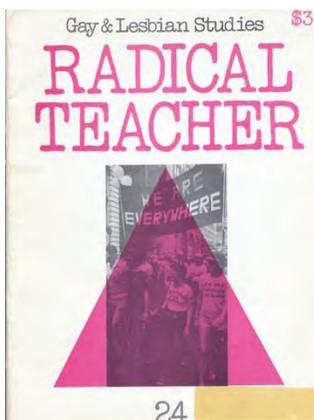


# RT 100 Anniversary Issue

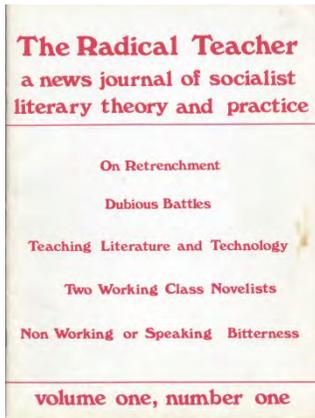


# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

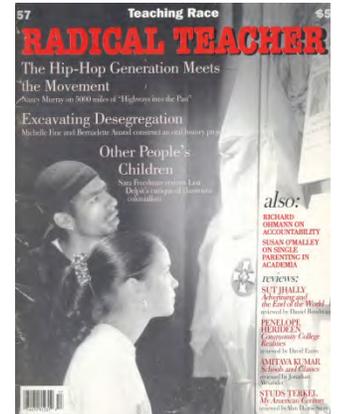
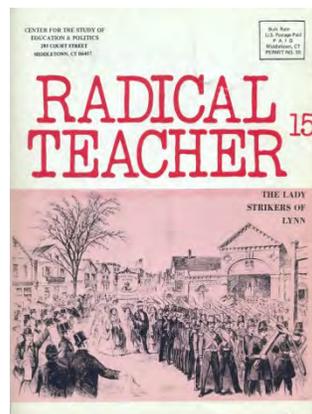
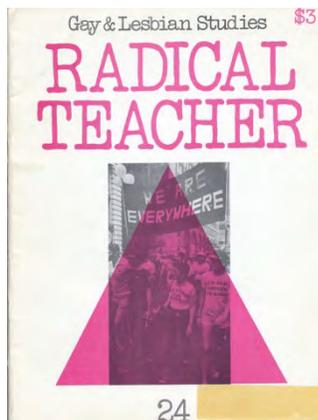
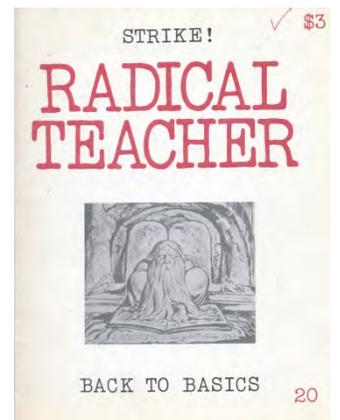
## Introduction to *Radical Teacher's* 100<sup>th</sup> Issue

by Michael Bennett, Linda Dittmar, and Paul Lauter



# RT 100

# Anniversary Issue



To acknowledge and celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> issue of *Radical Teacher*, we are reprinting selected essays from our very first issue (December 1975) through our last year as a print journal (2012). Though the selection process was never entirely clear or agreed upon, we have tried to choose articles that reflect *Radical Teacher's* focus on class, race, and gender/sexuality, as well as on the socio-economic contexts of education and educational institutions, primarily but not exclusively in the United States. We also wanted some essays that emphasized theory and some that emphasized practice, always hoping that these foci came together as praxis. We tried to balance historical sweep with essays that stood out for their timeless insights and clarity. The essays are arranged chronologically, with certain themes and interests recurring.

According to the cover of the first issue, we were *The Radical Teacher: a news journal of socialist literary theory and practice*. The literary focus was an outgrowth of the fact that we were sponsored by the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages, an affiliate organization of the Modern Language Association. The table of contents featured five articles: one essay and one interview critiquing higher education in the United States, two essays on literary study, and one on socialist journalism. All were written by university English professors who were members of the "Editorial Group" (later to become the "Editorial Collective"); four of those individuals who were part of the initial Editorial Group (Louis Kampf, Paul Lauter, Susan O'Malley, and Dick Ohmann) are now-retired professors who are still on the masthead and active in the journal. Given this social formation, it's not surprising that we have tended to focus on literary and cultural teaching at the university level.

However, the editorial that began this first issue, reprinted below, points to the Editorial Board's desire "to be open to other disciplines, rather than accepting the usual self-imposed divisions of standard academic journals. Our hope is also to address students, both graduate and undergraduate; all teachers of whatever level, those in public schools, those instructing graduate students, those in various alternative institutions around the country." The Board/Collective acted on that desire over the years, printing articles by and about what teachers from various disciplines do and think from grade school to grad school and in various alternative educational environments (e.g., community schools, prisons, and the Occupy movement). We have also tried to consider the organization and institutional structures within which radical teachers function at all levels of education.

That first issue, and many subsequent to it, also had on its back cover a quotation from Mao Tse-tung's "On Practice": "If you want to know the taste of a pear, you must change the pear by eating it yourself. If you want to know the theory and methods of revolution, you must take part in revolution. All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience." The editorial board had a number of hilarious discussions about that quotation, including one about maybe naming the magazine "The Pear." But sanity prevailed. It was not that the quotation misstated our

goals, or some of them; but the provenance suggested a kind of sectarianism we wished then, and now, to avoid.

In the second issue, the subtitle of *The Radical Teacher* was gone. Beginning with the third issue, the definite article disappeared. Our first book review, of Editorial Group member Dick Ohmann's *English in America*, appeared in issue 3, along with a spirited exchange between the author and other board members concerning audience: the efficacy of reaching out to liberals as opposed to rallying fellow radicals. A feature called "News for Educational Workers" began with issue 4. Both this feature and book reviews have been part of the journal ever since. Issue 4 also introduced the idea of a mini-cluster (called a "panel" at the time, as it originated in a panel at the MLA), on working class culture, which began *RT's* practice of alternating between miscellanies, mini-clusters on one or more themes, and issues devoted exclusively to one theme. The first issue devoted to a single cluster topic was issue 6 on "Women's Studies in the 70s: Moving Forward." Though earlier issues had included notes on teaching specific books, films, or lessons, the section called "Teaching Notes" was added with issue 11 in 1979. When a subtitle reappeared with issue 67 in 2003, the name and the format were as they remain: *Radical Teacher: a socialist, feminist, anti-racist journal on the theory and practice of teaching*. The topics represented by this subtitle, along with the more general socio-political contexts in which radical teaching occurs or is inhibited, structure the selections made below.

When *Radical Teacher* became an online open-access journal in 2012, we revisited the question of whether we wanted to have an explicitly "socialist" orientation. The overwhelming if not unanimous consensus was that we needed the word "socialist" to indicate that our brand of radicalism goes beyond left-liberalism to a form of anti-capitalism that is not a version of sectarian Marxism. In fact, part of our screening process for the editorial collective has long included efforts to maintain a radical socialist politics without falling into sectarian division, which is not to say that some of us aren't Marxists or Marxian, and that, like all thinkers on the left, we have definitely been influenced by Marx. One of the first essays we published that takes up this inheritance directly was Margaret Fay and Barbara Stuckey's "Who was Marx? What is Socialism? An Experiment in Socialist Pedagogy" in issue 9 (1978). *Radical Teacher* has never been interested in parsing Marxist theory—there are many journals that do so, badly or well—but we have always been involved in thinking of the implications of Marxist philosophy for social and political work, especially in the worlds of education. This emphasis is in keeping with our roots in the Radical Caucus of the Modern Language Association, which unlike the more theoretically focused MLA-affiliated Marxist Literary Group, with membership centered in research universities, is composed mostly of pedagogically focused radicals at colleges and teaching universities. Thus, over the years, *RT* has had less to say about Marxist theory than about working class literature and culture. For instance, a few years after Fay and Stuckey's essay, Dan Tannacito's "Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1906" 15 (March 1980) offered an original work with primary

documents as an important contribution to the field of working-class studies. Early in the twenty-first century, Lawrence Hanley's "Working-Class Cultural Studies in the University" 68 (Spring 2003) surveyed and expanded upon that field.

***When Radical Teacher became an online open-access journal in 2012, we revisited the question of whether we wanted to have an explicitly "socialist" orientation. The overwhelming if not unanimous consensus was that we needed the word "socialist" to indicate that our brand of radicalism goes beyond left-liberalism to a form of anti-capitalism that is not a version of sectarian Marxism.***

Our focus on gender and sexuality was evident from the beginning in terms of both who we are (striving for gender balance and LGBT-inclusiveness on the board) and what we publish. Kate Ellis's representative essay "Women, Culture, and Revolution" appeared in the second issue of *RT* and Florence Howe's "Feminism and the Study of Literature" in the following issue, but the essay we chose to include from our early years is Elaine Hedges' "Quilts and Women's Culture" from issue 4 (1977), where it was part of a cluster on working class culture. We have always tried to explore the ways in which gender, race, sexuality, and class intersect. It is not accidental that most of the early writing on race in *RT* is by women and feminist in orientation. One of *RT*'s strengths is precisely its recurrent highlighting of the intersectionality of modes of oppression and identity formation. The confluence of class and gender is the topic of Paul Lauter's "Working-Class Women's Literature—An Introduction to Study" (15, March 1980). Clusters/Special Issues on Women's Studies appeared in 1977, 1978, 1980, and 1984. Issues of gender and sexuality have been part of our repertoire ever since. Doug Honig's "The Gaylord Case: A Gay Teacher's Right to Teach," protesting a Washington State Supreme Court ruling that "being gay is and of itself enough to make one unfit to teach public school," appeared in the fifth issue. Perhaps our most reprinted essay, Tommi Avicelli's "He Defies You Still: The Memoirs of a Sissy," was published in our first Gay and Lesbian Studies issue (24, 1983). The word "queer" was added to the next such issue (45, Winter 1994). The fact that the "T" all-too-often gets left out of LGBT was the subject of issue 92 (Winter 2011), "Beyond the Special Guest: Teaching 'Trans' Now," which includes Kate Drabinski's essay "Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women's Studies Classroom." Throughout the life of our journal, we have tried to examine some of the ways in which the cultural politics of gender, race, and class (and how they intersected) were, are, and will continue to change and develop.

Race and anti-racism were topics addressed in the journal's first editorial and revisited every year since then.

Three of the more well-known, and often reprinted, articles that *RT* published on the intersection between gender and race were Gloria T. Hull's "Rewriting Afro-American Literature: A Case for Black Women Writers" (6, December 1977), Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (7, March 1978), and Mary Helen Washington's "These Self-Invented Women: A Theoretical Framework for a Literary History of Black Women" (17, November 1980). We thought about republishing these foundational works of Black feminist literary criticism, but decided to go with the less-often republished dialogue between Smith and Latina lesbian feminist Cherrie Moraga that adds sexuality and class into the mix: "Lesbian Literature: A Third World Feminist Perspective" (24, 1983), a dialogue, rather than a traditional essay, between two thinkers and activists who were responsible for opening and expanding previously neglected areas of study. Issue 33 (January 1988) on "Combating Campus Racism" includes important syllabi by Gay Wilentz, Hoby Spalding, and Ronald Takaki that explore ways of incorporating work by and about African Americans, Latinos/Latinas, and Asian Americans into curricula. Issue 59 (Fall 2000) on "African American Studies at Y2K" features book reviews about significant new work in the field. Issue 70 (September 2004) on "Race in the Classroom" offered many possibilities, but we chose Bree Picower's "Teaching Outside One's Race: The Story of an Oakland Teacher," which provides an intriguing blow-by-blow account of a young white teacher's fitful but ultimately successful transition to working in a school at the center of the "Ebonics" controversy. It provides compelling portraits of teachers and a community in tandem with self-reflection on the writer's own development. Issues 80 (Winter 2007) on "Teaching Beyond Tolerance" and 97 on "Hip-Hop and Critical Pedagogy" made notable contributions to *RT*'s publications on race and racism. *RT* has also published significant essays on Asian American studies (such as Ruth Yu Hsiao's "A Practical Guide to Teaching Asian-American Literature" 41 (Spring 1992) and on postcolonial literature (82, Summer 2008).

***Race and anti-racism were topics addressed in the journal's first editorial and revisited every year since then.***

We mention this last category because we feel that postcolonial studies, at its best, tries to think about issues of identity (ethnic, racial, gendered, and economic) as they are appropriated and politicized in national, transnational, and international contexts. In this respect, our focus on postcolonial and transnational issues is part of *RT*'s inclusive analysis of how people—bodies—find themselves in interlocking modes of oppression. Various issues of *RT* have tried to push against the U.S.'s insular self-definition to internationalize our sense of solidarity/solidarities. The clusters on "Peace Studies" (26, June 1984), "Globalism" (61, Fall 2001, and 62, Winter 2001-2002), "Teaching in a Time of War" (72, Spring 2005, and 74, Fall 2005), and "Immigration" (84, Spring 2009) helped to internationalize

our focus (along with older and recent pieces about teaching in Nicaragua, Mexico, Kurdistan, and Congo).

As for essays that provide a socio-economic critique of the historical and ideological contexts of education in the United States and beyond, it seems woefully prescient that the editorial in our very first issue, along with an essay by Paul Lauter, address the issue of “retrenchment” as a managerial ploy to undermine and dissipate the political energy of radical educators. Louis Kampf’s “Annals of Academic Life: An Exemplary Tale” 21 (1982) provides an insider’s narrative of the conservative pressures on departmental politics that will seem all too familiar to most radical teachers. Early special issues on “The Politics of Literacy” (8, 1978), “The Academic Profession” (11, 1979), and “Standardization” (31, 1986) also seem sadly current because of the ongoing conservative and neoliberal assaults on the left’s efforts to make education something other than a disciplinary mechanism. From the beginning, *RT* has applied a radical analytic framework for understanding the changing dynamics of educational structures. We have consistently provided a voice questioning the ways in which ever-evolving managerial policies have attempted to reshape education to meet neoliberal goals. Surely one of the primary assaults on radical ideals of public schooling today is the charter school movement. Our chosen essay on this topic is David I. Rubin’s “The Charter School Law in Massachusetts: Analysis, Commentary, Wish” (49, Fall 1996). One of the greatest institutional challenges facing radical teachers in postsecondary institutions is addressed in Michael Bennett and Jacqueline Brady’s “A Radical Critique of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Movement” 94 (Fall 2012): 34-47. Many of the issues discussed in these two essays are placed in historical context by Richard Ohmann’s “Historical Reflections on Accountability” (57, Fall 1999).

Other essays that we’ve chosen to republish don’t seem to fit into the neat parameters of this introduction. Patty Lee Parmalee’s “Teaching Nazi Culture” (8, May 1978) was a favorite of the Editorial Collective. Marilyn Frankenstein’s engaging “A Different Third R: Radical Math” 20 (1982) discusses the way “arithmetic skills [can be] learned through political application.” We wouldn’t want to overlook the role that art and graphics have played in the history of *RT* as another forceful mode of social analysis and criticism which we see as integral to our critical perspectives. In issue 81 (Spring 2008), Nick Thorkelson provided a visual homage to our first Art Director in “Tribute to the Work and Life of Elizabeth Powell (1930-2007).” We also owe thanks to Shana Agid who served as Art Director for a number of years after Liz’s death, before we left it up to the editors of each issue to provide their own artwork. Various essays in *RT* have also dealt with the teaching of art, film, and other media from a radical perspective, as indicated by Linda Dittmar and Joseph Entin’s “Introduction” to Issue 89 (Winter 2010) on “Jamming the Works: Art, Politics, Activism,” which is comprehensive, clear, and undogmatic in its consideration of the relation of artistic production to political activism. David B. Downing’s “What Does Neoliberalism Have to Do with Teaching Research Writing?” 85 (Fall 2009) describes his teaching of “Research Writing,” a required humanities

service course at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a school with a big split between publicly funded academic activities and privately funded fancy dormitories (for those who can afford them). Various readings, videos, discussions, and short writings lead up to and develop a framework for a longer research project (on topics of the students own choosing) called “Neoliberalism and Me.” Though we’ve said that these essays don’t *seem* to fit into the categories delineated earlier, we’d argue that they explore issues of class, gender, and race in pursuing the general mission of radical teachers to promote critical thinking. As educators, we share this emphasis with “the liberal professor.” As radicals, we put critical thinking in the service of a radical critique of current social/economic/gender/race practices and oppressions. These pieces emphasize thinking—writing, figuring, reading, seeing movies and media, producing art and music as empowering modes of resistance.

***Putting together this selection of essays from our first 100 issues has allowed us to re-experience a lot of great writing about the politics of pedagogy and to think more deeply about what radical teaching entails.***

We encountered another challenge to the system we’ve used for selecting essays when confronted with issues that as a whole addressed important topics but within which we found it difficult if not impossible to choose one representative essay. In such cases, we have chosen not to reprint a specific article but we would like to call your attention to these issues as worthy of note. The first *RT* issue on prisons and education (16) was called “Con Ed,” and it *appeared* in 1980. Subsequent issues on this topic—“Teaching Against the Prison Industrial Complex” (88, Summer 2010) and “Teaching Inside Carceral Institutions” ( 95, Spring 2013)—indicate our ongoing commitment to dismantling the Prison Industrial Complex. Efforts to reach beyond our usual focus on the humanities include issues on “Health Care and Science Teaching” (19, 1981), “Women and Science” (30, 1986), and “Computers and Technology” ( 63, Spring 2002). Other issues from which we couldn’t choose one specific article that stood out but we found the totality to be of note include 26 on “Peace Studies” (1984); 29 on “Sexuality” (1985); 40 (Fall 1991) on “Mississippi Freedom Schools;” 47 (Fall 1995) on “Disability Studies;” 61-62 (2000-2001) on “Globalization,” which includes two fine essay on teaching about sweatshops (one by John Miller and the other by Robert J. S. Ross); and issues 72 & 74 (2005) on “Teaching in a Time of War.” One issue that was repeatedly mentioned by members of the Editorial Collective as providing a stunning mix of insightful articles, moving poetry, great artwork, and socio-historical import is our first online issue (96, 2013) on “Occupy and Education,” edited by Joseph Entin, Dick Ohmann, and Susan O’Malley.

Not surprisingly, a lot of the early material in *Radical Teacher* is about *what* to teach (i.e., challenging the

canon), not about *how* to teach (i.e., pedagogy), which is quite different from the focus on praxis that evolved over the years. The battles over the canon were essential early on, but now they have to a great extent been assimilated into the curricula nationally (and variously internationally). Some of the 1960s ideas about pedagogy were mainstreamed too, though they are now being cut back and/or eliminated through the “assessment” movement and budgetary/corporate development. Teaching to tests, teaching online, shifting back to the lecture mode, and the huge reliance on underpaid temporary instructors and graders who have little incentive to form any commitment to their students are all eroding liberal education, let alone radical. Another limitation we have faced is that *RT* contributors have tended to focus on educators and education in the United States— though we have made a consistent effort to address global issues from early essays on teaching in Nicaragua and third world film to more recent discussions of teaching in Israel/Palestine and Kurdistan. As *Radical Teacher* looks to our next 100 issues, we hope to further explore the unresolved conflicts between the politics of pedagogy, the content of what we think people need to understand, and the sources of power and control in schools and colleges.

Putting together this selection of essays from our first 100 issues has allowed us to re-experience a lot of great writing about the politics of pedagogy and to think more deeply about what radical teaching entails. It concerns something more than the questioning that happens in all good classes: an inquiry that insists on thinking against the grain (an excellent early feminist concept)—on taking nothing for granted; on always asking whose interests are being served by this or that way of thinking; on what questions are not yet being asked and which ones should be asked and why; on what’s missing, rather than just what we know about what’s there. It’s an insistent rummaging for the suppressed knowledge and especially helping us, teachers and learners, understand the responsibilities of thinking and inquiry. It is also an insistent inquiry into the ways institutions—schools, factories, prisons, corporations, the military, etc.—constrain our thinking and attempt to suppress such questioning.

Another thing we appreciate from the overview of our work, and the cross section *RT* 100 provides of it, is the sense of interconnectedness of these issues. Though each of us works in her/his own limited place—one’s classroom, one’s union, one’s activist group, one’s prison, one’s high school or university or community program—*RT* reminds us of our interconnectedness! We can only put our efforts where we are, but our work needs to be informed by an awareness of and identification with other struggles that we hope *Radical Teacher* will be part of for a long time to come.

[In addition to showing our chronology in content, the *Radical Teacher* collective also wanted to show our changes in appearance and decided to add all of our original graphics and covers to our reprinted articles. To make this possible, Bob Rosen not only translated all the reprinted articles into Word but also scanned all the original graphics

and covers, for which we owe him a great debt of gratitude.]—The Managing Editor



**Contingent Academics Unite!**



RT 98 TEACHING THE FOOD JUSTICE MOVEMENT



RT 97 HIP HOP AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY



RT 96 OCCUPY AND EDUCATION

RADICAL TEACHER'S FIRST FOUR ONLINE OPEN ACCESS ISSUES

RT 96 TO RT 99



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



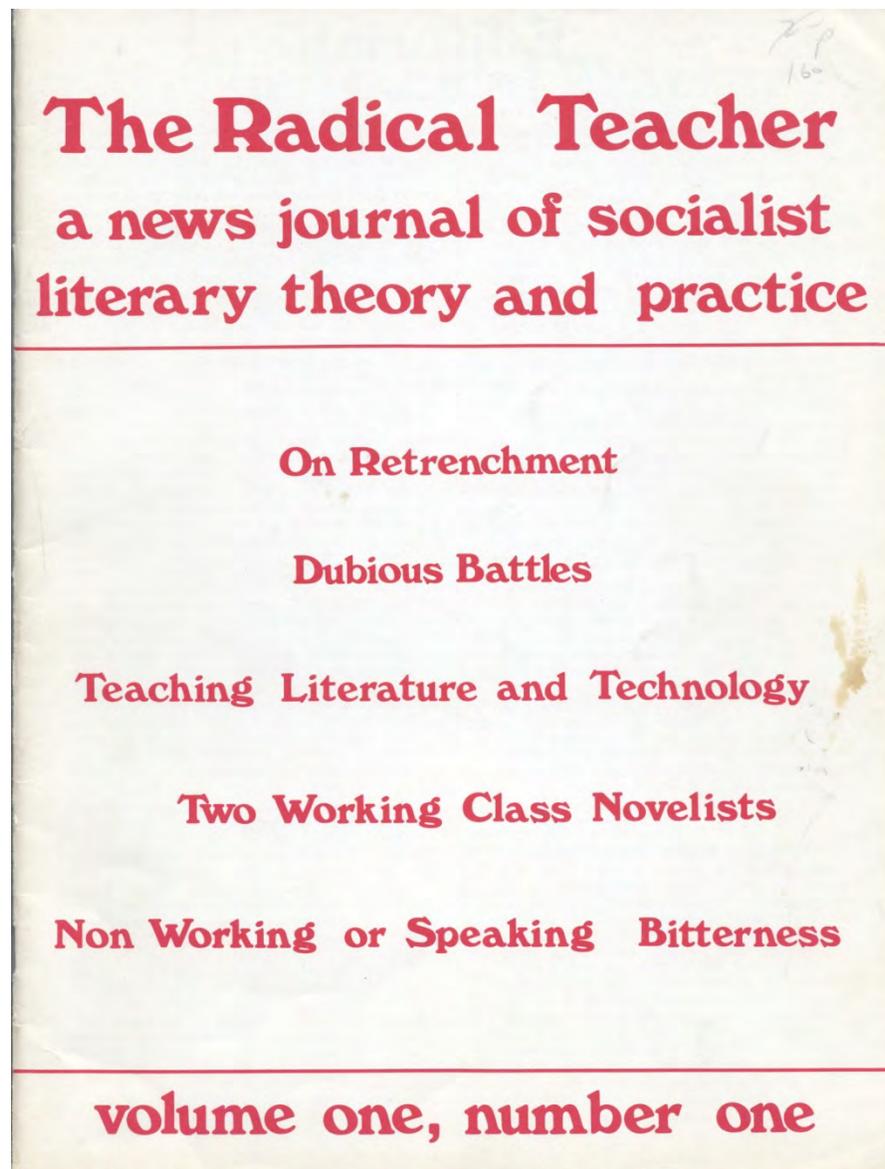
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Editorial

By the *Radical Teacher* Editorial Group



**R**etrenchment, the supposed decline in enrollments, the increased use of adjuncts, the "new vocationalism," the impending closings of several public universities. It seems a strange time to launch a new magazine, especially one directed at and written by those who are most under attack: radical teachers. But in some ways it was this sense of crisis that caused the development of *The Radical Teacher*. Many of us felt that now was the most dangerous time to be passive toward such a crisis situation. What was called for was greater commitment than before and a greater sharing of those radical political energies that too often were being isolated within our individual schools. Perhaps we can offer no answer more specific than this when asked about our origins.

*The Radical Teacher* grows out of the dissatisfaction that many of us felt within our own organization, the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages, a group that finds its origins in the New University Conference of the 60's. We became increasingly troubled with our inability to sustain any real sense of continuity after the decline of the antiwar movement. We were forced to question more closely the scope of our organization and the state of the profession. What was our role in relation to these areas?

Our first response was to express our purpose through the drafting of a statement of five principles on which the membership could agree. From this statement the magazine was formed. The magazine was in a sense a sixth principle, the most effective vehicle through which we could express the other five.

We call *The Radical Teacher* a "Newsjournal" to imply a flexibility expressing the need for both formal articles and yet also meeting the need for the greater immediacy of journalism and progress reports on teaching. What follows is our sense of the scope of this venture.

\*\*\*

For many of us the critical focus of literary study and of our work as socialists is the classroom. We would ask how reading and discussing a text with a particular group of people promotes or hinders the development of a working-class movement. To answer such questions, we believe the tools, including the language, of socialist analysis, and tradition of Marxist, third-world and feminist criticism to be important. But the test is in practice, especially in the practice of teaching and learning. While this emphasis differs from that of traditional Marxist criticism, we would nevertheless like to restore greater unity between the practice/theory split.

What we propose is a Newsjournal that will neither succumb to arid detached criticism nor discuss teaching in terms of mere technique. With very few exceptions, academic journals are involved in dead end, rehashed criticism. Radicals and activist classroom teachers are allowed to submit their articles or even to develop special issues. However, they are generally bound over,

consciously or not, to the restrictive structures of academic publications. Most disturbing and most evident is the separation of criticism from the actual experience of teaching and from social theory. These journals hardly acknowledge that the classroom exists, or that ideas about literature and society are fundamentally related. Nor should this come as surprise, for criticism is more a vehicle of academic promotion and a prop to bureaucratic structure than a way of helping people understand and deal with reality.

Not only do we want a new sense of our potential as teachers, but we also want to expand our sense of an audience. We have our roots in the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages, but we wish to be open to other disciplines, rather than accepting the usual self-imposed divisions of standard academic journals. Our hope is also to address students, both graduate and undergraduate; all teachers of whatever level, those in public schools, those instructing graduate students, those in various alternative institutions around the country. We also see this Newsjournal, like the Radical Caucus, as a means for maintaining communication among socialist teachers in isolated situations. To serve these purposes and this audience, the Newsjournal must include a range of articles dealing not only with literary works and with teaching practice, but with the economics of and political structure of academe, with educational theory, and with the impact of movements for social change on our work and lives.

Some areas in which the Newsjournal will solicit articles are these:

**Teaching:**

Can the teaching of literature be socialist organizing and consciousness raising? radical pedagogical theories and reviews of books on teaching; the politicization of composition.

Class analysis of teacherstudent relationships and the "laying on of culture"; autobiographical reports of our own miseducation.

Reports on developments in various ethnic and minority studies programs, including women's studies, gay studies, black studies, and third-world studies.

The experiences of radicals in the classroom; classroom reality; grass-roots reports; anecdote, firsthand experience leading to useful theory; syllabi, bibliographies, reading lists; reviews.

**Literary Theory:**

Questions of Marxist, feminist, third-world and socialist literary theory: how these discussions often separate themselves from a broader social theory and, instead of remaining radical, tend toward bourgeois social criticism; why theory rarely reaches into the classroom; how we can unify what never should have been divided.

Reconstructing the canon; attempting to define "canonicity"; reprinting submerged literary works of significance to radicals.

The relationship of cultures of the classroom and of American education (what is generally classed "high") and mass culture.

**The Economics of the Profession:**

Retrenchment; exposés of hiring and firing practices; attacks on and alternatives to tenure; the implications of union organizing; the "use" of part-time faculty. Interviews with, or autobiographical statements of, those who have not been able to get jobs in the profession.

**The Structure and Dynamics of Educational Institutions (on the model, for example, of "Crisis at CUNY"):**

University "master" planning; the "new vocationalism" and how to combat it; the changing social role of education.

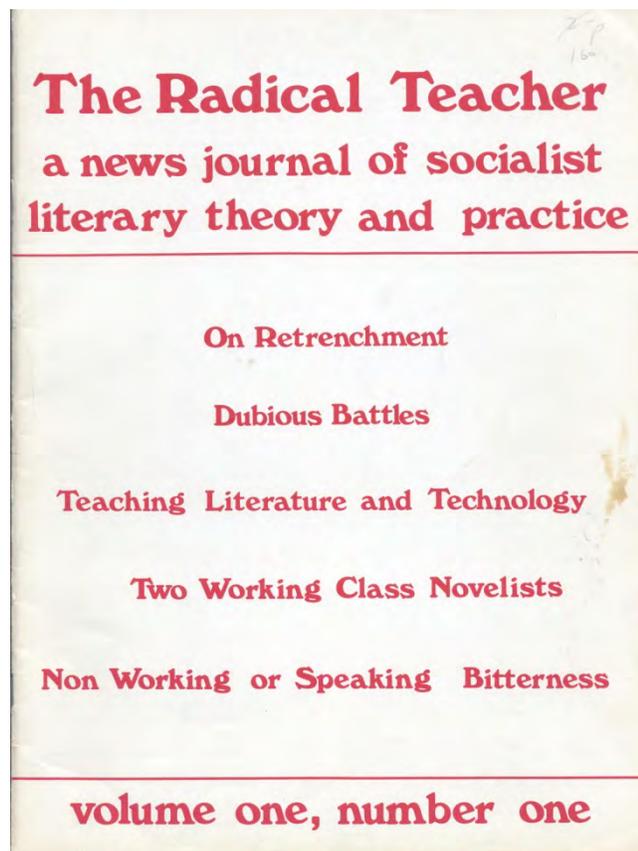
Education and the study of literature in other cultures -- e.g., Cuba, China.

Exposure of conservative and liberal academic ideologies: e.g., the attack on affirmative action in the name of "standards," the new push for classroom "neutrality," the move toward independent study and what that means.

Obviously, this first issue only touches on a few of the preceding subjects. Nevertheless, both in our range of topics and through the fact that all of this issue's contributors are members of the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages, we feel that here we have demonstrated the intensity of our commitment. What we have hoped to illustrate is the Newsjournal's flexibility and our openness to various points of view within the radical spectrum. We wish to encourage contributors and would also like to see some specific responses to articles appearing in this number.

-- *The Radical Teacher* Editorial Group

\*\*\*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



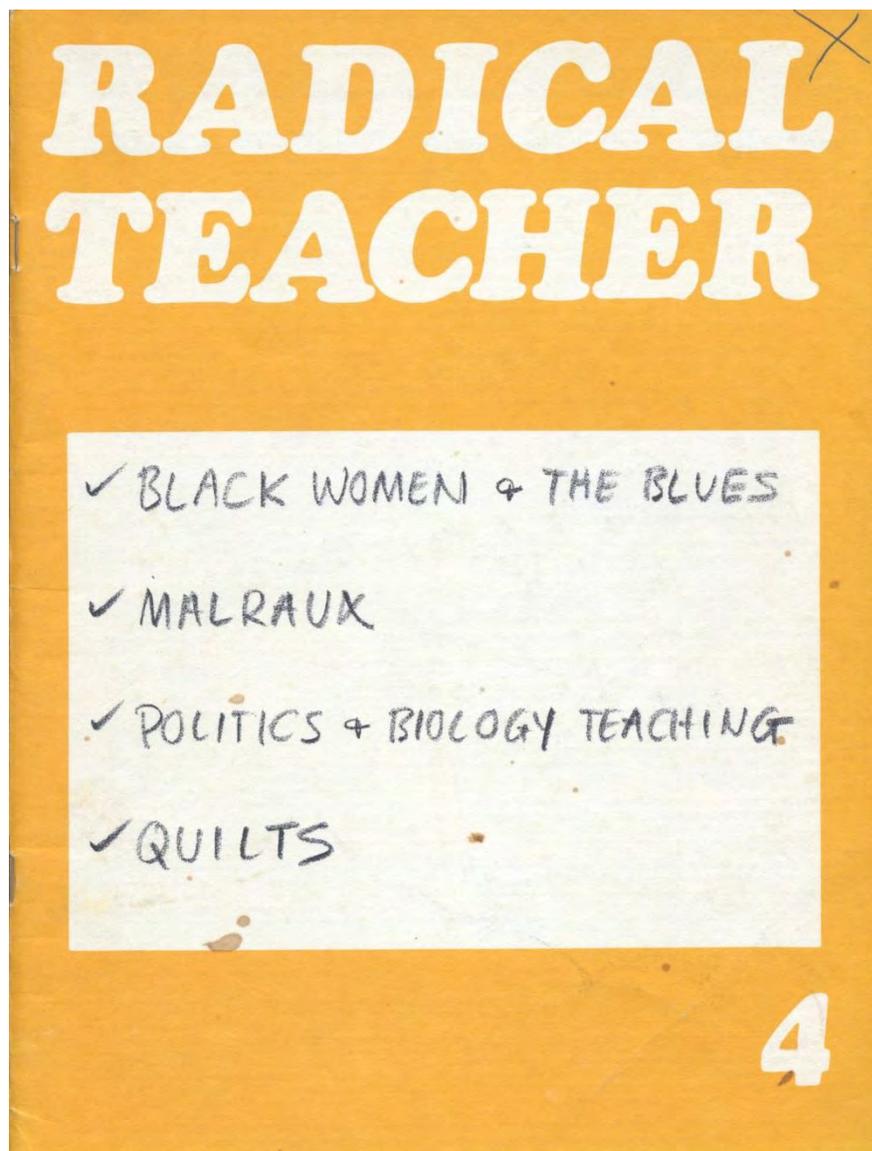
This journal is published by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program, and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Quilts and Women's Culture

by Elaine Hedges



**M**y interest in women's needlework, and especially quilts, began with a course I team-taught several years ago on women's art and literature. Because those of us teaching the course were concerned to break down class and race barriers, and distinctions between "high" and "low" art, or crafts, as well as distinctions between art and work, we were especially interested in women's needlework, as a form of activity that is universal – not confined to any one class or race – and that has combined the practical with the esthetic or artistic. It has always been necessary for women to sew, and, wherever and whenever extra time and energy have allowed, sewing has become "esthetic," in the sense of giving expression to an artistic impulse, providing its practitioners with an outlet for their creativity. Often this has been a creativity which, as Alice Walker has eloquently discussed in her article, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,"<sup>1</sup> a patriarchal society has officially stifled: for instance, by denying literacy to slaves and to many women. It is a creativity which might then erupt in the making of gardens, or blues songs, or quilts, such as the one she describes hanging in the Smithsonian Museum, made one hundred years ago by an anonymous black woman in Alabama: "an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use."

Many quilts today do hang in museums, and not just in historical museums such as the Smithsonian, but in art museums – the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Chicago Art Institute, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. And quilts are being avidly collected by many individuals. Quilts, as well as other forms of needlework, have achieved a status of some respectability in the art world. There was a major quilt exhibit at the Whitney in 1971, which travelled to the Louvre the following year, and other museums throughout the country have also mounted exhibits.

Such interest and exposure have led to some re-thinking of what is, and what should be, contained within the official definition or canon of fine art; more specifically, of what is, or what should be, the relation of what we commonly call "high" art to what have been regarded as minor forms of visual expression. The dividing line between creating with paints on canvas and creating with fibers has to some extent broken down in the twentieth century, ever since early-century collage began to incorporate bits of paper and cloth into the painted surface. In more recent decades weaving, knotting and crocheting have been used to create art works, such as wall hangings, fabric collages, soft sculptures, and the "art fabric" – a piece of fabric created with the sole intention of being a work of art.

Insofar as these new developments have made the definition of serious visual art more all-encompassing, we have a more hospitable context for the quilt, and possibly for some other working-class art products as well. But in practice such receptivity can also result in distortion, if the effort is merely to accommodate the

newly-defined art product, such as the quilt, to preexisting or currently prevailing standards of high art: to judge the style known as the "stuffed quilt," with its highly textured surface, for example, merely in terms of the subtle play of light and shadow or in terms of three dimensional form; or to judge an Amish (Pennsylvania Dutch) quilt, with its broad, bold, horizontal and vertical blocks and bands of simplified, solid color, in terms of a modern abstract painting.

Since pure geometric forms, abstract designs, contrasts of light and shadow, line rhythms, and both startling and harmonious combinations of color do have appeal, do give sheer visual pleasure, and can be evaluated by certain esthetic criteria, quilts most certainly qualify as art and can and should be appreciated and enjoyed as art. In many cases they represent an extraordinarily sophisticated art, of an intricacy, complexity and subtlety that bear comparison with much "high art" painting. Some quilts have rightly been called "quilt paintings."<sup>2</sup>

However, to think of them only or primarily as, or in relation to, paintings, is to run the risk of eventually seeing quilts as second-rate paintings, inferior to a modern abstract canvas. It is to see quilts through categories not intrinsically their own, categories that try to force them to be something else. Such categories isolate quilts, as the products of working women, from the social, economic and political context out of which they evolved and to which they must be returned for their full validation and meaning. We run the risk of doing to quilts what the new criticism has done to much literature: establishing works as timeless universals, divorced from their historical context, to be judged by some presumably "objective" standards – standards which, we now realize, surreptitiously embody a white male perspective, and which may therefore distort, or obviate the possibility of our discovering, the nature of artistic meaning in work by women.

To talk about quilts, then, as part of an interest in rediscovering working-class culture and working-class art, must mean returning the quilt to its origins. These origins are not in a "working class" as distinct from a "middle class," but are origins quite specifically in work – women's work of sewing, which, as has been said, cut across class lines. All women sewed; it was an experience they shared, and it could create common bonds.

Quilting itself goes back to the Egyptians, the Chinese, and the Persians, from whom it was introduced into Europe by the Crusaders. This discussion confines itself to the American quilt, or what is known as "patchwork." Patchwork arose out of necessity: the necessity for warmth, in clothing (which was sometimes quilted) and in bed covers, the form the quilt most commonly took. And it arose out of scarcity: there was little cloth in the American colonies in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; that which was imported from England and the continent was expensive; and so all scraps and fragments were saved, salvaged from worn-out items, and reused. The activity of quilting consisted of two main stages: designing and

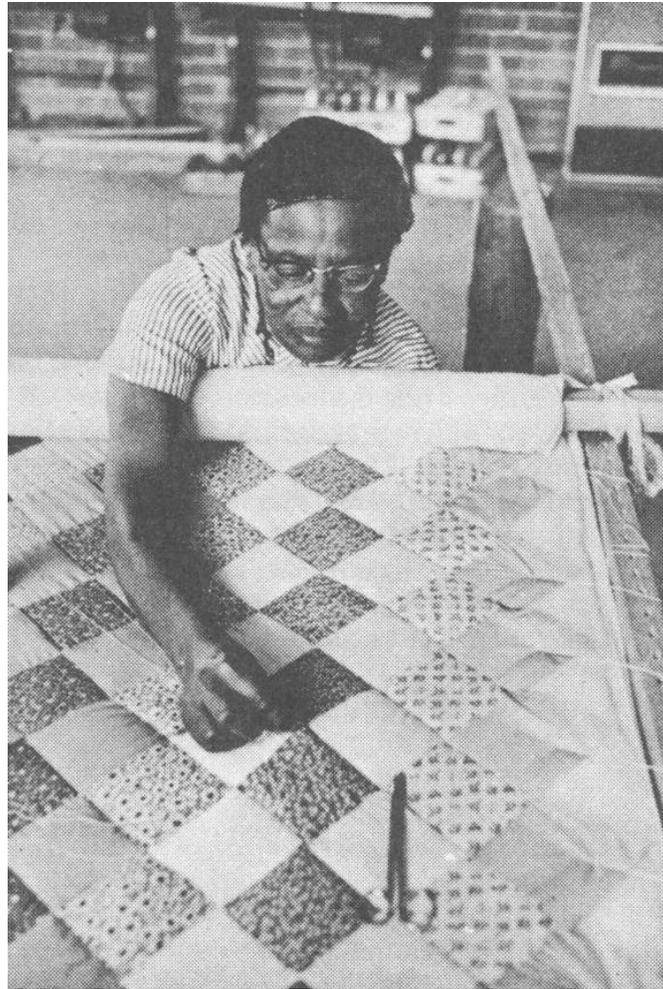
sewing the quilt top, which would be exposed on the bed; and doing the actual "quilting," which consisted of binding or stitching this finished top layer to a plain bottom layer, with filling or wadding in between. It was this triple thickness which gave warmth.

From the beginning, however, women expended time and care on the making of quilts beyond their utilitarian purpose. Artistry was possible, and was pursued, in two areas. First, the quilt top offered nearly limitless possibilities of design and color as one pieced and sewed together small, straight-edged bits of fabric to create an overall patterned top known as a "pieced" quilt; or as one "applied," that is, sewed small pieces or patches of fabric according to some design on to a larger ground fabric. These were the two main kinds of "patchwork." Second, in the quilting or stitching together of the three layers fine sewing could be practiced. Small stitches, and different, highly complex kinds of stitches were employed, often to create intricate designs of scrolls, flowers or feathers. In Emily Dickinson's words (Poem #617), "I'll do seams - a Queen's endeavor/ Would not blush to own."

The results, as one looks at hundreds and hundreds of quilts, are varied and dazzling - truly a visual feast. There is an esthetic indigenous to quilts, and the more one knows about the craft and the techniques - the possibilities and limitations of various fabrics and ways of cutting them, the geometric intricacies of various designs, the various stitch patterns - the more one can appreciate and even marvel at the skill, the sophistication, the inventiveness, the visual daring that quilts display. That women responded to the technical challenge implicit in quilt making, just as a painter might set and solve a technical problem of shading or perspective or design, is apparent when one learns, for instance, of a pieced quilt that contains 30,000 pieces, each 1/2 inch by 1/4 inch in size. One may have mixed reactions, of admiration and dismay, to such a revelation; and the implications of that kind of expenditure of time and energy on one product serving an essentially humble function will be examined later. But

the reality is that quilts were, from the middle of the eighteenth through the nineteenth century in this country, where patchwork achieved its highest form of development, *the* major creative outlet for women .

As we return the quilt to its original context in work and in history, then, there are certain characteristics that shaped and defined it as a product of women's culture and that are essential to a full understanding of it and respect for it. Many of these characteristics, I suspect, are analogous to or even identical with characteristics of other working-class art products. And many of them define at least part of what might be considered an artistic ideal .



COURTESY OF NYC PUBLIC LIBRARY PHOTO COLLECTION

The quilt was both an individual and a collective art. Usually, an individual woman designed and executed the top layer. The work of quilting together the three layers, however, was collective, and in fact no other art has ever brought together for its execution so many people. To the "quilting bee" would be invited the best sewers from the community. Quilting bees were usually festive occasions, opportunities to renew and cement friendships, to reestablish social bonds among women otherwise isolated, to exchange news and ideas and to express feelings. Under the stimulus of friendly competition, women vied to do their best sewing, creating art within a context that had a broadly nourishing social function. Where men had the tavern or saloon, the marketplace or the courthouse square for bonding together, women had the quilting bee.

Competition within a framework of cooperation functioned also to produce one specific class of quilts: the Friendship Medley, Autograph, Album or Presentation quilt, so named according to the occasion. In each case a group of people - friends, relatives, parishioners, and men as well as women - would independently create individual squares for a quilt top. The squares were then sewn together and the finished product, after quilting, presented to the recipient. Each sewer would do his or her finest work; but, since all of the pieces were intended to harmonize and complement each other in the finished design, there could be no destructive competition. Rather, there was a

competitive challenge intended to bring out one's individual best while yet acknowledging the claims of the group.

Quilt making was a traditional art. The origins of many stitches and patterns go far back in time, and as an art form, therefore, much of it remains anonymous. It is, in its overall distinguishing features, more representative of a culture or a society than of an individual or any series of individuals. As such, it asserted and conveyed values of continuity, stability and tradition – all useful values in a country of immigrants and of geographic mobility.

Within its broad traditionalism and anonymity, however, variations and distinctions developed. There were regional variations, ethnic or religious variations, and finally, individual variations, in the works of specific quilt makers whose names are known to us. Regional variations would include, for example, what is known as the Baltimore quilt, an appliqued Friendship quilt of the early nineteenth century with distinctive, recognizable designs, which reached an extremely high level of skill. Ethnic or religious variations would include the quilts of the Amish and of the Moravians; similar to and yet distinguishable from each other in their color ranges and patterns, these quilts are significantly different from those of other groups.

Regionally, too, distinctions were introduced into quilt making through the interesting process of re-naming. Ordinarily quilts were given names, usually the name of the basic pattern chosen for the top layer. In the course of time, and with geographical movement within the United States, name changes and sometimes small design variations were introduced in response to local needs and to both sectional and national events. Thus, during the Civil War a traditional rose pattern (of which there were many) was modified by the additional of a black patch at its center and renamed the "Radical Rose," in recognition of the slavery controversy. A chain or loop pattern originally called "Job's Tears" – one of many early pattern names taken from the Bible – was renamed the "Slave Chain" in the early 1820's; by 1840 the same pattern was being called "Texas Tears" in response to new political developments; and after the Civil War it was used to describe "The Rocky Road to Kansas." Indeed, quilt names provide a capsule version of much nineteenth-century American history, not least the hardships of the western journey. A pattern made of rectangles inside diagonal bands and known in pre-Revolutionary New England as "Jacob's Ladder," from the Bible, became in western Kentucky "The Underground Railroad," and in Mississippi and the prairie states "Wagon Tracks" or the "Trail of the Covered Wagon."

With equal inventiveness women renamed traditional patterns to accommodate them to the local landscape. Thus a pattern called "Duck's Foot in the Mud" on Long Island became "Bear's Paw" in western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Quilt names, indeed, give us insight into many aspects of the lives of the women who made them and their families. There are names of occupations, from farming to carpentry and mechanics, names (although

fewer) of recreations and amusements, and names expressing moral beliefs and hopes and dreams.<sup>3</sup> "Hens and Chickens" and "Trip around the World" demarcate the poles, real and ideal, of many women's lives. Whereas it has been estimated that the total of distinctively different quilt patterns is probably not more than three hundred, the names run into the thousands.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, out of such regional and other variations come individual, signed achievements. Many women did sign their quilts: their skill was recognized; they responded with pride and aspiration; they aimed to create a work of art for posterity. Often, too, individual women who became known as master quilters created a final "legacy" quilt composed of all of their favorite or best patterns. A woman's proudest boast might be that she had originated a quilt pattern. And women for whom quilting became an outlet for esthetic or creative expression invariably made, in the course of a lifetime, many more quilts than need demanded. The form thus removed itself, to an extent, from its work origins. Thus we know of a Susan McCord in Indiana (1829-1909), who in addition to her regular household chores as wife and mother, made soap and candles, raised, dried and canned fruits and vegetables, did embroidery, and left at her death over 150 quilts, many of them made according to patterns she had herself invented.<sup>5</sup>

In what has been said so far the emphasis has been broadly positive: quilts as an outlet for creative energy; as a source and emblem of sisterhood and solidarity; as a graphic depiction and dramatization of, and ingenious response to, historical and political event and change.

Such a list of positives could be extended to include, for example, quilts as inspiration and imaginative stimulus to the viewer. Thus we have Agnes Smedley, recalling her impoverished childhood at the beginning of her semi-autobiographical novel, *Daughter of Earth*:

*I recall a crazy-quilt my mother once had. She made it from the remnants of gay and beautiful cotton materials . . . (T)he crazy-quilt held me for hours. It was an adventure.*

It was also, obviously, what Agnes Smedley and working-class women in general had instead of books and paintings. The recollection of that quilt provided Smedley with a motivating analogy for her novel:

*I shall gather up these fragments of my life and make a crazy-quilt of them. Or a mosaic of interesting pattern – unity in diversity. This will be an adventure.*<sup>6</sup>

And finally, quilts, or women's sewing in general, can be seen as sometimes providing opportunities for political discussion and statement. Susan B. Anthony's first talk on equal rights for women was at a quilting bee, and she and Elizabeth Cady Stanton frequently used such gatherings to advocate political action and change. Earlier, Sarah Grimke advised women to

embroider anti-slavery slogans and images on domestic artifacts, urging, "May the point of our needles prick the slave-owner's conscience."<sup>7</sup> And there is the delightful story of the subversive wife who had her husband sleep under a quilt that bore, unknown to him, a pattern named after the political party he opposed.

But such freedoms or assertions must ultimately be interpreted in the larger context of women's work and oppression within a patriarchal society – an oppression of which needlework was not only symbol but actuality. Little girls were forced to learn to sew; and learning to sew often took precedence over, or was the female substitute for, learning to read and write. Sewing is thus used by Emily Dickinson in one of her poems (#508) as a symbol of the childhood and female bondage she rejects as she arrives at her own achieved status of poet. Sewing, for instance of samplers with moral messages, was intended to inculcate in little girls their class or gender virtues of neatness, submissiveness, docility and patience. One learned quilting, for example, by working on one small square, sewing it, ripping out the stitching, sewing it again, over and over and over, until proficiency had been achieved. Many women learned to hate the work. In other countries, various kinds of needlework have amounted and still amount to sheer exploitation of girls and women: young girls painstakingly tying the innumerable fine knots in Persian rugs because their fingers are small enough to do the work; young girls seated in rows in convents in Belgium, making lace for hours on end, not allowed to raise their eyes from their work; Italian women going blind after a lifetime of lace making.

To return to this country, one must ask to what extent needlework had to substitute, for women, for what might have been more meaningful work, or more freely chosen work, or for various forms of political activism. Does one respond with admiration, or dismay, to that quilt of 30,000 pieces? One may admire the dexterity of Pennsylvania Dutch women, who challenged themselves with the sewing of convex and concave, rather than merely straight, edges. Their quilts show a higher degree of exacting sewing than do the quilts of New England women, and may therefore receive higher accolades as art. But one realizes it was an

art born of oppression: the Pennsylvania Dutch women were among the most severely confined, almost never allowed to learn to read, rarely venturing beyond the home.

In the Victorian era, when middle-class women lost the productive role they had held in an earlier agricultural economy, quilts became more and more decorative, more and more examples of conspicuous waste in their often irresponsible use of expensive fabrics such as satin, lace, brocade and velvet. They became an inadvertently ironic sign of woman as consumer rather than producer, and of her confinement to a narrowed and less functional domestic sphere. They became a badge of her oppression and even an unfortunate safety valve that served to delay rebellion by diverting energy.

Our response to quilts as an art form rooted in both meaningful work and in cultural oppression will therefore inevitably be complex: a combination of admiration and awe at limitations overcome and of sorrow and anger at limitations imposed.

#### NOTES

1. Alice Walker, "In Search of our Mothers' Gardens," *Radcliffe Quarterly*, June, 1974, p. 5.
2. Lenice Ingram Bacon, *American Patchwork Quilts*, New York, 1973, p. 44.
3. Name changes are described in: Ruth Finley, *Old Patchwork Quilts and the Women Who Made Them*, Philadelphia, 1929, pp. 99, 103; Carrie A. Hall, *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt In America*, Caldwell, Idaho, 1936, pp. 65, 66, 117.
4. Finley, p. 107.
5. Robert Bishop, *New Discoveries In American Quilts*, New York, 1975, pp. 111-113.
6. Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*, Old Westbury, N.Y., 1973, p. 8.
7. Quoted in Mary Ryan, *Womanhood In America*, New York, 1975, p. 181.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



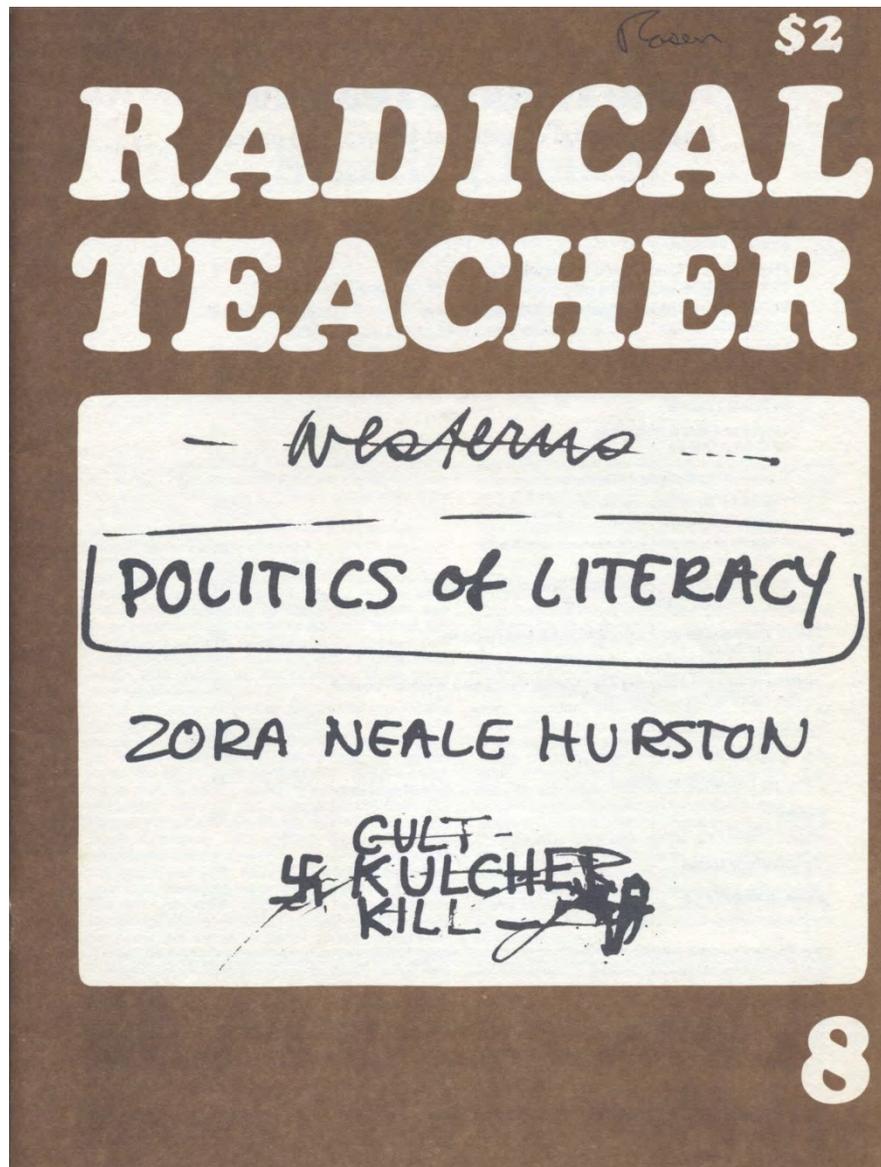
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/press/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Nazi Culture

by Patty Lee Parmalee



*What has to be explained is not the fact that the man who is hungry steals or the fact that the man who is exploited strikes, but why the majority of those who are hungry don't steal and why the majority of those who are exploited don't strike.*

*–Wilhelm Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism*

Nazi Culture would seem at first to be a very esoteric subject to teach to the rather practical-minded and not very cosmopolitan students of a northern New Jersey state college. But of course it is really a distancing technique, a *Verfremdungseffekt* à la Brecht. Teaching fascism is not really teaching fascism per se, but an angle for teaching capitalism and socialism. And teaching Nazi culture is an angle for teaching some of the purposes of capitalist ideology.

Students at Ramapo College come from working-class, lower-middle-class, and professional backgrounds. The majority are Catholic, some are adults, and most of them hold jobs while going to school. (They talk a lot about the nature of their work in relation to the course, e.g., hierarchies on the job and the Nazi divide-and-conquer technique of building hierarchies.) Like most working-class students they are, and should be, resistant to the kind of radical teaching that simply intones "socialism good, capitalism bad." In courses I have taught that were directly about capitalism or socialism, usually half the students have been with me, and the other half (thinking before I opened my mouth that I was going to try to convert them) have either resisted openly or, worse, given me what they thought I wanted and gone into resentful inner emigration. I know this is a fairly universal experience for teachers at non-elite colleges, and we usually save our ego and sense of accomplishment by rationalizing: "No teacher can reach everyone."

But to my surprise I found in the classes on fascism I seemed to be reaching everyone. Probably the number of "cadre" produced will be no greater than usual (nor do I consider that the purpose of teaching), but that normally resistant 50% had their notions of capitalism and socialism severely shaken up, perhaps for the first time, and they learned to recognize a historical phenomenon as a reality in their own lives: they became very sensitive to fascist tendencies anywhere. And perhaps more important, these students who have had very little practice in analyzing their society were able to approach the most important question of the course – why do people act against their own interest – with at least the beginnings of real concrete answers.

On the first day of class I asked students to write a paragraph on "What is fascism?" Most of them got in something about militarism, anti-semitism, and an authoritarian all-powerful state, and almost no one mentioned anything about the economic structure, except that about a third assumed it was some kind of communism. (I handed back these little essays on the last day of class without comment, so they could see for themselves whether they had learned anything.) I didn't say anything about that assumption till later in the course;

what interested me then was that universally everyone knew fascism was bad stuff. No need to try to persuade anyone of that. And so, uniquely in my teaching experience, the teacher and all the students were able to start out with a shared value system. I was able to make use of a knee-jerk reaction. (Clearly, the course would never work the same in Germany.) Both the problem and the opening then became that anything that looks like fascism is also bad. Unfortunately, lots of things about some socialist countries look like fascism. It is necessary to be open about that, not to ridicule students' confusion but to discuss Stalinism and the conditions under which socialism developed in the Soviet Union. But fascism is a form of capitalism, the epitome in fact of capitalism, and the more students learn about the structures of fascist economy and even ideology, the more they themselves see the parallels to the society they live in. They are very receptive to discussions of true and false community; in fact it soon becomes necessary to warn them against using the term "fascist" too loosely to describe their own society.

The perfect introduction to the course is Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor chapter from *The Brothers Karamazov*. A brilliant, prophetic explanation of authoritarianism, it expounds the philosophical rationale for believing that people fear freedom and need a strong leader and something to believe in, specifically "miracle, mystery, and authority" – and it tells all this from the point of view of the "benevolent" despot, the elite, the misleader. Students are challenged and frustrated by the Inquisitor's arguments against freedom; I ask them to debate him. Ultimately they decide they have to reject his premise about human nature that people will "never, never be able to share among themselves." Parallels to Skinner are obvious to students. The story stimulates an early discussion of the need for community: it is in fact a legitimate desire which we see manifest all around us. But that desire is co-opted by the creation of false community, which happens through everyone's relation to a higher authority. Authority prevents the creation of true community, which is built on horizontal, equal relationships. Examples of false community abound from our society: the Church, dictatorships, gurus, spectator sports, and Roosevelt's fireside chats. Dostoevsky also shows convincingly the need for something transcendent to believe in, which the Nazis understood very well. But where does the need for miracle, mystery and authority come from? That question introduces the rest of the course: Reich and Fromm answer it through social psychology, Neumann and Guerin (etc.) through political economy.

But first we develop the contradictions of Weimar, using the Introduction to Franz Neumann's *Behemoth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944, 1963) as a text and looking at two films: *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* and *Metropolis* (both available from Janus Films). Neumann's thesis here is essentially that the rapid economic development of Germany and its lack of colonies made expansion and overthrow of the obsolete political system necessary. There were various methods by which the German bourgeoisie could have achieved these ends peacefully, but they were all rejected because they would have meant giving up

some power to the working class. This left violent expansion into the rest of Europe as the only possibility.

*Metropolis* is (among other things) a symbol of the Weimar liberals' desire for easy solutions to class conflict in the face of glaring and beautifully portrayed contradictions and opposed interests. Through its graphic power and its flimsy resolution, it persuades the students, even against their will, that the class issues could not be smoothed over and are an important focus for study.

When we watch *Caligari* we ignore temporarily the question (raised by the framing technique) of whether Francis is mad. We look just at the implications of his symbolic story and find them extraordinarily prescient and foreboding. I ask the students who (in Francis' story) is the criminal; who carries out the criminal's acts; who controls whom; whether that control is in Cesare's interest; and what Francis' role is. The story shows a world where the sleepwalking and hypnotized Cesare (the German people) is made to carry out the murderous acts of a megalomaniac,

causing Cesare's own ultimate destruction; the lone sane antifascist (Francis) is a voice crying in the wilderness, ultimately himself declared insane by the madman because the latter has power. If I can restrain myself I wait till after the discussion to tell students the film was made in 1918.

Two more films we saw near the beginning were Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and her *Triumph of the Will*. (We also read the good article by Susan Sontag on Riefenstahl in a 1975 *New York Review*, called "Fascinating Fascism.") We saw them early because they too raise questions in students' minds. I give them a short essay I wrote to stimulate class discussion on *Olympia*: is it just documentary? Does beauty (Riefenstahl's defense) exonerate fascism? Why blow all that money filming an apolitical sports event? Is it a fascist film? *Triumph of the Will* makes clear what vast support the Nazis had (even if it was staged), helping us define true fascism as a mass movement, not (as in Chile and South Africa, which come up frequently as comparisons) a dictatorship imposed against the will of the majority. And so the question is: why did people support it, i.e., why did they act against their interests – and it is because *that's* the question we want to answer that we look, eventually, at Nazi culture.

Because ultimately of course what we are interested in is why working (and middle-class) people in our own

society act against their own interest. And gradually it becomes apparent that we are studying Nazi culture because in the Third Reich the techniques of manipulation were conscious and deliberate. Since the Nazi leaders knew what they were doing, we can find clues to what our own leaders and tastemakers may be doing less consciously (or with their motives less clear to us).

I thought it was necessary to understand the political economy of National Socialism before looking at ideology, but I might do it the other way around in the future because students can get more interested in the latter, and it's easier for them. Also the book I chose, Neumann's *Behemoth*, was very difficult, so that I had to print up outlines to help them read it. But I would still use that book. It is a beautifully reasoned example of materialist methodology; it was written before the defeat of fascism but forecasts its instability; and it makes very clear that fascism is capitalism. It is also exciting for students to learn how to read difficult but worthwhile material, if the

teacher sticks with them and really teaches how to read it.

*Behemoth* was the major text of the course, but describing the discussions we had about it would require double the length of this discussion. I will make only one suggestion for future use: that selections from it should be made with an emphasis on issues of class. Neumann is strong on 1) whether any

economic or political power was actually taken away from the large capitalists; 2) the Jews as the *visible* but not powerful capitalists (middlemen, store-owners, etc.); 3) the impact of fascism on the working class, always watching for the real power it was given rather than rhetoric; 4) the equivocal position and pivotal importance of the middle class; 5) the evidence of conscious class struggle; and 6) the methods used by Nazis to co-opt the left's base (red flag, left song melodies, National "Socialism," anti-capitalist rhetoric); students must understand the techniques by which capitalism masquerades as anti-capitalism.

Conveniently the book ends with a discussion of Nazi society, moving us into a study of the psychology and the arts of Nazism. But first, we saw the film *Night and Fog*, bringing in the shocker only now, to remind ourselves that we are not just studying theories but theories that resulted in enormous human waste. And we asked: what would you have done if you were inside one of those boxcars? or guarding them? How does a victim or an accomplice rebel?



(At some point we must all confront the victim and the fascist within us.)

Pushing the question how we ourselves would behave, we looked at the Milgram experiments in obedience to authority, with a film called *Obedience* and an article by Edgar Friedenberg in *Ramparts* called "The Privilege of Violence." The salient points in our discussion of the experiments were that people tend to obey, even against their gut desire, if 1) they perceive authority as legitimate and 2) they are relieved of "responsibility." Shades of the Grand Inquisitor. And of course the question everyone asks is again, Would I obey or rebel? or, How can society raise people who will rebel?

So we read Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (the first half). This fascinating and uneven work

the following theory of the relation between sexism and fascism:

It is the externalization of submissiveness that allows totalitarianism to triumph. But where do people learn submissiveness? The character structure of the dominated class is molded by the dominating class to fit the latter's needs like a machine. The daily obeisances that we make produce a habit that revolutionary tracts are ill-equipped to cure, partly because they ignore it.

We can see in the role of women (and children) the measure of civilization of a society. Reich says reaction always limits women's sex role to procreation, that it is terrified of sexually awakened women (and homosexuals). Why? A repressive society needs women to have constant sexual anxiety and guilt feelings so they will always feel



interested most of the students more than anything else we read, because it relates their own personal lifestyles to a whole social system: so much that they thought was private turns out to have public significance. There are many topics in the book that stimulated discussion, such as Reich's materialist method ("Ideology as a Material Force") and his criticism of the CP's economism. But for students the most immediate and fascinating of his ideas was the relationship between women's oppression/repression and class oppression. Here we were able to reverse the *Verfremdung* technique and use the personal experience of women, men, and former children in the class to illuminate the authoritarian state's microcosm and training ground, the authoritarian family – making the strange familiar now, instead of making the familiar strange. Through discussion of Reich and their own experiences, the class developed

powerless, because it is they who bring up the new generation of men and women: they must train their children in the habit of obedience. Mother teaches kids social values before the kids are able to reject them: her neurotic, guilt-inducing method is more effective than the authoritarian father's brutal method, just as in the state the role of propaganda is more important than the role of terror. The authoritarian (not necessarily the same thing as nuclear) family is a tiny version of the state, where the habit of obedience is learned, or more precisely the habit of suppressing natural desires because an authority tells you to. (Reich is referring to masturbation but surely the principle is wider.) Reich says that the suppression of natural drives (of women and children) leads to distortions, sadomasochism, and the will to enslavement. People are encouraged (think of *Bambi's* father -- *Bambi* is a very fascist film -- or the Lone Ranger or Marcus Welby) to need

a protective father whose power they can identify with rather than feeling their own power. Think of the frustrated creativity this leads to and the need for an object (children, in family; Jews and Communists, in society) to take that frustration out on.

