

RADICAL TEACHER

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

A Tribute to Richard Ohmann

by Pam Annas, Susan O'Malley, and Bob Rosen



PHOTO OF RICHARD OHMANN

Richard Ohmann, founder and long-time editorial board member of *Radical Teacher*, died on October 8, 2021 at the age of 90. We are publishing this issue--a selection from his many writings for the journal--to honor his memory.

You can read about his long and distinguished career as an English professor at Wesleyan University, as editor of *College English*, and as the author of *English in America*, *Reading Culture*, and other influential works in his obituary in the *New York Times*.^{*} Our purpose in this brief introduction is to share with *Radical Teacher* readers what he has meant to the journal and to his fellow editorial board members for almost fifty years.

Dick published roughly four dozen articles in *Radical Teacher*, conceived and organized numerous special issues, was intensely involved in editing (and sometimes, when necessary, re-writing) submissions, and was essential to charting the direction of the journal over the years. But no less important than his intellectual contributions to our group has been his social contribution.

Dick's sly and irreverent humor and his skills as lunchtime quartermaster have gotten us through dozens of four-hour business meetings. Most valuable, though – for the mental health and cohesion of the group – were the yearly “farm meetings” that he hosted at his place in idyllic Hawley, Massachusetts. Together with his partner, our long-time art director, Liz Powell, he orchestrated weekends of festive eating (he was a terrific cook), walks in the woods, late night discussions of everything from politics to movies to relationships and back to politics, joke-telling marathons, and, yes, even business meetings. Without these annual weekends, we very well might have split or deflated or burned out like too many other radical groups.

So many people, on and off the board, who have shared their memories of Dick have spoken of his generosity – not only as a host and as a friend, but also as a mentor. If you had some writing you needed edited, if you had a project you wanted to brainstorm, if you needed a recommendation, if you were just stuck, Dick was there, cheerful and incredibly helpful. It's no exaggeration to say that some of us owe our careers to him. Dick's generosity and fierce intelligence also informed his teaching, as you will see in the teaching articles that we're including here, so it is no surprise that the *Radical Teacher* board includes some of his students.

Re-reading Dick's writings for *Radical Teacher* was a pleasure as well as an education. His ability to make complex and strenuous radical arguments in a style both casual and precise, charming and often intimate, is something many of us have envied and even tried to imitate. So deciding what to include and what to leave out was not easy.

The dozen pieces we are including range from his earliest to some quite recent, among them introductions, historical overviews, course descriptions, critiques of educational institutions (and of course of capitalism), a book review, a teaching note, and a comradely response to a letter expressing disappointment with his book *English in America*. At the end of this collection you'll also find transcripts of

tributes to Dick from a special session of the Modern Language Association in January of 2022.

We believe these writings will give you a good sense of what Dick Ohmann was like or, if you knew him, help you remember why you enjoyed and admired him so much. Unless you've been a fanatical reader of *Radical Teacher* since 1976, many of these will be new to you, and those you've seen before will surely reward another read. We hope you enjoy and learn from them; we certainly did.

* The obituary is at: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8urz25>. Ira Shor is finishing Dick's book on the College Wage Premium; it will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press.



teacher, Summer 1979

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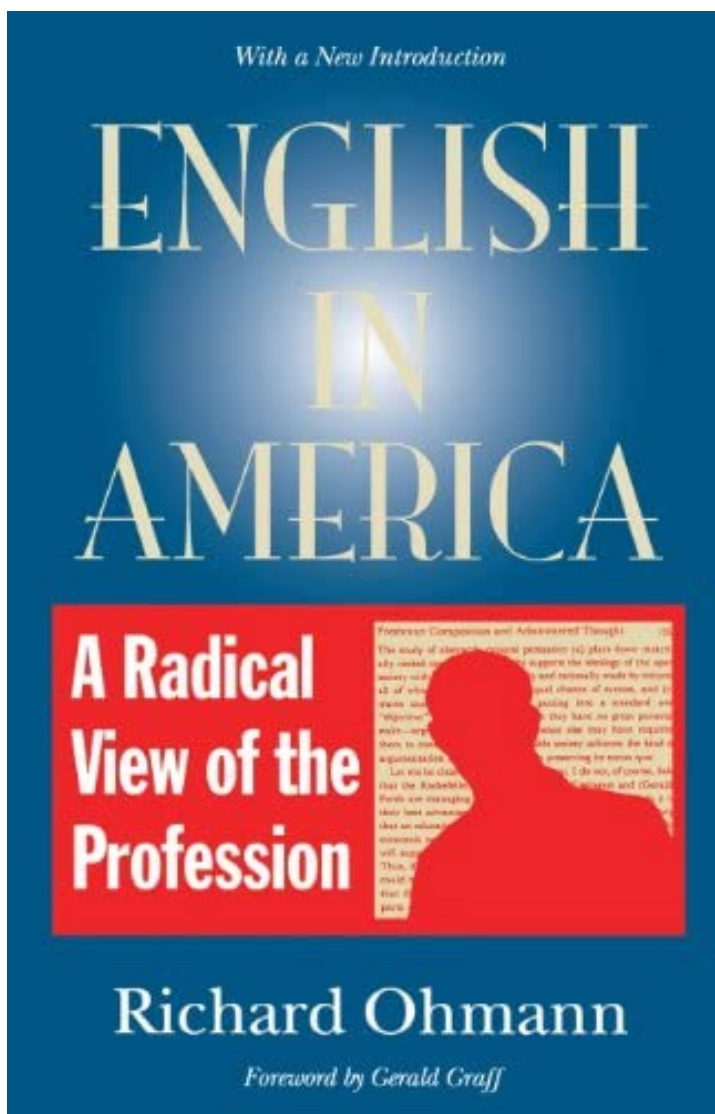
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FROM RADICAL TEACHER #3 (1976)

Letter to Richard Ohmann & His Reply

by Richard Ohmann, Louise Yelin, Susan O'Malley, Sharon Leder,
Reamy Jansen



RICHARD OHMANN. ENGLISH IN AMERICA: A RADICAL VIEW OF THE PROFESSION. WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1996

Dear Dick,

We feel that *English in America* loses some of its life and forcefulness in what appears to us to be an attempt to reach a larger audience of left/liberal academics, who at this stage in their careers are more likely to become cynical about their work, rather than become radical activists. Your book is part of an effort to shift their direction. But the other part of your audience, and we have little sense of the size or proportion of either, are those who are already with you: teachers involved in radical classroom practice; emerging graduate students; unemployed faculty. We suspect a split, perhaps it is only in attention, between the potential audience and the radical one, the latter becoming impatient with the book, and the others tending to feel defensive and under attack, if one can judge from the existing reviews and our general intuition. Did you have these questions of audience in mind when you were writing?

This split, then, has the potential for extending into the realm of practice. For example, if the book's polemics move the left/liberal reader to engage in the struggle for socialism, *English in America* implies that little at the university level can be done right now, and that any real change of substance will come only on the way toward socialism or after it has been achieved. Won't this once more lead back to cynicism about politics on the college level? We feel that while you effectively explain the causes of alienation in the class room, and the department, and tie them to the world of the university and the society at large, you open the door to having this alienation about the work life replaced by another form of alienation, which finds little hope in the possibilities for social action and change. We feel that the book should place more stress on such possibilities. In other words, now that we have an analysis, what do we do?

Sincerely,

Louise Yelin
Susan O'Malley
Sharon Leder
Reamy Jansen

Dear Louise, Susan, Sharon, and Reamy:

I appreciate your questions, and the criticism they carry. It must be rare for someone who writes a political book to have a chance to discuss its argument and reception with those who share its aims, and whose criticism comes out of comradeship and struggle rather than the wish to score debating points or advance a career or defend a position. I'll try to reply in the same spirit.

First, about my intended audience. You are exactly right about my trying to reach liberal teachers, and "shift their direction." I believe that since liberal values, including those associated with humanistic education, cannot be realized within liberal capitalist society (or call it the welfare state, or monopoly capitalism), it is possible to move such an audience toward socialism by showing how capitalist institutions defeat our humane intentions, even when those institutions are the professional ones we have in part created. This belief is not a point of abstract theory. I have come to it, most obviously, through my own experience of the last ten years. But of course that experience took place in the Radical Caucus, in NUC, in RESIST, in the classroom, etc., far more than in my private study. The process I went through was one that hundreds or maybe thousands of other students and teachers were going through at the same time. The evolution of liberal academic ideals into socialist practice is a recent historical fact, not a hypothesis.

I realize that reading a book is no substitute for years of political work. Why, then, write a book for liberals? Here I made in my mind a division of possible audiences somewhat different from the one you discuss in your letter. I hoped to reach younger people, mainly: graduate students and untenured faculty members who are frustrated by the way work and its institutions block their ideals, but who have not shared so directly as you and I in professional struggle and political evolution. I thought that for this group my book might be helpful as a record of recent activity, as a political autobiography, and as a socialist analysis.

Was I right in this estimate? It's impossible to know. But I don't think the reviews are decisive. Along with these public and mainly critical estimates of *English in America* by established professional men, I must give some weight to the 25 or so letters I've received from graduate students and untenured or unemployed teachers, women and men. Admitting the self-indulgence of the procedure, I'd like to quote from a few of these, representative, I think:

I just finished your book, *English in America*, and want to thank you for it. It's a book I've needed to read, and it helps me to focus the stray doubts and apprehensions that have been bothering me in the beginnings of a career in English. (First year graduate student, elite university -- subsequently a drop out.)

I have just finished reading your book, and its impact is still settling in my mind, but from this close perspective I know that you have articulated . . . many of the concerns which have been plaguing me for years. . . . My response is active as well as contemplative, and the book is now being circulated -- selectively -- around the department. (Assistant professor, major university.)

I want to thank you for writing *English in America*... You answer well two questions most teachers of English are unable to: what do we think we are doing? and what are we in fact doing? ("Underpaid, so-called part time lecturer," branch of a state university.)

What I'm supporting, especially, is your placing of our profession in an historical context, your very convincing connection of our professional values to the values that run our society. (Former assistant professor, small college.)

These 25 letters are all mainly favorable, though almost all critical as well -- more of that later. I have also had many invitations to speak to graduate students and departments and conferences since the book came out, and where I've had time to go, I've found students and teachers seriously contending with the argument of the book. Finally, for what it's worth, and to anchor these reflections in the capitalist marketplace, six weeks after publication (the only accounting I've had so far) the book had sold about 2000 copies. More than half were paperbacks, so the figures don't just reflect library purchases. Aside from healing the wounds to my ego inflicted by *TLS* and *NYR*, I mean what I'm saying here to remind me and you that we should be cautious in assuming that the left-liberal elite speaks for people on the margins of academia.

My relationship to socialist readers is another matter. I expected people like yourselves to be "impatient" with or even bored by the polemics on careerism, the MLA, New Criticism, etc. You already knew what I had to say about such things. I hoped you would find the analysis of departments, of freshman composition, and of academic history -- perhaps unsurprising ---but solid, integrative, novel in some of its detail, and useful both intellectually and practically. You can best say how reasonable that hope was.

So on balance I still think I made a correct decision about the audiences I might be speaking to. I feel much more vulnerable to the criticism in your last paragraph. Many of my correspondents sounded the same note. Perhaps the book offers readers sympathetic to it nothing but a kind of revolutionary paralysis. If socialism is the only answer, and one that seems a long way off, why do anything now? Are there no changes in our daily work or the surrounding institutions that will make a progressive difference? Surely it was wrong for me to spend so much time showing the futility of liberal reformism, and so little suggesting what it might mean to carry socialism into one's work. And it doesn't do much good right now to repeat the clichés, however true, that we must create alliances between workers and intellectuals, work toward, a mass-based socialist party, struggle against layoffs and repression in our sector, and so on.

As my essay in this issue of *Radical Teacher* shows, I think there's much to be done in and around the classroom by those of us lucky enough to have jobs. What that might

be will differ a lot from one situation to another, but I do believe it crucial to re-establish marxism and socialist teaching in the universities. The critique of capitalism should be our daily task, in however explicit or muted a form is tolerated (or unnoticed) by our bosses. Teach literature as ideology; teach how the bourgeoisie uses the "means of mental production" (*German Ideology*); teach writing as development of consciousness and as struggle; teach the literature of the oppressed. I don't have anything new to say about these strategies, but welcome the chance to endorse them.

I'm not pessimistic, most days. Our collectively taught course, "Toward a Socialist America," has 70 students. The new socialist organization at Wesleyan has 100 members. For a final project last spring, the students in a group tutorial that I worked with produced a good pamphlet (and used it for organizing) analyzing Wesleyan from a socialist perspective. Students now are working together to press the economics and government departments to hire radicals, and are trying to influence our whole curriculum.

There have been and will be fizzles and failures. Doing this kind of work heightens my frustration at my own ignorance and my deficiencies in political action. And I *am* aware both that class differences call for quite different strategies elsewhere, and that many who will read this could not possibly "get away with" what I can. Still, I think most can make at least some integration of politics and work, and I share your criticism of my book for encouraging a kind of alienation I don't myself feel. Not now, anyway -- maybe I did when I finished the book.

I want to conclude by registering three additional criticisms of *English in America*. (1) The book is not intellectually strong enough. It's eclectic, and too dependent on my own analyses -- often belated rediscoveries of the wheel. It's vaguely marxist, but not grounded in the best scholarship of the tradition, from Marx' own work to such recent, crucial studies as Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. I just didn't know enough. (2) Some parts of the book are dated more than they need to have been, because I didn't take into account the recent depression, the main single fact of most teachers' working lives now. (3) Although I knew that the book would reflect my own privileged situation and personal history, I did not make enough effort to bring in and understand the experience of teachers, like yourselves, who work in community colleges or trade schools, or who work part-time at lousy wages, or who don't work at all.

This is not self-flagellation; I wrote the book I could write at that time. But there's lots more to be said and done about English in this republic. I'm glad you've come at it (and me) dialectically.

Yours,
Dick Ohmann



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FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #3 (1976)

Teaching a Large Course On Contemporary Fiction

by Richard Ohmann



IMAGE BY DOM FOU VIA UNSPLASH

There are no doubt many ways to teach literature as a socialist. I imagine that the most natural way for many of us -- and the way that permits the closest approximation in the classroom to socialist practice -- is through a small or middle-sized elective course, with a subject like literature and revolution or images of women in literature. The topic will guarantee some students who are socially committed, or who at least have a personal investment, and a few tourists. The teacher can count on intensity, and with skill and luck help the students see that the logical outlet for their intensity is socialism. Such a course can also be taught dialectically: for instance, on the model Brent Harold developed in "Beyond Student Centered Teaching: The Dialectical Materialist Form of a Literature Course," *College English*, 34 (1972), pp. 200-212. I've worked in courses like this. Within Wesleyan's relaxed curriculum it's even possible for me to set up a study group explicitly in socialism, and have it count as a course. And freshman English and other staples may be inflected toward socialist ideas and practice, even in fairly repressive settings.

But I also think we should involve ourselves in large lecture courses. These exist perforce in most literary offerings. The depression has lately created, and will continue to create; more of them. For internal political reasons, many departments want to have some courses with big enrollments. And to teachers like us, the large course offers one obvious advantage: a chance to reach many students with a political approach to literature. Disadvantages are equally obvious: the alienating format of the lecture; the necessity of choosing a subject that will draw lots of students, rather than one that will naturally sponsor political discussion; the certainty that many of the students will be, precisely, tourists.

With these considerations in mind, I drew up a plan last year for English 283, "Contemporary Fiction as Part of Contemporary American Culture":

Fiction by such writers as Pynchon, Salinger, Kerouac, Kesey, Plath, Vonnegut, Roth, Jong, Brautigan, Heinlein. What makes for critical and popular success? How does the reading of novels relate to consumption of other imaginative forms -- TV shows and commercials, films, popular songs, comics, magazine literature, plays? What functions do these works have in capitalist society?

A few more than 120 students took the course, and I gave lectures two or three times each week: no pretense of its being other than a lecture course. But every other Friday I scheduled two discussion sections, one with me and one with an undergraduate TA (who did a splendid job). I told students to come to these sessions only if they liked discussion; about half came, so we had bulky but sometimes useful groups of 30. In addition, I left time at the end of some lectures, and encouraged people to challenge my arguments, or state positions different from mine. I also held ample office hours, and got to know 40 or 50 students that way, including most of the politically committed ones. But I want to emphasize that the format of the course was rather conservative. My only serious move away from depersonalization was to assign two medium-sized papers and a take-home exam (students could do a journal in place

of the first paper, and I encouraged collaborative work). This entailed a back-breaking load of work, especially at the semester's end, although Paul Goldstein, my TA, did some of the reading. I think it was worth the effort, because in this way I was able to respond to students' ideas. So much for mechanics of the course; back now to its content.

My intention was, not to survey political novels, or the ones I like best, or novels that meet some ahistorical standard of excellence, but to consider those that are in one way or another central to American bourgeois culture, and to help students understand that culture through their reading of the novels. So I picked the books fairly mechanically, according to these criteria:

- Written by an American
- Published since 1960
- Either a best seller in hardback, or a success in paperback over the long run, especially with young people
- Taken seriously by reviewers and the critical establishment, though not necessarily liked by all

This last criterion meant excluding fiction of the Harold Robbins-Jacqueline Susann type, though I did touch on *Love Story* and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* for contrast (also *Stranger in a Strange Land*, to have one representative of science fiction). Here is the main reading list:

- Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*
- Updike, *Rabbit Redux*
- Bellow, *Herzog*
- McCarthy, *The Group*
- Roth, *Portnoy 's Complaint*
- Dickey, *Deliverance*
- Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*
- Jong, *Fear of Flying*
- Plath, *The Bell Jar*
- Heller, *Something Happened*
- (all of the above were best sellers)
- Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*
- Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America*
- Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- Mailer, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

Mailer's novel is a dubious candidate on criterion (3), but I wanted one of his books on the list. Otherwise, all the books are both popular and included within the range that intellectuals read, criticize, argue about. Many are well on their way to becoming part of the collegiate literary canon.

Why? What are the tests a novel must pass to be influential within this part of our culture? These questions ran through the whole course, and they seem to me important ones, for anyone who is interested in artists and the public, literature and ideology, culture and power.

For one kind of answer, I examined fairly closely the way a book becomes a best seller: the economics of publishing, the politics of reviewing and advertising, the social class and values of the primary audience. (On best sellers, the most helpful work I found was, unfortunately, a recent French doctoral dissertation, *Le best seller aux États Unis*, by Simone Beserman. Richard Kostelanetz's *The End of Intelligent Writing* is politically wild, but has much good information about New York publishing and reviewing.) Essentially, for a novel to have this kind of success it must sell many hardbound copies within the first few weeks after publication. This gets it on the best seller list, at which point people buy it *because* it is a best seller. To achieve this initial impact, it must be bought, read, and talked about (more buyers learn of books they want to read by word of mouth than from any other single source) by a particular public: upper-middle-class people, mainly in and around New York. Advertising and publicity of the talk-show variety get the news to this readership, along with reviews in a very few periodicals, especially the *Sunday Times*. Since the rest of the reading public follows these leaders, best-selling fiction must somehow reinforce or appeal to their tastes and values. Hence, perhaps, the odd combination of fashionable intellectualism, sexual openness, and rock-bottom bourgeois ideas that characterizes most of the novels.

A similar bottleneck exists between publication of a novel and its acceptance as significant in academic and intellectual circles. The *Sunday Times*, again, has through its review the most power, with a handful of other journals as secondary taste makers: the *New York Review*, the *New Republic*, *Commentary*, the *New Yorker*, etc. In short, a small number of people -- editors, reviewers, buyers -- of fairly uniform class background have most of the say in deciding which novels will be seen as important, as a necessary part of conversation and culture, and which ones will not be seen at all.

There is a limit, of course, to how much analysis of this sort can be dealt out through lectures. I gave only two. The main approach to my questions, in a literature course, must be through the novels themselves -- how they render life in bourgeois society, what dissatisfactions they express, what accommodations they offer, how they pass on bourgeois values (as most do) to their readers, how narrative form and personal style convey ideology.

But these are not the questions most students bring with them into such a course. The students are fans of (say) Vonnegut or Salinger, and want to pursue their enthusiasm. Or they want academic time for reading fiction they've heard about. Or they want a light course to balance their pre-med labors. And whatever motives of this kind bring them to the course, most also want wisdom, insight into their own lives, understanding of the possibilities afforded them by America. An unrelieved political critique of the novels -- many of which are ideologically puerile -- would insult the legitimate interests of students and defeat the hopes they have for a

nourishing connection to fiction. Besides, almost all the novels manage at least some achievement in art and insight (*Deliverance* is the only one in which I found absolutely no redeeming social value); their failures are in part honorable, and can only be understood as proceeding from serious engagement with the task of figuring out how to live decently in America. Besides again, even with Wesleyan's upper middle-class and relatively verbal students, I couldn't assume appreciation of the novels on their own terms.

The main approach to my questions, in a literature course, must be through the novels themselves -- how they render life in bourgeois society, what dissatisfactions they express, what accommodations they offer, how they pass on bourgeois values (as most do) to their readers, how narrative form and personal style convey ideology.

So I adopted an approach that might be unsympathetically described as building the novels up in order to knock them down. But I think the strategy is warranted. Looking closely at what's good in one of these novels almost invariably means following some insight into the difficulty of living a good life on the terms offered by our society. (Many of the novelists would probably let it go at "living a good life," but since they take America as a given, the mimesis of capitalism is always there.) This is, to put it crudely, the *problem* posed by each novel, often revealingly. Most go on to hint at solutions, and here's where I think they fall apart. They displace politics and offer personal or anarchist or pre-industrial remedies for human sorrows that are rooted in advanced capitalism, industrial society.

I can't spell this out here; you probably agree any how. But for an instance, in the course I gave an early lecture on *The Catcher in the Rye* (only six out of my 120 students admitted not having read it). The book's power comes from Holden's sensitivity, his clarity of observation and language, and his entirely sharable longing for kinder human relationships. Contrary to what Salinger criticism has mainly held, Holden's revulsion fastens on divisions of class and the nastiness they produce (check through the things he stigmatizes as "phony"). But there's another strain in his critique, too -- a rejection not just of class society and the mores of the bourgeoisie, but of the conventions and sharing that are necessary to any society at all. Hence his vision of living as a deaf-mute in a cabin in the West. Having beautifully rendered some of the dissonance of bourgeois society, Salinger offers Holden and us a choice between it and no society at all, excluding other obvious possibilities, and excluding anything but individual action. With the choice posed this way, Holden naturally will make his way back to bourgeois society: any rejection of it, in this framework, is neurotic and self-destructive. The end of the novel betrays the main body of it -- as so often in these works, for lack of political understanding adequate to the author's social

intuition. (Carol Ohmann and I have argued this at length in an article called "Reviewers, Critics, and *The Catcher in the Rye*," in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1976.) To talk about the novel in this way is to grant its obvious appeal, understand that appeal socially and politically, and so make possible a critique of its failures which is at once moral, political, and esthetic.

I think that similar strategies for coping with bourgeois reality can be found in most of these novels. They give us central characters whose lives aren't working out well, for reasons that can easily be seen as social: Franny Glass nauseated by the striving for individual superiority that is the burden of her class; Rabbit Angstrom defeated by contradictions between the American dream and its embodiment in his dead-end working-class job and dull, imitation-suburban family life; Esther Greenwood stifled by the dehumanizing adult roles made available to her as a woman; Moses Herzog tasting the ashes of his intellectual and romantic ambitions and his rise, through world-conquering ideas, out of poverty; Oedipa Maas caught between the tedium and false cheeriness of Tupperware parties and the horror of seeing how society actually works. Often the novelists, with varying degrees of consciousness, choose to conceptualize such difficulties in terms of the central character's neurosis, breakdown, personal maladjustment. This happens in all the books just mentioned, to one degree or another, as well as in *Portnoy's Complaint*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Group*, *Breakfast of Champions*, *Fear of Flying*, and *Something Happened*.

Every novel on this list gets at some strain in capitalist society; some are fairly explicit about that. But because politics is always excluded imaginatively as a response, the books offer a variety of inadequate or disheartening "solutions."

1. The distressed character undergoes a kind of therapy, and learns to accept the world: *Franny and Zooey*, *The Bell Jar*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Herzog*, perhaps *Portnoy's Complaint*, *Fear of Flying*. Often he or she makes it with the aid of a family or a family-like group (the family, as the best shield against the nastiness of capitalism, may also be the most powerful diversion from politics in our society).
2. The hero conquers social reality through individual achievement (*Deliverance*, and a bit of this in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*) or imagination (*Trout Fishing in America*).
3. Society is replaced by a pre-industrial idyll or by anarchist spontaneity (*Trout Fishing in America*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Herzog*; Mailer and Vonnegut also toy with this nostalgia, but can't believe in it).
4. There's no solution, and we're left looking into the void (*Something Happened*, *Breakfast of Champions*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *The Group*).

In short, I believe that most of the novels, and the sympathetic responses they often get from students should

be treated with respect up to a point. Almost all render bourgeois society with some critical insight, personal and social, and with some art -- in a way quite beyond *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *Love Story*, and most best sellers scorned by academic people. But the insight falls short, and the art is often flawed by failure to follow the insight far enough, not to mention by narrowness of historical scope and by the divorce of ideas and feelings from material life. If this point is kept in view, many students can make good connections between their experience of the fiction and their experience of America.

I tried to strengthen these connections by constantly shuttling between novels and other imaginative forms, and between literary criticism and social analysis. I included a fair amount about TV, helped by Horace Newcomb's *TV: The Most Popular Art*, with its keen analysis of narrative formulas (situation and domestic comedy, westerns, doctor shows, cop shows, etc.) as resolutions of social problems, and of the family as our main image of security and well-being. We did most of this in discussion sections, where I could draw on the students' wide experience of TV, their awareness of its conventions, and their healthy cynicism. Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, also a text in the course, offers more insight on bourgeois neuroses and on the destructiveness of individualism. I gave a couple of lectures on American spectator sport as a surrogate for community and for politics; this tied in with the evolution of mass society, with the question of what people get from the entertainments they choose (including fiction), and with the exaltation of physical achievement by Dickey, Updike, and Mailer. A number of the novels render sexuality in detail that would have been restricted to pornography twenty years ago: a close look at the results led to lectures and discussion of sexual politics, the nature and uses of pornography itself, the sexual revolution, and Marcuse's hypothesis about the co-optation of political rebellion through the eroticization of culture. I extended the exploration of power offered by Pynchon, Heller, Vonnegut, and Mailer through discussion of Domhoff's *Who Rules America* and more recent marxist accounts.

Needless to say, I'm an amateur on all these matters, but if anything, that was a help: it diminished the authority that traditionally resides behind the lectern, helped show that I was getting into terrain not adequately covered by professionals, and encouraged students to explore with me and take seriously their own cultural intuitions. These goals were also furthered in a way I hadn't anticipated by another tactic I tried in the course: inviting students to collaborate in small groups on papers or on class presentations. The class was so large that only three groups were bold enough to volunteer for the latter task, but from them we got excellent presentations on pop sex (Dr. Reuben, etc.), the ideology of Walt Disney's enterprise, and that of popular and rock music.

What can students learn from a course like this? An antidote to formalism, which is not "mere" sociology. A way to read fiction, answering their wish that it help them think and feel about their lives, but in a way that is not ahistorical and private. A sense of how fiction conveys ideology and serves one or another class. A politicizing of form, style, image, convention. Some demystification of art. A

suggestion of how our cultural marketplace works. And (I'd be disingenuous not to mention this) some appreciation of how a socialist professor thinks about the world. Most students, I judge from their valuations, found themselves taking the course more seriously than they expected to. Only a few admitted to thinking my approach that of a philistine or monomaniac. I could tell from the papers and journals they wrote that some were rethinking their relationships to books and to history.

The failures and disappointments? Not enough personal engagement, dialectic, struggle. Perhaps half the students relatively passive, treating lectures as entertainment (or the reverse) and writing safe papers. My own tendency, not always successfully overcome, toward abstraction and academically elegant formulations. My wish, *never* successfully overcome, to be liked and admired by that big audience, a wish that made me recoil from angering them, and so limited my power to start motion in them. Not just for me, I believe, but for most of us who spent our youth being Good Students, putting on solo performances, being judged for our dazzling or ingratiating qualities, the role of lecturer stirs old anxieties that reinforce academic convention and make socialist teaching hard.

But I want to do more teaching in this format, and think that most of us should, who have loud enough voices and the chance to take over or invent popular courses. Many students are responsive to ideas developed in such courses, so long as they perceive the ideas to be the main thing, rather than just material to be objectively tested. And lecture courses do exist, to repeat myself. We should learn to use the form as well as we can, rather than wishing it out of existence.