Consequently, fighting against sexism is fighting against authoritarianism, and everyone on the left *must* care about it, or lose. We should be very suspicious of any attempts to idealize women, making us mysterious, exalted mothers, or otherwise very different from men. This is usually an excuse to give us honor instead of power and to keep us frustrated and dependent, filling us with ideology to justify our repression and oppression. All these terms that we have used so often when talking about private relationships take on new meaning when they refer to the relationship to the paternal authoritarian state.

For comic relief we then deal briefly with the madman and demonic theories that attempt to explain the mass phenomenon of fascism as hypnosis by a mystical power. The most extreme and therefore amusing example of this approach is a book called *The Spear of Destiny* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973) by Trevor Ravenscroft, which shows that Hitler held the destiny of the world in his hands because he claimed and understood the occult powers of the spear of Longinus, which had pierced the side of Christ. Another example of the personalization of fascism, also useful for teaching because it is so clearly misleading, is the psychological study *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* (New York: Signet, 1973) by Walter C. Langer. By now students are ready to reject this emphasis on the leader, seeing that it exonerates the followers, ignores the structures and therefore repeatability in other circumstances, treats people as homogeneous, not divided into classes, and is ultimately neither useful nor interesting.

Finally the last section of the course deals with the arts under National Socialism; we use George Mosse's *Nazi Culture* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1968) and student seminar papers. By this point the reasons for monumental architecture, Dionysian music, idealized naturalistic art, etc., are clear to the students, and they can also understand why avant-garde art was subversive. The main purposes in studying the arts become: 1) a discussion of issues of form and content or purpose, and 2) recognition of similar styles in one's own society or in other historical periods. By now too, from reading Neumann, students understand well enough the difference between socialism and national socialism to be able to discuss true and false

community intelligently, and to begin to deal with the very difficult problem of Stalinist art policies. I do not believe it is honest to teach Nazi art without mentioning how similar Stalin's or Zhdanov's policies were. The goal of socialism may be the opposite of the goal of fascism, but socialism can be perverted, and we want students to be able to recognize its perversions. A really thorough study of the structural similarities and differences between Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany was far beyond the scope of the course, and it is hard to broach the subject lightly without reinforcing old anticommunist attitudes. But it must be done. Even the use of Dostoevsky runs the risk of reinforcing the doctrine, which students get from other teachers, that socialism and fascism are just two kinds of totalitarianism. But by the end of the course they are surprisingly subtle and open-minded about the distinctions, probably because they have discovered many of them for themselves.

I didn't plan any contemporary comparisons to Nazism but they kept cropping up all the time. Several students brought in literature about Senate Bill 1, shocked by its similarity to what they were studying. During the course we made three increasingly sophisticated attempts to define fascism, involving comparisons to various police states as well as U.S. policy toward Indians, Vietnamese, blacks, prisoners. My general approach was to encourage students to restrict the use of the term "fascist" rather than expand it: it gets thrown around very sloppily by the left. But at the same time I encouraged observation of racism, sexism, mass cultural manipulation, and other kinds of repression.

Besides requiring a term paper on a cultural subject, I also asked each student to keep a journal in which he or she noted fascistic (and anti-fascistic) tendencies in overheard conversations, teachers, parents, lovers, newspaper clippings, etc. The lesson intended from that focus was Reich's lesson that the proper study of fascism is the study of the people, not the leaders. Because if we can understand what he calls the "cleavage"- between the working class or middle class economic situations and their ideology - we can begin to develop people who do not need miracle, mystery, and authority, and who will perceive in a Milgram situation that they do have a choice.

Ideally the Nazi culture course should be followed by one on culture that liberates.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



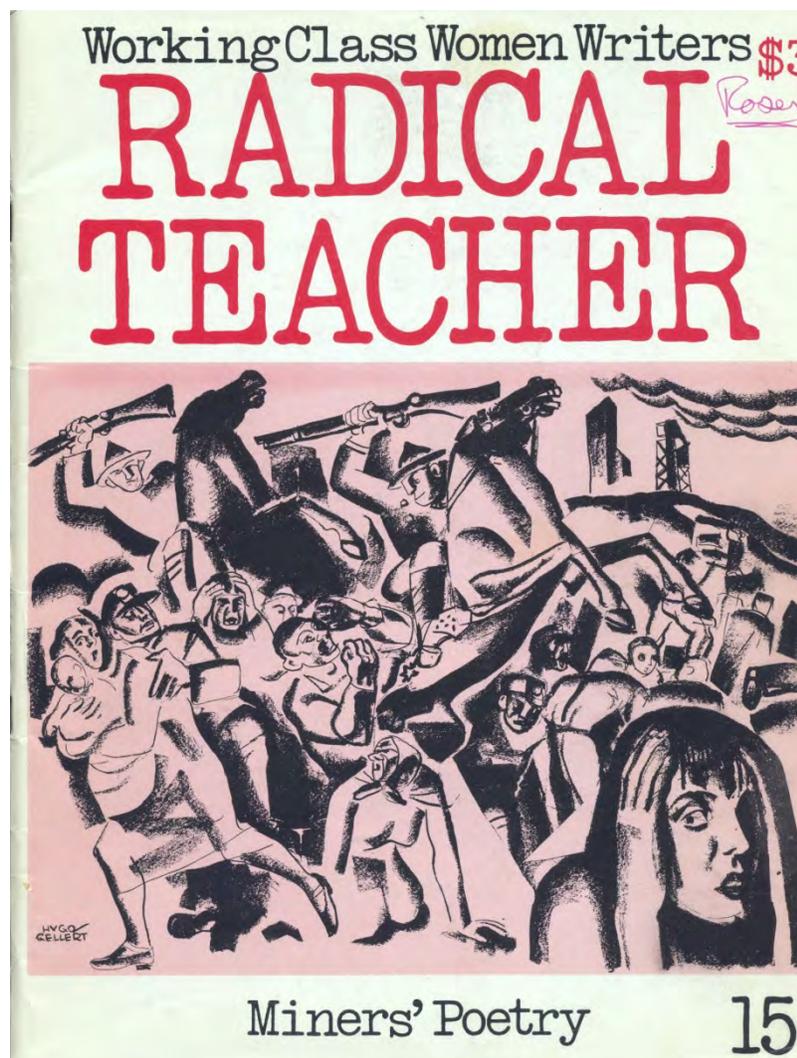
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1906

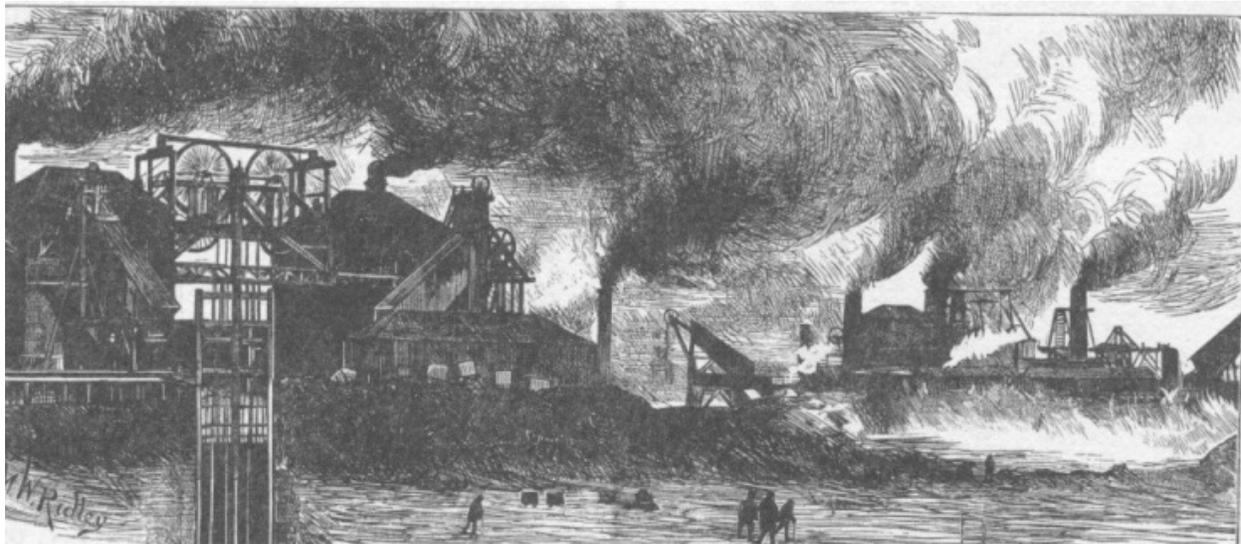
by Dan Tannacito



The poetry published in the *Miners Magazine* during the first decade of this century provides us with an illuminating case study of the characteristics and development of working-class literature in the United States. The creation of poetry by nonferrous metal miners in Colorado and surrounding areas illustrates the need for expression, affirmation, and communication on the part of the workers themselves and their allies during times of struggle.

The magazine, of which the poetry was a small part, was a vital tool in the organized resistance of the working class at the beginning of western industrialization. It was published weekly for the members of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and circulated on subscription to their friends as well as to other unions and union members. Responses to poems and contributions of poems from across the nation suggest that the miner poets stimulated feelings of readers who identified closely with the miners' cause.

The culture of the working class in the United States,



which the miner poetry illustrates, forms an important part of the total reality of American history and literature, yet a comprehensive view of that cultural reality is nearly absent from our educational institutions. The popularization of traditional working-class culture depends to a considerable extent on socially and historically conscious teachers of literature.<sup>1</sup> Among others, young writers in working-class situations can benefit from the history and literature of this tradition.<sup>2</sup> Quite possibly, when the traditional culture of the working class has been brought out of the darkness in which it has been shrouded, it may provide a useful, although not exclusive, basis for a new literature in the United States.

The poetry of the *Miners Magazine* was not the first such expression by the working class during the rise of industrialism in the United States. But the fact that the poetry was both reflective of and instrumental in conscious working-class struggle does indicate a relatively new phenomenon for the time. Upton Sinclair, a celebrated contemporary of the miner poets, indicated some of the

difficulty any writer of working-class life encounters when he remarked that:

*It is a kind of anguish that poets have not dealt with; its very words are not admitted into the vocabulary of poets – The details of it cannot be told in polite society at all. How, for instance, could anyone expect to excite sympathy among lovers of good literature by telling how a family found their home alive with vermin, and of all the suffering and inconvenience and humiliation they were put to, and the hard-earned money they spent, in efforts to get rid of them?*<sup>3</sup>

Yet unlike Sinclair's work, which spread beyond its initial proletarian audience, the literature of most working-class poets – and specifically that of the Colorado miners – has never been republished since its original appearance in the *Miners Magazine*. Because of the systematic exclusion of working-class poetry from the mechanisms (the popular magazines, scholarly journals, textbooks, and school

curricula) by means of which the received culture reproduces itself, the tradition of American poetry as well as the history of working-class culture in the United States has been seriously distorted for generations of young people. Until very recently, scholars – especially in the literary profession – have done little to rectify this. At best, working-class poetry has been treated as documentary evidence by historians and literary critics. At worst, the literature is regarded as "mere propaganda."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most common attitude is reflected in the remark: "Workers don't write poetry; poets write poetry." Of course, this response is drawn from the myth that characterizes workers as mute creatures shoveling ore, while another, articulate class thinks and feels for society as a whole. But the historical reality is that workers, like the Colorado miners, wrote poetry in order to share and express their feelings about their experiences as a class. They were creators of their culture as well as creators of the wealth of their society. Yet neither the labor of their mining nor the labor of their poetry has received due recognition.

The exclusion of working-class poetry from the reproduction of American culture has its virtues as well. For the poems by the Colorado miners were not objects written for the market from which the writers derived their livelihood. Hence, they avoided the customary fate of

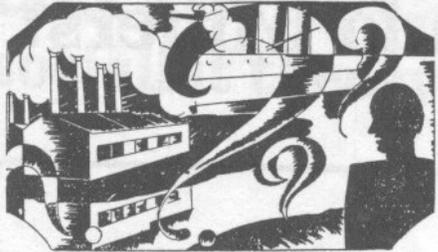
the immediate use made of it by its local audience of miners and sympathizers. By means of these poems the worker poets formed an intensified relationship with their worker audience that is not characteristic of twentieth-century poetry in the received canon. The miners shared an unalienated social poetry; that is, a poetry of commitment, communication, and concreteness.

The poetry of the Colorado miners contributed to the mining community's definition of its common life, work, and goals. All the poems were written during one of the most violent and significant episodes in United States labor history. "In Colorado between 1893 and 1897," Melvyn Dubofsky writes, "3,057 new mining corporations were organized, each capitalized at over \$1 million. New Yorkers and Chicagoans, Englishmen and Scotsmen poured their funds into the American West."<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, within a decade Cripple Creek grew from a virtual frontier town to a "modern productive center."<sup>6</sup> The strikes of 1893 provided the impetus for the organization of the mines. Moreover, the strength of a rapidly expanding and increasingly concentrated industry created such an intense situation that WFM President Charles Moyer felt that, "We are being attacked on all sides by the Mill Trust and Mine Owners' Association."<sup>7</sup> Labor militance was the response to the situation. "The union grew in members and power," Emma F. Langdon (one of the labor writers at Cripple Creek) reported in 1903, until "the organization embrace[d] between 150,000 to 200,000 with a substantial treasury."<sup>8</sup>

The bitter Cripple Creek strike of 1903-04 was precipitated by the implacable opposition of the mill owners to the WFM's attempt to organize the Portland, Telluride, and Standard processing mills. The WFM had stopped the supply of ore to the mills from the mines which had already been organized. The employers decided to muster all their economic and political strength to break the union. They used scabs, provocateurs, agents; they deported and "vagged" workers; they organized so-called "Citizen Alliances" of local businessmen and petty officials. Not satisfied with this repertoire of strikebreaking tactics, the owners enlisted Governor James Peabody, one of the most anti-labor governors of the decade. Peabody declared martial law and sent Colorado's militia to the region. As historian Vernon Jensen tells us, "The military leaders were from the first in the closest sympathy with the mine owners, and the efforts of the troops were devoted not so much to the simple preservation of order, as to crushing the activity of the unions. General Bell expressed himself very simply on this point. 'I came,' he said, 'to do up this damned anarchistic federation.'<sup>9</sup> After a long and bitter struggle in the hills of Colorado, the combined might of the owners' wealth and the state's legal and military coercion proved too powerful for the organization of the miners at that time.

The response, and in particular the poetic response, of the miners to this situation was remarkable. They articulated class values in their themes, imagery, and genres which possess a traditional character that enhanced the links between authors and community. Paul Lauter finds a similar phenomenon in other examples of working-class art:

WHILE THE ROCKEFELLERS  
PLAY GOLF IN FLORIDA —



TEN THOUSAND MINERS  
ARE FIGHTING FOR A LIVING  
WAGE IN THEIR COLORADO  
MINES

DOZENS of pickets are in jail. Winter is on and the battle is not yet won. The strikers and their families need food and clothing. Unable to save anything from the bare subsistence wage they have been receiving, the strike finds them penniless. Relief must be forthcoming if the strike is to be carried successfully.



*Hurry contributions to reach the  
miners children before Xmas.*

ALL DONATIONS—MONEY AND CLOTHES—  
ESPECIALLY SHOES

*Should be sent to:*

COLORADO MINERS RELIEF  
AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE  
Box 87—Walsenburg, Colorado

From New Masses, Dec., 1927.

artistic productions under capitalism: the transformation of poetry into commodities. Written neither for the market nor for posterity, the poetry was active in forming the culture of the working class at the beginning of the twentieth century. The real value of the miners' poetry was

*In many ways, therefore, working-class art like other elements of working-class life is highly traditional, even in a sense "conservative"; certainly innovative form is not a primary consideration. Similarly working-class poetry and song, especially, but also tales and the like, are often built around repeated elements – refrains, formulae, commonly accepted assumptions about characters. Language, too, is often simpler, even commonplace, less "heightened" than that of "high culture" verse.*<sup>10</sup>

The combination of tradition and innovation is especially important in the formulation of genres or types of poems written by the miners and other working-class writers.<sup>11</sup> The emotional scope in the poetic genres of the miners is varied, ranging from job-oriented chanting to poetic renditions of community storytelling to more traditional forms of expressing complaint, joy, and vituperation. They developed as a response to the differing tasks of the social group.

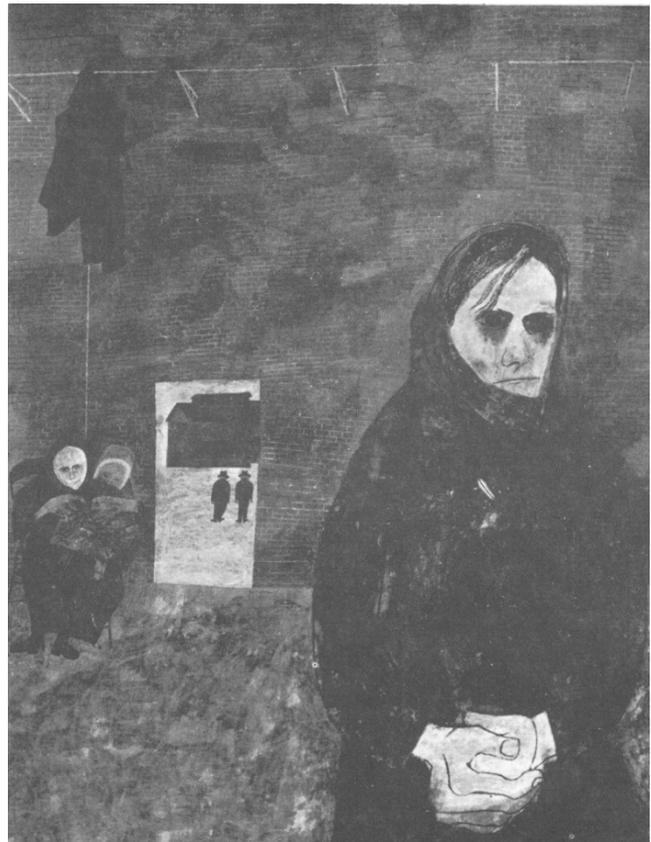
**Work Poems** are one of the most significant categories. The work poem arises from acute observation and intense feeling while participating in labor; it communicates the social experience shared by all members of the group. For example, Joe R. Lazure's "A Colorado Miner's Fourth" depicts the common experience of miners rescuing fellow workers in the aftermath of a mine disaster.<sup>12</sup> In stark contrast to non-working-class poetry, which tends to create individualized, esoteric and imaginary experiences, this type of poem strives to elicit shared emotions about real-life experiences among workers. Whether the technique used is that of traditional storytelling, as in "A Colorado Miner's Fourth," or that of chanting, as in the occupational songs more familiar among southern black workers, the function of the work poem is to shatter the social isolation of the job, to resist the monotony of the work day, or to inspire comfort or conflict.

The second main genre represented in the *Miners Magazine* is closely related to work poems. **Poems of Praise**, such as "South Range Strike," "A Colorado Heroine," "The Man Behind the Pick," "Myron Reed," "Labor Song of 1904," and "The Laborer" eulogize past and present heroes and heroines among workers and their allies.<sup>13</sup> Poems of this kind commemorate the heroic deeds of model individuals or important past struggles from which the community of workers takes its lessons. For instance, "A Colorado Heroine" lauds the courageous deeds of Emma Langdon, a typographical union worker for the *Victor Record* during the Cripple Creek conflict. In other instances, pioneers of labor solidarity are eulogized, as in "Myron Reed," which refers to the clergyman who used his pulpit to support the Colorado strikers of 1894. Oftentimes, the anonymous, common worker is the subject of admiration, as in these lines from "The Man Behind the Pick": "But he does it all in silence and seldom makes a kick/Which is why I sing the praises of the man behind the pick" (11.19-20).

Since conflict begets antagonists, **Poems of Censure and Condemnation** emerge as another genre.<sup>14</sup> The

purpose of poems like "Colorado's Shame," "Scab, Scab, Scab," "Peabody's Reign," "Curse of the Scab," and "The Secret of War" is diametrically opposed to that of poems of praise. Poems of censure and condemnation lash out at the perfidious conduct of scabs, owners, police, and other groups of enemies aligned against the workers. Such enemies are relentlessly exposed through description, narration, and dramatization, as well as by satire, invective, derision, burlesque, and mockery. Poems of this genre are designed to embolden workers and to deflate the prestige and authority of their opponents. These poems are unanimous in condemning the political antagonists as physically repulsive, morally reprehensible, and socially criminal.

Some of the poems by the Colorado miners and their allies, namely **Poems of Struggle**, form a significant group because they call upon miners to unite in action against their oppression.<sup>15</sup> These are fighting poems, as "The Battle Song of the Toilers" illustrates in its title, and call workers to "Take arms in the cause of freedom/and fight for home and right." Although the battle call of this poem is partly metaphoric, the revolutionary theme in other poems of this genre is made more explicit by allusions to comparable situations, such as the expulsion of oppressive invaders by the Bedouins in Kearney's "A Pariah's Prayer" and the warning to the rich and idle – "Beware thou! of the insurrectionary flame;/Know thou that such as this our patriot fathers saw" – in Dagenhart's



MINERS' WIVES BEN SHAHN

"Some Questions Asked." Legal forms of united action, such as striking and voting, are also depicted in these poems of struggle. The weekly publication of the *Miners*

*Magazine* afforded the writers the opportunity to encourage timely support for particular acts, such as striking for a shorter work day in "The Eight-Hour Day" or voting, as in "A Behest," for socialist candidates. All the poems of this genre exhibit a determination to stand, fight, and win, using legal or illegal forms of united action, whether for some short-range goal (e.g., "A Behest") or "Earth's finished State – The Comrade Commonweal!" as in "Anvils and Hammers."

**Poems of Solidarity** are a distinct genre in the poetry of the Colorado miners. In these poems non-miners, foreign-born workers, and itinerant miners express their sympathy with the plight of the Colorado miners and identify with their cause.<sup>16</sup> For example, Dale Damon, a ranch hand recruited to guard the company mines during the struggle, reveals in "On Squaw Mountain" his contradictory position, aligned with the owners and military officers, when his situation is precisely that of the miners against whom he has been placed. Similarly, "Hobo Miner" relates the experiences of migratory workers in the industry in order to support the view that "these same miners are as good as any in the crew." "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest," "Enigmatical Acrostic," and other poems of this sort see unity between workers in different industries and even unity against political oppression in different countries as the basis for solidarity. Poems of solidarity illustrate the familiar need to overcome divisions of labor as well as national and geographic divisions.

Finally, I note the use of the traditional prose poem genre of **aphorisms**.<sup>17</sup> Highly memorable lines such as "Agitation prevents stagnation," from William Haywood's "Bell Signals," were undoubtedly repeated among the miners. The wisdom in the pithy lines of the aphorisms, such as "Privileges are for the rich; duties for the poor," in "Outpost Echoes," stood as premises in the arguments by workers for their rights because the aphorisms summed up and condensed their common experience. The six genres which I have briefly defined and illustrated show considerable diversity of purpose. Most of the poems printed in the *Miners Magazine* during the first decade of this century (illustrated by the selection in the Appendix) belong to one or another of these genres. The extent to which these genres are natural vehicles of expression for other workers and at other times needs to be determined. The unity of the genres consists in the fact that the class of workers and their allies produced poems for themselves about the realities they shared. Each poem of the Colorado miners gives validation and convincing expression to the life experiences of the miners at work or in struggle or in community. Not only was the poetry intimately related to the daily life of workers at the earliest stage of the industrialization of the American West, but the miners conceived it as predominantly social in character and function.

The difference in the social and political character of this working-class poetry from that of established writers cannot escape even the most perfunctory examination by students and teachers who have been schooled in the tradition of "great poetry." To judge these poems by the esthetic, and ultimately the social, standards of "high" culture is a mistake because they are the product of a

distinctive psychology and social reality. The faults of working-class poetry may, indeed, be obvious. For example, some readers may object to the dependence on religious allusions, or to the occasional mixed metaphors, or even to some faulty rimes and meter – the result of hasty composition. Such objections, however, miss the point. The common values, the emotional bonds and outraged instincts, the visions of a united community for which these poems are important vehicles give them a distinctive worth which we need to measure in terms different from the ordinary assumptions about literature. For example, the fact that these poems use pronouns of collective self-reference – the "we" and "us" opposing "them" and "they" – is not a simple-minded dichotomy but a view of reality unshackled from the fragmentary consciousness of modern experience. On the other hand, the absence of artistic techniques, such as the use of poetic masks and voices as surrogates for authors' true feelings, illustrates the authenticity of feeling and thought in communicating values, rather than technical primitiveness. A more proper basis for the evaluation of these poems and others by workers can be developed by observing the regularities to be found in their thematic preoccupations.

The most prominent themes in the poetry of the Colorado miners are those of workers' self-image, ethnicity and race, and religion which come to embody the values of the mining community itself. Not only were the miners struggling for their economic and political rights, they were also arguing against propaganda intended to demean them as a class. One of the aphoristic columns in the *Miners Magazine*, "The Difference," shows the dichotomy of values and behavior which workers confronted:

A union man, thinking the guarantee of free speech means what it says, tries to persuade a scab not to work at unfair wages.

He is thrown into jail without a trial and is labeled an anarchist.

A millionaire whose wealth was secured by slave-driving in the sweat shops is welcomed into high society and made trustee of the fashionable church.

That is merely a recognition of his business ability.

A union man, rather than work to the injury of his fellow unionists, joins a sympathetic strike and endeavors to boycott an unfair employer.

That is crime worthy of life imprisonment.

A dozen manufacturers, rather than compete for business, organize a trust to rob the people and then steal the substance of widows and orphans by selling them watered stock by plausible promises.

That is commercial enterprise and its managers are hailed as captains of industry....<sup>18</sup>

The poetry was a vehicle for resisting imposed ideas and for sharing a self-image that was common but unspoken among the workers. By articulating what they thought of themselves and their opponents, the miner poets developed an authentic poetic identity and an analysis rarely available elsewhere.

The miners saw themselves as heroic, honest, just, brave, loyal, and in all ways standing up to the forces of greed, corruption, intemperance, and evil: the forces of the mine owners, superintendents, scabs, state officials, and the militia. The miners' image of themselves was inseparable from their image of the mine bosses and their agents, since it was impossible to talk about how noble the miners were, how just, how deserving, without also saying what they deserved and who they deserved it from. The miners' portrayal of themselves anticipated the epic portrayal of workers to be found in socialist realism some years later. But in a pre-socialist environment the positive self-image of the oppressed seemed to require a clear understanding of the nature of the oppressor. Hence, at the center of the self-image put forward by the miners in the *Miners Magazine*, was the imagery of producer versus parasite.

The miners saw themselves as brave at work and in battle. Sometimes the bravery of the miners is simply the ability to endure, as in these lines from an anonymous poem:

Undismayed, they toil in patience.  
 Brave as any knight of old;  
 Toil to gain a slender pittance  
 From the men whose sordid gold  
 Is the earning of their perils  
 In the dark abyss beneath;  
 Yet this pittance is exploited.  
 Even in the crash of death.<sup>19</sup>

Or again when the miner, Jimmy Stevens, was trapped below in a mine disaster, the poet extolls the miner's traditional virtue:

Not one man in ten thousand could  
 stand it, do you think?  
 Entombed alive for thirteen days, and  
 without food or drink.  
 But Jimmy bore up bravely....

At other times the poets honor that special courage it takes to do the ordinary job, as Edgerton writes in "The Man Behind the Pick":

Up the rugged mountain-side, a  
 thousand feet, he takes his way,  
 Or as far into darkness from the  
 cheerful light of day;  
 He is shut out from the sunlight in the  
 glimmer of the lamps;  
 He is cut off from the sweet air in the  
 sickly fumes and damps;  
 He must toil in cramped positions; he

must take his life in his hand;  
 For he works in deadly peril, that but  
 few can understand.

Courage to these miners meant courage in struggle, such as the minister Myron Reed's, as remembered by Anna Saunders:

He was noble, brave and strong,  
 (Knight of honor), when the toilers  
 Grappled with gigantic wrong.  
 He was with them in the conflict;  
 By their side he dared to stand.

Believing that, in the words of W.T. Withrow in "Address to Colorado," "Between the truth and falsehood is the balance cast," the miners stood up as honest men. This particular image is recurrent in a number of their poems, such as "Peabody's Reign," where Marshall DeWitt cursed "a hang dog cur that never feels, but lurks where honest



Trading shots with striking coal miners

men must go" and criticized those "who grab and gather honest labor's fruit." The fact that the miners thought of themselves as honest workers led them to value highly the steadfast loyalty of their comrades, although one former scab recorded his defection and subsequent remorse in "After the Strike":

Brave men were fighting, standing  
 side by side  
 Fighting for justice, fighting with  
 pride.  
 I was with them, with them heart and  
 soul,  
 But when the test came I left them in

the cold.

.....

That's why I'm lonely, that's why I'm  
sad.

The miners also defined themselves by the mine. The poets and the work mates knew that without the miners there would be no mine. "The Man Behind the Pick" puts it that:

He unlocks the bolted portals of the  
mountains to the stores

.....

Things of comfort and of beauty, and of  
usefulness are mined

By the brave, heroic fellow, who toils  
on all begrimed.

Josephine Conger declares in "Labor Song of 1904" that

We are the brawn and  
The muscle and brain  
And at last we are wide awake.

In a similar vein, Louis James in "South Range Strike" acknowledges the miners' intelligence as well as strength:

Their families must live on chaff,  
While the agents drink champagne;  
But the miners now give them the laugh  
And show they have some brains.

While the poetry projects an image of bravery, pride, loyalty, and intelligence, it does not fail to mention the miners' sources of dissatisfaction. Their lack of adequate food, clothing, and shelter made them aware of their oppressed social status, especially when compared to that of the superintendents and owners, as Louis James illustrated:

A miner can't exist on hash,  
But could relish a beefsteak.

.....

The miner often feels cast down,  
To see his children poorly clad,  
While others wear the best in town  
And have everything to make them glad.

Working-class women were consciously included in this poetry's imagery of resistance, and were, in fact, the authors of a number of poems in the *Miners Magazine*. Ida Crouch-Hazlett attributes to Emma Langdon the same virtues characteristic of the male miners, saying:

The true heart leaps with swelling pride

At deed courageous, soul so grand –

A woman's will in danger tried,

A woman's brave and steady hand.

Other poems, such as "Anvils and Hammers," included women in the fighting class:

O, anvils, hammer-worn! Where'er ye toil,  
In shop, mine, factory, in office, dark,  
In field or forest, on the land or sea,  
Doing your manly or womanly best  
From weary day to day for pittance wage,  
Ye've born the hammers of injustice long.

Even when not performing wage work, women are depicted in this poetry as an important part of the workers' community. In "Scab, Scab, Scab" a woman requires her boyfriend to quit the "scabby race" before she would marry him. Other forms of solidarity by women in mining communities are also illustrated in the literature.<sup>20</sup> The poetry by the Colorado miners, however, is not free of sexism. The repetition of the theme of "manhood" tends to exclude women from the most rigorous occasions. For example, in "Colorado Miners' Fourth" the wife of the trapped miner waits passively at home for the results of the rescue attempt.

The miner poets were clear that they were heroic, and heroes and heroines in literature demand their villains. The working-class poets contrasted themselves to the mine supervisors, owners, and their agents. The dividing line was clear, even if the villainy was diffuse. The most common sentiment, expressed by Gwennett Gwalin in "Colorado," was that the villains were those:

Whose greed for gold makes serfs of  
your mankind

Whose lust for gain takes all that they  
can grind.

In other poems the villains are imaged as "legalized thieves," "the plundering few," the "slimy, unclean flood," "human coyotes," "snakebloods," "bandits," "vipers," "vulgar rich," and "predatories" of all kinds who bring their "tools" "from predatory walks of life." Who were the "tools"? They were scabs, agents, provocateurs, the press, some preachers, the militia. Henry O. Morris in "Colorado's Shame" gives one poetic analysis of the villains from top to bottom. The predators found strength, according to "Master's Dream," in their economic power, their control of the governor and the laws, in manipulation of elections, in the disunity of the workers, as well as in the reserves of labor imported from overseas. In "Peabody's Reign" Marshall De Witt would

Point to her laws to Mammon sold,

Her jurists' ermine in the mire;

Her pulpits where the god of gold

Is praised by hypocrites of hire.

The prisons, where her martyred brave

Are tortured for defending right;

The journals that uphold the knave

To rob by virtue of his might.

The honest miners saw themselves up against liars, cheaters, and bullies who shirked all honest work and performed cowardly deeds against other men and women.

It is evident from the poems in the Appendix that the worst abuse was directed at the "purchased might" of Colorado – Governor Peabody, the "tin soldiers" commanded by General Bell, and the scabs. Peabody, nominal commander in-chief of "the troops, arrayed at Lucre's side," was satirized in "Colorado's Shame" as "a common rural clown" who had reached his office "by fraud and cunning acts of knaves." Morris, like other poets writing in the genre of censure and condemnation, turned the tables by applying to the governor the propaganda image of the working man as drinking, vulgar, dumb, and dull. While greed commanded Peabody, the poets perceived Bell as playing "jumping-jack" for his master in a "burlesque opera."

The scab, even more so than the "hired poets," divided the militia into the deluded and the corrupt, the halt and the blind. They also distinguished the officers from the soldiers, as some soldiers distinguished themselves as seen in Damon's "On Squaw Mountain." The imagery of DeWitt's "Peabody's Reign" renders the militia recruits more uncharitably as "Pimps, forgers, thieves and whisky bums,/A convict mob of human brutes." The assassin was regarded by the miner poets as the lowest of all enemies. Consequently he incurred the most scathing attacks – in a tradition that is perhaps the most widespread of all in the working-class poetry of the United States. The scab was the exact opposite of the loyal and hard-working miner. At best, the scab was a well-meaning coward who "when the test came" to be brave or cowardly, loyal or selfish, failed "manhood's" test. The scab could "bluster" and "brag," or he could, as M'Cormick depicted him,

Hang[s] his head and a' that

With shuffling gait and downcast eyes.

.....

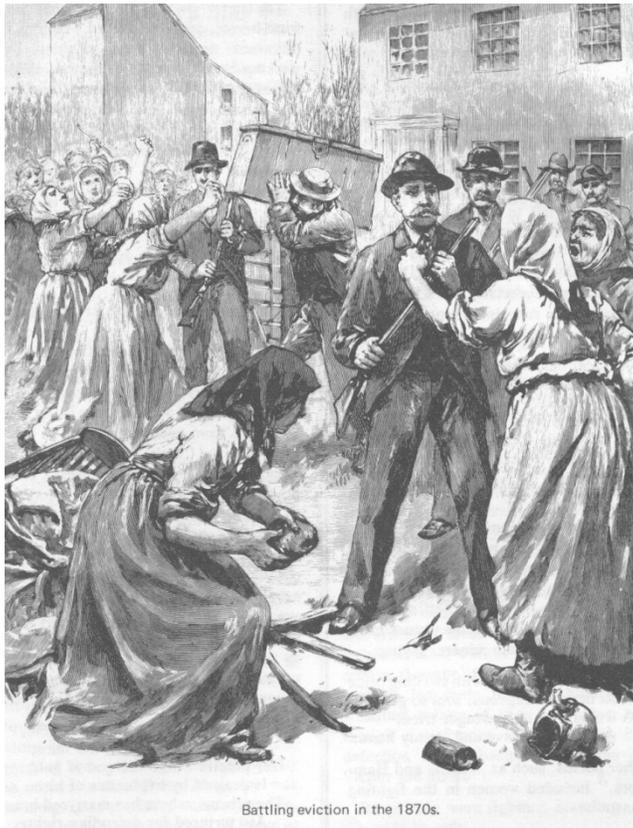
The governor may favor show

To parasites and a' that,

But manhood he can ne'er bestow;

A scab's a scab for a' that.

The miner poets mustered all the virulent anger that religion, morality, and tradition could provide against "the wretch that sells his class." Webster Rogers's "The Curse of the Scab" epitomizes the extent of the vilification. The scabbing image, however, is two-sided in the mining poetry. The mine and mill owners tried to import foreign-born scabs from the midwest, but many of these recruits refused to continue after they learned of the true situation in Colorado. Some of those few who remained were regretful, fellow workers cowed into submission by the threat of force or joblessness.



The poets show us that the miners' most consistent self-image was that of the honest and true man, occasionally narrowed into images of *white* men and fragile/passive women. But by defining themselves by the values of common humanity, by their work, and by contrast with the behavior of their opponents, the miners and their poets kept alive their identity as a class in the struggle for recognition of their hard work as producers. Ethnicity and race are less frequent themes of these poems than the workers' self-image; yet they are of considerable significance. Several historical accounts indicate that a significant percentage of the miners in the region were Italian and Mexican.<sup>21</sup> Some of the poets we have noted are Scottish. One writer, John F. Kearney,

directly addresses the question of ethnicity in "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest," which supports the political struggle in Ireland against British imperialism. The same author strikes another international note in "A Pariah's Prayer," which calls on justice and reason to rule "workingmen who've been toiling for thousands of years." Moreover, "Enigmatical Acrostic," dedicated to an Irish refugee in America, contains the lines:

Beggared exiles we of Pirate England's make

Outcasts whose spirits will not bend or break –

Live! Live! To see a European earthquake

which illustrates the kind of determination among ethnic workers to have workers of all national origins liberate themselves.

Just as the miner poems were not free from sexism, neither were they free from racism. In "The South Range Strike" Louis James used a derogatory comparison to counterpose black and white labor:

Well here's good luck to copper diggers  
They are worthy of our praise,  
Though they may be black as niggers  
They may yet see better days.

James's demeaning epithet was, perhaps, representative of the racial prejudice of some miners. But the immigrant and Chicano base of the WFM was more likely to count class solidarity above racial division. The perceived continuity between the slavery of the white wage worker and the long historical saga of oppression of races in many countries is prominent in the opening stanzas of "The White Slave." Henry Morris and Sidney Stevens also appealed to the tradition of black struggle against slavery in the seventh stanza of this poem intended to inspire Colorado miners. The view that slaveholders of all sorts, the bosses, were the oppressors implies the kind of labor unity Big Bill Haywood epitomized when he wrote in "Bell Signals": "The supervision of industry by the producers will obliterate race prejudice and imaginary boundary lines."

Religion was a central theme of many of the poems from the *Miners Magazine*, but the attitudes of the writers toward religion was varied and sometimes contradictory. The basic elements of the orthodox Christian vision are retained intact in a few poems, such as Withrow's "Address to Colorado." Probably influenced by Tennyson, Withrow idealized the pre-1904 life in Colorado by characterizing it as "The holy, quiet,/Deep, majestic calm of peace." Even more conventionally, he used an allegory of the Garden of Eden in the opening stanzas to equate the miners' oppression with man's fall – a stock device in the literary use of Christian ideology. Moreover, his solution to the class war at Cripple Creek (in stanzas seven through nine) is that the miners will obtain justice after the Last Judgment, at the end of history, through God's recognition of the righteousness of the miners' cause. This thoroughly idealistic view of work, history, oppression, and struggle was a minority view, but one which persisted, as is shown by James B. Clarke's similar poem, "The Voice of God," published in the *Miners Magazine* in 1918.

A more contradictory attitude toward religion is adopted in many other poems such as John Kearney's "A Pariah's Prayer." In a conventional way Kearney's meditation beseeched God to aid the miners: "God of Justice . . . will you nerve us to get it through the fears/of legalized thieves." But imploring turned into the need for action when the poet realized "Far too long we've been pleading for mercy." The efficacy of heavenly intervention is abandoned in favor of self-determination by the miners for whom "justice can be had for the taking." Kearney's prayer illustrates, with its demystifying analysis of the working man's situation, the developing consciousness of the miners about religion.

In de-emphasizing social institutions poets like Kearney frequently criticized organized religion. Kearney's

own "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest" used a bishop as a symbol of institutionalized religion, which is dispensed with when the institution upholds exploitation. Similarly, "Peabody's Reign" condemns "pulpits where the god of gold/Is praised by hypocrites of hire," and "Pulpits breathe forth libels" in "The White Slave." In "The Master's Dream" I.F. Mandeville satirized the use made of organized religion by the masters, who are made to say:

We must see that our priests and the preachers  
Handle our cause in their text;  
The poor are very fond of religion,  
And through it they will never get next.

Reversing the traditional associations of religious symbols and images achieved much the same effect in other poems like Roland Onwood's "Anvils and Hammers." Onwood commended to the workers the Christian analogues of Polycarp who, like an anvil, withstood brutal punishment and Christ who, like a hammer, drove the money merchants from the Temple. The workers, however, were counseled to seek their own salvation by voting.

Such expression of class-conscious criticism of institutional religion led some of the poets to question the entire religious outlook. In "Curse of the Scab" the poet, Webster Rogers, questioned the most essential element of any religious view, namely a superhuman god, with the critical line "Yet the nation's flag is a painted rag/And the bigot's god a dream." The ultimate sin for the working class, as Rogers saw it, was not the denial of God but of one's class. This was the standard by which the miners judged each other and also God, as the lines from the "White Slave" show: "The white slave's cup of woe is surely full/God of the wealthy, if thou be their God,/Cover thine eyes when this cup overflows."

The poetry of the Colorado miners illustrates a creative spring of thought and feeling made communicable by means of a diversity of genres that are characteristic of the working class alone. The miners' themes of moral and social identity, of race and ethnicity, and of religion both reflected their values and were instrumental in advancing the concerns of this sector of the working class during the early part of the twentieth century. Similar poetry by garment workers, butchers, seamen, painters, steelworkers, and communication operators, to name but a few occupations, can be found. To dig for these works would surely be productive, since the reconstruction of working-class culture can lead us to a deeper understanding of and to a broader basis for judging our history and values.

#### NOTES

1. There has been some movement in recent years by scholars and teachers to examine working-class literature seriously. Paul Lauter's article, "Working-Class Women's Literature -- An Introduction to Study," provides in the appendices as comprehensive a list of books and articles containing working-class poetry by men and women as is available. Lauter's essay is a much needed guide to this area of study. Martha Vicinus's seminal studies on British working-class literature are fundamental for any work in this area. They include: *The Industrial Muse* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975); "Literary Voices of an Industrial

Town," in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2, ed. H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 739-61; and "The Study of Nineteenth-Century British Working-Class Poetry," in *The Politics of Literature*, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 322-53. Other valuable attempts to rectify the one-sided view of literature too often found in our classrooms have appeared in this journal, but see especially Jack Weston, "Revising the Canon of British Eighteenth-Century Literature," *Radical Teacher* #2, pp. 25-29, for issues about pedagogy and working-class poetry. The importance of theoretical work on working-class poetry cannot be underestimated, since traditional literary theory has failed to provide any adequate means for dealing with this abundance of material. Yet the most immediate need, it seems to me, is for the discovery of hitherto unknown or ignored examples of working-class poetry by women and men of different occupations, places, and periods of time in the last century. As the known body of this literature grows in size and heterogeneity, significant theoretical advances can be foreseen.

2. Attention is due contemporary writers who confirm or show us the values of traditional working-class literature and life. For one fine example of how ethnic and class history provide literature with special value, I urge Peter Oresick's collection of poems, *The Story of Glass* (Cambridge, Mass.: West End Pressbook, 1977). The title poem and others in this volume express the point of view of glassworkers, particularly of Slovakian heritage, at the Pittsburgh Plate and Glass Factory in Ford City, Pennsylvania, where Oresick worked in between his years as an undergraduate.

3. *The Jungle*.

4. This opinion was answered quite adequately, in my judgment, by Lu Xun in "Literature and Revolution" (1928) when he said: "All literature becomes propaganda as soon as you show it to anyone. This applies to individualist works as well, once you write them down. Indeed, the only way to avoid this is by not writing or opening your mouth.... However, though all literature is propaganda, not all propaganda is literature.... In addition to catchwords, slogans, notices, telegrams and textbooks, the revolution needs literature -- just because it is literature."

5. Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), p. 22.

6. Benjamin M. Rastall, "The Labor History of the Cripple Creek District," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, no. 198, *Economic and Political Science Series*, III, no. 1 (Madison, Wisc., 1908), p. 61. Rastall's analysis of the significance of the Cripple Creek situation remains the best account to date. He says: "The history of the Cripple Creek District is one of rapid and spectacular growth. The sudden rise of a complete social fabric in a mountain wilderness, and the transformation of a barren area to a center producing \$2 million a month, formed the background of an equally rapid industrial development which finds its chief exponent in the mining labor movements. The district forms a small but distinct physiographical and political area. Within this area the stages of a complete industrial evolution have been passed through in a little more than a decade. Starting with primitive frontier labor conditions there was a rapid succession of stages ending in extreme capitalization and extraordinary organization. Gathering the strength of forces shut in unto themselves, and keeping pace with the other rapid developments, the labor-capital issues finally broke forth in a conflict worthy of the name revolution" (p. 10).

7. Quoted by Dubofsky, p. 39.

8. *The Cripple Creek Strike: A History of Industrial Wars in Colorado* (New York: rpt. Arno Press, 1969), p. 36.

9. *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Non-Ferrous Metals Industry Up to 1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, n.d.), p. 130.

10. "Working-Class Women's Literature," *Radical Teacher* #15, 1980. Indeed Lauter's perception is nontrivial, especially when one considers "traditionalism" as a characteristic of working-class literature throughout the world. For example, the cultural movement in China during the 1930s utilized old forms popular in Chinese culture, *dazhong wenyi*, which were rooted in the life and history of the people. Lu Xun, who practiced what he preached, provided a dynamic perspective on the value of traditional class forms when he said: "When eliminating something, we have to add something. The result is the emergence of new forms. This is innovation." Lu Xun *Quanji* (Peking: Jenmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1958), p. 20.

11. The categories discussed here are intended to be descriptive, pragmatic, and open-ended. The typology is meant to apply to other working-class poems as well, although the limits of the topic prevent illustration. The validity of this taxonomy is open to criticism, in fact, invites it for the purpose of correction, expansion, and reformulation. Confronted, on the one hand by no available literary theory, and on the other by the evidence of these and other poems, we need to start with some explicit emotional/political and situation criteria which do not sever the authors and the audience from the poems. Hopefully, better scholars can improve on this eventually.

12. *Miners Magazine* (hereafter MM), VI, 109 (July 27, 1905), pp. 11-12. All poems of the Colorado miners cited in this article are reprinted in the Appendix under their specific genres. I have not traced the working-class origin of each poet conclusively. The vast majority of the poems are by workers or are otherwise noted. I give full citations for each poem in the footnotes below in order to facilitate re-examination of the primary material by others. Berton Braley's "The Worker," MM (June, 1917), n.p., is also a "work poem" although of a later date than the Cripple Creek strike. Work poems, as defined in this article, are similar to many popular broadsides written by Manchester weavers between 1790 and 1810 about which Vicinus, "Literary Voices," p. 742, says that "poetry of this type, although written by one person, is not individualized, but is the response of a member of a particular group; its chief function is to describe accurately a well-known situation for that group."

13. Poems of praise: J.A. Edgerton, "The Man Behind the Pick," MM, V, 22 (Nov. 26, 1903), p. 11; Josephine Conger, "Labor Song of 1904," MM, V, 31 (Jan. 28, 1904), p. 14; Louis James, "The South Range Strike," MM, V, 42 (April 14, 1904), pp. 13-14; Anna M. Saunders, "Myron Reed! A Man and Hero," MM, V, 35 (Feb. 25, 1904), p. 7; Ida Crouch Hazlett, "A Colorado Heroine," MM, V, 36 (March 3, 1904), pp. 10-11; Alfred Bern, "The Laborer," MM, V, 16 (Oct. 15, 1903), pp. 14-15.

14. Poems of censure and condemnation: Webster Rogers, "The Curse of the Scab," MM, VI, 56 (July 21, 1904), pp. 14-15; Anonymous, "Scab, Scab, Scab," MM, V, 28 (Jan. 7, 1904), p. 15; William M'Cormick, "A Scab's A Scab For A' That," MM, V, 45 (May 10, 1904); Anonymous, "After the Strike," MM, V, 28 (Jan. 7, 1904), p. 15; ANYONEMOST, "The Secret of War," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p. 13; Marshall DeWitt, "Peabody's Reign," MM, V, 34 (Feb. 18, 1904), pp. 11-12; Berton Braley, "The Traitor," MM (June, 1917), n.p.; Henry O. Morris and Sidney Stevens, "The White Slave," VI, 68 (Oct. 16, 1904), p. 14; Henry O. Morris, "Colorado's Shame," V, 32 (Feb. 4, 1904), pp. 12-13.

15. Poems of struggle: M.E. Pisto, "The Battle Song of the Toilers," MM, V, 33 (Feb. 11, 1904), pp. 13-14; Shorty P., "A Behest," MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 15; Shorty P., "The Eight-Hour Day," MM, V, 48 (May 26, 1904), p. 13; Roland Onwood, "Anvils and Hammers," MM, V, 48 (May 24, 1904), p. 14; John F. Kearney, "A Pariah's Prayer," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p. 13; "Gwennett Gwalla," "Colorado," MM, V, 42 (April 14, 1904), p. 14; "Nemo," "A Warning," MM, V, 30 (Jan. 21, 1904), p. 15; Ernest Dagenhart, "Some Questions Asked," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p.15.

16. Poems of solidarity: John F. Kearney, "Enigmatical Acrostic," MM, V, 31 (Jan. 28, 1904), p. 14; John F. Kearney, "A Scoto-Irish-American's Protest," MM, V, 17 (Oct. 22, 1903), p. 14; Dale Damon, "On Squaw Mountain," MM, V, 20 (Nov. 12, 1903), p. 14; Joe Lazure, "Hobo Miner," MM, VI, 94 (March 13, 1905), p. 13; I.F. Mandeville, "The Master's Dream," MM, V, 26 (Dec. 24, 1903), p. 14; W.T. Withrow, "Address to Colorado," MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 15.

17. Aphorisms: William D. Haywood, "Bell Signals," MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 7; Anonymous, "Outpost Echoes," MM, V, 18 (Oct. 29, 1903), p. 14.

18. MM, V, 52 (June 23, 1904), p. 9.

19. MM, V, 33 (Feb. 11, 1904), p. 13.

20. Cf. *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*, ed. Mary Field Patton (Chicago: Charles Kerr Pub. Co., 1925), details the involvement of Mary Harris Jones at the Cripple Creek Strike during this period, especially chapters 13 and 15.

21. For example, cf. *Mother Jones*, p. 99, where she related her experiences at Cripple Creek at the time of the strike in November, 1903. At the WFM convention she addressed the miners, saying, "You English-speaking miners of the northern fields promised your southern brothers, 70 percent of whom do not speak English, that you would support them to the end. Now you are asked to betray them, to make a separate settlement. You have a common enemy and it is your duty to fight to a finish. The enemy seeks to conquer by dividing your ranks, by making distinctions between North and South, between American and foreign. You are all miners, fighting a common cause, a common master. The iron heel feels the same to all flesh."



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Appendix: An Anthology of Miners' Poems

### Work Poems

#### A Colorado Miner's Fourth

Oh stranger, this is a great day on this part of the earth –  
it's "Independence Day" of ours, which gave our nation birth,  
When our patriots assembled and declared, "It shall not be,  
We'll stand no more oppression; our country shall be free."  
While from the call of duty these miners will not shirk,  
This is the one day in the year on which they will not work.

I never worked on but one fourth, and that one was the last  
Fourth of July I'll ever mine, where'er my lot be cast,  
'Twas at a place called Goldfield in the county of Pinal,  
Way down in Arizona, I was working with a "pal,"  
There were nothing doing on this fourth, there was no place to go,  
So we decided we would work and try to save some "dough."

The day it passed off quickly, we were young then, full of life,

We've since had many ups and downs in this hard world of strife.

So when the shades of evening fell we thought it was our right

With other kindred spirits there, to celebrate that night.

The boys had scarcely settled down to have a quiet time,

With refreshments by the bottle, and several different kinds.

When in rushed old Riel Morse, his face as pale as death,

And says: "Come boys, get out of here!" when he could catch

his breath.

"For that old stope has caved in, clear down to the 2;

"Come get your digging clothes on, boys, for there'll be need of

you."

If Stevens was back in his drift, we knew there was some hope.

His orders were, that very day, "not to go through that stope."

We jumped into our harness, for the mine we made a dash,

And there we found Bolitho, for he had heard the crash.

Our foreman in the mine was he, and right here let me say,

He was a good one, stranger, he sleeps beneath the clay,

Near the new shaft he was standing, and with steady voice and

slow,

Says he: "Now I want one of you to go with me below.

"We'll go down to the 7; I think the shaft's all right,

"To see if Jimmy Lee is safe – he's working there to-night."

On the bucket there with Billy stepped the Kid without a word.

They found Lee on the 7, he knew not what occurred.

To the surface on the bucket, and back down to the 3,

They went, to find the quickest way to set poor Stevens free.

But that old stope was working – you could hear the timbers pop –

So Billy thought it safer to sink down from the top.

He picked out four of us at once to work on that night shift.

We started through the old cave there to tap poor Jimmy's drift.

Then Billy called up all the boys, and these words to them said:

"I'll want you in the morning, boys, now you can go to bed.

"I want you all to stay in camp, we will need all of you,

"For I'll work every man I can to carry that shaft through."

But every man was anxious, each one in the crew,

With strong hands and willing hearts to help on this rescue.

While Stevens, he was working too, we heard him digging in

To reach a little air-shaft which was not far from him.

But the ground was dry as powder, like sand it ran in fast,

And, with no light or timbers, he gave it up at last.

The time they made on this first shaft was pretty hard to beat;

It had taken just three days to sink it fifty feet.

But there we struck some timbers which came from that old stope.

We could not drive our spile in, and with them could not cope.

The morning of the 8th, then, Billy says: "We'll have to quit

And start a shaft thro' solid land; I know we can sink it."

The place where they then started in was right above Jim's drift,

And a small stope, some eighteen feet there, gave them quite a

lift.

Two rows of stulls they threw in there and lagged up good and

tight,

And how those miners made the "muck" fly was a pretty sight.

For they all worked like demons; there were many feet to  
drive,

We never thought to find poor Jimmy Stevens there alive.

Not one man in ten thousand could stand it, do you think?

Entombed alive for thirteen days, and without food or drink.

But Jimmy bore up bravely, and when the boys would drill,

They'd rap upon the foot-wall and he'd rap back with a will.

And this would cheer the boys up, and they'd dig in like a Turk.

They never needed any boss to make them do their work.

One hundred six and twenty feet that new shaft had to go.

Before they made connection with Jimmy's drift below.

The morning of the 17th the sun rose bright and fair,

You'd see by groups of miners who were scattered here and there.

By subdued voices, anxious faces, each one felt the strain,

And hoped that all their gallant efforts had not been in vain.



The "graveyard" shift had just come up, they knew the end was

near,

They knew that Stevens was alive, but would his mind be clear?

The morning shift had been on thirty minutes, or about,

When up the shaft came ringing a glad and joyful shout:

"We've reached him, boys, he is all right, we have just now

broke thro'!"

Then down the shaft a doctor went, to tell them what to do.

And when the doctor looked at Jim, he says: "Why he's all right,

"But we will keep him here a while, the sunlight is too bright."

In Colorado, all this time, their loving hearts did yearn,

His wife and little children, praying for his safe return.

For Jimmy, he had told me: "On the 15th I'll go home,

"To see my wife and family, for I'm too old to roam."

There, with aching heart, she waited; she knew about the cave,

How hard at work his comrades were, her husband's life to save.

How proud those happy miners were when they sent the news

that night

To his wife in Central City: "Your Jimmy's safe, all right!"

The people down in Mesa, "they're Mormons," some folks say,

The miners won't forget them if they live till Judgment Day;

For when they heard the story of these miners' brave rescue

That Stevens was all right once more, they knew just what to do.

They commenced to cooking chickens, cakes and pies, and

brought the band

And with their wives and daughters came to shake them by the

hand.

The way those hard-worked miners the whole bakery did take,

They say it was no "cake-walk," but walking into cake.

And how they stowed those "gumys" away, it surely was a fright.

They danced and ate, and ate and danced, till early morning light

While Jimmy Stevens, so they say, gained seven pounds that

night

"'Twas time for one to pick up some, who's forty-eight pounds

light."

The good people from that valley, to them it was a treat

To see those chickens disappear and watch those miners eat.

They showed a Christian spirit, true, and when they bade adieu,

invited every miner there to come and see them, too.

And when with hearts and baskets light they journeyed home

again

They left kind memories of them which always will remain.

Up home in Central City, when Jimmy stepped down off the train

With a band his friends had gathered there to welcome him again

The meeting with his loving wife who found him safe from harm.

His joy to see his little ones, and clasp them in his arms,

This picture is too sacred, pard; I'll draw the curtain here,  
For scenes like this are apt to start from me a pensive tear.

And there I fain would leave him now, alive and doing well.

But alas! poor Jimmy's story, the sad truth I must tell:

Far up in Colorado's hills he sleeps beneath the sod,

Caught in a cave in a mine there, he went to meet  
his God.

So, stranger, when each glorious Fourth of July  
rolls around,

I think of Jimmy Stevens, and stay from under  
ground.

Joe R.

Lazure, "Hobo Miner"

### **The Worker**

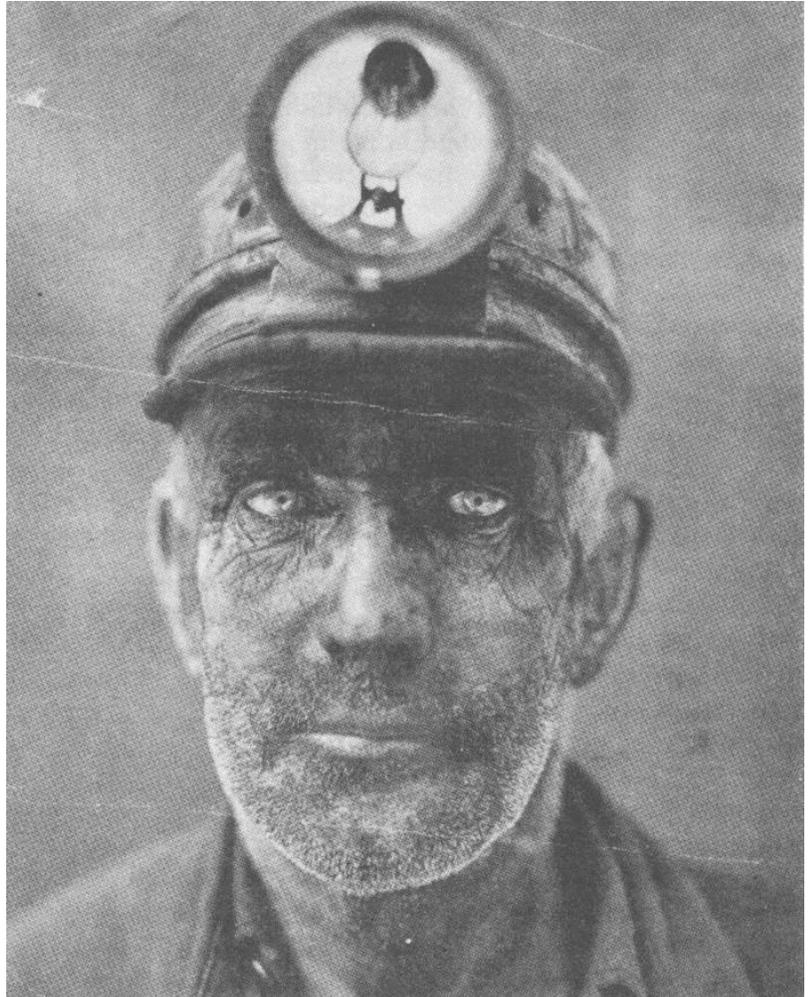
I have broken my hands on your granite,  
I have broken my strength on your steel;  
I have sweated through years for your pleasure,  
I have worked like a slave for your weal;  
And what is the wage you have paid me?  
You masters and drivers of men.  
Enough so I come in my hunger

To beg for more labor again!

I have given my manhood to serve you,

I have given my gladness and youth,

You have used me, and spent me, and crushed me



COAL MINER, 1944

And thrown me aside without ruth;  
You have shut my eyes off from the sunlight –  
My lungs from the untainted air,  
You have housed me in horrible places  
Surrounded by squalor and care.

I have built you the world in its beauty,  
I have brought you the glory and spoil;  
You have blighted my sons and my daughters,  
You have scourged me again to my toil,  
Yet I suffer it all in my patience,  
For, somehow, I dimly have known  
That someday the worker will conquer  
In a world that was meant for his own.

Berton Braley

## Poems of Praise

### **The Man Behind the Pick**

There has been all kinds of gush about the man who is  
"behind" –  
And the man behind the cannon has been toasted, wined and  
dined.  
There's the man behind the musket and the man behind the fence;  
And the man behind his whiskers, and the man behind his rents,  
And the man behind his plow beam, and the man behind the hoe;

And the man behind the ballot and the man behind the dough;  
And the man behind the jimmy, and the man behind the bars;  
And the Johnny that goes snooping on the stage behind the  
"stars";

And the man behind the kisser, and the man behind the fist;  
And the girl behind the man behind the gun is on the list;  
But they've missed one honest fellow, and I'm raising of a kick,  
That they didn't make a mention of the man behind the pick.

Up the rugged mountain side, a thousand feet he takes his way,  
Or as far into darkness from the cheerful light of day;  
He is shut out from the sunlight in the glimmer of the lamps;  
He is cut off from the sweet air in the sickly fumes and damps;  
He must toil in cramped positions; he must take his life in his  
hand;  
For he works in deadly peril, that but few can understand;  
But he does it all in silence and he seldom makes a kick,  
Which is why I sing the praises of the man behind the pick.

He unlocks the belted portals of the mountains to the stores  
Hid in nature's vast exchequer in her treasure house of ores;  
He applies a key of dynamic, and the gates are backward rolled.  
And the ancient rocks are riven to their secret heart of gold.  
Things of comfort and of beauty, and of usefulness are mined,  
By the brave, heroic fellow, who toils on all begrimed,  
Trampled down and underpaid, works on without a pick;

So I lift my hat in honor to the man behind the pick.

J.A. Edgerton

### **A Colorado Heroine**

At times when freedom's sacred boon

Is dashed to earth by dastard hands;

When dear-bought liberties too soon

Are crushed by sacrilegious bands;

When justice weeps and takes her flight

From outraged temple, hearth and home;

And usurpation's murky night

Obscures the stars of heaven's dome;

The true heart leaps with swelling pride

At deed courageous, soul so grand –

A woman's will in danger tried,

A woman's brave and steady hand.

And, blazoned on the deathless page

Of history in lines of gold

She who to cowards flung the gauge

Shall read her name to millions told.

'Twas when that traitor to his vows

Of constitution, law and right,

Who shamed fair Colorado's brow

By deeds of brutal, tyrant might,

The Peabody to scorn upheld,

At greed's relentless base behest,

Had raised his arm, and lawless, felled

The men who made the glowing West.

The troops, arrayed on Lucre's side,

Had occupied the mining town:

Proclaimed their orders far and wide

That court, and press, and speech must down,

And in they marched and seized the force

That got the Victor Record out:

They jailed them in the bull-pen coarse,

And thought them stilled beyond a doubt.

But all that night, with steel-set nerve,

A little woman, dauntless, worked,

Who loved the strikers' cause to serve,

And never task or danger shirked.

And when the morning tinged the east

With flaming shafts of sunrise gold,

Then only had her labors ceased –

The paper on the streets was sold.

And thus has Emma Langdon's name

Been placed with heroes of the past,

Wide given to the winds of fame

While love of truth and hope shall last.  
Till Labor, crawling like a slave,  
Shall lift its form in giant might,  
Shall break the death clamps of the grave  
And lead mankind to joy and light.

Ida Crouch-Hazlett

### **The Laborer**

The man who toils from morn to night  
In rain or shine, in heat or cold,  
With dangers everywhere in sight,  
Who toils until he is too old,  
And ever works,  
He never shirks,  
What is his boon, his compensation,  
Of all the wealth of his creation?  
With pick and shovel underground,  
With dynamite he ventures bold  
Far, far beneath all human sound  
To break the rocks in search of gold.  
No gold for him,  
His share is slim,  
It's just enough to check starvation  
Enough to chain him to his station.

He makes and guides the speedy train

From town to town, from land to land,

And rather dies in awful pain

In mishaps to leave his stand.

Oh human fools!

What willing tools!

But all you lack is education

To bring about your elevation.

He steers the ship with nerve and skill

Through weather-beaten seas,

He builds the palace, builds the mill

And all machineries.

He travels not.

Dwells in a hut;

He gets no time for recreation

Except when he has lost his station.

He battles for his country's sake

And dies for it with pride,

His little one he leaves at stake,

His wife, perhaps his bride

His country – his!

Ridiculous!

It is invention, base illusion

And intended for confusion.

Awake, awake ye laboring men

And cease to suffer, cease to groan,

Emancipate, you must, you can,

Then go to battle with the drone;

You'll easily win

Their lines are thin -

Awake, awake to your salvation,

To justice and equalization.

Alfred Bem

Denver

July 25, 1903



COAL MINERS, 1974

## Poems of Censure and Condemnation

### **The Curse of the Scab**

The man may betray his country

And his country's flag forsake,

And his name shall be accursed

And his life shall forfeit make;

The man may deny the Godhead

And the bigot's torch may gleam,

Yet the nation's flag is a painted rag

And the bigot's god a dream.