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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #5 (1977)

English in America: The Next Twenty Years

by Richard Ohmann

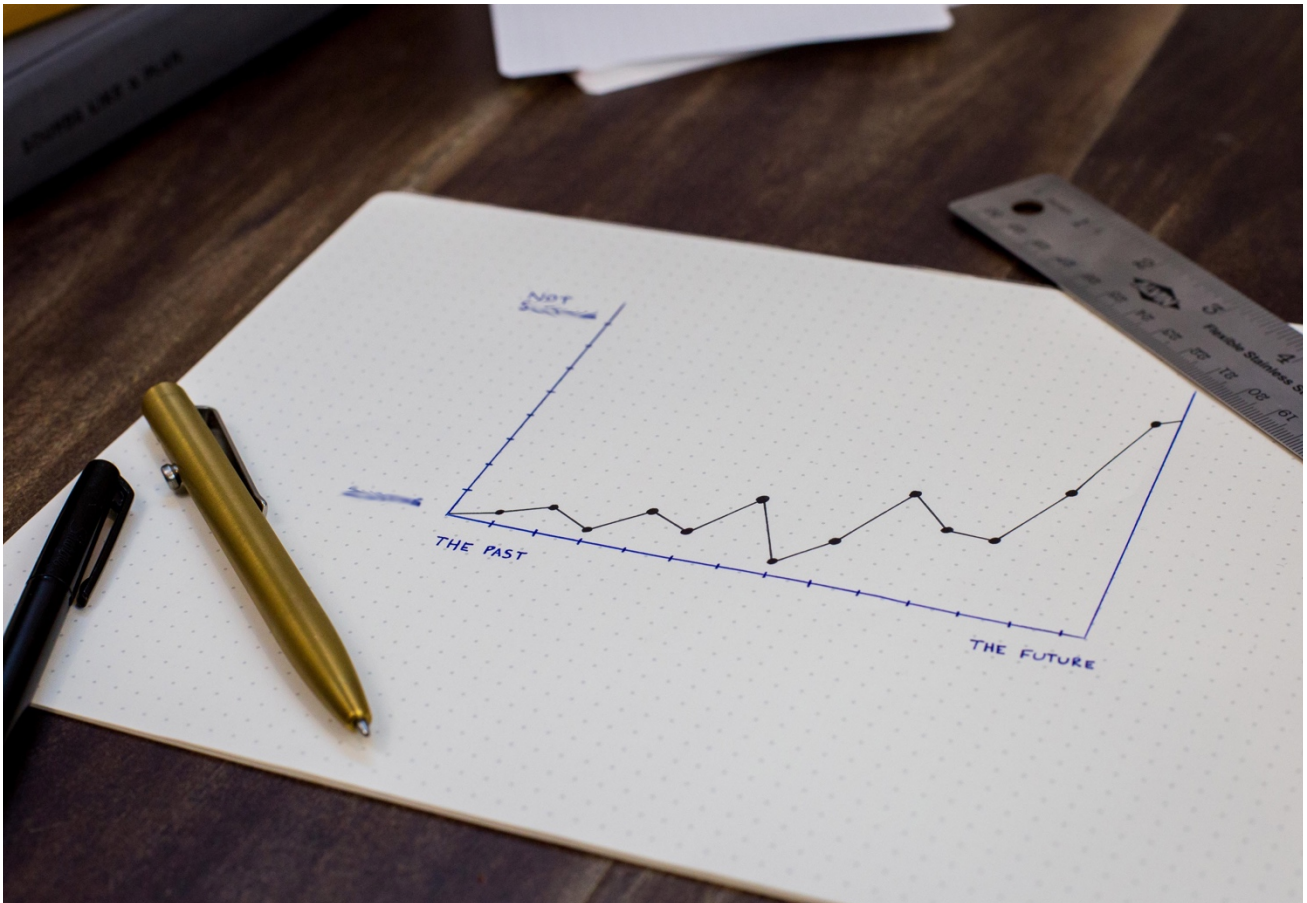


IMAGE BY ISAAC SMITH VIA UNSPLASH

In 1969 Edmund Farrell of NCTE did a fascinating piece of research. He asked four panels of experts—in learning theory, educational media, secondary curriculum, and English—to estimate, for each of some 200 possible developments, the likelihood of its occurring in a sizable number of schools by 1975, 1980, and so on to the millennium. So in Farrell's book, *Deciding The Future*,¹ we have a consensus on everything from the likelihood that teachers will be more accepting of the language children speak (a better than even chance that 20% will be so by 1984) to the likelihood of "food rewards during the day, e.g., ice cream, modifying behavior in the classroom" (only a 13% probability of 20% implementation by the year 2000).

The first five-year period has ended, and it is possible to do a little second-guessing. My point is not to mock the experts or dismiss Farrell's study: on the contrary, I'm grateful for the experts' willingness to speculate about the future, and I think Farrell's book of continuing value—almost more so, as some of its predictions go wrong and allow us to learn in what specific ways the future surprises us as it becomes the past. That may help us to think more powerfully about the part of 1969's future that is still future to us in 1977.

Let me take just two pairs of predictions, of special interest to me. Bear in mind that Farrell's subject was secondary education, but I believe that most of the forecasters would have extended their predictions to higher education.

The first set: the panel on educational technology saw "taxpayer revolts, leading to fewer books, fewer support personnel," etc. as a small likelihood in the earlier '70's, and a declining one through the remainder of the century, so that taxpayer revolts were seen as easily the least likely, by 1999, of all the 49 developments on which this panel was questioned. Farrell summed up their answers to this and other questions by saying, "Citizens will continue to support the schools financially and ideologically, though funding will not be as generous as educators might desire" (126). I wonder if, eight years later, any one would make the same prediction. The other one in this pair: the experts assigned a relatively high probability to a one-fifth reduction in teaching loads. Just now, such an outcome seems unlikely, if we are to count on the support of citizens to achieve it.

Those two predictions bear on financial support for education; the other two bear on content. (1) Of all 42 possibilities offered them, the curriculum panel thought least likely a greater emphasis at all levels on "communication skills," and a reduced emphasis on "literary appreciation." (2) The English panel's choice for least probable was a decline in the status of the humanities at the university level (153). I need hardly say that such a decline has already occurred, with no sign of reversal: between 1967 and 1973 there was already a 25% drop in the portion of all B.A. degrees that were granted in the humanities.² As for the balance between communications skills and literary appreciation, that outcome is far from certain, but I'll bet the panelists would make a different forecast now, in light of the back-to-basics movement that has sprung up since 1969.

All those predictions looked reasonable, at the end of the 1960's. Our educational system had been growing, seemingly without limit. With something between perplexity and relief, English teachers had been relaxing traditional requirements and giving first place to literature. Faculties and students apparently agreed that the humanities deserved to resume their ancient place at the heart of liberal learning. Where did the forecasters go wrong? Primarily, I imagine, in two assumptions: that present trends were a satisfactory guide to the future, and that what educators thought best would prevail. Or, to put it the other way around, they minimized the chance of historical discontinuity, and the dependence of the educational system upon the economic and political system as a whole. Farrell offered a similar surmise: "that the panelists suffered from being specialists, that they were perhaps insufficiently aware of or concerned about forces at work in the society which, though not within the traditional province of education, may nevertheless determine much of its substance and structure during the next three decades." As Galbraith put it, "It is the vanity of educators that they shape the educational system to their preferred image. They may not be without influence but the decisive force is the economic system"³—a point elaborated in convincing historical and materialist detail by Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Or, to climax this parade of authorities: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past."⁴ It is to the implications of that idea, for teachers as we forecast our future and create it, that I now want to turn.

Educational forecasting has passed rapidly through a series of failures and sophistications in the past fifteen years. In the euphoric old days, we had forecasts grounded in plain extrapolation: if the universities and colleges were expanding at such and such a rate, they would continue to do so indefinitely. This approach—obviously inadequate, but beguiling to most of us in the prosperous sixties—gave way to a more realistic and less encouraging one around the end of the decade. The "trend-demographic" technique of Allan Cartter and the Carnegie Commission still projected forward the increasing portion of college-age people going to college, but took into account the by-then obvious fact that our birth rate was declining and that in time the college-age cohort would also decline in absolute numbers. This method produced a much more sobering set of predictions. But not nearly sobering enough, according to Stephen Dresch,⁵ Director of Research in the Economics of Higher Education at Yale. Dresch calls his own method "demographic-economic"; his model of our future includes the information Cartter used, but also two other factors: the capacity of the economy to absorb college-educated workers; and what has happened and will happen to the supply of such workers, as a result of the universities' growth during the fifties and sixties.

In a rather dense article, Dresch shows that this growth has owed to a unique historical situation. First, in the post-war period great economic change occurred: not only the fact of rapid absolute growth in the economy, but the nature of that growth, had an impact on higher education. Much of

the growth was in new industries—television, electronics, computers, aircraft, space, etc. —that required large numbers of highly-educated workers. As this happened, the college-age cohort—from which new educated workers had to be drawn —was at first relatively small because of low birth rates during the depression and war years. And through the entire boom period—even after post-war children began arriving in college—those newly recruited by schools and colleges to teach them came from the small age cohort born during depression and war. As a result, the portion of the age cohort in college rose from 20% in 1960 to 30% in 1970. And of course, the portion going into college teaching rose even more swiftly. Hence the dramatic expansion and prosperity of our ranks during this period. One more factor needs to be reckoned in, according to Dresch: inertia. Lacking foreknowledge like Dresch's, young people keep going to college (and I would add, to graduate school in English) for a while after the economic reasons for doing so have weakened. The "wage-differential" between college-educated entrants to the work force and others peaked in the late sixties, but larger and larger percentages of young people continued to choose college even though the economy is glutted with educated workers. (Dresch believes that the lag, before people catch on, is about six years.)

We are, of course, seeing the dismal result of these ebbs and flows right now. But I have the impression that many lay people and some forecasters still think that our current troubles will last only a short while. Dresch's model predicts otherwise, and I'll mention a few salient points of his forecast.

- 1) The percentage of entrants to the work force who had a bachelor's degree was 13, in 1960. That will rise to a peak of 33% in the early 1980's, and then fall back to 16% by the year 2000.
- 2) The absolute expansion of our college and university system is nearly at an end. The system will not remain level, but will contract by 40% in the 1980's, and another 12% in the 1990's.
- 3) By 2000, the entire doubling of capacity in the system, which has taken place in the last fifteen years, will be redundant.
- 4) Clearly this means little need for new faculty members. By 1990, only about 3% of college teachers will be under age 35. In short, there will be in effect no new academic jobs during the 1980's.
- 5) For several decades, high school completion has varied quite directly with college entry: 50% of those finishing school go to college. Hence, as smaller portions of the age cohort choose college, more and more will drop out of high school. I would add that this in turn means little need for new teachers of high school English: and since a large proportion of college students in English (by comparison with other fields) are on their way to high school teaching, a collapse

of that market should affect our profession more than it will affect, say, sociologists or even chemists.

I don't want to suggest that Dresch has now handed us the final truth. Forecasting is a dim science at best, and I'd expect Dresch's argument to be amended both by other, still more sophisticated forecasters and by reality. Allan Cartter, for one, has absorbed that argument and, in response to it, adjusted his own view of our future; but he remains less gloomy than Dresch.

Too, cultural and political events can and doubtless will bollux up the workings of iron economic law. People do make their own history. Even now, for instance, the public's sudden, distorted concern over literacy offers a chance for our profession to make some gains that Dresch's model could not predict—depending on how opportunistic we are. But on the whole, Dresch is, in my amateur opinion, the most comprehensive thinker to date about our future. Even if it's a matter of choosing among oracles, we'd do well to listen to this one.

We find ourselves, then, in a vicious eddy of American economic history. Our fortunes as an occupational group have, for a hundred years, been closely bound to the evolution of industrial capitalism, for reasons I tried to analyze in *English in America*. Because our society expresses its values through the market, a sudden change in the market makes itself felt as a change in values. You can find in just about any of our professional publications now expressions of dismay that society does not seem to care about the humanities, about the full cultivation of the mind, about the higher literacy, about what we value most and are prepared to offer. Yet I doubt that American society, taken as a collection of individuals with personal values, holds literature or literacy any less dear in 1976 than in 1966. The point is that society determines our fortunes as a profession, not mainly through direct purchase of our services, but through the labor market where capitalists buy one or another kind of labor power. Right now they do not need nearly so much educated labor power as we, along with our colleagues in other fields, have been producing. This is the main fact about our present and future. The economic system is shaping our educational choices, and providing us the circumstances within which we will make our piece of history.

So long as we (along with the rest of the citizenry) accept those circumstances, we may have an illusion of choice, but. the choices we make are bound to implement—one way or another—the larger choice that the economic system has made for us. In the recent joint issue of the *ADE* (Associated Departments of English) and *ADFL* (Associated Departments of Foreign Languages) *Bulletins*, on Employment and the Profession, John Gerber imagines a future 50 years hence in which English teachers are happy and prosperous, owing to the determination of our profession, from 1984 on, to "render service to the entire public, not just a selected portion of it" (p. 17). I endorse Gerber's stand against elitism and special privilege, but from the perspective of this talk, it's clear that even during the boom years we did serve the entire public in the way dictated by the economy and our professional institutions.

We will probably continue to do so, though service is going to feel more like slavery than like humane learning, for a stretch.

Consider some of the suggestions made by Gerber and his fellow authors in the *ADE/ADFL* issue. Quentin Hope, along with many others, makes the most obvious one: admit fewer graduate students, and sift those few even more finely through the sieves of course work and apprenticeship in teaching. Now plainly the result of such planning—a drop in the number of entrants to our profession—is foreordained. That result may be achieved in the way Hope recommends, though so far our graduate departments have not displayed such enlightenment (Ph.D. admissions were up 15% in the humanities from 1971 to 1973, up 6.5% in English last year over the year before—cf. Physics, where the number *dropped* 30% from 1965 to 1975—*ADE/ADFL*, p.67). But if departments don't move toward such a restriction, it will occur (is occurring) in other ways: students not applying to good schools, dropping out from graduate work, failing to find jobs after getting their Ph.D.'s. Needless to say, some means are less nasty than others, but we should understand that the debate is about means, not outcomes.

Hope and Marilyn Williamson recommend, as another strategy, combining teaching assistantships into full-time jobs for Ph.D.'s. "This simple action would reduce the size of graduate programs," says Williamson, *and* employ more Ph.D.'s (p.27). Yes, indeed. And Williamson is one of those who sees, in the job crisis and in such tactics as these, "a rare opportunity to raise the quality of the profession." I would amend this only by changing the word "opportunity" to "command." Yes, we will be raising our standards, like it or not, for whatever consolation that is.⁶

This outcome would be reached more systematically if we adopted an idea of Neal Woodruff's: a national quota system for graduate admissions. This would constitute an orderly retreat, led by the graduate departments—and would afford the rest of us an interesting spectacle, as those departments tried to agree amicably on the goring of one another's oxen. The upshot (in the unlikely event of such agreement) would differ only slightly from that of the other proposals.

Carl Woodring recommends something rather different—that we ease senior professors (especially the lazier and more senile among them [us?]) into partial early retirement, and extend the normal probationary period before tenure or termination beyond seven years. These measures, taken together, could keep more young faculty members in the profession without reducing the number of jobs for fresh Ph.D.'s. But they would in no way change the shape of our problem—and I needn't comment on the certain outcry against and resistance to both proposals.

I could go on, but need not. These are tactical suggestions, some better than others and all better than pure anarchy, for getting where we are almost certainly going: toward a smaller profession with fewer young people in it, and occupied more than we are now with instruction in reading and writing of kinds that our clientele finds practical. (John Gerber's plan for eventual prosperity includes this shift in our work, as well as much more teaching off campus, and

outside the B.A. program. Fine; but again, this strikes me as endorsing the inevitable.)

I must say that what we've seen so far of the profession's response to economic change makes me think pure anarchy more likely than any of the coordinated actions I've mentioned. It's seven years since the job market in English collapsed, and that market is still the main agency for identifying the many who will be denied entry to the profession and the many others who will be forced out after losing one or two or three jobs. As I said a while back, initial graduate enrollments have actually been increasing during this period—not a cheering sign of the profession's will and ability to act as a body. So the painful adaptation is left to individuals—in the normal capitalist way. And they are doing what they can. Dropping out of graduate school, for one thing. While *admissions* went up 6.5% last year, *completions* of the Ph.D. *went down* 10%, and total graduate enrollments in English also declined. (Allan Cartter chooses to call this decline the "brighter side," and I guess he's right. He also concludes, from these figures, that "there is still considerable student demand for postbaccalaureate study, but less staying power beyond the master's level" [*ADE/ADFL*, p.61]. Apparently, by "staying power," he means the determination to commit economic suicide.) We're counting on young people to weed one another out, in the war of all against all. Most of them will go into other kinds of work, far less suited to their interests and skills than college teaching. There are stories in the *ADE/ADFL* collection of people making that adaptation—with "humor and ingenuity" according to Dorothy Harrison. She seems to be one of those optimists like the boy in the old story: when he found only a hunk of manure in his Christmas stocking, he concluded he's been given a horse, and set out looking for it.

Harrison points out that up to now most humanists have been "pocketed" in universities, to the detriment of the rest of society. "If students continue to flow through graduate schools in the next two decades, humanities doctorates will become more common in other sectors of American life, with advantage to the institutions which they serve and to the country as a whole" (p.68). A happy vision indeed: workers on the assembly line inspirited by Shakespeare's mighty iambic line, as intoned by their Ph.D. coworker; the used car lot transformed by the humane values of the Miltonist salesman; Platonic dialogue in the queue at the unemployment office.

I digress. And the point is not to mock Harrison, who is aware that some will think her a Pangloss, but to stress that the crisis in our field has causes beyond our control, and will almost certainly be resolved by processes in which we take only a rather passive role. Our profession—any profession—is organized well to certify our privileges and insulate us from the rigors of the market in good times, but not to defend us in bad times. (Remember, professional ideology declares us to be non-political.) Our future will feel as if it's being done to us, for the most part.

Not that all the acts will be personal decisions to drop out. There will of course be many institutional decisions that contribute more dramatically to the process. Last fall, 60,000 teachers did not return to their jobs,⁷ through no

choice of their own. New York City alone has laid off 15,000 in two years. In higher education, the agonies of CUNY have gotten most national publicity: last fall, establishment of tuition charges and admissions requirements ended an attempt there—admirable or quixotic, depending on your point of view—to equalize educational opportunity. And that decision was made not by teachers, but in effect by bankers. They will be doing much of our basic educational planning, I imagine, as the fiscal crisis of the state deepens. And helping them to shape the educational system will be powerful institutions of bourgeois hegemony, like the Carnegie Commission—with, for example, its recommendation that our policies de-emphasize the four-year college, and enhance what it appropriately calls "other channels—on-the-job-training, proprietary schools, apprenticeship programs, education in the military, off-campus extension work, and national service opportunities."⁸ Our course is being set, and not by ourselves.

So far I've accepted the framework supplied by Stephen Dresch, for thinking about our future. Socialist critics will remark that the analysis is rather undialectical. Indeed, I've made it sound as if iron economic law would grind out its results in a mechanistic way. History doesn't work like that. There are some large holes in my analysis, and I'll mention two.

First, although Dresch's forecast is more sophisticated than those of his predecessors, mainly by virtue of including a model of the economy and the work force, it does not attempt to anticipate dramatic changes in the economy itself. His is what the futurists call a surprise-free scenario—no wild economic fluctuation, no nuclear war, no environmental disaster, no basic change in our society. But all of these are at least possible, and the first—erratic change in the economic system—seems likely. For 40 some years, free enterprise has been in a continuing crisis: most obviously it cannot on its own operate at anywhere near capacity, or prevent intolerable inequality. If it were not for a vastly enlarged military establishment, according to some estimates, unemployment would still be at the level — about 25% —which was taken as evidence of total collapse in 1933.⁹

Warfare and welfare have been the capitalist remedies, along with a tremendous surge of neo-imperialism in the 50's and 60's, mainly through export of capital and gathering of profits abroad that have been unattainable at home. None of these remedies, I think, will work forever and they may be failing now. The costs of warfare and welfare have produced a "capital shortage" and a debt crisis that reach beyond the state, and into the private sector.

Some parts of the third world have defected from the capitalist system entirely, shrinking the outlets for capitalist expansion; while other parts are organizing—through resource cartels like OPEC and through proposals for debt moratoria—organizing politically to end their economic servitude. As a result, the so-called "Phillips Curve" (which models the trade-off, through Keynesian policies, between inflation and unemployment) has stopped functioning. The economic growth of the entire capitalist world is slowing down. And capitalism must grow or die. Furthermore, the crises threatened by capitalism's waste and its subordination

of resources to the profit motive, are still mainly to come. All this is a fulfillment, beyond anything Marx dreamt of, of his theory that under capitalism, as under all previous systems, the forces of production come into stark contradiction with the relations of production, until a new society is born within the old.

But—and here I come to the second flaw in my forecast for English in America —no contradiction shapes history independently of human effort. The situation I've been describing, like the one in our profession, is a fluid one, in which people can act to shape change. As I see it, the crisis of monopoly capitalism vs. liberal democracy is fatal, but by no means bound to produce democratic socialism—fascism is an equal possibility, and one that will be sought, whether they know its name or not, by many of the most powerful in our society. We, on the other side (I hope), need not stand by and watch our values defeated. But to do otherwise requires a political awareness and a political conception of ourselves and our work far beyond what the profession has now—only one of the contributors to *ADE/ADFL*, an unemployed ABD, was able to say that political and social action, finally is the only alternative to fatalistic retreat (George Karnezis, "A View from the Other Side," p.10).

What strategies make sense, for radicals in the profession? It's evident that if the analysis given here is right, we cannot be politically adequate to our own future if we restrict ourselves to local resistance against cutbacks or to pursuing narrow guild interests. A national union of college teachers might be a help— if it went beyond trade union consciousness—in fighting for the principle that education should be a universal right, rather than an adjunct to the class system and the needs of employers.

In addition, I think that there are important daily tasks for us: all the ones described in this news journal, for instance, and also directly teaching, in our colleges and out, a systematic understanding of capitalism and of the possibilities for a democratic society. I agree with Gramsci about the centrality of ideological institutions in holding an irrational system together by enlisting almost everybody in the "party" of the ruling class. Fighting for control of ideas and of these institutions is urgent, and possible. In my own teaching, anyhow, I've never experienced a time when there was so much unfocused malaise and distrust of capitalist institutions, so much desire to understand what's gone wrong with the old American project of development, and to know how we might replace it with a better one.

Notes

1. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971.
2. From 13% to 10% for men, and from 21% to 15% for women. Allan Cartter, "Statistical Trends," in *Employment and the Profession*, a special joint issue of the *ADE* and *ADFL Bulletins*, September, 1976, p.67. Hereafter, page references to this issue are in the text.
3. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1967), p.238.

4. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.
5. "Educational Saturation: A Demographic-Economic Model," *AAUP Bulletin*, October, 1975.
6. I predict that this "raising of standards" will run right through the system: proficiency tests, minimum competency requirements, grade deflation, tighter admissions standards. E.g., for an account of how the University of Colorado used the decline in test scores and the perception of a literacy crisis to set a minimum SAT verbal score as requirement for admission, see Elissa S. Guralnick and Paul M. Levitt, "Improving Student Writing: A Case History," *College English*, January, 1977.
7. Council-Grams (National Council of Teachers of English), November, 1976, p.i.
8. Quoted in Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p.208.
9. Douglas Dowd, *The Twisted Dream; Capitalist Development in the United States Since 1776*.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #20 (1982)

Reflections on Class and Language

by Richard Ohmann



CLASS, CODES, AND CONTROL BY BASIL B. BERNSTEIN, PALADIN PRESS (1973)

In the fall of 1978, I was consultant to a video project called "The Unemployment Tapes,"¹ designed to explore through talks with local people the human costs, the causes, and the possible cures of unemployment in an old industrial area of Connecticut. At the time, I was also reading and thinking about class, language, and the theories of Basil Bernstein.² I began to notice in the taped interviews a close correspondence to Bernstein's central distinction between "restricted" and "elaborated" codes: almost all the people interviewed on the streets spoke in the restricted code that Bernstein attributes to the working class, while managers and officials used the elaborated code of what Bernstein calls the "middle class." Brief excerpts from two interviews will illustrate this distinction.

I. A Couple

Interviewer: I'd like to ask you if you have jobs right now.

Respondents: Yes.

I: Have either of you ever been unemployed for any length of time?

R: No.

I: Well, would you say there was an unemployment problem in this area?

Man: Well, we're new in the area. We just moved in a couple of months ago. From what I've been reading there is unemployment in the area.

Woman: I would say so. There are an awful lot of people going to Oakfield and Hill County to get jobs. They're not staying in the Valley.

I: Do you have any ideas about what causes that problem?

M: I have no idea.

W: Not enough industry up here. A lot of industry is just leaving the area.

I: How come?

W: Taxes are too high. There's no rebate or anything else for them.

I: So if we give a tax break and some other breaks to business, then --

W: I would say that there's no reason for businesses to stay in Connecticut. They're not getting any benefits from it. It's cheaper to go down to the South and get cheap labor now.

II. The Mayor of Mill Town

Interviewer: How do you think the high rate of unemployment has affected this community as a whole, in terms of its self-image, in terms of its ability to deal with problems?

Respondent: Well, you know a very high percentage of unemployment is never a healthy condition, whether it's in

Mill Town or anywhere else, and this lower Mill Valley region here has been pretty much plagued by high amounts of unemployment for at least fifteen to twenty years, and probably the greatest contributor to that would be the fact of how automation has taken over so much of the factory process that was once the main employer.

I: What are the other causes of unemployment besides automation?

R: Well, I believe that automation is perhaps the chief cause of unemployment. Secondly, if we delve with other causes I would say it would be the lack of opportunity for the number of people that you have. We have a very densely populated area here, and like Mill Town with 6.2 square miles and you have over 21,000 people cramped into them, doesn't leave much space for industrial growth

I: Whose responsibility is it to see that industry comes to, like, stop the high rate of unemployment? Do you see that as the responsibility of government? Do you see it as the responsibility of business?

R: Well, I don't think there is any one segment of society which, you're trying to point out, that is responsible. Like if it isn't there, that this is part of the responsibility of this particular segment. I think that it is very conducive to government to encourage industry in their area

I: Do you think that the federal government should play a major role in bad economic times, as it is doing with CETA?

R: Well, certainly. I think if you look at the entire history of our country, that it has always been the federal government that has come to the rescue. Take the Great Depression and all the federal programs that we used to bail it out. What you are really doing is, you stimulate the economy by priming up the pump and throwing money into the economy. That's -- but by giving these people salaries and positions and all, they are going out and spending money, which gives business, the private sector, more of a stimulus, because they've got money coming in, they have the cash flow, and you hope for expansion.

Now here are some features that mark the couple's speech as restricted and the mayor's as elaborated (quite apart from judgments of eloquence or substance):

A. Length and Complexity

The responses are much shorter in I; so are the sentences. There is little coordination and almost no subordination in I, except in sentences beginning "I think," "I would say," etc., while there is much of both in II. There are few explicit causal or logical connections in I, and many in II.

B. Modifiers

There are few adjectives and adverbs in I, and those mainly of degree. Modifiers are many and varied in II.

C. Abstraction

There are few abstract nouns in I, many in II. Those in I appear mainly in simple constructions with the verb "be," and are unrelated to one another: "There is *unemployment* in the area"; "Taxes are too high." The abstract nouns in II

appear in a variety of syntactic positions, and are often related syntactically and conceptually to one another.

D. Reference to Context

The man and woman refer only a few times to the context of the discussion: "Oakfield," "Hill County," etc. The mayor not only anchors the discussion geographically to Mill Town with its 21,000 people in only six square miles, but also gives it a context in the social system (the economy, the government, etc.) and in history (the last fifteen to twenty years, the Depression, the early 1900s).

E. Reference to the Discourse Itself

There is virtually none in I, other than expressions of uncertainty, like "I think" and "I don't know." The mayor uses such constructions, and also refers to the discourse in at least four other ways: He comments on the interviewer's question -- for instance, when he begins his first answer by implying that the question is silly. He implicitly rejects the question: when asked who's responsible for reducing unemployment, he denies the presupposition that one part of society is. He comments reflexively on his own terms and statements: "In other words"; "I mean"; "Like if it isn't there." And he makes new starts in the middle of a sentence, indicating that he has reconsidered and thought of a better way to proceed.

Contrasts like these run through "The Unemployment Tapes." In Bernstein's analysis, they are caused by class, and they have important cognitive consequences. The elaborated code of the middle class facilitates distinctions of all sorts, in particular logical ones. Elaborated code users distance themselves more from the immediate situation and from the content of their talk, through abstraction, through passives, through expressions of probability, through suppositions, through questions and refusals to commit themselves quickly to definite interpretations of an ambiguous experience. The elaborated code allows or encourages more individuation of response and more reflection on language itself. Restricted code users are more bound to the local, concrete situation. Much of their meaning is implicit -- dependent on prior understandings of the context. In Bernstein's own words,

...elaborated codes orient their users toward universalistic meanings, whereas restricted codes orient, sensitize, their users to particularistic meanings... Restricted codes are more tied to a local social structure and have a reduced potential for change in principles. Where codes are elaborated, the socialized has more access to the grounds of his own socialization, and so can enter into a reflexive relationship to the social order he has taken over. (p. 176)

The political implications are clear. Bernstein himself doesn't dwell on them, but the moral is drawn more fully in *The Politics of Communication*, by Claus Mueller, who integrates a great deal of research besides that of Bernstein. Mueller argues that in advanced capitalist societies a social order marked by severe inequality and the powerlessness of most people is sustained and legitimated, not so much by coercion -- the police and the army -- or even by manipulation -- propaganda, the media -- as by one-sided "political communication":

Because of the restricted language code and rigid socialization patterns, the individual from the lower classes engages in arrested communication and tends to see the political universe as a static one and to abide by the prescriptions of external authorities.³

Mueller thinks this impasse especially intractable because the codes are passed on in the home to very young children. He agrees with Bernstein that class differences in child rearing are decisive, and that working-class parents block the development of linguistic autonomy in their children through strategies of instruction and discipline that call on authority more than on reasoning and exploration. If this is so, neither school nor *Sesame Street* could easily undo the damage. Mueller concludes that the only likely challenge to the legitimacy of the political and economic system in countries like ours will come, not from the traditional working class, but from the intellectual and cultural "strata."

But an alternative explanation of the linguistic facts is possible -- one with strikingly different and much less dire political implications. Although both interviews explore the same subject through similar questions, they are in significant ways two sharply contrasting events. One takes place in the street outside a shopping mall; it is impromptu. The other takes place in the mayor's office, by appointment. He has had time to prepare his thoughts. The mayor is interviewed because he is who he is; the identities and positions of the man and woman are of no consequence. They are selected precisely because they are representative, part of a mass. Again, the mayor must be -- or seem -- knowledgeable about the economy of the Valley. That is part of his job, while the man and woman suddenly find themselves in an intellectual terrain that is unfamiliar. Finally, the mayor is used to such encounters, and the man and woman are not. We may guess that the video equipment is at least a bit intimidating for them; it must make them feel that they are being observed, tested. Working with television is a familiar challenge for the mayor. In a way, television is an extension of his office and his power, something he can use to his own ends if he is skillful. The television people are there by his sufferance and on his timetable: he begins the interview as in some ways their superior. So although the issues remain constant in the two interviews, the social relations do not.

As you might expect, the participants also create their relationships differently in the two interviews, through the ways they talk to each other. For instance, the interviewer in I begins with four yes-no questions in a row. This is a way of getting out some basic information, but it also establishes a tight cognitive paradigm and narrow limits for the man and woman. By contrast, the three wh-- questions with which interview II begins all accord the mayor a kind of *carte blanche* as to how detailed and lengthy the answer may be. The sidewalk interviewer also assumes in his first two questions the prerogative of asking the couple for personal information, while the first question to the mayor is not only general and impersonal but assumes much knowledge on his part. It positions him as an expert, someone whose opinion is worth knowing, in detail and on a highly complex subject. It is an invitation to expatiate.

These differences arise from no bias of the interviewers, I believe, but from the speech situations themselves, and from moves that the participants make which accept and confirm those situations. As a result of these moves the first interview proceeds somewhat like a quiz. The man and woman respond like school children being drawn out against their will by an insistent teacher who is asking them to *have* opinions and ideas so they may be judged. In interview II, by contrast, the mayor freely expounds his position, which then becomes the subject of the discussion, and is in this way dignified. The interviewer is pressing him, as a serious antagonist.

These contrasts may be largely responsible for eliciting a restricted code from the man and woman, and an elaborated code from the mayor. Let me return, briefly, to my initial analysis of the interviews, and look at them in this light.

A. Length and Complexity

The short responses and short, simple sentences of the man and woman are obedient answers of unprepared people who feel themselves tested and perhaps judged. Why not, with the camera looking on, and a questioner who clearly knows more than they about the subject? The mayor is invited to expand upon his subject; he does so, and in the long and complex (if often inflated and garbled) sentences appropriate to that task.

B. Modifiers

The man and woman are not being asked to individuate their opinions, to shade, specify, qualify. But the mayor is invited to discourse on the "community as a whole," its "self-image," "its ability to deal with problems." He could hardly take on this huge and complex subject without qualifying his answer along the way -- and guarding his words because, after all, he's the mayor.

C. Abstraction

For the man and woman, terms like "industry," "taxes," "rebate," and "cheap labor," are hand-me-downs from television, the newspapers, casual conversation about distant matters out of their control. They produce these terms as part of their role in the quiz, but the terms are alienated. The man and woman have nothing to back them up with, no way to relate them conceptually to one another and to reality. For the mayor, abstractions about the economy are rooted in his daily work: in technical reports bearing on decisions he must make, in talk with advisors, the chamber of commerce, state and federal bureaucrats. This is not to say that his account of unemployment is better than that of the man and woman. In my own view, automation is a shallow cause, and the lack of acreage in Mill Town an empty one; and the woman is right on target in pointing to the free flow of capital in pursuit of cheap labor, though she is unable or unwilling to develop this hunch. But abstractions are a verbal medium the mayor is used to and works within. He manipulates them freely and voluntarily, rather than tentatively and with an air of talking someone else's language, under pressure. They are an instrument of power for him in this situation, and a token of powerlessness for the man and woman.

D. Reference to Context

The subject of the interviewer's questions belongs to the mayor's field of action. They already have a context in his work and thought. For the man and woman, government, the movements of corporations, unemployment, and history in the large sense are distant forces and events, not because of any cognitive or linguistic deficit, but just in that the man and woman are connected to such matters only through activities like drawing a wage, buying commodities, and voting, which relate them to the historical context only in fragmented and isolating ways.

E. Reference to the Discourse Itself

The mayor's self-reflexive expressions, his comments on the interviewer's questions, his refusal to accept their premises, his new starts, all reflect the mayor's sense that he is in charge of the conversation. And what he says is important enough to him to warrant taking pains, finding just the right formulation.

In all these ways the interviews embed power relations and speech conventions that existed prior to the encounters. But this is not to say that the speakers' codes reflect only the social relations that previously obtained. Choice is available at every point: note, for instance, how the mayor takes over leadership of the interview by volunteering the chief cause of unemployment without being asked, how he changes the terms of the questions, and so on. Only custom (only!) prevents the man and woman from doing likewise. The participants create the social relations of each encounter. In so doing they reproduce society. By such tiny increments is class made and remade.

At least as I see it. Bernstein and Mueller use a concept of class taken from mainstream social science, basically an heuristic concept obtained by calibrating one or more factors such as income, education, and occupation (the three that Bernstein uses). These factors are selected for the convenience of the theorist or experimenter, then correlated with others such as child-rearing patterns, voting behavior, or speech codes. Since a class constructed this way has no hard relation to the structure of society or its historical evolution, the selection of criteria is arbitrary, except in relation to the manipulations the sociologist wishes to perform.

A marxian concept of class, built from relations to the means of production, would take us further. Both working class and middle class, in Bernstein's analysis, are part of the marxian proletariat (except for a few small business people and independent professionals); they must sell their labor power to survive. The significant difference is that the "working class" sells its power to execute routine tasks at someone else's command, while the "middle class" sells its power of conception and planning as well. This distinction, I believe, would go a long way toward making sense of Bernstein's findings. Quite simply, a class builds its life on its role in production. If that role is limited, as for assembly line workers or keypunch operators, a "restricted" code of speech will suffice. If that role calls for conception and a measure of creativity, an "elaborated" code is a necessity.

But this notion of class is still inadequate, because too static. In E.P. Thompson's formulation,⁴ class is something

that *happens*. People do not simply and eternally belong to a class; they create their class position (even as it is created for them) through all their doings from day to day and year to year, including their verbal encounters with co-workers, bosses, subordinates, friends, families, and with interviewers who stop them on the street or come to their offices.

And so Bernstein's idea of code is also too static. One does not simply *have* a code, I believe, in the way that one has a car in the garage, ready to use for any journey. A code has no material existence, except as it is ceaselessly recreated whenever people speak. And of course when we speak we do so with other people, and never in a setting that is socially neutral. We talk within frameworks of power, status, intimacy or remoteness, family roles, institutional roles, designs on one another, and so on.⁵ The code people use at a particular moment is strongly influenced by the whole network of social circumstance within which they speak -- perhaps more than by relatively remote factors like income, the job status of their parents, or the number of years they spent in school.

If this argument, which I have sketched out all too briefly, is right, then Bernstein and Mueller ground their conclusions in damagingly static ideas of class and code. In effect, they correlate two things, neither of which can be abstracted without distortion from the stream of social interaction, and both of which are incrementally recreated in every encounter. In short, we are dealing here with a phenomenon that is dialectical as well as dialectal. The power relations of a society permeate speech and shape it, while speech reproduces or challenges the power relations of the society. The way we talk is not just an artifact of class, any more than class is an artifact of the ways we talk. Speech takes place in society, but society also takes place "in" speech. The point is well illustrated, I believe, by what happened in those two interviews. A Bernsteinian explanation of their contrasts badly misrepresents the social forces at work in them, assigning to static "class," differences in speech that express dynamic and changeable power relations.⁶

More the pity, because 1) Bernstein clearly meant his analysis to serve the working class; 2) it has been highly influential, especially in Britain; 3) the pedagogical inference drawn from it has generally been that we should teach elaborated codes to working-class kids, within the customary social relations of the school. Instead, I think the educational moral is roughly that of the 1960s reform movements, now much condemned: students should have as much responsibility as possible for their own education. The habits of expressive power come with actual shared power, not with computerized instruction in sentence combining or with a Back-to-Basics movement that would freeze students' language into someone else's rules, imposed from without. Respect the linguistic resources students have. Open the classrooms again.

Finally, Mueller's political pessimism is justified only if we suppose that political consciousness is fixed, either at home in infancy and childhood or even more deeply than that, by gross structural features of the society, if we assume that workers cannot become equal communicators and political participants step by step, and through action, but only by understanding, in a kind of conversion experience, the fundamental concepts of Marxism. Movements toward worker self-management, co-ops, progressive credit unions, consumer movements, union organizing, populist movements of many kinds, are all fertile soil in which elaborated codes (put to better use than by the mayor, I hope) may grow along with the habit of democracy.

Notes

1. Thanks to Gerry Lombardi and Jan Stackhouse, who carried out the project and gave me copies of some of the tapes. In the transcripts that follow, some names and places are disguised.
2. See especially Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), Vol. I, from which I quote later on. I have also drawn on research published in volume II of this three-volume work, and from other books by Bernstein and his collaborators. For my starting point in this inquiry, see "Questions About Literacy and Political Education," *Radical Teacher* 8 (May, 1978), 24-25. The present article is a much abbreviated version of one I hope to publish elsewhere.
3. Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication: A Study In the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization, and Legitimation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 84.
4. E.P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?" *Social History*, 3 (May, 1978), 146-51.
5. The notion of "variable" rules and varying codes is well established in American sociolinguistics, especially through the work of William Labov and Dell Hymes.
6. The mayor, it is worth noting, came from the industrial working class, and was a high school baseball coach before entering politics. I don't know the class position of the man and woman, and for the purpose of this article it doesn't matter.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #30 (1986)

Kinder, Küche, Kirche, Kapital

by Richard Ohmann

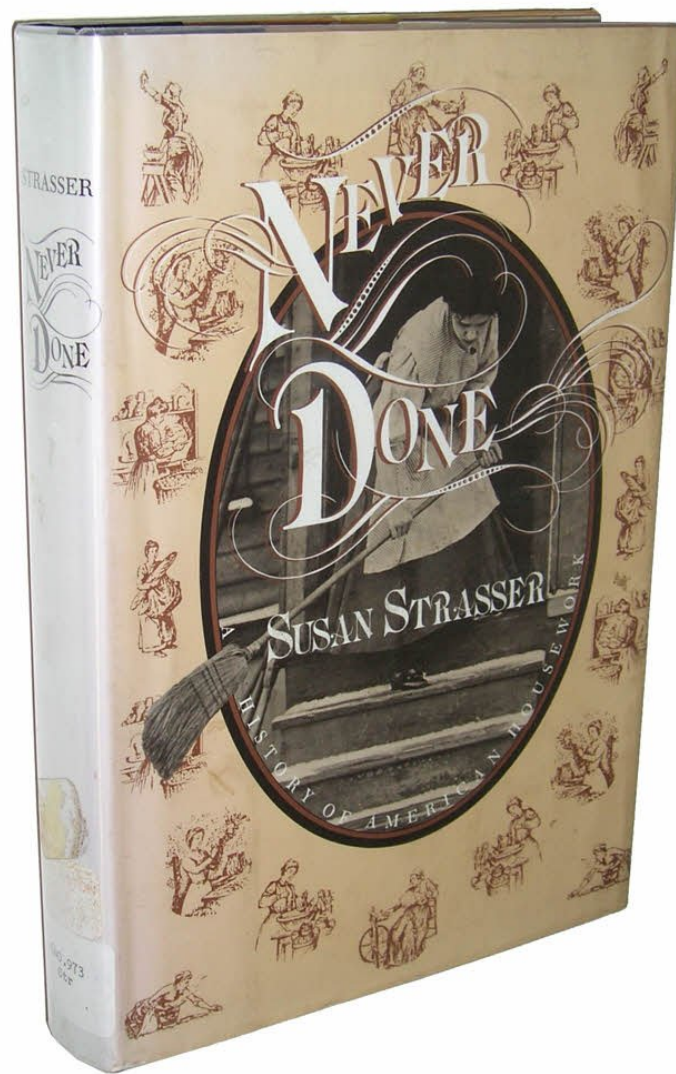


IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, ALISHA B. WORMSLEY

Review of Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

To kindle up the cook stove each morning, in the late nineteenth century, a housekeeper went through these steps:

First, dispose of the remains of the last fire: remove the stove lids; gather the ashes and cinders into the grate; replace the lids; close the doors and drafts; dump the cinders and ashes into a pan below the grate and sift either in a sifter built into the stove or in a regular ash sifter...; set a fire with shavings or paper, small sticks of wood, and a few larger pieces; reopen the drafts, light the fire, and add large pieces of wood or coal; now close the dampers.

In an advanced stove, this work produced a fire that would last four hours -- four hours for making dough, baking, plucking the chicken, roasting it, and carrying out the dozens of other tasks required to bring mainly unprocessed foods (flour was an early exception) to the Sunday table. The cook stove was a tremendous improvement over the kitchen hearth, with its array of crude iron utensils hung from a crane or standing on tripods over the open fire, where most women had cooked until after mid-century.

Yet these modern stoves were no microwave ovens. In 1899, when housework had become a process for experts to study and simplify, the School of Housekeeping in Boston kept track of the time and activities needed to care for a coal stove:

In a six-day period, twenty minutes were spent in sifting ashes, twenty-four minutes in laying fires, one hour and forty-eight minutes in tending fires, thirty minutes in emptying ashes, fifteen minutes in carrying coal, and two hours and nine minutes on blacking the stove to keep it from rusting.

During these six days, 292 pounds of coal went into the stove.

Some readers of *Never Done* will delight in the book even -- or especially -- for its profusion of gritty details like these about the work and the implements of keeping a house over the past two hundred years. I am one such reader. I am fascinated by changes in cookery that went with its move from fireplace to wood or coal stove; with the endless elaboration of the stove for bread baking, roasting, water heating, etc.; with the controversies and rear-guard nostalgia that surrounded these changes; with the ever-so-slow spread of pots and pans that wouldn't rust (enameled, aluminum, stainless steel). I read with dismay and admiration about nineteenth-century Mondays (plus Tuesdays, for ironing -- two-sevenths of each week for laundry). I confess to peering from very close up into the wonderful photographs in this book, letting my near-sighted eyes make me intimate with a group of quilting Dakota women in 1885, or with the crowd at the first self-service market (the Piggly-Wiggly in Memphis, opened in 1916). Susan Strasser brings back the lives, the words, the faces, the feelings, of women doing the work of social reproduction,

work that many of them and most historians have thought to be of no importance. That act of recovery is not the smallest virtue of *Never Done*. Strasser belongs in the company of excellent feminist historians-from-below, like Gwendolyn Wright and Dolores Hayden, who take us into homes where women made their lives, with finger knowledge and lofty ideals integrated into one picture. This alone makes *Never Done* an invaluable work of social history, a natural to use in any course that treats women and work in the United States.

Of course one may find out about our foremothers' skills and tools from coffee table books or on nostalgia trips to Old Sturbridge and Williamsburg. Strasser's project is very different. For one thing, although she respects the skills lost to commodified housework, laments its privatization, and fully acknowledges the movement of control over it from women's minds to corporate boardrooms, she in no way sentimentalizes the good old days. Housework was backbreaking, unhealthy, and dangerous for most women until just the day before yesterday. The appliance makers may have bamboozled millions into buying redundant gadgets like the electric can opener and wasteful ones like the self-defrosting refrigerator. But anyone who would like to cancel out the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner, indoor plumbing, or central heating is either an ignoramus, a masochist or a misogynist. Strasser sees much of the present technology of house work as a precondition for any truly radical reorganization of social life and of relations between men and women. I agree.

On the other side, she also differs from those infatuated with "progress," in seeing this technology always as responsive more directly to the profit imperative than to the needs of housekeepers, and not responsive at all to the socially articulated demand for a democratic and decent society.

On the other side, she also differs from those infatuated with "progress," in seeing this technology always as responsive more directly to the profit imperative than to the needs of housekeepers, and not responsive at all to the socially articulated demand for a democratic and decent society. Even more impressively, to me, she steadfastly resists any form of technological determinism, keeping always in sight the questions: who made the technology? for whose benefit? And *Never Done* explicitly challenges what I call the "fallacy of firsts," the dating of historical change by the first patent or first working device or first appearance of a new institution or practice. The technology of indoor plumbing and of the cook stove were available for many decades before as many as half of the women and families in the country benefited from these absolutely basic improvements. To put it another way, Strasser keeps class in mind and never mistakes the history of affluent women for the history of women. For most housework remained

primitive and grueling well into the present century. Capitalist home improvement goes where the profits are.

The virtues I've just mentioned follow from the book's main strength: keeping the whole historical process in view, and seeing housework as part of it. You'll have to read *Never Done* to appreciate this. Let me just stress two points here. First, Strasser shows convincingly how her subject fits into the great capitalist transformation of our society. The shift from home production to factory production and the market is a main theme, naturally enough. Strasser also argues well that housework changed along paths previously established for capitalist labor in general. From craft to manufacture; from country to city; from family and village control to corporate control; from traditional knowledge to the advice of outside experts like the manufacturer, the advertiser, the home economist; from use to exchange, so that housework is entirely organized with and around commodities now.

Second, *Never Done* places itself squarely in the new tradition of scholarship that explores the historical construction of gender. Perhaps its main contribution in this area is to put the much-discussed idea of "separate spheres" in a context of material life. As soon as wage labor away from home became common -- as early as the 1820s -- this doctrine began to emerge: the "outside" world was a competitive jungle, the home a sanctuary of caring, moral refinement, and piety. The former was the sphere of men, the latter of women, who were thus assigned the job of keeping capitalist society human -- for free. Strasser argues that even around the time of the Civil War, when the idea of separate spheres got its fullest articulation from writers like Catharine Beecher, and when it was integral to the dominant ideology, it was already losing touch with the realities of home and market, the two places becoming less separate as housework came to mean using industrially produced commodities and preparing boys for wage labor. Later, when more and more women went out to work for wages and when capitalists set out to make consuming the main project of the home, the ideology stretched to the snapping point, yet continued to find powerful exponents and to increase the tensions and anxieties of women's lives. I admired and learned from the way Strasser weaves together ideological debates, social movements, and the facts of home production and consumption, through this part of her story.

It comes to a provocative conclusion at the end of *Never Done*. Strasser thinks that both the current women's movement and the family-oriented traditionalists of the New Right presuppose the doctrine of separate spheres. Few will disagree with her claim that the latter celebrate and advocate return to a repressive separation that was contradictory even a hundred years ago. But readers of *Radical Teacher* will surely want to ponder and debate her view that as the women's movement went from its consciousness-raising stage to engagement with political and economic issues, it privileged the public sphere as if, for most women, their exploitation there were separate from what goes on at home. Strasser thinks women must struggle

for equality both at work and at home, but that this won't be enough. What else? Women and men must take back decisions over daily life from corporations, of whose increasing power in this area her book offers such a rich account.

A self-respecting reviewer should be quick to unmask methodological blunders, ideological lapses, and factual errors. Sorry. I found this a splendid study on all counts. It has helped me in my own current efforts to understand the emergence of a national mass culture just before the turn of the century; and everyone doing historical research or teaching in areas close to Strasser's subject will want to learn from her book. It would make a fine teaching text. It is written by a human being for human beings. High School students could read it. (So could dissertation writers.) It is always clear and often moving.

Strasser says she teaches and writes history because she believes, "only people who understand that societies can and must change will have enough faith to work for a better future: imagining the differences of the past challenges a hopelessly static conception of the present." This book helps us and our students do that.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #37 (1990)

Teaching Note: Reading the Romance; Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature

by Richard Ohmann



IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, ALISHA B. WORMSLEY

Janice A. Radway's book (University of North Carolina Press, 1991) is about romances of the Harlequin and Silhouette variety, whose sales make them easily the most popular book genre in North America. She tells lucidly the story of their development in the context of the book industry, as this rather quaint, family business became fully a part of monopoly capital during the postwar period, and adopted the techniques of sales and audience-creation long standard in other areas of mass culture.

But really, her book is about readers and reading. The phenomenal success of romances has naturally stirred the contempt of high culture critics, and more recently the concern of feminists, who have generally understood these narratives as promoting a kind of false consciousness, coating patriarchal values with a frosting of fantasy.

Radway avoids the condescension of this approach, noting that it presumes a stupefied mass audience unaware of what its experience means, until politically correct intellectuals intervene to explain the deeper significance of the texts.

Instead, Radway talked to actual readers -- a particular network of midwestern housewives, grouped around a woman who rated and sold romances through a newsletter and store. What she found was more complicated than the picture drawn by other feminist critics. The "Smithton women" appropriated romances as a pleasure strictly theirs, an antidote to the endless claims made on them by husbands and children, and a defense of "female" values like emotional sharing and (more or less) egalitarian marriage. Beyond that, the romances let readers identify with spunky heroines who "tamed" rough, sexy men and asserted their own rights. True, the women also, and finally, used romances to renew the energies they gave to conventional marriage and family. But for many, regular reading of these books fed a kind of proto-feminism that made for real gains in their lives, within the limits patriarchy sets for women. Some more recent romances even test those limits.

I used *Reading the Romance* in a class on popular fiction, made up entirely of college seniors, who were enthusiastic about the book and the subject. I believe that most college students would respond similarly: although Radway's book is quite sophisticated in method and theory, it is written in human prose, and it makes clear the real-world importance of its subject. Besides, that subject is one almost certain to have touched the lives of women in the class, whether or not they have ever been romance readers; and Radway's treatment poses a challenge to male readers more subtle than but as far-reaching as that offered by more direct feminist statements.

I had students read some romances and pool their responses, working partly in groups divided by sex. Are they the "right" readers for these books? Why and why not? What uses do they make of this reading? What happens to their high culture expectations, if any? We also worked with a group of magazine romances and confessions, two very

distinct genres aimed at a more working-class audience, to see how Radway's analysis did and didn't work with these stories. A group of stories from *Intimacy: Black Romance* brought race into the picture. Some students have gone on to projects on men's fiction, in biker magazines and magazines like *Penthouse*. If I were doing a similar course again, I'd build such study into it, and maybe do a unit on Louis Lamour westerns and the like. With more time, I'd ask students to interview readers of genre fiction, as some of mine have chosen to do. Radway's study points out in many directions; I've only hinted at its richness.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #42 (1992)

Political Correctness and the Obfuscation of Politics

by Richard Ohmann

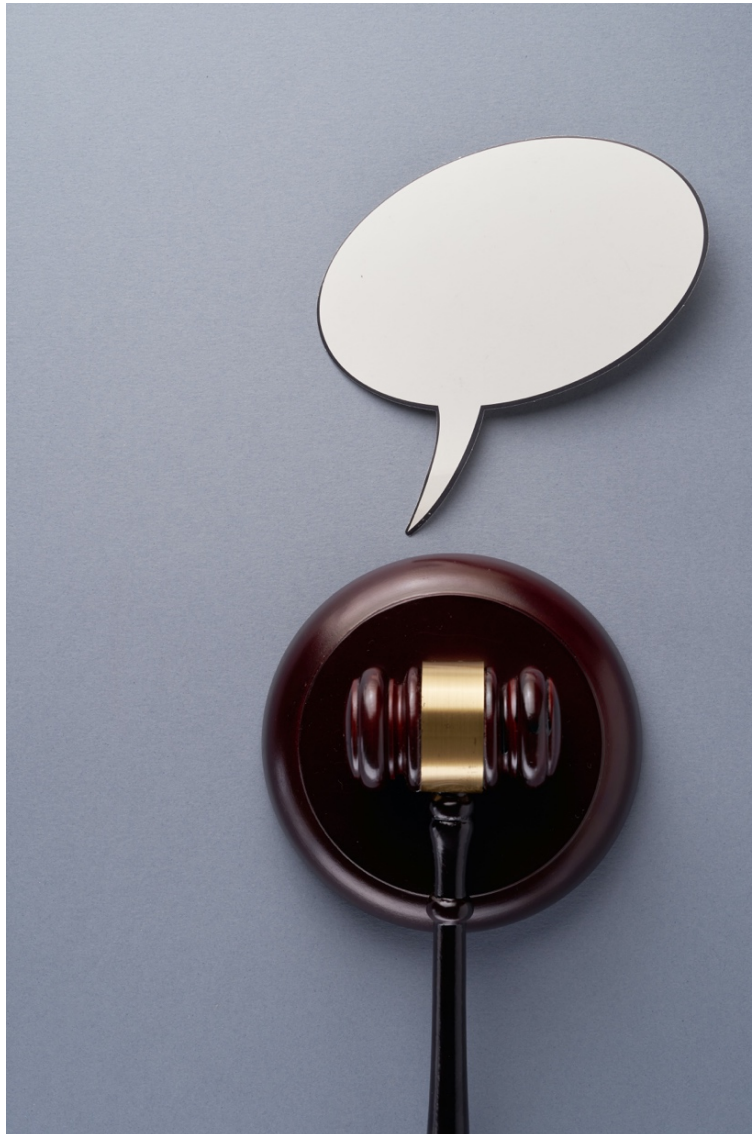


IMAGE BY ESKAY LIM VIA UNSPLASH

During the PC spasm last year I was talking regularly with friends on the board of this magazine, with colleagues at Wesleyan planning for cultural studies there, and with a group of left academics from colleges and universities in southern New England. We spent a good deal of time grousing about the assault on "political correctness" and multiculturalism, and trying to understand the phenomenon. What follows is an attempt to voice some of the exasperation we felt and sketch a "position" that was nowhere heard in the mainstream media. It came directly out of talks with my political friends, though of course I don't claim to speak for them.

The odd and infuriating thing is that attacks from the right over the past few years seem both directed at us and badly misdirected. We see our politics as radical; most of us have tenure. Are we not, then, the designated target of Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* and of the by-now-innumerable blasts from academics like Peter Shaw, Herbert London, Stephen Balch, Carol Iannone, and other members of the National Association of Scholars; from pundits like George Will, William Safire, and Richard Bernstein; from official intellectuals of the Reagan-Bush regime like William Bennett and Lynne Cheney; and from the education President himself in his Michigan commencement address? We would be pleased to square off against such antagonists, pleased even to quicken their heartbeats with fear or loathing. Yet we don't easily recognize ourselves in their characterizations; the bullets are flying over our heads.

Not to put too fine a point on it, we work in whatever ways we can toward the end of capitalist patriarchy. No kidding. Not just canon reform or a dissident reading of *Paradise Lost*, but the transformation of society. Most of us don't expect it to happen with a bang, or indeed within our lifetimes, but what we're about is dismantling the corporate structure; taking away the money and power of those who own most of productive capital, and thus the right to determine the future of this beleaguered planet; eliminating the U.S. war machine along with all the other war machines; ending male and white supremacy; and building a social order around full equality and democratic planning for the common good. We don't know how to do all this. We have no blueprint for the future. We belong to no vanguard parties. None of us is a Leninist; only some are Marxists. We didn't rest our hopes in the Soviet Union. We are socialists and feminists convinced that the present economic and social system has finished its historical work -- including some good and much evil -- and entered a phase of disorder and destruction whose manifestations are everywhere plain. Just read the news.