The man, he may slay his brother,

And his brother's ghost forgive;

The man, he may rob the widow

And may retribute and live.

The woman may sell her body

And her guilt at last will pass,

But who will plead in his day of need

For the wretch that sells his class?

Yet his deed is of ancient usage

Of the code of the "Tooth and Claw,"

And the crime he does is legal

Behind the shield of the law;

And the faithless guards of freedom

And the priests of vested wrong,

And the shepherds who steep, nor feed the sheep,

Have sung him a soothing song.

But the new, true ethics whisper

And his fellows loudly cry:

"Make thou no pact with the spoiler,

For the time of times is nigh;

By the bootless trade of Esau,

By Iscariot's age-long ban,

As the man in pride from the beast will divide –

Go prove thyself the man!"

The gods of the trial balance  
Of Epah, and Ell, and Lakh;  
They sit, in the gate of judgment,  
On the souls that turn not back.  
And may they curse with curses  
Whose powers be strong or faint,  
But into the breed of the traitorous deed  
They strike the great scab faint.

That taint in the soul will fester  
And burn like the serpent's bite,  
Will itch in the listless morning  
And throb through the restless night;  
And, be it becloaked or naked,  
All souls, as they pass, will feel  
And smell the rot of the putrid spot  
Of the scab that does not heal.

And never the ban of bishop,  
Nor curse of a priest or pope,  
Can drive so far from the guilty  
The ghost of a sinner's hope,  
For souls that are yet unshriven  
Of murder and foul rapine,  
By the lowest law their robes will draw

And cry: "Unclean! Unclean!"

The soul with the scab shall wander

On deserts of scorching heat,

And the stones cry out in horror

And the hot sands loathe his feet;

Or, if in the covering darkness

His fearsome course he steer,

The myriad eyes of the silent skies

Will open and blink and peer.

The curse of the scab will follow

Like a wolf on a winter trail –

Stealthy and gaunt and eager –

'Til the hunted footsteps fail,

'Til under the gray-faced shadows,

While the frozen moon stands still,

It tears the throat with a snarling note;

It tears, but it does not kill.

The soul with the scab will feel it

Like a crawling, slimy snake,

That coils on the breast at midnight

When the underself shall wake;

That winds like a choking horror

Round bosom and neck and limb,

'Till the cold beads start from brow and heart

And the white lip's quaking rim.

The soul with the scab will see it

In the cloudbank's scowling brow,

And his guilt will be told in thunder

That the traitorous heart will cow;

Will see it roost on his rooftree

Like a sullen brooding fate –

Like a raven of prey, whose croak will say,

"Too late! Too late! Too late!"

That curse will strike in the children

And its loathsome virus drip,

Will clot in the throat of the virgin

And crust on the suckling's lip,

With sighing and prayer and penance –

If penance and prayer be good –

But the taint still runs in the souls of the sons

To the third and the fourth of blood.

Webster Rogers

### **Scab, Scab, Scab**

Altho' it's not my color, I'm feeling mighty blue,

I have a lot of trouble, I'll tell it all to you.

I'm certainly clean disgusted with life and that's a fact,

Because my job is scabby and because my character is black.

My girl she took a notion against the scabby race.

She said if I would win her I'd have to change my place.

She said if she would wed me that she'd regret it bad,

Because I am an unfair man and working as a scab.

Chorus:

Scab, scab, scab, I wish my color would fade,

Scab, scab, scab, I wish my job was played,

Scab, scab, scab, I give my life for the maid.

I wish I was a union man instead of scab, scab, scab.

I had my white shirt laundered and gave my hair a cut,

I put my bran' new suit on – I certainly did loom up.

I started out to see her just twenty minutes of nine.

I had in mind the question to ask her to be mine,

And when I popped the question she said, "You made me sad

Do you know I can marry a union man? Do you think I'd look at a

scab?

My father is a W.F.M., my brother is the same,

My mother joined the auxiliary-I guess I'll not take your nam

Tune: "Coon, Coon, Coon"

Anonymous

## The White Slave

I.

Not bleeding 'neath the lash of Egypt's scorn,

Not in the dungeon, nor in galley chains,

Nor baited to the savage lions now,

Like those to Nero's bloody thirst consigned.

But look on him, the white slave of our time;

See on his face the centuries' stamp of crime.

II.

Ye see no chains, but yet more sharp than steel

Life's shackles cut into his tortured soul.

The white slave toils away his hopeless life

And dies like coral worm beneath the sea,

That palaces and gardens by his hands may grow,

While kingdoms rise and princes come and go.

III.

His masters revel while the white slave toils.

"Be ye contented," is his only cheer.

And when to God goes up a cry for help,

In vain he prays to him who dwells on high:

"O God of Plenty, art thou blind and deaf,

That to this lowly cry comes no relief?"

IV.

His masters revel. Their remorse of soul  
Is drowned in ruby wine, when tears should flow;  
Lights of the ball room, softly pleading flutes.  
What thoughts are lent for tales of man's distress?  
Tell these of sorrow and they heed you not,  
For splendor hides from them the cancerous blot.

V.

The masters revel. Countless thousands starve.  
The white slave's cup of woe is surely full.  
God of the wealthy, if thou be their God,  
Cover thine eyes when this cup overflows,  
For satan's realm makes not the whole of hell,  
While sons of earth such fearful tales can tell.

VI.

The pulpits breathe forth libels on thy name;  
Thou canst not be the God to whom they cry.  
Thou wilt not stand for treason's earthly lords,  
Nor see thy poor oppressed forever wronged.  
Come quickly, lest thy teachings fade away,  
And men forget thy mercies while they pray.

VII.

The black slave cried. His cry was not in vain;

Prophets arose to sound the warning note.  
The crisis came, and 'mid the clash of steel  
From sable limbs the cruel fetters fell.  
Great was the price, but not too great to pay,  
That men might be redeemed from slavery's sway.

VIII.

Ye white slaves stand together, side by side,  
And list in silent prayer the distant storm.  
Though faint and far we catch its murmur now.  
Prophetic ears cannot mistake the sound.  
'Tis coming -- coming fast, this storm-cloud dark,  
But those who revel neither see nor hark.

### **The Eight Hour Day**

In Telluride the strike is still on  
And on there it will stay  
Until we get just what we want --  
It is an eight-hour day.  
  
Eight months we have been out on strike.  
Up to the first of May,  
And eight months more we'll stay on strike  
Just for an eight-hour day.

Though gatling guns and cannonade

Surround the town, oh, say,

I wonder what they'll do with them

After the eight-hour day!

They may deport us from our homes,

And tell us to stay away;

But then we'll not call off the strike

Until the eight-hour day.

We have labored hard for many a year,

We have labored night and day,

But when the people cast the votes,

It was for an eight-hour day.

They may confine some men in jail,

But they can't win out that way,

For our cause is just and we won't quit

Until the eight-hour day.

Now working men from Telluride,

I say just stay away;

The fight is yours as well as ours,

To get an eight-hour day.

ShortyP-----

## **A Pariah's Prayer**

God of Justice, look down on the workmen,  
Who've been toiling for thousands of years,  
And for justice too often beseeching;  
Will you nerve us to get it through the fears  
Of legalized thieves, who still rob us  
And cast us out on the world as tramps.  
Far too long we've been pleading for mercy,  
And it's time we should light up our lamps.

Whose rays will illumine the darkness  
And enable the millions to see  
That justice can be had for the taking,  
And access to the land be made free;  
Then the castle and hovel will vanish  
And justice and reason command,  
We'll have no more of the jailer or almshouse,  
But fraternity and love through the land.

Go, ask the poor tenement housekeepers,  
Or the "tramps" in the old, frosty streets,  
What they think of Society's offsprings  
Or the men out from prison one meets.  
They will tell you that law is not justice  
When framed by the plundering few;

And the parties who prey on and jailed them

Are doing as the law bids them do.

I repeat that "law should be strangled,"

So that freedom will arise from its ruins,

Or some effort be made as determined

As was made by the plundered Bedouins

When the murderous, marauding invaders

Thought to force on that people their laws;

What lesson for us and our leaders

Was that blow for humanity's cause.

John F. Kearney

### **Hobo Miner**

Dear old Arizon, I love thy rocky hills,

But how often have I cursed thee when I had to make long "drills"

Across the barren sandy wastes, and often do I think

Of the many rivers I have crossed and could not get a drink.

I could tell you "hard luck stories" of long trails and blistered

feet,

The memories of them make me dry, "Come on, Pard, it's my

treat."

What will I drink? you ask me. Why, I'll drink the same old thing

That puts us miners on the bum and keeps us on the "wing,"

That makes these "Birds of Passage," the flock grows every year,

And increases still more rapidly since the advent of "scoop" beer.

Arizona she's too hot, for some she is too dry;  
Colorado, she's all right, but the altitude's too high;  
So they high themselves away up north at the opening of the  
    spring,  
But the chilly northern winter's sure a swarm back here to bring.  
They'll tell of the "tortilla route" and the "bread and milk line,"  
    too,  
It's all they ever get to eat in Utah comin' thro'.  
We call them "Hobo Miners," but this you will find true,  
That these same miners are as good as any in the crew;  
But their days are few and fleeting, they soon get the "wrinkles"  
    out,  
They look around the country then to pick out some "star route."  
  
There is always something wrong in every bloody camp,  
They're sure to find some good excuse to keep them on the tramp,  
If the "grub" and water are all right the air is never good;  
He "couldn't work there if he would, and wouldn't if he could."  
When he's in Arizona's heat, he'll dream of visions fair –  
Of Colorado's snow-capped peaks and cool, pure mountain air;  
So when in Colorado's snow a fierce desire will burn  
For Arizona's sunny skies his heart will fondly yearn;  
Away down South in "de vinter time" he longs to be again,  
With a small road-stake he'll catch a brake upon a south-bound  
    train;

In some warm stope it is his hope, to find a winter's home

In Arizona's copper camps – Globe, Bisbee or Jerome.

So thus with each succeeding year the feeling of unrest

And love for kindred spirits grows still stronger in his breast,

So when across the Great Divide he takes his last long "hike,"

We fondly trust he'll find a camp which "hobos" all will like –

All Union camps where the hours are short and the bosses are all

right,

Where they never change from day shift and have to work at

night,

Where the company furnishes gum clothes in all wet places there,

Where they don't "hold out his road tax" and the stopes all have

good air.

Where the summers never get too hot and the winters are not

cold,

Where everything goes in the "gobb" except the virgin gold,

Where there'll be no "hot sulphide stopes," they'll mine no

copper ore,

For there'll be naught heavenly lights on that bright golden shore.

At St. Peter's "hash foundry" is the end of his long route

He'll go out in the "jungles" there and take his last "boil out,"

So there we leave the wanderer in his bright Elysian home,

Where his "pie-card" never will run out and he'll care no more

to roam.

## Aphorisms

### Outpost Echoes

Manhood knows no pattern.

Liberty does not study etiquette.

Hypocrisy oils the wheel of custom.

A radical does not live by words alone.

Privileges are for the rich; duties for the poor.

One great hope compensates for many little fears.

Roosevelt carries a revolver; does he contemplate suicide?

Poverty sanctifies property, and poverty results from theft.

The state argues by means of rapid fire guns and big bribes.

When the throne of God has fallen the other thrones begin to  
tremble.

At present woman's great privilege seems to be to love her

chains.

The morrow holds in its womb what would be scorned and stoned  
to-day.

Some men build monuments to liberty, while others become  
liberty's living monuments.

The Liberal Party in England, like the Democratic Party in  
America, is a condor with the voice of a nightingale.

He whose social nature has been ruined by studying the tricks of  
trade will never understand what Socialism means.

Capitalism is singing a siren song into the ears of labor, the tune  
of which is brotherhood. Labor is holding off; capitalism wants to  
be the bigger brother.

Anonymous

### **Bell Signals**

Agitation prevents stagnation.

\* \* \*

The machine is the apprentice of yesterday, the journeyman of  
today.

\* \* \*

A rich sermon is poor satisfaction to an empty stomach.

\* \* \*

If the producer is not entitled to the equivalent of that which he produces, who is?

\* \* \*

A labor organization without political purpose is as meat with the nutriment extracted.

\* \* \*

The supervision of industry by the producers will obliterate race prejudice and imaginary boundary lines.

\* \* \*

A soldier commits wholesale murder for \$13 a month. The working class abets the crime by upholding the system that permits it.

\* \* \*

Colleges and universities are the modern scab hatcheries where the Farleys secure strikebreaking recruits. It is to Rockefeller's interest to maintain such institutions, at the people's expense.

\* \* \*

When the working class is sufficiently well-organized to control the economic power – the means of life – legislatures and courts, militia and police, will be expensive luxuries for capitalists.

William D. Haywood



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



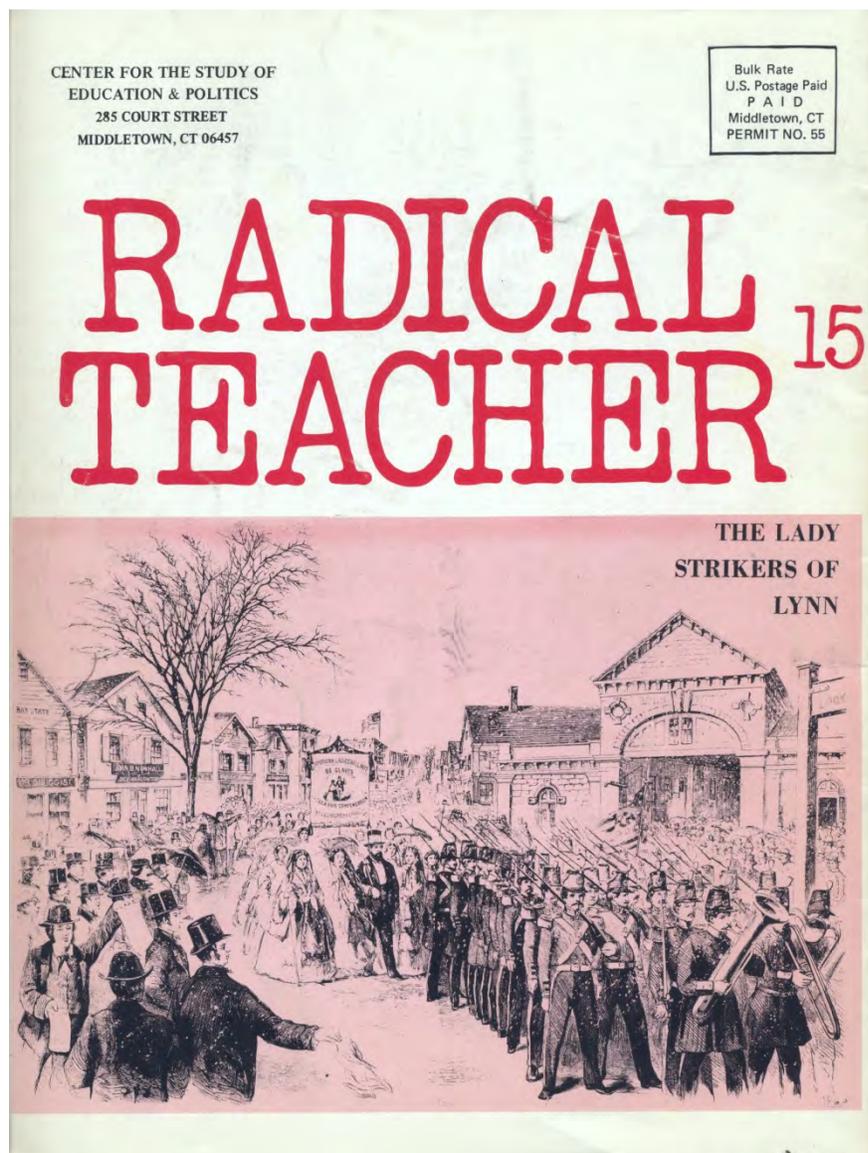
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Working-Class Women's Literature: An Introduction to Study

by Paul Lauter



Writing – and indeed thinking – about working-class literature presents a number of unique problems. To begin with, what do we mean by “working-class literature”? Literature *about* working-class people, literature by them, or literature addressed to them? If we use the first definition, should we include works that are ignorant of or hostile to the working-class people they write about like some turn of-the-century “industrial” novels? If we focus on writing by working people, do we include pieces that do not deal with their lives or even with their real concerns, like some “popular” songs? Should we include, say, literature by people of working-class origins, like D. H. Lawrence? To complicate the issue still further, there is the question of audience or, perhaps more accurately, of the differing functions of works with differing audiences. Florence Reece’s song “Which Side Are You On?,” for example, urges miners to stick together in the union, whereas Edwin Markham’s poem “The Man with the Hoe” calls on the “masters, lords and rulers in all lands” to right the wrongs of working people. Since both concern changing the condition of the working class, are both working-class literature? *Life in the Iron Mills*, the first significant portrait in American literature of the lives of the industrial workers, clearly addresses a bourgeois audience, while many drugstore novels, like those of Mickey Spillane, attract a substantial working-class readership. Which would one want to retain in a “canon” of working-class fiction? Such questions cannot be answered categorically; we need a more adequate understanding of the techniques, functions, and distinctive qualities of working-class art.

Beyond these issues, there is the question of what defines the working class. Many such definitions exclude more people, especially women, than they include. The traditional image of the American industrial worker, for example, is male, in part because of ignorance about the role of women, historical and current, in United States industry. And the traditional image is also white, reflecting the racially segregated job structure that still persists in some industries.

It seems best to use relatively loose definitions and broad categories, but we must remain sharply aware of the difficulties involved, the manifestations within the culture of efforts to overcome (or to retain) class privilege, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Here I discuss literary works by and about working people, written and oral forms, “high,” “popular,” and “mass” culture. I designate as “working-class people” those who sell their labor for wages; who create in that labor and have taken from them “surplus value,” to use Marx’s phrase; who have relatively little control over the nature or products of their work; and who are not “professionals” or “managers.” I refer to people who, to improve their lot, must either move in *solidarity* with their class or leave it (for example, to become managers).<sup>1</sup> I include those who work in homes, whose labor is sold although not for pay, as surely as is that of those who work in the mills or in the streets. I also include those who work on farms and those whose labor is extorted from them by slavery and peonage. Such categories, though admittedly blurred at the edges, give us at least a reasonable place from which to start.

In dealing with working-class culture, and especially with women’s literature, we are confronted by a problem more fundamental than that of definition. It can be seen in a poem by Bertolt Brecht, “A Worker Reads History”:

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?  
 The books are filled with names of kings.  
 Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?  
 And Babylon, so many times destroyed,  
 Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima’s  
 houses,  
 That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?  
  
 In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished  
 Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome  
 Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over  
 whom  
 Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song,  
 Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of  
 the legend  
 The night the sea rushed in,  
 The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.  
  
 Young Alexander conquered India.  
 He alone?  
 Caesar beat the Gauls.  
 Was there not even a cook in his army?  
 Philip of Spain wept as his fleet  
 Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?  
 Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War.  
 Who  
 Triumphed with him?  
  
 Each page a victory,  
 At whose expense the victory ball?  
 Every ten years a great man,  
 Who paid the piper?  
  
 So many particulars.  
 So many questions.

Brecht’s poem vividly illustrates that the workers of the world have been hidden from history -- omitted from the chronicles, myths, sagas, and fictions that embody it. Less openly, the poem illustrates how much *more* hidden are

the women of the working classes, appearing here fleetingly as those who weep for the drowned sailors of Philip's fleet, and, perhaps, as the haulers of stone and the slaves of Atlantis. The chronicles, sagas, fictions, and poems were seldom written by people who labored for their bread. Laborers did not have the leisure or, generally, the literacy to write books (though they did leave us the works of their hands, in materials like stone and wool). And if they were female, still other veils shrouded their lives and limited their creations.

But working people were by no means silent. On the contrary, they have always produced literature. Its forms, however – including the forms of its transmission – its structural elements, and its purposes have been quite different from the dominant written forms of the last twenty-five hundred years or so. To approach working-class culture, therefore, we must lay aside many of our presuppositions about what literature *is* and *is not*.<sup>2</sup> We must begin by asking in what forms, on what themes, in what circumstances, and to what ends working people spoke and sang to one another. How did they gather, examine, transmit, and renew their experiences?

First, we need a broader definition of what we can call "literature." That working-class literature has often taken



VISITING NURSE. NEW YORK. 1902

oral forms is not surprising, since many of its creators, along with their audience, did not read or write. (A theme of working-class art has been the struggle to gain access to the resources of culture and power, including literacy.) The study of working-class art must therefore include works that in the last fifty years have been generally displaced into courses called folklore and the like.<sup>3</sup> Today, when literature departments are more likely than they were a decade ago to include undergraduate folklore courses, as well as women's studies itself, we are better prepared for the interdisciplinary approach required for the study of folk culture. Similarly, since songs – for reasons I explain below – are one of the forms most widely used by working-class artists, we have to pay attention to their literary elements; many are significant creations of language. In addition, as is true in women's studies generally, we must pay more

attention to the "fragmentary" or "incremental" genres – letters, diaries, and documents derived from oral sources.

As we move toward more inclusive definitions of "literature," certain issues that are largely submerged in the study of "high culture" become more critical. For example, it becomes necessary to distinguish between "folk" or "people's" ("popular") culture and what Dwight MacDonald characterized as "mass culture." Popular culture is what people who share class, ethnicity, and/or race produce in communicating with one another, as distinguished from what is produced for consumption by the "masses." There is, obviously, no clear-cut dividing line, and the distinction is particularly difficult for those of us brought up in the bourgeois cultural system, in which the norm is production by artists for consumption by consumers.

The distinction is only in part one of quality, although mass culture, which is often directed by the political imperative of shaping and dominating the consciousness of the masses, generally involves basically simplified ways of appealing to the lowest common denominator – as was illustrated by the sudden flourishing, a few years ago, of television shows portraying the cop as hero. It is more important here, however, to understand the functions of "popular" art and its patterns of creation. Much working-class culture originates and exists in situations that do not absolutely distinguish between the active "performer/artist" and the passive "audience"; or if that distinction is made, the artist's "product" is offered not for its *exchange* value (money for the song) but for its *use* in the lives of the people to whom it is directed. A fine example is provided by the Kentucky mountain songs sung with great majesty at the funeral of "Jock" Yablonski and recorded in the film *Harlan County, U.S.A.*

This distinctive quality of popular culture becomes clearer when we consider more fully the processes of creation and the functions of working-class art. The creative process is nowhere better described and analyzed than in Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*,<sup>4</sup> required reading for anyone concerned with this area. Levine has collected a number of vivid, firsthand descriptions of the creation of "sorrow songs," mainly in post-Civil War black churches, and he has examined the common features of these descriptions. One important observation is that new songs were most often based on old ones: a look at most labor songbooks shows that working-class artists were often concerned less with creating a work that would be unique than with building variations on tunes and themes well known in their communities. In many ways, working-class art, like other elements of working-class life, is highly traditional, even "conservative"; innovative form is certainly not a primary consideration. Similarly, working-class poetry and song – and to a lesser extent tales and the like – are often built around repeated elements – refrains, formulas, and commonly accepted assumptions about characters. Language, too, is often simpler, even commonplace and less "heightened" than that of "high culture" verse. These characteristics are, of course, common to oral art, made necessary by the exigencies of memory and improvisation.

But they also reflect a certain communal quality, which Levine finds exemplified in the creation of a song – different people chime in, a melody is picked up and carried forward by a new voice, or a chorus swells it spontaneously. In such situations, the individual creator is less important than the group, or rather, if the individual creator shapes a common stock to new group purposes, she or he does so without diminishing or expropriating that common stock. The song leader in church is not asked to provide new hymns (and would be looked at with suspicion for doing so) but is asked to point or enhance a hymn that is known, perhaps to add something especially appropriate to the situation.<sup>5</sup> Early jazz musicians may have been admired for a new melody, but probably more often for their ability to ring variations on melodies the listeners knew and followed. I emphasize the “folk” or communal elements of working-class art at the partial expense of work produced by self-conscious individual working-class artists because this approach helps to bring out distinctive qualities about working-class art that are not seen so easily when one focuses primarily on the production of individual artists. Yet a continuum obviously exists between works created primarily by individual imaginations and the songs, poems, and tales that are, so to speak, common property.<sup>6</sup>

Much working-class art is created and experienced in group situations – not in the privacy of a study, but in the church, the hall, the work site, the meeting hall, the quilting bee, or the picket line. It is thus rooted in the experiences of a particular group of people facing particular problems at a particular time. It is not conceived as timeless and transcendent, nor does it often function in such modes. Understanding this transitoriness is especially important in searching for working-class women’s art. Many of the finest men’s songs come from the prison chain gang or the work camp, and many women’s work songs have come from the communal experience of the church -- but also from the loneliness of the solitary room often portrayed in the blues. More women’s work songs have been located and recorded in recent years and doubtless as we come to understand more about female subcultures, we will discover more about songs and stories exchanged in the markets, mills, quilting rooms, and nurseries.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding the *instrumental* character of working-class art is also important to perceiving the aesthetic theory that informs it, a theory unfamiliar to most of us. Martha Vicinus has discussed the functions of working-class art in *The Industrial Muse* (the only full length-study in English of working-class [British] literature and, with Levine’s book, required reading for anyone interested in this area). In a paper on the poetry of the Colorado miners, Dan Tannacito has addressed the same subject. Tannacito suggests that “the real value of the miners’ poetry was the immediate use made of it by its local audience of miners and sympathizers” (p. 1). The writers’ objectives in writing were inseparable from these goals toward which the lives of the workers directed them. Vicinus points out that working-class artists, themselves persuaded of the power of literature to “influence people’s behavior,” aimed to “persuade readers to adopt particular beliefs.” Some artists recommended middle-class values and the culture of their “betters.” Others, believing that

social and political change was impossible, reassured readers of the worth of their own culture’s values, providing at least entertainment and consolation in a fixed and largely oppressive world. More – certainly most of the poets discussed by Tannacito – aimed to produce change in the status quo. They wrote, Vicinus says, “to arouse and focus social tension in order to channel it toward specific political actions.” By “clarifying” economic, social, and political relations between working people and those who held power, these artists helped to “shape individual and class consciousness” and to “imbue a sense of class solidarity that encouraged working people to fight for social and political equality” (Vicinus, pp. 1-3). Tannacito shows how miner poets accomplished such goals: poems of “praise,” for example “commemorate the heroic deeds of model individuals or important past struggles from which the community of workers takes its lessons.” Other poems aimed to inspire workers to struggle in particular ways at specific moments. In general, the miner poets and “their allies produced poems for themselves about the realities they shared – oppression by bosses, common work, the militia, scabs, and a heritage of struggle (Tannacito, pp. 2, 3).

The fundamental points here are that “artists” and “audiences” shared a reality, a similar set of experiences and outlooks on the world. They saw artistic production within the context of that shared experience, the world here and now. Art was not a means of lifting people outside the world in which they lived, or a means of producing “catharsis” and thus achieving “stasis” (if art ever does produce whatever these are). Rather, it was a means of making working people conscious of their world and actions within it, of extending their experiences of that world, indeed of enlarging the world they could experience. Thus, even as sophisticated and artful an example of working-class fiction as Tillie Olsen’s *Tell Me a Riddle* is directed to the problem of inspiring a new generation with the values, hopes and images that directed the actions of an earlier generation and that lie buried under forty years of daily struggle. Theories about the effects of art remain highly problematic, to be sure; I mention them here not to dispute them but to suggest that Aristotelian and other traditional notions will not be helpful in approaching working-class literature. Looking for the timeless and transcendent, for contemplation as an end, for metaphysical complexity of language, and for pastel ironies of tone can only obscure or demean the objectives and excellence of working-class art.

The next step, after developing a theory for an area of art, is to assemble examples and compile bibliographies. This work has begun to some extent for working-class literature in general, but rather little has been done with working-class women’s literature. Appendix A lists the bibliographies I have come upon that will be helpful to anyone working in this area. But a word of warning is necessary: searching for examples of *women’s* art in most of these bibliographies, like searching in collections, will be frustrating and slow. For example, the massive bibliography of German working-class songs assembled by a collective under the leadership of Inge Lammel lists perhaps a dozen songs by women in over two thousand

entries. David Madden's *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1968), while it contains interesting background analyses, includes no woman writer as a subject or, for that matter, as an author. The important collection *Folklore from the Working Folk of America* (ed. Tristram P. Coffin and Hennig Cohen [Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Doubleday, 1973]) focuses on men and presents women primarily as witches, running with wolves, and the like. Even collections from socialist nations provide little help; *Para un mundo amasado por los trabajadores*, selected by Roberto Retamar (La Habana: Editorial de Arte y Literatura, 1973) contains only works by and about men. The compilation of inclusive, annotated bibliographies is thus a priority, as is the writing of descriptive articles. A significant number of works deserve to be reprinted, but there are many, even by individual working-class women writers of the recent past, for which we must first locate copies.

Republication and fresh consideration of a small number of working-class American women fiction writers from the 1920s and 1930s (as well as from more recent times) are, in fact, under way. Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker* generally remains in print, and other works by

number of works by Meridel LeSueur, who is still writing; the Feminist Press will issue a LeSueur Reader, *Ripening*, in 1982. Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1927, rpt. Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist, 1973) has been in print now for a few years, as are a collection of her writings on Chinese women (Feminist, 1976) and her biography of Chu Teh (*The Great Road* [New York: Monthly Review, 1956]). Also, Jan and Steve MacKinnon are well advanced in their biography of Smedley. Two volumes by Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (New York: Persea, 1975) and *The Open Cage: An Anzia Yezierska Collection*, ed. Alice Kessler Harris (New York: Persea, 1979), are now in print. And of course, there is Tillie Olsen, the source for much of what we have learned about working-class literature – especially that by women – and the author of classics like *Tell Me a Riddle* (New York: Dell, 1960) and *Yonnondio* (New York: Delacorte, 1974). She remains a fount of inspiration and information.

While a few books by other working-class women fiction writers of the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., Tess Slesinger and Myra Page) are in print here and there little has been done on most. Such writers include Sarah Henry Atherton, Sanora Bobb, Catherine Brody, Olive Tilford Dargan



'ROSIE THE RIVEER'

Arnow are becoming available. Arno Press has republished two of Josephine Herbst's novels in the expensive series edited by Elizabeth Hardwick, and Elinor Langer's critical biography of Herbst will be out in 1983, as will a Feminist Press edition of one of her novels. Zora Neale Hurston, none of whose major works was available until quite recently, is the subject of a fine biography by Robert Hemenway (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1977); and her best novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, has also been reprinted (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1978), as has her folklore classic, *Mules and Men* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978). A Zora Neale Hurston reader, *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*, is available from the Feminist Press (Old Westbury, N.Y., 1979). Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds* and *The Devil's Hand* were originally reprinted by the Southern Illinois University Press (Carbondale, Ill., 1972, 1974), and the former is being reprinted by the Feminist Press (1982). West End Press has reissued a

(Fielding Burke), Lallah S. Davidson, Josephine Johnson, Margerie Latimer, Josephine Lawrence, Grace Lumpkin, Grace McDonald, Ruth McKenney, Page and Slesinger, Anna Louise Strong, Gladys Taber, Mary Heaton Vorse, Clara Weatherwax, Leane Zugsmith; these women were most prominent during the period in which left-wing literature flourished in the United States. Less is known about the women writers of a generation or two earlier who were concerned with the lives of working people, although they themselves seldom had working-class origins. In listing these I cite only a typical book or two for each: Estelle Baker (*The Rose Door*, 1912), Zoe Beckley (*A Chance to Live*, 1918), Helen Campbell (*Miss Melinda's Opportunity*, 1886), Florence Converse (*Children of Light*, 1912), Grace MacGowan Cooke (*The Grapple*, 1905), Amanda Douglas (*Hope Mills*, 1880), Mary Hallock Foote (*Coeur d'Alene*, 1894), Susan Glaspel (*The Visioning*, 1911 – Glaspel continued to write fiction and drama well into the

1930s and was a significant figure in the *Masses* and *Liberator* as well as in the Provincetown Playhouse groups), Josephine Conger Kaneko (*A Little Sister of the Poor*, 1909), Myra Kelly (*Little Aliens*, 1910; *Little Citizens*, 1904), Alice Robbins (*Uncle Tom's Tenement*, 1886), Katherine M. Root (*The Stranger at the Hearth*, 1916), Vida Scudder (*A Listener in Babel*, 1903; more of a socialist discussion book than a novel, but fascinating nonetheless); Charlotte Teller (*The Cage*, 1907), and Marie Van Vorst (*Amanda of the Mill*, 1905). Among the interesting books that male authors have written about working-class women – apart from those by Dreiser, Crane, and Sinclair – are Arthur Bullard's *Comrade Yetta* (1913) and Reginald Wright Kauffman's *The House of Bondage* (1910). Not all these books are important works of fiction by any means, nor indeed are all sympathetic to working people, but they do cast light on the lives of workers in the early 1900s and on attitudes toward the working class. Given our inclusive definition of working-class literature, these books need to be reassessed.

Two earlier writers of considerable interest, Rebecca Harding Davis and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, have recently received attention in articles and dissertations. But only Davis' *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861; rpt. Feminist, 1972), which has an important afterword by Tillie Olsen, and Phelps Ward's *Story of Avis* (1879; rpt. New York: Arno, 1977), concerned with a woman artist not of the working-class, are readily available. Phelps's fascinating industrial novel, *The Silent Partner*, remains largely unknown, though it is, as Rideout suggests (App. A), the first American work of fiction after *Life in the Iron Mills* to treat a factory woman's life sympathetically and realistically. *The Silent Partner* is of great historical interest because it antedates most theoreticians in suggesting the importance of cross-class organizing of women; indeed, it implies that working women are organized less by the labor movement as such than by other women. Davis and Phelps are not, to be sure, women of the working class, but they are, as women, distinctively sensitive to working-class lives.

A rich and largely unexplored source of short working-class fiction is provided by the many labor, radical, and immigrant magazines and newspapers, particularly those of the decades immediately before and after the turn of the century. Most such periodicals that were published in English in the United States are listed in Black and Goldwater (see App. A). But there is also much in non-English-language journals and newspapers. Norma Fain Pratt has examined the work of Yiddish women writers (e.g., Celia Drapkin, Anna Margolin, Kadya Molodovski, Ester Schumiatcher, Rachel Holtman, Malcha Lee, Sara Barkin, and Aida Glazer) in periodicals like *Zukunft*, *Freiheit*, and *Frei arbeter shtime* (Norma Fain Pratt, *Culture and Politics: Yiddish Women Writers, 1900-1940*, Jewish Studies Association Convention, Boston, 1978). Similar work could be done for other immigrant groups and with working-class publications from centers like Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis. (Tannacito provides a useful model, although he deals almost entirely with men.) The working-class world has, after all, never been restricted to

"our fathers," however much foremothers have been ignored and submerged.

As one might expect, socialist countries, along with Finland and Sweden, have made more efforts to collect working-class fiction, songs, and poetry than have other countries, although women are not especially well represented in the anthologies I have located. For British working-class fiction, I know of no study equivalent to Martha Vicinus', which concentrates on ballads, broadsides, music-hall songs, and working-class poetry. But it is likely that in Britain, as in the United States, most such work is issued by feminist and radical journals and publishing houses and has simply not yet found its way into libraries here.

Autobiographies that reflect working-class life are a rich source of information. To be sure, many autobiographies, especially those by white women, were



TRUCK DRIVER DEBORAH JOHNSTON

written after the authors had moved into other class circumstances. But taken as a whole, autobiographies constitute a significant body of working-class women's literature. I know of no comprehensive study of such works or even an adequate bibliography that includes both black and white women's autobiographies, much less those by women from other countries or those still in manuscript. Brigane, Fine, and Williams (App. A) provide useful basic bibliographies, which include such categories as slave

narratives and immigrant autobiographies. Only a handful of prominent labor and radical organizers – “Mother” Mary Harris Jones, Emma Goldman, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn – have published autobiographies, but many others probably exist in manuscript. There are at least three collections of interesting short autobiographies of British working-class people: *The Annals of Labor: Autobiographies of British Working-Class People, 1820- 1920* (ed. John Burnett [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974])<sup>8</sup>; *Life as We Have Known It, by Cooperative Working Women* (ed. Margaret L. Davies, intro Virginia Woolf, 1931; rpt. London: Virago, 1977); *Working Days: Being Personal Records of Sixteen Working Men and Women, Written by Themselves* (ed. Margaret A. Pollock [London: J. Cape, 1926]). A volume called *Women at Work* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972) includes both Dorothy Richardson’s *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl* and Elinor Langer’s *Inside the New York Telephone Company*. Probably, similar volumes, especially from the 1920s and 1930s, can be found in working-class libraries in English-speaking countries and elsewhere.

No comprehensive book about working-class women’s songs and poems exists nor is there any unified collection of them. I use the words “comprehensive” and “unified” to signify two basic requirements for work in this area. The first has to do with bringing together black and white working-class materials. Almost all writing produced by African-Americans is, by any definition, working-class literature: most of the authors have working-class origins, and their subjects and audiences are generally working-class people like themselves. Although some important collections of folk songs – notably those by socialist artists and collectors – do acknowledge that black literature is working-class literature, few secondary works in this area consider songs and poems of black and white working-class women together. The reason, in part, is that the two have different musical traditions: the black folk songs are largely “sorrow songs,” or “spirituals,” and the blues; the white songs are “country” and British-derived ballads. But separate treatment has obscured the commonalities of female experience as well as the interactions of the two traditions.

The second requirement is to integrate “folk,” or “popular,” songs with “high-culture” poetry. The two are almost invariably considered distinct. Most collections of women’s poetry (with a few exceptions, like Louise Bernikow, ed., *The World Split Open* [New York: Vintage, 1974]) ignore blues singers and songwriters like Aunt Molly Jackson. And while serious books on music carefully consider African-American influences on Western composers, starting with Dvorak, few books on formal poetry make even a gesture in that direction. For working-class women’s art, such a separation is particularly harmful, whether one is talking of literature or the plastic and visual arts. Women of the past, generally excluded from formal schools and training, created works of art with what one might call “nonacademic” media like quilting, embroidery, and cutouts – works of art that were also useful in their daily lives.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, many women, especially those of working-class origins, were not familiar with academic traditions and academic forms in literature

(e.g., the sonnet and blank verse) and used what was familiar or what came readily to hand – like songs that they learned from their grandmothers or in church, on the picket line, at quilting bees, or at other rituals of communal female experience. Such literature, which we generally designate as “song,” must be read and studied together with the more academic or high-culture forms for which we usually reserve the term “poetry.” And this union should be made not simply to show how, for example, Emily Dickinson transcends the banality of consolatory verse and tombstone poetry; rather, we need to become aware of the hierarchy of the categories themselves. Approaching works primarily in terms of their genre may provide the critic with useful, or at least convenient, lines of demarcation. But if we are interested less in literary typology and more in what literature reveals to us about the lives of women, and of working-class women in particular, then this approach is not useful. It implicitly places more value on the kinds of experiences with which “poetry” deals and the kinds of language (and the people who use it) in which it is expressed. Further, the categorization fragments what is continuous and distinctive in female experience, at least in Western societies, regardless of class – for example, labor that is undervalued or trivialized, the ever threatening union of sexuality and childbearing, the power and limits of “sisterhood,” the anger and waste in keeping one’s “place.” Further, working-class women’s literature – by dealing with such concerns as work and especially work for wages, organizing with other women, and the fear of desertion and physical violence – completes the picture of women’s lives that most bourgeois forms show only in fragments. Such female experiences, their commonalities and class-based distinctions, come into focus best when we base our work on women’s historical reality rather than on the literary distinctions created primarily by male and bourgeois critics.

A “comprehensive” view of working-class women’s poetry in the United States thus encompasses songs and more formal verse from both black and white traditions. We specifically need to reexamine the formal, often left-wing working-class poets. The names, though not generally the work, of a few such women, like Genevieve Taggard, are familiar to scholars, but others have been quite lost – for example, Lola Ridge, Hazel Hall, and Sarah N. Cleghorn. The major sources for studying their work are back files of such left-wing periodicals as *Masses*, *Liberator*, *Anvil*, *New Masses*, and *Mainstream* (see, e.g., Jayne Loader’s bibliography). With the exception of *May Days*, edited by Taggard, anthologies of women’s poetry have not included verse called “Comrade Jesus” (Cleghorn) or “Buttonholes” (Hall). Among the poets of “song” whose writing (or, in a few cases, interpreting) needs serious consideration are “Sis” Cunningham, Aretha Franklin, Sarah Ogan Gunning, Vera Hall, Billie Holiday, Mahalia Jackson, Aunt Molly Jackson, Ma Rainey, Florence Reece, Malvina Reynolds, Jean Ritchie, Bessie Smith, and Ella May Wiggins. For some black singers of the blues and gospel music, reasonably accurate bibliographies – or, more properly, discographies – exist, and often the text of at least one version of a song is in print. It is difficult to know whether even that much attention has been given to the work of women of the labor movement in the United States, although the collection *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-*

*Hit People* (App. C) does include works by writer-singers like Jackson and Gunning. I have not been able to locate any systematic treatment, like Alan Lomax' book on Vera Hall, of influential artists like the late Malvina Reynolds or "Sis" Cunningham.

I have included as Appendix C a list of sources for working-class women's poetry. This list is by no means definitive. In the first place, many songbooks are quite ephemeral, and the ones I list are those I happened on in the libraries to which I had access; different lists could probably be compiled from the holdings of libraries on the West Coast and in the South and from the personal collections of collector-activists like Mary Elizabeth Barnicle. Second, I have not included books contained in Vicinus' extensive bibliography, many of which I could not check (since they are available only in Britain) to see if they contain women's work. Finally, while extensive collections of working-class poetry and song have been published in Europe, particularly in the socialist countries (and some are included in App. C), these works are only erratically available in American libraries and, in some cases, the gender of writers cannot be ascertained.

In certain respects, bibliography will be the most useful resource to scholars working in this field. I have therefore included a number of appendixes as a means for sharing with readers what my own research has turned up. I have already mentioned Appendix A (a bibliography of bibliographies), and Appendix C (collections of working-class women's poetry). Appendix B lists collections of both prose and poetry, including some that consist primarily of "documents." Appendix D shows secondary works on working-class women's poetry and song, including a number of biographies of black women artists, a few major analyses of the blues and other expressions of black women's art, as well as the rather rare writings concerned with white working-class songwriters. Appendix E is a very selective list of secondary works that concern or can help inform the study of working-class women's literature. Finally, Appendix F is an even more selective list of magazines that publish, with some regularity, work of interest in this area. Wherever possible, I have examined the books to see whether they include works by or about women.

#### NOTES

1. A most useful discussion of the distinctions between the working class and the bourgeoisie is that of Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Harper, 1966), pp. 324-33.
2. See Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (New York: Barnes, 1974): "What we call literature, and what we teach, is what the middle class – and not the working class – produced. Our definitions of literature and our canons of taste are class bound; we currently exclude street literature, songs, hymns, dialect and oral storytelling, but they were the most popular forms used by the working class" (p. 1).
3. Note that the study of folk literature was once clearly a part of the literature and language profession; indeed, it was a field considered "appropriate" for female scholars. Louise Pound, the first female president of the Modern Language Association (MLA), specialized in the study of songs and ballads, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, an early life

member of the MLA, was an important folklore collector and political activist.

4. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 25-30.

5. See "The Burning Struggle: The Civil Rights Movement," an interview with Bernice Johnson Reagon, *Radical America*, 12 (Nov.-Dec. 1978), 1820.

6. Dan Tannacito, "Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1905," *The Radical Teacher*; 15 (1980): "But the historical reality is that workers, like the Colorado miners, wrote poetry in order to share and express their feelings about their experiences as a class. They were creators of their culture as well as creators of their society" (p. 1).

7. Zoltan Kodaly, for example, wrote an entire opera, *The Spinning Room*, based on songs exchanged among or sung to women working at their looms and spindles. I have come on pictures of women singing at quilting bees, but I have seen no detailed exposition of what they were singing.

8. In a useful review of this book, Catherine Gallagher discusses stylistic elements used by these and other working-class writers and the problem of an excessive concern, on the part of professionals, for the work lives of working-class people. See "Workers," *University Publishing*, 5 (Summer 1978), 1, 24.

9. See C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell, *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women* (New York: Dutton, in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, 1979).

#### APPENDIX A

The following works either constitute or contain bibliographies useful to the study of working-class women's



LILLIAN LIGHTBOURNE CHIPPING SLAG FROM WELDS AFTER FITTING AND TACKING PIECE. LIGHTBOURNE IS A MEMBER OF IRONWORKERS SHOPMEN'S LOCAL IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

literature. Addresses are given for little known publishers.

AMS Press, Inc., *Catalogue of the Labor Movement in Fiction and Nonfiction*, c. 1975. A useful publisher's catalog.

Anderson, Eleanor C. *A List of Novels and Stories about Workers*. New York: Woman's Press, 1938. Brief but helpful.

Arno Press. *Books by and about Women*, 1977. Publisher's catalog of several series of reprints. Arno also has a useful catalog of reprints dealing with American labor.

Batchelder, Eleanor, comp. *Plays by Women: A Bibliography*. New York: Womanbooks, 1977.

Black, Henry. *Radical Periodicals -- Their Place in the Library*. Mena, Ark.: Commonwealth Coll., 1937. A brief essay justifying inclusion of such periodicals in library collections; the list of periodicals, with brief descriptions, includes some not listed in Goldwater's later bibliography.

Block, Adrienne Fried, and Carol Neuls-Bates. *A Bibliography of Women's Music*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979.

Brignano, Russel C. *Black Americans in Autobiography: An Annotated Bibliography of Autobiographies and Autobiographical Books Written since the Civil War*. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1974.

Chatham Book Seller. *Radical Novels: Poetry and Drama in America*, no. 8; *The Political Novel in America*, no. 30; *Black Literature*, nos. 34, 40; *Radical Novels, etc. in America*, no. 35; *Women's Rights and Liberation*, no. 43; and *Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, Pacifism in the U.S.*, no. 44. These catalogs not only list books for sale but record items not found in major libraries.

Collector's Exchange, comp. Frank Girard. This publication includes a list of periodicals, an index to articles, assorted notes of interest to collectors and anthologists.

Daims, Diva, and Janet Grimes. *Towards a Feminist Tradition: An Annotated Bibliography of Novels in English by Women, 1891-1920*. New York: Garland, 1980.

Dellinger, Harold R. "Notes on the Midwestern Literary Rebellion of the Thirties," *West End*, 5 (Summer 1978), 45-48. A genealogical and bibliographical essay, mainly about important left magazines of the 1930s.

Fine, David M. *The City, the Immigrant, and American Fiction, 1880-1920*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1977. Useful bibliography of novels and stories, a number by forgotten women.

Foner, Philip S. *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975. The excellent bibliography in this important book includes the locations of rare works.

Franklin, H. Bruce. *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978. Includes works from slavery life and black life in general as well as works from prison.

George, Zelma. *A Guide to Negro Music: An Annotated Bibliography of Negro Folk and Art Music by Negro Composers ....* Diss. New York Univ. 11953. Mainly concerned with music, but helpful nonetheless.

Goldwater, Walter. *Radical Periodicals in America, 1890-1950*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964. A list of 321 radical periodicals -- dates, places published, editors, etc. Needs to be supplemented with black periodicals.

Greenway, John. *American Folksongs of Protest*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1953. Apart from having an important text, the book contains a vital bibliography.

Grimes, Janet, and Diva Daims. *Novels in English by Women, 1891-1920: A Preliminary Checklist*. New York: Garland, 1980.

*Guide to Working-Class History*. Somerville, Mass.: New England Free Press, c. 1977. Includes novels, oral history, and so forth.

Humez, Jean. *Women Working in the Arts: A Bibliography and Resource List*. Mimeographed, Women's Studies Program, Boston: Univ. of Massachusetts, c. 1976.

Janes, Louis. *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963. Contains a list of penny-issue novels.

Jones, Hettie. *Big Star Fallin' Mama: Five Women in Black Music*. New York: Viking, 1974. Useful brief bibliography and discography and a list of notable women in black music.

*Ladyslipper Music. Catalogue and Review*. Extensive list of records, tapes, etc., by women singers and some writers.

Lammel, Inge, et al. *Bibliographie der deutschen Arbeiterliedblätter 1844-1945*. Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1975. Massive list of 2,000 songs, almost none by women.

Loader, Jayne. *Women on the Left, 1906-1941: A Bibliography of Primary Resources*, University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies, 2 (Sept. 1975), 9-82. Contains much useful information on journals, reportage autobiographical writings, poems, and the like.

McBrearty, James G. *American Labor History and Comparative Labor Movements*. Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1973. Has a section devoted to a list of novels, which is uneven but helpful.

Michigan Dept. of Education, State Library Services. *Michigan Women: Biographies, Autobiographies and Reminiscences*. Lansing, Mich., 1975. A bibliography.

Ogden, Jean Carter. *Annotated List of Labor Plays*. Rev. ed. New York: American Labor Education Service, 1945.

Porter, Dorothy B. *North American Negro Poets: A Bibliographical Check-List of Their Writing (1760-1944)*. 1945; rpt. New York: Franklin, 1963.

Prestridge, Virginia W. *The Worker in American Fiction*. Champaign: Univ. of Illinois, 1954. Inst. of Labor and Industrial Relations. The most extensive bibliographical work on the subject; describes fiction that, from any point of view, has "authentic working-class problems and conditions as the central theme."

Reuben, Elaine, and Deborah Rosenfelt. "Affirmative Interactions in Literature and Criticism: Some Suggestions for Reading and Research" (Mimeographed). MLA Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession, Dec. 1974. Among other items this contains Tillie Olsen's invaluable reading lists from the *Women's Studies Newsletter* (vol. 1, no. 1 [1972], nos. 3, 4 [1973]; vol. 2, no. 1 [1974]); Sonny San Juan's "Provisional Listing for Third-World Literature/Culture Courses," a bibliography from the *Radical Caucus Newsletter* 10 (July-August 1973);



APPRENTICE BRICKLAYER HELEN MORESCHI WORKING ON SIDEWALKS OF CHELSEA. MORESCHI IS A MEMBER OF LOCAL 3 (BOSTON) OF THE BRICKLAYERS, PLASTERERS, AND MASONS INTERNATIONAL UNION OF AMERICA.

and the useful (for background) but almost entirely male reading list from an M.A. course -- *Literature and Society, 1910-1945* from the same *Radical Caucus Newsletter*.

Rideout, Walter. *The Radical Novel in the U.S., 1900-1945*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1956. The bibliography, arranged chronologically, is one of the most helpful.

Skowronski, Jo Ann. *Women in American Music: A Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ.: Scarecrow, 1978. Annotated bibliography of secondary sources -- not of collections or anthologies -- covering 1776-1976 and including every possible subject relating to women in American music.

Soltow, Martha Jane, and Mary K. Wery. *American Women and the Labor Movement: An Annotated*

*Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ.: Scarecrow, 1976. Useful for background and for bibliography of archival sources.

Steiner-Scott, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Pearce Wagle. *New Jersey Women, 1770-1970: A Bibliography*. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978.

Vicinus, Martha. *The Industrial Muse*. New York: Barnes 1974 The bibliography, which, like the text, is extraordinarily rich and comprehensive, may be considered definitive for the British work it covers.

Williams Ora. *American Black Women in the Arts and Social Sciences: A Bibliographical Survey*. Revised and expanded ed. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1978. The basic bibliography on the subject, with lists of other bibliographies, anthologies, novels, autobiographies, poems, and so forth.

Women's Soul Publishing Inc. *My Sister's Song: Discography of Women-Made Music, 1975*. Mainly folk and popular, but separate sections on jazz, blues, and so forth.

## APPENDIX B

The following books contain prose (some of it more documentary than imaginative) and/or poetry by working-class women.

Baxandall, Roslyn, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby. *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600 to the Present*. New York: Vintage Random, 1976.

Blassingame, John W., ed. *Slave Testimony*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977.

Cole, Josephine, and Grace Silver, comps. *Socialist Dialogues and Recitations*. Chicago: Kerr, 1913.

Conroy, Jack, and Curt Johnson. *Writers in Revolt: The Anvil Anthology, 1933-40*. New York: Lawrence Hill, 1973.

Courlander, Harold. *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore*. New York. Crown, 1976.

Foner, Philip S., ed. *The Factory Girls*, Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1977.

Handler, Esther, ed. *The Pavement Trial: A Collection of Poetry and Prose from the Allis-Chalmers Picket Lines*. Foreword by Meridel LeSueur. West Allis, Wisc.: Local 248 United Auto Workers, 1946.

Hicks, Granville, et al., ed. *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, New York: International, 1935.

Hoffman, Nancy, and Florence Howe, eds. *Working Women: An Anthology of Stories and Poems*. Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist, 1979.

Keating, P.J. *Working-Class Stories of the 1890's*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971. No stories by women but a number about them.

Kornbluh, Joyce. *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1964.

Lerner, Gerda. *Black Women in White America*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Female Experience -- An American Documentary*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977.

Loewenberg, James, and Ruth Bogin, eds. *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life*. University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1976.

Münchow, Ursula. *Frühe deutsche Arbeiterautobiographie*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973.

North, Joseph, ed. *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties*. New York: International, 1969.

Voigtländer, Annie, ed. *Hierzulande, heutzutage: Lyrik, Prosa, Graphik aus dem werkkreis, "Literatur der Arbeitswelt."* Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1975.

Wenzel, Karl Heinz, Marianne Schmidt, and Konrad Schmidt. *Körnchen Gold: Eine Anthologie Schreibender Arbeiter*. Berlin: Tribüne, 1969.

## APPENDIX C

Collections (or articles) containing at least some songs or poems by working-class women writers.

Abelson, Walter. *Songs of Labor*: Newburgh, N.Y.: Paebar, 1947.

Allen, William Francis, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison. *Slave Songs of the United States*. 1867; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1971.

Alloy, Evelyn. *Working Women 's Music: The Songs and Struggles of Women in the Cotton Mills, Textile Plants, and Needle Trades*. Somerville, Mass.: New England Free Press, 1976.

Althoff, Arneliese, et al. *Für eine andere Deutschstunde, Arbeit und Alltag in neuen Texten*. Ed. Arbeitskreis Progressive Kunst. Oberhausen: Asso Verlag, 1972.

Amalgamated Clothing Workers. *Song Book*. New York, 1940.

Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Local #489. *Picket Line Songs*. Andalusia, Ala., c. 1967.

American Music League. *March and Sing*. New York, 1937.

*Arbeiterdichtung: Analysen, Bekenntnisse, Dokumentationen*, comp. österreichischen Gessellschaft für Kulturpolitik. Wuppertal: Hammer, c. 1973.

*Arbeiter und Freiheitslieden* No. 1 (1973). Hannover: Arbeiter-MusikAssoziation.

Bab, Julius. *Arbeiterdichtung*. Berlin: Volksöhnen-Verlags-und-Vertriebs, 1924.

Balch, Elizabeth. "Songs for Labor," *Survey*, 31 (1914), 408-12, 422-28.

Benet, William Rose, and Norman Cousins. *The Poetry of Freedom*. New York: Random, 1945.

Bogorad, Miriam, et al., comps. *Songs for America*. New York: Workers Library, 1939.

Bold, Alan. *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1970.

Busch, Ernst, ed. *Internationale Arbeiterlieden*. Berlin: "Lied der Zeit" Musilverlag, 1953.

Carpenter, E. *Chants of Labor: A Song-book of the People*. London: 1897; rpt. Allen and Unwin, 1922.

Cheyney, Ralph, ed. *Banners of Brotherhood: An Anthology of Social Vision Verse*. North Montpelier, Vt.: Driftwood, 1933.

Clark, Thomas Curtis, comp. *Poems of Justice*. New York: Willett, Clark and Colby, 1929.

Collinson, Francis. *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

*Commonwealth Labor Songs: A Collection of Old and New Songs for the Use of Labor Unions*. Mena, Ark.: Commonwealth Coll., 1938.

Conroy, Jack, and Ralph Cheyney, eds. *Unrest*, 1931. New York: H. Harrison, 1931.

Davis, N. Brian. *The Poetry of the Canadian People, 1720-1920: 200 Years of Hard Work*. Toronto: N C Press, 1976.

Denisoff, R. Serge. *Sing A Song of Social Significance*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972.

Druskin, Mikhail Semenovich. *Russkaia revoliutsionnaia pesnia*. Moscow, 1954.

*Every-day Songs for Labor Festivals*. London: Labour Party, n.d.

Federal Music Project. *Folk Songs from East Kentucky*. Washington, D.C.: Works Project Administration, c. 1939.

*Folksongs of Peggy Seeger*. New York: Oak, n.d.

*Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians (as Sung by Jean Ritchie)*. New York: Oak, n.d.

Foner, Philip S. *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975.

Fowke, Edith, and Joe Glazer. *Songs of Work and Freedom*. New York: Dover, 1973.

Friedman, Perry, ed. *Hör zu, Mister Bilbo: Lieder aus der Amerikanischen Arbeiterbewegung, 1860-1950*. Berlin: Riitten und Loening, 1962.

Friedrich, Wolfgang, ed. *Im Klassenkampf: Deutsche revolutionäre Lieder und Gedichte aus der zweiten Hälfte des 19 Jahrhunderts*. Halle: Verlag Sprache und Literatur, 1962.

Glazer, Tom, ed. *Songs of Peace, Freedom and Protest*. New York: David McKay, 1970.

- Heisden, Marcel Charles Antoon van der, comp. *Werkmansbrekje*. Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1971.
- Heller, H. *Oesterreichisches Proletarier-Liederbuch*. Wien: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, c. 1900.
- Highlander Folk School. *Songbook*. Monteagle, Tenn.: Highlander Folk School, 1943.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Songs: Labor, Folk, War*. Monteagle, Tenn.: Highlander Folk School, 1944.
- Hille, Waldemar, ed. *The People's Song Book*. New York: Oak, various dates.
- Industrial Workers of the World. *Songs of the Workers (To Fan the Flames of Discontent)*. Chicago: IWW, many dates and editions.
- International Ladies Garment Workers Union. *Dixie Union Songs*. Atlanta, Ga.: ILGWU, n.d.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Everybody Sings*. New York: ILGWU, 1942.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Let's Sing*. New York: ILGWU, 1934.
- Köpping, Walter, ed. *Unter Tage, über Tage: Gedichte aus der Arbeitswelt unserer Tage*. Frankfurt a.M.: Europaische Verlags-anstalt, 1966.
- Kriselkreisel: Lieder und Texte*. Berlin: Arbeitskreis Musik im Klassenkampf, 1974.
- Kuhnke, Klaus, comp. *Lieder der Arbeiterklasse, 1919-1933*. Arhensburg: Damokle Verlag, 1971.
- Kürbisch, Friedrich G., comp. *Anklage und Botschaft: Die lyrische Aussage der Arbeiter seit 1900*. Hannover: Dietz, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Arbeiterdichtung: Versuch einer Standortbestimmung*. Wien: Sozialistische Bildungszentrale, c. 1972.
- Lazarus, Emma. *Emma Lazarus: Selections from Her Poetry and Prose*, ed. M. U. Schappes. New York: Book League, Jewish People's Fraternal Order of the International Workers Order, 1947.
- Leuchtkugeln: Ernste und heitere Vortragsgedichte für Arbeiterfeste*. Berlin: V Verlag Vorwärts, 1905.
- Levenstein, Adolf, comp. *Arbeiter -- Philosophen und Dichter*. Berlin: E. Frowe, 1909.
- Lloyd, Albert Lancaster. *Come All Ye Bold Miners: Ballads and Songs of the Coalfields*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1952.
- Lomax, Alan. *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. New York: Macmillan, 1934.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Folk Songs of North America*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Our Singing Country*. New York: Macmillan, 1941.
- Lowenfels, Walter, ed. *For Neruda, for Chile: An International Anthology*. Boston: Beacon, 1975.
- Lomax, Alan, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger. *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard Hit People*. New York: Oak, 1967.
- MacColl, Ewan, ed. *The Shuttle and the Cage: Industrial Folk Ballads*. London: Workers' Music Association, 1954.
- MacColl, Ewan, and Peggy Seeger. *I'm a Freeborn Man and Other Original Ballads and Songs*. New York: Oak, 1968.
- Marcus, Shmuel, ed. *An Anthology of Revolutionary Poetry*. New York: Active Press, 1929.
- Mühle, Hans, ed. *Das Lied der Arbeit, selbstzeugnisse der schaffenden*. Gotha: Leopold Klotz Verlag, 1930.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Das proletarische Schicksal*. Gotha: Leopold Klotz Verlag, 1929.
- Münchow, Ursula, ed. *Stimme des Vortrups: Proletarische Laienlyrik, 1914 bis 1945*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961.
- Nechaev, Egor Efimovich. *U istolzov russlzoj proletarskoj poezil*. Leningrad, 1965.
- Offenburg, Kurt, comp. *Arbeiterdichtung der Gegenwart*. Frankfurt a.M.: Mittelland-Verlag, 1925.
- Olivier, Paul. *Les Chansons de Métiers*. Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1910.
- Palmer, Roy, ed. *Poverty Knock: A Picture of Industrial Life in the 19th Century through Songs, Ballads, and Contemporary Accounts*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974.
- Poslední' bitva uzplála: Vybor z veršú a písni dělnických bás níku*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1951.
- Reynolds, Malvina. *Little Boxes and Other Handmade Songs*. New York: Oak, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Malvina Reynolds Songbook*. Berkeley, Calif.: Schroder Music, various editions and dates.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *There's Music in the Air*. Berkeley, Calif.: Schroder Music, n.d.
- Riddle, Almeda. *A Singer and Her Songs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1970.
- Salzman, Jack, and Leo Zanderer. *Social Poetry of the 1930's: A Selection*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1978.
- Schramm, Godehard, and Bernhard Wenger, comps. *Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1974.

Schwachhofer, Rene, and Wilhelm T. Kaczyk, comps. *Spiegel unseres Werdens: Mensch und Arbeit in der deutschen Dichtung von Goethe bis Brecht*. Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1969.

Silber, Irwin, ed. *Lift Every Voice! The Second People's Song Book*. New York: People's Artists Publication, c. 1953.

Smith, Lewis Worthington, ed. *Woman Poets Today*. New York: George Sully, 1929.

*Songs of the Southern School for Workers*. Asheville, N.C.: Southern School for Workers, c. 1940.

Taggard, Genevieve, ed. *May Days: An Anthology of Verse from Masses-Liberator*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925.

Trask, Willard R. *The Unwritten Song: Poetry of the Primitive and Traditional Peoples of the World*. 2 vols. New York: Macmillan, 1966-67.

Trent, Lucia, and Ralph Cheyney. *America Arraigned! (Poems on Sacco and Vanzetti)*. New York: Dean, 1928.

*Vi Viltaende: Ukjente nord-norske arbeiderdikt, 1780-1920*. Oslo: Pax, 1975.

Vincent, Leopold. *The Alliance and Labor Songster: A Collection of Labor and Comic Songs*. 1891; rpt. New York: Arno, 1975.

White, Newman I., ed. *American Negro Folk Songs*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1928.

Woolridge, Dorothy, comp. *The Poetry of Toil: An Anthology of Poems*. London: Faber, 1926.

*The Worker Looks at the Stars*. Vinyard Shore, Mass.: n.p., 1927.

Yearsley, Ann (a milkwoman of Bristol). *Poems, on Several Occasions*. London: T. Cadell, 1785.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Poems, on Various Subjects*. London: Robinson, 1787.

## APPENDIX D

Secondary books and articles mainly on working-class women's songs and poetry.

Albertson, Chris. *Bessie*. New York: Stein and Day, 1972.

Armstrong, Toni L and Sally G. Newbury "Women's Songbooks: An Introduction and Survey." *Paid My Dues*, 3, no. 1 (1978), 34-36.

Baraka, Imamu Amiri (LeRoi Jones). *Blues People*. New York: Morrow, 1963.

Barry, Phillips. "The Factory Girl's Come-All-Ye." *Bulletin of the Folksong Society of the Northeast*, 2 (1931), 12.

Charters, Samuel. *Poetry of the Blues*. New York: Oak, 1963.

Chilton, John. *Billie's Blues: A Survey of Billie Holiday's Career 1933-1959*. London: Quartet, 1975.

Cunningham, Agnes "Sis." "Sis Cunningham: Song of Hard Times" (as told to Madelaine Belkin Rose). *Ms.*, 2 (March 1974), 29-32.

Denisoff, R. Serge. *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1971.

Drew, Caroline. "Remember Ella May!" *Equal Justice (Labor Defender)*, (Sept. 1930), 181.

Feldman, Eugene P. Romayn. "Union Maid Revisited: The Story of Ella Mae Wiggins." *ABC-TV Hootenanny*, 1, no. 3 (1964), 25-26.

Green, Archie, ed. "Aunt Molly Jackson Memorial Issue." *Kentucky Folklore Record*, 7, no. 4 (1961), 129-75.

Greenway, John. *American Folksongs of Protest*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1953.



Harrison, Daphne Duval. "Black Women in the Blues Tradition." In *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*. Ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1978.

Heath, Colin. "Bessie Smith: Empress of the Blues." *Heritage*, no. 17 (1970) 2-5; no. 18 (1970), 2-5.

Heilbut, Tony. *The Gospel Sound, Good News and Bad Times*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1975.

Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. *Army Life in a Black Regiment*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.

Jackson, Aunt Molly. "I Am from Kentucky Born." *Equal Justice (Labor Defender)*, 8 (Jan. 1932), 8.

Japenga, Ann. "Women of the Blues." *Paid My Dues*, no. 5 (1975), 12-14.

Jones, Hettie. *Big Star Fallin' Mama: Five Women in Black Music*. New York: Viking, 1974.

Kahn, Kathy. *Hillbilly Women*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973.

Korson, George. *Coal Dust on the Fiddle*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1943.

Larkin, Margaret. "Ella May's Songs." *Nation*, 9 Oct. 1929, pp. 382-83.