We think ordinary people can make something new, something better. We ally ourselves with the millions in this country and around the world working for something that would be worth calling democracy, whether it's called socialism or not. And most of us join in that work, outside of classrooms and academic conferences. We work in peace organizations, women's groups, Central American support networks, tenants' organizing groups, gay rights groups, progressive unions, groups for Palestinian autonomy, reproductive rights groups, environmental groups, and so on and on. I don't want this to sound too virtuous and risky. We are professors. We grade papers and go to committee

meetings. We are middle-class people who live in decent homes and, if we are arrested at a demonstration, are quickly and safely out of jail: we don't suffer beatings, torture, and rape there, as do many of our brothers and sisters who are political prisoners. To claim for ourselves the name of revolutionaries would strike most as too grand. But we think that way, and we are active.

So what charges does the right lay on us? That we care only about theory. That we write in elitist jargons. That we don't believe texts have meanings. That we hate literary classics. That we think culture just expresses economic relations or prejudices of class, race, and gender. That we endorse the claims of every oppressed subculture, including the claim to cultural separatism. That we don't believe in values. That we despise history. That, in short, we are clowning mandarins -- even when occasionally seen as "dangerous" (thank you George Will). It's enough to make an aging English professor fantasize about throwing bombs.

Those of us "in" literature (many are not) do care about the issues flagged by the right, but it never gets our positions straight. The mischaracterization of "tenured radicals" in the media has entered new reaches of the bizarre in the shaping of two issues on which we do mainly agree, and on which we disagree with both so-called sides: multiculturalism and political correctness. Let me try for a little schematic clarity about these.

The right sees multiculturalism as an eroding of "the" Western tradition, an attack on aesthetic values and on value generally, a privileging of the third-rate, a campaign for ignorance, and a desecration of culture. Pardon me if I read through these concerns to a wish that the same people who managed cultural capital seventy-five years ago would again be in uncontested charge of it, and would not have to sit in meeting rooms with women, minorities, and radicals who might challenge its authority -- might want to study it as a particular historical construction rather than as the embodiment of timeless universals. Given only the choices presented to us by the media, my political friends and I would grit our teeth and choose multiculturalism, which at least weighs in against the blindness of the dominant to what they dominate, fosters respectful interest in the variety of the world's peoples, adheres to such ideals as that of affirmative action, and argues an emancipatory project for education.

But we lefties are not that keen for what often presents itself as multiculturalism. There is a version of it that takes the people of the world to be parceled out into cultures and subcultures, each self-contained and uniform, and each accessible only to its members -- so that, for instance, only a Chicana would have the authority to teach about Chicana poetry. On the contrary, we think that all cultures are in continuous exchange with others, and that even the smallest societies are not homogeneous, but embrace their own hierarchies and conflicts. The search for purity is futile. Worse, it precludes learning about cultures from outside and certifies only the "other" as a source of knowledge about other cultures. It also tends to valorize raw experience as the only foundation of knowledge, and to forbid critique of cultures except from within. This sort of multiculturalism sees people as just intrinsically what they are -- black

lesbians, white male heterosexuals, and so on. Its essentialism is almost as disturbing to us as is the fatuous universalism of the right. On top of that, it leads to a politics of identity that makes any sort of embracing social movement against capitalist patriarchy hard indeed to imagine. The fact that multiculturalism has become a slogan of many college administrations and funding sources suggests how unthreatening it is to the holders of power, and how easy to contain and control in the guise of "diversity," not to mention its usefulness in training global corporate managers.

As for political correctness: the right apparently feels not only itself but the very possibility of civilized discourse to be under siege by a phalanx of rude and stone-faced thought-cops who enforce a tyranny of newspeak, censorship, and fear. Pardon me again if I read through these touching tales of martyrdom, these ringing defenses of free speech, and see behind them an undying enmity toward sixties movements, toward whatever remains of their democratizing force in universities, and toward any challenge to dominant groups and ideas; because whatever else happened in the sixties, universities opened then to new students and to critical ideas, both new and long silenced. The right would like to cancel those gains. Given the choice presented by it and by the complaisant media, my friends and I would swallow hard and line up with the politically correct, who at least unambiguously dislike white supremacy, male supremacy, and all the "isms" that disrespect and demean.

But much about the PC phenomenon drives us up the ivied walls. Censorship, of course: we'll all take a loyalty oath to free speech. I pay dues to the American Civil Liberties Union and endorse most of its positions. And if it's OK for the Klan to speak on campus, it's surely OK for our National Association of Scholars colleagues to teach their classes (with unaccustomed responsibility for their ideas, of course). The few incidents of actual censorship, however, incidents recycled endlessly through the media, and those of egregious bad manners (with no censorship involved) that draw headlines like "Return of the Storm Troopers" (*Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 1991), are not what we mainly hold against PC, much as we deplore them. We object to PC because it is often a self-indulgent substitute for politics, a holier-than-thou moralism of the converted. PC is attitude politics, a politics of feeling good, a politics of surfaces and gestures that in its extreme form amounts to a conviction that the ills of the social order will be cured when executives no longer call their secretaries "girls" and thin people stop using the word "fat." As the right correctly (!) perceives, this is also a politics of separate issues, a catechism that can be memorized by sophomore year, a "cluster of opinions about race, ecology, feminism, culture, and foreign policy" (Richard Bernstein, *New York Times*, October 28, 1990).

What's missing is any perception that these issues are knit together in a whole system of domination, which might be grasped as a totality and strategically opposed. To be

sure, in everyday life my political friends and I also spend a lot of energy fighting specific injustices. Nobody can totalize much of the time. But unless local actions are guided by a unifying analysis and vision, they will forever be a discrete series of defensive maneuvers. And certainly discrete attitudes don't add up to a radical politics; they aren't even politically correct, in the bad old Stalinist sense that we have evoked for years, always ironically, when we have used the now useless term. These debates will block understanding, if carried forward in their present terms. For instance, they hide the role of the right itself in generating excesses of PC multiculturalism, by trimming alternative programs until the dispossessed are left fighting one another for jobs and turf. More broadly, the media spasm about PC obscures the fact that battles over the canon and insulting language take place in just a small corner of the university, not to mention the whole educational system. In the university as a whole the core curriculum is neither Shakespeare nor Alice Walker. It is accounting, computer programming, training for service jobs or for Wall Street high flying, acceptance of such divisions of labor as natural and unchangeable, the quiet reproduction of inequality, and political hopelessness. Add K-12, and the whole curriculum reveals itself as a far-from-benign neglect of most students and teachers. That's the only curriculum the right has proposed for just about everyone who doesn't make it to Harvard.

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The threat is genuine; for just one example, the right has virtually closed off support for emancipatory research in the humanities, through its putsch at the National Endowment (see Stephen Burd, "Chairman of Humanities Fund Has Politicized Grants Process, Critics Charge," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 1992). But we won't get far in opposing their program by lining up to defend the bad versions of multiculturalism and political correctness. Do it when cornered; the politically correct are not our enemy, and Lynne Cheney is. But remember that our aim is to scrap the tired yet violent project of capitalist patriarchy and move on to a new one that will allow human beings to flourish in their common weal.



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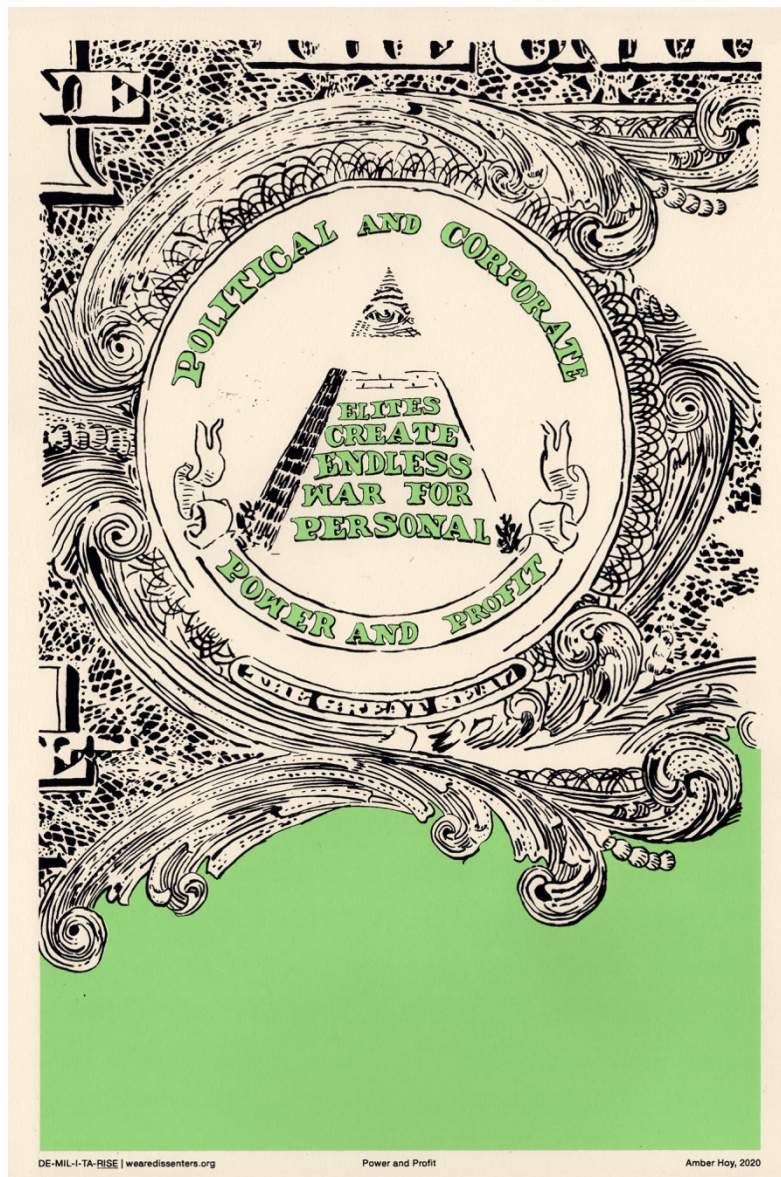
RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #68 (2004)

Is Class an Identity?

by Richard Ohmann



ARTWORK BY AMBERHOY, "POWER AND PROFIT" VIA JUST SEEDS

In my section of Introduction to Literature, we were discussing Jane Austen's *Emma*. I knew from experience that a lot of students would have silently rejected the premise of the plot -- indeed, of almost all those 19th-century plots: that whom one marries is really important, where "whom" refers less to any unique individual (Mr. or Miss Right) than to a social status and the conduct that is supposed to enact it in public. Their expected incredulity was in fact the starting point for the unit on *Emma* that some of my Wesleyan colleagues had developed.¹ We would work through letters of Austen, historical documents, and historically based criticism to open a vista of marriages as hugely consequential for the two parties and their families, for the social order of the village, and, beyond that, for the very future of England, which depended in part on whether the landed gentry and the aspiring commercial class would peacefully negotiate their relations and justly rule the nation and the world.

Most students could understand the historical and symbolic seriousness of marriage within and across classes, and even see how such issues got tangled up in the emotions of individual lovers. But along with this grudging acknowledgement went an almost palpable sense of condescension, and of relief that our own civilization had left such superficialities behind, that nobody could now be stigmatized or ruled out as a marriage partner because his or her family was "in trade," that we were free of class chains and class blindness. I decided, one year, to challenge the assumption:

"Well, hypothetically if you were ever to get married" (I had to put it that way to get past their quite proper unwillingness to leave lesbian and gay people out of the conversation and their perhaps less proper revulsion against marriage as an arrangement even for straight couples) "if you were to get married, would class lines be no barrier?"

"Certainly not" -- general agreement "it's love that counts."

"You would be as free to marry a 7-11 clerk as a medical student?" "Of course we'd be less likely to meet and get to know the clerk, but it's the person, not the job or the money, that matters."

"What about differences in education or taste?" "No, the 7-11 worker could read the same books and like the same music that we do." (I hear strains of *My Fair Lady*.)

"And how would your parents react to news of your plans?" Hmmm: that turns out to be a quite different story. To translate their response into my own words: the parents didn't shell out \$25,000 a year or otherwise support and strive and sacrifice, in order to have their kids marry straight down and out of the professional-managerial class (hereafter, PMC). The parents, though maybe nice enough, are old fashioned, bound by antique social rigidities; they are something called "classist." If only we could get rid of classism, along with sexism and heterosexism and racism, people would be unhampered individuals at last, free to love where the heart sings, perhaps even to marry; and the ghost of Jane Austen could rest in her grave.

Now let me acknowledge the narrow reach of this anecdote. Wesleyan University is selective and expensive. Over half of the students have some kind of financial aid, but even many of those come from PMC families. The rest have, with help from parents, striven to join that class. Many of those are minorities. All have come to a college that, like many similar ones, advertises its diversity as an attraction. The ethos is liberal, respectful, what its enemies like to call "politically correct." Most students hate prejudice and inequality; they accept the goal of a small utopia in Middletown, Connecticut, at whose threshold you check all invidiousness, distinction, and privilege based on color or gender or sexuality or ethnicity. (I think that's one meaning of the disappearance of family names from social interaction, so that it's almost rude to ask "Jason what?" after an introduction.)

But if this analysis is right, the anecdote may after all have something to teach about class and identity. These students have entered a college world that is supposedly without hierarchy. Living for a while in such a "diverse" world is a PMC initiation ritual; living in a classless world is, paradoxically, a manifestation of class privilege. To notice or make a fuss about class would, then, spoil the illusion; it would remind all that they came to a selective college in part to preserve or upgrade their class standing. It would call into question their individuality, uniqueness, and freedom. So they enact class without allowing its reality -- at least now, at least in this society, at least for enlightened Wesleyan students.

Granted, the students are reasonably self-aware. They can mock the ideology. Gags about "diversity" abound: "Wesleyan is so diverse that you can meet people here from almost every neighborhood in Manhattan." The students make their way through the world with sensitive compasses and gyroscopes that tell them also which neighborhoods in Brooklyn are homelike to them and which parts of Boston; which places have nothing to do with their lives (e.g., Staten Island and Paterson); where are the places to go after college (New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, Washington); where they might spend summers; what styles and fashions signify how to speak in what Basil Bernstein called the "elaborated code" of the middle class²; how to place those who don't; how to avoid alienated labor by deploying credentials or creativity and -- yes -- whom to marry, should it come to such a pass. Their political causes are numerous and sincere. They know there are rich and poor people. But many are reluctant to decode all of this intuitive knowledge, and much else, in terms of class.

Is class an identity? I think yes. It is a complex and powerful identity, a script you act out daily, a bundle of habits and feelings and ways of relating lodged deep in your psyche and broadcast by your talk and conduct. It is not instantly visible like race and gender. But neither is it easy to revise or conceal -- much harder than suggested by those ads for tapes you can listen to while commuting, which will soon have you speaking as well as Henry Higgins, thus shielding yourself from harsh inferences about your background.

But most people don't so readily identify themselves by class as by gender or race, and perhaps don't even feel being

working class or PMC the way they feel being white or male or straight or, especially, being Latino or black or female or gay -- except of course when they are way out of their usual class habitat: a mechanic plunked down in the Century Club, say, or an English Professor at the Elks. And even such misadventures are not likely to endanger the displaced person, the way women and African Americans and gay men and others risk insult or violence in many venues. Class is not so insistent, not so turbulent an identity as these others. Famously, a large majority of our fellow citizens place themselves in the vague and commodious middle class -- just as our rulers would have them do, in order to preserve this supposedly classless and harmonious society. In writing courses I sometimes would ask students how they characterized their class membership. A typical set of uncomfortable replies: 18 middle or upper middle class, and two not. One of the two said she was "lower class"; the other said his family was "rich." Bold and disconcerting replies, I might add.

I have much less experience of other class locations in U.S. education, but I wonder if these generalizations mightn't apply, at least partially, in settings very different from Wesleyan. The students I taught a couple of times at our local community college knew where they came from and where they were, and they knew it wasn't Harvard. But except for a couple of trade unionists, they were reluctant to think of the difference in terms of class. First generation college students, they had a big stake in believing anyone could make it in this country. Class seemed an artificial barrier and a rebuke to their hopes of rising. They needed to see class as epiphenomenal.

Now, of course the ideology we take in with every breath has a lot to do with the many ways in which students at Wesleyan and at Middlesex Community College overlook or evade the hard reality of class. The U.S. is a country where every immigrant's destiny is to make good, or at least enable his and her kids to make good. A country with no hereditary ranks, where everyone is as good as everyone else. A country where all who work for a corporation are part of a big "family." A country with equal opportunity, where you end up with what you earned through talent and hard work.

So for any teacher of composition or literature who wants to nourish critical thinking and writing, this is rich soil. The potential for demystification, for thinking through the myths we have lived, is large. In addition, class so subtly mixes the external (hood or burb, Brooklyn Tech or Exeter) and the interior (including language and love) that the possibilities for discovery through writing are exciting and endless. I used to adapt Ira Shor's classroom investigation of best and worst jobs to get students started on what they expected out of life and how they imagined the mass of people who had the worst jobs.³ (The best imagined jobs were all professional or creative -- we're a PMC institution.) Students did collaborative projects on work, taking off from Studs Terkel and interviewing people at the college and elsewhere about their jobs. A couple of times, students set off to interview others they knew to be rich or poor, discovering among many things how differently the two classes

imagined social space. The kids without money talked about college as an escape hatch, a way to "get out of" rural Maine or their Korean neighborhood in Queens. The rich students had the whole world in their sights, a sense of choice as their birthright, but also, often, an ethos of obligation or even guilt, derived from their good fortune. I have written about group projects on dress and fashion that discovered class in every morning's choice of garments. Interviews were one of my favorite media for the writing class, for various reasons.⁴ But my point here is not to recommend that pedagogy, just to urge a focus on class.

Those my age remember that for the more privileged college students, race, gender, and sexuality were also in hiding through the 1940s and 50s. It took Betty Friedan and James Baldwin and Paul Goodman and the movements of the sixties to make them real, put them on the educational agenda. If they sometimes reside there as frozen identities surrounded by halos of correctness, we can try to complicate that rigidity in our teaching and political work, partly by considering how these identities interact with each other and with class. In teaching about class, I think we start at a more basic level. Yet students and teachers do have deep reserves of tacit, textured knowledge about class. We can draw out and structure that knowledge, adding what social scientists know; understanding why class won't go away if people just stop being snobs; theorizing; *writing* class in the writing class.

It's a good time to be doing that. After long absence, class has once again become visible in the public arena, if crudely, as the "widening gap between rich and poor." Everywhere, global capitalism is degrading and casualizing the labor of the old, industrial working class -- but also of the PMC itself. Look at what's happening to our own profession, including to most of the people who teach first-year writing courses. Students seeking class advancement face that same barrier. There's room for solidarity between students and instructors, perhaps in ways that have not been possible for a while -- perhaps even in a way comparable to the solidarity that sometimes pervades and enlivens black and women's and queer studies classrooms.

Notes

1. This essay is based on a talk I gave at the 2001 convention of the College Conference on Composition and Communication. I have written about this course in "Teaching Historically," an essay included in my *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions, and Print Culture* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).
2. Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).
3. Ira Shor, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
4. See "Writing and Empowerment," in my *Politics of Letters* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #69 (2004)

Politics of Teaching

by Richard Ohmann



ARTWORK BY MEREDITH STERN, "INVEST TO EDUCATE, NOT TO INCARCERATE" (2014) LIBERATING LEARNING PORTFOLIO, JUST SEEDS

Is progressive education progressive? What kind of a future does it have? I will approach these questions by looking very briefly at the politics of rebellion and reforms since 1965 in post-secondary education, at what is left of those reforms now, and at the conditions for change in the time to come.

By "politics of teaching," then, I mean relations between and among the individuals, groups, and social roles that are involved in formal teaching and learning -- for instance, in the conduct of a credit-bearing college course.¹ Some of these relations are built into the institution. An instructor (sometimes more than one) supervises the work of some students over a specified period of time. The instructor, an employee of the college, is paid to do this. As customers, students pay for it to happen. The instructor has a credential that qualifies him or her to teach a subject and rate students' achievement. The students have been admitted to the college and enrolled in the course. Some body of faculty members has approved the course. And so on.

Other relations -- an infinity of them -- are like rules. The syllabus typically makes some of them explicit: attendance requirements; due dates for papers; a schedule of tests, exams, problem sets, oral presentations, lectures, and the like; standards to be applied in judging the work of students. Many rules are improvised along the way. Many others (including who sets the rules and how) are conventional, and often beneath conscious awareness: e.g., how a class begins and ends; who can be where in the classroom; who can talk when; who can introduce a topic or terminate a discussion; whose voices carry authority; what kinds of talk are in and out of bounds; whether students speak only to the instructor, seeking his or her approval, or respond to one another, too. You or I could extend this list indefinitely.

To understand it as a list of political as well as of pedagogical relations will not seem strange to most readers of this magazine, and I will take only a moment to say why I favor extending the core meaning of "political" in this way. First, the people taking a college class, though not its citizens, do enter, for a term or a semester, into a small system of governance, where power is exercised, members have certain rights, laws are made and enforced and broken, disputes are resolved, and so on. Second, pedagogies convey lessons about governance that may influence the way students later act as citizens, and what sorts of politics will win or lose consent across a whole society. A single course will rarely be so consequential. But the politics enacted in an academic field, in a whole curriculum, in higher education generally, and of course in K-12 schooling, may significantly shape the way a generation does politics in the conventional sense, later on.

But the politics enacted in an academic field, in a whole curriculum, in higher education generally, and of course in K-12 schooling, may significantly shape the way a generation does politics in the conventional sense, later on.

I know, I know: educators often hugely overestimate the effects of what we do. Compared to what kids learn about authority, power, rights, and freedoms, from church, from commercial culture, and above all from family, what they learn in school and college may be less than decisive, and what they learn from pedagogy only a small part of their whole political socialization. Teaching has content, too, after all, and it may be possible to instill democratic beliefs through a pedagogy of fear, or raise up a generation of monarchists using the methods of Summerhill. But if pedagogical relations have political consequences at all, they are worth taking seriously for that reason, as well as because they make a difference in how well students learn.

From time to time, on grounds both educational and political, activists and reformers have objected to practices of teaching that seemed pointless, rigid, stupefying, oppressive, invidious, and so on. One such period of rebellion began around 1965 in American universities. Pedagogical discontent rode in with the student power movement and the vague but pressing demand for "relevance" in college courses. Student power advocates generally welcomed and affiliated with the civil rights and black power movements, despite obvious conflicts in goal and strategy. The anti-war movement added its critique of university complicity in devastating Southeast Asia, and of illegitimate power and authority that permeated all our institutions, including the classroom. The women's movement brought a more exact and thoroughgoing critique of pedagogical relations, including those among teachers and students in academic programs, as they made educational and administrative decisions. (Remember "collectives"?) If you were around a college in those years, you know that there was plenty of dissonance among and within these movements, on pedagogy as on everything else. Nonetheless, there were some points of agreement, and in any case, I must simplify. So here is a portmanteau, late sixties critique of traditional classroom relations.

They were undemocratic. The professor and still more remote authorities decided everything from details of course content to what points of view were legitimate. Once in a course, students could only follow where the professor led. A closely connected complaint: relations of teaching and learning were hierarchical, reproducing in miniature the dominations and privileges that obtained in American society generally. This charge opened out into a critique of the whole curriculum (it was white, male, and upper middle class, with no recourse for the excluded) and of the academic profession (it organized its knowledge of the world in impersonal, abstract formats meant to guard academic authority and suppress other perspectives and interests). As a result, college education failed to address or even connect with the deepest concerns of students. Nor, in a time of war, domestic conflict, and injustice, did college courses acknowledge, much less explain, the pathology, or point to actions that might reverse it.

Finally, there were two complaints that sat uneasily together. One: competitive individualism ruled in the class and the college, as in the whole society. Pitted against one another by custom and the grading system, students strove to excel. They did not listen to or build upon the contributions each could make to a shared inquiry. And of

course, male voices drowned out female, black students were silenced, upper class assurance won out over first-generation timidity, and so on. The other complaint -- a holdover from the 1950s I believe -- was that schooling required students to act and think alike. It denied their individuality and along with it the habit of open-minded inquiry that drives all genuine learning.

Clearly, this analysis damned many conventions that had seemed natural in undergraduate teaching through the postwar period: the lecture course with its passive or absent students; the discussion section, where students tried to guess the right answer or defeat classmates in combat; the inflexible syllabus; the spit-it-all-back examination; the paper topic demanding that students adopt disciplinary rhetoric and interests as their own; the system of evaluation that distilled an A- or C+ from all particular striving, and converted learning or its lack into a numerical rank-in-class, a dried-out credential. In addition to routines of coursework, the critique took on curricular assumptions about what constituted respectable subject matter, and what students must do to qualify for graduation -- in particular, take required courses.

Now, as I have spelled it out, this critique made little distinction between educational and political virtues. Teacher-centered pedagogies would produce shallow and alienated learning, movement people thought; egalitarian pedagogies would foster critical thinking and strong motivation. I don't recall reading or hearing the argument in just that form, but believe that the equation of political principle with educational efficacy was common -- in spite of abundant evidence, to be sure, that some students learned well in conventional lecture courses, and, from about 1968 on, that a class run on democratic lines could get lost in a pathless wasteland. It took a while to sort these matters out, in the whirlwind of critique and reform that blew through the university.

Well, actual reform ranged from the systemic to the local, and an adequate survey would certainly include such national, disciplinary upheavals as the one in my own and neighboring fields that drew attention away from masterpieces, traditional canons, great men, and great events, in order to privilege forgotten texts, multiple voices, subordinate groups, the not-so-short and simple annals of the poor -- as well as dissident ideas, from feminism to post-colonial theory. The reason I would group these broad shifts in curriculum and scholarly interest with changes in classroom dynamics is that both proceeded from challenges to the exclusion of most social groups and their values. And of course, those challenges derived in turn from social movements that had made their way into the university, along with previously excluded or demoted populations.

Another target of reform was the set of rules governing courses and credits and instruction. It will be obvious how the abolition or reduction of requirements answered to the political critique I have summarized. Democratic learning meant students taking responsibility for what they would study, and when -- in consultation with faculty mentors but not on command of the faculty as a legislative body. Likewise, faculty members had been the sole generators and certifiers of courses and majors. Where I taught, at

Wesleyan University, the faculty abolished requirements in the late sixties. It became possible around 1970 for students to initiate small courses through a system of group tutorials, and to conduct their studies partially independent of faculty direction. "Education in the Field" allowed individual students to convert off-campus projects and internships into academic credits, and a "University Major" provided a way for them to draw from several disciplines in planning and carrying out their main courses of study, rather than following the major program of any department. Pass-fail grading gave students more choice in how their work would be assessed and in how they would divide their energies among courses -- to the disgruntlement of many reformers, who found students taking their liberated courses pass-fail so as to ace biochemistry or allocate half their study time for a semester to Professor Hannibal Lector's famous political science course. In the late sixties, too, through teaching evaluations, students gained a formal role in assessing the work of their instructors, and thus influence over methods of instruction.

As for pedagogical strategies within individual courses: these were and are varied, shifting, and more or less private at Wesleyan. However, at many institutions, including Portland State University and the University of Louisville, people have thought about and, in collaboration, reconfigured in-class relations of students and instructors. According to descriptions of a program called University Studies at Portland State, much of the effort in first year courses goes to establishing small learning communities, each one comprising a faculty member, a peer mentor, and a group of students. Their roles are different, but not sharply separate or hierarchical. The relation between mentors and instructors is a "partnership." Mentors learn the matter of the course deeply, and help plan it out, week to week. They learn from the faculty how to facilitate, how to build community, how to teach collaboratively. Over time, the faculty member also learns to teach more effectively: from the mentor, and -- partly through his or her mediation -- from the other students: what needs more discussion? What frictions or anxieties may be getting in the way of learning? Mentors work with students in small, cooperative groups that include no instructor. Learning in such a group depends heavily on interaction of each student with the others. Students' lives, the conditions of their learning, are granted a role and a hearing. The assessment of students' work is also a collaborative venture, not the impersonal assignment of a grade. Students rewrite the learning goals of the program to their own needs, and reflect on their progress toward those goals each term. They build portfolios to document and share it. What will ultimately be evaluated is their individual progress.

Now I realize that the rhetoric of program descriptions tends toward untroubled cheerfulness. But if what I read and heard of University Studies at Portland State is even half true, a student-centered pedagogy has been naturalized there. Besides, even if the descriptions were a shameless PR job, it would be historically interesting that they proclaim the goals of the program in a language of democratic pedagogy that came into universities 35 years ago: learning communities, mentors, teams of peers, student-centered learning, active learning, collaboration.

Similar ideas and practices are alive in the respected composition program at the University of Louisville, to judge from its handbook and articles on its procedures. Consider how the University prepares teachers of writing, especially through the course required for all new teachers, English 602, "Teaching College Composition," team-taught by Brian Huot (thanks to him for sending me the materials upon which I draw, here) and three grad students, and through administration of the program by the same four people. As this arrangement suggests, this program seeks equality across formal lines of authority and rank. It casts the assistant directors as "developing professionals," asking them to share administrative tasks and collaborate as equals in designing 602 and in leading classroom activities. A journal article -- also a collaborative effort -- describing this arrangement is aptly titled "Breaking Hierarchies."² The course syllabus addresses beginning teachers, too, as professionals who will build their own theories of language and pedagogy, and take part in collaborative, small-group learning.