Lomax, Alan. *The Rainbow Sign (on Vera Hall)*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959.

Lovell, John, Jr. *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

Lynn, Loretta. *Loretta Lynn: Coal Miner's Daughter*. Chicago: Regnery, 1976.

Mitchell, George. *Blow My Blues Away*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1971.

Monahan, Kathleen. "Women's Songs of the American Labor Movement," Master's thesis Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Union Maid," *Paid My Dues*, no. 4 (March 1975), 24-26, 36.

Odum, Howard W., and Guy B. Johnson. *Negro Workaday Songs*. 1926; rpt. New York: Negro Univ. Press, 1969.

Oliver, Paul. *Bessie Smith*. New York: Barnes, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Meaning of the Blues*. New York: Collier, 1963.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition*. London: Cassell, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Story of the Blues*. New York: Chilton, 1969.

Ritchie, Jean. *The Singing Family of the Cumberlandds*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955.

Rosen, David M. *Protest Songs in America*. Westlake Village, Calif.: Aware, 1972.

Rushing, Andrea Benton. "Images of Black Women in Afro-American Poetry." In *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*. Ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1978.

Russell, Michele. "Slave Codes and Liner Notes." *Radical Teacher*, no. 4 (1977), 1-6.

Ryder, Georgia A. "Black Women in Song: Some Sociocultural Images." *Negro History Bulletin*, 39 (May 1976), 601 ff.

Seeger, Pete. *The Incomplete Folksinger*. New York: Simon, 1972.

*Sing Out!* 25 (1976), esp. no. 1: *Songs of the Labor Struggle*, no. 2: *Songs of American Women*, no. 3: *Music of La Raza -- Songs of the Puerto Rican Nation* and no. 5: *Immigrant Traditions in America*.

Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York: Norton, 1971.

Southey, Robert. *The Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets*. Ed. J. S. Childers. 1831; rpt. London: H. Milford, 1925.

Stanford, Ron. "Which Side Are You On? An Interview with Florence Reece," *Sing Out!* 20, no. 6 (1971), 13-15.

Stewart-Baxter, Derrick. *Ma Rainey and the Classic Blues Singers*. New York: Stein and Day, 1970.

"Successful Women Song-Writers." *Literary Digest*, 13 (Oct. 1917), p. 87.

Watson, Edward A. "Bessie's Blues." *New Letters*, 38 (Winter 1971), 64-70.

## APPENDIX E

Secondary books and articles especially helpful to the study of working-class women's literature.

Adickes, Sandra. "Mind among the Spindles: An Examination of Some of the Journals, Newspapers and Memoirs of the Lowell Female Operatives." *Women's Studies*, 1 (1973) 279-87.

Dundes, Alan. *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Farrer, Claire R. Introd. to special issue on women in folklore, *Journal of American Folklore*, 88 (Jan.-March 1975).

Fine, David M. *The City, the Immigrant, and American Fiction*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1977.

Franklin, H. Bruce. *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978.

Greiner, Bernhard. *Die Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR*. Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1974.

Hull, Gloria, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist, 1982.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977.

Lipsitz, George. "Working Peoples Music," *Cultural Correspondence*, no. 2 (1976), 15-33.

Ragon, Michel. *Les Ecrivains du peuple: Historique, biographies, critique*. Paris: J. Vignau, 1947.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Histoire de la littérature ouvrière du moyen âge à nos jours*. Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1953.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne en France: Littérature ouvrière, littérature paysanne, littérature d'expression populaire*. Paris: A. Michel, 1974.

Randall, Margaret. "Truth Is a Convincing Answer . . . !" (conversations with three Vietnamese women writers). *Left Curve*, no. 3 (1975), 30-35.

Runnquist, Åke. *Arhetarskildare från Hedevind till Fridell*. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1952.

Tannacito, Dan. "Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1905." *Radical Teacher* no. 15 (1980), 1-8.

Unwin, Rayner. *The Rural Muse: Studies in the Peasant Poetry of England*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1957.

Vicinus, Martha. *The Industrial Muse*. New York: Barnes, 1974.

Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: The Creativity of Black Women in the South," *Ms.*, 2 (May 1974), 64-70, 105.

Wertheimer, Barbara. *We Were There: The Story of the Working Women in America*. New York: Pantheon, 1977.

*Radical Teacher* esp. nos. 4,6,10,15.

*Sing Out! Esp.* 25, nos. 1,2,3,5.

*West End*, esp. 5, no. 1 (1978): *Midwest People's Culture Anthology*.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Appendix

## F

A very selective list of magazines that regularly run material of interest in the study of working-class women's literature.

*Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, esp. 2, no. 2 [Summer 1977], on women's oral history.

*Paid My Dues: A Journal of Women and Music*.

*People's Songs*. 4 vols. 1946-49



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



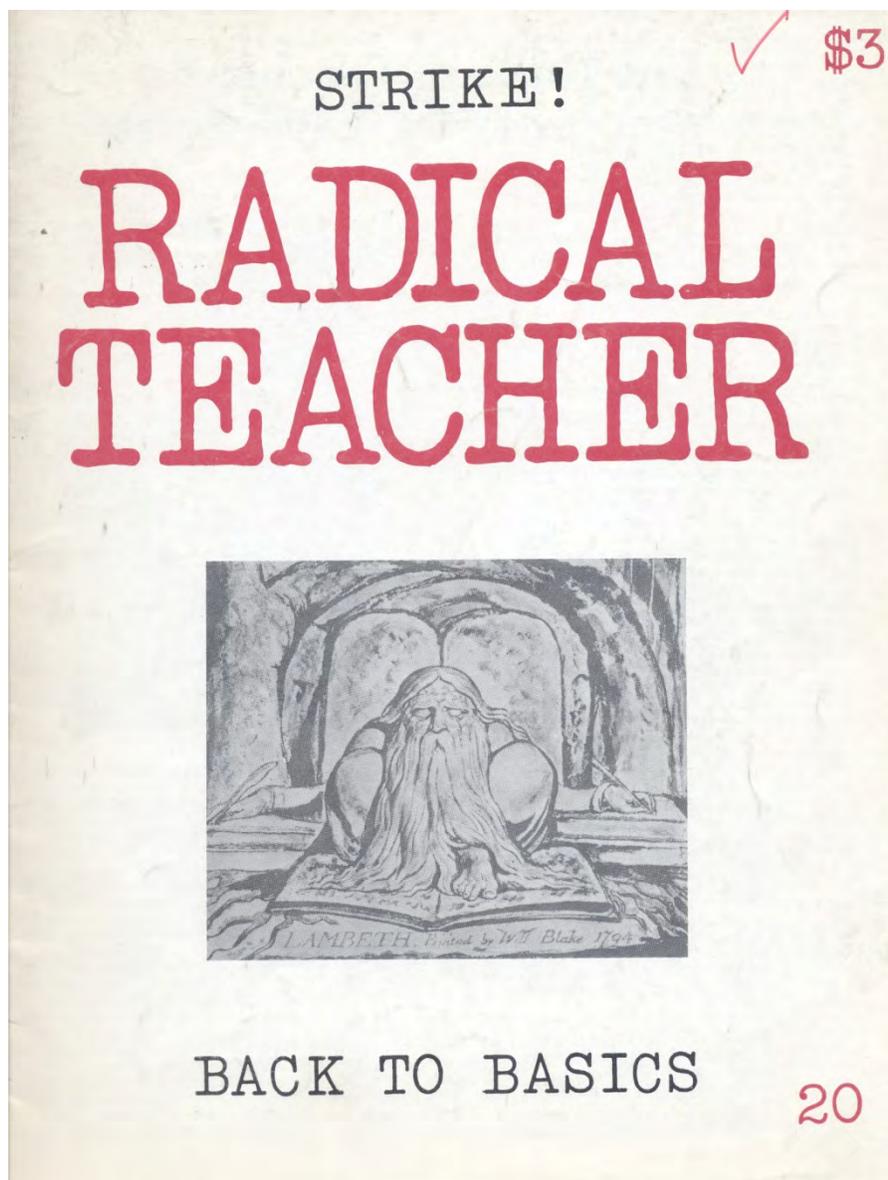
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## A Different Third R: Radical Math

by Marilyn Frankenstein



**M**athematical literacy is more than the ability to calculate. It is the ability to reason quantitatively, the ability to use numbers to clarify issues and to support or refute opinions. Yet the proliferation of arithmetic courses at the college level is evidence that people are not learning even basic computation skills in school. Too many adults cannot use numbers effectively in their daily lives. This article will briefly examine the causes of this situation and will outline a basic arithmetic course that not only teaches adults math effectively, but raises their political consciousness and empowers them to analyze and question the status quo, and to fight back.

The reasons why people aren't learning math involve the scandals of education in our society: too many teachers babysit instead of helping students learn; too many teachers convey their own hatred or fear of math to their students; the math curriculum is irrelevant to students' lives; the math curriculum is boring. More complex reasons involve the scandals of our society: sexual stereotyping leads many women to believe that learning math undermines their femininity; intellectual stereotyping leads many people to believe that learning math is too hard for them; meaningless, boring school work serves to prepare people for meaningless, boring jobs.

Underlying all these scandals is the fact that the ruling class can more effectively keep people oppressed when these people cannot break through the numerical lies and obfuscations thrown at them daily. A mathematically illiterate populace can be lulled by the media into believing, for example, that racism is disappearing, for it will not think to answer back that median black income was 61 percent of median white income in 1969 and only 57 percent in 1977, that official black youth unemployment was 45 percent in 1979 compared to 16 percent for white youth, or that nonwhite infant mortality rates were 21.7 per 1,000 births in 1977 compared to 12.3 per 1,000 births for whites. When promoters of nuclear energy argue that nuclear power plants provide 12 percent of our electricity, only a mathematically sophisticated populace could counter that nuclear energy provides just 3 per cent of our total energy needs.<sup>1</sup>

Most college arithmetic courses emphasize rote computation drills and word problems whose solutions fit a few simple patterns. They are based on what Paulo Freire calls "banking" methods: "expert" teachers deposit knowledge in the presumably blank minds of their students; students memorize the required rules and expect future dividends.<sup>2</sup> At best, such courses make people

minimally proficient in basic math and able to get somewhat better paying jobs than those who can't pass math skills competence tests. But they do not help people learn to think critically or to use numbers in their daily lives. At worst, they train people to follow rules obediently, without understanding, and to take their proper place in society, without questioning.

The radical math literacy course which I will describe is based on the idea, expressed by Freire, that illiterates "are not marginal to the structure [of society], but oppressed . . . within it. Alienated . . . they cannot overcome their dependency by 'incorporation' into the very structure responsible for their dependency. There is no other road to humanization – theirs as well as everyone else's – but authentic transformation of the dehumanizing structure."<sup>3</sup> The content of this course teaches arithmetic while simultaneously raising political consciousness. Its methods try to break down traditional authoritarian teacher-student

relationships by giving students meaningful control over their learning process. The aim of the course is to educate people to want radical social change while giving them both the math literacy tools necessary to challenge ruling ideas and the cooperative learning experiences necessary to create and live in a new society.

Education is never neutral. Traditional education and daily life bombard students with oppressive pro-capitalist ideology. A trivial application like totaling a grocery bill carries the non-neutral message that paying for food is natural. Even traditional math courses which provide no real life data carry the hidden message that learning math has nothing to do with learning to understand and control the world. Radical

courses such as this try to show that there is another point of view. I believe the best we can do as teachers is to tell students our own biases and encourage them to use numbers to support whatever opposing views they hold.<sup>4</sup> By having students examine issues quantitatively and by providing data that most students would not otherwise obtain, we are not feeding students propaganda, but helping them to think critically and to ask incisive questions about the conditions of society.

## CONTENT

In this radical math course, arithmetic skills are learned through political application.<sup>5</sup> In addition to raising students' political consciousness by using numbers to expose the inequalities and insanities in our society, the content of this course provides many other political benefits.



First, class discussions which use math to analyze complex, adult issues increase students' intellectual self-image. Touching on a wide variety of topics adds to the students' background knowledge and therefore improves their ability to argue effectively. As students gain confidence in their own intelligence, they become more willing to voice their opinions and challenge what they have been taught.

Second, radical math is an ideal subject for practicing the slow, careful thinking that people need to examine critically the structure of our society. Because a math text must be read slowly, by filling in steps between the lines, students are forced to slow down their intake of information. Because small visual changes in the symbols can totally change the meaning of a mathematical expression, students are forced to slow down their perceptions. Because the political application problems in this course either contain more information than needed, or require finding additional information, students get practice examining and searching for data, rather than immediately spitting out an answer. And because this course asks students to formulate their own math problems, they get practice examining the consequences of many possible situations before determining what questions they can ask and answer.

Third, since the applications come from a wide variety of areas, it is more than likely that students will raise subject matter questions that the teacher cannot answer. This provides students with an important experience: realizing that the teacher is not an "expert" with all the answers. It encourages students to become skilled at searching for information to answer their own questions. Thus, students become what Freire calls "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, radical math challenges the fragmented view of society presented by a traditional curriculum which breaks knowledge into separate, unrelated issues to be discussed only by specialists. When math is taught as a necessary part of a careful analysis of the conditions of society, students have a clear example of how knowledge of specific subjects can be integrated to give a critical understanding of the world.

The following sample problems illustrate how to integrate the teaching of basic mathematics with the raising of political consciousness, and how to foster critical thinking by expanding traditional problem-solving techniques to include definition of problems and gathering of required information.<sup>7</sup>

### **Applications of Operations with Decimals**

According to the Boston Globe (27 Dec., 1980), an unpublished Department of Energy study states that since its beginning nuclear power has benefited from federal aid in five major areas: \$23.6 billion for research and development, \$237.4 million to promote foreign reactor sales, \$2.5 billion for uranium market promotion, \$7.1 billion in fuel enrichment pricing aid, and \$6.5 billion for management of wastes, mining spoils cleanup, and unpaid decommissioning costs.

1. Find the total federal subsidy to the nuclear power industry.

(This additional problem requires understanding how decimals are used with the words "million" and "billion." It can also help improve students' intuitions about large numbers. A powerful way of describing the gigantic amount, \$40 billion, is to have the class compute that, spending at the rate of \$1,000 per hour, it would take over one hundred years to spend just \$1 billion! There are many good charts, put out by organizations like SANE, that give specifics on how much in human services our nuclear power and nuclear armament spending costs us.)

2. (a) Write a brief statement of your opinion about nuclear power. (b) Work in a group with three or four others who have similar opinions. List the kinds of numerical data that would support your opinion. (c) Find at least one of the facts that you feel would support your opinion and describe how you would find the others.

(The goal of this exercise is to make students aware of how people find and use numbers to support their arguments. For example, this study reported that without these subsidies nuclear power would be twice as costly [4.7¢ per kwh] and unable to compete with oil-fired electricity, currently the most expensive power [3.75¢ per kwh].)

### **Applications of Percent**

According to "Eating Better for Less" by Lucille Sandwith (Food Monitor, Sept.-Oct., 1980, pp. 8-12), fifty out of the 32,000 U.S. food manufacturing firms make 75 percent of the net profits. Of these top fifty corporations, thirty-one bought 63 percent of the national media advertising, or roughly \$5 billion in 1977. Of the top twenty-five advertisers from all industries, eighteen were food companies.

1. What percent of the U.S. food manufacturing firms make 75 percent of the net profits?

(This question requires careful reading since the many given percents might be confused with the percent asked for. And its solution serves a purpose: changing 50/32,000 to 0.2 percent highlights the fact that only a tiny percent of the firms make most of the profits. The information in the question can lead to a political discussion of agribusiness and corporate monopoly in general, as well as to a math-related discussion of the advertising industry [70 per cent of television food advertising, for example, promotes low nutrient, high calorie foods, whereas only 0.7 percent promotes fresh fruits and vegetables].)

2. Based on the information given, create and solve a math problem whose solution involves using percents.

(Students will fully understand percents when they understand which percent problems can be created from given information. For example, here students must realize that you cannot find out how much profit the top fifty firms make, but you can find out how much money is spent on national media advertising. Also, it is unclear whether the national media advertising figure refers to the total spent

by food manufacturing firms or by all industries. Students must find more information in order to clarify this.)

3. Read the entire article (on reserve at the library). Discuss at least three points in the article that are supported by the use of percents.

### Applications of Signed Numbers

According to research done by the Coalition for Basic Human Needs in April, 1980, the AFDC welfare grant provides \$140 per month for shelter costs: \$96.20 for rent, \$26.30 for fuel, and \$17.50 for gas and electricity. Actual shelter costs in every major Massachusetts city exceed that allowance. This means that to live on the welfare budget you must go into debt. Fill in the following chart, which compares the AFDC debts in various cities in Massachusetts:

(This can lead to a political discussion of poverty in this country and the role of welfare in band-aiding the

City	Actual Average Rent(a)	AFDC Rent Debt	Actual Utility(b)	AFDC Utility Debt	Actual Fuel(c)	AFDC Fuel Debt	Total Monthly AFDC Debt
Boston	\$143.13	-46.93	47.79		64.08		
Brockton	95.99		43.93		64.08		
Cambridge	192.43		40.49		64.08		
Fitchburg	76.23		45.69		64.08		
Lawrence	78.91		41.01		64.08		
New Bedford	74.90	+21.30	38.02		64.08		
Pittsfield	108.05		36.87		64.08		
Springfield	87.58		39.34		64.08		

(a)Based on 1970 U.S. Census Bureau data for poverty families  
 (b)Based on rates for 355 kwh electricity and 2.5 mcf gas usage  
 (c)Based on actual degree days in Massachusetts

problems of our economic system. Statistics which show the disproportionate percent of nonwhite and female heads of poverty families can broaden the discussion to include the economics of racism and sexism. Also, using research done by local political action groups can broaden students' ideas about how to collect information outside libraries, and may even encourage students to get involved working with a particular group.)

## METHODS

Because, as Freire says, "a project's methods cannot be dichotomized from its content and objectives, as if methods were neutral and equally appropriate for liberation or domination,"<sup>8</sup> new methods, as well as content, are important in teaching a radical math course.

Traditional teaching methods convince students that they are stupid and inferior because they can't do arithmetic, that they have no knowledge to share with others, and that they are cheating if they do their school work with others. Such methods effectively prepare students to compete for work at boring jobs over which they have no control.

The methods that follow are intended to begin to undo the training students have received from traditional schooling, to give students a positive intellectual self-image, and to encourage them to work together to accomplish the task at hand. The techniques are most effective when the reasons behind them are discussed in class.

## Analyzing Error Patterns

All wrong answers (except those guessed wildly from pure anxiety) involve some correct, logical reasoning. For example, there is logical thinking behind these incorrect subtractions:

95	64	82
<u>-48</u>	<u>-29</u>	<u>-36</u>
53	45	54

This person realized that you subtract each place value column separately and that you must subtract smaller numbers from larger numbers. However, he didn't know how to "borrow," so he guessed by subtracting the only way he could imagine. The class not only analyzes this student's reasoning, but also discusses how to convince him that the method was wrong and how to teach him correct methods.<sup>9</sup> Analyzing error patterns provides non-rote reinforcement of computation skills, and shows students that you respect their intelligence and will not think they are stupid when they make errors. This, in turn, encourages students to respect their own and each other's intelligence.

## Keeping a Math Journal

Journals are an effective means of reducing students' math anxiety. They serve as vents for feelings and act as concrete records of progress for students who, too often, belittle their own successes and focus on what they cannot do. The journal helps students realize that they can now accomplish what one month ago they thought was impossible and helps them clarify which learning techniques worked best. Students are expected to write in their journals for five to ten minutes, three to four times a week. Topics vary: how they feel in class, how they attempt to do the homework, how they use math outside school, how they feel about their progress, and so on. I collect the journals frequently and comment on them. My comments offer encouragement, alternative solutions or perspectives, and explanations of how students' remarks on learning math often apply to learning in general. Students' comments on the class are very helpful for my lesson planning. I find time to read and comment on journals when I don't collect homework assignments but instead give students the answers to homework problems and encourage them to work on them in class and evaluate their learning together.

## Quizzes

I start most lessons with a review and a one- or two-question quiz. I correct the quiz in class while students solve class-work problems, return the quiz, and review it immediately. The quizzes tell me which topics the students understand and which topics confuse them. They give the students a clear message about what they were expected to learn from the previous lesson. Also, giving students many quizzes then discussing feelings about taking tests, the fairness of the questions, and techniques for working under pressure gradually diminish their test anxieties. In addition, when end-term grades are required, an abundance of quiz grades can be helpful to students.

## Students Teaching

In order to teach a math problem to someone, you must be able to recognize all the correct methods of solving it as well as the logic behind incorrect methods. At the beginning of the term, I have students explain problems at the board and then, after discussing the difference between explaining and teaching, I gradually train them to teach. As various students practice teaching, they begin to involve many other students and to ask them to justify their answers. I remain quiet; the class checks itself and rarely lets a mistake go by. The students get very involved, arguing constructively and thinking creatively about solutions to the problems. The student teachers effectively involve even the quiet students, who are more willing to participate when it helps a classmate. A feeling of solidarity develops in the class as students, learning from each other, come to respect one another. After many students have had a chance to teach problems at the board, the class attitude begins to reflect their greater understanding of my role as teacher. Students realize how difficult it is to think on one's feet, to write at the board, and to talk to people who aren't paying attention. Having students teach helps break down the authoritarian image of the teacher and simultaneously builds true respect for the hard job good teachers do.

## Students Working in Groups

In order for the class to work in groups, certain understandings need to be developed: that people learn at different rates, that they learn by asking questions and analyzing their mistakes, and that every problem can be solved in several correct ways. While the class works in small groups, I circulate among them to facilitate cooperation and to help students who are ahead realize that they can learn by sharing their knowledge.

I suggest a structure for group tasks by writing the task breakdown, with times, on the board, and having the class evaluate how the groups worked after each assignment. The following are sample group tasks:

### 1. Group Evaluation of Homework

(a) (five min.) Working in groups of three or four, determine which homework problem was easiest.

(b) (five min.) Determine which homework problem was hardest.

(Evaluating homework questions is a good lead into having students create their own math problems. Also, this task shows students that because people learn in different ways they find different problems easy or hard.)

### 2. Group Creation of Quizzes

(fifteen min.) Working in groups of three or four, create two quiz questions based on the previous lesson. I will then choose from your questions to create today's quiz.

(Once students learn to create fair, comprehensive test questions, they will be able to anticipate the test questions teachers will ask and therefore be able to study effectively for tests. Hopefully, the more practice students have in creating questions, the more they will become used to asking questions, in school and in their daily lives.)

## FINAL NOTE

I must stress that although I have been developing this curriculum for six years, it is still far from finished. I want this course to be more than just a respectful alternative to the traditional, condescending arithmetic courses taught to adults. I want this course to radicalize students and move them to action. There are two potential underlying problems with which I am currently grappling: that, as with any "reform," there is the danger the course goals might lose their radical focus and become blended into traditional, liberal educational innovation; and that the course curriculum might create overwhelming pessimism in students.



In the future, I would like to add to the course quantitative data showing victories that have been won. I would like students to complete an action project arising from quantitative data they collect on an issue that concerns them. The project must be small enough in scope to have a real chance of success, so it does not wind up reinforcing the childhood message of inherent impotence which, as Jonathan Kozol points out, is so effectively learned in school.<sup>10</sup>

A radical math course can help students focus and document their criticisms of life under capitalism. But, I am now convinced that it is vitally important for radical educators to offer more than just a critical analysis of

society. I welcome suggestions about how we can also help give students the hope and the energy to act.

#### NOTES

1. Dollars and Sense (July-August, 1979), p. 7 (their source: Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P-60 series); Dick Cluster, Nancy Rutter, and the staff of Dollars and Sense, *Shrinking Dollars, Vanishing Jobs* (Boston: Beacon, 1980), p. 28; "Infant, Maternal, and Neonatal Death Rates, and Fetal Death Ratios, by Race: 1940 to 1977," *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*, no. 108, p. 75; *Information Please Almanac*, 1979, pp. 345, 347.
2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), ch. 2.
3. Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Educational Review, 1970), p. 11.
4. As William Profriedt points out, just the opposite happens in most classrooms, where there exists "a silly neutralism in which teachers believe they are just presenting facts and avoiding opinions or value statements. They avoid value statements because . . . they do not believe that such statements are susceptible to rational inquiry and verification. Of course in practice they are transmitting a set of values, but one which is not identified as such, and hence is not open to critical inquiry." "Socialist Criticisms of Education in the United States: Problems and Possibilities," *Harvard Educational Review* (November, 1980), p. 477.
5. I also use pure math patterns, puzzles, mathematical magic, and mathematical art to add some recreational interest to the course.
6. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 68.
7. These examples are not all current. I chose them to illustrate the range of political applications and the types of critical, creative thinking involved in the curriculum. Also, the examples are not in order of difficulty, and they are longer and seem somewhat harder to solve than when presented as part of a gradual buildup over a whole semester.
8. *Cultural Action for Freedom*, p. 44.
9. Other examples of error patterns can be culled from your teaching experiences or found in Robert B. Ashlock's *Error Patterns in Computation* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1976).
10. Kozol summarizes this message of powerlessness: "Ask, and you may rest assured that you will be refused, but you will have done as much as you should, or as much as anybody has the right to ask, by the very fact of making the request." *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far From Home* (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 98.

**Food for thought.**

**McDonald's**  
We do it all for you..

For years everyone's been telling kids spinach was good for them. But not why. McDonald's® Nutrition Action Pack™ was designed to help primary teachers (grades 1 through 4) answer kids' questions. Stimulate their curiosity about different foods. And create interest in a well-balanced diet. Commissioned by McDonald's, this course was developed by nutritionists and educators\* Recommended by Fredrick J. Stare, M.D., Professor of Nutrition at Harvard. And enthusiastically evaluated by kids and teachers. Inside you'll find thirteen (13) "Activity Masters" that make a minimum of 200

copies each. Plus lots of well-thought-out classroom activities. All in all, McDonald's Nutrition Action Pack is everything your kids never wanted to know about nutrition (and you probably dreaded teaching them) made fun. Send for it. McDonald's Action Packs, Box 2594, Chicago, Illinois 60690. It only costs two dollars. And buys a lot of food... for thought, that is. Also available: McDonald's Ecology Action Pack™ (\$2.00). And McDonald's New Economic Action Pack™ (\$2.00). Designed for grades 4 through 6, its lesson plans and "Activity Masters" make teaching economics easy for you and fun for your students.

\*Cleveland Health Museum and Education Center, and the Community Nutrition Service of Cleveland.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



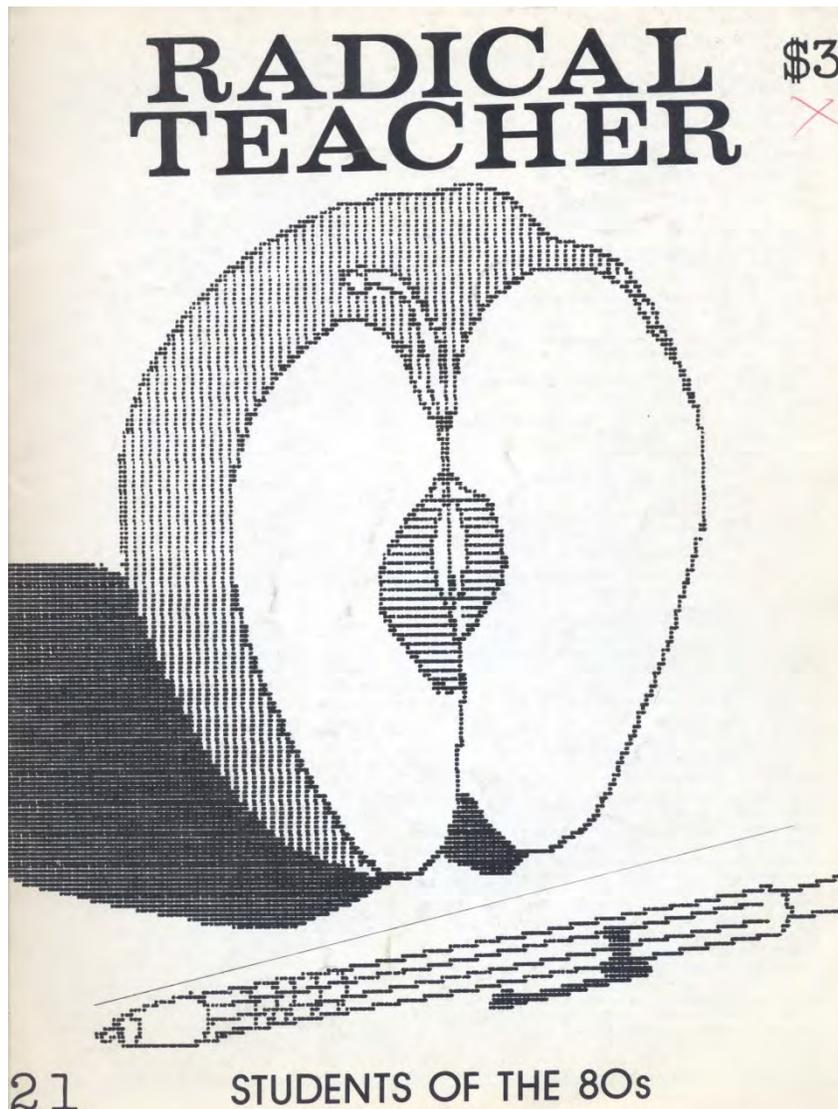
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Annals of Academic Life: An Exemplary Tale

by Louis Kampf



The narrator of the following vignette is not to be mistaken for the author. Though the tale appears to be autobiographical, it must be a fiction. Academic institutions, as we know, are the repositories of rationality. Professors have been bequeathed the patrimony of the Enlightenment. Such evidence indicates that the events described below could not possibly have happened.

\* \* \*

The faces are those of ten-year-olds playacting at seriousness. They belong to my colleagues, the tenured members of the English department. Alas, their performance is not staged for the benefit of parents at a grade school's annual Christmas play.

"It's the most agonizing decision I've ever had to make," mumbles Remington. I look for a trace of irony in his face, but find only the grimness of domestic tragedy. He runs his fingers through his neatly trimmed hair, directs the hint of a boyish smile my way, and lets his almost double chin sink onto the knot of his tie. Seated around the oval seminar table, his colleagues nod their heads knowingly. They too are in pain. Their brows are furrowed, their lips tightly shut, their eyes intently fixed on stacks of recommendations ominously marked "confidential."

"I've been up most of the night," Remington continues, "and though I really like Leah, I cannot approve of her scholarly methods. When she quotes from original manuscript sources it's done in the original spelling. This is very misleading for future scholars. She really should modernize the spelling." I'm facing Remington and begin to smile. I'd really like to double over with laughter, but Leah Scott's future is at stake, so I control myself. I glance at my colleagues. Maybe – just maybe – someone will giggle. No. Lips are even more compressed, brows more deeply furrowed. Remington does not respond to my smile. He plays obsessively with the buttons on the vest of his double-knit suit. Leah Scott's many publications – two books, articles, reviews, editions – lie scattered around the table. They draw little attention as this gathering of scholars arduously culls nasty little snippets from the file of confidential recommendations. My colleagues, after six hours of squeezing out scholarly reflections as profound as Remington's, vote to deny Leah Scott tenure.

\* \* \*

That morning I had gone through my breakfast ritual of envisioning apocalypse. The newspapers were my book of visions: murder and destruction in El Salvador, the planned deployment of nuclear missiles, starvation in East Timor, a rape in my neighborhood, Reagan's cutback of medical services for old people. Death, destruction, and mean-spiritedness on a global scale. Neither my heart nor brain found much room for worries about Leah. After all, nearly everyone (except Leah) had known for at least two years that she would be fired. My colleagues could not officially say that a feminist doing women's studies was not to be taken seriously, but reasons would be found. And we shall sit around a table (do they sit around similar tables in the Pentagon, I wonder) and apply our collective interest to finding them. Six hours that might be spent on halting

nuclear madness; on enlightening students; on enjoying oneself; on acts of generosity. As I savor the flavor of a particularly tart grapefruit, I know what the scene will be, and I can barely get myself in motion toward school.

Six hours! I walk into the meeting room beginning to feel ashamed of my revulsion. It's not six hours on an assembly line. It's not six hours correcting compositions. It's not six hours spent preparing lectures about books I do not want to teach. In fact, while several of my friends are unemployed, I have a plush job at an elite institution. I teach what I want to teach. There's an occasional struggle over that, but since I'm tenured I can afford to put up a fight against pesky requests from the curriculum committee, and usually get my way. My hours are not overly long. I have a sense of my own competence as a teacher, and my students, who are mostly intelligent and nice, respond to me in class. I have a good time with them, and some learning does go on. In various pockets around the school there are a few faculty members I respect and have affection for. Working with them enlarges my spirit. They have supported me when I was in trouble, and they will do so again. We have enjoyed each other's company at lunch, across a seminar table, at demonstrations, and in jail. I teach at an elite institution involved with the monstrosities I read about at breakfast, yet I enjoy the comfort of doing political work with comrades in the school's socialist group.

But on this particular morning I would rather stay home and vacuum the living room rug.

\* \* \*

I creep away from the meeting. My brain, I am convinced, will never again formulate a coherent idea. Clarity is my goddess; at the moment, I cannot envision her. In an hour I shall be teaching "Contemporary Issues in Politics and Ideology" to students who would like to do something decent with their lives. We'll discuss underdevelopment in Central America, and how to support the popular forces in El Salvador. I feel in communion with these young people. Their concern pricks my conscience. Soon their expectant looks will fill me with anxiety: they hope for so much more than the mechanical transfer of knowledge. How can I possibly meet their expectations? Perhaps I can't. But right now anxiety fuels my desire to make the attempt. When I walk into class I shall be a teacher, not an educational bureaucrat; the professor will feel connected to the rest of me. Meanwhile, Leah stays on my mind.

I glance at some lecture notes, but memory interferes and reaches back to the sixties.

\* \* \*

Remington, a new instructor, has a beard so scraggly it looks like it's been pasted on. Unkempt hair hangs down to his shoulders. His smile hints irony but still tells me he is alive with passion. While he was in graduate school, Remington was arrested twice for participating in sit-ins. Since coming here he has given much of his time to working with anti-war groups. Remington's outrageous sense of humor gives his militance a rare ebullience. He

can double me over with laughter while we're trying to dodge a tactical policeman's oversized club. His inventiveness is at the edge of the surreal, spilling out ideas, wisecracks, analyses of Shakespeare or Dylan. His freakiness is tempered by an unfailing rationality.

Where have you gone, Remington? "I do not believe in equal opportunity curricula," he told me a few days ago, when I asked him why there were no women authors in the "Masterpieces of Western Literature" course. Remington does scholarship so wretchedly conventional, so dull, it nearly embarrassed the administration into denying him tenure. As head of the curriculum committee he worries whether "Popular Narrative" might be used as a catalogue entry for both "Science Fiction" and "Fantasy Fiction." How

few hours I spend in class. Leah will appeal her firing, and I shall have to work in her support. More meetings. Political struggles quicken my pulse, and ordinarily make me feel as if I'm giving history a small shove. But there is no joy in butting heads with my colleagues; they simply won't butt. No issue is ever met head-on, and I find myself haggling not over ideas or values, but over formalities. If Leah's head is to be saved from the chopping block, it will be by the grace of the good god Procedure. I know: a democracy can work only if consistent procedures are applied equally to all. And so I'll spar with my colleagues in this ghostly match where all is form and nothing substance; where a real issue – contempt for feminist scholarship – will have to be ignored; where neither they nor I will say what we think



does he shut off his imagination? Why doesn't he explode? No doubt, he has attained the peace that passeth understanding, since God is a living presence for those who follow acceptable scholarly procedures. Such peacefulness allows him to deny Leah tenure for using early English spelling.

\* \* \*

Only half an hour until I'm restored by the "Politics and Ideology" class. But my musings have nearly turned that prospect to ashes. What am I really doing in that class? Anything more than providing future Remingtons with a little room to breathe? Right now I do not want to be here. My institutional life, after all, is composed of more than the

of each other. Though furious with myself for hiding, I maintain a politic silence. The faces of nearly all the men seated around the table are hidden behind nearly trimmed beards. The features of one colleague, a woman, are masked by a permanent smile which threatens to crack her jaw; I'm sure it will be there the moment Reagan pushes the atomic button. We are the guardians of the eternal verities, yet never speak our private truths. I'm part of the act, a performer playing to the demands of institutional life.

I look at my watch. Sixteen minutes till class starts. I try to put my opening remarks together, but my thoughts fade to Saul Durling, one of my bearded colleagues with tenure. Saul looks like an obsessed chassid lost in the Ivy

League. Several years ago, while being interviewed for his job, he sidled up to me, and in a staccato jabber confided that he had been heavily influenced by my writing. What, I wondered, have I wrought? "Perhaps too heavily," he added mysteriously. Soon after he got hired, he came into my office, closed the door ostentatiously, and urged me to teach black studies. He assured me that I could do it a lot better than any black person the department might hire. "I would be very offended," he explained, "if I were forbidden to teach Milton because I'm Jewish." I began to argue, but stopped in mid-sentence. He knew what I would say; I knew what he would say; we would dance our dance and I would be left in a rage. "Hear me," he nagged, "I often feel that you're not discussing these very serious matters with me. At least (grinning) you should tell me I'm full of shit." I yielded: "All right, you're full of shit."

I look back and wonder about my passivity. I avoided the argument because Durling's intellectual stance, his very personality, offend my sense of what a literary intellectual ought to be. With great hesitation I decided to become a teacher of literature and ideas because I believed that intellectuals spend their time not dancing verbal dances, but moving ideas and history forward. What is the point of one more stupid academic hassle? My inspiration had come from Alexander Herzen's memoirs, from Diderot, from Virginia Woolf's literary essays and reviews. And there I was about to turn an important issue into academic nit picking with Durling.

I feel depressed. Poor me. I have a nifty little job at a big famous place, but I feel depressed. A contradiction. For years I've written articles telling people that universities are not the guardians of the critical tradition of the Enlightenment, but the ideological servants of ruling elites. So why do I act as if it's news? When I have to deal with this truism in the flesh and bones of my professional life, I nearly boil over with resentment.

I go off to class. Students scramble by me in the halls. One who has the maddened eyes of Alexander Haig tries to stare me down. I wonder how many will be complicit in the planning of nuclear holocaust or the economic strangulation of millions. How can I, a teacher, hope to change this? What impact can even the best course have? My depression deepens as I walk into class. On this particular day, teaching these very decent students about political possibilities does not brighten my spirit.

I feel cheated. I began teaching this course, which is not part of the English curriculum, during the 1960s. It had been a small part of the challenge to academic dogma initiated by radical students. Here in this class, I said to myself, I'm acting out the role of critical intellectual. I'm engaged with the world. These ideas will matter in the struggle for social change because they are being carried on the wave of a great social movement. The students and teachers who were trying to invent a more rational curriculum gave me hope for the possibilities of education. This course is one remnant of that hope. So when the small monstrosities of a departmental meeting dampen my pleasure in feeling like a true heir of the Enlightenment, I feel depressed. This, I tell myself, is not the life I wanted

to lead. In spite of my pretensions, I am just one more hod-carrying professor.

\* \* \*

The class is over. After several minutes of feigned interest in the students' heated discussion, I wander toward my office. I feel separated from everything around me: people pass me like ghosts; the massive stone buildings seem outlines drawn without perspective. The only reality is a bitter memory: the meeting that decided Leah was a malignancy to be removed. Here are the fruits of the Enlightenment: humanity must be protected against the dangers of improper scholarly procedures.

Having felt dangerously exposed in the classroom, I enter my office like a bird returning to its nest. I sit down on my swivel chair, and whirl around to gaze at the books – shelf on shelf of them. Why don't I give them away? What reassurance do they give me? Do they certify me as a man of deep knowledge? My mocking reflections are interrupted by Samuel Smith, who has just wandered in. Smith is handsome, his eyes are frozen in perpetual amusement; he dresses in discreet versions of the latest styles. He is the only black person in the department. He was hired because Andover, Amherst and Yale had given him the words my colleagues wanted to hear. He saw *The Deerhunter* last night, and wants to discuss its structure of images. I observe that *The Deerhunter* is part of a movement to falsify the history of America's war against Vietnam. He listens patiently, then says he's not really interested in such matters. Smith also has an idealized notion of what a literary intellectual ought to be. It's different from mine. He sees himself as a civilized gentleman discussing the arts, frequenting sophisticated bars, leading a life of elegant comfort. He plays this role well, avoiding the appearance of academic seediness. Hassles over departmental policy buffet his image of the academy as a haven for humanistic literary discourse. His experience in the department has led him to conclude that the academic game isn't worth the effort. In the fall he will begin law school: it takes money to be truly civilized. After three years, the living will be easy. I wonder why Smith seeks me out so often. Is it because for me the living is, in fact, easy? In Smith's eyes I do lead a civilized life. My deepest concern does not seem to be whether the introductory course will be structured around genres or historical periods. Who will be the next department chair? I don't give it much thought. I have tenure, travel, discuss the arts with some knowledgeability. I am, in short, cultured. No wonder I feel depressed. When Smith leaves for law school will Durling once again ask me to teach black studies?

\* \* \*

When I get home I head for the kitchen. After taking my first sip of pernod (Did Sartre soothe his nerves similarly after a rough day at the Ecole normale superieure?) I begin the intricate task of preparing dinner. Dicing the eggplant for the pasta sauce, my tension recedes as I look forward to the pleasure of my friends and comrades savoring the robust and complex beauty my labor and the tradition of Sicilian cooking have produced.

After dinner, lingering over a glass of wine, we discuss tomorrow's demonstration in support of the Salvadoran rebels. I find it needs work to convince myself to go. Each demonstration, each meeting, each phone call urging a friend to sign a petition seems like a distinct event. Each demands a new expense of spiritual energy on my part. No compelling historical design urges me to plunge into the next task. Work in school, I reflect, is just one more piece in the political puzzle I can't put together. Nearly every moment I must convince myself that the academic routine is leading – somewhere. Am I really pushing the boulder any further up the hill? Will sitting through one more meeting to save Leah's job make the misshapen colossus

where I earn my living a more humane workplace? I think so. But then I don't feel sure. Doesn't the battle (grandiose word!) involve a small attempt to control the conditions of my work? It does. But since I teach at an elite institution, there is no union. So the battle over someone's job is carried on in near isolation; it threatens to turn me into a crank. Meanwhile, there is the demonstration I might be working on.

I swallow the last bit of wine. The dishes need to be washed. There is a class to prepare, an essay to be polished, a phone call to be made to a friend about the demonstration. If I do my work with resolution, there might be time to catch a late movie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



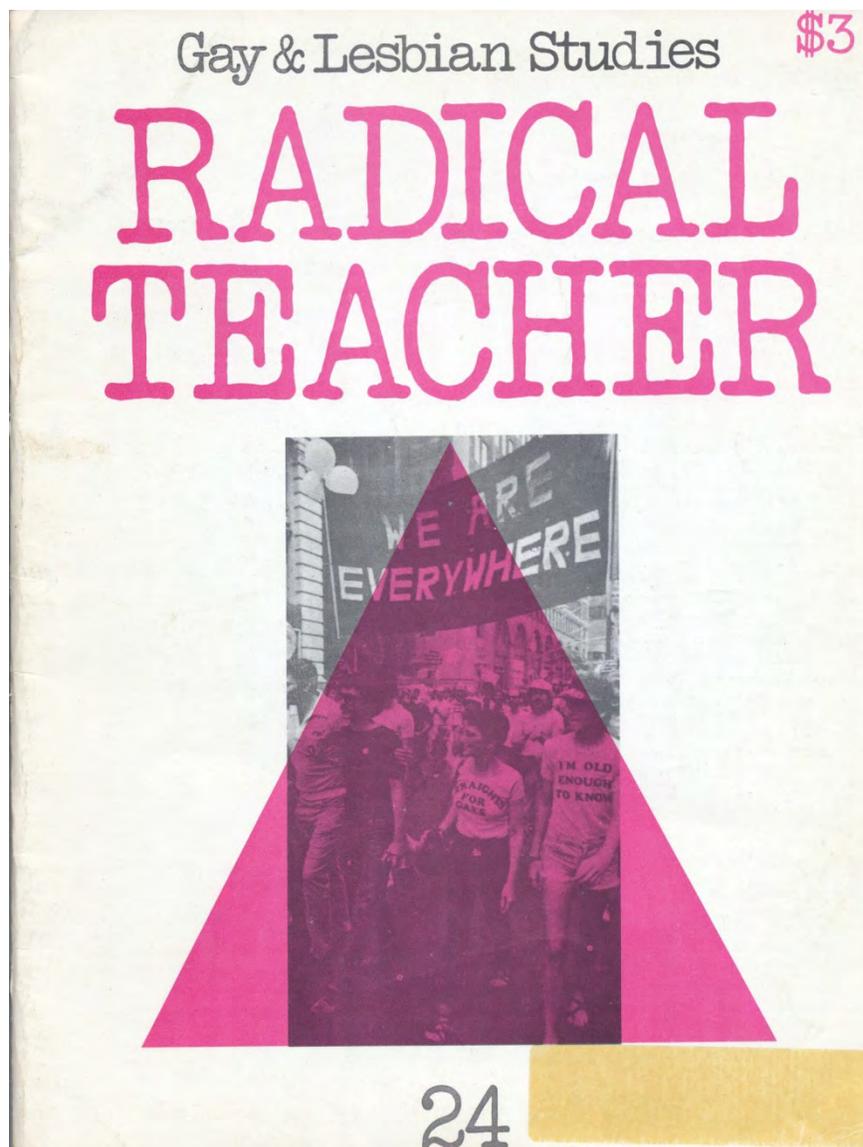
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://d-scribe.org/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## He Defies You Still: The Memoirs of a Sissy

by Tommi Avicoli



*You 're just a faggot*

*No history faces you this morning*

*A faggot's dreams are scarlet*

*Bad blood bled from words that scarred1*

## SCENE ONE:

A home room in a Catholic High School in South Philadelphia. The boy sits quietly in the first aisle, third desk, reading a book. He does not look up, not even for a moment. He is hoping no one will remember he is sitting there. He wishes he were invisible. The teacher is not yet in the classroom so the other boys are talking and laughing loudly.

Suddenly, a voice from beside him:

"Hey, you're a faggot, ain't you?"

The boy does not answer. He goes on reading his book, or rather pretending he is reading his book. It is impossible to actually read the book now.

"Hey, I'm talking to you!"

The boy still does not look up. He is so scared his heart is thumping madly; it feels like it is leaping out of his chest and into his throat. But he can't look up.

"Faggot, I'm talking to you!"

To look up is to meet the eyes of the tormentor.

Suddenly, a sharpened pencil point is thrust into the boy's arm. He jolts, shaking off the pencil, aware that there is blood seeping from the wound.

"What did you do that for?" he asks timidly.

"Cause I hate faggots," the other boy says, laughing. Some other boys begin to laugh, too. A symphony of laughter. The boy feels as if he's going to cry. But he must not cry. Must not cry. So he holds back the tears and tries to read the book again. He must read the book. Read the book.

When the teacher arrives a few minutes later, the class quiets down. The boy does not tell the teacher what has happened. He spits on the wound to clean it, dabbing it with a tissue until the bleeding stops. For weeks he fears some dreadful infection from the lead in the pencil point.

## SCENE TWO:

The boy is walking home from school. A group of boys (two, maybe three, he is not certain) grab him from behind, drag him into an alley and beat him up. When he gets home, he races up to his room, refusing dinner ("I don't feel well," he tells his mother through the locked door) and spends the night alone in the dark wishing he would die....

These are not fictitious accounts -- I was that boy. Having been branded a sissy by neighborhood children because I preferred jump rope to baseball and dolls to playing soldiers, I was often taunted with "hey sissy" or "hey faggot" or "yoo hoo honey" (in a mocking voice) when I left the house.

To avoid harassment, I spent many summers alone in my room. I went out on rainy days when the street was empty.

I came to like being alone. I didn't need anyone, I told myself over and over again. I was an island. Contact with others meant pain. Alone, I was protected. I began writing poems, then short stories. There was no reason to go outside any more. I had a world of my own.

*they'll            single            you            out  
Their laughter will leave your ears ringing  
like            the            church            bells  
which            In            the            schoolyard            today  
once awed me....2*

School was one of the more painful experiences of my youth. The neighborhood bullies could be avoided. The taunts of the children living in those endless repetitive row houses could be evaded by staying in my room. But school was something I had to face day after day for some two hundred mornings a year.

I had few friends in school. I was a pariah. Some kids would talk to me, but few wanted to be known as my close friend. Afraid of labels. If I was a sissy, then he had to be a sissy, too. I was condemned to loneliness.

Fortunately, a new boy moved into our neighborhood and befriended me; he wasn't afraid of the labels. He protected me when the other guys threatened to beat me up. He walked me home from school; he broke through the terrible loneliness. We were in third or fourth grade at the time.

We spent a summer or two together. Then his parents sent him to camp and I was once again confined to my room.

## SCENE THREE:

High school lunchroom. The boy sits at a table near the back of the room. Without warning, his lunch bag is grabbed and tossed to another table. Someone opens it and confiscates a package of Tastykakes; another boy takes the sandwich. The empty bag is tossed back to the boy who stares at it, dumbfounded. He should be used to this; it has happened before.

Someone screams, "faggot," laughing. There is always laughter. It does not annoy him anymore.

There is no teacher nearby. There is never a teacher around. And what would he say if there were? Could he

report the crime? He would be jumped after school if he did. Besides, it would be his word against theirs. Teachers never noticed anything. They never heard the taunts. Never heard the word, "faggot." They were the great deaf mutes, pillars of indifference; a sissy's pain was not relevant to history and geography and god made me to love honor and obey him, amen.

#### SCENE FOUR:

High school Religion class. Someone has a copy of *Playboy*. Father N. is not in the room yet, he's late, as usual. Someone taps the boy roughly on the shoulder. He turns. A finger points to the centerfold model, pink fleshy body, thin and sleek. Almost painted. Not real. The other asks, mocking voice, "Hey, does she turn you on? Look at those tits!"

The boy smiles, nodding meekly; turns away.

The other jabs him harder on the shoulder, "Hey, whatsamatter, don't you like girls?"

Laughter. Thousands of mouths; unbearable din of laughter. In the Arena: thumbs down. Don't spare the queer.

"Wanna suck my dick? Huh? That turn you on, faggot!" The laughter seems to go on forever.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Behind you, the sound of their laughter  
echoes a million times  
in a soundless place  
They watch how you walk/sit/stand/breathe. ...<sup>3</sup>*

What did being a sissy really mean? It was a way of walking (from the hips rather than the shoulders); it was a way of talking (often with a lisp or in a high pitched voice); it was a way of relating to others (gently, not wanting to fight, or hurt anyone's feelings). It was being intelligent ("an egghead" they called it sometimes); getting good grades. It means not being interested in sports, not playing football in the street after school; not discussing teams and scores and playoffs. And it involved not showing fervent interest in girls, not talking about scoring with tits or *Playboy* centerfolds. Not concealing naked women in your history book; or porno books in your locker.

On the other hand, anyone could be a "faggot." It was a catch-all. If you did something that didn't conform to what was the acceptable behavior of the group, then you risked being called a faggot. If you didn't get along with the "in" crowd, you were a faggot. It was the most commonly used put-down. It kept guys in line. They became angry when somebody called them a faggot. More fights started over someone calling someone else a faggot than anything else. The word had power. It toppled the male ego, shattered his delicate facade, violated the image he projected. He was tough. Without feeling. Faggot cut through all this. It made him vulnerable. Feminine. And

feminine was the worst thing he could possibly be. Girls were fine for fucking, but no boy in his right mind wanted to be like them. A boy was the opposite of girl. He was not feminine. He was not feeling. He was not weak.

Just look at the gym teacher who growled like a dog; or the priest with the black belt who threw kids against the wall in rage when they didn't know their Latin. They were men, they got respect.

But not the physics teacher who preached pacifism during lectures on the nature of atoms. Everybody knew what he was -- and why he believed in the anti-war movement.

\*\*\*\*\*

My parents only knew that the neighborhood kids called me names. They begged me to act more like the other boys. My brothers were ashamed of me. They never said it, but I knew. Just as I knew that my parents were embarrassed by my behavior.

At times, they tried to get me to act differently. Once my father lectured me on how to walk right. I'm still not clear on what that means. Not from the hips, I guess; don't "swish" like faggots do.

A nun in elementary school told my mother at Open House that there was "something wrong with me." I had draped my sweater over my shoulders like a girl, she said. I was a smart kid, no complaints about my grades, but I should know better than to wear my sweater like a girl!

My mother stood there, mute. I wanted her to say something, to chastise this nun; to defend me. But how could she? This was a nun talking -- representative of Jesus, protector of all that was good and decent.

An uncle once told me I should start "acting like a boy" instead of like a girl. Everybody seemed ashamed of me. And I guess I was ashamed of myself, too. It was hard not to be.

#### SCENE FIVE:

**Priest:** Do you like girls, Mark?

**Mark:** Uh-huh.

**Priest:** I mean really like them?

**Mark:** Yeah -- they're okay.

**Priest:** There's a role they play in your salvation. Do you understand it, Mark?

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Priest:** You've got to like girls. Even if you should decide to enter the seminary, it's important to keep in mind god's plan for a man and a woman....<sup>4</sup>

Catholicism of course condemned homosexuality. Effeminacy was tolerated as long as the effeminate person did not admit to being gay. Thus, priests could be effeminate because they weren't gay.

As a sissy, I could count on no support from the church. A male's sole purpose in life was to father children -- souls for the church to save. The only hope a homosexual had of attaining salvation was by remaining totally celibate. Don't even think of touching another boy. Don't even think of thinking of touching another boy. To think of a sin was a sin. And to sin was to put a mark upon the soul. Sin -- if it was a serious offense against god -- led to hell. There was no way around it. If you sinned, you were doomed.

Realizing I was gay was not an easy task. Although I knew I was attracted to boys by the time I was about eleven, I didn't connect this attraction to homosexuality. I was not queer. Not I. I was merely appreciating a boy's good looks, his fine features, his proportions. It didn't seem to matter that I didn't appreciate a girl's looks in the same way. There was no twitching in my thighs when I gazed upon a beautiful girl. But I wasn't queer.

I resisted that label -- queer -- for the longest time. Even when everything pointed to it, I refused to see it. I was certainly not queer. Not I.

\*\*\*\*\*

We sat through endless English classes, and History courses about the wars between men who were not allowed to love each other. No gay history was ever taught. No history faces you this morning. You're just a faggot. Homosexuals had never contributed to the human race. God destroyed the queers in Sodom and Gommorrah.

We learned about Michelangelo, Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein -- but never that they were queer. They were not queer. Walt Whitman, the "father of American poetry," was not queer. No one was queer. I was alone, totally unique. One of a kind. Were there others like me somewhere? Another planet, perhaps?

In school, they never talked of the queers. They did not exist. The only hint we got of this other species was in religion class. And even then it was clouded in mystery -- never spelled out. It was a sin. Like masturbation. Like looking at *Playboy* and getting a hard-on. A sin.

Once a progressive priest in senior year religion class actually mentioned homosexuals -- he said the word -- but was into Erich Fromm, into homosexuals as pathetic and sick. Fixated at some early stage; penis, anal, whatever.

Only heterosexuals passed on to the nirvana of sexual development.

No other images from the halls of the Catholic high school except those the other boys knew: swishy faggot sucking cock in an alley somewhere, grabbing asses in the bathroom. Never mentioning how much straight boys craved blowjobs, it was part of the secret. It was all a secret. You were not supposed to talk about the queers. Whisper maybe. Laugh about them, yes. But don't be open, honest; don't try to understand. Don't cite their accomplishments. No history faces you this morning. You're just a faggot  
no history  
just a faggot

## EPILOGUE:

The boy marching down the Parkway. Hundreds of queers. Signs proclaiming gay pride. Speakers. Tables with literature from gay groups. A miracle, he is thinking. Tears are coming loose now. Someone hugs him.

*You could not control  
the sissy in me  
nor could you exorcise him  
nor electrocute him*

*You declared him illegal illegitimate*

*Insane and immature  
But he defies you still*

## NOTES

1. From the poem "Faggot" by Tommi Aviccolli, published in GPU News, Sept. 1979.
3. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
- 4 From the play *Judgment of the Roaches* by Tommi Aviccolli, produced in Philadelphia at the Gay Community Center, the Painted Bride Arts Center and the University of Pennsylvania; aired over WXPB FM, in four parts; and presented at the Lesbian/Gay Conference in Norfolk, VA, July, 1980.
- 5 From the poem "Sissy Poem," published in *Magic Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Philadelphia: Spruce Street Press, 1976).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



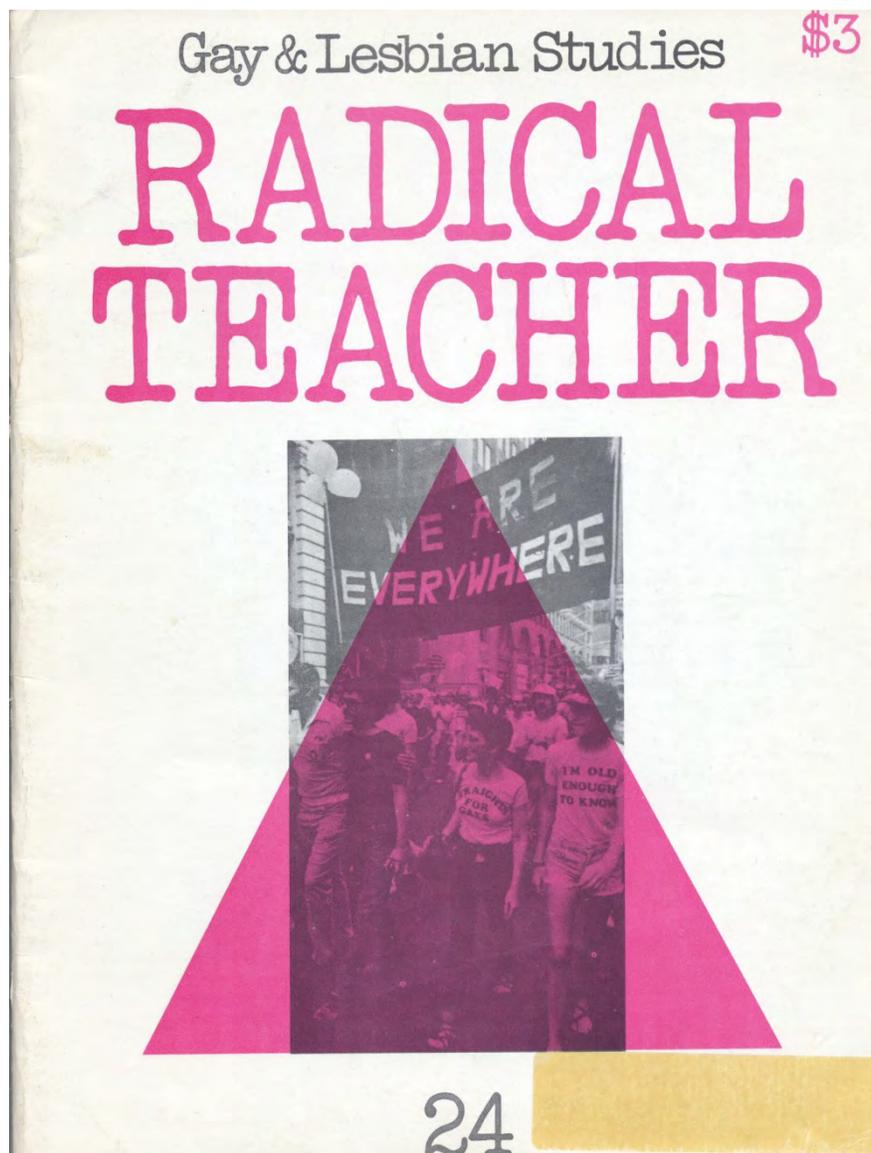
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Lesbian Literature: A Third World Feminist Perspective

by Cherrie Moraga and Barbara Smith



## "A Baseline From Which to Build a Political Understanding: The Background and Goals of the Course."

**Barbara Smith:** I'd taught Black women's literature, interdisciplinary courses on Black women and talked about Lesbianism as an "out" lesbian in my "Introduction to Women's Studies" courses, but I really wanted to do a Lesbian lit course. Lesbian literature had never been offered by the Women's Studies program at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, although the program is almost ten years old. There was a gay literature course that had been co-taught by a gay man and a lesbian, but its orientation was quite a bit different from what I had in mind.

**Cherrie Moraga:** Lesbian literature had been taught a number of times at San Francisco State through the English department. My major motivation for wanting to teach the class was that I thought it was the perfect place to integrate a political perspective that centered on Lesbians of color. The other motivation came in response to taking other women's studies classes and Lesbian-related courses that were so completely white and middle class. I wanted to teach a course that covered what I thought was missing from those classes.

**B:** I had no intention of teaching what I called on the first day of class "Rich White Women." The Renee Vivien and Natalie Barney types and shit. No interest whatsoever, because they do get taught, and some of them even get taught in straight literature classes.

**C:** The other thing is that in gay literature classes what is usually taught are books like *Rubyfruit Jungle* and whatever stuff is as mass-market as can be. Not necessarily feminist. And then, in a Lesbian course taught by a white woman, you would get racist and classist selections by default.

**B:** One major goal was to familiarize the women who took the course with the writing of women of color. The other goal was for them to get a grasp of how the issue of racism in the women's movement connected to them. I felt that it was impossible to talk about the literature of women of color without talking about the reality of racism also.

**C:** One of my goals was actually to teach a course on the theory of oppression through a feminist perspective. I wanted to talk about how Lesbians function in a positive and visionary way for a feminist future, for social change. But at the same time, I wanted to talk about lesbianism as oppression and to talk about homophobia. Regardless of their color, most of the women in the class had lesbian oppression in common, which gave them some sensitivity to racial oppression and class oppression. Some of the students didn't know they were oppressed. But there would be a source of oppression to work from.

## "People Came Around": Our Students

**B:** Most of my class were white women and Lesbians. There were some white straight women and one Black straight woman, but no Lesbians of color who attended on a regular basis. I did everything possible to inform women of color about the class. I talked about this difficulty to the students from the beginning and I think at a certain point they thought I was saying that I didn't want them to be there, but I think that they began to understand what the significance was of having Third World women actually in attendance as we got into the subject matter. University of Massachusetts in Boston is an urban university that basically serves working-class and lower-middle-class students. The composition of the class did not reflect the racial composition of the campus. Not just Afro-American women, but Latinas, people from the Caribbean, Asian women, all kinds of people go there. But what began to be obvious is that the risks involved for a woman of color to take a course called "Lesbian Literature," whether she was a Lesbian or not, were high, particularly if she was a Lesbian. Most of the people who took the course were in their early twenties.

**C:** My class was also predominantly white. There were four women of color officially registered and, fortunately, often Third World women in the community would attend. The effect of the course? "People came around," as you would say. They had little or no exposure to the works of women of color, and they got some. In the first six weeks of the course, however, there was a great deal of tension in the room, particularly between the white women and Third World women. I experienced this tension as well. Many of the white women in the room didn't know that they'd have to be dealing with racism when they came to a Lesbian lit course. Finally, they began to comprehend that the way I was defining "Lesbian Literature and Feminism" meant that they had to be antiracist.

**B:** Despite what I consider to be the success of the course, there were times that I felt alienated in the situation of virtually all white women. In all my teaching experience, I am constantly dealing with this contradiction of the powerfulness of being a teacher against the powerlessness of being Black. Most white university students have never had a Black teacher. That, in itself, is a mind trip. The teacher is in a position of power. I think it does a trip to white students' heads to have a Black person – a Black woman in particular – in that position over them when their general experience of Black persons in the society is in situations where Blacks are subordinate to them.

**C:** If not subordinate, then nonexistent.

**B:** Sometimes I have the feeling in the classroom that the look in my white students' eyes is, "What is she going to do next?!" People have so many *negative* images of Black people. And teaching (particularly on a non-university level) has many *positive* connotations. A teacher is someone who *takes care*. In other words, their connotations of "teacher" are different from their connotations of "Black."

Another thing is intellect. To have a Black person in a position of intellectual power over white people is UNKNOWN: You know? I mean how could the Black person know more than they do? AHHHHHHHHHHHHH: (laughter) How could a Black person be teaching them anything? Just like I say in the introduction to *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*: "How could somebody who looks like my maid or my fantasy of my maid teach me anything?"

I'm supposed to know everything. I'm white... (sigh, pause) Oh God save me.

**C:** My being a light-skinned Third World woman vs. being Black meant that in my class there was less of a specifically racial or color dynamic happening. But since my being Chicana formed my politics, which determined the makeup of the course, they felt at a disadvantage. I think they wondered, "How can I learn something if I wasn't born into it?" when all along we, as working-class and Third World women, have been required to learn *and* teach outside of our own point of reference.

There's nothing like a passionate lived connection when you're teaching a subject.

## "The Political Significance of Being a Dyke": The Design

**C:** I began the course trying to talk about the criteria on which Lesbian literature is examined. I used your definition of feminism. To paraphrase: *Feminism that is not about freeing all women, which means working-class women, women of color, physically challenged women, et cetera, is not feminism but merely female self-aggrandizement.* We took some articles like Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan Wolfe's "Toward a Feminist Aesthetic" and an article by Bertha Harris, "Notes toward Defining the Nature of Lesbian Literature" and contrasted those against Elly Bulkin's article "Racism and Writing" and your article "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." If Lesbian feminists are doing criticism then they are responsible for doing actively anticlassist, antiracism work, using anticlassist and antiracist criteria for examining those literatures.

Did you discuss Lesbian feminist aesthetics much?

**B:** No. We hardly talked about aesthetics at all, because to me aesthetics is talking about what makes something pretty as opposed to what makes something effective. We certainly talked about effectiveness.