"Collaborative learning," "collaborative teaching," "sharing" -- the ideal mode of their relations is, unsurprisingly, imagined as communitarian. The team tries to foster "a sense of teaching as a public act" and an "open-door environment" in which students "respond to each other's teaching and writing," says the syllabus. Working as an administrative group, the team strives for consensus on "teaching strategies or programmatic polity" by "trading perspectives," thus overcoming barriers of authority. The administrative group, both in its own work and in 602, favors critical reflection in working with divergent views and values. It takes "resistance" as an invitation to negotiate change in the way things are done, not as a disruption to be overruled or overlooked.³

Well, these egalitarian and democratic politics may govern only small parts of the curriculum at Louisville and Portland State, but they are core segments. It's suggestive, if hardly a proof of anything, that ways of learning and teaching forged in 1960s conflicts and movements remain as part of institutional commitment in two urban, public universities, as well as in the expensive private college where I taught, and are still attached to progressive political goals.

Nearly forty years have passed since the onset of this educational movement, which, amorphous and decentralized though it was, not only changed pedagogical relations in a thousand classrooms, but pulled itself together for campaign after campaign on one and another front: the foundation of black studies and women's studies programs, the opening up of canons, the loosening of requirements, the participation of students in governance and in evaluating faculty work, the search for alternatives to the grading system, and so on. Most of those campaigns met resistance at the time, and have been vigorously contested since, including by well-funded conservative foundations, by spin-off groups such as the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the National Association of Scholars, and by high officials such as Lynne Cheney and William Bennett. How deep and extensive were post-sixties reforms in the university? How have they held up over time? Are Louisville, Portland State, and Wesleyan typical or unusual in having

retained the innovations and the rhetoric briefly described above?

A broad study would be valuable to those working for educational democracy. For now, my brief, informal, and conjectural reply to these questions is:

1. Some changes in curriculum were substantial and lasting, especially those that led to various "studies" programs, brought multiple voices into the syllabus, and established other-than-dominant perspectives as legitimate, and indeed urgent. A comparison of humanities, arts, and social science listings in course catalogs today with those of 1965 will readily bear out that generalization.
2. Academic requirements have made something of a comeback, but fulltime undergraduate students in traditional universities still have more say in planning their courses of study now than they did 40 years ago.
3. Classrooms are more participatory in most institutions. In a few disciplines that had not yet staked out their own domains in the late sixties, student-centered pedagogies are the professional standard. Rhetoric and composition is the clearest example, and an important one, because almost every college student passes through its gateway. Women's studies is another. Needless to say, the old, mass-production methods persist alongside newer ones -- but perhaps more because of cutbacks and budgetary stress than on principle.

In short, although some of the movements that stimulated reform are nearly forgotten, their academic heritage lives on in the face of strong counter-movements to regiment the young as never before and defend them against any taint of critical thinking.

How might this conflict develop in the future? Any prediction will depend on how one characterizes the future and understands its connection to the present and past. I first note that once before the 1960s, an American movement gathered for which the social relations of teaching and learning were a primary issue. I refer to progressive education, which was first identifiable as a movement in the 1890s. Grounded in schools, not colleges, it rose in response to crowded classes, especially in the elementary grades; to authoritarian teachers and learning by rote; to a curriculum little changed since the arrival of the McGuffey readers; and more generally to demands imposed on the common school by the growth of cities, millions of immigrants, the factory system, and depopulation and poverty in the countryside. The reformers insisted that schooling should start not from a potted curriculum but from children's actual life-worlds, their "real interests and ends," in John Dewey's words. It should seek integration of experience, putting to work the child's "innate" desire to explore, interpret, and create. Thus, it should proceed through active learning ("by doing"), not memorization and drill. Freedom and responsibility should be its means.

This last principle slides over into the explicitly political: progressive educators sought enlightened relations in the classroom, less for their own sake than as educationally generative, and to prepare the young for active participation in civic life. Dewey's most systematic and influential book is called *Democracy and Education*; in it he argues for free exchange among culturally diverse groups, for schools that would help overcome economic inequality, and for teaching that would foster peace by showing the common interests of all nations. His analysis and program resemble those of sixties reformers in many ways – though the latter took no leads directly from progressive education, and seemingly knew little about it except as it had been embedded in their own experience of school. (I attribute this amnesia in part to the desperate rush of sixties reformers responding to crisis after crisis, and in part to the routine skepticism or even contempt of university people for anything coming out of public schools or schools of education.)

In addition to striking similarities in pedagogical and political doctrine, one other bears emphasis. Although the educational uprising of the 1960s and after has no name -- such as "progressive education" -- to give it historical presence, it, like its predecessor, was an educational movement within a more comprehensive movement for social change. The student, civil rights, antiwar, and women's liberation movements gave birth to it. Only the student movement was grounded in the university to begin with. The others arose to challenge injustice and war, and then developed academic branches and projects.

Progressive educational reform was also part of something broader, the progressive movement itself. The school reformers' vision of social progress was congruent with that of the urban planners, the advocates for public sanitation and health, the enemies of child labor, and so on. Indeed, these were often the same people. Jane Addams not only fought disease and malnutrition among the poor, supported unions, helped launch the profession of social work; she also promoted an idea of "socialized education" beginning with the dangers and resources of the city, and served four years on the Chicago Board of Education. Walter Hines Page promoted modernization and humanization of the industrial system in his magazines, *The Forum* and *The World's Work*; sat on a commission to alleviate rural poverty; and proposed to regenerate the South partly by improving its schools. Progressive educators were there at the formation of the progressive movement, and their goals were integral to its project of building a rational and decent industrial society on the foundations laid in the early days of the republic.

In short the meaning of "progressive" did derive from that of "progress"; and this may be a critical difference between the two episodes of reform. Progressives around the turn of the last century, unlike 1960s radicals, by and large rejected neither the principles and institutions of American democracy nor its great transformation by machine production and industrial capital during the post-Civil War decades. They felt confident that they were adjusting a process of liberatory development that had advanced farthest in the U. S., but been diverted by malefactors of great wealth, by poverty, by corrupt city machines, by militarism, and by other identifiable

pathologies. These could be remedied through the application of reason, science, expertise, and disinterested good will. In this project, education had an obvious role to play: liberating children from ignorance and servility, and preparing them to contribute, as adults, to social improvement.

How in fact did progressive education fare in the new social order it helped to create? Here are some conjectures I'd explore if I were digging into this subject. First, the movement in which progressive education played a small part did succeed in rationalizing and thus stabilizing capitalism in its new corporation-led form, which I'll call Fordism. But within that social order, progressive education relaxed its transformative ambitions. After a brief surge of radicalism in the 1930s, around Teachers College and the journal *New Frontier*, it mutated from a political into a strictly educational movement, valued by parents and groups who wanted both critical education and social privilege for their kids. In this phase it did well in some private schools and in model, suburban enclaves of the professional-managerial class such as Winnetka, Illinois and Shaker Heights, Ohio -- where, I now discover, I myself was progressively educated, without having been aware of it at the time. (I might add that, returning for a 50th reunion, I found few signs of politically progressive consciousness among my classmates.)

I further propose that vague ideals of student-centered education, grafted onto professional-managerial class feeling, contributed to 1960s rebellions against cold war ideology, "conformity," the multiversity, and "irrelevant" education there. By the end of the decade, educational revolt along these lines had fused with civil rights and antiwar movements, and then gained new force from the nascent women's liberation movement. These and other rebellions gathered into a broad attack on major premises of Fordism, and so provoked a "conservative restoration" (Ira Shor's term, in *Culture Wars*) that went from campaigns for basics and "excellence" to the 1990s campaign to repudiate multiculturalism, free the university from "political correctness," and reestablish truth and virtue (as in Lynne Cheney, *Telling the Truth*; William Bennett, *The Book of Virtues*).

The counterattackers went after progressive pedagogy, too. In the public schools, they have won sweeping victories under the banner of standards and accountability. That regime tends to squeeze out student-centered teaching and any politics of learning that interferes with performance as measured by tests. In colleges, post-sixties curriculum and democratic teaching are less vulnerable to political assault. But a parallel economic movement could once again drain the political energy from progressive education, leaving it a quiet backwater. I refer to the remaking of capitalism in the U.S. and globally into a flexible, shape-changing system wherein the staid, Fordist corporation must become agile or die, where mergers and takeovers and startups proceed breathlessly, where technologies, products, services, and markets proliferate, and where capital vaults electronically across national boundaries, outflanking the old, unionized, well-paid, benefitted, and secure Fordist workforce and scattering it among the global, reserve army of casual labor.

This new economic order is aggressively bringing higher education within the scope of its transformative power.⁴ Universities have long taken the lead in use of casual labor, and that process goes on apace. In a fresher development, the traditional, non-profit university behaves more and more like a business, adopting corporate methods such as performance measurement, program budgeting, productivity incentives, subcontracting, outsourcing, and so on. In addition to these practices of cost-cutting and slimming, universities have cultivated new sources of income. To mention just two that have gained much attention: since the Bayh-Dole act of 1980, which permitted universities to patent and sell discoveries made in government-sponsored research, universities have entered into a dazzling variety of deals with corporations, and have often themselves become brokers or venture capitalists, establishing "incubators" for start-up companies and even whole campuses where new businesses can reside. The other bundle of schemes involves exploiting students' wants and purchasing power, via such arrangements as exclusive contracts with Coke or Pepsi, from which universities have received tens of millions of dollars over five or ten years; or through the sale of students' attention directly to advertisers, as when portal companies provide a college with software to use in registration, course enrollment, campus announcements, and so on, while planting advertisements and offers along the electronic pathway.

Of course, the chief commodity that universities market is still education itself, but presented now in a mushrooming of new formats such as online courses and tutoring services, as well as in old formats such as continuing education. Adults now account for half of all enrollments in college courses. Some of these offer old, liberal arts subjects, but most package knowledge and skills that the student hopes will lead to advancement at work, a change of jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities, and the like. Certificates, a related kind of parcel, are big business in themselves -- New York University, for example, offers more than 100 different certificates, usually to people who already have degrees and are further specializing their labor power. In short, post-secondary education comes in ever smaller and precision-marketed units, for customers who are often refashioning themselves to meet the needs of employers. In this sense, too, universities have privatized their work. Income from sale of these units becomes an ever-larger element in the budget. Famously, tuition payments from regular, full-time students have also outpaced inflation.

So the funding of education in public and private universities now comes increasingly from market transactions, and less and less from taxation and philanthropy. Those older methods of funding in effect transferred big chunks of the social surplus to colleges and supported higher education as a public good. Today, by contrast, it makes rough sense to speak of privatized knowledge and commodified learning. And that's without even considering the for-profit sector of higher education, with 2000 corporations like Motorola and General Electric running internal "universities" to retool their workers, and with proprietary institutions like DeVry Institutes and the University of Phoenix sprouting campuses everywhere: Phoenix has over a hundred, more than 100,000 students,

essentially no tenured faculty, and curriculum constantly changing to meet the demand of individual and corporate customers. These companies may be modeling the university of the future. Without question they are reconfiguring higher education along the lines of the agile, post-Fordist company. In short, as American capitalism has remade itself since 1970, the structure and practices of post-secondary education have changed in homologous ways. In the process, control of curriculum is passing out of the faculty's control, out of the institution's control, and into a market where effective demand is directly or indirectly responsive to the needs of business.

To push this oversimplified analysis a bit farther: with higher education ever more commodified and with business indirectly paying the piper, the curricular tune changes. Not that demand for programs and perspectives derived from sixties movements diminishes a lot in absolute terms, or even at all. Many students want and will pay for some of the critical knowledge, some of the bracing demystification, lodged in the university by activists 35 years ago. Historical and anthropological and literary questioning of the status quo will continue to feed doubt and Utopian hope, and will even have some oblique economic value for young students on their way to leadership roles that put a premium on "thinking outside the box," as the current cliché goes -- just as traditional liberal arts education has long provided intellectual suppleness and cultural capital for that same group.

Yet the share of enrollments going to liberal arts courses has been in a long decline, even in traditional universities (where 35 years ago most students cited the acquisition of a "philosophy of life" as their main reason for going to college, and where now, the leading reason is to get a well-paying job). Naturally, liberal arts enrollments make up a much smaller share in the burgeoning proprietary and public sector, where most of the adult students seek economic advantage, and business's needs determine what studies will yield that advantage. There are no figures on the demand for critique and demystification in that sector, but I think it a fair guess that few students attend DeVry or Phoenix to learn about class, gender, and power in the U.S. and around the globe.

Does it follow that student-centered and other progressive pedagogies have dim prospects in the new economic order? A few quite general thoughts, now, on that question.

If we conceptualize the transmission of knowledge and skill as a series of small and large transactions undertaken by buyers on at least a tacit reckoning of material cost and benefit, and if a corporation is directly or indirectly the buyer, it will want a learning packet that brings the best return on investment, and will want that packet delivered (!) in the most effective way. Exactly the same holds for students taking information technology or product design or, for that matter, seeking to improve their chances in specific job markets, or qualify for advancement where they already work. In the education marketplace, they will want to buy the right stuff at the best price. The implications for a democratic politics of learning seem obvious: precisely to the extent that students (and other buyers) base their

educational choices on the market advantage they hope to gain -- to that extent, they will disregard other educational values they might have, such as the wish to work in cooperation with other students, or to initiate and control their own learning process, or to understand and fight inequality. If that's all there were to it, my argument would have a simple conclusion: in a time of market-driven higher education, there will be little demand for democratic ways of learning.

But neither history nor students are quite so easy to read as that. Let me pursue this chain of ideas just one step farther, by noting that even from a narrowly self-interested point of view, the best price for a package of skills and knowledge need not be the lowest: no point in buying a paralegal course at bargain rates, if it fails to teach you what you need to qualify for the job. In the open market for useful learning, pedagogy does and will have value.

You can probably guess where this thought leads. I said earlier that the critique which drove innovations of the sixties and after made "little distinction between educational and political virtues," assuming that the latter would lead to the former. I myself believe that this equivalence does often hold. That is, students working out of their experience and needs, learning by doing, working collaboratively in self-governing groups, taking joint responsibility for the results, and so on, not only learn to be social in ways well fitted to democratic citizenship, but learn sociology, chemistry, or philosophy more deeply and confidently than they would on, say, the old lecture and exam plan -- the banking model. But there's no reason to limit the point to liberal arts subjects: these pedagogies will work in management theory, tax law, computer programming, and accounting. And although I have not investigated the matter, I have seen enough sidelong references to make me think a fair number of people who teach in for-profit or corporate universities, and in credential-oriented programs everywhere, are in fact pragmatically using methods that were improvised 25 to 35 years ago, with the overthrow of the system in mind.⁵ On this premise, one would predict a continuing place in the agile university and even in corporate culture for democratic relations of pedagogy, so long as they answer to criteria of efficiency. Where they can be justified chiefly on civic or moral grounds, they lose out. And of course, where they are retained for utilitarian reasons, they are necessarily detached from any ideal of resistance, any strategy for social transformation, any vision of a more decent world, any ideal of human agency outside the universal market. In that case, how will students or teachers identify good learning with any social principle at all?

Now I can make explicit an answer to the question with which I began. Progressive educational methods are not in themselves politically progressive. They do, I think, encourage students to be active learners and critical thinkers, but these qualities can -- in different circumstances -- be mobilized for the advancement and privilege of a social class; or to help some people manage others; or to teach the skills that local businesses want. Progressive education may in fact serve democratic and egalitarian ends chiefly when its advocates are already stimulated and empowered by movements for peace, equality, justice, and so on. (And even there, the choice of progressive methods is hardly

inevitable.) If this tentative conclusion is right, what else might one guess about the future of democratic relations of teaching and learning?

That they will survive in settings where education is not wholly or simply market-driven and in professional fields with a strong ethos of democratic public service -- writing instruction, as previously mentioned, and maybe K-12 schooling, until the apostles of accountability exorcise from it, too, the spirit of professional integrity, along with the ghosts of Jane Addams and John Dewey. Otherwise, I anticipate no surge of fresh energy into the remaking of pedagogy until that happens as part of some wider movement comparable to the uprisings of the 1960s, in the U. S.

But -- in a more optimistic swerve with which I'll end this essay -- I think we can all glimpse possibilities for the awakening of such movements. After the attacks of 9/11, for instance, there was a surge of curiosity about Islam and the history of Central Asia and the Middle East, leading to teach-ins, forums, and many quickly improvised college courses. The question, "why do they hate us so much?" was heard everywhere, including in the mainstream media, last September. That question became even more urgent in 2003, as we read the public opinion poll figures on what people around the globe thought of the war on Iraq, and as we saw crowds on television burning American flags. The precarious future of U.S. foreign policy could launch an inquiry on campuses and elsewhere into other cultures, and into American and corporate global policy over, say, the last fifty years. In my view that would in itself be an enormous gain for education in the cause of citizenship. Americans on average are sadly ignorant of history, not just of dates and names but of the forces that have brought us where we are and will carry us helplessly into the future unless we can understand them better. Likewise, most peoples and nations of the world are pretty much a blank spot in our mainstream media and in national awareness. These are matters where civic interest and education come urgently together.

Look also at the contradictions and conflicts around globalization: environmental degradation through free trade in its present form; corporate demands for an energy policy that perpetuates our dependence on oil from the Middle East or Central Asia or wherever; the search for cheap labor, from the maquiladoras of Mexico to the sweatshops of Indonesia to the ranks of adjuncts and grad students in the North American university; the need our leaders feel to police the globe and the homeland in the name of a limitless war on terror; the propping up of tyrannical regimes (such as that of the Baath Party in Iraq) that are supposedly on "our" side, until they mysteriously turn evil; the support of insurgent groups like the Taliban who turn out to be tomorrows tyrants.

You don't have to imagine movements contesting the new world order, because they already exist -- the anti-globalization movement, and then the astonishingly strong international movement against war on Iraq, and maybe against war in general. We'll see whether such groups will fade away now, or grow, make common cause with others, and act in a democratic spirit. If the latter, a progressive

politics of teaching will likely be one of their methods and achievements.

Notes

1. Henry Abelove, Donald Tyree, and Tom Van invited me to give talks at (respectively) Wesleyan University, Portland State University, and the University of Louisville. Thanks to them and many of their colleagues and students who helped me develop the argument presented here.
2. By Susan Popham, Michael Neal, Ellen Schendel, and Brian Huot, in Shirley K. Rose and Irwin Weiser, ed., *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist: Making Knowledge Work* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook), 2002.
3. See Katrina M. Powell, Cassandra Mach, Peggy O'Neill, and Brian Huot, "Graduate Students Negotiating Multiple Literacies as Writing Program Administrators: An Example of Collaborative Reflection," *Dialogue*, 6:2 (Spring, 2000), 82-110.
4. I have made this argument at length in my *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions, and Print Culture* (Middletown, CT; Wesleyan), 2003. See especially the essay called "What's Happening to the University and the Professions? Can History Tell?"
5. See for example Jim O'Loughlin, "Questioning the 'Success' of Collaborative Learning," *Socialist Review*, 27:1+2 (1999), 29-47.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #87 (2010)

Teaching in Bad Times

by Richard Ohmann



ARTWORK BY MOLLY COSTELLO, "REPAIR", DE-MIL-I-TA-RISE DISSIDENTS PORTFOLIO VIA JUST SEEDS

The thought behind this issue of *Radical Teacher* was vague and simple. We editors* and most of our contributors do political battle and daily work as if in the "long march through institutions" (Gramsci), on the way to a better world -- or maybe not, but we keep slogging. Even back in 1975, not many of *RT*'s founders hung on to 1960s dreams of revolution, or even of a united movement towards it. But we retained the same goals, the same allies, the same enemies: "a socialist, feminist and anti-racist journal," our cover says. Suppose, on the other hand -- and the other hand was shaking its fist at us editors pretty insistently -- suppose the long march reaches some really different terrain. Capitalism could run out of oil or water. The polar ice caps could melt, sinking the Maldives and Bangladesh like Atlantis. The United States could squander what is left of its wealth in endless wars. Casino capitalism's house of derivatives could come crashing down. What would the long march be like if it fell into a monstrous pothole, we asked? Since we do not know the answer, why not do an issue of *RT* on teaching in bad times, and reflect on what radical teaching might and should be if there are historical eruptions and discontinuities in our near future. That was the vague but simple thought.

Well, surprise. Casino capitalism did crash, while we were in an early stage of planning; and naturally, the crash of 2008 influenced our development of this issue. Here are the questions we posed in our call:

- how are hard economic times affecting students' economic choices?
- how are they affecting the educational system as a whole?
- how can progressives in K-12 and higher education promote radical understandings of the depression?
- can we teach better and more directly about capitalism as a system?
- can we better dismantle the ideologies of patriotism, masculinity, markets, and individual choice that are so stupefying now?
- does the crisis call for new courses, curricula, or pedagogies?
- does it call for new kinds of activism in and around education, given the crisis of funding that faces us?

At the end of the call, we added, "And if you would rather discuss teaching about the other crises -- war, oil, climate, and so on -- please feel free." But our economically based questions were given added emphasis by the harsh realities of 2008-09, and most of the proposals and manuscripts that came to us were about those realities. My aim in this introduction, therefore, is to repackage some other looming crises with economic collapse, in an attempt to flesh out the "what if?" question that prompted us to do a bad times issue.

So: what if apocalypse comes at us in the guise of economic depression, to be sure, but also of peak oil, or peak water, or rapid and freakish climate change, or

ecological crisis, global economic depression, further immiseration of poor people and poor regions, failure of the imperial wars to which our new administration is as committed as was the old, failure of states and social systems, resistance movements far larger than Al Qaeda, or the use of a few nuclear bombs. Some of these scenarios seem to me unlikely, some all but certain. My aim is not to argue for any of them: although I confess a personal attraction to doomsday scenarios, I can also appreciate the silliness latent in a list such as this:

For instance, you go off to your 9:00 class one Wednesday having heard on National Public Radio (NPR) that South Florida is under water; that the Cuban government is rounding up "yacht people" and sending them back to Miami; that southern Arizona is being evacuated because of no water; that gas cost on average \$20.00 a gallon at the pump last week; that the official unemployment rate hit 25%; and that the Taliban have established martial law throughout Pakistan. Will you arrange the chairs in a circle and teach the class you had prepared on subordinate clauses or feminist readings of *The Scarlet Letter*, improvise a debate on catastrophism, cancel class and organize a teach-in, or head for Canada?

What is silly about this is not the fake news items themselves -- each one is vaguely plausible -- but yanking them out of the historical process and stirring them together in one dystopian brew. Can collapse have become the new normal while you were looking the other way and your school or college was doing business as usual? That is worse than silly, it is undialectical. So are some forecasts by people I take quite seriously. For instance, Mike Davis. At the end of a chilling article on the end of the Holocene epoch ("Welcome to the Next Epoch," posted 6/28/08 on *Tom Dispatch*) and the advent of its successor -- the "Earth epoch," in which industrial society becomes a "geological force" -- he suggests that "chaos . . . could soon grow exponentially from the convergence of resource depletion, intractable inequality, and climate change," presenting a "real danger . . . that human solidarity. . . will suddenly fracture and shatter into a thousand shards."

The trouble I see here is with "exponentially" and "suddenly." Chaos, if it comes, will more likely slither into our lives, than explode there. Human solidarity, if it fractures, will do so unevenly and with new alliances, movements, fightbacks, victories, and losses. Between now and that fearsome then, people will have many chances at historical agency. Teachers will not just wake up to flux and disaster one Wednesday, but, like everyone else, will be repeatedly provoked, frightened, confused, and challenged, by everything from heavier workloads to right wing efforts at mobilizing education in the service of some new jingoism or religious millenarianism. And by the way, we should acknowledge that leftists have been sighting the approach of capitalism's Big Crisis, at least since Marx and Engels announced the specter that was haunting Europe; and we should remember that capitalism is resilient. So far. Maybe the bailouts and stimuli will put Humpty Dumpty back together this time. Maybe some kind of market magic will bring us workable schemes of renewable energy before the cost of oil stops the gears of production, and before the substitution of coal hastens global warming to the point of

social chaos. Maybe fusion power will forestall disaster. And so on.

All that said, it seems a little timid, if not dangerously evasive, for people in and around education not to be entertaining dire thoughts about the challenges it may face and its future, given the specters that haunt capitalism today. I do not hear such thoughts among progressives, beyond worry and anger about continuing trends: privatization of this public good; casualizing of labor; severe funding cuts as states and localities struggle with big deficits; the relentless march of high-stakes tests. To be sure, our national leaders are not thinking in fresh ways, either. For 25 years, officialdom has framed educational issues solely in terms of corporate interests and job training: we need better schooling to help U.S. capital compete in world markets and raise GDP; kids need schooling to become better workers. Those premises underwrite the regime of accountability we have now, and I do not hear politicians questioning them, even in the name of education for citizenship, much less of education for the decline of our social order. Well, what would one expect from the Arne Duncans and Barack Obamas who are tending the education store on behalf of their corporate masters? I do expect more from educational workers on the left -- more than our usual plans to raise consciousness in individual classrooms and fight rear guard actions against deteriorating conditions of labor. So here goes, with a framework for the conversation I would value, and a few general topics.

What have we radicals learned, through the 1960s and after, about how education works in, for, and sometimes against societies like this one? First, that it plays a big role in the reproduction of labor, sorting out, through its structurally refined institutions, degrees, and programs, who will be the corporate leaders, who the power elite, who the professionals and managers, who the technicians, who the specialized service workers, and of course who, not having gone to college, or having dropped out, will do minimum wage labor or join the reserve army of the unemployed. Scandalized indictments of the high school dropout rate or the low quality of education, on grounds that the U.S. workforce is undereducated for necessary work, ignore the nice fit between the highly unequal educations our youth receive and what the actual needs of capital are.

A second, overlapping task of higher education is to reproduce the class system. No need to elaborate, for RT readers. A third is to produce much of the knowledge that capital needs for its project of accumulation, plus what the professions need in order to secure their market havens. Fourth, the university has a major role, alongside the media, in maintaining and adjusting dominant ideology and the system of culture. Fifth, and in partial contradiction to the other four tasks, schools and colleges open a way out of poverty for some new aspirants to well-paid mental labor, and thus help sustain the impression of equal opportunity and social mobility -- we are all one big middle class. There are more tasks, of course, including the ever-receding ideal of producing critical citizens and wise or happy people, but these five strike me as key observations of sixties movements and the new left.

How might one or more of the crises I have mentioned scramble the university's articulation with U.S. society as a

whole? The economic collapse of 2008-09 has already accelerated the strangulation of funding initiated forty years ago in the turn toward neo-liberalism. As I was starting this introduction, news arrived that the number of college job openings in English and foreign languages has declined by more than 50% in two years, and has fallen at a similar pace in neighboring fields, giving us a dismal glimpse of what can happen with the bursting of just one bubble. Should the economy convalesce, through the desperate measures our leaders took last year, do not expect a doubling of academic jobs, restoring them to previous levels any more than you can expect most of the non-academic jobs lost in the depression to come back. Economic setbacks have enabled structural adjustments for decades, and will continue to do so. Outsourcing, speedup, privatization.

Toss into the hypothetical mix something like peak oil and fast climate change, and what happens to the work that schooling in capitalist America does? We are in conjecture land. Here are a few of mine. Pressures on the reproduction of labor will change dramatically: more energy engineers, social planners, security guards; fewer professionals of most sorts, not just teachers; schooling privatized and vocationalized at all levels. Reproduction of the social order? Tectonic shifts, as the rich get richer, coercion trumps hegemony, and the country becomes a gated dystopia with elite schools and universities minding the gates. The making of knowledge for corporations trying to commodify disaster and hang onto global control? I can hardly imagine, but it will be nasty. Ideology and culture? Still worse strains here, as pain, deprivation, and disorder deepen, and angry populist movements arise on both left and right, to challenge competitive individualism and social complacency. Seeming to offer social mobility? Another area of profound dissatisfaction and potential revolt. Severely bad times, if they come, will throw our familiar arrangements for education into chaos, along with everything else. But with such disruptions will also come openings for the renewal of radical movements, in and around schools and colleges. Here are four and a half conjectures about that possibility.

First, the near future will be dense with teachable moments. The possibility of volcanic change is alive in popular imagination. It is driven less by scary future-talk, right now, than by daily troubles: from disappearance of the jobs that graduating students and their families had taken for granted, to declines in comfort, to deepening insecurity about health and retirement. When people are frightened or angry (e.g., at "Wall Street"), some will retreat into simple dogma, closing their minds to novel threats, and some will look for racial or international enemies to scapegoat. But many will want to learn more about who makes historically significant choices in this kind of society, for what reasons, and through what mechanisms and processes. They will perhaps find less comfort than before in the shallow understandings of political economy that pass as common sense for most Americans. If so, they will come unmoored from old certainties in a way analogous to what male students vulnerable to the military draft felt around 1967. It is sensible then, if a little condescending, for us teachers to speak of "radicalizing" students -- not indoctrinating them, but putting their anger and insight into conversation with broader analysis. This will be a great time to teach about

capitalism in school, in the media, in every public forum. How can lefties get together in a plan for doing so?