**C:** When we discussed aesthetics we did so in relation to color and class. This led us to examine the white middle-class bias of what is considered good art in the first place.

**B:** We did a section in the course called "Forerunners, Prefeminist Lesbian Writing." I had an opportunity to show a slide show on Lesbian pulp fiction.<sup>1</sup> I wanted people to have an understanding that Lesbian literature existed pre-feminism. We had quite a debate over whether *The Black and White of It*, a recent book by Ann Allen Shockley, was feminist writing or not. I think that this was one of the first examples of how people's effort to be nonracist made it difficult for them actually to be critical of what we were

discussing. In their eagerness not to be negative about a Black woman writer's work, they used different standards to approach it. In other words, because she was Black, they felt they couldn't say she wasn't explicitly feminist.

**C:** In my class we spent some time talking about Lesbianism outside of a feminist framework. Instead of using pre-feminist literature, however, we used some articles about specific sexual questions among Lesbians now. I felt that the majority of the women in the class came out as Lesbians through the feminist movement and had very little understanding of what it meant to be gay without the support of a woman-identified political movement. In some way, they had been sheltered from viscerally dealing with plain old queerdom. I felt that it was critical that a lot of them come to terms with that.

In contrast, I also included a section that was about Lesbian feminist visions of the future. This has been a heavy genre in Lesbian feminist writing. All the major books coming out around 1978 had a section that talked about a feminist vision in some way. Like the third section of *Gyn/ Ecology*, which was supposed to be about Lesbian ecstasy. And then the last section of Susan Griffin's book *Woman and Nature*, and the last section of Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*. And also Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, which is a feminist fantasy. These white writers were producing a body of literature that was talking about where we should go from here. My problem was that I could never get behind any of them (with the exception of Rich, who incidentally titled her final section "Not Somewhere Else, But Here," with the emphasis on the "Here"), and I didn't understand why. So in class we used *The Wanderground* as a way to seriously examine how that vision was in some way actually exclusive. It was not an all encompassing vision, but was directed only to a particular group of women that could indeed feel liberated by the guidelines she had set forth. One of the best parts of the class was actually when Sally Gearhart came in and we could talk with her face to face. This then brought up the issue of a Lesbian feminist writer's commitment to speaking out of her reality but at the same time with a sense of inclusiveness.

Judy Grahn, for example, is very clear about how her class has actually affected the kind of writing she does in terms of form and content. And has also affected her politics. The pivotal point of the whole class was talking about the question of ethics by focusing on "A Woman is Talking to Death." That one long poem became the breakthrough for lots of women to really understand, not in an analytical, theoretical, or abstract way, the political significance of being a dyke. Many white middle-class feminists write ethical poetry but you can't get underneath it. It's not concrete. Judy's stuff in a very daily way helps you see how indeed she is up against all the forms of oppression and how they all collapse in on each other.

**B:** We talked about how the first moral dilemma that she poses is should she help out a Black man. Besides accountability, violence, accidental violence, and the white-boy stupidity that got the motor cycle rider killed in the first place, race is up front. And when was the poem

written? 1973? Before most people were even thinking about racial accountability as a feminist issue.

In my class we talked about the irony of the fact that the people who were really asking practical ethical questions were perverts – the people who were talking about having enough food for people to eat, trying to end race hatred, war, what-have-you. I think that's even different from so-called revolutionary male or non-feminist women writers who might ask those very questions but whose perspective is ruined by homophobia.

**C:** A recurring theme that comes up in Lesbian literature – which is to me the heart of why I would bother to teach the course – is some kind of personal conviction that something between women could be different than what it has been before. In the works of Audre Lorde, Judy Grahn, and Adrienne Rich you can see this. Somehow maybe it's possible that between women racism, hunger, etcetera could be overcome.

**B:** As Adrienne says, "The decision to feed the world/ is the real decision. No revolution/ has chosen it. For that choice requires/ that women shall be free."<sup>2</sup>

**C:** And along the same lines, the theme that goes through "A Woman is Talking to Death" over and over again, is that of touching. Because she touches women she's a pervert, and yet the reality is that the true perversion or the true indecent act is when she didn't touch women.

Judy Grahn says, "Yes I have committed acts of indecency with women and most of them were acts of omission. I regret them bitterly."<sup>3</sup> There's the same kind of ethical frame of reference in Audre Lorde's work. Take a poem like "Between Ourselves," in which she writes, "I do not believe/ our wants/ have made all our lies/ holy."<sup>4</sup> She refuses to use race as an excuse for imposing other forms of oppression. It's all rooted in very concrete stuff. That's the critical difference.

**B:** White working-class women are almost the only white writers who are appropriate to include in this kind of course.

## "Our Ideas Precede Our Means": The Materials

**C:** We had to use handouts because we don't have bound books. One of the problems typically brought up about why women of color and/or Lesbians of color aren't really discussed in women's studies courses is that there isn't any available material. It takes a real invested interest and commitment to find the stuff. Because it's actually there, but it's in feminist and Third World small-press form and published randomly in periodicals.

**B:** It's also much easier to find, at this point, collected writings of Black Lesbian writers because of publications like *Conditions: Five* than writing of women of color who are not Afro-American.<sup>5</sup> It would have been easier to teach a course using only Black Lesbians, but it would hardly have been comprehensive. Often white women in particular think only in terms of Black and white and think if they've

added a few Black women to a course they've done what's expected of them.

The hardest to find book which dealt with racial issues was actually by a white woman writer: *The Changelings*, by Jo Sinclair, written in the 1950s. We had only three copies of the book to pass among thirty people. Because of that process we ended up talking about the book last as opposed to where it actually appeared on the syllabus. And that was a really great book to end on since my class was almost entirely white. Although Jo Sinclair never publicly identified herself as a Lesbian, the book was written from a Lesbian and feminist perspective, and it talks about issues of race from the perspective of a Jewish woman. In other words, it brought together many of the themes of the course because it was talking about race, but from a white woman's perspective. It was Lesbian literature in that it focused upon a friendship between a Jewish girl and a Black girl.

## "They Taught White Men, So Why Can't They Teach Black Women": The Third World Lesbian and Women's Studies

**B:** There are virtually no women of color who are out as Lesbians who are in a position to teach courses in universities. The people who have the politics don't have the jobs, or the credentials. The people who have the credentials and the jobs don't have the politics.

**C:** But what about the white women who are already teaching there?

**B:** The white women who are teaching there – they definitely don't have the perspective in the main because if they did women's studies would have a whole different look than it does. I don't think it's trashing to say that white women have been extremely limited by their whiteness and their class backgrounds, because every text, every piece of tangible evidence that you pick up indicates that. In other words it's not just an impression, it's a reality. You can document it. All you have to do is go into your women's studies section at your university and see what's being taught.

**C:** I think that on our various campuses, there has been at least some effort to begin. There are some white women teaching who do some Third World women's studies and are trying to do some substantial integration in the curriculum. But it's very slow.

**B:** Another thing is that there's little Lesbian literature taught anyway. Of all the women's studies courses taught, it might be the one taught least, because of the issues and risks involved. This brings up the issue of whether you're intending on making it in the university system. I think it's significant that the two people who taught *these* Lesbian lit courses had *no* interest whatsoever in having careers in the university.

**C:** So we didn't have as much to lose.

**B:** Yeah, in other words we could be Third World Lesbians, teaching Third World literature, teaching Lesbian literature. We didn't expect a future.

**C:** Right.

**B:** What really makes me angry about straight white women's studies teachers in general is like how they can never see where women of color and lesbians would logically fit into their subject matter. Women in my classes would come back and talk about other women's studies courses they were taking simultaneously, and they would complain bitterly about the narrowness of a women's studies course that the very semester before they might have taken on face value. And I think they only had this consciousness by having been involved in my course at the same time.

**C:** I think basically the mentality of most programs is we will teach white middle-class, heterosexual women for all our courses *except* in the Lesbian literature course where we will teach white lesbians and in the Third World women's course where we will teach straight Third World women. And that's it (laughter).

So if you happen to be a Third World Lesbian, forget it. Because there's not going to be one course that you could totally relate to. Your Lesbianism gets dealt with in an all-white atmosphere and your color gets dealt with in a straight context. Then they want to know why there are no Third World women or Third World Lesbians taking women's studies.

And certainly you're not going to hear anything about Lesbianism in any other department.

**B:** Right, unless it's abnormal psychology.

**C:** And what you find in ethnic studies programs is probably not going to be very much about women.

**B:** Another factor is that we are active as feminists. I don't see teaching as political work, but certainly my political consciousness affects what I think is important to teach. Do we really believe white women can teach these classes? Because my feeling is, they can.

It's not about them teaching it as we would teach it, but teaching it as opposed to all that alien crap that they are teaching.

**C:** If white women could teach white-boyism for so many years, why couldn't they teach Third World women's stuff? After all, they aren't white men, anymore than they are Third World women. They could particularly teach Third World women's literature because literature opens you up

into the mind of another person. They taught white men, so why can't they teach Black women?

**B:** The reason that one thing appears easy and the other hard is that confronting the experience of women of color calls white women's lives into question in a way that the writing of white boys just doesn't. They can remain aloof because they're not having to examine their relative power in a relationship to poor and Third World people, nor their own role as collaborators with the very people who oppress them.

**C:** The point is that if you do teach a course that involves a Third World woman's perspective, a lot of the assumptions that you are making in the course are going to be turned around. I think this is terrifying to teachers because to bring in another body of information would mess up their whole system.

What Lesbian feminists need to be responsible for is producing a body of literature that makes people have to get up and move. Why use the word "feminist" if you're talking about a body of literature that rationalizes people's complacency, that prevents the reader from ever having to deal with the woman down the street....

**B:** With race, class, and color....

#### NOTES

1 This slide show by Maida Tilchen and others has never been distributed.

2 Adrienne Rich, "Hunger," *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 13.

3 Judy Grahn, "A Woman is Talking to Death," *Collected Poems* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 125.

4 Audre Lorde, "Between Ourselves," *The Black Unicorn* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 113. "Between Ourselves" was originally published in 1976 by Eidolon Editions, Point Reyes, California.

5 With the completion of collections like the *Latina Anthology Compañeras*, edited by La Colectiva Latinoamericana (in progress) and *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1981), works by Lesbians of color from many racial/cultural backgrounds are becoming increasingly available in print.

"Lesbian Literature: A Third World Feminist Perspective," a dialogue by Cherrie Moraga and Barbara Smith, appears in a longer form in *Lesbian Studies*, edited by Margaret Cruikshank (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1982).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



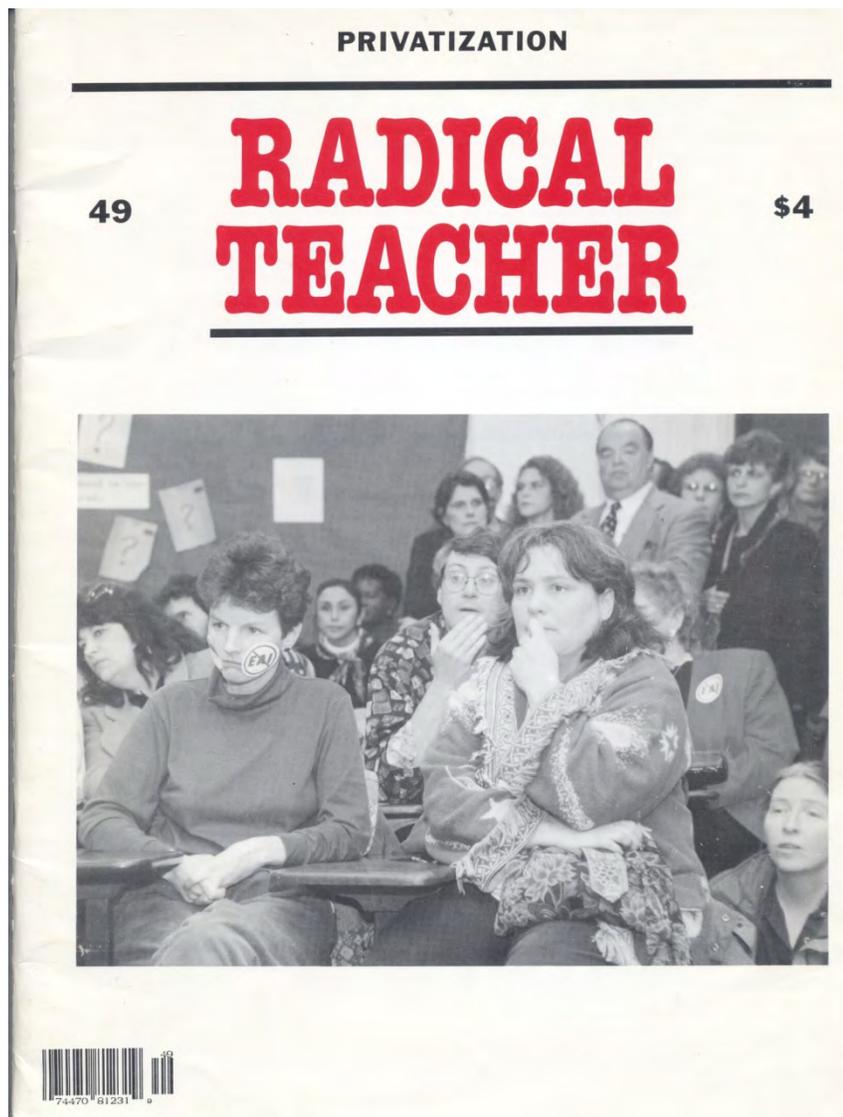
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## The Charter School Law in Massachusetts: Analysis, Commentary, Wish

by David I. Rubin



Nowhere is the link between the right's national political agenda and the privatization of public education clearer than in Massachusetts. In November 1995, just weeks before announcing that he would run for the U.S. Senate against the liberal Democratic incumbent John Kerry, Governor William Weld unveiled a truly radical plan for reshaping K-12 education that could make Massachusetts the testing ground for every weapon in the privatization arsenal.

Weld wants to voucherize the entire public educational system, putting an educational voucher in the hand of every low-income student in Massachusetts and radically expanding the idea of school choice by including parochial and private schools in the voucher program. He wants to remove the cap on the number of charter schools (currently set at 25 by law) and let them expand without limit to increase competition with public school systems throughout the state. He wants to eliminate all forms of teacher certification. He wants to limit the independence of the Board of Education, a body that has been strongly critical of Weld's new proposals.

But Weld is too good a politician to be satisfied with "the having of bad ideas" (apologies to the title of Eleanor Duckworth's wonderful book, *The Having of Good Ideas*). He has also placed fresh horses in key leadership positions in the hierarchy of public education, from kindergarten through graduate school, appointing Boston University President John Silber as the Chairman of the Board of Public Education, insurance industry magnate George Carlin as Chairman of the Higher Education Coordinating Council, and using his influence to make sure that the UMass Board of Trustees named the Massachusetts Legislature's Senate President, William Bulger, as President of the University of Massachusetts system. All are on Weld's ideological wavelength, all wield power ruthlessly, all are white males, and none has any significant experience in public education. This leadership troika is best understood as Weld's management team for a hostile takeover of all levels of public education.

While Massachusetts under Weld may be leading the privatization charge, it's clear that this movement continues to gain momentum nationally. Privatization initiatives are underway in most states, and are especially potent in urban areas where dissatisfaction with public education is greatest. This opens the way for troubling alliances between poor people, especially in communities of color, and slick-talking entrepreneurs like the Edison Project's founder, Christopher Whittle, who seduce these communities with promises of a computer in every child's home, upscaling "hoop dreams" into "computer dreams." The lure of privatization is also great for big city mayors and school boards frustrated with failing public schools and thus vulnerable to sales pitches from entrepreneurial "ed" companies promising they can run better, cheaper schools and turn a profit for their investors at the same time.

Claims made by charter school advocates and others in the privatization movement have great appeal to people who are frustrated, angry and alienated by their sense of the multiple failures of public education; this appeal extends to progressive teachers and parent activists who

have been unable to bring about needed changes within their public school systems. Charter school movements present themselves as an extension of public school systems and argue that they combine the democratic values that gave birth to public education in this country with competition, the engine of progress beloved by every free marketeer. Advocates use familiar buzzwords like grassroots organizing, community-based coalitions, empowerment, innovative education, parental involvement in education, school-based management.

Here, for example, is language from an overview of charter schools put out by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education in its charter school application brochure:

*Unlike other popular reform initiatives which have come and gone with little lasting impact, charter school reform is a decentralized, "bottom up" approach to school reform which is fueled by local creativity and grass-roots initiative. (Charter 2)*

Decentralized . . . local creativity . . . grass-roots initiatives: all familiar rhetoric to progressive educators working for change. But the next sentence in the Secretary of Education's description of charter schools slips in a new and radical idea:

*Through a charter granted by the Secretary of Education, a private entity or coalition of individuals is given public authority to create and run an independent public school which is legally autonomous from the local district. (Charter 2)*

How quickly the language shifts from "grass-roots initiatives" to "private entities." In this sentence the distinctions between private and public have been obscured. What is the difference between a private entity being given public authority to create a school and a private school? And what is a coalition of individuals? Would a teachers' union qualify?

The final sentence in this paragraph from the Secretary of Education's official "overview" of charter schools brings together key elements from progressive educational rhetoric and the new conservative rhetoric:

*These new community-based schools have real potential not only to empower local communities, but also to unleash a sorely needed dynamic of entrepreneurship into the larger school establishment. (Charter 2)*

Meant to read seamlessly, the language stitching between "community-based schools," "empowerment of local communities," and "dynamic of entrepreneurship" is about as subtle as the stitching across the forehead of Boris Karloff's version of the Frankenstein monster.

It's tempting merely to rebut the conservative educational agenda at the rhetorical level, but such an

approach falls short of recognizing how well-organized and effective these efforts have been to date. To really understand the charter school movement and other privatization initiatives, it's necessary to grasp the political, legislative and economic strategies used to further them: the realities on the ground. One vehicle for doing this is a brief analysis of key features of the charter school legislation contained in the Educational Reform Act of 1993 (M.G.L. Ch. 71, s. 89). This analysis is done from the perspective of an educator, not a lawyer; it seeks to bring out the political, economic, and, most important, the educational implications of charter school legislation.

## Decision-Makers and Managers: Structural Issues of Power and Control in the Charter School Legislation

M.G.L. Ch. 71, s. 89 begins: "A charter school shall be a public school operated under a charter granted by the Secretary of Education, which operates independently of any school committee and is managed by a board of trustees. The board of trustees . . . shall be deemed to be public agents authorized by the Commonwealth to supervise and control the charter school."

By giving all approval authority and administrative oversight to the Secretary of Education, this legislation creates a separate school system for charter schools that is for all practical purposes under the direct control of Gov. Weld. The Secretary of Education is a cabinet-level official appointed by the Governor, and the Office of Education is obviously part of the executive branch. Unlike any other public education structure in Massachusetts, which prizes local control of public schools, this is a highly centralized structure. While this approach might have been rationalized as a temporary protective structure for the first stage of an educational experiment, it's clear from other language in the law related to charter renewals at five-year intervals that the intent is to create a separate system in competition with locally controlled school boards. (Even before the first 25 charters had been granted and before any evaluation of the effectiveness of charter schools could possibly be made, Weld called for unlimited expansion of the number of charter schools in Massachusetts.)

***In the charter school portion of  
the 1993 law . . . Weld and his allies  
managed to achieve the exclusion  
of tenure and due process  
protections for teachers in charter  
schools.***

By mandating that charter schools will operate "independently of any school committee," this legislation challenges the principle of local control of public education. This is no surprise, given the attacks by charter school proponents on elected local school committees and on public school administrators and teachers. But it is profoundly anti-democratic, especially in light of Massachusetts' long tradition of local control of public

education, and funding formulas that reflect local control. Although the charter school rhetoric is grass-roots and participatory, the control structure created by this legislation is centralized, hierarchical, and subject to the whims of any governor's political ideology and influence without the check of legislative review.

Teachers' unions are also arch-villains in the script written by charter school advocates. The undermining of unions also begins in the first paragraph of this statute: boards of trustees of charter schools are "deemed public agents authorized by the Commonwealth to supervise and control the charter school." Inferentially, none of the protections for teachers won by unions apply to teachers hired under "new management." Issues such as salaries, performance evaluations, promotions and tenure, extracurricular responsibilities, length of school day and length of school year, in-school preparation time, and continuing professional education must be addressed anew, school by school, perhaps even teacher by teacher.

While the control of the charter school "system" under the Secretary of Education is highly centralized, this radically decentralized approach to school management is surely intended to free the entrepreneurial spirit of each Board of Trustees. Unfettered from collective bargaining and contractual constraints (often called union "rules"), each charter school is now free, for example, to lengthen the school day and lengthen the school year, a goal of many charter school advocates. But, absent a teachers' union, who is left to express concern about added workloads for teachers and staff, about the dangers of speed-up and exploitation, about a principle of fairness that requires added compensation for added work? From the point of view of a teacher dedicated to a career in public education, this charter school legislation looks more like a Golem about to run amok than a Prometheus unbound.

## Teachers: Their Legal and Economic Status in the Charter School Legislation

Nowhere is the potential for exploitation of teachers clearer than in the paragraph of this legislation that strips charter school teachers of tenure and due process protections against firing or arbitrary dismissal: "A charter school shall operate in accordance with its charter and the provisions of law regulating other public schools; provided, however, that the provisions of section 41 and 42 (of M.G.L. Ch. 71) shall not apply to employees of charter schools." To understand the significance of what has been taken away from teachers in the charter school legislation, we need to look briefly at these two sections. Section 41 begins: "For the purposes of this section, a teacher, school librarian, school adjustment counselor, or school psychologist who has served in the public schools of a school district for three consecutive years shall be considered a teacher, and shall be entitled to professional teacher status as provided in Sec. 42." Section 42 develops a series of procedural safeguards to prevent arbitrary firing or dismissal of such teachers.

Unions fought hard to achieve these legal protections related to job security and due process. They now apply to all teachers and other professional educators in all public school systems in Massachusetts, except those who work in charter schools. There is no obvious rationale for denying teachers in charter schools these legal protections, except the claim that this too is an area of "innovation and experimentation." It is better understood, though, as part of the right-wing campaign to "liberate" public education from job security protections won by teachers' unions, thus part of the larger crusade against all public-worker unions and toward privatization in all public sectors.

Gov. Weld and his key education advisors have consistently attacked tenure for public school teachers by associating it with complacency and mediocrity in teacher performance. Weld tried to abolish teacher tenure altogether in the 1993 Education Reform Bill, but the teachers' unions rallied effectively against his effort, and he found almost no support in the Legislature. In the charter school portion of the 1993 law, however, Weld and his allies managed to achieve the exclusion of tenure and due process protections for teachers in charter schools.

Teacher certification is another area in which the 1993 charter school legislation seems to be a stalking horse for Weld's more radical agenda. Relying on the absence of any statutory language on certification or any other set of standards for hiring teachers in the charter school law, Weld's then Secretary of Education, Pied Robertson, ruled that charter schools were exempt from state certification requirements, even though other sections of the same 1993 Education Reform Law had significantly strengthened the state's standards for teacher certification.

The Code of Massachusetts Regulations for charter schools states only that each charter school application should include a plan for "recruitment of qualified teaching and managerial staff" (601 CMR 1.05, (k) 2). What, then, does "qualified" mean? In practice, it seems to mean that the Board of Trustees for one charter school might insist on certification as a qualification for hiring teachers, while another Board might not. Charter school proponents defend this as opening the way for non-traditional educators to become teachers, but it also has the potential to undercut teaching as a *profession*, to make the exploitation of teachers easier by hiring marginally qualified teachers at lower salaries, to further obscure the difficult task of assessing effective teaching skills, and to erode teacher accountability. In addition, founders of charter schools may develop idiosyncratic criteria for membership on each Board of Trustees that controls the hiring process. Opportunities for incestuous hiring patterns and cronyism are rampant in such a structure. This is an educator's nightmare.

## Students: Who Will Be Admitted to Charter Schools?

Although some selective admission takes place in public school systems through exam schools like Boston Latin, so-called magnet schools, and even ability-grouping or tracking systems within a particular school, the

underlying conception, so central to the values of democratic society, is that all children in any public school district have equal access to the schools. But the section of charter school legislation relevant to admissions creates tools of selectivity and exclusivity unheard of in public education.

The law creates the appearance of fairness when it states: "Charter schools shall be open to all students, on a space available basis, and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, or proficiency in the English language, and academic achievement." But the next paragraph reveals the reality of unfairness: "A charter school may establish reasonable academic standards as a condition for eligibility for applicants." What does "reasonable" mean in this context? Will the definition of "reasonable" vary from one charter school to another based on the whims of each Board of Trustees, as is the case in all other areas of the law? Isn't there a conflict between not discriminating on the basis of academic achievement and establishing "reasonable academic standards" as a precondition governing "eligibility" to apply to a charter school? Is this an educational variation on the old poll tax and literacy test obstacles to prevent Blacks from voting?

The Secretary of Education's regulatory language further exposes and deepens this contradiction. The pertinent section (601 CMR 1.05[j]) forbids discrimination on various grounds, including "special need, proficiency in English, or academic achievement," but also permits each charter school to set its own admissions standards, unlike public schools in general. It authorizes charter schools to use tests, interviews, recommendations and other admissions screening devices, in sharp contrast to the universal access to education mandated on all public school systems. How can one use tests as part of the admissions process, and not use them to discriminate on academic grounds? For what other reasons would charter schools be testing applicants? Personality traits? Loyalty?

It's still too early to know whether the first group of charter schools is indeed creaming off the best and brightest students from local public school districts, but at least one charter school, the Benjamin Franklin classical charter school, includes the professional resumes and cv's of parents as part of the application process. The groundwork has been laid here for discriminatory practices in admissions to charter schools and for charter schools, enabling some to function as special preserves for elite students and parents – essentially private schools at public expense. The admissions tools granted through this legislation create an unlimited potential for unequal access to public education.

## Funding of Charter Schools: "The Full Catastrophe"

There has been more controversy about the funding provisions in the 1993 charter school law than about any other aspect of the law. The law says essentially that for

any student attending a charter school, the local district in which that student lives is required to "pay to the charter school an amount equal to the average cost per student in said district." For all local school districts this means that funds in their operating budgets already committed for a full range of educational costs (teachers and staff, school libraries, building maintenance, supplies, transportation, etc.) must now be diverted to pay for charter schools. This is completely independent of whether the local public school system needs additional schools to serve its student population, and in virtually all cases this funding formula is forcing local systems to fund unneeded schools. Charter school advocates make the counter-argument that the system doesn't have to bear the cost of educating its students who attend charter schools, but this is quite specious, since so many of the per pupil costs in education are systemic rather than unique to each student.

The City of Boston provides a clear example. Five charter schools opened in Boston in 1995. During the first year, approximately 1,200 children will attend these schools. Assuming most or all will be students from the Boston Public Schools, and using the per-pupil tuition figure of approximately \$7,000 established by the Secretary of Education, the Boston Public School system will have to pay approximately \$8.5 million out of its already committed operating budget in per-pupil tuition costs to charter schools. In addition, it will have to pay transportation costs for these students, and benefit costs for teachers from the Boston Schools who take leaves of absence to teach in any of these charter schools, bringing the real total closer to \$10 million. Facing a rebellion from Boston and other cities, the state provided some short-term funding to cushion the impact, but as enrollments at charter schools increase to meet projections, the real costs to the Boston Public Schools will soon reach \$20 or \$30 million per year.

If this approach to funding continues, and especially if the number of charter schools is allowed to grow without limit as Weld is demanding, it will certainly damage the quality of education for students remaining in the Boston Public Schools. It will lead to a two-tier system with high quality charter schools for a small minority of students and inferior public schools for the great majority of Boston's children. The driving force behind this approach to funding public education is punitive rather than innovative. Public school systems, teachers and teachers' unions are declared failures, they are blamed for everything that doesn't work well in public education, and they are punished for their misdeeds by having the costs of charter schools deducted from their operating budgets.

## A Special Case: The Renaissance Charter School as Run by Chris Whittle's Edison Project

One particularly insidious aspect of charter school funding relates to the question of for-profit education companies running charter schools. The current law

forbids private and parochial schools to apply for charters, but it permits "a business or corporate entity" to apply for a charter, thus opening the door to profit-making companies like Chris Whittle's Edison Project to become involved in the charter school movement in Massachusetts. Whittle is of course a near-legendary, highly controversial figure. To some, he is a guru of privatization for all of American education, a captain of free enterprise with a dream vision: America's young people shaped by Edison Project schools to become lean, mean, and entrepreneurial (with good traditional values and good taste in the arts). To others he is a huckster seducing public officials with his sales pitch that his Edison Project can create schools that are better, cheaper, and profitable to investors all at the same time. What is not in dispute, though, is that Whittle Communications lost nearly \$400 million in investor funds and defaulted on \$100 million in bank loans between 1992 and 1994. During this time, Whittle did some serious "downsizing" himself, selling off all his enterprises, including Channel One, until the only venture he had left was the Edison Project, which failed to land any major contracts during this same time period.

***If a public school were given the same resources to work with that the Renaissance School has been given, it too would be successful.***

So he downsized his ambitions for the Edison Project from managing a chain of for-profit schools all across America to a player in the charter school movement in several states. This was based on a political and economic assessment that in most American communities charter schools would be seen as a compromise vehicle between public education and the privatization of education that would bring much-craved innovation to education, and would thus draw far less opposition than Whittle's straight-ahead for-profit school model. Enter Governor William Weld, with a little help from Whittle's friends at the Pioneer Institute, credited by Weld's Secretary of Education as "a private, non-partisan research group (that) played a central role in advancing charter school reform, providing personal assistance to applicants and serving as a charter school advocate and resource" (Charter 2). Weld likes charter schools; Weld likes Chris Whittle's Edison Project. Once the charter school law was passed, Weld personally invited Edison Project to apply for school charters. Edison applied for five; three were given preliminary approval by the Executive Office of Education's screening committee, in Boston, Lowell and Worcester. For reasons of its own, Edison then withdrew all but the Boston school proposal.

This application went forward with the legal sponsorship of a newly-formed non-profit group called, with painful irony, the Horace Mann Foundation. Formally, the non-profit Horace Mann Foundation has been granted the charter to run the Renaissance Charter School in Boston, and its Board of Trustees (which of course includes a high-ranking Edison Project executive) has contracted with the Edison Project to run the school. The contract

gives the for-profit Edison Project \$6800 of every \$7000 in per-student tuition. This relationship between non-profit and profit-making education may seem like smoke and mirrors mystification, but using a non-profit "front group" has a number of legal and strategic advantages for Whittle's operation, including tax exempt fund-raising, the ability to negotiate low-rate building lease arrangements with the state, and a complex financial management structure which makes it difficult to audit how the Edison Project turns public monies into investors' profits. It also gives the appearance of local control, even though a New York corporation is running the show.

***Once the charter school law was passed, Weld personally invited Edison Project to apply for school charters.***

The language of the law fits the Horace Mann-Edison Project match remarkably well, suggesting strong involvement of Edison and Pioneer Institute lobbyists in drafting the legislation. It states that a charter school is, "a body politic and corporate with all powers necessary or desirable for carrying out its charter program, including . . . [the power] to make contracts and leases for the procurement of services, equipment and supplies; provided, however, that if the [charter school's Board of Trustees] intends to procure substantially all educational services under contract with another person, the terms of such contract must be approved by the Secretary." Amazingly, Weld's Secretary of Education had no objection to the contract made between the Horace Mann Foundation and the for-profit Edison Project. Thus are differences between non-profit and profit-making, public and private, thoroughly fuzzed.

In the case of the Renaissance School, through a mixture of conservative ideology, political power, and skillful legislative drafting, the way has been opened for huge amounts of public money raised through state and local taxes to flow directly or indirectly to Chris Whittle's Edison Project: nearly \$20 million dollars just for the first year of operation, and more than \$100 million over 10 years, far more than what has been made available to other charter schools. Weld located the school in a prime downtown Boston building owned by the state and gave it a sweetheart lease worth at least \$10 million in state subsidy over its ten-year life; he fronted \$12 million in state money for a bond issue to renovate the building; and the school will receive about \$81 million in per-student tuition reimbursements set generously by the state at \$7,013 per student, about \$1,000 higher than is paid for students attending the Boston Public Schools. This money will be paid from the Boston Public Schools' budget through the Horace Mann Foundation to the Edison Project. Not a bad day's pay for one charter school run by a company that until September 1995 had never operated a single school anywhere in the United States.

There is no doubt that Whittle wants the Renaissance School to be a showcase for the Edison Project, and to use it to market Edison-run schools nationally. Starting with

about 650 students in grades K-5, it is scheduled to expand to about 1200 students in grades K-12 within three years. That will make it by far the largest charter school in Massachusetts, and a high-profile point on the national charter school landscape. The Edison Project has provided the Renaissance School with a ready-made curriculum and with teacher training and school management programs which Edison claims it spent \$40 million to develop. These ambitions of the Edison Project coincide nicely with Weld's political ambitions for national office. His newly minted agenda for public education plays well to the Republican right at a national level, and will no doubt help him in fund-raising efforts for his campaign. This extraordinary confluence of political and economic power will almost certainly help the Renaissance School to succeed on some set of educational terms.

But its success will not provide replicable models for public education or teach us anything that we don't already know from vast amounts of research. Smaller schools, smaller classes, better student-teacher ratios, current texts and related learning materials, appropriate use of technologies, support staff sufficient to deal with individualized student needs, in-service training and professional development opportunities for teachers and staff, parental involvement and community orientation, school-based management, effective leadership and role models in school personnel: all of these make for better quality education. All cost money. If a public school were given the same resources to work with that the Renaissance School has been given, it too would be successful. So what gain is there for public education as a whole by putting forward a model such as the Renaissance School that is too expensive to replicate? Is it anything more than a costly, cruel and cynical bait and switch strategy devised by Whittle and Co. to further their entrepreneurial adventure into education, and with which Weld has colluded because of his own ideology, values and national political ambition? Thanks, Guv'nah!

## Final Thoughts

Why should we think that the forces of competition will behave more equitably in education than in industry, or that innovation can take place only *outside* public school systems, as though every effort toward improvement from inside the public schools is damned to failure in advance? By insisting on the ideological fiction of an exclusive and privileged zone as the only place within which meaningful change can take place, the charter school initiative engenders anger, fear, hostility, and defensiveness among supporters of public education. Still, we must understand that many fine teachers, students, parents and community activists are frustrated with seemingly insoluble problems in public school systems, that they have become deeply alienated from these systems, and that they are responding to the possibility of starting charter schools as the only chance they have to create alternative educational models. It's not enough to criticize the weaknesses and dangers in charter school legislation; we must also understand the needs and aspirations that are emerging in the form of proposals for charter schools, even while we

reject the political and economic strategy of the right that is channeling creative energies for change in education toward charter schools and away from public school systems.

There is genuine diversity among the 15 charter schools in Massachusetts that opened in September, 1995. Some seek to resemble private schools, emphasize high academic standards, and are located in affluent, mainly white suburban areas. Some, such as the City on A Hill School in Boston, design a curriculum around a particular focus and set of values, such as democratic processes and involvement in public service. Others, especially those in working-class and poor urban communities, have designed schools for under-served student populations, and also function as social service and community centers. It's especially important to recognize that charter schools in poorer communities are attempting to respond to needs that the public school systems currently are unable to meet. As described in "Mass. Charter Schools Approved in 1994," the Youthbuild Charter School in Boston teaches building trades skills to "disenfranchised youth who have dropped out of high school" (4). The Atlantis Charter School in Fall River includes a "Family Learning Center that . . . will serve as a Total Family Support Center, coordinating health, nutrition, social, day care, and parent (adult) educational services. The Center's mission is . . . to merge family needs and participation with the child's educational experience" (5). The Boston University Charter School at Ft. Devens will serve students who are "homeless or wards of the state" (5).

Clearly, some of the new charter schools want to expand the range of services they offer so that they can become central, stabilizing institutions within troubled communities. Such goals have great appeal for progressive educators, but they may result in nothing more than another form of co-optation, drawing these grassroots efforts outside public education systems and neatly deflecting critics of privatization with a few examples of genuinely community-based charter schools, thus providing liberal window dressing for the underlying entrepreneurial objectives of the charter school movement. Still, supporters of public education must recognize that some charter schools, especially those in poorer communities, are responding to real community needs. The task for public schools is to become equally or more responsive by reintegrating themselves into local communities and serving not only the learning needs of their students but the social and economic needs of the community.

For better or worse, public education has become a national battleground. The right, energized by the collapse of the Soviet Union and other socialist experiments, is determined to remake American education in its own image. It is eager to privatize public education because it wants an educational system that will reflect its values and, more practically, prepare young people for their roles in the drive toward an American-dominated capitalist global economy. This is not an easy challenge for progressive educators to confront, especially when we are few in number, less than perfectly organized, underfunded and certainly outgunned. But we should be working hard

in at least two critical areas: academic research and activist initiatives.

The start-up of charter schools in Massachusetts creates opportunities for a wide range of needed research. While some of it will no doubt be designed and controlled by advocates of charter schools both inside and outside the state's education establishment, there is ample room for schools of education and public policy programs to conduct research on charter schools. Also, teachers' unions and citizens' groups could sponsor research. Among a very long list of possible research projects are: admissions policies and practices in charter schools; student demographics (including migration from private and parochial schools) and academic ability profiles; hiring practices for teachers, with special reference to certification standards; salary structures, working conditions and job security for teachers and other charter school employees; charter schools' responses to affirmative action and desegregation mandates for both students and staff; impact of loss of funds on local school districts. There will also be a great need for disinterested professional evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning in charter schools, along with the question of whether educational models developed in charter schools can be replicated elsewhere in public education. The most ambitious and perhaps most important research would be comparative studies of innovations taking place in charter schools and in public school systems (yes, Virginia, some educators really are trying to improve education in the public schools).

The single most important thing that progressive educators can do is to become active in the fight to save public education. We should be "out there" as advocates for and participants in public school systems at all levels:

\*Teachers in public schools should increase the momentum for innovation in public education and press for needed reforms.

\*Faculty members in higher-education should make common cause with public school teachers in every possible form, from teacher training and professional development, to shared research agendas, to direct involvement in the public schools.

\*Teachers' unions should publicize successful innovations and just plain good teaching and learning to remind citizens of the centrality of good public schools. They should develop and support organizing strategies to counter charter school initiatives at the local level. And wouldn't it be fun if teachers' unions started an organizing campaign to unionize teachers in the charter schools, beginning, say, with the Renaissance School (the law says that charter school Boards of Trustees "shall be considered the public employer . . . for collective bargaining purposes").

\*School superintendents and principals need to become more visible leaders within their local communities, making their schools truly responsive to community needs.

\*Elected representatives at the state and local levels must summon the political will and moral strength to fully fund public education; they will need strong constituent backing to reject the initiatives of Weld & Co. to privatize public education.

If the right has its way, it will continue to shift resources away from public schools toward the full array of privatization initiatives that Weld and others like him are now touting. Those who continue to teach and learn in public schools will be punished by the steady impoverishment of those schools; those who move to the fertile fields of charter schools and the like will be rewarded. It will require an enormous amount of dedication and hard work to retake the initiative on behalf of public education in America, but that is what must be

done. We need to rekindle a progressive vision of public education as a way toward a more just society, and the kindling may be found in any little organizing act.

#### WORKS CITED

- Charter School Application. Boston: Executive Office of Education, 1995.
- Code of Massachusetts Regulations: Charter School Regulations. 601 CMR 1.00. Boston: Executive Office of Education, 1993.
- Massachusetts Charter Schools Approved in 1994. Boston: Executive Office of Education, 1995.
- Massachusetts. The Great and General Court (Mass. Legislature). The Education Reform Act of 1993; Charter School Legislation. M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 89. Boston: Massachusetts Legislature, 1993.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://d-scribe.org/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Historical Reflections on Accountability

by Richard Ohmann



Imagine that almost all academics think of ourselves as *responsible* to others, and, if pressed, might allow substitution of "accountable." Responsibility to our employers is contractual, and the professional ethos urges responsibility to students (our clients), to colleagues, and to vague but strong principles of intellectual conduct that obtain in our disciplines. The professional idea calls for responsibility to society as well: we earn our privileges not just by guarding and augmenting our special bodies of knowledge, but by undertaking to put those knowledges to work for the good of all.

"For the good of all" opens up a vast ideological space for disputes that are familiar enough, and a space for the anti-professional cynicism that, as Stanley Fish has argued, festers endemically within professional groups, not just among the envious laity. Still, even cynics tend to think *they* serve the needs of important others; and except in times of deep conflict (such as the years around 1970), professionals with different allegiances live more or less comfortably together, under the capacious roof of that "all."

To speak of professors: most believe that open inquiry and free debate do in fact advance the interests of a democratic society. For liberals, that may be enough. Conservatives tend to identify the good of all with the good of the sovereign individual. People of the left inflect it toward the good of those lacking wealth and power. At this level of abstraction, accountability is not especially controversial, nor exacting. Certainly it was not so for this person of the left. Accountability to my students: plan the course, show up in class, keep it moving, comment thoughtfully on papers, mentor when asked, submit grades, write recommendations – the usual packet of services. To my departmental colleagues: take on my share of core courses and administrative duties. To the administration and trustees: just don't make scenes, I guess; the thought rarely crossed my mind. To society as a whole: I cheerfully held myself account able to the wretched of the earth, the workers, the women, the racially cheated and despised, the queers, the reds, all the disempowered. And aside from the enmity of a very few colleagues and students, this noble commitment was virtually risk-free at Wesleyan University, as were the commitments of faculty conservatives and liberals. I know that accountability imposes itself more obstinately in the working lives of teachers at less privileged institutions, and teachers without tenure at all institutions. Still, when faculty members have been able to define our own obligations to society, we have charted a high road – the good of all – that practitioners can travel easily together in spite of different values and allegiances, and without much fuss about ways in which our specific work meets those obligations, or doesn't.

This mild regime of self-policing has been under pressure for some time. It articulated well enough with such concepts as responsibility and obligation. But accountability, the more salient concept in recent decades, is different, and in major ways. First, as its root suggests, accountability means keeping score. Not sufficient, in the new regime, to invoke free inquiry, critical thinking,

socially beneficial knowledge, and other such ideals, however wide their appeal to the public. Accountability entails being able to show that the efforts of an instructor or department or institution actually did move toward the desired end. That in turn requires framing the goal precisely enough to permit agreement on the state of affairs that would constitute its fulfillment, and on the amount of progress made in its direction at any point. Measurement, in short. And while the measure of success may be crude (e.g., Wesleyan set its sights for a while on reaching at least a certain spot in the *U. S. News and World Report* rankings), it must be quantifiable. Academic resistance to accountability owes in part just to that fact: how can the complex things we most highly value be reduced to numbers?, we ask.

### ***Accountability is not to the disempowered but to the powerful.***

Quantification of aims and accomplishments may seem less rebarbative to scientists than to humanists. All in the arts and sciences, however, are likely to be put off by the ideas and language of business that have trailed along with accountability in its migration into the university. A 1994 book on *Measuring Institutional Performance in Higher Education* (edited by Joel W. Meyerson and William F. Massy; Peterson's: Princeton, NJ,) works in a semantic medium of "client feedback," "stake holders," "make or buy options," "output" (of departments), "use synergy," and the like, and carefully recommends to educators common business practices such as TQM (total quality management), BPR (business practice reengineering,) and benchmarking (comparing your performance by quantifiable measures to "best practices" at other institutions). A brochure for administrators from Johnson Controls offers "open system architecture," "system integration," "cost control," "project management," and "performance guarantees." Speakers at an October, 1999 conference on "Market-Driven Higher Education" sponsored by *University Business*<sup>1</sup> used a lexicon of "markets" (e.g., students), "product," "brand" (your university's name and aura), "value added" (including, I guess, to students as labor power), "marginal cost," "deals," and "resource base" (the faculty, chiefly). They taught why to want and how to get "customization," "knowledge management," "just-in-time learning," "strategic partners," "faculty management," good "assessment models" (though some said no good ones exist), "policy convergence" (I took this to mean something like consistency, and the left hand's awareness of what the right hand is doing), and – my favorite – the "Hollywood model" (i.e., the sort of contract put together by agents, actors, producers, and so on, in contrast to the antiquated and feckless arrangements we now have in higher education for owning and selling knowledge).

Administrators are becoming fluent in this language. It feels alien to many faculty members, and not centrally because of academic distaste for business. Some are hostile to business, some not; but I think all can see that the discourse of books on accountability and of the *University Business* conference is one for managers, not

the managed. And while it is no secret that universities have ever expanding administrations, many faculty members cherish the hope that their administrators are managing on behalf of us and the students, taking care of the business side so we can teach and students can learn. But accountability for administrators means managing us and our work, not just physical plant and endowment. The literature on the subject may urge them to enlist faculty members in the setting of goals and devising of measurements, but we are not within earshot of these prescriptions, not part of the intended audience. In short, when politicians or business men or trustees or university presidents call for accountability in higher education, they are asking administrators to plan, oversee, and assess our labor.

Well, isn't that what managers do? Exactly so, and the accountability movement would be of little interest except that it brings managerial logic into the area of self-management to which all professions aspire, and which the stronger ones were able to stake out in an uneven and conflicted historical process beginning more than a hundred years ago. Accountability, when achieved, turns back that process. Its advocates stigmatize the foot-dragging of professors as whiny and selfish (which it may sometimes be), but more pertinently as retrograde. And that it always is – in just the way that Luddite resistance was retrograde in its time and the resistance of doctors is retrograde now. These were and are defenses against new relations of production, imposed from without, to reduce or eliminate the control that groups of workers have exercised over their labor.

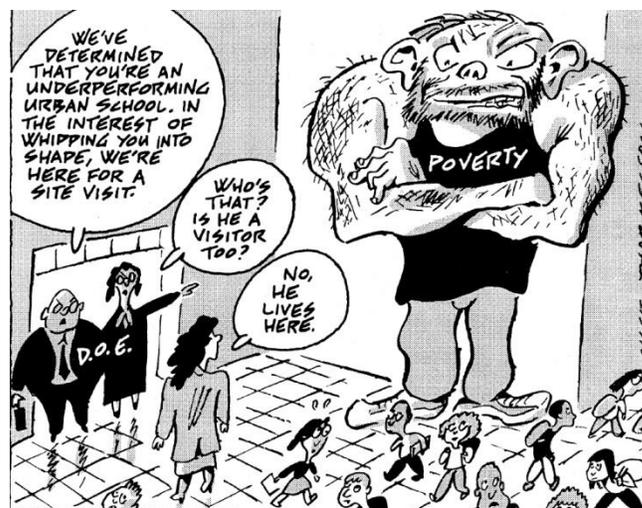
***High stakes testing schemes will make for more surgical channeling into the job market and the class system—and under the banner of accountability.***

That brings me to the last major way in which accountability differs from obligation or responsibility. In the utopian regime of my employment at Wesleyan, or at least in my fantasies about it, I could hold myself responsible to the disempowered, and identify my work with democracy and equality (just as my colleague on the right could identify his with individual freedom). After all, most people here and abroad are disempowered. When Lynne Cheney or William Bennett occasionally took hostile notice of my work, that only proved I was doing something right. I and my comrades were on the side of the general public; Cheney and Bennett spoke for an usurping coterie. We wanted to try democracy, for the first time in history; the Right wanted to maintain the rule of the few and call that democracy.

But of course there was an obvious problem with this comfortable position: the wretched of the earth do not organize militantly to support academic progressives, or the politics latent in much of our scholarship and pedagogy since the 1960s. Business and the right organize effectively against the academic left. Many of the general public see

the world more as Cheney and Bennett do than as we do. That's ideology. That's hegemony. Accountability, in short, is not to the disempowered but to the powerful. There would be no agonizing among professors on this subject, except that boards of regents and trustees, legislative bodies, conservative foundations and interest groups, corporations, and so on want to make teachers and knowledge workers in general more responsive to their purposes, and have power enough to advance that project.

Thirty-five or fifty or eighty years ago, they not only lacked such power, but had not even hit on the project. Why not? Why now? In answer, I will put two skeletal narratives to work. The first can be seen as more or less internal to education. In it, the years 1945-1970 brought rapid expansion of the university system. Prosperity and a growing cohort of young people were in part responsible. In addition, the U.S. economy grew fastest in industries such as communications and petrochemicals that required both highly trained knowledge workers and an enlarged research apparatus. Meanwhile, Cold War leaders mobilized the university to do combat against the Soviet Union and its allies, funding science and technology, weapons research, artificial intelligence, basic computer development, area studies, economics, and parts of other fields thought critical to the dominance of capitalism and Western democracy. These new tasks required no dramatic change in the university's procedures or its structure of relatively autonomous departments and research units, though the change in scale brought talk of, and worry about, the "megaversity." The academic professions flourished through this period, buoyed by proliferation of graduate programs, full employment for new entrants, and public demand for higher education.



CARTOON BY NICK THORKELSON

Around 1970 the party tired. Public funding became less certain. Graduate programs in many fields were turning out more Ph.D.s than there were jobs: in English and foreign languages the crisis was evident at the 1969 MLA convention, where a caucus of angry job seekers abruptly formed, to the surprise both of the leadership and of dissidents who had come to protest other things. Those other causes also disrupted the postwar complacency of the university and its constituent profession: civil rights, black power, women's liberation, and antiwar militancy came in from the streets along with open admissions and new student populations. A student power movement germinated within the now-alienating and "irrelevant" megaversity itself. This is a familiar part of the story, abbreviated here in cliché phrases to arrive at the following suggestion: that in the late sixties, dissenters within the university both put themselves in opposition to systems of domination outside it and staged a critique of its relations to those systems ("Who Rules Columbia?," etc.), The professions came under assault by many young aspirants and some established members. Secure old knowledges were challenged, new canons proposed. The curriculum, in the broadest sense, changed.

Conservatives, readying to launch their offensive against the liberal welfare state and alarmed at what seemed the rule of liberals and worse in universities, took countermeasures. Some of the new right-wing foundations zeroed in on education and intellectual life, building and circulating ideology and attacking the versions of democracy that had grown out of sixties movements. Their work on one front led in time to the culture wars of the 1990s and the attack on "political correctness" and multiculturalism. On another, it produced schemes of privatization. On a third, mainstream conservatives and neoliberals mounted a critique of U.S. education in general (including especially K-12) through commissions and reports that proclaimed our "nation at risk" because of inferior schooling, and called for "excellence." These official reports harmonized with media events like the "literacy crisis" of the mid-1970s and movements such as "back to basics" a bit later. Schooling became and remains as reliable a public concern – a media concern – as welfare or the

British Royals. Candidates run for high office on school reform platforms, and both Bush and Clinton have aspired to be "education Presidents." It was in this context



COLLAGE BY LIZ POWELL

that calls for accountability became ubiquitous. Framed by this narrative, they can be grasped as part of a complex reaction against social

movements of the sixties and seventies, and as allies in culture wars that are often explicitly political.

The other narrative is economic, and embraces far more than the university and the educational system. It too begins with the postwar boom, seen as the cresting both of corporate, Fordist capitalism in the U.S. and of our dominance in the world economic order. Around 1970, those arrangements began to unravel. The dollar faded against stronger currencies. The U.S. balance of trade turned negative, and has remained so. Unemployment began a steady rise from its 1969 level of less than four percent, a level it never again approached until the current boom. Real wages, up substantially since 1945, stalled for a few years after 1970 and then went into a decline from which they have not recovered. The economy stagnated. Both federal and personal debt headed up sharply from the late 1970s on, with corporate debt following a few years later. The economy stagnated. Growth in productivity slowed to a trickle. The world became a far less secure place for American capital's project of development in this time of globalization.

Capital responded with strategies, familiar enough by now, that are perhaps creating a new economic order: the rapid movement of capital around the globe; a proliferation of new products and services; elaboration of financial instruments to the point that almost no one can understand the international system of money, investment, and speculation; corporate restructuring and waves of mergers; dismantling of the old core labor force with its high wages, security, and benefits; downsizing, temp labor, part time labor, outsourcing, subcontracting, and so on. This system, still in formation, has been variously named: globalization, turbo-capitalism, the "regime of flexible accumulation,"<sup>2</sup> the knowledge society. That last term predates the others, but may be critical for grasping the place of higher education in the new order. For if knowledge is now not only an accomplice in the making of other goods, but itself the most dynamic area of production, we could expect intense efforts on the part of business to guide its development, control its uses, and profit from its creation and sale. That has implications for universities and faculty members to which I will return.

First, however, I want to suggest a way of locating accountability in these two narratives. For both of them, the years right around 1970 are pivotal. And it was precisely then that accountability exploded into the language and politics of debate about education. In June, 1970, "accountability" first showed up in the *Education Index*, with reference to teaching. The Library of Congress introduced "educational accountability" as a subject heading two years later (thanks to Cynthia L. Spell of the Reference Department at the University of Massachusetts library for finding this out.). To be sure, the word was in use much earlier, and its first OED citation is from 1794. But for nearly two hundred years "accountability" carried a broad meaning: the state of being liable, responsible, held to account for one's actions; and it had no special link to education. A keyword search at the library I use (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) turned up 585 book titles, only six of them predating 1970, and none of those six about education. In 1970 appeared professor of education Leon

M. Lessinger's *Every Kid a Winner: Accountability in Education* (Palo Alto: Science Research Associates), soon to be characterized as the "bible of accountability." In the next five years, dozens of books were published with titles such as *Accountability and Reading Instruction*, *Accountability and the Community College*, *Accountability for Educational Results*, *Accountability for Teachers and School Administrators*, *Accountability in a Federal Education Program*, *Accountability in American Education*, *Accountability in Education*, *Accountability in the Elementary School Curriculum*, *Accountability, Program Budgeting*, and *the California Educational Information System*, and *Accountability: Systems Planning in Education* – to mention only those with "accountability" as the first word. Accountability had suddenly become an established idea joined at the hip to education, a recognized field of study, a movement, and a battleground.<sup>3</sup>

By no means did Lessinger's book inaugurate the movement. A 1972 anthology of articles and talks on the subject includes a number from 1969, and suggests that accountability, "one of the most rapidly growing and wide spread movements in education today," began "as a flickering spark in the twilight of the 60s. . ." (Frank J. Sciara and Richard K. Jantz, ed., *Accountability in American Education* [Boston: Allyn and Bacon], 1 and 3). Writers seeking origins tend to mention the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, later amendments that required program audits, the beginning of the National Assessment Program in 1969, a 1970 speech by President Nixon, and so on. Sciara and Jantz thought the origins of the movement hard to isolate, and I agree. The interesting thing is that abruptly in 1970 it was a movement, felt as historically momentous, powerful, and, depending on one's point of view, either tonic or dangerous.

***It is no coincidence (as marxists like to say) that accountability emerged and gained strength as a coherent movement exactly when the postwar U.S. economy was tearing at the seams, and when the right began to organize itself against sixties movements.***

Beyond specific Acts, speeches, and books, or vague and timeless agents such as "the federal government," "concerned taxpayers," and "alarmed administrators," it is clear that three main forces drove the movement. One was an intense fiscal crisis of the state, brought on in part by war spending, but expressed chiefly as disillusionment with Great Society programs. In a speech of 1970, Terrel H. Bell (then a Deputy Commissioner in the Office of Education, later Reagan's Secretary of Education) noted that his department's budget had increased from \$500 million to \$4 billion a year through the sixties, and that Congress had poured "literally billions of dollars" into the schools, often into "crash programs" for which the schools were "comically unprepared." Money alone would not buy good education (does this sound familiar?). Washington now wanted "results," wanted "to be sure that every dollar

invested in an educational program will produce a payoff. . . that can be measured and that can be proved" ("The New Look of Federal Aid to Education," in Sciara and Jantz, 41-47). Nixon's man did not specify which "expensive will-o-the-wisps" Washington had now rejected, but it is evident from the early literature that accountability was in part a counterthrust against liberatory ideas and experiments in "open education": i.e., against the critique of schooling mounted by sixties visionaries and radicals. That reaction was the second force. The third – more specific to higher education – was a reaction against "turmoil and disruption on the campuses" and "political action by students and faculty members," which had produced a "mounting distrust of higher education by the public" and an "increasing demand for colleges and universities to justify what they are doing and to disclose the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations" (T. R. McConnell, "Accountability and Autonomy," in Sciara and Jantz, 200). In short, it is no coincidence (as marxists like to say) that accountability emerged and gained strength as a coherent movement exactly when the postwar U.S. economy was tearing at the seams, and when the right began to organize itself against sixties movements and build what Ira Shor has called the "conservative restoration."

Origins do not set meanings permanently in place. Accountability has been and is a contested field of meaning and a terrain of conflict. But I believe the historical conjunction that birthed it continues to inflect and propel it. To put the case (somewhat too) bluntly: accountability is most deeply about the right's project of containing sixties movements and about capital's project of recomposing itself internationally, marketizing whatever areas of life had previously eluded that process, and dominating workers of all sorts in ways more pervasive but less confrontational than those that marked Fordism. At this point, several hundred pages might ensue, arguing that the hypothesis organizes a variety of seemingly discrete events and situations into its tidy gestalt. I cannot supply those pages here (and hope I will not be the one to write them anywhere). But in shorthand, here is the sort of thing I have in mind.

1. The 30-year job "crisis" for Ph.D.s, the campaigns against tenure and for post-tenure review, the heavy reliance on part-timers and adjuncts, the outsourcing and subcontracting of many academic and support tasks – these events and practices respond of course to local pressures on administrators and trustees, and (one must admit) to self-destructive inertia among the leadership of academic disciplines. But beyond that, one can see in the casualization of academic labor the same process of dispersal and degradation that capital initiated against the core workforce in almost every industry around 1970. The regime of flexible accumulation brings accountability to us in this guise, whatever the designs or motives of its local agents.

2. These labor practices nest within a far more encompassing set of tendencies. The list could be long, but just let me mention distance learning, burgeoning adult education, the buying and selling of courseware, the intensive marketing of academic research, "partnering" between corporations and universities for that purpose, the

effort of administrations (and legislators) to assess and compare programs by bottom-line accounting, the rapid growth of for-profit universities (such as the University of Phoenix) selling job-related training and credits, the proliferation of learning companies (to the great interest of Wall Street), and the existence today of 1800 "corporate universities" (GE started the first in 1955). All of these, clearly, support the widespread observation that the university has become more and more like a business – an idea voiced not only by academic critics of the change such as Bill Readings, Lawrence Soley, Cary Nelson, and David Noble, but by advocates, including many speakers at the University Business conference and writers for *Business Week* (see for instance "The New U; A Tough Market is Reshaping Colleges," Dec. 22, 1997, 96-102). My second narrative, above, suggests a more encompassing generalization: that capitalism in its new phase extends the logic of the market to encompass areas of production not previously within its scope, and, in particular, seeks to commodify knowledge wherever possible.

3. Which brings me to a nice "clipping" in *University Business* of January/ February 1999: "In 1955, not a single health care company appeared on the list of the top 50 U.S. Corporations as measured by market capitalization. Today, seven of America's richest companies are in the health care industry. Where the health care market was 40 years ago, the education-and-training market is right now."<sup>4</sup> What I want to comment on here is how the reorganization and extension of capital's work challenges the professions. Our self-managed intellectual capital (our specific bodies of knowledge), along with our creed of public service, legitimized our partial autonomy for a hundred years. The commodification of knowledge and the marketization of professional services are in direct conflict with that autonomy. If medicine, with all its prestige and power, has given up big chunks of its domain, why expect professors to do better in the new regime? In fact, most professions (worldwide) are losing ground. (See Elliott A. Krause, *Death of the Guilds; Professions, States, and the Advance of Capitalism, 1930 to the Present*, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.]) Accountability, viewed on the broad canvas painted here, is not just an extra demand on professions. It erodes their historical conditions of possibility.

4. Primary and secondary education are caught up in the same economic transformation. Channel One, advertising in school corridors, contracts with Coke and Nike are but symptoms: the sale of children's attention to corporations, in an effort to ameliorate the fiscal crisis of the state. Marketization works more deeply through the project of companies (like Edison) that seek profit by contracting with school districts to manage learning. Voucher systems, if they gain ground against hot opposition, will be a further step. Whether or not the charter school movement tends in the same direction remains to be seen, but in any case, it is one sign of a tectonic shift in the way public schooling sorts children out – i.e., reproduces the economic and social system, by guaranteeing that there will in the next generation be much the same distribution of wealth and power as in this,

and that inequality will be widely seen as just (i.e., based on merit), or at least inevitable.

Let me mention another sign, perhaps less noted as yet: high stakes testing. More than half the states now have or are developing standard curricula linked to tests that will decide which students can graduate. In Massachusetts (where I serve on a local school board), the first trial run of the tests, in 1998, placed 39 percent of tenth graders in the bottom category, "failing," and a total of 72 per cent in the bottom two, out of four, prompting the thought that in the Commonwealth, unlike Lake Wobegon, three-quarters of our children are below average. Predictably, students in vocational schools, special education, and inner city schools where English is for many a second language, failed in droves. The professed aim of Educational Reform in the Bay State is to guarantee all students a good education, but unless something bends, it will instead guarantee a much higher dropout rate five years from now. Why block the different paths toward a diploma that have been open to various kinds of students, and push them all along this single track? Without guessing at "real" motives, I think it clear that high stakes testing schemes will make for more surgical channeling into the job market and the class system -- and under the banner of accountability, needless to say. The official ideology of public education now is that of the market. When George Bush sent Congress his Educational Excellence Act of 1989 he cited exactly four benefits of "educational achievement": it "promotes sustained economic growth, enhances the Nation's competitive position in world markets, increases productivity, and leads to higher incomes for everyone."

5. Finally, the Culture Wars. The attack on multiculturalism and political correctness this past decade explicitly took on 1960s movements, seen as having all but won the battle for higher education. Furthermore, the germination of this strategy in centers of conservative thought and policy, from the 1970s on, is well documented. So there is no need to flog the obvious point that it carries forward the political project embedded in the accountability movement right at the outset. What I want to suggest, also, is that between the lines of their crusade for traditional values and great books and free speech, the culture warriors have provided a rationale for defunding the public university and putting it in the custody of market forces. This is a large hypothesis deserving careful analysis that I cannot offer. Let it stand as a gesture toward the unity of understanding one might achieve by historicizing accountability in the way proposed here.

To be sure, unity of understanding deriving from big historical narratives can shade into paranoia. Buyer (and

seller!) beware. On the other hand, I think that courses of action pursued without such understanding are likely to be scattered, contradictory, and at worst self-defeating. So the effort seems worth the risk, and I offer these large, pear shaped thoughts to those enmeshed in a thousand local skirmishes over accountability.

#### NOTES

- 1 A magazine from the publisher of *Lingua Franca*, sent free to 34,000 college and university administrators – itself a sign and a facilitator of marketization and accountability.
- 2 David Harvey's phrase, in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); his analysis has strongly influenced my own.
- 3 In 1971, for instance, the Educational Testing Service sponsored a "Conference on Educational Accountability," and Ralph Nader organized one on "Corporate Accountability." That phrase continued to sound in liberal and left circles, but the official discourse of accountability was irreversibly about schooling, not about holding the powerful to account.
- 4 The quotation is attributed to Jack Gordon, in *Training*, November, 1998. It continues: "And that market is about to explode in the same way, except that the time frame will be collapsed. What took 40 years in health care will take only 10 in education."

Reprinted by permission from *Academe*, the magazine of the American Association of University Professors, January-February, 2000. Thanks to its editor, Ellen Schrecker, for encouraging me to write the article. The version printed here is longer and in other ways different from the one in *Academe*.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/press/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Teaching Outside One's Race: The Story of an Oakland Teacher

by Bree Picower



## The Warning

"Oh, the District placed you at Prescott Elementary? You better watch out – they hate white people. Especially that Carrie Secret – she's one of those black radicals, you know, the Ebonics people." This was the warning I was given multiple times in multiple ways when people found out that I had been assigned to Prescott Elementary School for my first teaching position, in Oakland, California in 1999. The "warners" were other white folks who were trying to protect what they saw as a young, new teacher from what they perceived to be a hostile place. However, I really didn't fit the stereotype. I had been involved with several organizations that explicitly addressed issues of race and education for several years, often as the only white person there. I was thrilled to be placed at a school such as Prescott, whose reputation for high achievement for African American children and adoption of the "Ebonics" program had placed it at the forefront of national debate.

I am writing this paper in order to reflect on my experiences at Prescott Elementary School. Here, I discuss the aspects of the school that are unique: the culturally relevant pedagogy, the other teachers on the staff including Carrie Secret, the professional development at the school, the Ebonics debate, and, finally, racial identity development and how it informed relationships at the school. A goal of this paper is to contextualize what was really being done in Oakland schools in contrast to what the media reported as teaching Ebonics.<sup>1</sup> I also hope to show the importance of successful mentor teachers of color in the development of new teachers at a mission driven school.

## Prescott Elementary School

When I was first assigned to Prescott, I drove to the school to see what it was like. It was summer and the school was gated and locked. From the outside, it looked like a barren and dismal place. There was no grass, no playground, only a huge, concrete excuse for a yard. The main building and the portables were all a drab shade of industrial yellow. When I was finally able to enter the school weeks later, the difference between what I had seen from outside the gate, and the reality of what it was really like inside was like night and day. The walls inside the main building were covered with a vibrant mural tracing leaders of African American history. Even before the school year started, kids were everywhere, helping teachers set up their rooms, playing in the yard, and welcoming me and the other new teachers. The children, primarily African American, but also Latino and Asian American, seemed to feel so at home at the school, as if they had a real sense of ownership of the place. Because I wasn't initially assigned to a room or grade, I took the opportunity to walk around and introduce myself and help the other teachers. When I did finally get my own room, filthy from being used as a storage space by construction workers, many children, from kindergartners to graduated middle schoolers, came by to help me unpack.

My class was a second and third grade Sheltered English class which consisted of a very diverse group of students reflecting the multilingual community of Oakland. While Prescott as a whole was primarily African American, my students were Guatemalan, El Salvadorian, Cambodian, Filipino, and Arabic as well as African American children. My classroom was in a building off the main school that housed three classrooms – mine, Carrie Secret's, and that of another teacher whom I had also been warned about – Aileen Moffitt. I had been told that I should align myself with Ms. Moffitt because she was "the only white person that has ever been accepted at Prescott."

## Afrocentric Environment and Culturally Relevant Teaching

The political nature of the school soon became obvious. Walking into the classrooms and viewing the bulletin boards of the veteran teachers, I could easily see how central African American history was to the school. The library was filled with multicultural texts. Carrie's and Aileen's rooms were explosions of color, with paintings, posters, and photographs dedicated to telling the story of African American people. The school assembly calendar, handed out the first day of school, listed events honoring not only Black history, but Mexican history, Cambodian dance, and multicultural art.

I breathed deep and knew I had found my home. It seemed that the teachers here fit Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1994) definition of culturally relevant teachers. "They see themselves as a part of the community and they see teaching as giving back to the community. They help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities" (p.25). This was the kind of teaching that I longed to do, and I was relieved that I had found a place where it was not only going to be safe to do it, but it would also be valued and accepted. I couldn't believe my luck.

Veteran teachers who came by my room saw the same kind of respect for cultural diversity reflected on my walls, and it wasn't long before they were sharing materials and ideas to help me with my teaching practice. After Miss Moffitt saw me at the copy machine reproducing U.S. maps depicting European colonization and diminishing Native American land (from Bigelow, 1998), she came by my room to give me a song about Columbus. The lyrics began:

In fourteen-hundred-ninety-two,  
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.  
It was a courageous thing to do,  
But someone was already there.

The song goes on to describe the destruction of the land of various Native American tribes, the ensuing slavery, and the spread of disease that decimated the people. My class performed this at the Thanksgiving assembly along with other students who celebrated Native American dance and recited poetry about different forms of colonialism. Because my personal philosophy was so

closely aligned with the mission of the school, this year was turning out to be a powerful and positive experience for me.

## Carrie Secret

Prior to the beginning of the school year, I had attended a new teacher training that was led by veteran teachers from the district. The first session was facilitated by none other than the infamous Carrie Secret. Her talk was inspiring, energetic, and straightforward. She shared a wealth of actual classroom ideas that I was thirsty for as a pre-service teacher. I approached her after the session and let her know I would be teaching at her school. We ate lunch with another teacher, an older African American minister who would also be teaching at Prescott in the fall. Afterwards, I couldn't help but wonder if Ms. Secret was the same person I had been warned about, or if I had gotten the names confused. I had to question why the "warners" had felt so much discomfort and animosity towards her.

As Jordon-Irvine (2003) highlights in a story that shows the development of Kipp Academy, a white founded charter school successful with African American students, it is often veteran teachers of color who educate not only their students but other teachers as well. The school was started by two white, Teach for America interns who learned to teach under the mentorship of Harriet Ball, a veteran African American teacher. "This story of the Kipp Academies illustrates that the culturally-specific pedagogical teaching strategies of teachers of color can be taught and adopted by all teachers, regardless of their race or ethnicity. There are, in fact, many urban teachers who have survived and thrived only because experienced teachers of color have mentored and provided them with assistance and encouragement" (p.13). I know I too benefited greatly from the mentorship that I received from Carrie Secret.

Early on in the school year, I asked Carrie for her advice on a unit I was planning on African American inventors, and within the day she delivered to my room a huge bag of materials for me to use. She also gave me a book that described the historical relationship between Africans and Cambodians. This was Carrie's way. She waited for an opening, and once it was there, her generosity for working with new teachers was as endless as her historical knowledge. She shared countless ideas and materials with me and was always available before and after school to talk about issues and concerns I was having

in my class. We began collaborating on different projects and we made copies of materials for both of our classes that we thought the other would want to use.

Carrie's classroom was truly a unique place. From floor to ceiling, student artwork depicting the Middle Passage, lynching, the African continent, and more covered every available spot on the wall. Desks piled high with books, notebooks, atlases, thesauruses, markers, and other resources were pushed to the perimeter of the room and all work took place on the huge rug of the United States in the center of the room. Carrie and her students would be sprawled barefoot on the rug, hard at work, while R&B, gospel, or African music played on the boom box in the corner. I was always struck by how independent her students were. They didn't come running over for attention or approval like many children would. They just worked on their own or with friends, approaching Carrie for assistance when needed. Teacher-led lessons usually centered around the overhead projector and often involved call and response or group recitation. The kids were

always working on long performance pieces on African or Mexican history (Carrie had one Mexican student) that they performed throughout the state. Carrie always incorporated the cultural history of whoever was in her class, whether they were African American, Mexican, or Cambodian. I shared my observations with her, and Carrie and I continued to develop what I now consider to be one of the most valuable relationships of my life.

Carrie's approach to teaching is closely aligned with the definition that

Ladson-Billings uses to describe a culturally relevant teacher. She sees teaching as an art and believes "that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some" (p.25). Her special education inclusion student, Malik<sup>2</sup>, who had been labeled "uneducable," was expected to achieve at the same level as the other students and was given the support needed to be successful.

Ladson-Billings claims that "Such teachers can also be identified by the ways in which they structure their social interactions: Their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom" (p.25). Because Carrie has taught at the school for thirty years, she has taught the parents of most of her students. She often said, "See, you're just like your mama was!" and knows this to be true. These deep and long standing relationships with her students' families allows her to educate the whole family because she still sees their parents as learners. Parents often spend hours in the classroom, grappling with the same issues that the class is



PRESCOTT ELEMENTARY STUDENTS. PHOTO BY BREE PICOWER

learning. The classroom itself is an extension of the children's families. At Prescott, it was expected that teachers would stay with their students for more than one grade. They believed that the splitting up of children and teachers every year mirrored the practice of splitting up African American families under slavery and therefore they made every attempt to keep classes together for as long as possible. Most teachers kept their classroom for two or three years, but Carrie moves with her students from first grade through graduation.

"Finally, such teachers are identified by their notions of knowledge," Ladson-Billings concludes. "They believe that knowledge is continually re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike" (p.25). Carrie and her students take on serious issues that affect their community. Throughout their elementary career, her students are engaged in learning about issues such as the Middle Passage, the Civil Rights movement, white supremacy, and important historical figures. Lessons often grow from students' observations and interactions with the materials and writings offered to them. Carrie is continually growing as a learner as well. She participates in book clubs at and outside of the school, takes classes, and keeps up on relevant research. For example, after reading recent brain research, Carrie started incorporating classroom lessons to strengthen the right side of the brain, which is called upon less frequently in typical school environments.

***Carrie's and Aileen's rooms were explosions of color, with paintings, posters, and photographs dedicated to telling the story of African American people.***

Several researchers have documented Carrie's practice over the last several years.<sup>3</sup> Asa Hilliard (2003) discusses the existence of "gap-closing" teachers, people who are able to move students who usually perform poorly into the highest quartiles on standardized tests. Carrie Secret is one of the teachers whom he highlights as a gap closer and whose practice deserves greater attention:

*We can say something about Secret's distinctive process. Her success seems to be a product precisely of her deep continuing study to expand her knowledge of her subjects, African history and culture, and the study of racism and its manifestations, her close family relationship with her students and their families and community, her uncompromising commitment to get her students to achieve at the excellence level, by any means necessary, her linkage to a network of teachers who share her sense of commitment and mission; her willingness, her keen sense of social justice and her sense of duty to save the children and to save African people, and others, from the negative fate that awaits many of them. (p.154)*

This rich pedagogy, aimed at sparking the genius in African American students and celebrated by leading educational researchers, was the exact same pedagogy that ignited the flames of fury and racial disruption during the national debate on Ebonics.

## Ebonics and the Standard English Program (SEP)

What did the Ebonics controversy have to do with Prescott? Right before the school year started, I lay tossing and turning at three in the morning, worried about my first teaching experience. I suddenly remembered a back issue of *Rethinking Schools* that had addressed the national debate around the controversy. I stumbled to my file cabinet and pulled it out, opening to an interview with, that's right, Carrie Secret. The interview and ensuing book on the subject (Delpit and Perry, 2002) chronicles the controversy that erupted in Oakland in 1996. It described the high academic performance at Prescott Elementary as an anomaly in the District. After presenting achievement gap data in Oakland, Delpit and Perry write:

*Against the backdrop of this dismal picture of school failure, the above average performance of African-American students at the Prescott Elementary School caught the attention of the task force members. Prescott Elementary was the only school in the Oakland school district where the majority of its teachers had voluntarily chosen to participate in the Standard English Proficiency (SEP). This statewide initiative, begun in 1981, acknowledges the systematic, rule-governed nature of Black English and takes the position that this language should be used to help children learn to read and write in Standard English. (p. xi)*

It was Prescott's success with teaching African American children that motivated the district to adopt SEP, igniting the flames of the media across the country. A great deal of research has been done to document the way in which the media misrepresented the District's decision to use SEP to improve the achievement gap.<sup>4</sup> Rickford and Rickford (2000) carefully analyze the events around the school board's adoption of SEP and the media's reaction to it. "The Oakland school board never intended to replace the teaching of Standard or mainstream English with the teaching of Ebonics, or Spoken Soul. But it did intend to take the vernacular into account in helping students achieve mastery of Standard English (reading and writing in this variety in particular)" (p.176). In *Rethinking Schools*, Carrie Secret explained, "There's a misconception of the program, created by the media blitz of misinformation. Our mission was and continues to be: embrace and respect Ebonics, the home language of many of our students, and use strategies that will move them to a competency level in English. We never had, nor do we now have, any intention of teaching the home language to students. They come to us speaking the language" (p.81).

## Staff Development at Prescott

The strategies that Carrie referred to and used were developed under the leadership of Wade Nobles at the Center for Applied Cultural Studies and Educational Achievement (CACSEA) at San Francisco State University. It was through this center that the SEP program adopted by the Oakland Unified School District was created. At a staff meeting early on at my time at Prescott, I received a CACSEA document, "Utilizing Culture in the Achievement of Educational Excellence for African American Students" (Nobles). Referencing research by Boykin, Foster, and Ladson-Billings, CACSEA laid out nine cultural precepts, nine recurring cultural themes, and effective instructional strategies for educating African American students. CACSEA developed a program called "Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit): Educational Process for Achieving Educational Excellence with African American Students" (Olson, 2001) that was used as the basis for Prescott's professional development throughout my time there. Although the SEP program had officially ended due to the national controversy by the time I started teaching, we were still trained to use SEP strategies because of Prescott's deep belief that this was the right kind of education for our students.

Led by either Carrie or Nebeehah Shakir from the disbanded SEP program, weekly staff development centered on the CACSEA program. Throughout the year, we analyzed the cultural precepts and looked for examples of them in our lives or classrooms. We observed each other's teaching, looking for the recommended instructional strategies. We explored recurring grammatical components of African American language. We discussed integrating culture into the language of mathematics and other content areas. In Perry's interview (1998), Carrie describes the program in this way:

*There are three cornerstones to our SEP program: culture, language, and literacy. Our program is not just a language program that stresses how well you acquire and speak English. We emphasize the learning of reading by incorporating a strong literacy component. Another crucial issue is that we push students to learn the content language of each area of curriculum. The Oakland SEP program is not just a grammar and drill program, but a program that emphasizes language and content and encompasses all areas of curriculum. Children are not empowered simply because they know subject-verb agreement. That is not powerful for children if they don't have content in which to use the language. Yes, we want the children to speak English and have positive feelings about themselves, but that comes about only when the children know content. It doesn't matter how well you speak if you are not able to participate in and use the language of the content areas during discussion times. The other issue is culture. If you don't respect the children's culture, you negate their very essence. (p.80)*

At no point in my training or time at Prescott was I taught to or expected to speak or teach Ebonics to my students, just as I was not expected to teach Khmer, Spanish, or Arabic. Rather, teachers were encouraged to teach in ways that celebrated and reflected our students' cultures. Ebonics was spoken throughout the school because Prescott promoted the home culture of the student and teachers were expected to understand Ebonics because it was the home language of the majority of the students. It was our responsibility to help the students translate their home language into Standard English. The way this was done was the same way I was trained to do with all of my second language learners, through techniques designed to familiarize and contrast their language with Standard English. The training taught me a great deal about the rich history of Ebonics and African American culture, and I think an important factor in this is that the program was led by veteran, successful African American teachers. Aileen Moffitt, my white ally at Prescott, explains:

*As a result of studying Ebonics through the Oakland Standard English Proficiency Project, I have also developed an appreciation of the language. Ebonics has a richness that goes beyond the obvious features (grammar, syntax, phonology, phonetics, morphology, and semantics). There are also characteristics of the non-verbal, the gestural, the rhythmic, and the emotional quality of the speech. I may be fluent in the grammatical rules of Ebonics, but I am definitely NOT proficient in these other qualities. Yet I can appreciate and admire them for the richness of expression that they provide. Poetry in Ebonics (including Maya Angelou's) can be music to my ears. (Delpit, 2002, p. 42)*

Despite the media's misrepresentation of the Oakland Resolution, and the disbandment of the official SEP program, the CACSEA training continued on at Prescott, just as it had before.

***This rich pedagogy, aimed at sparking the genius in African American students and celebrated by leading educational researchers, was the exact pedagogy that ignited the flames of fury and racial disruption during the national debate on Ebonics.***

## Racial Identity and Politics at Prescott

Because of the nature of our staff development, racial identity, racism, Afrocentricity, and white supremacy were central topics of conversation at Prescott. The staff at the school was both racially and generationally mixed. Becoming a part of the leadership structure of the school, or gaining insider status, appeared at first glance to be dependent on race. However, it became apparent as time

went on that it had more to do with your level of commitment to the mission of the school, which in turn had much to do with where individuals were in the development of their racial identity. Beverly Daniel Tatum refers to racial identity development as the "process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group" (Tatum, 1997, p.16). Research on this process contends that this process involves different developmental stages for whites and people of color.

*Establishment of a clear, affirming group identity and recognition of the necessity of collective action for self-determination and against racism are the hallmarks of an adult liberation perspective for people of color. White anti-racism requires parallel elements: new identity as a*

I believe a major period of development for me was in the early nineties when I was employed at a community center that worked to meet the needs of the residents of three public housing sites in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The center was directed by Rose Martin, an African American woman who grew up in over 12 foster families and had overcome her own struggles with drugs and alcohol (Martin, 2002). The center was staffed with people who had all been born and raised in the community. Starting as a volunteer, and eventually being offered a job, I was one of the only two white people who worked there. Having grown up in New York City, I was accustomed to and comfortable in diverse settings, but this was the first time that I was the real minority. I worked there for four years, eventually co-directing all K-6 programming. During my stay, I learned a great deal about that particular community and, more generally, how to live with, work



PRESCOTT ELEMENTARY STUDENTS. PHOTO BY BREE PICOWER

*White, a critique of racism and the institutions of white society, and a recognition of the necessity for collective action. In essence, all must undo the profound impact of the ideology of racism on their self-concepts and social perspectives. However, the process of change differs, reflecting the distinctions we have been making between people of color and Whites. (Sparks in Tatum, 1997, p.28)*

Because of the diversity of the Prescott staff, who they were and where they came from directly influenced their racial identity development, and therefore their status at the school. To clarify, I will highlight a few staff members in order to show how their racial identities influenced their behavior and status at the school, starting with myself.

with, respect, and be respected by people of color. I had to reflect upon my own identity as a white person, because much of my way of thinking, being, and acting was different from that of the people I spent every day with. I gained an appreciation for the importance of leadership of color when working with communities of color, having worked in prior settings that were "serving" black children, but that were run by white adults. Working as a liaison between my students' families and their teachers, I was confronted directly with the ways in which the Ann Arbor schools were not meeting their needs, often arising out of a cultural mismatch between students and teachers.<sup>5</sup>

After several years and a move to California, I began working at the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools, working with schools to close the achievement gap between black and white students while raising overall achievement. Through this work, I was explicitly

addressing issues of equity and race with racially diverse faculties. Following the framework set out by Sparks for white development, these two experiences gave me the opportunity to identify and reflect upon my whiteness, to recognize types of white supremacy and racism, and to "join people of color and other exploited groups to change racist systems" (Sparks in Tatum, 1997, p.31). Because of this background, I was developmentally "ready" to be a member of the Prescott community, participating in an environment with an African American leadership structure and an explicit focus on race and racism.

Some of the veteran white teachers, such as Ms. Moffitt, had been teaching at Prescott for years, and this provided them with the opportunities to reflect upon their racial identities and build relationships with people of color. Through these relationships, they were able to work on culturally relevant teaching practice and became advocates for their students and the school, particularly during the Ebonics debate. However, some of the new, white, younger teachers arrived at Prescott without having had the opportunity to reflect on their racial identity. Ladson-Billings reflects on her white pre-service teachers:

*The average white teacher has no idea what it feels like to be a numerical or political minority in the classroom. The pervasiveness of whiteness makes the experience of most teachers an accepted norm. White teachers don't understand what it means to "be ashy" or to be willing to fail a physical education class because of what swimming will do to your hair ... The indictment is not against the teachers. It is against the kind of education they receive. The prospective teachers with whom I have worked generally express a sincere desire to work with "all kinds of kids." They tell me that they want to make sure that the white children they teach learn to be fair and to get along with people different from themselves. But where is the evidence that prospective teachers can get along with people different from themselves? (2001, p.81)*

Many new white teachers see whiteness as the absence of race, or only recognize it in opposition to "others" and this leads to a level of discomfort when issues of race are raised. Having lived in and among primarily other whites, many whites see themselves as part of a "racial norm" and believe that they are "color-blind," holding no prejudices towards others (Tatum, 1997). This "color-blindness" stops them from seeing who the students really are and the cultures that they bring with them to the classroom, and therefore limits the educational strategies that they can draw upon to teach them (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p33). At a school like Prescott, not being able to recognize culture caused whites at this stage of development to feel alienated by the racially charged discussions that permeated the school. Many of them came to teaching because they "loved children" and did not understand why "we always have to talk about race." Many of these teachers believed that they had not been

accepted by the staff of Prescott, and felt uncomfortable at the school.

The veteran African American teachers came from a very different place. Many of them had grown up in the segregated South and valued the education they had received as children from African American teachers. They came to teaching as a way to give back to their community and had a sense of responsibility to educate African American children to high standards. Similar to the findings of Michele Foster's (1997) study of black teachers, "these teachers are committed to African American children and the communities which spawn them: to believing in their unlimited potential, to working hard to provide a quality education despite difficult circumstances, to struggling against (and helping their students struggle against) all forms of racial oppression, and to building a sense of connection between students and their communities" (p. xi). According to Tatum's stages of racial development, these teachers were in a later stage, working with their students to "resist negative societal messages and develop an empowered sense of self in the face of a racist society" (p. 94).

### **Many new white teachers see whiteness as the absence of race.**

In an interview, Carrie Secret discusses the impact that her own racial identity development has had on her and her teaching practice. She recognizes a transition that she made when moving through the developmental continuum, one that she defines as moving from being "Black" to becoming "African." "When I was Black I was angry. When I became African, I was at peace. That blackness keeps you in a frenzy. Now I get disturbed about things and I respond to things, but that African sense of peace and self, knowing who I am...Therein lies my strength" (Olsen, 2001, p.76). Carrie's racial identity development has moved her to work with her students and other adults to recognize their unique cultural histories and to empower them to look at ways to transform the existing structures of white supremacy. "Grannie," a parent who worked in Carrie's classroom, talks about the effect that this racial consciousness has had on her own learning:

*She was teaching things that were awesome, okay? Especially when she started talking about being African American, because very little did I know about my history, and that was fascinating. I learned -- maybe learned is not the right word-- but I began to love myself for who I am and where I came from because of Carrie Secret and her class. I started to actually love myself from the inside out, okay? And being able to speak freely, because I am free now. I didn't want to be black like I am. I didn't want this kinky hair I got, okay? Now I am -- hey! -- I walk like a peacock with my tail feathers spread all the time. I just learned so much about African Americans in her classroom, myself, and her and her style of*

*teaching, how she incorporates everyday life throughout our history. (Olsen, 2001, p.77)*

## Oil and Water?

When this diverse group of Prescott teachers came together at our staff meetings, concentrating on racially focused content, the difference in racial identity development often directly impacted the types of interactions between people. I found that for myself, and several other newer teachers, entering the school with a desire to learn from the veteran African American teachers about the Standard English Program and culturally competent teaching pedagogy was one way to earn acceptance. The veteran teachers, the "insiders" who had been there for twenty to thirty years, had seen the full range of white attitudes that had come to the school, from the missionary to the hippie, all thinking that they knew what it would take to "save these poor kids." This attitude, reinforced and reflected in popular movies such as *Dangerous Minds* and *Music from the Heart*, showed white teachers who seemed to have all the answers and were able to rescue black and brown students from their misguided communities.

### ***When I was Black I was angry. When I became African, I was at peace.***

In reality at Prescott, every day was a struggle for these white teachers. It was striking to see the difference between the way students in the veteran African-American teachers' classrooms behaved and the way the students in the new, white teachers' rooms behaved. Something about the structure and relationships between the new teachers and their students reinforced the worst stereotypes of both groups. The students ran around, rarely listened, and talked back. The teachers yelled, threatened, cried, and complained. The black teachers yelled often as well, but there was something different in the tone of the yelling. It was more of a mother's voice pushing their child, not a yell coming from a place of lack of control or of fear. Their students were no angels, but their rooms were structured, the environments were warm, and learning was obviously taking place.

This exact issue of the racial difference in the tone of yelling was brought to the table at a staff meeting my second year at Prescott. It came up during a discussion in which several new teachers claimed that they felt no support at Prescott from the veteran teachers. The veteran teachers answered that the young teachers had no interest in learning from them and had never attempted to seek support. They were angry that the new teachers were clearly failing and were apparently doing nothing to try to improve their practice. The veteran teachers couldn't understand; why hadn't they knocked on the door of the older teachers and asked for help? Leslie Morrison, a newer black teacher, and I raised the issue that we had felt very supported, but that at Prescott, you have to prove to the veteran staff what your intentions are and that you

are willing to learn from them. Because of their stage of racial identity development, many white teachers were unwilling to recognize culture as an issue, or as a doorway for success with their students. Therefore they did not benefit from the staff development at the school, and did not know how to participate in the community.

I remember early on a debate that erupted during a meeting in which grade level teachers were charting what skills and knowledge they wanted their students to enter their classroom with at the beginning of the year. The charts were then to be shared with the teachers of the prior grade so that they could be used as a scope and sequence for the year. Ms. Charles, a veteran African American teacher with an outstanding record of success with her students, was telling Ms. Kelly, a second year, white kindergarten teacher, what she expected her students to be able to do in math when starting first grade. She was outraged by how low in skills her new class was and blamed the current kindergarten teachers and their low expectations. The low expectations were clearly identifiable by what was written on the kindergarten chart. (The kindergarten teachers had charted what they planned on teaching that year – since they couldn't control what level of education the students came to school with.) When this chart was shown to the whole staff, Carrie, Ms. Drew, and other veteran teachers exploded. Carrie confronted the newer teachers and declared that she remembered when the kids came with higher skills because the black kindergarten teachers that used to be there believed in their students and pushed them to higher levels.

This argument of a racial disparity between black and white teacher expectations has been documented in 2003 by Jordon-Irvine. She finds that "African American teachers of color, as a group, had higher expectations for black students than their white counterparts" (p.7). Jordon-Irvine also discusses the way in which African American teachers act as mentors and advocates for students of color, as demonstrated in the example of the staff meeting above:

*In addition to Mentors are advocate teachers who help black students to navigate school cultures, which are often contradictory and antithetical to their own. They serve as a voice for black students when communicating with fellow teachers and administrators; when providing information about opportunities for advancement and enrichment; and when serving as counselors, advisors, and parent figures. Teacher-mentors and teacher-advocates are willing to exercise resistance by questioning and defying rules and regulations that are not in the best interest of their students. (p.8)*

The ongoing racial conflict at Prescott was not lost on Carrie. As part of our ongoing staff discussion series, we read a book called *Black and White Styles in Conflict* by a white man named Thomas Kochman (Kochman, 1981). In his book, Kochman highlights the different cultural styles that black and white people use to approach the same

situations. As part of a staff meeting, we used this text to try to reflect on some of the conflict that had arisen in past meetings -- including the one with Ms. Kelly and Ms. Charles. Using the text, Carrie was able to explain that when she raised her voice, it showed her passion for the topic and it was not necessarily a personal attack. The meeting in which we used this text helped move the whole staff closer to each other by grounding our conversation in a cultural framework that we could all relate to. While we were not able to resolve all of the issues that we struggled with as a staff, we were unique in our willingness to name the racial differences among us and examine how they play themselves out in our interactions.

***My real teacher education did not happen in a pre-service program, but rather came from educators of color, who taught me about the importance of relationships and culture in reaching children.***

## Lessons Learned

My real teacher education did not happen in a pre-service program, but rather came from educators of colors, such as Rose Martin and Carrie Secret, who taught me about the importance of relationships and culture in reaching children. Being successful in an environment such as Prescott is not something that a "methods" course could ever teach in a semester. It requires a commitment to the cause of social justice and a true desire to change the inequities that exist within the current structure of education. It requires expanding the idea of a classroom from being a room with four walls to the community it is situated in, where you are both the teacher and the learner at the same time. It requires building real relationships with the people you are working with or for and seeing your students and their families as your employer rather than your administrators and superintendents. It requires explicitly addressing your own racial identity and taking responsibility for how it informs your interactions and power dynamics with others. Finally, it requires a continual quest for both learning more and doing more to address the root causes of racism and white supremacy in order to really teach the children you are hoping to educate.

## WORKS CITED

- Bigelow, B., & Peterson, B. (1998). *Rethinking Columbus: the next 500 years* (2nd ed.). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Delpit, L. D. (1995) *Other people's children: cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Delpit, L. D., & Dowdy, J. K. (2002). *The skin that we speak: thoughts on language and culture in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Foster, M. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching*. New York: New Press.
- Irvine, J. J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: seeing with a cultural eye*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kochman, T. (1981). *Black and White styles in conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: the journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Martin, R., & Truax, D. (2002). *One rose blooming: hard-earned lessons about kids, race, and life in America*. South Boardman, MI: Crofton Creek Press.
- Nobles, W., & Nsaka Sunsum, Educational process for achieving educational excellence. San Francisco: San Francisco State University. Center for Applied Cultural Studies and Educational Achievement.
- Olsen, L., & California Tomorrow. (2001). *And still we speak -- stories of communities sustaining and reclaiming language and culture*. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.
- Perry, T., & Delpit, L. D. (1998). *The real Ebonics debate : power, language, and the education of African-American children*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black : promoting high achievement among African-American students*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rickford, J. R., & Rickford, R. J. (2000). *Spoken soul: the story of Black English*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Tatum, B. D. (1999). "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race (Rev. ed.). New York: BasicBooks

## Notes

1 Delpit, 2002; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Rickford and Rickford, 2000.

2 Aside from those of Rose Martin, Aileen Moffitt, Leslie Morrison, Carrie Secret, and Nebeehah Shakir, all names have been changed.

3 Olsen, 2001; Hilliard, 2003; Perry, 1998, 2003.

4 Perry, 1998; Rickford and Rickford, 2000; Delpit, 2002.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



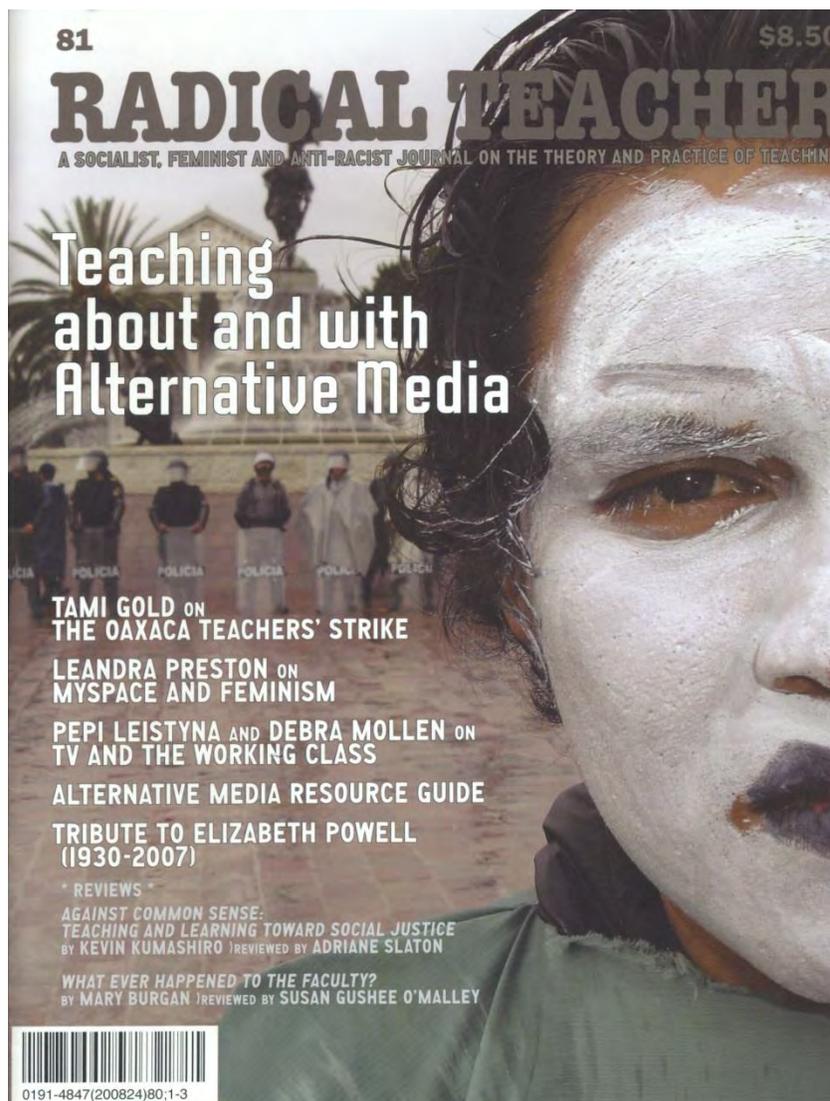
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Tribute to the Life and Work of Elizabeth Powell (1930-2007)

by Nick Thorkelson



Elizabeth Powell was a master cartoonist, though virtually unknown as such to anybody who didn't read this journal. With no tools at hand but her own perceptiveness, passion and drawing skill, she could conjure up a zany alterkocker lifting hourglasses instead of weights (figure 1), a daydreaming bag lady (figure 2), a low-income mother attempting to bear her burdens with dignity, an arrogant pastor or president, or an entire cast of random characters engaged in an impromptu discussion of media and politics.

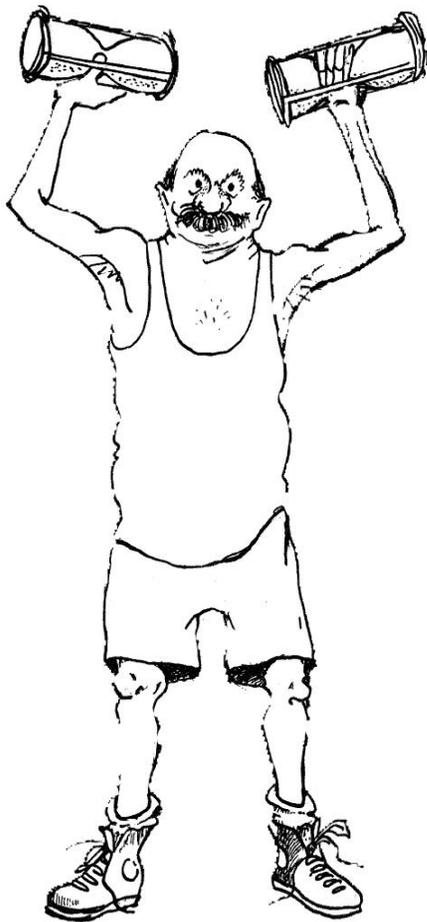


FIGURE 1. FROM RT #71

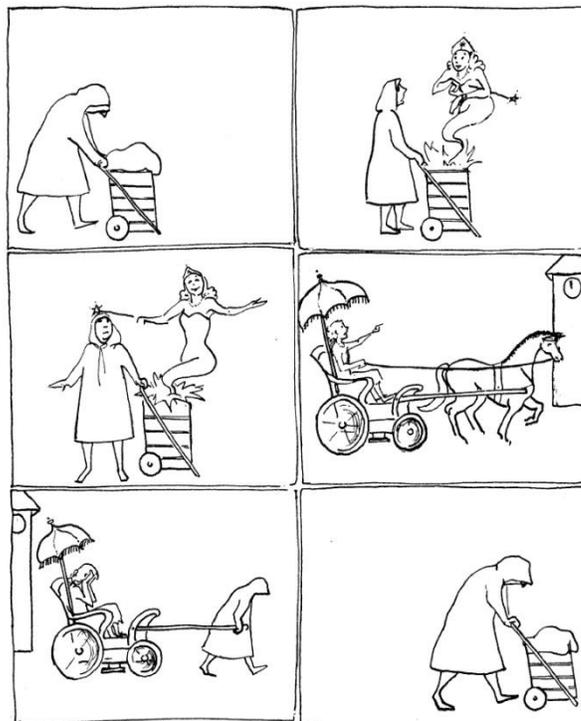
The most striking quality of her drawings was empathy. Though lack of thoughtfulness was an inexcusable crime in the worlds she created, even her thoughtless characters had life, weight, and bones beneath their flesh.

A central problem of cartooning is that a cartoon communicates in generalities and yet, for the cartoon to be compelling, each character should come across as autonomous and self-determined. We male cartoonists tend to use vivacious or ingenious technique to mitigate our reliance on stereotypes. Liz was like many of the best female cartoonists — Nicole Hollander, Lynn Johnston, Alison Bechdel, and Sharon Rudahl are others that come to mind — in her ability to give characters physical and personal specificity, at the same time that they are rendered symbolically or simply enough to speak for whole classes of people.

She had a few continuing characters: the bag lady mentioned above; George W. Bush, whose studied hypermasculinity Liz nailed very nicely; a philosophical pair of pigeons (figure 3). In three different versions of a poor family in its kitchen, the sharp and experienced yet bewildered profile of the grandmother contrasts with the open faces of her daughter and grandchildren (figure 4). Uncle Sam appears often, borderline handsome, bland, gone-to-seed but vain nevertheless. In one drawing he flashes his naked self to a group of females. They are all cracking up except one girl who, in a very Liz-ish touch, is too busy studying to take notice (figure 5).

METAMORPHOSIS

FIGURE 2. FROM RT #71



Not all of Liz's drawings for *Radical Teacher* were cartoons. A pencil drawing of a globalizing devil figurine (figure 6) showed her fine color sense and her drawing virtuosity. A disturbing drawing of two naked figures joined at the head, simultaneously embracing and striking each other (figure 7), is indicative of her emotional fearlessness. A relief print of a lynching, with slivers of moonlight tracing the spectators' faces, acknowledges the dreadful humanity behind race violence, without posturing or flinching (figure 8).

I should mention what a pleasure it was to work with Liz on *Radical Teacher* for eight years, not least because of my admiration for her talent. On the one occasion when we met face-to-face, I found her to be surprisingly self-effacing, considering her forthright angry cartoons. Perhaps this is a confirmation of the theory that cartooning is the art of shy people who are boiling inside.

Our collaboration was characterized by the kind of mutual trust and co-inspiration that you long for in work, politics and friendship. Thank you, Liz, and thank you

Radical Teacher for providing a platform for this original and amazing artist.

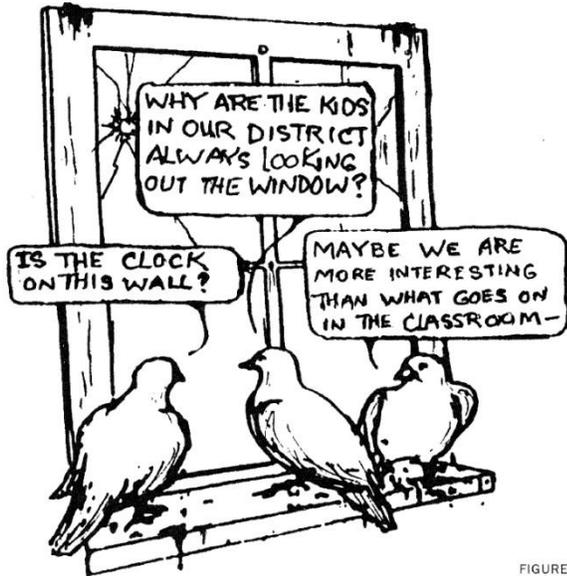


FIGURE 3.  
FROM RT #64



FIGURE 4. FROM RT #59



FIGURE 5. FROM RT #71

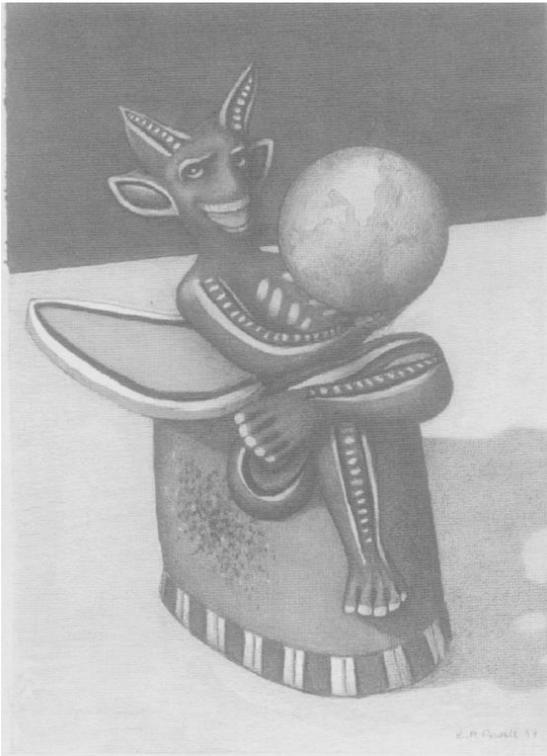


FIGURE 6. FROM RT #62

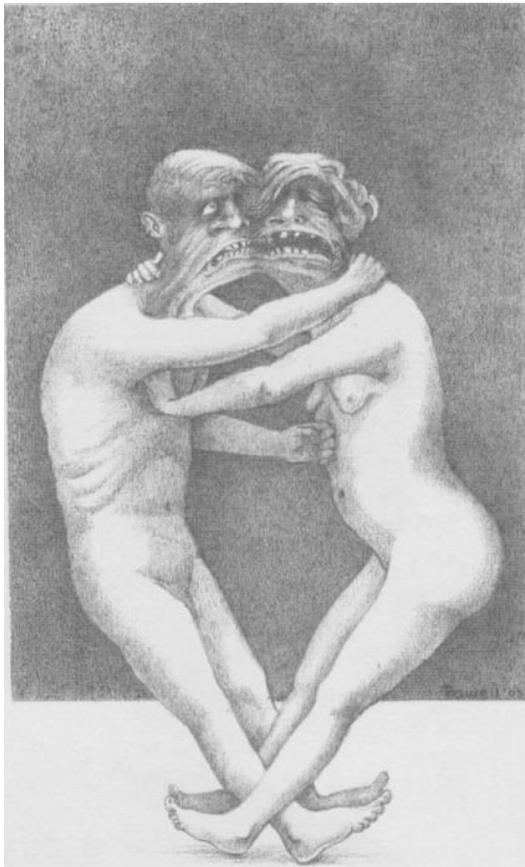


FIGURE 7. FROM RT #67



FIGURE 8. FROM RT #59



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



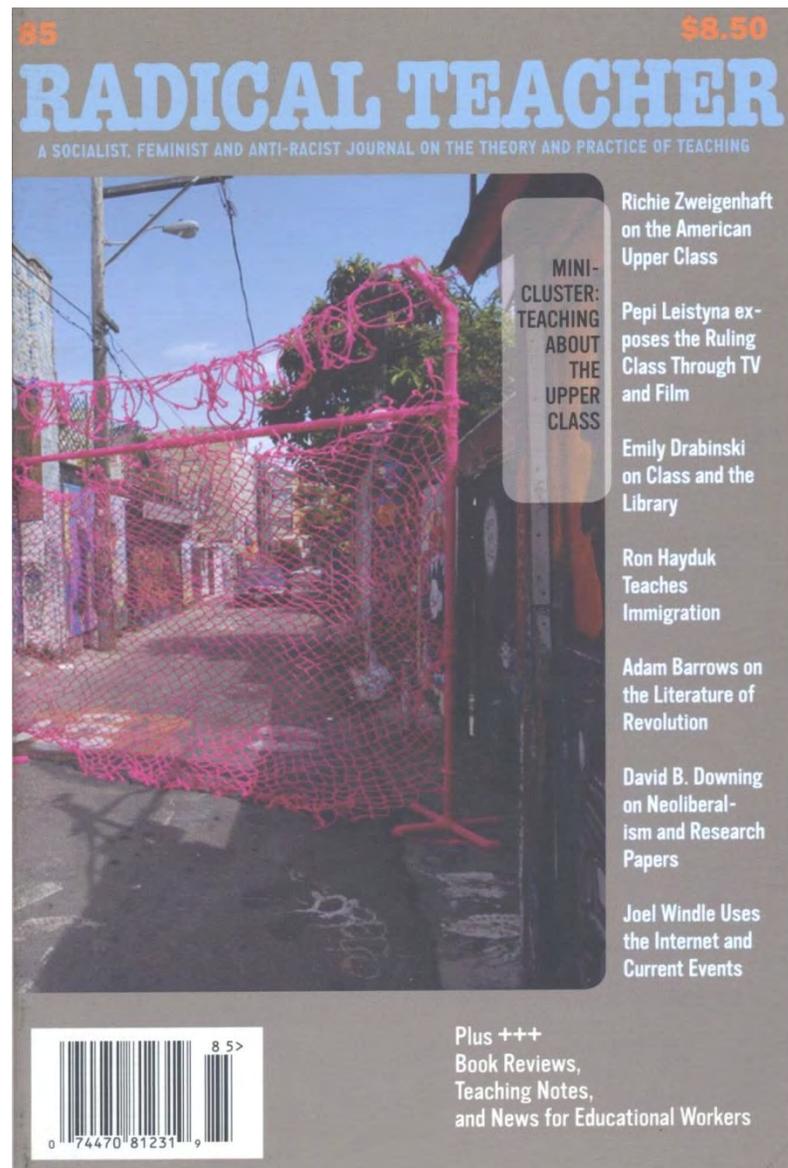
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## What Does Neoliberalism Have to Do with Teaching Research Writing?

by David B. Downing



## I. When Research and Writing Confront the Disappearance of History

Ask any progressive educator the question posed by my title, and you won't have to wait long for an answer: everything. From the size of the class, to the quality of the computer lab, to the costs of textbooks, to the demographics and the class schedules of the students, to the workload and the compensation of faculty assigned to teach them—it is just so easy to name a few of the obvious material factors signaling the neoliberal economy's effect on how we teach required service classes like research writing (or any course, for that matter). By and large, we share basic understandings about that history, so I am not going to rehearse it here.

Rather, in this essay I focus on how I have experimented with bringing some version of relevant history into a general humanities required course called Research Writing. The problem I address is that most educators still struggle with the disappearance of history from the disciplinary agenda scripted into a class like research writing. Service writing courses occupy an especially difficult position when the consumerist powers that be wrap such courses into the anti-historical formalism of decontextualized skills that can supposedly be swallowed quickly if not painlessly. Not one research writing handbook on the market today even begins to address the significance of the transformations of the global political economy and the neoliberal production of knowledge as having much of anything to do with their basic research and writing tasks. How can a teacher frame this complex history (all in one *writing* [not history] class?) in such a way as to combat the historical amnesia, while making such history vital, understandable, and engaging to first year undergraduates? That is the task of my class and this essay.

Of course, what is possible in any given class is determined by context: the relations between the local and the global meet wherever we happen to be. For this reason, in the next section I will sketch the local colors of my own institutional circumstances, before describing some of the strategies I have experimented with in my own research writing classes.

## II. A Little Local Context: Public Education in a Private Economy

Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), where I have taught for twenty years now, is a mid-sized, public university. All faculty in the state system of 14 universities work under a collective bargaining agreement reached between the union (the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty [APSCUF]) and management (the state). This is not a minor point since the entire system is an anomaly with respect to American higher education: we have roughly 25% of our faculty on temporary contracts in contrast to the national average which is getting close to the inverse (about 75% contingent labor). This means that all faculty in the English

department end up teaching the basic humanities distribution requirements for composition, research writing, and humanities literature. These factors explain why, even though I am now one of the most senior members in the department, I regularly teach research writing. These working conditions become an issue in the course itself: IUP's faculty union has successfully on this score resisted the pressures of neoliberal privatization that seek flexibility, contingency, and cheap teaching all around (Bousquet). Regardless of how students feel about me, it is important that they have a sense of collective bargaining's ability to protect some dimensions of the public commons from direct capital control.

At the same time, students at IUP can hardly avoid the remarkable ironies in their own educational circumstances. For instance, students can readily see that there are some dimensions of their education over which the union has absolutely no control. Indeed, management has cleverly found many ways to work privatization into the public university, so it is an easy initial research question to ask students where they see examples of such privatization on campus. It is a long list, similar to the franchising and branding going on all over U.S. campuses: they can only buy Pepsi, not Coke; Chick-Fil-A, not McDonalds; Spring Reflections bottled water, not Dasani, etc. But the biggest irony is right before their eyes every time they walk out of a campus building: the enormous dormitory expansion project at IUP. This they cannot miss.

Some of the readers of this essay might not have missed it either. One of the front page stories in the April 11, 2008 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* is titled "Swanky Suites, More Students?" and it describes IUP's building bonanza as, perhaps, the largest dormitory expansion project in the history of higher education in America. The article included several color photos of the luxury suites together with an explanation of the administration's goal to "reinvent its living-and-learning program" (Supiano A1). Many people are very proud of this project, but (and you would not know this from reading the *CHE* article), many people, mostly faculty, like myself, also have strong objections to the idea of reinforcing class differences among students on the basis of the progressively more costly fees for the new dorms.

Funding for this massive 270 million dollar building project comes from the IUP Foundation, in other words, from private sources, donations, etc. The Foundation hires private developing corporations to do the building on state-owned land leased on long-term contracts to the corporations. The point is, as the administration points out, this building project budget has nothing to do with academic funding for the institution because those revenues come from state taxes and student tuition. In contrast, the corporations building the dorms even handle all business arrangements, including the room payments which are made directly to the private enterprises, not to the university or the state.

Now there is no rule that says the Foundation could not invest directly in academic projects, but the separation of public and private realms explains why the administration can raise class sizes, authorize faculty hiring

freezes, and ask all college divisions to tighten their budgets because of fiscal crisis. The public/private split is immediately evident to students in my research writing class because the humanities building itself is deteriorating rapidly, with peeling paint, cracked walls in places, and no carpeting except in a few rooms. In other words the public spaces for education for all students in the humanities is deteriorating while for those students who can afford it (the luxury dorm suites cost between a third more than and twice as much as regular dorm rates), there are some pretty fancy private places to enjoy good living (and, I suppose, good learning) on campus.

Not to be too jaded, but these local public/private splits really help my students to understand what privatization in the neoliberal economy is all about. One instance really stands out: following our in-class discussion of these campus circumstances, one student, who was trying to access the IUP budget, got frustrated because she could only get very general accounting figures without any details. She then accessed the State legislature, and ended up locating the specific statute that says all public institutions in Pennsylvania must make budget allocations publicly available. Everyone felt something was wrong here, but a week later, after a few students had interviewed local administrators, we had our answer. We could not access any form of a detailed budget because it was kept confidential, and the administration gets around the law by making the general budget figures available. The effort it would take any individual or group to protest these circumstances is so great that the administration feels safe in playing by their narrow (mis)interpretation of the law. In this case, the entire class got a good lesson in the way that public regulations can be evaded by private interests.

### III. Negotiating Power and Framing History for Research Writers

The critical pedagogy movement launched by Paolo Freire has led the way in teaching us how to negotiate the asymmetrical relations of power in the classroom. Through the writing of the syllabus, we are in some pretty fundamental ways the authors of the narratives embedded in our syllabi. Self-consciously presenting these perspectives over which we are invariably viewed as author/authority when we seek dialogic engagement and critical consciousness can easily end up in a zero-sum game played out between the emancipatory intentions and the institutional authority of the teacher. Indeed, the historical frame comes from me, and that asymmetrical power relationship can be negotiated, but it cannot be idealized out of existence.

Nevertheless, the appearance of a strong political agenda on my part versus the more apolitical agenda of formalist skills is itself ahistorical. In other words, the vocational skills model is itself an enormously powerful ideological project authorized and supported by a long history of institutional formations and only appears neutral to the extent that it has been naturalized as the way things are in the field. Abuses of teacher authority, therefore,

come not from the content of the agenda per se (since both ahistorical formalism and social activism can be bludgeoned into students), but rather from the specific protocols and behaviors of the instructor regarding how he/she negotiates the institutional power he/she has been granted.

***My claim, which the students get to test out, as I put it to them, is that the historical flames we explore deeply impact their own lives.***

One way to theorize the negotiation of classroom authority is to conceive of both teachers and students as what I call "resource translators." By this term I mean to indicate that the teacher's credible (as opposed to the more obvious institutional) authority comes, first, from his/her access and understanding of available resources, and, second, from his/her ability to translate some of those complex resources from diverse sources and disciplines into accessible concepts, rhetorics, and frames. Teachers and students must translate knowledge resources from one context into another. Indeed, students are also resource translators since they bring to the class various kinds of knowledges such as their home discourses, their skills at interacting on YouTube and Facebook, their areas of special interest, which they often have to translate for their classmates into accessible terms, explanations, or narratives. Moreover, the nature of a research writing class often positions students themselves in the role of experts in relation not just to the other students in class, but also to me. Their own research projects often lead them into disciplines other than English, and that very limitation with respect to my own disciplinary subject position can be highlighted as an opportunity for students to take responsibility as resource translators in communicating knowledge of their specialized topics to their peers and their instructor. Resource translator might seem to echo the kind of objectified skill required by the standardized rationales, and such echoing is intentional on my part, if only to indicate that teachers as well as students confront the commodification of their own skills. Except for one key difference: those skills are not disinterested, but interested in a particular project, social justice, which is the ideological rationale for the course itself. I explicitly state this rationale in the syllabus, so I will quote directly from myself here:

*The basic premises for this class are large, important assumptions about the nature of knowledge, education, society, and democracy. They are these: that the hope for social justice is at the root of any basis for a worthwhile human life; that learning, socializing, research, understanding, awe, imagination, and inspiration should be directed at expanding human freedom; that research and writing are not just technical, vocational skills to improve (although they certainly involve such skills) but are directly*

*related to the larger social hope for a better world for all peoples on this earth.*

This basic rationale may sound grandiose, but I always try to make the motive for social justice not philosophically difficult (which it is) and tied to sophisticated notions of recognition and redistribution, but based on a simple, practical question: what's fair here? And the good thing is that most students can easily subscribe to these general principles.

My key notion of historical frames is a direct consequence of translating by way of simplification the complexity of the historical archive available. I organize the course around two overlapping historical frames. My claim, which the students get to test out, as I put it to them, is that the historical frames we explore deeply impact their own lives, and that some knowledge of these frames is a necessary way of interacting with the complex world of consumer culture that they inhabit. The first frame is more conceptual (capitalism vs. socialism), the other more chronological (regulated, New Deal, social-welfare state capitalism followed by deregulated, free-market, neoliberal capitalism).

In the first instance, at the conceptual level, we work to develop a shared, basic understanding of the two modern historical movements of capitalism and socialism, and the history of tensions between them. Most students have a general, ideologically charged view of how capitalism works, and how whatever counts as socialism does not work, but beyond that, they have often not received very much direct attention in their education to these fundamental historical movements. For this reason, the textbooks assigned for the course I consider to be essentially resource translations: they provide articulate overviews and simplifications of complex historical changes.

Fortunately, we now have available such resource translations: the small books by James Fulcher on *Capitalism* and by Michael Newman on *Socialism*. Now these books draw on immense historical archives and translate that material into concise narratives accessible to many readers, but this audience still does not in most instances include second-year college students. So my job is to simplify and reduce even further, which means that I prepare a few handouts to frame the differences as different views of human freedom and justice regarding the production of goods and services by any given society. Privatization of the means of production will make much more sense once we have some contrastive views of public ownership, control, and regulation of the way wealth gets produced and distributed. The key concept I focus on here is surplus value, so we go over the way any production process adds value to the raw materials, and that added or surplus value gets distributed in three main ways: to replenish raw materials, to the workers/employees, and to the employer/management/shareholders. The key question is: how does private management (capitalism) or the collective work force (socialism) produce, appropriate, and distribute the surplus value, in short, the profit? And do they do it fairly? It does not take long for everyone to see

examples of the mal-distribution of surplus value made visible in the massive wealth inequalities, class differences, and the exploitation of workers both in the United States and globally. Indeed, we only spend about 3 weeks laying out these main concepts, after which we turn to the overview of the last 60 years of global history.

The main historical frame for the course I actually take from David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. His historical overview divides the last sixty years into two phases: 1) embedded liberalism (1935-1970s), and 2) neoliberalism (1970s—). The turning point for Harvey is the years 1978-80 when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Deng Xiaoping took control of China, and Ronald Reagan became President of the United States. In my experience, these dates have proven to be convenient and understandable. Nevertheless, the first time I used this book, I presumed (and I was correct) that it would be very difficult for students, so, again, I negotiated these difficulties by assigning only strategic chapters and using several key handouts that simplified the two-part historical frame.

One handout, called "The Basic Historical Frame," is particularly key to the whole class, and I hand it out when we begin reading Harvey. It lists at the top some of the key events of the turning point years, before dividing the page in half, listing contrasting features of each phase on the left and right columns. On the left, embedded liberalism is represented by key characteristics of the regulated, New Deal, Keynesian version of capitalism, and, on the right, neoliberalism is represented by the deregulated, Friedmanian version of free-market capitalism. In short, the contrast is between the social welfare state and the privatized neoliberal market economy

On the handout itself, crucial to these contrasting lists are some easy to comprehend statistics regarding the most massive construction of wealth inequality in modern history: the contrasts in the two periods between CEO/average worker salaries; the proportion of wealth ownership as a percentage of assets and income; the decline in real wages; the destruction of organized labor; the decline in public funding for education; the shift from a 75%-25% ratio of tenure-track faculty to the current 25%-75% ratio; the decline from 1970s highest levels of progressive taxation at 70% to current levels of 33%. The schematic presentation of this data tends to be quite dramatic for many students, who have never been taught any of this material in 12-14 years of their formal education. That these changes have been a direct result of specific policy decisions rather than merely the uncontrollable "nature" of the market is the lesson at hand. To even begin to imagine that socialism names a tradition of trying to think of alternatives to these grossly unjust forms of the appropriation and distribution of surplus value is a first step in beginning to understand how knowledge produced under capitalism always happens in some relation to the surplus.

Of course, my historical agenda is a bit overwhelming to contemplate for a research writing class. But I have also found that most students adjust to this difference, and the appreciation of those who respond to the challenge has far

outweighed the resistance. In each class, however, I have organized our interactions so as to anticipate and accommodate both resistance and appreciation. For that reason, I have devised a series of integrated reading/writing/discussion exercises to mitigate my authority, but also to engage a whole set of recognizable skills required by the catalog course description. The exercises are progressively designed so as to move from basic individual reading/writing strategies, to note taking, to more complex, and often more collaborative tasks such as clarification of terminology, consulting and comparing alternative kinds of sources, drafting, and developing a paper or web site. Most of this work appears online, since we use a WebCT blog that provides for threaded discussions. Students are also asked to view all their writing during the first half as part of their construction of a "Neoliberal Portfolio" which by mid-term consists of their own selections of (and justifications for) their most significant online, in-class, and out-of-class writing. The main tasks are as follows:

**WebCT Responses:** Students are asked to write and post daily responses to each assigned reading. Some of the assignments include videos, so that, for example, when we read Harvey's chapter on Deng's efforts to restructure the Chinese economy, we also view David Redmon's provocative documentary, *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, which poignantly shifts between jubilant celebrations of Mardi Gras in downtown New Orleans with the raucous rituals of throwing beads and baring breasts; and the bead factories in China where the average workers are 14-18 year old girls making \$1.60/hour. The text/video relationship is crucial to translating the resources into understandable terms and experiences. These daily responses have proven crucial to everything we do. Some students respond positively with enthusiasm; others, with worry that the reading is going right over their heads; and sometimes there is outright disagreement when, for example, they take a hard-line position that socialism is just an ideal that will never work. But sometimes there are epiphanies of sorts, which every teacher looks for, as when one student remarked that: "The Mardi Gras movie blew my mind. Everything we've been talking about just fell into place."

**Key Quotes:** For every assigned chapter or essay, three students have the task for that day of highlighting what they feel are the important passages. They are asked to do this by dividing the reading into three sections, with each student responsible for typing up one page of "key quotes" for their section. The group then assembles their three pages into one file, also mounted on WebCT. Students must also boldface any new terms or terms they might not understand. To some extent they take on the role of resource translators for that day's reading since they are representing (translating into a digested form) a simplified version of the text to make it more accessible to their classmates.

**Definitions:** In this assignment, also done in small groups, students each take 3-5 terms to define from the boldfaced items highlighted in the previous day's key quotes. Since it becomes pretty clear that there may be two or more separate (and often competing) meanings,

they should try to clarify those differences when they arise. This task helps the class to progressively develop a working vocabulary. And I provide a model for how this is done at the beginning of the semester by defining the four terms I want to emphasize: surplus value, privatization, deregulation, and free market fundamentalism. With respect to my choice of key terms, I agree with Richard Ohmann that "the concept of privatization gives us more analytic leverage than that of globalization in trying to grasp what is happening in post-secondary education" (par.13). Again, students are functioning exactly as resource translators: making definitions clear and accessible to the immediate audience of the students in class.

**Culture Wars synopses:** Students are asked to explore various news and commentary sources representing two opposing sides in the debates that have shaped contemporary U.S. social and political life with respect to the rise of neoliberalism. The opposing sides represent, generally speaking, the political left and the political right. Their specific task is to choose one issue and read two sources about it, one from each side, and then write a synopsis of each article, and a brief comparison of their similarities and differences. I supply a list of suggested alternative journal and web sites from both sides, although students are free to select their own sources as well. A good example of how such resources translate into classroom practices happened when one student decided to search "Noam Chomsky" on YouTube, and found there, among other things, an interview with rapper Zach de la Rocha, the first half of which we showed to the whole class on the overhead. This provoked a discussion of Chomsky, de la Rocha, (and his first group, Rage Against the Machine), and The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), one of the key topics of their conversation. Fortuitously, we had also just been reading David Harvey's description of NAFTA, so suddenly we had an amazing set of links between their time spent on YouTube, alternative media figures like de la Rocha, and neoliberalism.

***[When discussing student proposals], students hear from other classmates that everything has a history, and once we get that far, it invariably leads back to the social, political, and economic dimensions of the frame we have outlined.***

**Mid-term Research Project: "Neoliberalism and Me":** For their first full research project, I ask students to explore the ways that their personal life, career plans, and choice of major have been affected by neoliberalism. The scope of the project is a 6-8 page paper in which they get to relate my agenda to theirs, so to speak. Some students really get to open whole new ways of thinking about their future opportunities (or lack of them), and the most interesting papers are often the surprising ones. For example, one nursing student, who had previously seen

Michael Moore's film, *Sicko*, told the story of how her learning about neoliberalism gave her a much better understanding of Moore's contrast between socialized medicine in France and Great Britain, and privatized care in the United States.

#### IV. Freedom of Inquiry and the Hope for Social Justice

My hope is that the first half course work, aimed at articulating the historical frame of neoliberalism, will influence and, at best, infuse their second half projects over which they have entirely free range with respect to topics. My only suggestion is that they should care deeply about the issues they seek to investigate so the topics should not be frivolous, and we do indeed end up discussing some proposed topics that may at first seem trivial, say, hair coloring. But often after discussion, students hear from other classmates that everything, including hair color, has a history, and once we get that far, it invariably leads back into the social, political, and economic dimensions of the frame we have outlined in the first half. During the first 2-3 weeks of the second half of the course, students work to develop their topics, which are quite literally all over the place: from the history of high heel shoes, to the construction of the U.S./Mexican border wall, to the history of tanning salons, to No Child Left Behind, to gay marriage, to revenue sharing in Major League Baseball, to more place-based investigations of how a powerful factory affected the local economy of their hometown, and so forth. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide details of these investigations, let me sketch out how technical research skills function within the historical frames I have outlined.

For two weeks in the middle of the second half of the course, I turn to the typically boring if not dreaded concerns for documentation, citation, and plagiarism. I do so in relation to the course theme by asking the class to undertake a brief investigation into the history of intellectual property laws. Since their formation in late 18<sup>th</sup> century England, the intellectual property debates provide a good example of how under emerging industrial capitalism, citizens and governments were struggling over the rights of private intellectual property and the sharing of that knowledge in the public commons. Now, since students in this class have already had a good overview of the relations between private and public ownership, they are relatively well-prepared to understand the key issues. I have a few handouts highlighting these debates, as well as an overview of the historical evolution of the different major documentation styles, APA, Chicago, MLA. We even touch on the significance of the WTO's 1996 TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), which extends all kinds of legal protections favoring the private corporate ownership of a huge range of intellectual property, from genetic codes to Hollywood movies. Given these historical overviews, then, the care with which students should follow the documentation styles of their chosen fields is a form of social caring. The ethics of justice is always a key issue in citation because students realize that they must borrow from the public commons

knowledge often produced by private individuals, and any form of social justice calls for considerable care in recognizing their predecessors from whom they must borrow and on whom they depend in their research translations. They can also see that there really are some grey areas regarding ownership rights of individuals to texts, musical phrases, video images, and the like. This, of course, segues well into discussions of plagiarism and the injustice of such unacknowledged appropriations. Citation, therefore, acquires a contextual sense of social and political importance, rather than coming down as a set of picky, decontextualized rules.

The goal of the final projects is to develop either a multi-media web site presentation, or a desk-top published magazine/book that they produce for a specific audience. I ask them to reflect on the imagined audience to whom they are translating the results of their research by composing a one-page audience analysis that accompanies their final projects. Again, how much they draw on our first half historical frames, and how they imagine their audience responding to those historical contexts, varies considerably, sometimes as a reflection of their resistance to the anti-capitalist considerations the course opens up. Indeed, although many students remain unremitting free-market advocates, I have yet to encounter a student in Research Writing classes who does not have hopes that social security checks will be showing up in their mailboxes in some distant future their parents have called retirement. By the end of this class, they can at least see that when Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in 1935, this part of the New Deal was a slim slice of the socialist plan for a more equitable redistribution of wealth right in the heart of capitalist America. Even after we discuss the web site for the World Social Forum, and its links to the wide-spread alter-globalization movement, it goes without saying that students do not all become active members of the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America); understandably, since the resistance to any wholesale conversion runs pretty deep. All I can say is that so far I have negotiated the resistance, or to put a positive spin on it, the gratitude for the historical frame expressed by quite a few students in the course evaluations helps to keep me going.

## WORKS CITED

- Bousquet, Marc. *How the University Works*. New York: New York UP, 2008.
- Fulcher, James. *Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Moore, Michael. Writer and dir. *Sicko*. Documentary Film. 123 min. Dog Eat Dog Films, 2007.
- Newman, Michael. *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Ohmann, Richard. "Citizenship and Literacy Work: Thoughts without a Conclusion." *Workplace: A Journal of Academic Labor*. 4.1 (June 2001). <http://www.cust.educ.ubc.ca/workplace/issue7/ohmann.html>
- Redmon, Marc. Prod., dir., ed. *Mardi Gras: Made in China*. Documentary Film. 61 min. Carnavalesque Films. 2002.
- Supiano, Beckie. "Swanky Suites, More Students?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 54.31 (April 11, 2008): A1, A24-25.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Jamming the Works: Art, Politics and Activism

### Introduction

by Linda Dittmar and Joseph Entin

***But what does it mean, exactly,  
to describe a work of art as  
"activist"?***

As we enter the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, art that aims to actively challenge the social order continues to spark controversy and encounter resistance. In one recent instance, the University of California at San Diego threatened to revoke the tenure of Ricardo Dominguez, a professor of visual art, who developed what he calls "transborder immigrant tools"—recycled cell phones loaded with GPS software that point border-crossers to caches of fresh water in the desert. Dominguez has called the phones, which feature an audio application that plays inspirational poetry to migrants, a "mobile Statue of Liberty." "I'm interested in how different forms of power respond to this," Dominguez explained to an *LA Times* reporter. "Our work has always been to bring to the foreground what artists can do using available low-end, new technologies that can have a wider encounter with society than just the limited landscape of the museum, the gallery and the scholarly paper."<sup>1</sup>

Dominguez's cell-phone project stirs up the age-old debate about what is "art." Can a mass-produced, quotidian object like a cell phone really be art? Who exactly is the artist—the cell phone designers and manufacturers, the poets whose words are recorded on these machines, the phone users who activate them, or Dominguez himself? As this example suggests, the idea makes the art, not the material object out of which the art was made. Marcel Duchamp's "readymades" made this point forcefully, as did

other dada artists when they assembled the detritus of daily life into what they displayed as art (collages made of bus tickets, bits of string, and other odds and ends). Putting a signed urinal on view as an object of public aesthetic contemplation (Duchamp, *Fountain* 1917), pulverizing language in paroxysmal fury (Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty," anticipated by Alfred Jarry's inaugural use of "shit" on stage in *Ubu Roi* 1896), or inventing the empty label "da-da" to describe their work, artists were responding to the Great War's gratuitous destruction of so many young lives but also, more broadly, dehumanization by industry and smug bourgeois proprieties. Here is cultural work that slams conventional notions of the unique beauty of the handcrafted object as "art"—work that is disruptive, irreverent, and transformative.