Second, the near future will be dense with organizing moments, too. College students will not only find their expectations of prosperity in exchange for hard work and earned credentials whacked by unfolding reality, but, in community colleges and public universities, will suffer a painful decline in public support of their learning, manifested in bigger classes, less interaction with teachers, cuts in funding for libraries and technology, and so on, coupled with large increases in tuition and reductions in financial aid. K-12 teachers will also be pressured to do more with less. These deprivations will for many coincide with family hardships that require students as well as parents to work longer hours for pay, drop out for a while, or just quit. A student squeezed in such ways may be ready to think about them not just as a series of personal defeats but as a shutdown on social mobility and a hardening of class injustice. Students will share many grievances with teachers. Left teachers can help clarify what is behind environmental catastrophe, what is making the economy creak and falter, and help push frustration and anger beyond protests against higher tuition and other local miseries, toward more durable organization than is common in campus politics, and into militant alliance with other groups fighting the erosion of public goods. The term "class" has reentered political talk, in a big way. What can we do to frame the economic and ecological breakdown as intrinsic to class struggle?

Third, this will be a good time to rework our understandings of crisis and change, in concert with strong political movements. The old Marxian concepts, for instance, allow us to understand even crashes like those of 1929 or 2008 as ordinary episodes in the history of capitalism, and to bring forward the structure of class antagonism beneath social disaster. But toss in such contradictions as the socializing of catastrophe for the sake of profit while capital drains the earth of oil and water, or the creation of a new geological epoch through climate change, and we are a long way from the labor theory of value or the falling rate of profit. Marxism has been grounded in a continuity of forces and relations: social formations come and go, but the laws of motion remain constant. I am not sure this (largely tacit) belief will hold up as the system reaches new kinds of limit. On the other hand, while some non-Marxian prophets of catastrophe write as if vengeful nature will invalidate all previous laws of social process, I see no reason, in global warming or in attrition of the resources on which industrial capitalism gorged itself, for scrapping historical materialism or the centrality of labor or class. We should be ready for ruthless critique of these prophecies, but also of our own premises. Movements are good places to rethink the world; students, teachers, and workers of all kinds are good people to rethink with.

Fourth, and more specifically: if some rocky decades are coming, teachers can band together as educators to teach what people most need to know. The needs are manifold.

College economics prepares students very badly to understand contradiction, discontinuity, and crisis; high school economics is extremely thin and biased. Both need reconnection to politics, power, and justice. The curriculum needs to be freed up from its fixation on the United States. Environmental studies and biology belong in an integrated curriculum. Crises, if they come, will point to many such needs. How about an alliance of progressives from many different sites and organizations to devise and share strategies for critical teaching and for getting disaster curricula into colleges and schools? In turbulent times, for instance the late sixties and early seventies, ideological "common sense" loses plausibility, schooling's reproductive tasks become hollow, and ways of understanding that integrate fragmented experience can get a hearing. The left should be finding spaces for such hearing and acting. We can be sure the capitalists will be trying to colonize them.

That points to a last half-thought: this will be a teachable moment not only for radicals, but for racists, skinheads, fascist groupings, religious sects including especially those expecting the rapture, and of course for purveyors of crackpot realism such as the American Enterprise Institute. Radical teaching in bad times, more than in good, is bound to be teaching against opposition from many sides. I try not to dramatize teacherly work too much, but it is probably healthy to imagine it now as a form of struggle.

* Many thanks to fellow *RT* editors Sarah Chinn and Louis Kampf for commenting on manuscripts and giving counsel of all sorts as we worked on this issue.



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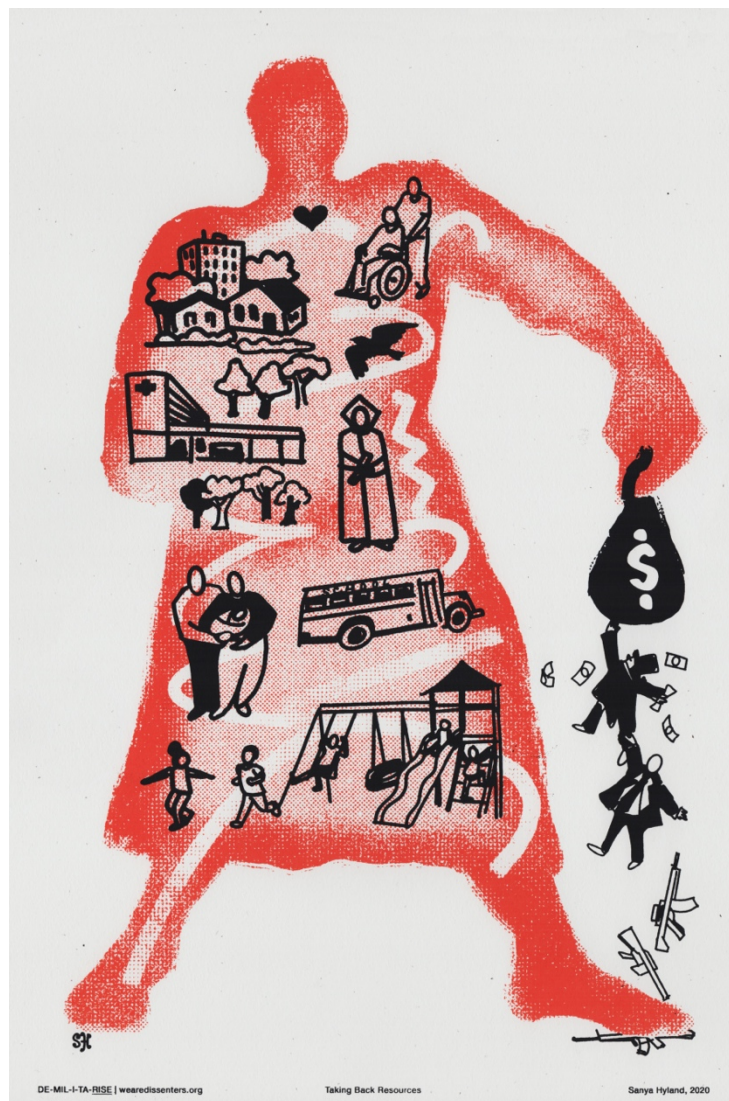
RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #93 (2012)

College for Dollars?

by Richard Ohmann



ARTWORK BY SANYA HYLAND "TAKING BACK RESOURCES" DE-MIL-I-TA-RISE DISSENTERS PORTFOLIO (2021) JUST SEEDS

Some years back, at a conference for administrators organized by *University Business* magazine, former Yale president Schmidt gave the keynote address. He had become head of Edison, the for-profit schooling company, and he spoke enthusiastically about the benefits his new project would bring. During the question period, I asked him if we could expect its benefits to rival those enjoyed by health care consumers since the system's takeover by HMOs, insurance companies, and big pharma. He paused a second to take in the hostile intent of my question, then replied, "Even better," and went on to enumerate. I do not remember his list, but one thing we can certainly enjoy about the privatization of higher ed is the rich vein of black humor in news reports of recent years. For instance:

- Bridgepoint Education Inc. bought a private, accredited college in 2005 and another in 2007. The total enrollment of the two, at purchase, was 400 students. At the end of 2009, it was 53,688, 99% of whom took courses exclusively online (Daniel Golden, "Your Taxes Support For-Profits as They Buy Colleges," *Bloomberg.com*, March 4, 2010). [When a for-profit takes over the accreditation of a college it acquires, it represents that it will preserve the mission of the college.]
- A number of for-profits receive 80-90% of their revenue from the federal government in the form of financial aid for their students. This is the free market?
- An associate degree from one of Education Management Corp's (EDMC) art schools costs on average about \$50,000 ("With Goldman's Foray Into Higher Education, a Predatory Pursuit of Students and Revenues," *huffingtonpost.com*, Oct. 14, 2011). EDMC, which owns a bouquet of around 70 "colleges," gets 70% of its income from us taxpayers.
- Given that income stream, enhanced by the fact that, unlike subprime mortgages, default on these subprime tuition loans is entirely a matter between the student and the government, it is no surprise that recruitment of students has become ruthless. When Goldman Sachs became one of three partner-owners of Education Management, the admission staff tripled, to a sales force of 2,600, around the country. Heavy advertising; cold-calling; on-street hustling ("With Goldman's Foray"). A *Radical Teacher* board member walks regularly along Broadway, near 33rd street, past for-profit recruiters hailing passers-by like carnival barkers. Our guy told two men hearing the sales pitch that it was a scam; they should go to a community college. They agreed and walked off. The recruiter followed our guy all the way to his gym, yelling "I don't shit in your kitchen, don't you shit in mine," and the like. Bounty payments for such recruiters were common until the federal government began investigating them.

- When Christopher Beha went underground to take classes at a New Jersey "campus" of the University of Phoenix, and write about it for *Harper's*, his application form asked for his high school and year of graduation; that was the entire academic portion of the form. No transcript required; Phoenix did not check with his high school to confirm. I call that wide open admissions (Christopher R. Beha, "Leveling the Field; What I Learned From For-Profit Education," *Harper's*, Oct., 2011).
- Really wide open admissions: a spokesman for Phoenix defended the University against allegations of especially lowdown recruitment, saying the company does not allow recruitment at homeless shelters, and "any employee who violates this policy faces disciplinary action up to and including termination" (Melissa Korn, "Party Ends at For-Profit Schools," *Wall Street Journal*, August 23, 2011). Wider open still: "Frontline" told of a college recruiter at Camp Lejeune who signed up Marines with serious brain injuries; the fact that "some of them couldn't remember what courses they were taking was immaterial," so long as they qualified for G. I. Bill benefits. (Hollister K. Petraeus, "For-Profit Colleges, Vulnerable G.I.'s," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2011).

There are signs of these times at non-profits, too:

- Clarkson University has established scholarships for freshmen entrepreneurs -- free tuition, but Clarkson gets a percentage of any profits the start-up companies may later achieve.
- Washington State has created an Opportunity Scholarship Program, funded partly by the State and partly by corporate donors; Boeing and Microsoft kick-started it with \$25 million each. The board that governs the program, "composed of private sector representatives," will determine specific policies, including which fields will have the most scholarship students sent their way: health care, manufacturing, science, mathematics, and technology, for instance. Educational and political leaders in the state praised the program, with its "industry leadership." The president of Boeing said, "We need creative solutions to ensure businesses across the state have a pipeline of talent to remain competitive in a global economy" ("Boeing and Microsoft Pledge \$50 Million to New Scholarship Fund," *Microsoft News Center*, June 6, 2011). Not so funny, I admit, as the dark humor our proprietary universities are emitting like deadly laughing gas. But that is the scary thing: educators and the general citizenry have gotten used to the idea that corporate needs should largely determine the course of higher education, coupled with the chiefly economic hopes of students. That idea is no longer funny or outrageous, the way recent scams and crimes of the burgeoning for-profit industry are funny and outrageous.

The economic rationale for higher ed is a given, these days. Our aim in this issue of *Radical Teacher* and mine in this introduction is to probe this ideology, and to propose that radicals say "no" to it and to the practices it justifies, whenever and however we can.

Susan O'Malley's article* opens a wide window on the practices of companies that sell higher education for profit. Some of the ones that have been especially lucrative over the past few years are, like the instances listed above, scandalous. Recruitment tactics in particular are misleading or worse. Admissions people will take anyone, no matter how badly prepared for "college," who can pay tuition. Up front, that is: no refunds if you drop out. Tuition does not even guarantee that students will do any college-level work; they can be stuck in remedial courses until they give up. Most of their tuition money comes from federal and other loans. A student must repay the government even if he or she never completes a degree or certificate program -- or completes it but never gets the kind of job the original sales pitch held up as a likely reward for college study.

So, a common enough story is that of the student who takes classes for a while at the university, does not finish her intended course of study, does not get a better job (or, in many cases, is still unemployed), and is saddled with serious debt from which there is no refuge in bankruptcy. The "product" such a student bought is less than worthless, yet the university received a lot of revenue for it: nearly \$27,000 for a semester at one of the ITT Educational Services technical institutes, for instance; the institute did not have to provide any more of the promised services once the student vanished. Oh yes, and very likely, the university gave "short weight" from the beginning, by putting less instructional time and effort into each credit hour than is standard at traditional universities. Bear in mind: this is a worst-case scenario. Some for-profits offer substantial programs to students who can do the work and who, in many cases, get career boosts as a result. What I have described is by no means the proprietary business model. But it is common among new corporate players in this field. And these hot-shot practices could be responsible for turning the boom into a burst bubble.

Other lucrative practices -- cost-cutting ones -- are at least marginally legitimate. Close to that margin is the purchase of private colleges that have fallen on hard times, in order to take over their regional accreditation, as has been done about three times a year during the for-profit boom. Accreditation is a must, to attract students and to qualify for government loans. To win it in the regular way takes years, and is expensive. Buying a college lets the new owner begin collecting the government money that will be its main source of revenue, immediately (Daniel Golden).

As the Bridgepoint example suggests, the for-profit buyer of a college is likely to take instruction almost entirely online, and online has been the trend at most for-profits for more than a decade. In tandem with that cost-cutting strategy, for-profits save by running their "campuses" cheaply. The campus (one of about 200 that the University of Phoenix runs) where Christopher Beha pretended to take

courses consists of the first and fifth floors of an office building near a commuter train station in New Jersey. No shaded walks, sports fields, or well stocked libraries to drag down profitability.

Then there is labor. Ninety-five percent of University of Phoenix instructors are part-timers. The credentials required of for-profit teachers are minimal; pay is low. Benefits are rare, tenure almost unknown. Precarity is the name of the game. There is no academic freedom. Faculty members are under constant pressure from bosses to meet quotas of various kinds. Faculty members have no role in governance. Nor do they have much of a say in choice of textbooks and other materials. Curriculum? Standard practice is nicely described by Robert Myers, the president of Daniel Webster College in New Hampshire, before ITT bought it and fired him: ITT said, "We only want faculty to teach.' We'll develop curricula in Carmel, Indiana, and give them to you" (Daniel Golden). In a word, although many who teach in for-profits do have professional credentials, the academic profession is non-reality for them. Why would a corporation want a group of highly paid employees with professional safeguards and privileges when it can hire the labor power of a dispersed and compliant workforce on the cheap, Taylorize their work, and take home the profits?

Ask the same question about a traditional, nonprofit college or university, public or private, and some obvious answers would probably pop into mind, such as: to ground learning in reputable knowledge, and to ensure the development of knowledge apart from particular commercial and political interests. Yet as everyone reading this introduction probably knows, nonprofit institutions were casualizing and deskilling academic labor well before the proprietaries grabbed a significant share of enrollments in higher education.

When do you suppose part-time teachers in California community colleges approached 60% of the whole teaching force? Here is Emily Abel, in the July, 1977 issue of *Radical Teacher*, "The Professional Proletariat":

Although part-time instructors constituted the majority of the faculty in almost every community college district in the state by 1975, these teachers were not considered regular members of the college staff. Lists of the faculty generally omitted the names of part-time instructors. The pay and conditions of part-time instructors reflected their low status. A part-time instructor is generally paid less than one half of the prorated salary of a full-time instructor [i.e., \$800 per course], and is denied all fringe benefits. Classified as "temporary employees," part-time instructors have no job security and are not entitled to due process hearings when they are dismissed. Thus, the institutions that claim to function as the democratizing agents in higher education are in fact run like profit-oriented businesses: they maintain a small staff of full-time workers and, when business demands increase, hire supplementary parttime workers who can be paid at a lower rate and who can be dismissed at will.

At Santa Monica, the community college where Emily Abel taught, enrollment increased by 3,400 from Fall, 1974 through Spring, 1976. To deal with the increase, the college

added 15 full-time teachers, and 350 part-timers, just as a "profit-oriented business" would have done. No profit landed in the bank accounts of trustees because Santa Monica cut costs and gained flexibility through this strategy. Presumably its administration responded as it did because that was the easiest way to deal with a flood of new students, but chiefly because government funding for higher education had already begun its long decline -- gradually through the 1970s, then rapidly in the following three decades.

This is not the place to retell the even bigger story behind the squeeze on public higher education. In any case it is by now pretty well understood on the left. I mean the cresting of the postwar boom in the United States toward the end of the 1960s; stiffening competition from European and Japanese capital; the fiscal crisis of the state and the steady withdrawal of public goods and services; the rightward turn in politics, led by a phalanx of conservative foundations and consolidated during the Reagan presidency and afterward - including the deregulation of capital, to roam the world, perform new stunts of risky accumulation, and bring on the collapse of 2008.

The labor "crisis" in most academic fields began punctually in 1970. Old timers in language and literature will remember what happened at the December, 1969 convention of the Modern Language Association. It had been moved from Chicago to Denver, to protest the riot of Mayor Daley's cops against demonstrators at the Democratic nominating convention in 1968. People in the Radical Caucus showed up ready to raise hell about the war, racism, male supremacy, and so on, to discover that a Job Seekers Caucus had formed to protest still more loudly about the collapse of the job market. No interviews. No jobs.

Since then, employment for new Ph.D.s in those fields has drifted up and down; it is now at about 1968 levels, though the population of college students has grown apace. Emily Abel sounded an early alarm in 1977 about the way strapped public universities had resorted to hiring teachers off the tenure track (OTT). Cries of distress and outrage were followed by numerous careful studies. For example, to stick with my own area, the Modern Language Association issued its excellent "Final Report of the MLA Committee on Professional Employment" in 1998. It began: "Higher education in [MLA] fields . . . has reached a crisis that has been building for a long time" and went on in its first paragraph to assert that "as financial support for colleges and universities lags behind escalating costs, campus administrators increasingly turn to staffs of ill-paid, overworked, part- or full-time adjunct lecturers and graduate students to meet instructional needs . . ." (*ADE Bulletin*, Spring, 1998). Sounds familiar. The situation is worse now than 14 years ago, much worse than in 1969. Now, between 70% and 75% of instructors in colleges and universities are OTT. "Crisis" is the wrong label for a situation that has persisted and worsened for 40+ years, unless in a very broad sense: e.g., an historical crisis of the capitalist system.

That is where I for one think we are. No need to press the big thesis here, or start raving about climate change and peak oil, as I am prone to do. Capital's success, since 1970,

in reducing labor to its lowest global denominator and piling up bigger surpluses from exploitation than at any time since the days of the robber barons is enough to settle for, in this essay. That idea gives us a handy, provisional way -- not a cheerful one -- to think about the degradation of academic labor in this epoch.

And, of course, about the commercialization of higher education. The casualization of the workforce has many advantages for private employers, including obviously those who run the gung-ho, for-profit universities. In the nonprofits, it came along as part of the same system-wide movement, and with a big assist from the digital technologies, but not with the same incentives. Rather, it proceeded unevenly from the decline in government support for public universities, and from various other pressures on all but the richest private universities and colleges. Changes in university management -- corporate structure, bottom-line orientation, top-down rationalization of work, ever more intrusive practices of "assessment" and "accountability" -- both resulted from and helped bring about the new labor regime. It is a main feature of the commercialized university, and should be a critical organizing focus for progressives in the academy.

The defunding of public higher education, one tactic in the general assault on the welfare state, has partially caused many changes, which, together, add up to what we are calling "commercialization":

- Budget cutting wherever possible: eliminating tenured positions, freezing salaries, putting faculty members on "furlough," and so on.
- Activity-base costing: i.e., rating and rewarding or punishing departments, programs, and other units according to how much money they bring in, per dollar spent; at an extreme (as at Texas A&M recently), figuring out the value added (or lost) by each instructor and researcher.
- Outsourcing: finding businesses to provide services more cheaply than the university is able to do on its own: maintenance, food services, book stores of course, and more recently, health services, student housing, purchasing, payroll, technology operations, and on into what we might think of as faculty work: instructional design, online courses, "learning management," tutoring, even library management.
- Economizing on the educational process itself: putting courses and much else on line.
- Hiring consultants and administrators from the for-profit economy to advise, manage, and streamline -- i.e., make the university more like a business.

More dazzlingly, commercialization has also meant pursuing new sources of revenue:

- Raising tuition is the most noted of these strategies; with it goes deferring costs to students

through loans, and up to a lifetime of paying interest on them.

- Profiting from faculty research: the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 was a critical step in allowing universities to license ideas and inventions to profit-making companies.
- Starting up for-profit companies themselves; establishing "incubators" for them, on research campuses.
- Seeking corporate investment in faculty research (over \$2 billion a year, by 2002).
- Selling rights to market stuff on campus -- Coke and Pepsi, most lucratively.
- Selling students' attention to corporations, through advertising that comes along with registration, enrollment in courses, billing, campus announcements, and such.
- Expanding profitable adult education programs.
- Adding vocational certificate programs to the usual, more time-consuming degree programs.
- Shifting the whole curriculum in a vocational direction, often with the employment needs of local companies as a direct (if sometimes errant) influence.

For decades, enrollments in liberal arts have held fairly steady, while enrollments in subjects promising employment advantages have gone way up. In responding to the economic needs of corporations and the perceived vocational needs of students, traditional colleges and universities have come to look more and more like the for-profits. (See "What's Happening to the University and the Professions? Can History Tell?" in my *Politics of Knowledge*, Wesleyan, 2003 for a lot more on this subject.) They still have far to go, and we can be sure that big differences will persist across the spectrum of for-profits, public universities, and private nonprofits, so long as education must remain stratified in order to do its bit for the reproduction of social class, in an increasingly unequal society. Harvard College admitted just six percent of its applicants this year. Though it has been called a hedge fund with a university attached, Harvard is not likely to merge with the University of Phoenix any time soon. Still, the two kinds of institution are often conceptualized together these days. Speaking of Harvard: Clayton M. Christensen (a prominent business school professor there) and Michael B. Horn recently wrote, "the business model that has characterized American higher education is at -- or even past -- its breaking point" ("Colleges in Crisis," *Harvard Magazine*, July-August 2011). Almost 90% of students in the United States are at colleges and universities that are not businesses, but that seemed irrelevant to Christensen and Horn's argument, which was that online universities (mostly for-profit) have the business model of the future.

This blurring of distinctions is not peculiar to the vision of business school honchos; it has become standard in public talk about higher education, including political debate about how to fund or defund it. Since Reagan's time, federal support for funding of K-12 schools has been ritually linked to the premise that it is good for (a) individual economic success, (b) the competitiveness of U.S. corporations, and (c) an ever-rising GDP. The same obsequious ritual is almost compulsory now for those who would convince legislators to fund (however shabbily) education at public universities. And of course, to oppose the many who, like Christensen, might hold that nonprofits have no reason to survive competition from proprietary institutions unless they can produce the economic benefits that now seem the only measure of value. Marx was right. Capitalist markets swallow all human activity the way black holes swallow galaxies. Few capitalist politicians and bureaucrats -- certainly not Barack Obama or Arne Duncan -- resist this shift in what we talk about when we talk about education.

Teachers and students should resist and refuse it. When we have our chance to pitch in, we should gently and powerfully (go Occupy!) remind leaders that we think of education as a human, not an economic, right. Curiosity, lifelong learning, wisdom, and pleasure for the 99%, not subprime loans and more Twinkies. Maybe reeducation camps for the top one-tenth of one percent? Can we imagine a pedagogy of the imprisoned for the Kochs and Cheney's? Ah, well, not in my lifetime.

But speaking of Twinkies, and ships and shoes and sealing wax, etc., we really need to fight against the commercializing ideology also because the commodification of all human needs is going to make our planet a desert. Again, not in my lifetime. But too soon, unless we win the fight for education as democratic citizenship and direct it toward smart decisions about the common future. That means knowledge for the people, not the corporations. We can cheer for free inquiry without cheering for bigger profits from it.

When I did the college tour with my granddaughter two years ago, only one of the expensive and hard-to-get-into schools on her itinerary included in its admissions office pitch any reason for going to X other than, basically, "you can get anything you want, here"--an upscale version of education as a commodity, omitting scary references to the tough world in which good jobs are hard to find, maybe impossible even with a degree from X. One college said it was for peace and justice. She went there. Let's all go there.

Note

"The Leading Edge of Corporatization in Higher Ed: For-Profit Colleges," *Radical Teacher* #93 (Spring 2012)



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

FROM *RADICAL TEACHER* #99 (2014)

The Decline of the Professions

by Richard Ohmann and Ellen Schrecker



ARTORK BY JOSH MACPHEE, "UNIVERSITY AS FACTORY? NO!" VIA JUST SEEDS

"A Lawyer and Partner and Also Bankrupt" is the headline of a story in the *New York Times*, as we begin this introduction. When the firm in which the 55-year-old man had been a partner collapsed, he joined another prominent firm, but took a backward career step, from full, equity partner to "service" partner. Service partners "do not share the risks and rewards of the firm's practice," have no clients of their own, have no job security. These "partners" are, well, employees. There are more and more of them: 84% of the largest firms have service partners now, up 20% since 2000. Law firms are consolidating, cost-cutting. There has been a decades-long drop in the percentage of lawyers who make partner. Now the number of associates is declining, too (Stewart). These are all people with law degrees; no wonder law school enrollment drops, as the traditional career becomes a rarity and ever more highly trained labor becomes contingent. That is without mentioning the army of paralegals and others with lesser credentials, or the commodifying of legal documents and do-it-yourself services on line. One of us asked his country lawyer about these changes. The attorney said, in effect: by the time I retire, law practices like mine will be defunct.

Those of you teaching in the arts and sciences will note similarities. The paradigm of an academic career -- doctoral study, then a well charted ascent through the ranks, culminating in 25 or 30 or so years as a full professor, and tapering off with many years on an ample pension -- was never guaranteed or anything like universal, but was a reasonable aspiration for a college graduate who loved physics or sociology or art history. Now, getting the Ph.D. guarantees roughly nothing, except a load of debt. In history and literary studies, 3/4 or 4/5 of entering Ph.D. students want to be teachers and scholars on the tenure track at colleges and universities. Roughly half of those who complete their degrees in a given year will move directly into such jobs. Some of the others will eventually make the tenure track, after adjuncting for a while. Some will be contingent faculty members forever. And some will find other lines of work. Starting over in a different profession might look good. Law school might look good, even as news about the marketability of its "product" grows dire and as stories of bankrupt senior not-quite-partners make the *New York Times*.

Consider the same picture now as a snapshot of an occupational labor force. Of those teaching in colleges and universities, around 75% are contingent workers: short contracts, no assurance of renewal, low pay, maybe health insurance but probably not, no pension fund, little if any say in faculty governance or in the making of curriculum, maybe no office and no phone, maybe several other jobs off the tenure track. Many adjuncts have Ph.D.s; many have M.A.s; and many, like real estate agents, computer programmers, or dietitians who moonlight at community colleges or for-profit universities, have no degree that traditionally qualified people for college teaching. It is a lot like the legal work force. In both professions, the old, secure, and privileged core has been shrinking for decades, and the periphery of part-timers, adjuncts, contingent workers, service partners, and so on (the names proliferate) has grown. Some of the peripherals have core degrees, many (e.g., paralegals) do not. A larger and larger part of the profession's work is done

on line. By whom, one might ask? By poorly paid pieceworkers; by the student or client herself. And cui bono? The for-profit employer of piece workers, or the administration at Defunded State U., or . . . More about that, soon.

This issue of *Radical Teacher* puts on display more examples of professional decline. The ones just mentioned have to do with weakening the semi-monopolies that strong professions maintained in specific areas of work: the adjudication of disputes (law), and instruction in colleges and universities. Even medicine, long at the pinnacle of the professional universe, now keeps doctors focused on their computer screens by the electronic record keeping systems that deflect them from paying attention to their patients. And not only do medical practices contain ever more numerous helpers and specialized practitioners with less training and lower pay than physicians, but Walmart and other marketers are now turning the work of healing into a retail business.

Weaker professions have lost ground, too. As readers of this journal know well, K-12 teachers have less and less control over what and how they teach. Lightly trained Teach for America recruits and many others without the old, state-mandated credentials are taking classroom jobs from K-12 teachers and saving money for school districts. These short-term teachers are especially common in the charter schools that are now most of what survives in public school systems like those in Philadelphia and New Orleans. In Canada, librarians no longer catalogue books so much as input squibs sent by publishers, while research with documents that was previously done by librarians and archivists is outsourced to for-profit genealogical companies. In journalism, always one of the less organized professions, bloggers paid little or nothing now do a vast portion of online journalism, while newspaper and television jobs vanish.

Similar reassignments of professional labor in other fields come readily to mind. Work is outsourced to engineers and radiologists in India who are paid one-fifth as much as their displaced counterparts in the United States. Tax-preparation chains like H&R Block take over the tasks of professional accountants, if they are not already being replaced by do-it-yourself taxpayers themselves, using software from the Internet. Not to mention more complex or chaotic, unplanned shifts such as the closing of public mental hospitals with a consequent flow of the emotionally ill onto the streets and often, then, into prisons -- some run for profit.

We have focused on the loss of professional jobs. That loss, along with the failure of many professional school graduates to find the careers they expected, challenges the credibility of professional education generally. Other symptoms of decline: Bosses increasingly manage the work of professionals (over half of doctors and lawyers now work for salaries). Professions like these two become increasingly stratified; some with the right credentials get rich while others who are equally qualified get crumbs. For-profit companies take over the work of traditional professionals. And, in the world of K-12 education, federal regulations and planning move into areas such as curriculum formerly under

the control of teachers' groups and local school boards -- cf. No Child Left Behind.

By contrast, ever since the professions more or less formally organized themselves at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, practitioners enjoyed a prestigious and economically secure work life. They achieved it by asserting and defending a monopoly over a particular occupation. In so doing, they managed, as Magali Sarfatti Larson noted in her path-breaking 1977 study, "to translate one order of scarce resources -- special knowledge and skills -- into another -- social and economic rewards." The process of obtaining what sociologist Andrew Abbott calls their "jurisdictions" or their ability to maintain control over the provision of their particular services and expertise was hardly smooth. It often required either destroying competitors, as physicians expelled midwives from childbirth, or the development of legitimating procedures by such outside institutions as the university, the teaching hospital, and the state.

Not every aspiring profession obtained the monopolistic control enjoyed by such iconic ones as medicine and the law, but all aspired to the standard model that they exemplified. Some of its main features were:

- a) respect, social status, and a secure and often highly remunerative income
- b) expert knowledge (usually as certified by an educational institution, professional organization, or the state)
- c) workplace autonomy
- d) peer control over access
- e) a service ethic, often with a code of conduct.

Not every profession adheres to this model. Academics, notably, are employees as well as independent scholars. There are also considerable gradations of status within every profession. Not just money or prestige, but the very work is different -- as are the clients. Partners in the big Wall Street law firms advise corporations and negotiate deals but have little in common with the store-front practitioners and jailhouse lawyers who help individuals buy houses, get divorced, and contest D.W.I. violations. True, they all have credentials from law schools, though not necessarily from ones with the same status or access to lucrative careers.

And those credentials -- a crucial, perhaps the crucial, element in the professions (provided by the professional academics themselves now under attack) -- not only stand in for the expertise that makes up the core of a professional's work, but also serve as a gate-keeping device. They also, along with the profession's traditional ethic of service to its clients and the common good, legitimize a profession's monopolistic control over its market. Especially when it receives state recognition, such a credential reaffirms the professions' ostensibly meritocratic nature, as an engine of social and economic mobility open to talent and hard work. That claim, as Larson points out, reinforces the American egalitarian myth that conceals modern capitalism's inequitable reality.

Just as there is no platonic form of a profession in North America, much less in all societies, there was no golden age when professions serenely ruled their jurisdictions. Occupational groups struggle against rival practitioners to establish and secure professional autonomy, authority, and privilege. Some make it; some never do; some manage partial and precarious success. And succeeding is not forever. Corporate values and the hierarchical administrative practices that accompany them are now undermining most professions, destroying the intrinsic rewards of a professional career, and limiting the ability of professionals to serve the best interests of their clients and the broader community.

Is there a pattern in these ups and downs? Might an historical narrative help find it? We think yes, and would propose a story along these lines: gradually, through the nineteenth century, the traditional professions of law and medicine grounded their practices in bodies of knowledge; elaborated them in journals, conferences, and so on; organized themselves in departments and national organizations; regularized admission to and advancement in their ranks; won the right (often backed by legislation) to exclude rival practitioners; and gained recognition as experts, better pay than most non-professionals, and such perquisites as job security. Other groups strove to professionalize at the same time. University professors (for whom job security was eventually formalized as tenure) are the group best known to readers of *Radical Teacher*. The lineup also includes engineers, accountants, librarians, nurses, architects, social workers, dentists, and others that consolidated their positions in the early 20th century. A smaller number did so later (e.g., audiologists, on a small scale, around 1950; computer scientists in a disorderly, then triumphal, march through the 1960s and after). By and large, the professionalizing of new labor groups slowed from 1970 on and older professions began the slide that continues unabated today. What might explain such a story -- "explain" in the informal sense of locating it in a broader narrative, and connecting it to the forces and agents that have shaped our world?

The first part of such an explanatory move is easy: the professions achieved their modern forms and their prominence just when entrepreneurial capitalism was morphing into a system managed by large, vertically integrated, industrial corporations (Standard Oil, General Electric, U. S. Steel, Procter and Gamble, etc.) that controlled the economic process from the extraction of raw materials through manufacturing all the way to the sales effort. Then, in the 1970s, just as the corporate system began its transition into the casino capitalism we now endure, the professions lost their momentum. In short, the period when professions dominated major fields of mental labor coincided with the peak time of the Fordist regime ("monopoly capital," as Baran and Sweezy called it).

The other part of the explanation is more challenging. For our purposes, a highly schematic sketch will have to suffice. Around 1900, the giant corporations came increasingly to rely on bodies of knowledge built by professionals, especially in science, engineering, business methods, and corporate law. Professionals also took vigorous part in regulating and limiting the rapaciousness of

those same corporations, through public organizing and state action; progressive era reform bore the stamp of distinctive professional attitudes and ideology (Wiebe). To that contradiction -- professionals both advanced and checked the corporate rise to power -- add another. Professions both fought to improve working conditions, health, and safety for the industrial proletariat, and sought to regulate working-class life through projects that ranged from rules for nutrition and family hygiene, through public schooling and settlement houses, to legislation against riot, sex, booze, and racial equality. These contradictions were tolerable because, through them, corporations got rich, workers' lives improved, and the social order became less cruel and unpredictable. And of course, professionals worked them to great advantage. Not only did they win higher pay, prestige, and privilege; their ideology of progress through expertise and rational planning won many adherents, though by no means defeating the bourgeois ideology of competitive individualism. Their leading institutions -- the university, the suburb, and so on -- came to represent the good life to millions who wanted it for themselves or their children (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich).

To complete the explanation, we need not only a temporal link (the early 1970s) between the cresting of Fordism and the cresting of the professions, but also causal links. Here, we can do no more than gesture in their direction. We would look for them chiefly in the area of (surprise!) class struggle. At the same time as U.S. capital faced significant economic competition from Europe and Japan, it also found its social order and its imperial war seriously challenged by the 1960s movements. It took arms both against those movements and against organized labor, which had gained pay and a small share of workplace control in the postwar period. That campaign relied on casualization, union-busting, stripping away health and retirement benefits, subcontracting, outsourcing, off-shoring, sanctifying free trade, and deskilling work (partly via computer technology). Then, when capital turned hostile attention toward mind-work, it used many of the same weapons against professionals, along with -- crucially -- the defunding of public services and institutions, including the university. The "fiscal crisis of the state" (O'Connor) provided a framework and method for this attack. Along with the backlash against the campus uprisings of the late sixties, the case against "political correctness" came to rationalize cutting support for the academy. More generally, the work of right-wing foundations, the emergence of Reaganism and then neoliberalism, the spread of libertarianism, the rise of the Tea Party, and so on provided a venomous potion of confused but powerful ideologies to sap the vitality of professions.

We did not need Warren Buffet or, now, Thomas Piketty to teach us that the one-tenth of one percent have won the class war, though it is encouraging to hear the wild ovation greeting Piketty's book, and to hope that *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* will help secure a permanent place in mainstream media and politics for the central idea of the Occupy Movement. We would just reemphasize here our claim that the victory of the billionaires is making losers of professionals as well as of blue-collar workers. To be sure, not many Ph.D.s and M.D.s are sleeping in homeless

shelters, and a minority are doing better than ever. But most new recruits are not, and the professions as institutions are faltering.

That retreat accelerated in the crash of 2008: could an economic recovery win back lost ground? We are skeptical. Six years later, state funding has returned (spottily) to our sector of the academic profession (the humanities), and the gap between the number of new doctorates and the number of tenure track job listings has narrowed a bit. We do not expect it to return to pre-recession levels, miserable though they were. We will not try to "prove" this conjecture, just make three observations that give it initial plausibility.

First, after the academic job market tanked, in the early 1970s (when the U.S. working class also stopped making economic gains), and after at least two subsequent recessions, tenure-track employment in the humanities did not bounce back to its previous levels, relative to the growth of higher education. Structural change occurred; adjuncts were hired to do more of the teaching that tenure-track faculty members used to do. That restructuring was reflected in the size of scholarly and professional organizations: for instance, membership in the Modern Language Association dropped from over 30,000 members in 1970 to about 28,000 now, while postsecondary enrollment in the United States was doubling. Membership in the American Association of University Professors dropped by half, in the same period -- i.e., by 75% relative to the number of college and university students. Second, the post-2008 economic recovery has in general benefited the rich a good deal, the 99% relatively little. It would be strange if such an upward redistribution of income and wealth returned higher education to its former prosperity. Third, unless there are radical changes, processes such as the privatizing of public services, the ballooning of college administrations, and the digitalizing of almost everything, which have gnawed away at academic labor for decades, seem unlikely to go into reverse.

Comparisons with other professions would be instructive, but impossible to do in the time and space available for this introduction. So we simply reiterate our belief that if the reconfiguring of our political economy that has gone on apace for 40 years continues along the same lines, there is no reason to expect it to become more hospitable to professions than it has been so far. Crises in energy, food, and the ecological underpinnings of our civilization seem likely to make things still worse. Of course if the earth fries, survivors will have more to worry about than the well-being of professors and lawyers. Short of apocalypse, though, people in the professions will worry, and will need to think strategically.

It may be handy to think of radicals in the professions as presented with a strategic choice: work to rebuild the structures, the power, and the market havens we had in the 1960s or cast our lot with the traditional working class and the ever broadening swath of it now often called the "precarariat." Of course, the two projects are not mutually exclusive. Regaining at least some of the professions' traditional autonomy, economic security, and ability to transcend the marketplace almost certainly requires coalitions with workers in other sectors -- i.e., the 99 %.

Whether those coalitions develop within traditional labor unions or some new political formation, once professionals opt for solidarity with -- instead of superiority over -- their clients and fellow workers (a non-trivial project), they might be able to restore some of their lost autonomy. They might even regain the power to direct their research from the corporations that have been assiduously privatizing it, as well as contribute to the movement for a more just society. Science for the people is as sound an idea now as it was in 1970. Just to take one obvious example, both medical professionals and their patients would benefit from a single-payer healthcare system and the socializing of medical research.

No one route will take us to where we want to go. In the short term, unionization (or its equivalent in right-to-work states and other places where the NLRB does not reach) may well provide the most effective tactic. For academics, that means overcoming the status divisions within our profession and supporting, even joining, the organizing efforts of TA's and part-timers, not to mention the secretaries, janitors, and other campus workers, all of whom confront the same corporatizing administrators. We could seek broader alliances, as well, with other declining professionals and with our students whose disastrous indebtedness stems from the same defunding of the public sector that now guts the professoriate. Ultimately, we need a broad-based social movement that contests the power of the plutocrats on every front.

Meanwhile, until either socialist revolution or the collapse of civilization occurs, there will doubtless be ordinary teaching days, department meetings, curriculum planning sessions, and proposals before the faculty senate. The essays in this issue of *Radical Teacher* point toward practical issues for left practitioners in K-12, undergraduate, graduate, or professional education to engage. How, for example, should we modify our own pedagogy and scholarship?

As they grapple with those issues, our authors range from the classroom to the courtroom, raising questions and suggesting possible ways to resist the deskilling and precarity that today's capitalist system imposes on professionals. Though they produce no easy answers, their proposals and analyses, by revealing the ubiquity and similarity of the problems the professions face, may perhaps encourage us to think in broader terms and to take at least some steps toward the collective action that we so desperately need.

We can, for example, take encouragement from such organizing gains as those of the K-12 union in Chicago, the agreement just reached (after five years without a contract) between their counterparts in New York City and the de Blasio administration, and the achievement, this spring, of collective bargaining rights by faculty unionists at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Similarly, Piketty's ascent onto the best-seller list may signal a long-overdue change in the ideological climate. Certainly, we are not about to

abandon the struggle for a decent society. Who knows, we might even win -- some day.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Tributes to Dick Ohmann:
Special Session, Modern Language Association,
January 7, 2022

by Sarah Chinn, Joseph Entin, Barbara Foley, Pat Keeton,
Paul Lauter, Susan O'Malley, Ellen Schrecker



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Barbara Foley

Richard Ohmann, a highly prominent—and much esteemed—figure in our profession, died in October 2021. His loss is mourned by the many people who knew and admired him. The participants in this roundtable—most of whom worked alongside him as activists in the MLA Radical Caucus and/or the editorial collective of *Radical Teacher*—will reflect upon Dr. Ohmann's many contributions to the study of the humanities. Such a tribute is only fitting.

Some of us were influenced by his materialist approach to speech-act theory and his rigorous work as a cultural historian. Others had the benefit of his teaching, either at Wesleyan University or at the many MLA sessions where he presented his work on American culture. Others were moved by *English in America* (1976), which, more than any work of its era, critically examined the politics routinely embedded in pedagogy in the humanities.

Besides appreciating Dr. Ohmann's outstanding contributions to critical theory, literary and cultural history, and humanistic pedagogy, all the participants in the roundtable were personally acquainted with Dr. Ohmann through the MLA. One—Paul Lauter—goes back to the days of antiwar activism in the late 1960s. Others have worked with Dr. Ohmann over the decades in bringing before the Delegate Assembly dozens of resolutions concerning everything from supporting unionization to opposing attacks on academic freedom, backing student movements against sweatshop labor to supporting undocumented students' demands for access to financial aid. Still others have tirelessly put out issue after issue of *Radical Teacher*, a magazine committed to exploring how anti-capitalist and egalitarian values can effectively be brought forth in the college classroom.

Dr. Ohmann was, among his many virtues, a generous and very funny man. No doubt some of the speakers will take a few minutes to relate favorite anecdotes.

Richard Ohmann exemplified the spirit of the best in the humanities: a passion for truth, as well as grace and humility in its pursuit: "full of moral virtue was his speech/ and gladly would he learn and gladly teach." The MLA benefited greatly from his presence and dedication; this roundtable will attempt to do justice to the contributions of this remarkable scholar and human being

Paul Lauter

The year is 1967. The war on Vietnam seems to be accelerating and undermining Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty." Demonstrations—larger and larger—have no discernable effect, nor does lobbying Congress or petitioning the President. Not even a sit-in at a Pentagon parking lot. An increasing number of young men have decided to burn their Selective Service cards or to commit civil disobedience by resisting the draft. A group of America's leading intellectuals and academics join in the disobedience by issuing a "Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority," which commits them—illegally—to support and encourage the draft resisters and other direct actions against the war. On

October 2, the group of us, which included Noam Chomsky, Benjamin Spock, Paul Goodman, Grace Paley, William Slone Coffin, and Dick Ohmann hold a press conference to announce the "Call to Resist" and to make visible our own commitment to disobedience. Later, we go up to Columbia University to form a new draft resistance support organization, to be called Resist.

Dick Ohmann, along with Chomsky, Louis Kampf, Florence Howe, and I, became part of the Resist steering committee. During the following year, 1968, at Resist meetings we begin to talk about "stirring things up" at the MLA convention, which is scheduled for the end of December in New York. Dick writes a letter* to the *New York Review of Books* inviting people to join us in a meeting at Columbia just before the MLA. His language—ironic yet dead serious—sets the tone of our efforts. People volunteer to create buttons (one said "Mother Language Association"); they put together posters (one quoted Blake: "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction"); they circulate petitions, like one against going to Mayor Daley's Chicago for the next MLA. Others organize an anti-war talk by Chomsky in a huge hotel ballroom.

Once the convention is underway, we begin meeting regularly in Dick's room at the City Squire motel. We call ourselves the "tactics committee." We plan events, like a sit-in in the lobby of the Americana, for which the hotel called the NY Tac Squad. We organize a quiet picket of an MLA presidential forum—ties and dresses, please. Two proposals marked our meetings: Louis Kampf and two others had been arrested defending our posters from a house dick who wanted to tear them down. It was at Dick's suggestion that we decided to run Louis for MLA second vice-president, from which position he would be elevated to MLA's presidency in two years. Dick nominated him, and Louis was indeed elected. But our most consequential decision was to take up a proposal made by two women—whose names are unknown, at least to me—to establish an MLA Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession. Dick's was a strong and crucial voice in support of this then quite remarkable proposal. The MLA business meeting soundly voted to establish the Commission; it would become a significant force within the MLA, and it provided a model for similar efforts in other academic and professional organizations.

We transitioned from the "tactics committee" to the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages, which of course continues to exist and act these 53 years later. When we separated the magazine *Radical Teacher* from the Radical Caucus, Dick and I continued to work in both. Because, as his career so vividly illustrates, and as he taught many of us, radical change requires both action from principle and eloquent expression. He provided us with both.

* See: <https://tinyurl.com/yyyyf9dnv>

Ellen Schrecker

Whenever I open my refrigerator, I'm reminded of Dick. There's a big jar of olives just waiting for the martinis that we share whenever he comes for dinner. My presence in this compendium of tributes is testimony, as if such is needed,

to the breadth of Dick's intellectual interests and genuine interdisciplinarity. I'm an historian who's written a lot about McCarthyism and political repression as well as about the politics of higher education – the subject that brought me and Dick together.

I first got to know Dick sometime in the 1980s, though it did feel as if I must have known him forever. We had a few mutual friends and acquaintances and were both newcomers to the Upper West Side. Confessing that he was looking for intellectual companionship, Dick reached out to me because of our mutual interest in the politics of higher education.

We also bonded over our shared background at Harvard in the late 1950s and our rather embarrassing nostalgia about Cambridge in the so-called Golden Age of the American university. I didn't know Dick then; as a member of the hyper-elite Society of Fellows, a group of some dozen graduate students selected every year for their intellectual promise, he was far above my station. I was an undergraduate at Radcliffe, very much on the periphery of things, but nonetheless aware of the aura of intellectual excitement that existed in those days at that place.

As our friendship grew, Dick and I would go for walks in Riverside Park, and then, as I began serious research on the academic community in the 60s, these casual conversations morphed into more formal interviews – sometimes coinciding with a glorious dinner that Dick seemingly effortlessly produced – accompanied, of course, by the requisite martinis. As the book took shape, Dick became a key presence in the narrative – and not just because of his antiwar activities and efforts to revolutionize his discipline. His wry self-awareness and measured analysis of the events he had participated in guided my own understanding of how radicalism evolved within the academic profession. Plus, it was hard not to quote some of his pithier observations. As my book's index revealed, I cited Dick ten times, admittedly somewhat less than the other members of his squad – Paul Lauter and Louis Kampf – received. But he was perhaps more involved in his simultaneous day jobs of producing literary criticism and trying to democratize Wesleyan University. There were not many leftists in the upper administrations of American academia – then or ever.

My fellow authors will address Dick's scholarship more knowledgably than I can, but what most impressed me about his work, besides the breadth of his interests, was his dedication to the craft of writing. He once confessed that he edited all his emails. But he concealed his high standards beneath such an abundance of warmth and charm that it gave you hope. It was possible for a cis-male of his generation to be both brilliant and kind. And funny and a hotshot poker player and a nationally ranked competitive swimmer.

Our collaboration included more than martinis. Back in about 2013, we co-edited an issue of *Radical Teacher* on The Decline of the Professions.* I don't think I contributed much to that endeavor, but I certainly learned a lot. Dick's wide-ranging engagement with the sociology of knowledge encouraged me to read at least three or more books on whatever aspect of the professions we were looking at.

A few years later, as my book, *The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s*, began to take shape, Dick graciously agreed to critique the chapters on which I was working. He did so in his usual understated yet probing manner – almost always, it should be noted, pushing me gently to the Left by pressing me to be more explicit about the political implications of what I was discovering. I'm not sure I ever satisfied him, but I do know that the final product benefited enormously not only from his specific advice and encouragement but also, and above all, from his example of a serious scholar whose intellectual work had political value.

I did finally pay him back a little bit a few years ago when I followed up after a conversation with my recently widowed friend Susan O'Malley, who confessed that she thought that Dick, whom, she noted, she had known forever, seemed to be taking a different kind of interest in her. I immediately invited them both to dinner – and the rest is history. I miss him a lot, especially when I struggle over finding exactly the right tone in an email to an editor or colleague and realize that I'm subconsciously channeling a little bit of Dick Ohmann's perfectionism – though certainly not his brilliance.

See *Radical Teacher* #99,
<http://radicalteacher.library.pitt.edu/ojs/radicalteacher/issue/view/4>

Pat Keeton

What I have always admired about Richard Ohmann and learned from him is the value and necessity of day-to-day, year-to-year activism. I worked with him on the MLA Radical Caucus Steering Committee meetings where we would begin with an analysis of the current world and US situation from a Marxist perspective and then debate resolutions that we could put forward in the MLA Delegate Assembly: one that we thought would have a chance to pass and one further to the left that would allow us to raise consciousness and build support in the Delegate Assembly. Dick always contributed his Marxist analysis to our collective deliberations about the focus of the annual guaranteed RC panel, urged members to organize other panels, wrote and handed out petitions and leaflets, proposed radical actions including picket lines and protests, and spoke convincingly during the Delegate Assembly debates. Dick played this role to the end, actively participating in the virtual 2021 RC annual meeting and a few subsequent planning meetings after that, all on Zoom.

On my computer I found an archive of Dick's wisdom and activism going back to 2002. Here is a resolution from the 2002 MLA convention submitted by Dick and the Radical Caucus to the Delegate Assembly on the "Language of War":

Whereas governments seeking popular support for war deploy rhetoric that normalizes violence, neutralizes the pain of war, makes the enemy appear radically different from "us," and in general represents war as just and inevitable,

Therefore, be it resolved that as professionals who teach about language and culture, we have an obligation at this time to explore with students and other citizens the deceptive and dangerous force of terms such as "regime change," "war on terrorism," "axis of evil," and

"preemption" as used to justify aggressive war against Iraq.

Another Resolution from 2006 "urged that the term 'illegal aliens' be declared a term of abuse, to be substituted by the term 'undocumented workers,' and that undocumented workers be guaranteed in-state tuition wherever they reside."

And a Resolution in 2020 asked that "university faculty, staff and administrators sever university complicity with ICE."

I like to think of Richard Ohmann as a radical seed planter in his many years of activism with his students, the *Radical Teacher*, and the MLA Radical Caucus. During his long life he remained constant in his call for a Marxist class analysis and the need for socialism in his teaching, political work, and in the world.

Joseph Entin

Thanks to Barbara for organizing this, and to you all for being here. I want to say a word about Dick via his Raymond Williams-inspired 1987 book *Politics of Letters*, which reflects the wide-ranging purview of Dick's critical interests: from discussions of teaching as "theoretical practice," to the astounding chapters on the formation of the post-WWII literary canon that were originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, to dexterous histories of the rise of mass culture and modern advertising (seeds of what would become *Selling Culture*), to a critique of Strunk and White's insistence on "concrete language." There's so much here that is key to Dick's legacy: he shares his non-lectures and talks about his students taking over the classroom; "students," he writes, "must have as much responsibility as possible for their own educations. . . . Respect the linguistic resources students have," he insists, and "make language a vehicle for achievement of real political and personal aims" (293). He demonstrates his embrace--quite early among US academics--of Gramsci's insistence that ideological domination is always complex and conjunctural, that power is not a function of elite manipulation, but of the fact that "hegemony saturates the practices and beliefs and feelings of most Americans" (197); he reminds us that there is "[n]o reality without history," that seemingly fixed institutions like literature, culture, and universities have long, contested histories, structured by economic and social power: they have changed a great deal, and are thus subject to change now. He insists that institutional contexts must always be acknowledged and interrogated; teachers and writers must contest, even as they inevitably work within, the structures that shape our class interests and labors. "Marxism and feminism will not simply teach themselves via the conventions of the traditional classroom," he reminds us. "We must work out ways of mediating them that estrange those conventions and hint at alternatives. The language we use and yes, the arrangement of the chairs, can make a difference" (130).

In admirably dialectical fashion, Dick's writing weaves together the large and the small, moving deftly from the global scope of critique, in which everything is subject to ruthless scrutiny against the horizon of multinational

capitalism and epochal historical change, to the intimacy of critique, in which we find the systemic force of domination in a sentence, a clause, a phrase. "It is hardly an exaggeration to say," Dick writes in an essay on class and language, "that the whole of society as I know it is present in or impinges on my every verbal transaction" (287).

But what the book really prompts me to talk about is Dick's style--his way of writing and his way of being with others, especially his students, colleagues, and his audience, whom he approached affably as potential co-conspirators. Of course, given his erudition, smarts, and at times caustic wit, to be in Dick's presence could be humbling (as one member of the *Radical Teacher* editorial board once noted, Dick thinks in full paragraphs!). He was well-prepared for intellectual contestation, and seemed to take an almost gleeful approach to public conflict with right-wingers such as Bill Bennett and Lynne Cheney, or with the centrist-liberal editors of *The New York Times* (see his stinging letter** to the *Times* about its coverage of the MLA uprising). Even during the nadir of the Reagan era, Dick was never apologetic or sheepish about his socialist commitments.

But while he enjoyed mixing it up, Dick's approach to intellectual interaction was resoundingly invitational (and one reason I love the 1984 photo of him we projected at the start of the session, with his hand outstretched). Put differently, his mode was comradely--an invitation to conversation founded on the innate equality of minds, on the insistence that those who were often presumed by academic or social convention to know less--students or young people, in particular--often knew things that their supposed seniors or betters didn't.

As part of this stance, he was often funny and self-deprecating--as when, on the opening page of *Politics of Letters*, he recalls a talk at Wesleyan extolling the Arnoldian virtues of criticism. Listening, Dick realized that the speaker "made no mention of the circumstances within which practitioners actually work, or the functions their practice might have for them. I thought," Dick explains, "that Arnold's title called for inclusion of such matters . . . since criticism [in our time] has become so thoroughly institutionalized. As a shortcut to making the point, I mentioned the function criticism had had in advancing the speaker's own career. Well. Old hand as I am at making rude remarks, I can't remember giving such offense, before or since" (3). HA! I think the humor was there to remind us that Marxist critique need not be a dull, dry, sour affair; skewering bourgeois culture can be a gas, and a tool of radical struggle, to boot.

If you've read Dick's prose, you know it's genial and conversational; he actively defied the academic injunction to pretend total knowledge. In the end, I think the politics of his style--convivial, colloquial--reflect the very humane style of his politics--the generous, democratic vision of Marxist socialism that animated his hopes for the world, his resolute insistence that a better society would be forged only through collaboration. And that there would be a good deal of laughter, as well as rigorous critical thinking, along the way. Dick ends one of his chapters on literacy by saying: "The only way to have a democracy is to make one" (229). Dick did his best to be a democracy maker, and here democracy

is not a society governed by popular voting, but a liberated world where people make history under conditions they themselves have a genuine hand in shaping. It is a world he tried to prefigure in his teaching, writing, and relating--a world that I and many others can see more clearly thanks to Dick's influence.

**See: <https://tinyurl.com/566ckzjy>

Sarah Chinn

I didn't know Dick Ohmann as long or as well as many of the people on this roundtable. I wasn't his student or his academic colleague; I was a baby when he and his fellow radicals took over the MLA in 1968; I was just out of graduate school when he published *Selling Culture*; I didn't join the editorial collective of *Radical Teacher* until the early 2000s. Others here can talk knowledgeably about Dick's massive role in remaking the study of literature and culture, his collaborative and generous pedagogy, his commitment to mentoring younger scholars, and his unwavering belief in the possibility of social justice, despite the jaundiced eye he often cast upon current social and political arrangements. (In a panel we were both on at the 2018 MLA that commemorated the academic protests of 1968, Dick observed that while left academia may have made some nice shots, in the wake of the neoliberal marketization of higher education and the attempted privatization of pretty much everything, reactionary politics ran the table. He said: "We won; their victory eclipsed ours. Big history swallowed up small history. To challenge and alter its catastrophic course, we'll need to look squarely at how we lost while winning, since 1968.")

So I've established that my bona fides here for reflecting on Dick's legacy are pretty slim. But I want to talk about him in terms that Dick himself probably would have rejected as sentimental, drenched in the history of US Christian supremacy, and perhaps even beside the point. Dick was a man whose life was defined by grace.

By grace I don't mean elegance of movement or affect. Dick rejected the niceties of the conformist suburbanism of his youth and the self-aggrandizing propriety of the Ivy League. And as far as I could tell, he wouldn't win any deportment awards, with his long limbs and his way of folding himself into chairs that couldn't always contain him. Nor do I mean the typical Christian definition of grace as a kind of salvation from God's hand, a notion he would have rejected without hesitation.