While the driving force behind this work was often anarchic rather than ideological, it proved to be the wellspring of a political art that is continuing to challenge the social order to this day. In this sense Dominguez's cell phones raise questions we already knew in other guises. Is Duchamp's cheap print of *Mona Lisa* plus mustache art defaced or art? Is a dadaist "exquisite corpse" poem, made of unconnected lines, actually a poem? Is Basquiat's use of graffiti in fact "art"? Does a Jackson Pollock canvas involve skill and expressive content or is it a haphazard mess? And what about Andy Warhol's soup cans or Jasper Johns' flags? What repeatedly emerges from such controversies is

the fact that definitions of “art” are subjective, unstable, and often a function of commerce and muscle. While at issue are certainly questions of crafting and expression, at issue are also considerations of status, exhibition, and investment value as these interact with precedents—with preceding arguments and uses. Dominguez’s cell phones cite earlier debates around “readymades.” The Olivetti typewriter on display at New York’s Museum of Modern Art may be participating in a later and different conversation regarding applied design as “art,” but it also re-insinuates the ironies of Duchamp’s dada apotheosis of a ratty typewriter cover as “art”; in a flea market it is just junk. When Jerome Robbins incorporated the drawing of graffiti into a ballet he choreographed, “dirt” became “art.” Warhol’s *painting* of tomato soup cans at once gestures toward art and dismantles it; the cans’ lowly reference and mechanical reproduction confront bourgeois exclusivity with the banalities of lower-middle-and working-class life.

For us as radical teachers what is most important is less a work’s entitlement to the hallowed label of “art” than its social uses. At issue is the *making* and *use* of artifacts rather than their acquiring *Artforum’s* or *Art in America’s* seal of approval. In this respect we must register ways both the marketplace and public institutions have been working to control the circulation, funding and exhibition of controversial work. Recall Hitler’s and Stalin’s repression of the international modernist avant-garde, Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s arrest and trial on obscenity charges for selling Alan Ginsberg’s *Howl*, the National Endowment for the Arts’ scandals of the early 1990s, or Chinese artists’ imprisonment for making art that pointed at state corruption accountable for the death of many children trapped in shoddy school buildings during the 2008 earthquake in Schezuan.

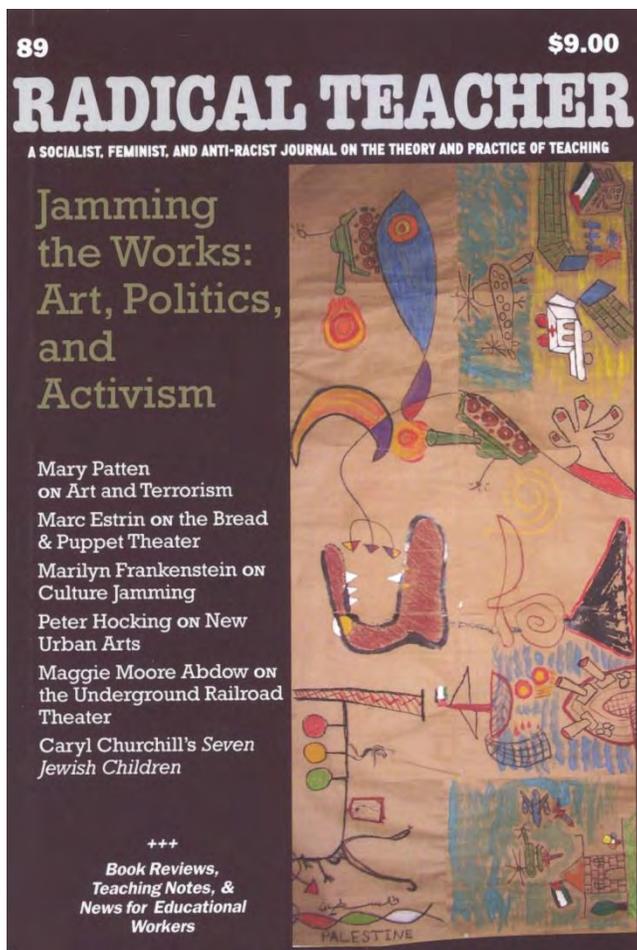
Examples of art censored or suppressed abound. A tacky sculpture of the Ten Commandments (tablets) or a crudely made statue of Jesus can be erected obtrusively in public spaces while Andres Serrano’s visually mesmerizing and indeed reverent photograph, “Piss Christ” (1987), came under severe attack for bathing a plastic crucifix in the yellow glow of the body’s natural fluid. The film *Salt of the Earth* made in 1953 by members of The Hollywood Ten continued to be unavailable long after the House Un-American Activities Committee ceased to exist. The photographic work of sexual renegade Robert

Mapplethorpe as well as Marlon Riggs’ film *Tongues Untied* (1990) led to right wing attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts. Isaac Julien’s homage to poet Langston Hughes, *Looking for Langston* (1989), and Todd Haynes’ film about late pop star Karen Carpenter, *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987), were both blocked from circulation by family members—*Langston* (now back in circulation) for its gay content; *Superstar* (bootleg at YouTube and elsewhere) for linking anorexia to the hypocrisies of “family values.” Such examples remind us that what art is and does goes beyond both aesthetics and commerce. It is very much a matter of political power—disruptive, irreverent, and transformative.

While we may not be able to delineate the boundaries of what art is with any finality, we want to insist that, broadly conceived, artworks (in image, word, sound, gesture, etc.) are products of crafted rhetoric that moves one emotionally as well as informs. Of course art can move us in terrible directions. In fact, most ideologically driven art has been created, sponsored or adopted by persons and groups in power. Church officials, kings, presidents, and economic elites have all used art to authorize their power—from pyramids and cathedrals to heraldic weaponry, flags and skyscrapers; from portraits of celebrated rulers, altar pieces, monumental sculptures and historical paintings to displays of abstract art in corporate offices; from church and state pageants to theatre that merely sanctions business as usual. These and more serve to enhance, naturalize, or glorify claims to dominance. Perhaps no twentieth-century

political group had as finely tuned a sense of art’s power to galvanize consent as Fascism, which turned to Leni Riefenstahl’s innovative film techniques to bolster its popular legitimacy and to neo-classical forms of public art and architecture (as did Napoleon) to fashion an imperial heritage for itself. Hitler, himself a painter, well understood the value of visual spectacle in consolidating national passions.

In the face of all that, it is heartening to remember that the arts of the powerful have always been countered by the arts of the powerless and their allies. The lavish church pageant met its counterpart in the village square; the overpriced canvas is challenged by the cheaply produced poster and graffiti; the canonic book is de-



sanctified by the zine. The major progressive social movements of the twentieth century all fostered powerful artistic output to support their calls for justice. Even a cursory survey reminds us of the centrality of art to counter-hegemonic social projects. Think for instance of the importance of freedom songs to the Civil Rights movement, of mock-theatrics by second wave feminists and, even more so, the LGBT community at Pride parades, of the evolution of camp as a language of resistance to the values of straight society, of Teatro Campesino and community murals to the Chicano movement, of the guerilla graphics disseminated by Gran Fury and ACT-UP winning public support for AIDS research funding, of films such as *Winter Soldier* to the anti-Vietnam war and now Iraq movements.

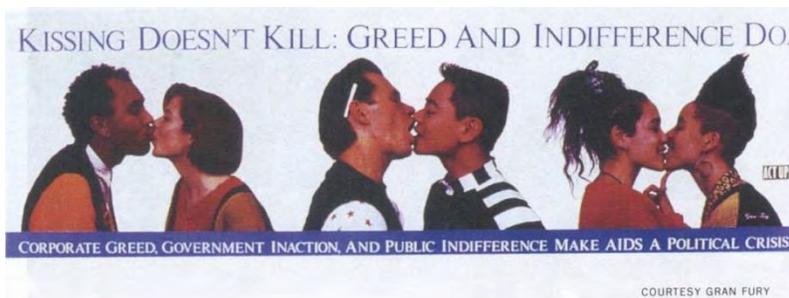
None of this is new. For many protest movements, past and present, social realist or avant-garde, art proved a powerful tool of social persuasion—the vehicle through which alternative values are broadcast. A notable American example, one among many, is Clifford Odets’ 1934 play about taxi drivers, *Waiting for Lefty*, which ends with a collective call to “STRIKE!” This is also the goal in Sergei Eisenstein’s Soviet era films *Strike* (1924) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). While Odets’ social realism and Eisenstein’s formalism elicit different modes of response, their conviction that art should galvanize people and inspire revolutionary action joins them to many other political and artistic movements, from dada to Cultural Front dramatists, to Black Arts poets, to feminists like the Guerrilla Girls, and on to contemporary graphic and graffiti artists. What Maulana Karenga wrote about Black art in the 1960s applies to all: “[Black] art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution.”<sup>2</sup> In a recent book on the art of protest, critic T.V. Reed notes that “the essence of [protest] movements entails [what political theorist Charles Tilly calls] ‘repeated public displays’ of alternative political and cultural values by a collection of people acting together outside officially sanctioned channels.”<sup>3</sup>

But what does it mean, exactly, to describe a work of art as “activist”? Does Fernando Botero’s painted Abu Graib series serve an activist function? Or Francisco Goya’s paintings of the Horrors of War, or Otto Dix’s equivalent work on the first World War, or Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*? Such objects are sometimes works of protest and at all times works of witness aimed at consciousness-raising, but



prestigious Lincoln Center or on a main stage in Dallas? Brecht, after all, hoped that the audience will emerge from the auditorium riled up enough to join the revolutionary masses.

The answer, at least in part, has to do with settings and audiences, but only in part. Performing in a park for no admission fee engages with society in a different way than performing in an elite venue, and it often engages a different segment of society as well. But “engagement” is a



vague term that does not in itself earn the label “activism.” Mounting an exhibition of radical posters from the 1960s at a non-profit venue is different from exhibiting them in an art museum. Images of a Vietnamese

woman wielding a gun, of a Black Panthers’ fist raised in defiance, or of migrant farm workers urging support for the grape boycott were used to invite direct involvement in targeted struggles of a specific moment in ways that neither the art museum nor the non-profit space can address. In this sense activist art has only a short life span. The posters once taped crudely on campus walls and office doors become objects of contemplation—of nostalgia for those old enough to have used them, of diffuse inspiration for those who are in the struggle, and as art-history and cultural studies “texts” for generations to come.

The Bread and Puppet theater marketplace of “Cheap Art” insists on this transience with its sale of ephemeral artifacts marked by low production values and even lower monetary value. Arrayed on crude boards supported by rickety trestles, these devalued objects of exchange knock the notion of “art” off its pedestal. Meanwhile, alongside it, group members and volunteers distribute free bread, making life and art equally democratic—in essence, a human right. If we agree to define “activism” as a vigorous and even aggressive action in pursuit of political or social change, the Bread and Puppet example speaks to that. The posters mentioned earlier did so too at the time. Their job

was to organize! While their particular focus has lost its immediacy since, the gesture has not.

In addressing the relation between art and activism we touch, then, on relations of immediacy and permanence, pleasure and social change, rhetoric and function, personal expression and purposeful joint action. At issue for us, writers and readers of *Radical Teacher*, is also the relation between art (in the broad sense of crafted expression) and education, in so far as the very notion of radical teaching is tied to engagement in social change. In this respect it may interest you, our readers, to know that our initial impetus for assembling the present cluster of articles came from British playwright Caryl Churchill's putting her play, *Seven Jewish Children* (2009), in the public domain. Written in protest of Israel's massive bombing of Gaza in 2008 and events that preceded it, the play is a powerful testimony to the horrifying effects of violence on both Jews and Palestinians, seen through children's eyes. Its repeated injunction of "Tell her," placed at different historic moments, underscores ways experiential politics get harnessed through the teaching of children. Churchill's decision to release this play from the requirements of copyright regulation in exchange for voluntary contributions to a related political fund clearly mark her intention as activist. The emphasis is on the use of this play, not what profits it might bring in. (The play is included in this cluster, with a note attached regarding contributions. It was also put on YouTube by the *Guardian*.)

Though this emphasis on use speaks to the relation between art and activism, it does not answer definitively the question of what is "activism." Churchill's goal is two-fold—to raise awareness and stir engagement. Her play clearly aims to move her audience toward social action, even if that action is just making a financial donation to enable others to do the activist work she values. A more confrontational engagement happens in Coco Fusco's and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992-94), where the two artists inhabited a cage displayed in Madrid's Columbus Plaza and then major



museums of natural history and New York's Whitney Museum. Dressed in an-all-too obvious pastiche of "primitive" attire, Fusco and Gómez-Peña constructed for visitors disconcerting viewing relations that reiterate earlier colonial discourses. The address to these visitors was simple: be aware of your racism, of your power and privileges, of your responsibilities for making the world what it is, and of the revolutionary power of "our" (the performers') presence.

That this artwork's confrontational address presumes the necessity of change echoes Karenga's formula for Black art: it exposes the enemy, praises the people, and supports radical change.

But does this in itself lay to rest the question of what is "activism"? As we go about our work, devising courses and debating pedagogies that aim to intervene in the social order—to expand our students' understanding of the need for progressive social change and encourage them to do something about it—the troubling questions that inevitably nag at us remain: "Are we going about our teaching, writing, art making, etc. the right way" and "Are we doing enough?" Such questions dog us precisely because they presuppose *results*! Seen this way, the dividing line between direct action, which is incontrovertibly activist (e.g. taking over a building), and activities that educate and agitate for such action (e.g., making a poster that critiques what that building represents) is not so clear. That is, the lines separating awareness, advocacy, and action are fuzzy.

One of the problems with engaged art is that it is not likely to "convert" non-believers. "Preaching to the choir" is an all too familiar jibe leveled at the limited usefulness of radical art, including the teaching and making of it in educational settings. In response we need to remember that this in itself does not make politically engaged art less valuable. The main collective value of this work is in building solidarity and stirring to action those who are already inclined this way, as evidenced so clearly in the inspirational role music played in the Civil Rights and other liberation movements. Tracking down cult queer films such



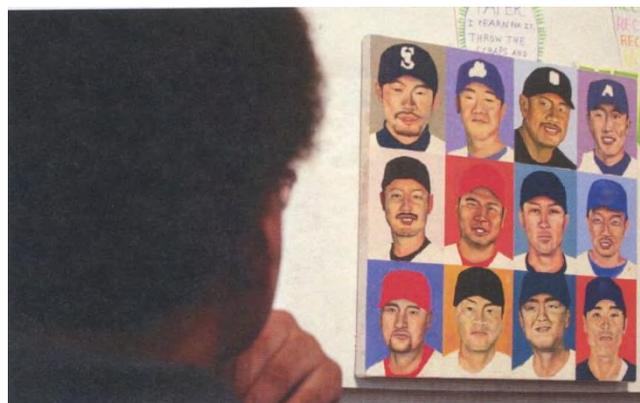
Jean Genet's repeatedly censored *Un Chant d'Amour* (1950), Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), or Barbara

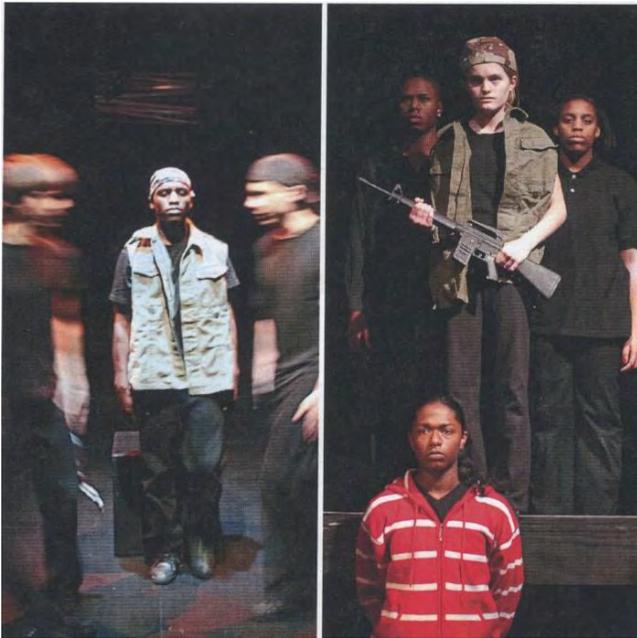
Hammer's *Dyketactics* (1974), helped galvanize a movement. Seeing the same revolutionary posters, again and again, on one's friends' apartment walls as well as one's own, affirmed a community and a shared history of struggle. Living in a neighborhood distinguished by its unique graffiti and murals, one reads and rereads one's communal "texts" daily.

This sense of community—of dialogue in a common "language"—is at the heart of the teaching and art-making that concern the articles assembled here, be they about neighbors attending a play where the performing youth mirror the audience to itself as a community (Abdow); an arts program that encourages agency in city youth (Hocking); performative communal engagement (Estrin); advanced art students responding with image and word to terrorism (Patten); or the liberatory practices of culture jamming (Frankenstein). Community is also at the heart of Caryl Churchill's play, *Seven Jewish Children*, which spans decades of gratuitous pain, Jewish and Palestinian, at once lodged in and perpetrated by people whose sense of self is deeply aggrieved and damaged. Like all the projects described below, the most viable response to Churchill's play is a constructive coming together—not merely the togetherness implied in "com-munity" but the joining of people in "-unity" for action.

Though there is no single orthodoxy or party line joining these and other radical/activist art examples we could have included here (an article on music is forthcoming), collaboration is evident in all of them. Art always aims to liberate the imagination and alter the way we see the world and how we think about art, but for political artists and their audiences the need is also to bring people together in thought and action that go beyond individualized experience. While the counter-hegemonic practices of politically Left art obviously energize the dissent and activism of those who are already inclined to radical views and actions, its often collaborative nature and public reiteration also touch people who are not necessarily part of the movement to begin with. As T.V. Reed notes in a quotation we include earlier, political dissent and action are galvanized by repeated public displays of alternative political and cultural values. For the contributors to this cluster of *Radical Teacher* articles, as artists, teachers and writers, at issue are not some abstract notions of pure "art" and "activism" but the *uses* to which we can put "art," broadly defined. Most immediately, these uses center on ways art, or indeed anything else we teach and do, intervenes in the political order to make visible new possibilities for change.

With special thanks to Deborah Bright (Rhode Island School of Design) for her substantive contributions to this cluster.





## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dominguez is quoted in Richard Marosi, "UC San Diego Professor Who Studies Disobedience Gains Followers—and Investigators," *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 2010, available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/07/local/la-me-ucsd-professor-20100507-53>.

<sup>2</sup> Maulana Karenga, "Black Art: Mute Matter Given Force and Function," in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 1974.

<sup>3</sup> T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xiv.

*The graphics used throughout this Introduction come from the original "Jamming the Works" cluster. Gran Fury appears on page 3, Photographs of Bread and Puppet by Donna Bister on page 4, New Urban Arts on page 5, and The Underground Railroad's Youth Program on page 6.*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



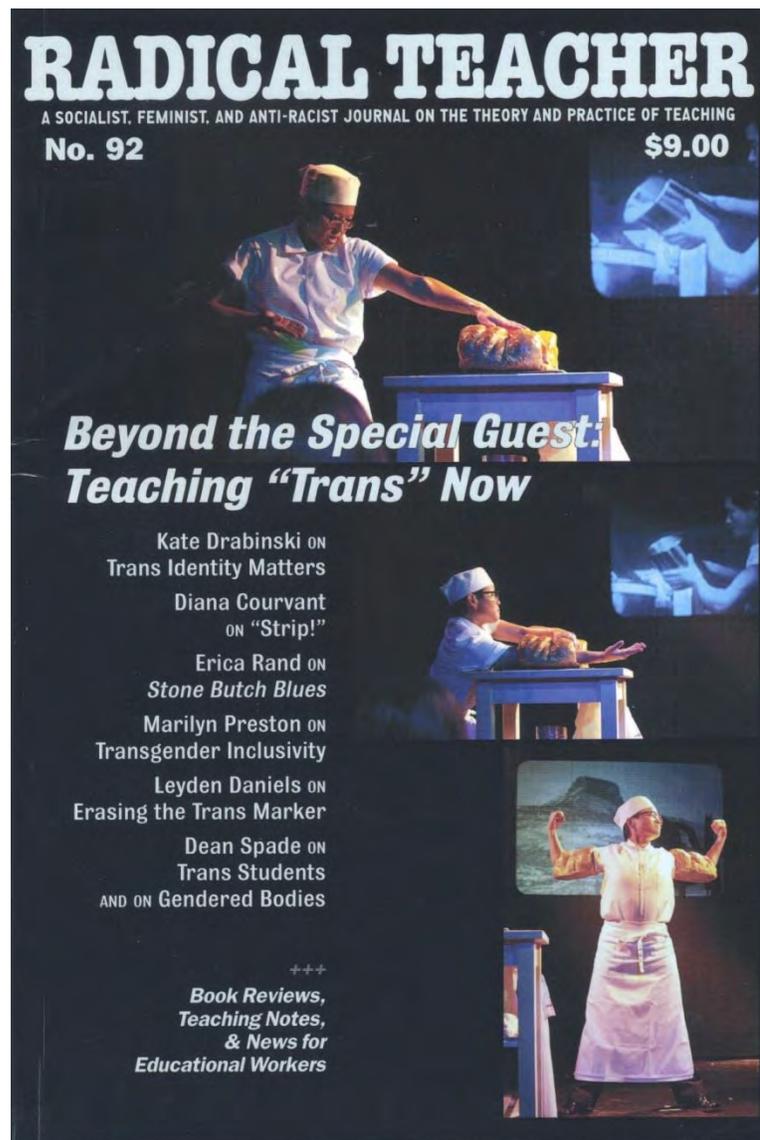
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women's Studies Classroom

by Kate Drabinski



Teaching transgender studies is often assumed to fall under the purview of gender and women's studies programs and the GLBT studies programs often nested there where claims have been made on the territories of gender and sexuality. The questions that have long plagued these programs persist: Is our subject matter women and men, gays and lesbians, transgender people? Or is it rather the *production* of those categories and how they come to matter? What, exactly, is the object of our study, when that object is so often our own subjectivities and a necessarily moving target? Identities are historical artifacts rather than static realities, so to teach identity-based programs is to risk further calcifying the very categories that operate to oppress those of us who live on the margins of them. At the same time, those categories are necessary to our understanding of very real material histories of oppression and resistance; to teach as if identity is mere figment would render invisible the very real legacies of domination that must be understood if they are to be undone.

Teaching transgender studies in a women's studies curriculum runs up against this old problem that scholars like to imagine we have solved. Transgender issues tend to be taught in the "special guest" model, never central in their own right and always interesting only insofar as they illuminate more clearly "women's" issues. This is evidenced in the literature, awash in tomes that open with anecdotes about individual transgender people and only then widen out, in syllabi that reserve a day for transgender issues, and in classrooms where "transgender" is reduced to a vocabulary word or an example to illuminate some other issue. As a result, transgender studies risks being ghettoized in a women's studies curriculum that is historically hostile to the field, if not the people,<sup>1</sup> and the great potential of teaching and learning from transgender is reduced to a freakish footnote in our students' notebooks to be trotted out at the next party as a crazy example of what they are teaching over in gender studies. Teaching transgender is thus particularly challenging given the lack of complicated public discourse about transgender people, identities, and movements, but this teaching has the potential to open up radical new pathways for thinking about gender, sexuality, and identity more generally. In what follows, I argue that teaching transgender as a set of practices rather than only or always as an extension of identity logics offers an important challenge to the dangerous assumptions most of my students have absorbed through popular discourses about transgender people. This teaching expands the purview of transgender studies beyond the study of individual transgender people to show students how transgender studies in this broader sense can help them think more generally through the social, cultural, and political issues at the heart of women's and gender studies.

In order to accomplish these goals, I center rather than marginalize transgender as a conceptual category in the women's and gender studies classroom, resisting the logic of identity inherent in what this issue of *Radical Teacher* so rightly identifies as the problem of the "special guest." More specifically, I begin my introductory course in gender and women's studies with Susan Stryker's work on

transgender feminism to center transgender as fundamental to understanding gender as practice rather than identity, even as those practices tend to congeal into identities that we experience as natural. I then organize class discussions and activities to get students to see how they too are implicated in social practices of gender, no matter how "natural" gender might feel to them. These exercises risk falling back into the logic of gender as personal identity, so my first written assignment asks students to think about gender and sex without thinking about human bodies at all. This layered approach to the texts we read, the classroom activities we engage, and the assignments we write radicalizes our teaching of not only transgender studies, but women's and gender studies more generally.

## Reading Transgender

How we teach is fundamentally tied up with who we teach. Students enroll in introductory gender and women's studies courses for all kinds of reasons: it fits their schedule, it fulfills a university diversity requirement, they want to learn about themselves, it is supposed to be easy or fun, and the list goes on. The introductory classroom is thus a real mix of students, some of whom have deep personal knowledge of the issues raised, others with some general interest but no expectation of being reflected back to themselves, and of course the occasional student who enrolls in order to play "devil's advocate" and fight against the perceived takeover by liberals of their university. (That bait must not be taken, but that is the subject of another article entirely.) This article draws on my experiences teaching at Tulane University, a large private research institution in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Tulane undergraduate population is over 80% white and largely economically privileged, with only 38% of this year's entering freshman class offered any amount of need-based financial aid.<sup>2</sup> The school has also been in the midst of a massive rebuilding project after the levee breaches of 2005. This rebuilding has taken the form of repairing and upgrading the physical plant, but also recasting Tulane as a school for students interested in civic engagement, pumping significant resources into service learning initiatives and public/private partnerships with K-12 schools in the city. Tulane's Gender and Sexuality Studies program has also undergone significant rebuilding, converting from a Women's Studies program serving a relatively small number of students in a truncated curriculum without dedicated courses in LGBT studies to one serving upwards of 200 students a term in introductory courses alone and a dedicated curricular track in sexuality studies.

That growth has been accompanied by a change in the students enrolling in program courses; increasingly students identify as queer or feminist and expect the course to speak to them. When I began teaching at Tulane in Fall 2007, courses attracted a comparatively narrow student type: white women, many of whom were active participants in the Greek system, few of whom identified, publicly, at least, as GLBT. In my first year I taught only one self-identified male student across six courses. My

Spring 2007 course in queer theory, titled "Sexual Politics" by a somewhat nervous program chair, drew a similar crowd. By the time of my last semester at Tulane, my classrooms were far more diverse in terms of gender identity, sexuality, and race, and I think this was largely a response to syllabi that focused on diverse experiences and course titles that signaled that approach to students, including Narratives of Race and Gender and Advanced Sexuality and Queer Theory as well as the increased visibility of a growing queer faculty. This shift has necessitated a shift in teaching strategy in order to meet the needs of a diverse community of learners, many of whom, frankly, are there only to take a "fun" class. The expectations of students, often tied up in their own sense of personal identity, significantly impact how transgender studies are taught—or rather, learned.

In spite of changing class demographics and the growing reputation of the program, many students are not really sure what they are supposed to learn in a class like mine. When I ask students on the first day of class what they think they are going to learn, I tend to get a lot of blank stares until someone raises her hand and mutters, "women?" Well, sort of, I say, before admitting to them that I have asked them the one and only trick question they will be asked in my class. We are not going to be able to pin down, once and for all, the object we think we are going to study precisely because one of our axioms will be that identities are sociohistorical constructions rather than permanent fixtures. At the same time, our objects of study are remarkably recalcitrant in the academy just as in real life, and regardless of the name of the program, Gender and Sexuality Studies, students and their teachers largely continue to follow the women's studies model. Students who enroll in the course expecting to see their identities reflected answer that first-day-of-class question differently, often with some version of, "I'm a woman/lesbian/gay man and want to learn about myself." I have not yet had a student come out as transgender on the first day of class, though given the way that identity category is becoming increasingly intelligible and available to students—and all of us—and hopefully an integrated part of gender and women's studies curricula, I will not be surprised when that happens; I have taught gender-variant students, but they have largely either not identified as such, or have "come out" in office hours or more private settings. Yet I must assume that my student population includes transgender students along with students struggling with gender identity, sexuality, invisible disabilities, and racial/ethnic identity. When it comes to identity, you really cannot tell by looking.

At the same time, in my experience, very few students are used to thinking about identity in terms of practices. Even if they recognize themselves as occupying an identity category, the practices that produce that identity are not automatically legible to them. For traditional college-aged students reared in educational settings that think about difference largely in terms of tolerance and diversity models, identity is a given, and having oneself recognized for who one *is* remains a primary goal of political identity formation. I struggle as a teacher to break out of these expectations even as I recognize the very different

interests, concerns, and stakes different students bring to the classroom. This first-day-of-school exercise highlights immediately the difficulties of teaching critical approaches to identity in an identity-based program where some students come to learn about themselves, assuming any discussion of their identities will reflect them back to themselves, and others come to learn from life's "special guests"; in both cases, identity logics overdetermine what students are ready to learn.

In order to combat this problem, I turn to Susan Stryker's work in transgender theorizing. In her essay "Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question," Stryker argues that women's studies should embrace the analytic lens offered by transgender theorizing to break from the mimetic model of sex and gender where sex is reified as a biological base from which the social world of gender is built. Transgender feminism, along with other feminisms of difference, potentially helps us break away from that old distinction to challenge "the ways in which bodily difference becomes the basis for socially constructed hierarchies, and helps us see in new ways how we are all inextricably situated, through the inescapable necessity of our own bodies, in terms of race, sex, gender, or ability" (85). Stryker goes on to explain how transgender theorizing can help us understand issues that affect all of us, beyond how gender works to its connection with disability, immigration politics, labor, family organization, criminalization of certain populations, and a whole host of

***When I ask students on the first day of class what they are going to learn, I tend to get a lot of blank stares until someone raises her hand and mutters, "women?"***

other sociopolitical and personal subjects. For Stryker, transgender as a category of analysis potentially offers a way to think about broad connections across areas often kept separate, analytically speaking. Stryker's work calls on women's studies to take seriously its commitments to thinking about difference and embodiment in terms of both specific experiences and universalizing structures. Beginning the course with Stryker's work on transgender feminism builds in a critique of false universalism from the very start, but it also introduces a tension that recurs in our critical-theoretical work as well as in the classroom: what is the connection between personal experience/selfhood and the social structures that delimit even as they enable the personal in the first place? In the case of teaching transgender in the classroom, the tendency of students to start with a focus on identity and identification, as the textbook indeed asks them to do, recapitulates the long-standing struggle to see transgender issues outside of the "special guest" model.

I find Stryker's argument utterly convincing and in line with my own intellectual and political commitments in the classroom. I teach her essay in the first two weeks of my Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Studies course every semester as one of the foundational texts of the course.

And yet invariably students respond to the text as if it is our “special guest,” in spite of its position at the very beginning of the course, rather than on its own argumentative terms. They ask why Stryker waits until the end of the essay to tell the reader that she identifies as transgender. They want to know how genital surgery is done and how common it is, and they make their squeamish faces as I give them the answers they have requested. They use male pronouns to refer to the author or ask me what pronoun to use, in spite of the fact that *Susan* Stryker never brings up the pronoun question in this particular piece. The intellectual currency of the piece is often lost in a sea of probing personal questions exactly of the sort Stryker demands we resist in its challenge to remove *any* particular body as the “ultimate ground for feminist practice” (85).

I used to find this response *only* frustrating, proving that the persistent representation of transgender people as singular freaks had overcome my students’ ability to read an article critically, but after several years of teaching this piece and transgender issues more generally, I have come to see this response as an essential teaching moment. Students respond to these issues in terms of “the special guest” partly because of the way these issues are most often presented to them. Popular culture portrays gender variant people as the special guest quite literally, on talk shows and made-for-TV documentaries on the Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel, and other stations that have professionalized the freak show. This representative tendency carries over to the academic field as well where all too many introductory syllabi continue to follow the pattern of starting with discussions of an assumed category of “woman” and adding differences as the semester wears on. It is our job, as teachers, to respond to this classroom moment in ways that challenge not only the students, but also ourselves, to respond to Stryker’s call to center practices rather than identities, and to unmoor bodies from our naturalized assumptions of difference as difference *from* sex-normativity. I have responded by choosing a textbook and designing class discussions and assignments that frame the course in terms of gender, rather than women, a still-radical move in most programs, even those that have changed from women’s studies to women’s and gender studies, or gender and sexuality studies, an example yet again of how changing a name is not enough to change how we do our work.

I use the textbook *Feminist Frontiers* in my introductory course precisely because it does not replicate the additive identity logics that women’s studies curricula struggle to escape, in spite of decades of criticism and new scholarship. Taylor, Rupp, and Whittier’s textbook opens with the section, “Diversity and Difference,” comprised of articles from Peggy McIntosh’s classic, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” to Paula Gunn Allen’s also-classic, “Where I Come From is Like This.” The many “differences” represented in their first section undo the expected special guest format of the women’s studies syllabus or textbook, centering alterity rather than mimesis as a model for thinking feminism. At the same time, the collection cannot help but reflect, to a certain extent, the special guest model. Part of this is, I think, simply a

problem of identity and grammar. Identity is intersectional, and yet, linguistically, we cannot talk about single aspects without excluding others, at least for the moment that a word takes up a single spot in space and time. As a result, this peppering of “difference and diversity” can give the impression of a tossed salad where we just are not talking about the lettuce yet. The following section, “Theoretical Foundations,” succumbs to this danger in some respects. Although structurally this section comes second, its title indicates that this is where the meat of the course will begin, that this is the “foundation.” The first readings introduce students to gender as an analytical category before complicating gender with other differences. Stryker’s essay, for example, is situated in the midst of a whole array of women’s studies’ “special guests.” The textbook and our teaching practices, in other words, are themselves partly responsible, along with that one *Grey’s Anatomy* episode or *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, for soliciting this response from students.

## Talking Transgender

The readings I assign aim explicitly to center alterity as key to thinking about gender, and yet reading alone is not enough to break students from the gender dichotomy that is so natural to so many of us. How do we get students to see beyond this easy dichotomy in a way they can get in their guts? I organize my class discussions to get students to *feel* gender. I begin by asking students to tell me how they know if someone is male or female. The answers are usually slow in coming, as students seem to think it is a rather silly question. We all know what makes a boy a boy and a girl a girl, or so they think, and the first answers are usually related to body parts: breasts, vaginas, penises, and the occasional Adam’s apple. I point out that we are not usually privy to the privates of our acquaintances, and yet we still think we always know. I point out that gender is also in our names (I review enrollments before each semester, and I am usually fairly certain how many men versus how many women I will have in class), how we sit in seats in public (I model this by sitting “like a girl,” legs crossed, upright, and then “like a boy,” splayed out, taking up a lot of space), what happens to our voices when we give answers in class (women students often have that questioning lilt at the end of each statement), and the list goes on: what we wear, the bags we carry, what razors we use and where on our bodies we use them, what kind of car we drive, what movies we are supposed to want to watch, the games we play—and watch—in our free time, and on and on and on.

My goal with this opening exercise is to get students to see that gender is not only more than what we assume to be “real” biological sex, but that it is all-pervasive, shaping our experiences of ourselves down to our very bodily comportment, each other in our relationships, and the social and political world. I make this point by showing my students the difference in how women and men tend to sit on public transportation, an example most students can relate to. I sit upright with my arms pulled in and my legs crossed tight, and then I make that gendered switch, slumping down, opening my legs, *taking up space*. I am

just sitting here, but in my sitting, I am *doing* gender. This exercise always gets a laugh because the difference is immediately recognizable, though for most students, it is not something they have articulated before. I ask students if they fully identify with everything on one or the other list of male/female attributes, and invariably they do not. They look around the room and see women slumped down and spread out, women with short hair, men with purses at their feet, and they see in a real way that when it comes to gender, everybody is doing it, but nobody is doing it exactly "right." I want students to see immediately that for all of us, there is a gap between gender ideals and the realities of our lived experiences. This sets the students up to better understand Stryker's claims in their next reading that rather than thinking in terms of transgender *people*, we would do well to think in terms of transgender phenomena as practices and acts rather than identities. Stryker defines transgender phenomena as any practice or act that steps outside the boundaries of gender normativity as against an understanding of transgender as a contemporary practice of identity. Stryker's theoretical intervention widens not only the scope of transgender issues, but also the category of gender; as she writes, "transgender makes the category of woman more interesting" (83). Such various acts as women wearing bloomers and riding bicycles to playing sports to men wearing makeup and dancing freely can all be considered part of the transgender spectrum. I teach students to think about transgender issues in these terms precisely to move away from the "special guest" paradigm and to center transgender issues, experiences, and history in a discussion of gender that is both deeply personal and entirely structural.

***I next focus my students on gender not as an attribute of identity—though it certainly is that—but as a structural category that can be removed from the human body altogether and that moves through social life as a tool of normativity.***

Although this approach helps center rather than marginalize transgender issues, it risks reaffirming gender as a natural category of identity that is open to free choice; I can *choose* to wear a skirt or pants, and it is this choice that determines whether or not I am subject to violent gender discipline or not. Students regularly make choices about whether to shave or not, to dress up or not, to wear makeup or not, and I do not want to level out those experiences with the experiences of transpeople for whom choice simply does not have the same meaning. In order to do this, I next focus my students on gender not as an attribute of identity—though it certainly is that—but as a structural category that can be removed from the human body altogether and moves through social life as a tool of normativity. For most students, this is a terrifically radical move. For them, as, I would argue, for most people, gender is something taken for granted as a natural part of

the self. It is one of the first things we notice about people we meet, but we hardly ever notice that we are noticing it until we are forced to by either our own experience of an incongruity between the gender we are told we are, and how we think about ourselves, or by meeting someone whose gender is not immediately sussed out by looking. Part of being intelligible to ourselves and others is to be intelligible in terms of gender, and as a result, gender has become completely and utterly naturalized; that does not mean, however, that gender is *natural*.

## Writing Transgender

In order to break up this naturalized understanding of gender, I ask my students to see gender as a mobile category that does not come prepackaged in human bodies. My first written assignment builds on this approach to teaching gender by asking students to see gender as not simply a personal attribute of free choice, but as a category of existence that must be continuously reaffirmed if it is to make sense and do the work of organizing our social lives as it does. In the essay assignment, "Gendered Objects," I ask students to write a critical analysis of how an object socially constructs gender. In other words, how does an object tell us the story of normal gender? As Jeanne Kilbourne powerfully points out in her *Killing Us Softly* series, advertisers are not simply selling us their products; they are simultaneously selling us values, identities, morals, and, most fundamentally, *what it means to be normal*. Once students have their eyes opened to the ubiquitous and essential nature of gender, they see it everywhere, and this assignment helps them put that into words. Students will write about fairly obvious examples, comparing and contrasting, for example, Secret deodorant with Old Spice, or Dove products with those from Dove's brother company, Axe. These kinds of objects are coded in relentlessly dichotomous ways, meeting the grossest gender norms out there. Other students dig a bit deeper and discover gender in such surprising places where gender seems irrelevant, such as drawer hardware, travel websites, and trash bags. It turns out, they discover, that gender is everywhere, and as such, it is not just a property that inheres in their cells from the moment of birth, either pink or blue, but an analytical and ideological category that is much more complicated than whether or not you wear a skirt.

Students also learn, through discussion with peers about their different projects, that the very same gendered images and practices can mean different things to different readers. Building on discussions of standpoint theory, this aspect of the project helps students see through discussion that the way we each "see" is shaped by where we stand. For example, where some students might argue that beer is for dudes, flavored martinis are for girls, and straight whiskey or bourbon is for men, other students challenge those assumptions in class discussion from communities not wedded to such heteronormative understandings of gender. As a self-identified lesbian student once argued in class, a woman ordering a Jack on the rocks at a dyke bar is doing gender in a very different way than a frat guy ordering the same drink at a college bar. Diet products like

Lean Cuisine and Diet Coke have also shown students how what might read as “girly” in one sexed and gendered community reads differently in some queer contexts where staying thin is an essential part of embodying some gay masculinities. The introduction of Coke Zero, a masculinized version of Diet Coke, has added another wrinkle to these readings as companies recognize the ever-shifting complex terrain of social gender in order to sell us more stuff in more ways.

Classroom arguments about the gendered nature of ads often emerge when students bring up some of the most obviously misogynistic advertising campaigns. Nary a semester goes by without a student bringing up the cadre of advertisements from Axe. This company’s body care products are aggressively marketed to young men by arguing that “the Axe effect” will result in users of the product getting mobbed by conventionally pretty, skinny, slutty girls. Many students write papers about their different ad campaigns, decrying the obvious misogyny embedded in Axe’s representational strategies. I complicate this easy reading by asking them to consider the role of humor. The representations are so outrageous and perhaps meant to elicit laughs about these silly notions of heterosexualized masculinity; does that change our reading? Who is the assumed audience, and who is actually the market for this stuff? Students have told me over the years that the real market for Axe is junior high school boys, and the classroom has reverberated with laughter over the idea of the smell of Axe wafting through middle-school hallways as boys aim for an older and more virile

masculinity in a setting where that stuff is most up for grabs. Other students find the ad campaigns so unremittingly sexist that any humor is lost, just part of the cover for telling old stories about women as hapless sluts, almost animalistic in their response to the Virile Male. Still others argue that from their perspective, the ads are really about marketing men to men, in spite of the presence of women; it is the men’s sexuality that is really on display. I share with them my own experience of purchasing the Axe body wash and “detailler” (the very gendered name of their loofah). Nothing about the marketing campaign suggests this is a product for me, so one might argue that my purchase and use of it is an example of transgender phenomena. On the other hand, others might argue that I am simply buying into and supporting negative portrayals

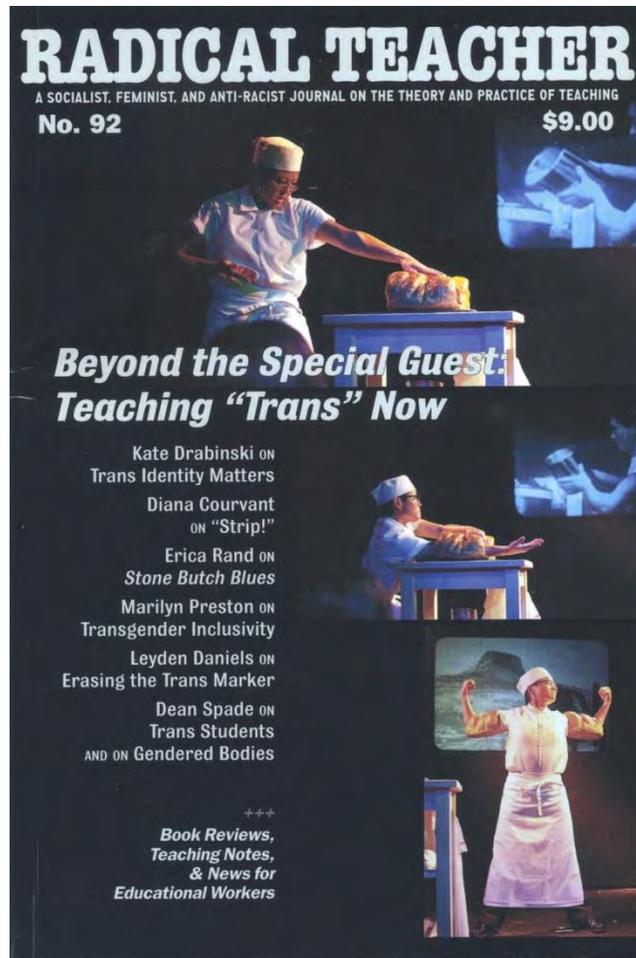
of women. Or perhaps it is an example of doing gender as a butch lesbian. Again, one’s interpretation of images and the way gender and sexuality work through them is dependent on one’s standpoint. The assignment allows students to share their different interpretations based on their own situatedness, driving home the point that gender is more and bigger than any individual interpretation. This kind of classroom interaction is only possible in a diverse classroom, diverse in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, class, and, if at all possible, age.

The results of this first assignment often show me how difficult it is as teachers to get students to really get, in their guts, the ways in which gender is a lot more complicated than the dichotomies they are sold and use to

think through their own sense of gender identity. Part of the difficulty is the persistent ways popular representational practices reduce gender to its basest stereotypes. To someone unfamiliar with our culture who only consumed television or visited our drugstores, men and women would appear to be two radically different species, and everyone would have to be one or the other in order to figure out what and how to shave (legs or face, Venus or Mach 3 Turbo), what to eat (Lean Cuisine or Hungry Man meals), and more. Of course, none of us live our lives by blithely following gender orders from Madison Avenue. I ask my students to consider what assumptions would be made about someone buying or using the object who did not occupy the gender status assumed by the object itself. First responses are usually aimed at what they expect I want to hear as a gender studies professor: that a man shaving with a Venus razor

will be called a faggot while a woman buying a Hungry Man will be called a fat dyke. This is of course not the case at all, even if men eating yogurt appears to put one at real risk of being called a pussy, according to a recent campaign from Yoplait. In reality, gender norms are much more complicated than this, and that is part of Stryker’s point, I think. If we think in terms of teaching transgender phenomena rather than teaching transgender people, we can radicalize our understanding of gender and, as a result, bring transgender studies out of the shadows of women’s studies.

One of the risks of this approach, however, is to vacate the category of transgender of its specificity as an historical identity category.<sup>3</sup> In other words, we are not all



transgender, and to claim otherwise would make it difficult to talk about the specific issues facing transgender people and risk abandoning the potential intersectional connections that transgender issues can articulate. As Stryker argues, being transgender, theorizing from the standpoint of transgender subjectivity, means being able to articulate wide-ranging issues due to the position of her body at the intersections of gender, modes of embodiment, and the technologies of power that work at the level of the body in the service of other social and political practices. Stryker summarizes like this: "Let me recapitulate what I can personally articulate through transgender: misogyny, homophobia, racism, looksism, disability, medical colonization, coercive psychiatrization, undocumented labor, border control, state surveillance, population profiling, the prison-industrial complex, employment discrimination, lack of health care, denial of access to social services, and violent hate crimes" (87). She can articulate these things precisely because, in her words, her "bodily being lives in the space where these issues intersect" (87). Teaching transgender must attend to the specificities of a certain identity-based reality while also remaining open as an analytical concept.

This is the double-edged sword of teaching transgender like this: either transgender is everywhere, or it is nowhere. As a teacher, I find myself stuck between wanting students—including trans and gender-variant students—to find points of entry, which often take the form of identification, and wanting students to learn without meeting the narcissistic demand that they always be able to relate to what we are learning. I deal with this problem by using the transgender framework to discuss other issues in the course, ones that do not on the face of things appear to be transgender issues. For example, where the textbook groups articles around the theme of Violence Against Women, I recall Stryker's article and reframe the issue as *gendered* and *sexual* violence, related to policing proper masculinity and femininity as well as heterosexuality. Stryker's sense of transgender as an articulating category reframes this classic feminist debate in very useful ways that neither refuse the specificities of violence against transgender people nor the analytical utility of thinking about transgender as a description of practices that exceed the framework of identity. The gendered object assignment is one I return to as an example throughout the semester to keep the focus on gender as a practice that both is and

is not of the body, and of identity. In combination with the reading assignments and class discussion, this approach retains the radical potentiality of transgender that is lost when it congeals into an identity category while also showing the ways in which identity categories themselves are historical processes, shifting and changing, no matter how dear our identities are to ourselves.

#### WORKS CITED

- Killing Us Softly 4*. Dir. Sut Jhally. Perf. Jeanne Kilbourne. Media Education Foundation, 2010. Film.
- Stryker, Susan. "Transgender Feminism." *Feminist Frontiers*, 8th Edition. Eds. Verta Taylor, Leila Rupp, and Nancy Whittier. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008. 83-88.

#### Notes

- 1 For an excellent review of historical and contemporary intersections of women's studies and transgender studies, see Talia Bettcher and Ann Garry's introductory essay to Hypatia's special issue on what they call the "interaction" between feminism and transgender studies, titled "Transgender Studies and Feminism: Theory, Politics, and Gendered Realities." *Hypatia* vol. 24, no. 3 (Summer, 2009).
- 2 "College Search Tulane." College Board. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Aug 2011. <<http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/search/CollegeDetail.jsp?collegeId=2291&profileId=2>>.
- 3 See David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



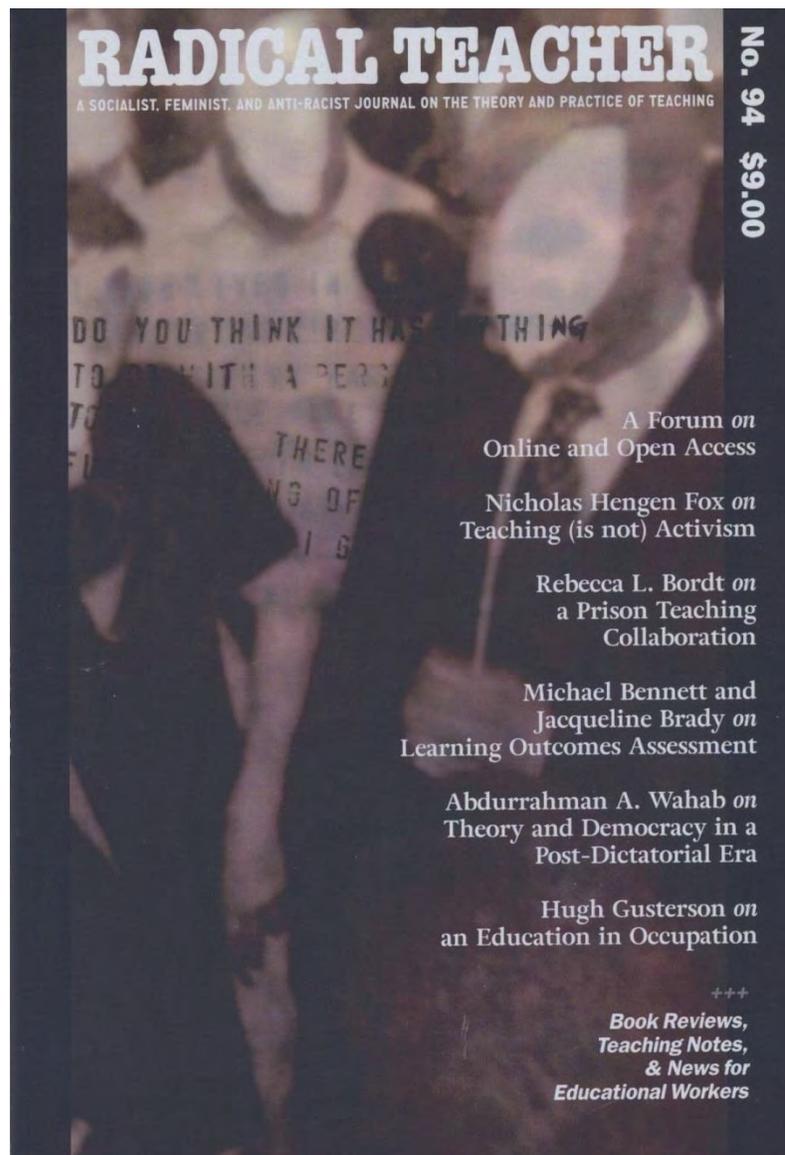
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## A Radical Critique of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Movement

by Michael Bennett and Jacqueline Brady



The Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA) movement seems rather innocuous. Teachers and administrators at colleges and universities are asked to articulate the goals, objectives, measures, and outcomes of the educational process at every level: from the classroom to the department to the institution as a whole. Educators engage in this process with the help of curriculum mapping or educational matrices or a host of other tools and templates provided by any number of readily available frameworks (see the website of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment for many examples). The information gathered is then used to evaluate curricula, programs, instructors, and institutions for purposes of internal review and external evaluation.

And yet we insist that a radical perspective on the LOA movement can be summarized in one word: RESIST! Why resist what appears, on the surface, to be such a benign process? Our radical critique of LOA goes beneath the surface level to historicize the movement, examine its socio-political contexts, and ultimately suggest that the movement provides an ideological smokescreen acting as a distraction from the real problems with U.S. higher education.

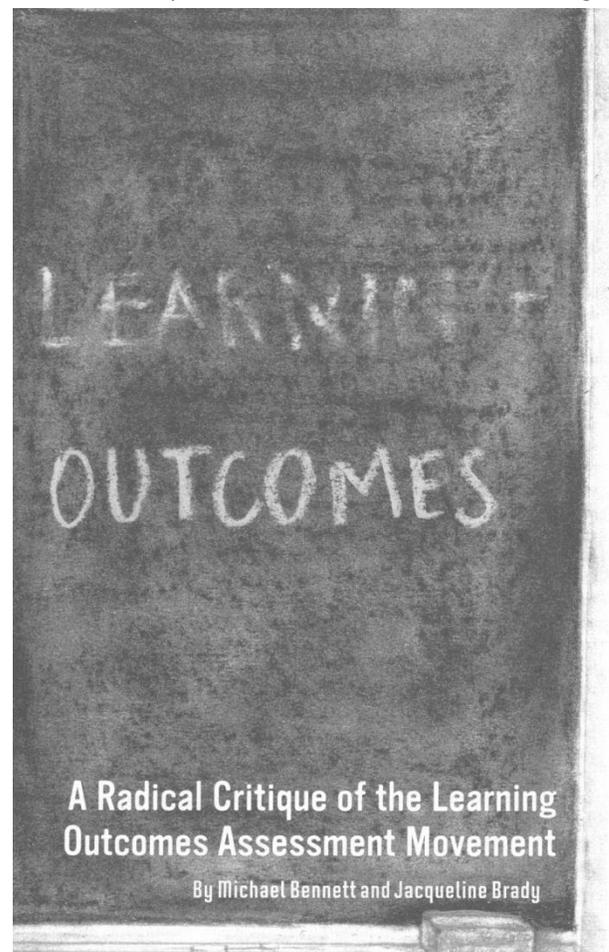
First, we need to distinguish between the LOA movement and legitimate faculty-driven efforts at curriculum development, best assessment practices, and course evaluation. Trevor Hussey and Patrick Smith delineate three types of learning outcomes that are the result of: 1) one lesson; 2) an entire course; and 3) a whole program of study. According to Hussey and Smith, the first two types are basically mere changes in vocabulary from “lesson plan” and “course content” to “learning outcomes.” They argue that the focus on learning outcomes becomes less effective as you move beyond the individual lesson toward a full course, until it is basically meaningless when used to articulate outcomes for whole programs of study.

The use of the term “learning outcome” for what is to be included in a whole program of study leading to a qualification such as a degree constitutes a misuse. In short, the further away from the student and the teacher in a classroom, the more remote, generalized, and irrelevant statements of learning outcomes become (114). Because engaged learning is so complex, the level at which the LOA movement most often is focused renders meaningful assessment impossible. Outcomes become a “device for monitoring and auditing” educators, rather than a tool of teaching and learning (Hussey and Smith, “The Uses” 357). Thus Hussey and Smith conclude that “The focus on intended learning outcomes . . . has more to do with administrative and regulatory necessity rather than education in the sense of students’ deep engagement with curriculum” (“The Uses” 358).

In the United States, the roots of the LOA movement, as opposed to engaged learning practices, can be traced back to Taylorism and theories of scientific management. LOA is really another manifestation for the standards movement, which emerged alongside the efficiency movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the first decade of the last century, business models, rhetoric, and

ideology had so saturated the field of K-12 education that educators themselves began proposing that schools should run as efficiently as factories. A social efficiency movement in education took firm hold, with influential proponents such as William C. Bagley, who wrote the textbook *Classroom Management* in 1907 so that teachers, educators, and professionals in the field might better apply the principles of scientific management to their workspaces. His book was followed by Franklin Bobbit’s *The Curriculum*, in 1918. Drawing his influence from business and economic sectors, Bobbit—the inventor of Curriculum Theory—argued that schools, like businesses, should be efficient, eliminate waste, and focus on outcomes to the degree that the curriculum must be useful in shaping students into adult workers. Along with Frederick Winslow Taylor, Bobbit believed that efficient outcomes depended on centralized authority and precise, top down instruction for all tasks performed. Teachers were expected to acquiesce in the outside knowledge of efficiency experts—administrators and professors of education. Thus, curriculum was conceived of as a normalizing device and instrument of social regulation, one that would help control the working class so that the United States could better compete with German production. In the last century’s efficiency movement, as in the current LOA movement, teachers were conceived of as passive receptacles, rather than primary players in the process of education (Eisner 347).

In the contemporary context, assessment advocate Peter Ewell argues that LOA transferred from the mainstream corporate world to the realm of higher



education starting in the 1980s when the "burgeoning competency movement in corporate training . . . [stimulated] accreditation's interest in examining student learning outcomes" (3) as part of the effort to "develop a '21<sup>st</sup> Century' workforce" (2). Rising with the tide of late twentieth century neo-conservatism/neo-liberalism, the discourse of LOA circulated from private think tanks and non-governmental organizations, such as the conservative American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) and its neo-liberal cousin the Committee for Economic Development (CED), to the halls of Congress as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and Congressional Hearings on Assuring Quality and Accountability in Postsecondary Education and the White House, most famously in the Spellings Report (2005), but also in various other Department of Education pronouncements made over the past ten years.

ACTA's report *Can College Accreditation Live Up to its Promise?* makes the link between outcomes assessment and accreditation when it claims that accrediting agencies had historically focused only on inputs rather than outcomes: "Rather than ensuring education quality, accreditation merely verifies that a school has what accreditors regard as the proper inputs and procedures" (Leef and Burris 2). This leads to the conclusion that accrediting agencies should be limited or abolished unless they accept ACTA's agenda:

*First, the connection between eligibility for government student aid and accreditation should be severed. Second, trustees should become more active in the accreditation process. Third, state governments should bring needed competition to the field of accreditation . . . Finally, the accreditation associations should start acting in a manner more akin to business consultants . . . (Leef and Burris 3).*

ACTA at least has the virtue of being clear: the business of higher education is business; teachers and students should be subject to the same disciplinary measures as any other workers and their products. Frederick Taylor would be proud.

The dictates of capital still generate the discourse of outcomes assessment, which is characterized by the buzzwords and practices of neo-conservative/neo-liberal ideology. The phrases that recur include educational consumers, target market, corporate management perspective, competitiveness, value, efficiency, productivity, regulatory burden, stakeholder demands, return on investment, entrepreneurship, and value-added education.<sup>1</sup> Institutions of higher learning and the education process become just like factories that manufacture and sell products.

To see how this discourse circulates, here is Rep. Thomas E. Petri of the House Subcommittee on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competitiveness of the Committee of Education and the Workforce at the aforementioned Congressional hearings of 2003-2004 repeating ACTA's agenda almost word for word:

*Unfortunately, accreditation, these days, has little to do with academic rigor or educational outcomes. Rather, it serves only to show that a school has the right sort of inputs. Yesterday, I introduced HR 838, the Higher Education Accrediting Agency Responsibility Act. This legislation eliminates the requirement that schools be accredited in order to receive federal student aid funds. It will help to open the accreditation process to competition.*

In the names of "freedom" and "competition," this legislation directly adopts ACTA's call for a shift from inputs to outcomes. It eliminates the requirement that federal aid go to students only at accredited universities so that non-accredited for-profit schools of suspect quality can compete for those federal funds.

***The phrases that recur include educational consumers, target market, corporate management perspective, competitiveness, value, efficiency, productivity, regulatory burden, stakeholder demands, return on investment . . .***

With anxiety mounting about the state of the economy and joblessness in the United States and widespread fear that North America will not be a competitive force in the globalized market, the influence of the LOA movement has successfully spread to various educational governing bodies. The National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) try to show their "reasonableness" by accommodating corporate interests. Accrediting agencies, as the AAUP Committee on Accreditation points out, get co-opted by governmental pressure and the lobbying efforts of for-profit pseudo-schools such as the University of Phoenix and Jones International. Even some prestigious members of professional academic organizations such as the Modern Languages Association (MLA) have promoted LOA.

Gerald Graff's first column as incoming president of the MLA in 2008, "Assessment Changes Everything," illustrates the problems with liberal/centrist advocacy for the LOA movement. Graff adopts the mantra that LOA will reveal how "our own pedagogical and curricular practices contribute to the achievement gap." This argument relies on a logical fallacy common in the LOA movement (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*/after this therefore because of this) in assuming that if there is still an achievement gap after four or more years of schooling, then it must be caused by our teaching practices. To the extent that graduate programs teach roughly the same things and thus undergraduate curricula look generally very similar, it is not the slight variation in internal pedagogical practices that create an achievement gap but the huge structural inequalities that are everywhere evident in the widely divergent resources available to students and faculty of different classes. Blind to such structural inequalities, the conservative/neo-liberal discourse of LOA ignores the contextual situations in which

students of different classes study, obscuring the fact that better educational opportunities require fundamental social change.

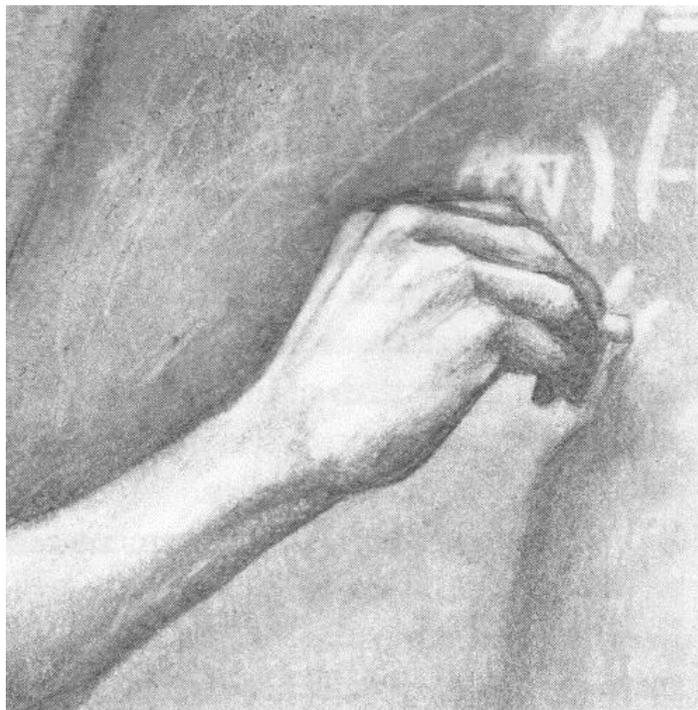
Second, Graff's centrist position erases the full historical context of the LOA movement, claiming that "the original motivations of assessment lie in legitimate progressive efforts to reform higher education from within." This may be true of certain localized assessment practices, but the original motivations for securing standardized outcomes on a national level are rooted in conservative movements for industrial scientific management. And frighteningly reactionary bipartisan forces, such as the Walton Family Foundation of Walmart and Gates Foundation of Microsoft, are still driving the current LOA movement. Through their corporate reform agenda, they are seeking to impose a mandatory exit exam for tenth graders and terminate schooling for those students who fail it.

Third, Graff errs in saying "that the leadership in outcomes assessment comes from state universities and community colleges rather than from the high-prestige elites is another indication of the democratic character of the movement." Far from revealing the "democratic character" of LOA, the fact that it has been most prominent in community colleges and state universities shows that these institutions are less able to resist onerous disciplinary mechanisms than are "high-prestige elites." These are strapped institutions serving underprepared student populations. They operate in constrained circumstances and are often subject to trustees and administrators who are more accountable to local business communities than to educators or students. Those of us who teach at non-elite institutions can readily testify that LOA is yet another way in which we are made to engage in unpaid seemingly purposeless service and bureaucratic red tape from which our more fortunate compatriots are exempt. It is also another way in which already meager funding is misdirected away from the needs of students and towards private businesses connected to the testing industry, even as classroom sizes swell and university trustees call for reducing credit hours in humanities courses.

In sum, Graff reveals a classic liberal's blindness to the ideological and socioeconomic contexts in which a practice exists by assuming a kind of level playing field on which we all operate. As we have seen, the original motivations for high stakes assessment are rooted in the undemocratic

movement for social efficiency that arose from industrial scientific management, which categorized and tracked students as different kinds of workers, maintaining a strict divide among social classes. However "democratic" recent assessment practices may claim to be, the LOA movement has been and will be used for profoundly undemocratic ends—as a disciplinary mechanism for college administrations, government entities, and accrediting agencies that seek to "objectively" measure the practices of institutions with vastly different resources serving dramatically stratified student bodies.

The effects of the LOA movement can be seen most powerfully so far in the K-12 system. In spite of the fact that there is really no evidence that the data produced by high stakes testing and the whole LOA movement is useful to teachers or beneficial to students, the results of low tests scores have been used recently by policy makers and politicians in a public siege against teachers—to vilify,



LEICHA CURBIN/OLYMPIA

shame, threaten, and fire them. Consider any of the following events of the past two years: in Rhode Island in 2010, the Superintendent of Central Falls High School decided to fire all of the school's 74 teachers if they did not comply with a program designed to improve student math scores; in Washington, D.C. in 2011, 206 teachers were fired for not sufficiently meeting the requirements for test score improvement; at an MIT conference this past December, NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg blustered that if he had his way he would cut the number of NYC teachers

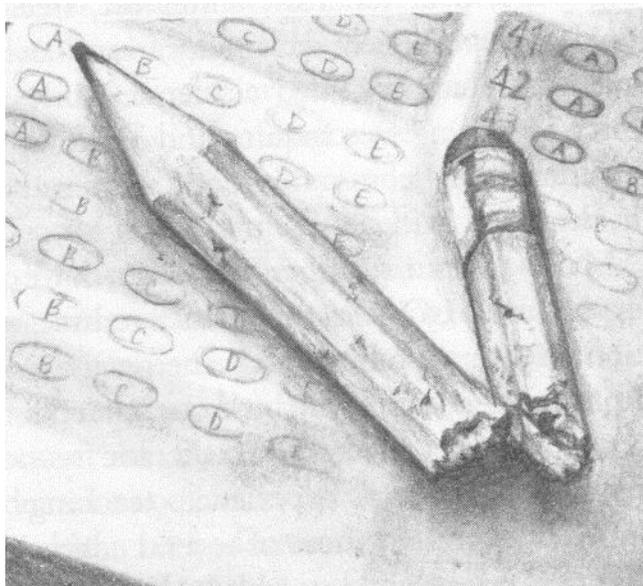
in half and double the class size because this would be a better "deal" for students; and finally, just last month in New York, the DOE decided to publish the ratings (largely based on student test scores) of 18,000 NYC public school teachers.

Who benefits from this system wherein high stakes testing (read: outcomes) is used by politicians and policy makers to drum up public vitriol against teachers? Private businesses do. In primary and secondary education, low test scores have become not only a battle cry for the creation of more charter schools, but also the excuse to spend public funding on private multinational companies in the growing testing industry. The Government Accounting Office estimated that from 2002 to 2008, the amount that states would pay private multinational companies such as Harcourt Education Measurement and CTB McGraw-Hill for developing and scoring tests mandated by NCLB would fall between 1.9 and 5.3 billion dollars (Miner). Experts further suggested that additional indirect costs of things such as

test preparation, practice exams, and testing workshops could make the final amount spent on implementing NCLB testing 8 to 15 times higher (Miner).

This misdirection of much needed resources away from students and classrooms and towards private companies is by far the most insidious result of the LOA movement in higher education today. Increasingly, in state universities and community colleges where resources are also scarce, dollars that could be much better used to defray the rapidly rising costs of student tuition instead are spent on outcomes assessment—to hire assessment experts; to create assessment measures; to analyze, score, and report on tests; to train teachers to teach towards tests; and to train administrators how to implement and advocate for more testing.

Readers of *Radical Teacher* know that the problems our students face with outcomes (such as graduation rates, performance on standardized measures, and obtaining good jobs) are most directly and intimately connected to



ALL DRAWINGS IN THIS ARTICLE ARE BY LEIGH CUNNINGHAM

inputs: inadequate college preparation; extensive family obligations; working at minimum wage; student debt; a corporatized educational system at odds with academic labor; inadequate healthcare and nutrition; lack of access to social, cultural, and economic capital. The actual reasons that students drop out of school, fail classes, or are unable to secure a “good job” have nothing to do with factors that can be measured by LOA. As James Pontuso and Sarranna Thornton point out, very little data produced by outcomes assessment is useful because “metrics do not exist that would allow individual colleges to assess student learning while simultaneously controlling for student aptitude, willingness and ability to do college level academic work, and other variables”(63). What separates positive from negative learning outcomes has everything to do with access to support mechanisms inside and outside the classroom and with available resources—wealth, health, time, self-confidence, and preparation. Just as SAT scores have been shown to correlate with nothing as strongly as family income, LOA is really measuring and maintaining

inequality.<sup>2</sup> For there is mounting evidence suggesting that high stakes testing actually creates more inequality by increasing the gap between higher and lower achieving students, instead of closing the “race gap,” the stated aim of standardized testing according to most of its advocates (See “High Stakes Testing Hurts Education” on the website for Fair Test: The National Center for Fair and Open Testing).

Thus the LOA movement is not at all a genuine attempt to decrease the “race gap,” improve education, and get students onto an even playing field. It is part of the broad bipartisan campaign to privatize the system of public education. It is also a way for the wealthy to control the working class (increasingly becoming the working poor) and maintain class stratification. As outcomes assessment functions, working-class students at poor colleges and universities are required to take more high stakes exams than their peers at wealthier private and public schools. Their professors are required to compromise their own understanding of effective and thorough teaching and give up precious class time prepping students for those exams. The working-class students at these schools, who are exposed to exams that are disconnected from the content of their courses, come to see education not as deep learning, critical thinking, or understanding, but as skills and drills. In other words, now colleges and universities, not just high schools, are providing the perfect training for low-skilled jobs. And this is a good thing for the wealthy, especially those who know that the only real projected job growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that of relatively low-skilled jobs. Meanwhile students in wealthy and elite colleges and universities will largely be exempt from such high stakes testing and testing preparation and so will have more time to be groomed to compete for whatever higher paying jobs are still available. Ultimately, this whole process of LOA works not only to make education profitable for the wealthy, but also to strengthen the forces that control working-class students and to normalize the success of students in elite schools.

Outcomes assessment also has a long history, as the new form of standardization. It is part of an old dodge from the real problems with the American educational system: that it is embedded in an inequitable and violent socioeconomic system deliberately established by corporate powers. The kind of policies that would truly help the students with whom we work are not more hearings, campus visits, and testing, but adequate funding for secondary education; child care; a living wage; debt relief or, better yet, free universal post-secondary education; an adequately compensated academic workforce exercising free inquiry and building an educational community; and universal healthcare.

Many of us in higher education have experienced LOA first hand as a redirection of our resources and energy away from the needs of faculty and our students and towards a bloated bureaucratic system. Kamala Platt’s experiences teaching in Texas represent those of several educators who contributed to a lively discussion of LOA on the MLA’s Radical Caucus listserv,<sup>3</sup> revealing that mandated assessment practices have harmful effects when “they corporatize the education process, molding both

faculty and students to meet expectations created (often by those with little or no educational training) outside the classroom or even the Department” (Platt). In Texas, as in many states, the chief impetus for LOA is coming from right-wing members of the state legislature, Board of Education, and boards of trustees. Kamala notes that there is also a racialized component to the LOA movement, which attempts “to homogenize classrooms and curricula, and to marginalize those teachers or students who do not fit homogenization.” And in practice, LOA procedures are also alienating for faculty who have to fill their syllabi with university-approved boilerplate and surrender autonomy over their classrooms in order to generate required material for externally “dictated student learning objectives.” The LOA movement acts not on behalf of those it purports to help, but on behalf of the forces that seek to discipline and contain them. As Kathleen Kane puts it, LOA’s “mode of address is upward, hierarchical, and focused on the bureaucratic.”

The LOA movement is a danger to students because it pretends that their problems have more to do with easily quantifiable outcomes rather than with the need to create an environment conducive to truly engaged student learning through legitimate faculty-driven efforts at curriculum development and course evaluation. Through such misdirection, fetishizing LOA is likely to increase the inequities of higher education for students, who are increasingly bound to service their debt from graduation day to retirement age, confronted with curricula that come more and more to reflect the teaching-to-the-test model familiar to us from NCLB. Expending resources on assessment tools will only be used to show that students at rich schools do better on standardized measures than those who labor at poor schools. In the context of higher education, this finding will be particularly unfair because students in elite schools will by and large not be required to take standardized tests.

The LOA movement is a danger to teachers because it places us, and particularly those of us who are not tenured or not on tenure tracks, in service to a disciplinary mechanism that curtails academic freedom, places us at risk of unfair surveillance, and asks us to engage in further uncompensated or poorly compensated labor for dubious purposes. Conservative forces are using the LOA movement to blame teachers for the problems with U.S. higher education and put us on the defensive at a time when our energy needs to be focused on access, equality, and education. In an environment where more than two-thirds of the teaching in colleges and universities is done by non-tenure-stream faculty, and where administrators outnumber full-time faculty on most campuses, all the best aspects of the academy—open inquiry, the tenure system, faculty self-governance—are under assault. For these reasons, we need to resist the institutionalization of the LOA movement—from the efforts of conservative think tanks and for-profit institutions to take over the accreditation process to right-wing efforts to attack tenure, teachers’ unions and academic freedom while promoting standardization and corporatization.

We can resist, within our departments, by questioning the current wisdom that assessing learning outcomes

should take priority over teaching our students how to think critically, including thinking critically about their own educations. We can ask our colleagues at meetings, “What really is the purpose of this focus on learning outcomes?” We can also embrace genuine department-specific assessment, what we used to call “curriculum development” and “course evaluation,” whether through portfolios or other means.<sup>4</sup> We can pressure accrediting bodies to recognize that institution-wide inputs are more relevant and controllable than outcomes. For example, radical teachers can talk with visiting accreditation teams and volunteer to be part of such teams or other outside assessment mechanisms to help push back against the LOA movement and foreground questions of inputs. We can work with political movements that advocate for what students, especially “at-risk” students, need most in order to be successful—debt relief, employment programs, healthcare, childcare. In short, we can embrace all that is sidetracked, undervalued, and underfunded because of the well-financed movement for phony forms of assessment.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This discourse is everywhere in the professional LOA literature. See, for example, Peter Ewell, or really anything written by or for the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS); Paul Gaston, one of several critics of LOA who nonetheless buys into much of the corporatist model; Jacobi, Astin, and Ayala, Jr.; and, in particular, the various publications by ACTA ([www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org)) and CED ([www.ced.org](http://www.ced.org)).

<sup>2</sup>On how assessment tests in general, and the SAT in particular, end up measuring social class more than student potential, thus reinforcing inequality, see Lemann, Nairn, and Sacks.

<sup>3</sup>Learning Outcomes Assessment was a hot topic of conversation for several weeks on the discussion list of the Radical Caucus of the MLA (those readers who are members of the MLA and interested in joining the Radical Caucus may sign up at <http://groups.google.com/group/radcaucus>). We would especially like to thank the following individuals (some of whom we quote) for strengthening our critique of the LOA movement: James Berger, John Crawford, Barbara Foley, Grover Furr, Rich Gibson, Katie Kane, Marian Lupo, William Lyne, Sophia McClennen, Gregory Myerson, Dick Ohmann, Kamala Platt, David Siar, and Julia Stein. And thank you also to those who defended LOA—notably, Cathy Birkenstein-Graff and Steven Thomas—for likewise sharpening our analysis. And thanks as well to John Champagne, who shared a copy of his 2008 MLA talk on assessment and the corporate university.

<sup>4</sup>For example, at Michael Bennett's home institution (Long Island University's Brooklyn campus), departmental student evaluations and portfolios revealed the need for more instruction in accessing and using information from electronic databases, a task which we have embraced. But many of us also feel the need to resist the increasing institutionalization of what might be called the Assessment Industrial Complex, as witnessed by the growing administrative armature (including a Vice President of assessment) and seemingly endless demands for uncompensated labor in the form of email blasts, seminars, and other efforts to create an "assessment culture."

## WORKS CITED

- Bagley, William C. *Classroom Management: Its Principles and Technique*. New York: MacMillan, 1911.
- Bobbit, Franklin. *The Curriculum*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918.
- Eisner, Elliot. "Those Who Ignore the Past . . .? 12 'Easy' Lessons for the Next Millennium." *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 32.2 (2000): 343-357.
- Ewell, Peter T. *Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure*. Washington, D.C.: CHEA, 2001.
- . *Information on Student Outcomes: How to Get It and How to Use It*. Boulder, CO: NCHEMS, 1983.
- Fair Test: The National Center for Fair and Open Testing Website. "High Stakes Testing Hurts Education." Accessed on March 22, 2010. <http://www.fairtest.org/reports-high-stakes-testing-hurts-education>.
- Gaston, Paul T. "'Measuring the Marigolds': Literary Studies and the Opportunity of Outcomes Assessment." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 24.2 (Autumn 1991): 11-20.
- Graff, Gerald. "Assessment Changes Everything." *MLA Newsletter* 40.1 (2008): 3-4.
- Hussey, Trevor and Patrick Smith. "Learning Outcomes: a Conceptual Analysis." *Teaching in Higher Education*. 13.1 February (2008): 107-115.
- . "The Uses of Learning Outcomes." *Teaching in Higher Education*. 8.3 (2003): 357-368.
- Jacobi, Maryann, Alexander Astin, and Frank Ayala, Jr. *College Student Outcomes Assessment: A Talent Development Perspective*. Washington, D.C.: ASHE-ERIC, 1987.
- Kane, Kathleen. Email correspondence. 26 February 2008.
- Leef, George C. and Roxana D. Burris. *Can College Accreditation Live Up to its Promise?* Washington, D.C.: ACTA, 2002.
- Lemann, Nicholas. *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Miner, Barbara. "Testing Companies Mine for Gold." *Rethinking Schools*. Winter 2004/2005.  
<[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special\\_reports/bushplan/test/92.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bushplan/test/92.shtml)>
- Nairn, Allan. *The Reign of ETS: The Corporation That Makes Up Minds*. Ralph Nader, 1980.
- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment Website. Accessed 23 January 2012. <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org>.
- Petri, Thomas E. *Hearings of the House Subcommittee on 21st-Century Competitiveness of the Committee of Education and the Workforce*. 107th Congress, Second Session. 1 October 2002.
- Platt, Kamala. Email correspondence. 14 January 2012.
- Pontuso, James F. and Sarranna R. Thornton. "Is Outcomes Assessment Hurting Higher Education?" *Thought & Action: The NEA Higher Educational Journal*. Fall (2008): 61-69.
- Sacks, Peter. *Standardized Minds: The High Price of America's Testing Culture and What We Can Do to Change It*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 1999.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Peddling Pedagogies: The Winners and Losers of a Standardized Testing Economy

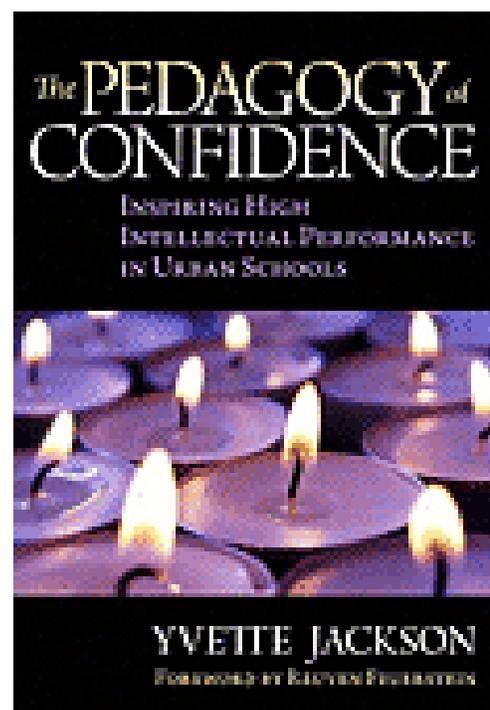
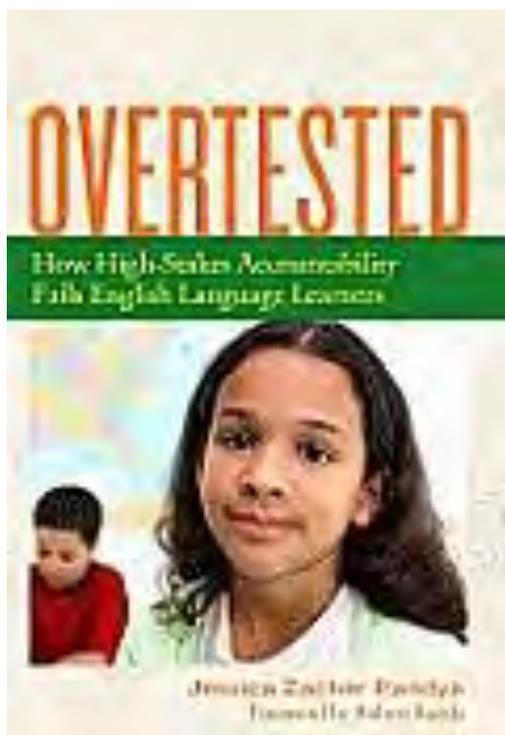
**Overtested: How High-Stakes Accountability Fails English Language Learners**

by Jessica Zacher Pandya

**The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools**

by Yvette Jackson

Reviewed by Lucy Arnold Steele



**Overtested: How High-Stakes Accountability Fails English Language Learners by Jessica Zacher Pandya (Teachers College Press, 2011)**

**The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools by Yvette Jackson (Teachers College Press, 2011)**

In 2014, authors writing for and about teachers and classrooms must position themselves in regards to the over-compassing specter of standardized testing. There are a myriad of possible positions from radical defiance of the testing culture to liberal attempts to work within the system while still engaging in liberatory education practices to conservative full complicity. Both of the books I discuss here have staked positions in the conversation about testing, and their differences in terms of content, research, and message have important implications for the lives of teachers and students.

*Overtested: How High-Stakes Accountability Fails English Language Learners* is the fruitful result of Jessica Zacher Pandya's year-long ethnographic study of a fourth-grade, predominantly English Language Learner (ELL) classroom in California. This book richly describes the requirements that students and teachers face and particularly discusses how these requirements impact ELL students. More specifically, Zacher Pandya's text focuses on a fourth-grade class at Laurel Elementary and a teacher whom Zacher Pandya refers to as "Ms. Romano". Zacher Pandya also discusses the climate created by high stakes testing; the structure of the school and the state school system; and the teacher education program in California. Situating Ms. Romano's work within a broader social context is crucial to Zacher Pandya's critique because her argument is that no single pedagogy will solve the problems created by standardized testing. Instead, she makes a case for institutional change, suggesting specific policy changes that would have better outcomes for ELL students.

One striking moment in Zacher Pandya's text occurs when Ms. Romano, having seen the negative impact of testing on her students, attempts to rebel against the system. After witnessing how a mandated, high-paced reading program stultifies her students and how she herself succumbs to a system in which the teacher becomes a "proxy ventriloquator" who "in the name of pacing and timing...shuts students off, ignores student talk, hurries students up, and glosses over obvious misunderstandings" (57), Ms. Romano adopts teaching practices that she thinks better meet the needs of her ELL students. As a result, her students do not pass district-mandated tests; their placement scores are too low to warrant their entries into the middle schools they want to attend; and administrators warn Romano that her job is in jeopardy. Not surprisingly, after this backlash, Ms. Romano returns to the mandated curriculum. This story of the disappointment of Ms. Romano is an important aspect of Zacher Pandya's work, which does not endorse a valorous, individual teacher who operates as martyr but argues for systemic change instead.

Yvette Jackson's *Pedagogy of Confidence* tells the story, not of a teacher like Ms. Romano, but of a program: The Pedagogy of Confidence™. Using language culled from various pedagogical sources (including, ironically enough, Paulo Freire himself) and anecdotal evidence from her own experience and that of her mentees, Jackson promotes a program, which she believes encourages achievement in traditionally low-achieving urban students. Her pedagogy is comprised of classroom strategies designed to engage learners along with the idea of "mediative communities," which encourage a dialogue between teachers and students about content being learned.

Reading Jackson's work generously, one might speculate that she saw a need for urban educators to have a ready-made pedagogy. But, as readers of *Radical Teacher* know, pedagogy and teaching philosophy is context dependent and cannot be gift wrapped and handed over to teachers. Just such well-meaning educators developed Open Court™, the supposedly "teacher proof" reading program that Zacher Pandya demonstrates to be unsuitable to the needs of Ms. Romano's students. In fact, the problem of Jackson's program is most evident when paired with Zacher Pandya's research on Ms. Romano's classroom. For instance, whereas Jackson recommends the teaching tool of the visual map, Zacher Pandya discovered that Thinking Maps™ (which students fill in to represent their prior knowledge before a reading) were being used in ways that did not match the teacher's expectation of the activity because the teacher had to move through the mandated curriculum so rapidly and did not have time to ensure the maps were used effectively.

Even more problematic is Jackson's stance on standardized testing. Jackson, like Zacher Pandya, is critical of deficit models of education, which focus on what students don't know and what they aren't able to do. She admits that "an appreciation of the breadth of all students' intellectual capacity should motivate us to recognize and address what is in fact the real gap school-dependent students have been relegated to experience: the gap between their potential and their achievement" (29). But Jackson, unlike Zacher Pandya, sees the problem as stemming from teachers and their practices, not from the testing agenda itself, or the privatization of public education. In fact, Jackson claims that "standardized assessments in the various disciplines are designed to alert us to the progress students are making in grasping the understandings from the disciplines and in applying knowledge and indicated skills" (146). Such support of standardized testing ignores its long history of bias, which privileges students most familiar with the dominant discourse. Of course Jackson, who in her book is selling her own trademarked pedagogical program, is in no position to critique the capitalist practices of the testing agenda, even though it is this system that is catastrophically and nearly silently maintaining, not just an achievement gap, but a possibility gap, for the very students Jackson claims to champion. Standardized testing is a multi-billion dollar industry that maintains a classist status quo by mandating a middle class set of interpretations and values. It follows that urban students, like those whom Zacher Pandya

studied, are not valued by the white, middle class discourse of standardized testing.

A pedagogy that truly seeks to educate urban students must be critical of the institutions and industries that do not value the languages, communities and discourses of urban students. At the very least, such a pedagogy should seek to analyze and deconstruct standardized assessments to understand what happens when urban students take these tests. It is notable that in the conclusion to *Overtested*, Zacher Pandya does not offer a set of classroom practices or suggestions for teachers. Instead, she suggests policy changes: to defund testing programs, change ELL identification and testing practices, and make time for learning to be a priority in classrooms. Jackson, on the other hand, cannot critique the system that makes a trademarked pedagogy possible, nor can she even provide options for beating the system that validates her own work. Her program reveals the sad fact of public education in the U.S. today where curricula and their implied ideologies are bought and sold by states and school districts, all in the name of improving student achievement. Publishing companies, testing companies, and educational consultants flourish in this system and are always on the lookout for ways to offer "improved programs" and "better tests." While companies like SRA/McGraw Hill (publisher of Open Court) and Renaissance Learning (publisher of Accelerated Reading) and individuals like Jackson disingenuously sell their products as ones that are good for democratic education, money would be far better spent on teachers, who could use the time and resources to think through their own ideologies and classroom practices and develop their own professional networks.

In *Overtested*, Zacher Pandya is able to critique the institutional constraints of teachers, whereas Jackson, in *The Pedagogy of Confidence* stacks another brick on top of an already formidable (and lucrative) testing wall. I have seen the devastating effects of standardized testing on students first-hand, in kindergarten students through college freshmen, and believe that we are ethically

compelled to speak out against practices that continue to disadvantage those who are already disadvantaged and privilege those who are already privileged. Research like that by Zacher Pandya is the kind of research that needs to be conducted and disseminated. Programs like the Pedagogy of Confidence™, however, are dangerous because they replace a teacher's hard earned wisdom with feel better formulas.

#### References

- Franklin, V.P. (2007). "The Tests Are Written for the Dogs: The Journal of Negro Education, African American Children, and the Intelligence Testing Movement in Historical Perspective." *The Journal of Negro Education* v 76 n 3 (Summer 2007): 216-229.
- Howell, Leanne, Chance W. Lewis, and Norvella Carter, eds. (2011). *Yes We Can!: Improving Urban Schools Through Innovative Education Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Jackson, Yvette. (2011). *The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Zacher Pandya, Jessica. (2011). *Overtested: How High-Stakes Accountability Fails English Language Learners*. New York: Teachers College Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

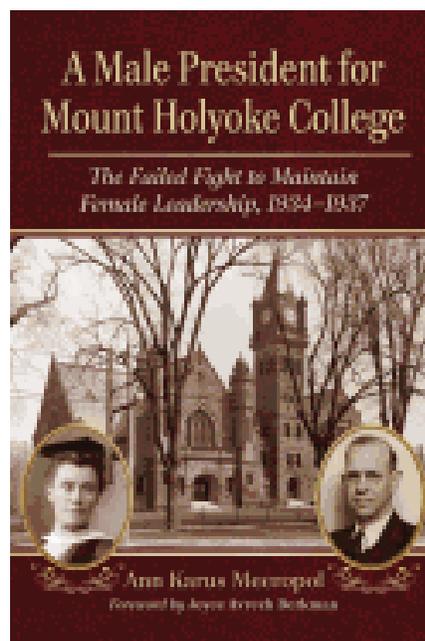
# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Review: A Male President for Mount Holyoke College: The Failed Fight to Maintain Female Leadership, 1934-1937

by Ann Karus Meeropol

Reviewed by Frinde Maher



**A Male President for Mount Holyoke College: The Failed Fight to Maintain Female Leadership, 1934-1937 by Ann Karus Meeropol (McFarland 2014)**

For almost two hundred years the histories of women's colleges in the United States have offered both examples of and templates for women's wider struggle for equality. The story of the 1937 presidential succession at Mt. Holyoke College, one of the early centers of higher education for women, shows vividly that these battles must be fought and refought in every generation. This book is a detailed and complex account of the ultimately failed struggle by the leaders of Mt. Holyoke to maintain their commitments to female leadership. From 1901 until 1937 Mary Woolley, the President, not only built the college into a strong and influential voice and exemplar for women's education. She also showed how educated women leaders might perform on a larger world stage. She was the sole American woman delegate to the 1931 Conference on the Reduction and Limitations of Armaments in Geneva, capping a series of national and international roles: member of the American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, acting President of the American Association of University Women, major speaker at the Sixth Conference on the Cause and Cure of War in 1931 in Washington, DC.

By the time of the Mount Holyoke Centennial in 1937, the new President of Mt. Holyoke had just been elected by the Board of Trustees. His name was Roswell Gray Ham and he came to Mt. Holyoke from Yale. In the Mt. Holyoke *Alumnae Quarterly* of November 1936 the President-elect was quoted as saying in part, "I see woman as the housekeeper of civilization, of the world's culture." (137) According to Meeropol, in subsequent months and years as President, Ham focused on the college rather than on any engagement with the wider world, with mixed results for the quality of the faculty and for student development. The highly qualified female-dominated faculty became one dominated by males, a number of them from Yale. Woolley's broader vision was lost.

Most of this book is a careful reconstruction of the process by which the Mount Holyoke Board of Trustees, dominated by powerful businessmen and their female allies, arranged for the successor to Mary Woolley to be a man. This upsetting of all expectations for Mt. Holyoke's future leadership prevailed in the face of the strong, eloquent but ultimately ineffectual voices of faculty, students, alumnae and, not least, Mary Woolley herself. Meeropol expertly guides the reader through a dense thicket of documentation – letters, press releases, newspaper articles – all that a compendious archive might offer the researcher.

The arguments she quotes for and against recruiting a man for the job are eloquent examples of the discourses surrounding single-sex education and the education of women generally, discourses that persist today. For example, one eager alumna wrote to Ham that "if there is anything that Mt. Holyoke needs, it is just what you can bring – a good healthy Western breeze, a normal family in the President's house, and a masculine point of view." (128) Woolley's closest relationship was with the woman she lived with, Jeannette Marks, and this example of overt

lesbian-baiting was typical of many contemporary reactions across the world of women's colleges to the leadership of unmarried women.

But on the other hand, from another alum: "We have a tradition of the widening of opportunities for women...We don't teach or preach feminism, we have never thought of it as something to be taught. All we want at Mt. Holyoke is the right to use what brains the Lord gave us.... So long as the men's colleges maintain a closed door against women on their faculties, so long as opportunities for women are limited, our [resistance] to your appointment is natural." (146)

The story as Meeropol tells it is fascinating on its own terms, and anyone who has wondered about the politics of university life, presidential searches above all, will get a vivid picture of the ups and downs of a process whose outcome was never by any means certain. Indeed it was Meeropol's access to the Woolley archives at Mt. Holyoke that spurred her to undertake her multiyear exploration into the case; the blow-by-blow descriptions of the different phases of the struggle are the biggest strengths of the book.

***The story as Meeropol tells it is fascinating on its own terms, and anyone who has wondered about the politics of university life, presidential searches above all, will get a vivid picture of the ups and downs of a process whose outcome was never by any means certain.***

But the story she tells also has a wider significance. As she points out, the replacement of women by men in positions of leadership in the academy in the 1930's and afterwards also represents a reassertion of male corporate power over the academy in general. Women like Mary Woolley, Frances Perkins (a Mt. Holyoke grad who came back unsuccessfully to take up the cause of a female succession) and their like were not only feminists in the broadest sense of fighters for women's equality, they were advocates for peace, for the rights of working men and women, and for progressive social change. Prominent among such women were not only Woolley herself, but also M. Carey Thomas at Bryn Mawr, Virginia Gildersleeve at Barnard, and Ellen Pendleton at Wellesley. (Not to mention of course Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, and many other women in the forefront of the peace, labor and suffragist movements of the early twentieth century.)

The men who sought to replace them in positions of power were businessmen. They were people who no doubt sincerely thought a woman's happiest and proper place was in the home, but they also thought that women's education needed a narrower and more strictly domestic focus than leaders like Woolley envisioned. As Meeropol puts it, "The strength that women had gained in leadership provoked fear and resentment and the urge among men to put women 'back in their place.'" (180) When this first generation of powerful women academics departed from

the scene, it was to be almost half a century, until the 1970's, before Second Wave feminism reignited the struggle for equality and parity in women's education.

***The men who sought to replace them in positions of power were businessmen. They were people who no doubt sincerely thought a woman's happiest and proper place was in the home, but they also thought that women's education needed a narrower and more strictly domestic focus***

This reviewer went to a college (Radcliffe), which went out of existence in the 1970's because Harvard wanted it so. The only remaining vestige of Radcliffe is the Radcliffe Institute, set up originally to help struggling early-career women scholars and now an institution rewarding only already prominent scholars of both sexes. I taught for 27 years at Wheaton College, a single sex college for women, which, like Mt. Holyoke, benefitted in its early years from the visionary leadership of women such as Mary Lyon and Mary Woolley herself. Wheaton went co-ed, like Harvard, in the late 1980's by admitting men, the only way the trustees could see to keep the college afloat. Although Wheaton briefly considered a program for older working women, like the Comstock scholars at Smith and other such programs elsewhere, the board ultimately decided for gender rather than social class diversity. As at Harvard, the money to keep Wheaton going came from men, not women, the wealthy themselves rather than their wives.

No doubt the stories of these related events and others like them are as complex and multifaceted as the story Meeropol tells. And no doubt similar questions about the pivotal role of individuals, as opposed to the sweep of historical inevitability, should and will persist. Yet, as noted above, this fight at Mt. Holyoke was symptomatic, even paradigmatic, of many larger political and cultural

shifts. Women of the teens and 1920's gained the suffrage, entered higher education and gained advanced degrees in record numbers, had substantial careers, and were heavily involved in the leadership of the new professions of social and community work. Yet while the rest of the country was moving left in the 1930's, women's progress faltered. As Meeropol points out, "In the context of the Depression women all over the world were losing out as men sought to take for themselves a larger share of shrinking opportunities." (182) Indeed the Depression retarded women's progress in every arena. The scarce jobs available became men's province. New Deal programs and the rise of the labor movement overwhelmingly benefitted men.

Meeropol might usefully have given readers much more of this wider context, and in fact Joyce Berkman, in her very useful *Foreword*, sums up some of the literature on the decline of feminism in the 1930's. Nevertheless this book explores a powerful microcosm of some of the female progress that was lost in many sectors of society, not just at Mt. Holyoke, and not just at other women's colleges, over the decades that began in the 1930's. It was to be 40 years, and well into the next stage of the women's movement, before Mt. Holyoke again had a female president.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



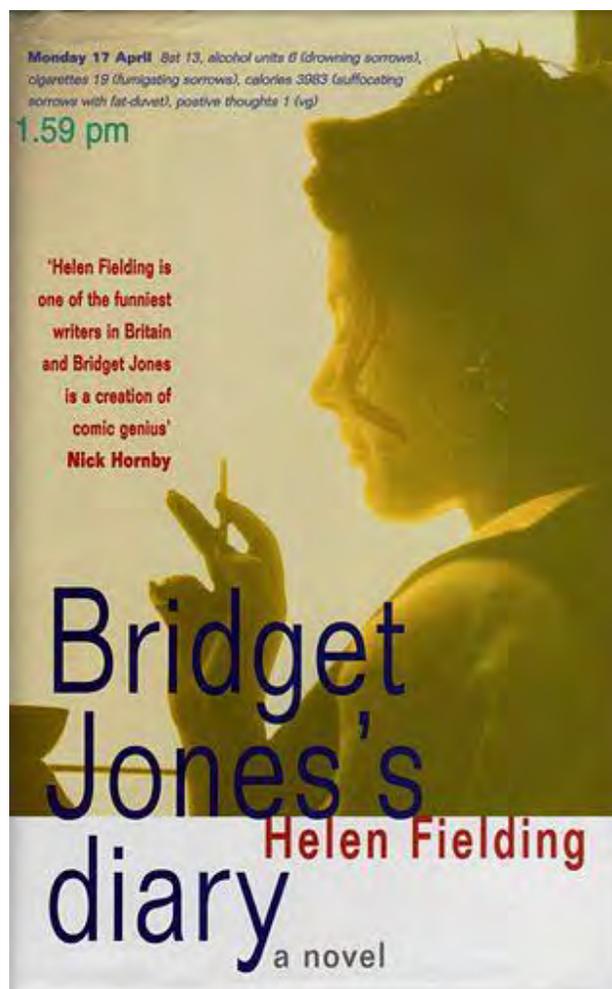
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Teaching Note: Deconstructing “Real” Love in the Classroom

by Erin Hurt



Though less than twenty years old, the genre of chick lit, first popularized by Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), has embedded itself in our cultural consciousness. By now, the tropes are familiar: a young, single woman in a big city searches for happily-ever-after, which includes but is not limited to a loving and lasting relationship, career success, and real friendship. In spite of the genre's relative newness, scholars have found strong pedagogical justifications for teaching chick lit.<sup>1</sup> These novels offer students opportunities to assess an emerging cultural phenomenon, consider feminism's place in popular culture, and analyze a text that engages us not just intellectually but also affectively.

Though chick lit allows for new conversations, this body of work also brings with it several challenges. In my upper-division American literature seminar on chick lit at West Chester University, part of the Pennsylvania state system, I ask students to question how these novels construct cultural meanings for romantic love, intimacy, and success. Though excited to read the books, students often struggle to detach emotionally from these novels' romantic tropes. The romantic relationship tropes that appear in these works often reflect those narratives found in wider popular culture, such as "Love at First Sight. Always a Bridesmaid. The One That Got Away. The Love of My Life" (Mamont). Having internalized these ideas about romantic love, students often identify with these "big stories." Thus, they struggle to analyze them as socially constructed fantasies. They are not the only ones. Though intellectually aware of the cultural work these tropes do, I cannot easily dispel my own lingering attachments.

After teaching this course multiple times, I have created several approaches that help students disengage from these texts, or, when they feel emotionally invested in the novels we read, to better articulate why. Modeling my own experiences with these tropes is my first tool for defamiliarizing the "realness" of intimacy found within these novels. I explain to students the difficulties I face when unpacking my emotional investment in these narratives, and name for them those stories *I* want to believe rather than analyze. Framing the course with my own imperfections, and a willingness to co-investigate, encourages students to do the same.

In addition to teaching strategies, I use readings to destabilize students' attachments to chick lit novels and the romantic narratives they profess. In Liz Mamont and Amanda Hess's short essay, "How to Ditch Happily-Ever-After and Build Your Own Romantic Narrative," the authors explain how US culture's fixation on what the authors term "stock romantic narratives" exerts enormous influence on all U.S. cultural citizens. This piece offers students an accessible model of how to name the romantic narratives that they see in the novels we read. Furthermore, this article suggests that even if we know these stock narratives are "sexist, boring or alienating" they can also be emotionally clarifying and satisfying (Mamont). Mamont and Hess's willingness to reflect on their beliefs about

relationships also helps students to identify their own relationship clichés.

Another piece, by Lauren Berlant, lays the groundwork for a class discussion that analyzes how the romantic fantasies found in chick lit, or those held by students, normalize certain desires, practices, and lives while making other lives and forms of intimacy invisible.

In her introduction to *Critical Inquiry's* special issue on intimacy, Berlant's heavily theoretical piece ruminates on many aspects of intimacy, touching on concepts such as attachment, normativity, intelligibility, and the public-private divide. She speaks about world-building, and the need to imagine and allow for many different forms of intimacy. I use this piece to help students move from uncovering chick lit constructions of intimacy to deconstructing how U.S. popular culture more broadly has naturalized particular versions of love and intimacy. Berlant's piece prepares students to engage in more difficult conversations about more complicated, convoluted forms of intimacy such as singlehood, monogamy, and legal marriage.

***Though chick lit allows for new conversations, this body of work also brings with it several challenges. In my upper-division American literature seminar on chick lit at West Chester University, part of the Pennsylvania state system, I ask students to question how these novels construct cultural meanings for romantic love, intimacy, and success.***

When I last taught this course in spring of 2013, the Supreme Court was in midst of hearing arguments about Prop 8 and DOMA, legislation that sought to institutionalize particular forms of intimacy at state and federal levels. During class, I challenged students to apply Berlant's ideas to the arguments made in support of and against gay marriage. How did this national debate define intimacy? Was the push to legalize gay marriage a queering of chick lit romantic love? Or, was it a normalizing of something alternative and queer? Though we drew no definite conclusions, students were able to see the very real ways tropes of romance function in the world around them. That students often begin the semester believing, and believing in, these romantic narratives, is exactly why they should be taught. I offer these approaches as a means to disrupt their uncritical consumption of these novels. Through their investigations, students begin to see that "real" love is, in fact, a constructed thing.

NOTE

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Callahan and Low; Love and Helmbrecht; Rowntree, Bryant, and Moulding; Scott; and Wilson.

WORKS CITED

Berlant, Lauren. Introduction. *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Winter 1998): 281-288. Print.

Callahan, Meg and Bronwen E. Low. "At the Crossroads of Expertise: The Risky Business of

Teaching Popular Culture." *The English Journal* 93.3 (Jan 2004): 52-57. Print.

Love, Meredith A. and Brenda M. Helmbrecht. "Teaching the Conflicts: (Re)Engaging Students with Feminism in a Postfeminist World." *Feminist Teacher* 18.1 (2007): 41-58. Print.

Mamont, Liz and Amanda Hess. "How to Ditch Happily-Ever-After and Build Your Own Romantic Narrative." *Good: A Magazine for the Global Citizen*. 27 Apr 2012. Web.

Rowntree, Margaret R., Lia Bryant, and Nicole Moulding. "Women's Emotional Experiences of

Chick Lit and Chick Flicks: An Ambivalent Audience." *Outskirts Online Journal*. Vol. 24 (May 2011). Web. 23 June 2014.

Scott, Robert F. Rev. of *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding. *Modern Language Studies*

33.1/2 (Spring – Autumn 2003): 107-112. Print.

Wilson, Cheryl A. "Chick Lit in the Undergraduate Classroom." *Frontiers* 33.1 (2012): 83-100.

Print.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://d-scribe.org/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Explaining Prejudice with Merton's Typology and the Film *Black Like Me*

by Teresa A. Booker



Carl Lerner's 1964 film, *Black Like Me*, tells a true story based on the autobiography of John Howard Griffin, a Caucasian man who chemically changed his skin from white to black in order to experience life as a black man. The film traces his "experiment" across the South as he interacts with both blacks and whites. This movie can be used to explain privilege, differences between prejudice and discrimination, and how societies behave as they do.

According to Merton's typology, people are either prejudiced or unprejudiced, and they either do or do not discriminate. This reality results in four types of predictable behavior. An individual who is neither prejudiced nor discriminates is an all-weather liberal. One who is not prejudiced but will discriminate if socially pressured to do so is a reluctant liberal. A person who is prejudiced but, nevertheless, does not discriminate (i.e., if it costs him anything or if he is socially pressured *not* to do so) is a timid bigot. An all-weather bigot is prejudiced and discriminates.

***When I used the film in my Race and the Urban Community class at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, it was interesting to observe the reactions of mostly black and Hispanic Millennials move from incredulity, to astonishment, to outrage as they witnessed the protagonist travel from state to state, encountering antagonists who felt free to say anything to him—from presuming a preference for white women, to asking to view his genitalia.***

Examples of all of these types of individuals are illustrated in the film, but only a few will be mentioned here. For example, the protagonist, John, is obviously an all-weather liberal since he has voluntarily manipulated his body and given up his white privilege in order to become a second-class citizen, merely to recount a newsworthy perspective. So, too, however, are the majority of blacks who interact with him, in addition to a white man who picks up a hitchhiking John and offers him a donut. In contrast, the white grocery store manager—who refuses to even consider offering John any job other than that of stocker—is a reluctant liberal. Despite John's suggestion that black customers would be happy with the manager's decision were John hired as a cashier, the manager kowtows to potential white backlash and refuses to even symbolically accept John's application. Alternatively, the gas station manager who employs John is a timid bigot when he shrewdly but indirectly accuses John of stealing money from the register. The elderly black waitress is, too, when she recounts her conversation with a white woman in which she states that the black race "gave birth" to the white race, not the other way around. Examples of all-weather bigots include the two strangers who chase John

through deserted streets; the female window clerk at the bus depot who doesn't want to break a ten-dollar bill, claiming not to have change; and the potential employer who tells John to his face that he doesn't give "white men's jobs" to blacks.

*Black Like Me* is far from being a perfect film. The fact that it is forty years old and filmed in black and white may disinterest some students. The cosmetics used to make the actor's white skin appear black is amateurish, in light of modern cinematic advances, and the audience must suspend belief in order to ignore the fact that the actor portraying John has blue eyes.

When I used the film in my Race and the Urban Community class at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, it was interesting to observe the reactions of mostly black and Hispanic Millennials move from incredulity, to astonishment, to outrage as they witnessed the protagonist travel from state to state, encountering antagonists who felt free to say anything to him—from presuming a preference for white women, to asking to view his genitalia. When I explained to students, afterwards, that from the 1890s until as late as the 1950s or 1960s, the primary reason for the lynching of black men was their alleged raping of white women, the antagonists' queries took on new meaning.

On a micro-level, students were able to observe how race is socially constructed, distinguish between prejudice and discrimination, identify stereotypes and examples of white privilege, apply Merton's typology to characters, and witness an extraordinary example of the self-fulfilling prophecy. On a macro-level, they were able to use the functionalist theory to explain how the marginalization of blacks was due to a *Southern* consensus which specified where blacks could (and could not) sit, eat, and sleep, with whom they could fraternize, and how they must address whites. Equally important was that whites knew it, too. While some social norms were "agreed upon" via Jim Crow laws, other behavior was clearly tacit—such as the unofficial prohibition of a black person from even *inflecting* his/her voice while speaking to a white person. Students were similarly able to use conflict theory to explain the struggle over ideas, beliefs, and resources between groups of unequal power. In the film, when a Southern black person was asked a question, the appropriateness of the answer depended upon the race of the intended recipient. Minimal, straight-to-the-point answers were offered to white folks, and "the real deal" (i.e. answers meant to assist, enlighten, and perhaps, even, entertain) was compulsory for black folks.

***On a micro-level, students were able to observe how race is socially constructed, distinguish between prejudice and discrimination, identify stereotypes and examples of white privilege, apply Merton's typology to characters, and witness an extraordinary example of the self-fulfilling prophecy.***

Finally, students were able to use a critical race theory perspective to explain how some citizens were marginalized legally and in a myriad of ways due to a racist society. For example, John is willing to change his skin and go undercover to highlight inequity because he believes that a portion of American society is unjust. Over the course of his travels, he discovers that there are *de facto* safe and unsafe places everywhere. Random blacks are the targets of random whites with the former having such low expectations for legal reprieve that they don't even bother reporting the crimes. Moreover, the only safe housing for visiting blacks is either guest lodging within private residences or segregated housing—both of which legally exist on the "other side" of town because of either state law or city zoning ordinances. Similarly, when seeking out "white people's jobs" (as one defiant employer puts it), John encounters one obstacle after another that

can only be defined as systemic and sustained by custom, if not altogether by law. In short, the system discourages blacks from complaining about mistreatment, relegates them to live in blighted communities, and prevents them from transcending their lot in life.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://d-scribe.org/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/press/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt



U.S. TROOPS ESCORT AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS FROM CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS, OCTOBER 3, 1957. PHOTO COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

## Race and Education

"Yes, It's a Racial Thing" by Gary Younge (*The Nation*, May 12, 2014) reports on the Network for Public Education's conference in March, 2014 and its panel on "Grassroots Organizing." An audience member made it clear to the all-white panel that the concerns of the conference (to "give voice to those opposing privatization, school closings, and high-stakes testing") disproportionately affected people from poor and minority communities who, because of the all-white panel, were given no voice as to how they might contribute to the discussion and the resistance.

May 17, 2014 celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 U. S. Supreme Court decision that prohibited states from segregating schools by

Organizations about her brutal injustices when trying to vote and about the forced sterilization of African American women in Mississippi. Freedom Summer 50<sup>th</sup> was a five day conference held from June 25 to 29 in Jackson, Mississippi at Tougaloo College to explore present-day struggles for justice not only in Mississippi, but globally ([info@freedom50.org](mailto:info@freedom50.org)). *Radical Teacher* published the Mississippi Freedom Schools curriculum in issue # 40, available on JStor.

## Charter Schools

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana seized 102 of the city's 117 schools and transformed them into charter schools under the watch of the Recovery School District. *The Washington Post*



race, overturning the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of "separate but equal." As successful as *Brown* was for inspiring freedom rides, sit-ins, voter registration drives and other actions leading ultimately to the civil rights legislation in the late 1950s and 1960s, it "was unsuccessful in its purported mission [of undoing] the school segregation that persists as a central feature of American education today" (portside.org, May 13 and 16, 2014).

Another celebration in the summer of 2014 was the June 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mississippi's Freedom Summer, launched to end the systematic and violent disenfranchisement of African Americans in Mississippi by registering them to vote and also to cultivate the organizing skills of local leaders. Fannie Lou Hammer, one of these leaders, is also celebrated on this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary for her testimony at the Council of Federated

recently wrote an article praising the success of this 100% charter school system which was rebutted by Mercedes Schneider in her blog of May 20, 2014 ("On the 'Success' of a 100% Charter Recovery School District").

Even when charter schools have more honest success than the ones in New Orleans, they can create a toxic dynamic when traditional public schools and charter schools exist under the same roof. This is the case with the Harlem Success Academies, New York City's most successful and well-funded charter school network. For a dozen years under ex-mayor Bloomberg, charter schools were offered free rent in city-owned school buildings, creating a highly visible disparity between the "have" charter school students and the "have-not" public school students. As the new New York City mayor Bill de Blasio attempts to oppose charter schools and create a more equitable public school system for all New York's children,

he is being accused of incompetence and called a fumbling amateur (portside.org, April 27, 2014 and "Framing de Blasio" in *The Nation*, April 14, 2014).

## Testing and the Common Core

"How Bill Gates Pulled Off the Swift Common Core Revolution" (portside.org, June 8, 2014) chronicles how Gates' "money solves all problems" mentality pulled off one of the swiftest and most remarkable shifts in educational policy in the history of the United States by not only funding the development of the Common Core State Standards but also, with an additional \$200 million, building political support across the country and persuading state governments to make systemic and costly changes in curriculum.

Four years later, the Gates Foundation wants a two year moratorium on test results being used for teacher evaluation or student promotion. Teacher and parent revolt against high-stakes testing and the Common Core may have helped Gates reach this decision. In Chicago, through the efforts of pro-public education and anti-testing activists, a boycott of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test has spread across the city. Some states such as Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina have already dropped the standards and states like Missouri and North Carolina are making moves to drop the standards. Perhaps another reason for this reconsideration of the value of high-stakes testing and the Common Core is the growing public awareness that the only people who actually benefit from these tests are the people at Pearson, the for-profit company that creates them (portside.org, June 8 and 15, and August 3, 2014; *In These Times*, June 2014; Daily Kos, May 5, 2014).

The Walmart heirs have now joined the Gates Foundation in pouring \$1 billion into shaping American education by funding charter schools, voucher policies, and legislative attacks on teachers. The Waltons hired an education program officer who had worked at a conservative business group, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), gave money to help close Chicago public schools and expand charter schools, and are now attacking New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for daring to turn down a handful of applications by charter schools to take over public school building space (Daily Kos, April 30, 2014).

## Sexuality and Education

In April, 2014, students at the all-women's Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, protested against Smith's policy of not admitting transgender women if their earlier records identify them as "male" (*In These Times*, July 2014).

"Campus Rape Crisis: The system is broken. Can it be fixed?" (*The Nation*, June 23/30, 2014) reveals that 1 in 5 women is sexually assaulted in college and asks if the universities are capable of providing justice.

## The Economics of Education

"Never in the history of the developed world has an entire generation had to go into debt just to get an education and a job. Until now" (truthout.org, May 22, 2014). It is almost common knowledge now that tuition costs have more than doubled over the past generation, that student debt now exceeds \$1 trillion, and that 40 million people in the United States have education debts that often reach into the tens of thousands of dollars. What may not be so well known is how much money is spent on university amenities with costs passed on to the students in the form of additional tuition. A new study from the Debt & Society Project on debt across the higher education system details the millions of dollars being spent on gleaming new football stadiums, shiny dorm buildings, and restaurant-like dining halls (*The Nation*, May 23, 2014).

Another reason the costs of higher education have soared is because the salaries of higher education presidents and administrators have soared. In 2011, the last year figures are available, 42 private college and university presidents received more than a million dollars a year each for their work, with the University of Chicago's president making well over \$3 million. At public colleges and universities, nine top administrators made more than \$1 million each. Between 1993 and 2009, the numbers of campus administrators increased by 60 percent, ten times the rate of growth of the faculty (portside.org, July 25, 2014).

## Unions

In schools, a new teacher union movement is building, as seen by the success of some progressive union contract struggles across the nation. In Los Angeles, Union Power, an activist caucus, won leadership of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the second-largest teacher local in the country.

In cities like Portland and St. Paul, union contracts reflected a vision patterned after the Chicago Teachers Union. Social justice unionism seems on the rise (Common Dreams, May 23, 2014). In May of 2014, Barbara Madeloni was elected union president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. Madeloni refused to participate in a standardized teacher-licensing program at the U. of Mass/Amherst and is part of a growing teacher insurgency movement. She is a member of the progressive caucus Educators for a Democratic Union (portsidelabor.org, May 14 and portside.org, June 24, 2014). On May 1, 2014, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a new contract with the United Federation of Teachers. The nine-year agreement ended a bitter five-year conflict between the city's teachers and the previous Mayor Michael Bloomberg (democracynow.org, May 2, 2014).

At the college and university level, unions are also active. On April 16, 2014, The University of Illinois at Chicago reached a tentative contract agreement. Hundreds of University of Illinois educators formed a union as non-tenure track faculty in Champaign-Urbana joined

the national movement to improve university working conditions. The 2,100 graduate assistants at the University of Connecticut have voted to form a union. Buzzfeed (May 8, 2014) published "Top Ten Consequences of Unions on College Campuses":

1. Service Workers Are Being Treated Fairly and Paid Living Wages
2. Adjunct Professors Don't Die in Poverty
3. Graduate Teaching Assistants Can Afford Education and Health Insurance
4. Colleges Stop Supporting Sweatshop Labor
5. Cafeteria Workers Are Allowed Sick Days
6. Reduced Risks of Sports-Related Traumatic Brain Injury
7. Guaranteed Medical Coverage
8. Higher Graduation Rates
9. Scholarships That Fully Cover the Cost of Attending College
10. A Say on Rules that Govern Athletes' Lives

## University Divestment in Fossil Fuels

Stanford University joined the student-led movement to divest from the fossil fuel industry by pulling its money from coal companies (democracynow.org, May 7, 2014). The Board of Trustees of Pitzer College, a top-ranked undergraduate liberal arts and sciences college and a member of the Claremont College system, unanimously approved a new Fossil Fuel Divestment Climate Action Model which was announced at press conference by actor Robert Redford, a member of the Pitzer Board of Trustees ([www.pitzer.edu](http://www.pitzer.edu), April 23, 2014).

## Education and Israel

Professor Steven Salaita had accepted a position at The University of Illinois as a professor of American Indian Studies but, after making comments on Twitter about his responses to the current attack of Israel on Gaza, he lost the position. The university says his job was "rescinded" but many feel he was "fired." As a matter of fact, a number of academic activists for Palestinian justice, such as Tithi Bhattacharya and Bill V. Mullen, ask in their article "Is the Firing of Steven Salaita the Beginning of a New Blacklist?" (portside.org, August 13, 2014). In response, nearly 300 scholars have signed petitions pledging to stay away from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign until it rescinds its decision not to hire Salaita (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 13, 2014).

Martin R. Federman, former executive director of Northeastern University's Hillel Foundation and its university Jewish chaplain, is speaking out against the restrictions placed on Palestine solidarity activists ("Jewish Educator Speaks Out – Why Jews Must Oppose Muzzling of

Palestine Solidarity Activists," *The Electronic Intifada*, April 9, 2014).

The American Studies Association, following its vote of last year to boycott Israeli universities, has now called on the United States government to withdraw all support from the state of Israel, stating "Israel's continued attacks on identifiable academic institutions are part of its campaign of collective punishment that . . . goes well beyond the denial of academic freedom to further escalate Israel's longstanding practice of denying an entire people the basic necessities of life and freedom" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 4, 2014).

For a sense of the academic experiences of people in Palestine from kindergarten through college under Israeli occupation, read "Challenging Bullets, Not Boycotts: Education Under Occupation in Palestine" on [truthout.org](http://truthout.org), May 15, 2015.

## Resources

Bullfrog Films has two new films usable in either schools or colleges. In *The Human Scale*, influential Danish architect Jan Gehl argues that we can build cities in a way which takes human needs for inclusion and intimacy into account. 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and by 2050 it will be 80%. Cities have become the primary human habitat. According to Gehl, if we are to make cities sustainable and livable for people we must re-imagine the very foundations of modern urban planning. Rather than examining buildings and urban structures themselves, Gehl and his team meticulously study the in-between spaces of urban life, the places where people meet, interact, live, and behave.



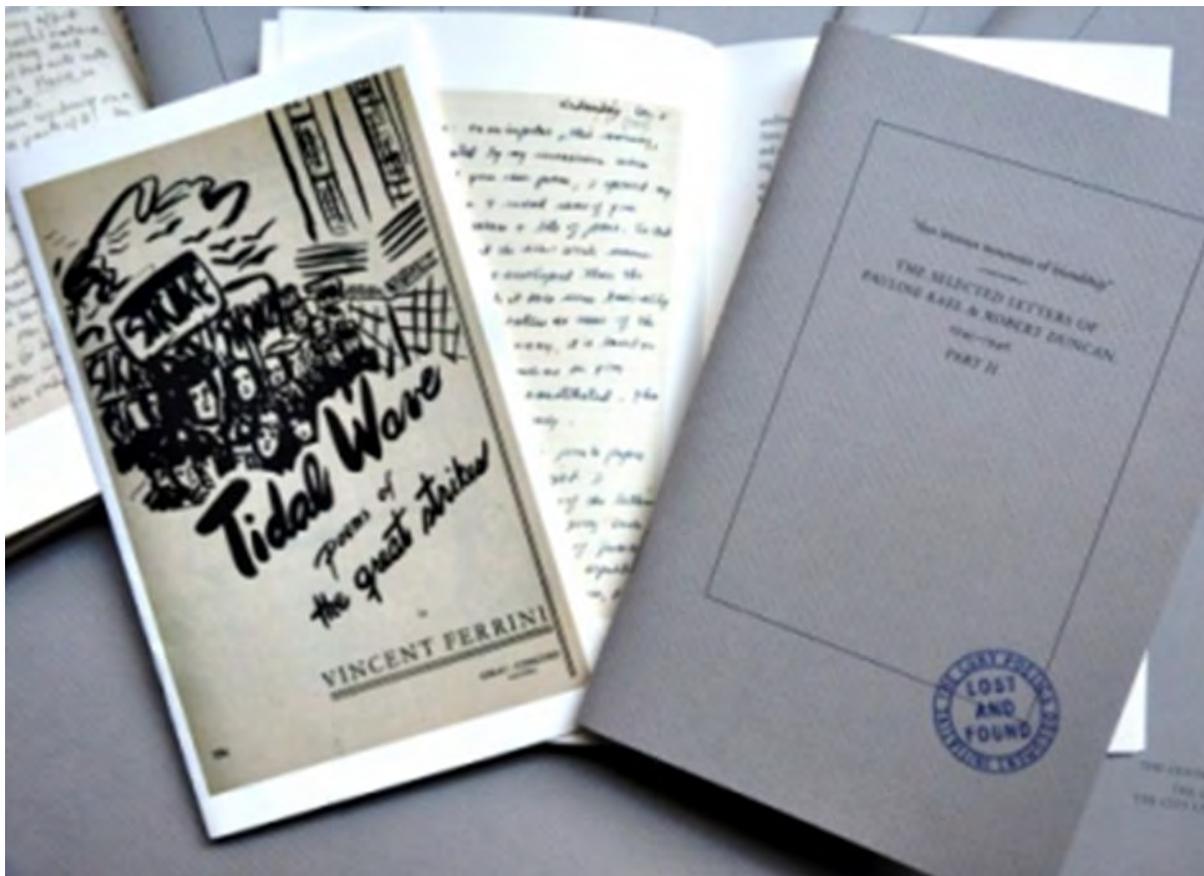
THE HUMAN SCALE. COURTESY OF BULLFROG FILMS

In *Standing on Sacred Ground*, a 4-part series, indigenous people from eight different cultures stand up for their traditional sacred lands in defense of cultural survival, human rights and the environment. Indigenous communities around the world and in the United States resist threats to their sacred places—the original protected lands—in a growing movement to defend human rights and restore the environment. For more information, for prices, or for a preview copy, contact [bullfrogfilms.org](http://bullfrogfilms.org).



STANDING ON SACRED GROUND. COURTESY OF BULLFROG FILMS

The special joint issue of *Cultural Logic* and *Works & Days* on the topic "Scholactivism: Transforming Praxis Inside and Outside the Classroom" has become a double issue with an extension of the deadline for proposals to October 1, 2014 and a complete paper deadline to June 1, 2015. To request a call for papers or to submit a proposal, email [jgramsey@gmail.com](mailto:jgramsey@gmail.com).



LOST & FOUND: THE CUNY POETICS DOCUMENT INITIATIVE SERIES IV CONSISTS OF EIGHT BEAUTIFULLY PRINTED CHAPBOOKS (600 PAGES IN ALL), FEATURING RARE AND UNPUBLISHED TEXTS, INCLUDING LATE WORK BY HARLEM RENAISSANCE POET HELENE JOHNSON, ADRIENNE RICH'S TEACHING MATERIALS, A NEWLY DISCOVERED FILM SCRIPT BY EDWARD DORN, THE FORMATIVE CORRESPONDENCE OF PAULINE KAE & ROBERT DUNCAN, AND A FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION OF VINCENT FERRINI'S 1946 TIDAL WAVE: POEMS OF THE GREAT STRIKES. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO [WWW.CENTERFORTHEHUMANITIES.ORG](http://WWW.CENTERFORTHEHUMANITIES.ORG).

COURTESY OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK'S CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

*Is there a news item, call for papers, upcoming conference, resource, teaching tool, or other information related to progressive education that you would like to share with other Radical Teacher readers? Conference announcements and calls for papers should be at least six months ahead of date. Items, which will be used as found appropriate by Radical Teacher, cannot be returned. Send hard copy to Leonard Vogt, Department of English, LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, New York 11101—or email items to [lvogt@nyc.rr.com](mailto:lvogt@nyc.rr.com).*



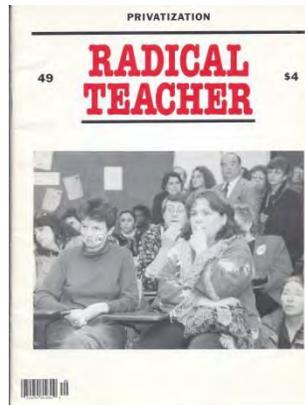
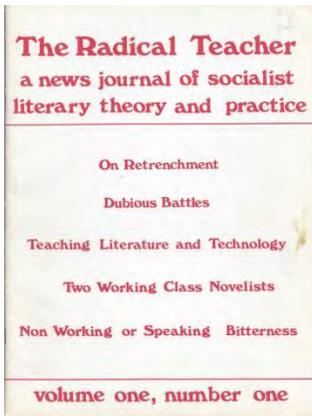
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



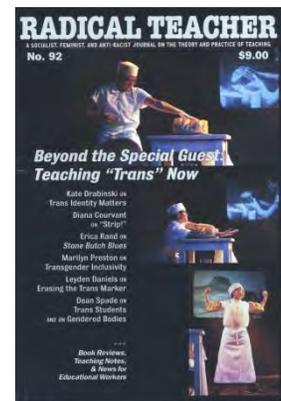
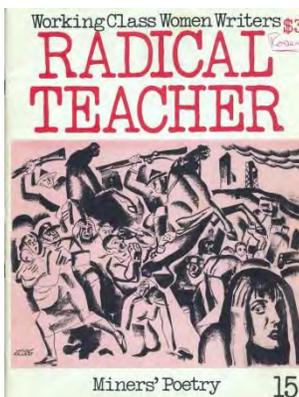
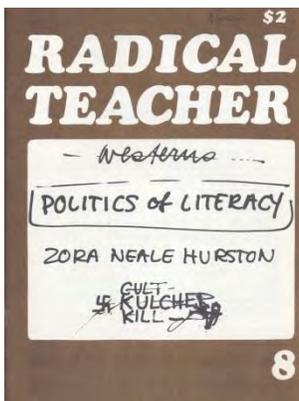
This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING



## Contributors' Notes



**Lucy Arnold Steele** is a lecturer in the University Writing Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In addition, I am a doctoral student at UNC-C in the the Curriculum and Instruction Ph.D. program. My research interests include the teaching of writing, critical pedagogy, science writing, and school reform.

**Tommi Avicoli** is Local News Editor for the *Philadelphia Gay News* and a poet and journalist whose works have appeared in many publications.

**Michael Bennett** is Professor of English at Long Island University, Brooklyn and has published several academic books and articles, as well as poetry or fiction in *The Redneck Review of Literature*, *Downtown Brooklyn*, *Podium*, and *Hawk and Handsaw*. He is on the editorial board of *Radical Teacher*.

**Teresa A. Booker** is a tenured assistant professor at John Jay College. She is, by training, a political scientist and teaches in the interdisciplinary department of Africana Studies. One of her many interests is the implementation and evaluation of policy and practices.

**Jacqueline Brady** is Assistant Professor of English and Assistant Director of Freshman Writing at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY). She also coedits the book review section of *Radical Teacher*.

**Linda Dittmar** is Professor Emerita from the University of Massachusetts—Boston and long time member of *Radical Teacher's* editorial group. Her teaching and writing in the US and abroad focused on modern literature and on minority, women's, and third world literatures and films. Her post-retirement work includes teaching Palestinian and Israeli films and literatures and a memoir-in-progress. Her writing includes *From Hanoi to Hollywood; The Vietnam War in American Film* and *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*.

**David Downing** is Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He is Editor of *Works and Days* and his most recent book is *The Knowledge Contract: Politics and Paradigms in the Academic Workplace*.

**Kate Drabinski** earned her Ph.D. in rhetoric and teaches gender and women's studies, queer studies, and activism at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She is quite certain that the world can be other than it is, and she enjoys watching her students imagine how to make the world differently, hatch plans, and give them a try.

**Joseph Entin** teaches English and American Studies at Brooklyn College (CUNY) and is a member of *Radical Teacher's* editorial collective. He is the author of *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (2007) and co-editor of *Controversies in the Classroom: A Radical Teacher Reader* (2008). His current research interests include U. S. working-class literature and documentary photography after 1940.

**Marilyn Frankenstein** has taught at a variety of alternative high schools and colleges, including Park East High School in East Harlem, New York, Stockton State College in south Jersey, and the Group School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is a member of the *Radical Teacher* editorial board and now teaches math at the College of Public and Community Service, UMass/Boston.

**Elaine Hedges** teaches English and coordinates Women's Studies at Towson State University in Baltimore. She edited C. P. Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* for the Feminist Press and is now working on a volume of Meridel Le Sueur's writing.

**Erin Hurt** is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at West Chester University, where she teaches courses in US Latin@ literature, Women and Gender Studies, and Popular Culture. Her current project examines the cultural work of chica lit.

**Louis Kampf** is retired from The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is one of the founders of *Radical Teacher*.

**Paul Lauter** is Professor Emeritus English at Trinity College in Connecticut and editor of numerous anthologies of literature.

**Frinde Maher** is a member of *Radical Teacher's* Editorial Board. Now retired, she taught education and women's studies at Wheaton College and is a Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis College.

**Cherrie Moraga** is co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Persephone Press) and of *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press).

**Richard Ohmann** was a founder (1975) of *Radical Teacher* and has been on the board since then.

**Patty Lee Parmalee** is an assistant professor at Ramapo State College, where she teaches courses on literature and society. She is the author of the forthcoming *Brecht's America*.

**Bree Picower** is a Doctoral Fellow at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education. Her research explores the ways in which race shapes the daily life of classrooms in which White teachers work with students of color. She has taught elementary school in Oakland, CA and New York City and currently works with pre-service teachers preparing to work in public schools.

**David I. Rubin** is Associate Professor in the College of Public and Community Service, University of Massachusetts, Boston.

**Barbara Smith** is co-editor of *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (The Feminist Press). She is editor of *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Persephone Press).

**Dan Tannicito** is teaching in the English Department of Indiana University, Pennsylvania. He is studying and compiling working-class poetry in a variety of occupations.

**Nick Thorkelson** is a well-known artist and, in previous years, graphic designer for *Radical Teacher*.

Most of these contributors' notes appeared when the original articles were first published in *Radical Teacher*.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Errata

An article in *Radical Teacher* 99[Professional Decline and Resistance: The Case of Library and Archives Canada, Tami Oliphant and Michael McNally] inadequately acknowledged use made of an article by another scholar, and cited the wrong source. We apologize to readers for this lapse.

—The editorial board

In the article "Professional Decline and Resistance: The Case of Library and Archives Canada," the authors erroneously attributed a quotation from an article by Myron Groover ("Contempt for values: The controversy over Library and Archives Canada's Code of Conduct", published in the May 2013 issue of *Academic Matters*) to an unrelated article which appeared in the same issue of that publication. The ideas presented in Mr. Groover's article were not properly acknowledged. The authors are deeply apologetic for this oversight; Myron Groover has been a vocal critic of the LAC for and a highly regarded advocate for library workers.

—Tami Oliphant and Michael McNally



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.library.pitt.edu/dscribe/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.library.pitt.edu/).