Rather, I want to say that Dick had, and bestowed, grace in his fierce intellect, his generosity, and his humility. His gift of himself was, as theologians put it, "generous, free and totally unexpected," without self-importance or self-consciousness. That's not to say that he was uncritical. One of my clearest memories of Dick is from countless *Radical Teacher* meetings. Each meeting we spend a few minutes talking about the most recent issue that had just been published. In my experience, unless there is something terribly wrong with a journal issue that has come out -- a misspelling of an author's name, say, or an article that misrepresents or plagiarizes its sources -- it's been put to bed, done, no longer on the agenda. For Dick, however,

every issue of *RT* was worth discussing and analyzing. He would praise but also critique articles, pointing out ways in which the issue editors could have done a more skillful job of working with an author to pare down academic jargon, or tighten an argument, as a guide to how we could do it better next time around. One of the elements of Dick's grace was to model how to keep inquiring into how and why things were done, and how not just to ameliorate but to think systemically about the task at hand.

Dick's grace was wholly without vanity, both physical and intellectual. On my first visit to Hawley for our annual *Radical Teacher* "farm meeting," Dick appeared (in my memory, he's just there -- did he open the door? Come from the garden? I don't remember), wearing an old Resist t-shirt, cut-off jeans shorts, and a red bandanna around his head. Whatever intimidation I had felt towards someone whose work was so important melted away.

This is not to say that Dick was Pollyanna-ish: while he was profoundly supportive of colleagues and students, he had no illusions about how industrial capitalism and its successor, post-industrial neoliberalism, shaped every institution, every profession, every cultural product. Our obligation was to be as clear-eyed as he was, not to wish away a crisis but to engage with it (in this way he was much like another brilliant cultural critic whose loss we mourn, Stuart Hall). And he insisted along with deep analysis we bring revolutionary intention. In an interview with Marc Bousquet almost twenty years ago, he recommended that we have "pitiless clarity of vision, and rebellion. Try to see what is happening and why it's happening, and if there are somehow liberatory possibilities in the moment, fine. If it's just bad news, then just tell the bad news."

In this, I think, there is real grace. "Tell the bad news" doesn't much sound like a revolutionary rallying cry, but it's clear and unapologetic. The goal is not some kind of radical perfectibility but rather a commitment to keep going despite the various setbacks and wrong turns (Dick could be hilarious about his brief flirtation with leftist sectarianism). It's less William Blake and more Antonio Gramsci, less Bob Dylan and more Billy Bragg (or even, dare I say, Joni Mitchell). It is, I suppose, living in the world as it is and knowing that it -- and we -- can be transformed, if we're willing to do the work.

Susan O'Malley

In the fall of 1974, I first met Dick Ohmann at a Radical Caucus meeting at U Mass Amherst and then again at a meeting at Yale in the spring of 1975 when the group decided to publish a magazine called *Radical Teacher*. It was also decided at the Yale meeting that Reamy Jansen, who had been editing the *Radical Caucus Newsletter*, and I would be the co-editors, a job for which I was totally unprepared and did for the next 44 issues.

My first MLA was in 1973 when I took the train to Chicago from New Orleans to look for a job, which I was offered at Kingsborough Community College at CUNY. (I had received my PhD from Tulane two weeks before.) In the South I had been teaching and organizing a union at the University of New Orleans and was involved both with the

Civil Rights Movement and the sectarian left, not the best way to get tenure. After 10 years in New Orleans, I was anxious to return to the northeast and join what appeared to me as a progressive, activist, Marxist faculty movement. It also appeared to me that you all had more fun than I was having in the South. I avidly read everything I could find about the NUC and the Radical Caucus.

Enter Dick Ohmann. Dick was a mentor and a friend to me, inviting me to speak at Wesleyan and MLA, and instrumental in the formation and survival of *Radical Teacher* for 46 years. I count 40 some articles, introductions, and book reviews that he contributed to the magazine. In the early days the editorial board wrote much of the material. Dick was also a superb editor. I studied the articles Dick edited to learn how to be a better editor. He was also an extraordinary Board member in that he always read every issue and reported his comments both favorable and unfavorable at the next meeting.

Issue #3 of *Radical Teacher* has a review of Ohmann's *English in America* written by Reamy Jansen and a group of us working with him. The book was a critique of the history and function of English departments in supporting professionalism in the United States and in having no analysis of class. For those of us entering the profession, it was devastating. At the end of our *RT* review we wrote Dick a letter that concluded, "In other words, now that we have an analysis, what do we do?"

Dick responded with a letter that we published with our review that said:

It must be rare for someone to write a book to have the chance to discuss its aims, and whose criticism comes out of comradeship and struggle rather than the wish to score debating points or advance a career or defend a position.... I think there's much to be done in and around the classroom by those of us lucky enough to have jobs. What that might be will differ a lot from one situation to another, but I do believe it crucial to re-establish Marxism and socialist teaching in the universities. The critique of capitalism should be our daily task, in however explicit or muted a form is tolerated (or unnoticed) by our bosses. Teach literature as ideology; teach how the bourgeoisie uses the "means of mental production" (*German Ideology*); teach writing as development of consciousness and as struggle; teach the literature of the oppressed.

At Wesleyan, Dick said that his course, "Toward a Socialist America," had 70 students and the new socialist organization 100 members.

In the same issue Dick writes about "Teaching a Large Course on Contemporary Fiction" in which the syllabus included novels by Salinger, Updike, Roth, Plath, Bellow, McCarthy, and Vonnegut. He describes his approach "as building the novels up in order to knock them down. Looking closely at what's good in one of these novels almost invariably means following some insight into the difficulty of living a good life in the terms offered by our society.... Most go on to hint at solutions, and here's where I think they fall apart. They displace politics and offer personal or anarchist

or pre-industrial remedies for human sorrows that are rooted in advanced capitalist, industrial society."

For many years the *Radical Teacher* meetings were held every 6 weeks in the English Department at Wesleyan. Every summer we gathered for a weekend at Dick Ohmann's farm in Hawley, MA. The weekend would start on Friday and end Sunday at noon. We would bring food – Dick was an amazing cook – argue about movies, laugh, tell all kinds of jokes, share stories, talk politics, swim, skinny dip, once we even danced the Provost strut (Dick was then Provost) and the adjunct submissive dance, and always walk two miles to the country graveyard where Dick will be buried when the ground is warm enough in the spring. These were glorious times.

The 2 ½ years before Dick died I spent a lot of time with him. He introduced me to his doctors as his "sweetie." He became an extraordinary friend; I met many of his friends who came to the Farm and to W. 111th St. He cared deeply about his friends and former students and was a great listener. (He still had friends from his elementary school in Shaker Heights, Ohio.) When we were not together, he would send me the most carefully crafted poetic emails. His memory for poetry, facts, music, friends was phenomenal. He could sing to me all the songs he sang in elementary school and popular songs of the fifties. He even knew some lullabies. His sense of humor, if a bit bawdy, was quick and sharp. For his 90th birthday Mary Ann Clawson, a Wesleyan colleague, and I organized a Zoom party for him at the Greenfield Rehabilitation Center. Friends sent limericks. The morning of his birthday, he was rushed to the hospital with internal bleeding and that afternoon decided to go into hospice at the farm. The doctor gave him 3 months to live. At the end of 3 months the internal bleeding cured itself. The doctor was amazed; Dick was headed back to NYC and looking forward to working on the *Radical Teacher* issue on Teaching Socialism. Then his kidneys and heart failed the week before he was to return. His daughter Sarah called me so I could say goodbye to Dick before he was given morphine. He died quickly.

I will end with two birthday limericks:

When Dick reads a draft for RT

His pen moves so fast you can't see

With trenchant critique

That is not for the weak

He'll declare "it's too liberal for me!"

- Sarah Chinn

There was a professor from Hawley

Who hated all manner of folly.

With his sharp lance of wit

He proceeded to tilt

At capital's bastions, by golly!

Linda Dittmar



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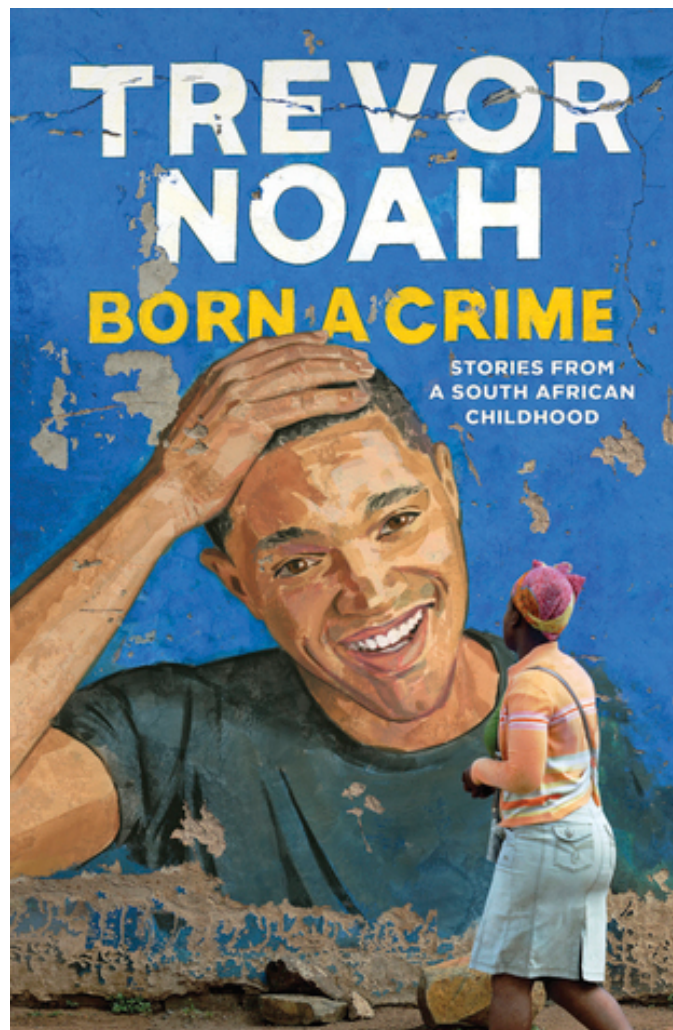
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

Teaching Middle School Students About Structural Racism with Trevor Noah's "Born a Crime"

by Salsabel Almansori



TREVOR NOAH, BORN A CRIME: STORIES FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDHOOD, 2019. ONE WORLD

The first chapter of Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime* grabbed the attention of the entire class. "Run," it's pointedly called, and it details the story that led to Noah, his mother, and his infant brother escaping a moving vehicle and running away after the driver threatens their lives upon figuring out that they are from a different tribe.

"What was that?! Why are we running?!"

"What do you mean, 'Why are we running?' Those men were trying to kill us."

"You never told me that! You just threw me out of the car!"

"I did tell you. Why didn't you jump?"

"Jump?! I was asleep!"

"So I should have left you there for them to kill you?"

"At least they would have woken me up before they killed me."

Hooked, my students couldn't stop talking about this outrageous event, which happened to Noah when he was around the same age as they were. Voices of shocked intrigue reverberated: *I can't believe they jumped out of a moving car! I guess it was safer than being killed by the driver.*

Tasked with teaching Grade 7 virtually, I struggled to engage my students while maintaining a political praxis that facilitates young people's understandings of social experience as fundamentally mediated by systemic power and privilege. My students were a gender, socioeconomically, and racially diverse group of students that came from an inner-city elementary school in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Many of them had disabilities that impacted the ways they learned and experienced school, and some were refugees and new immigrants to Canada. I ultimately chose to use *Born a Crime* as a novel study when I found that there was a young readers' edition. I was delighted to learn that this edition was exactly the same as the original, except without the swear words, because I did not want to shelter my students from complex concepts that are often deemed too controversial. I knew that they weren't too young to learn the truth about systemic violence and resistance through story. At the same time, I did not want to get in trouble, especially since my lessons were streamed into students' homes, so a version of the book that was free of curse words was just what I was looking for. The novel study consisted of daily and weekly reflections and discussions, pop quizzes in the form of Mentimeter surveys, accommodations and modifications for students based on their diverse learning needs, and a final book report that was non-traditional in that students were allowed to choose between making a PowerPoint presentation, a short play, a survey, a portfolio, or a stand-up comedy sketch. Self-assessment and descriptive feedback were also key parts of the flexible evaluation of student learning.

The main strength of using the book as a novel study is that Noah artfully integrates humour and story to illustrate the implications of growing up biracial amongst systemic

racism and poverty. One student eloquently shared the following reflections in his book report:

Racism is another main theme in the book. The title "Born a Crime" refers to the fact that interracial relationships were illegal in apartheid South Africa. Trevor was a product of a white father and Black mother, so he was considered the "product" of crime from birth. Racism tries to separate people based on their skin colour and this was especially difficult on Trevor. He was not accepted by the white people because he was "too dark" and Black people found him "too white". Racism treats some people as superior based only on their skin colour and often treats non-whites with suspicion and guilt. Even after the end of apartheid in South Africa, race was still an important factor in where you lived, who you spent time with and where you went to school or worked.

The main strength of using the book as a novel study is that Noah artfully integrates humour and story to illustrate the implications of growing up biracial amongst systemic racism and poverty.

Chapter after chapter, I witnessed the jargony word *apartheid* become a regular part of my students' vocabulary. I read their reflections as they tapped into the complicated notions of power and privilege. I listened to my 12- and 13-year-old students' discussions as they brought Noah's life stories in conversation with their own experiences, knowing that implicating ourselves in systemic oppression is a task that has been challenging even for the students I teach at the university level.

While Noah's stories reveal the realities of racialized and classed oppression in post-apartheid South Africa, empowerment is at the heart of his narrative as he centers acts of resistance, particularly when discussing his mother. Storying these acts of resistance allowed my students to see that where there is oppression, there are always people who fight, who are agents of change and empowerment for themselves and their communities. One theme that my students consistently picked up on is the way Noah speaks of his mother in awe, love, and curiosity, even when he doesn't understand or agree with her decisions. Noah regards his mother as a rebellious and free spirit who opposed racist systems through her everyday actions, and in doing so expanded her children's understandings of the nuances of life under injustice.

The final theme that emerged most frequently out of their reflections was the idea of imagination as bounded my circumstance. "We tell people to follow their dreams, but you can only dream of what you can imagine, and, depending on where you come from, your imagination can be quite limited," Noah recalls. Opening reflections and imaginative possibilities, this quote created an air of cognitive and emotional dissonance in my class. One student wrote in her daily reflection: "Because my family came to Canada only two years ago, I sometimes feel like there is a lot I still have

to figure out. This quote makes me wonder how what I don't know and haven't learned yet could hurt my dreams and wishes for my future."

When I asked students at the end of the year via a Mentimeter survey, *What was the highlight of our class?* they overwhelmingly responded *Born a Crime*. This year, I teach at a different school, but I recently paid a visit to my former students, who are now graduating and moving on to high school. A group of them warmed my heart when they came up to me to share that they still have inside jokes from the last year, one of which involves Noah being thrown out of a moving car.



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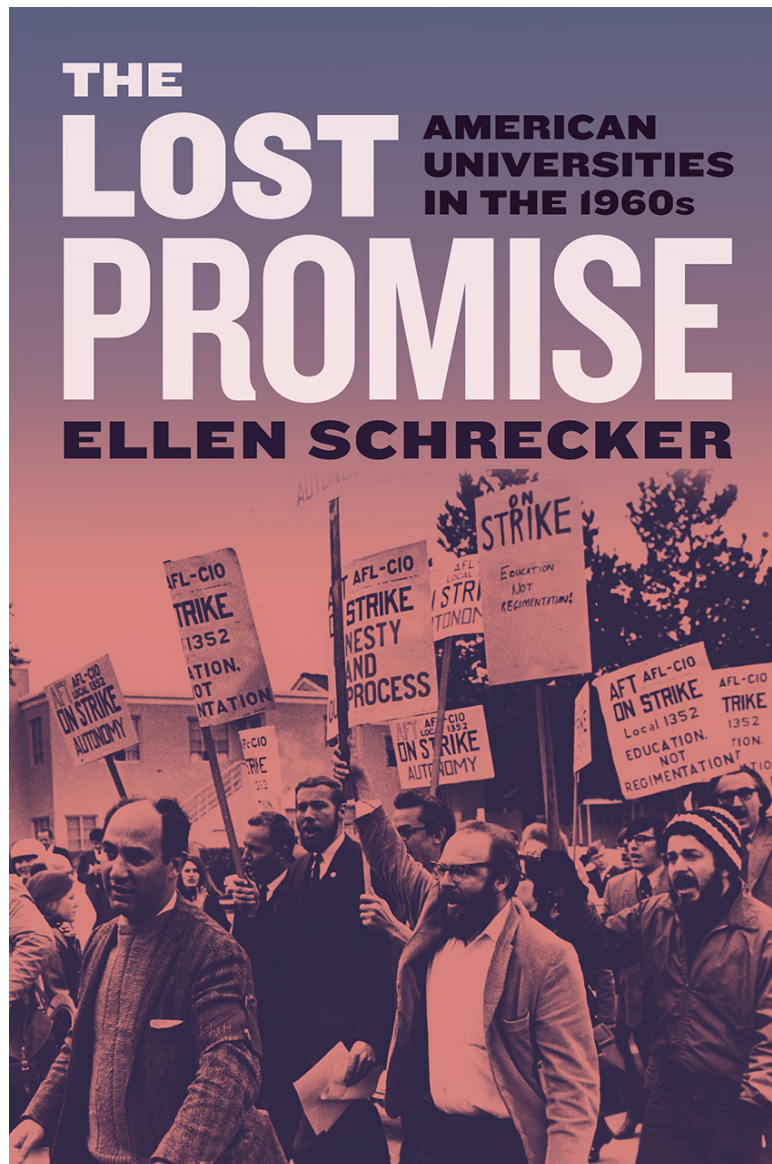
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review

The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s

by Bill Miller



THE LOST PROMISE: AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES IN THE 1960S. BY ELLEN SCHRECKER (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2021)

The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s.
By Ellen Schrecker (University of Chicago Press, 2021)

As someone who was an undergraduate, graduate student, and beginning faculty member during “the long Sixties” (late fifties to early seventies), I find *The Lost Promise* a depressing “chronicle of declension, a sobering story of how a seemingly indispensable social institution attained a position of power and approbation – and then lost it” (1-2). Post-World War II universities, growing along with an expanding economy and government activity, offered promises to administrators, faculty, and students. Sometimes these promises meshed, but other times they led to conflict. Though much has been lost, Schrecker reminds us that there have been some lasting legacies of the ferment of ideas and activities, especially in the impact on the methods and content of the social sciences and humanities and in innovative teaching practices such as encouraging students to question. Among the many books about sixties student movements, *The Lost Promise* stands out for its broad view of the activities of the three key actors in the university – administrators, faculty, and students.

In 1963 administrators endorsed University of California President Clark Kerr’s promise of the “multiversity.” A dynamic pillar of society that trained experts to cope with social problems, foster technical innovations, and educate citizens of a nation that had emerged from war at the top of the world. No longer an ivory tower, the multiversity would be a major contributor to the social and scientific progress that most Americans still believed in. Spurred by increasing enrollments of men under the G.I. Bill and women war babies and boomers, universities built new buildings and improved facilities, generated new campuses, and prospered from Cold War expansion of government grants not only for scientific but also for social-scientific research

This vision of the university did not reach everywhere: it was concentrated in the large elite institutions, both public and private. Administrators of public institutions had to deal with conservative politically appointed trustees and the politics of state legislatures. Public universities were founded to serve their states, but some people had a narrow conception of that service. Private universities were freer from political pressure, but still had to respond to trustees and alumni. Small colleges carried on older traditions of personalized liberal arts education for people for whom that in itself was a passport to leadership.

The expanded post-war universities, though, contained seeds of faculty and student discontent. They opened recruitment of faculty from a limited group of gentlemen to men (there were few women until the 1970s) of diverse social class and ethnic backgrounds. Many of these new faculty supported the new social role of universities and sought to update curricula in ways that conflicted with the agenda of more traditional faculty members, who often endorsed the new prioritizing of research over teaching, with “publish or perish” anxieties. However, as the Cold War wore on, they also questioned the nature of research that supported the “military-industrial complex.”

For many faculty, the promise of the university was that it could serve to educate students and the public about reform issues that came to the surface during the late fifties. They fought the remnants of McCarthyism like loyalty oaths, protested military recruiting and university research on weapons of destruction, and supported the Civil Rights movement. Teach-ins during the early years of the Viet Nam War were a major result of faculty and student demands for information on the war’s origins and nature. Many faculty rallied behind colleagues whose leftist publications and teaching of American society, politics, and history caused them to be fired or denied promotion by administrators or conservative professors. Many faculty and graduate students saw academia as a place where radical ideas could flourish free from outside interference and could reshape their own disciplines. Others sought to take these ideas outside academia to change society. For them, the university would serve as a base for action as well as for ideas about social change.

Many undergraduate students shared these ideas with faculty, but they also sought an education relevant to the changing society around them, and they used the university as a recruiting ground for social activism. By relevance they meant not only the subject matter of courses but also the response to the needs of women and people of color who were increasingly admitted to universities by the later sixties. This response, initiated by students through peaceable and sometimes not so peaceable demonstrations, led to new courses in Women’s Studies and Black Studies, and more courses about the history, literature, and culture of groups who had not been previously part of university curricula. Yet as universities grew larger and more socially diverse, faculty became less committed to teaching, and students began to resent, as Mario Savio later put it, being cogs in the machinery. Others objected to administrative control of their personal lives, revolting against parietal rules dictating their social activities and limitations on organizing political protests. They also protested the firing or failure to promote popular teachers. For many students during the sixties, being a student was the center of their identity, and they sought to assert that identity both as part of the university and against its limitations and restrictions.

Most of Schrecker’s book is about why these promises of genuine social change, including the democratic vision of universal mass higher education, largely, though not completely, failed. She does not blame any one of these groups: all shared in creating a divided university that was blindsided by right-wing attacks on administrators, faculty, and students alike which undermined the prestige of learning, especially liberal arts education. Administrators were divided about how to handle protesting students; some were punitive or tough on protesters, like San Francisco State’s S.I. Hayakawa, while others attempted to steer a moderate course between conflicting groups, like Yale’s Kingman Brewster. Whatever course they took, they faced criticism from the left, the center, and the right. The opaque quality of many administrators’ deliberations did not help to settle disputes: too often decisions (firing professors, banning activities, punishing students, calling in the police) came down with little warning to faculty or students. Having emerged from the scarring attacks of McCarthyism,

administrators were not well-prepared for the civil disobedience protests of the sixties.

Faculty were deeply divided. Most did not support student protests, and many objected to the general politicizing of academic life. Conservative and moderate faculty defended traditional curricula and what they saw as rationality against irrational and sometimes violent students. Angry rhetoric and the appearance of Black Panthers with guns at Cornell tipped the scales against the students in the eyes of many faculty. Sometimes fisticuffs resulted, as in the CCNY history department's conflict over curricula and open admissions. Many faculty agonized about the future of the university, some forming a national organization to counter the protests in the name of reason, the University Centers for Rational Alternatives, in 1969.

Like faculty, most undergraduates did not engage directly in protests, whether against the university itself or the Viet Nam War or in sympathy with African Americans. Those who did were often divided over tactics, the most significant difference being between the Civil Rights movement inspired non-violent Berkeley protestors, and the third-world revolution inspired students in the later sixties, as at Columbia University, disrupting classes, occupying buildings, and holding occupants of university offices hostage. The two factors that changed the nature of protest were the escalating Viet Nam War and the violent repression of African American urban uprisings. The stakes seemed much higher, and the rhetoric and action reflected that. Schrecker's discussion of the student movements is probably familiar to readers: her significant contribution is her description of how a divided and conflicted university, at the height of its promise, tried to cope with unexpected crises.

Fortunately for readers' remaining hopes, Schrecker does cover lasting accomplishments of the sixties protests. Radical Caucuses within disciplinary professional associations permanently reshaped content and methodology in their fields. Social history, even Marxist history, became acceptable (as in the still-surviving *Radical History Review*); the literary canon was broadened to include works by more women and people of color. Other disciplines like sociology and economics were shaken by critical analysis of topics previously ignored. Programs dedicated to the history and culture of women and minorities proliferated, and multiculturalism became part of the establishment academic thought. Academics began to be concerned about how to teach students effectively, as well as the content of their courses (you need not look far for an example). Unfortunately, these changes we see as positive have often isolated academics from the rest of society.

Schrecker's last chapter and epilogue return to the book's grim picture. There were others invested in the academic crisis besides the three groups (administrators, faculty, and students) immediately involved - right wing and centrist critics of all three. Schrecker devotes a concise chapter to the reaction against the protests and leftist trend

of many universities, pointing out how it diminished respect for higher education in general and how the recession in the seventies gave an excuse for cutting funds for public institutions. It also prefigured the corporatization of higher education, about which Schrecker has written a previous book (*The Lost Soul of Higher Education*), to which this is a prelude. In some ways the corporatization of higher education designed to provide student "customers" with jobs rather than the supposed luxury of a liberal education reserved for students who could afford it, returns to the multiversity on a much narrower basis. It is still serving society, but a society whose promise has curdled.

Schrecker ends with a call for universities to turn away from inequality and vocational emphasis to restore teaching of critical thinking. All true, but it is more a plea than a hope or a plan. The university remains an embattled liberal enclave, attacked by the right from outside and the left from within.

If you remember the "long sixties," read this book for its deep and comprehensive picture of academia and, if inclined, mourn lost hopes for a better world. If you do not remember the sixties, read it to gain a broad and nuanced view of a vital aspect of an era that has entered textbooks along with "the Gilded Age" or "the Progressive Era."



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Review

Talking to the Girls

by Doris Friedensohn

TALKING TO THE GIRLS

Intimate and Political Essays on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire



Edvige Giunta and Mary Anne Trasciatti, Editors

EDVIGE GIUNTA & MARY ANN TRASCIATTI (2022). TALKING TO THE GIRLS: INTIMATE AND POLITICAL ESSAYS ON THE TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY FIRE. NEW YORK: NEW VILLAGE PRESS.

Edvige Giunta & Mary Ann Trasciatti (2022). *Talking to the Girls: Intimate and Political Essays on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire*. New York: New Village Press.

Talking to the Girls is a deceptively simple title for a rich collection of essays about teaching the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. The fire, which occurred just off New York's Washington Square Park, claimed the lives of 146 girls and women, garment workers all. Editors Edvige Giunta and Mary Anne Trasciatti have seized upon this workplace tragedy to teach - - starting with their own classes - - writing, research skills, family studies, and working-class history to college students and others. While their inquiry begins by locating the victims - - girls, women, and their immigrant families in Lower Manhattan - - it moves toward larger questions of class, the urban economy, social justice, early 20th Century New York, and archival sources for the writing of history.

Crucial to the success of the volume are the editors' skills as teachers of writing. Giunta and Trasciatti believe that writing matters. Yes, writing expands consciousness. It fuels a sense of connection - - to family, neighborhood, and community. Writing alerts students, often first-hand, to gritty workplaces and the structure of opportunity (or no opportunity) in America. Through writing about the Triangle Fire - - and joining in some commemorative events - - students glimpse the ugly underside of the American Dream. Writing, they struggle to make sense of the hopes and disappointments which have shaped their families and their own lives. Writing, they respond to events which would otherwise seem distant, multi-faceted, and, yes, above their pay grade.

Among the contributors --in addition to college teachers and their students -- are union organizers, a social worker, a poet, and an Episcopal priest. In their separate essays and as a "collective," these writers underline links between vulnerable workers, sweatshops, corporate greed, and global capitalism. Students who may have started out thinking about the Triangle Fire as a tragic moment in the lives of some New York immigrants and their families discover analogous patterns elsewhere. In Bangladesh, for example. They learn about the 2012 Tazreen Fashions factory fire, on the outskirts of Dhaka, killing 146 workers; and then the collapse of five factories killing over 1,000 workers and injuring more than 2,500. In a powerful Epilogue, the editors interview Kalpona Akter, a Bangladeshi garment worker turned activist. Akter says, memorably, "One hundred and twenty years after the Triangle fire, we had to lose over 1500 workers to get an accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh." She concludes, "The Triangle fire changed the whole labor movement. You saw that fire happen. You saw that people died. You saw that burned building. That history will teach you that you can make a change."

Giunta and Trasciatti's readers can imagine the Triangle building burning. Like the student researchers and other contributors to the volume, they might be impelled to visit the Memorial and contemplate "a ribbon of metal rising to the ninth floor where most of the 146 worked." They might also discover the connections between that event of over a century ago and the dangers that, even today, American workers continue to face. The rest resides in the process that the teaching sets in motion: first, for students to find in themselves the strength to fight injustice; and second, to know that their efforts, however modest, speak to hope, decency, and a better future. Readers of this engaging and important volume will want to do no less.



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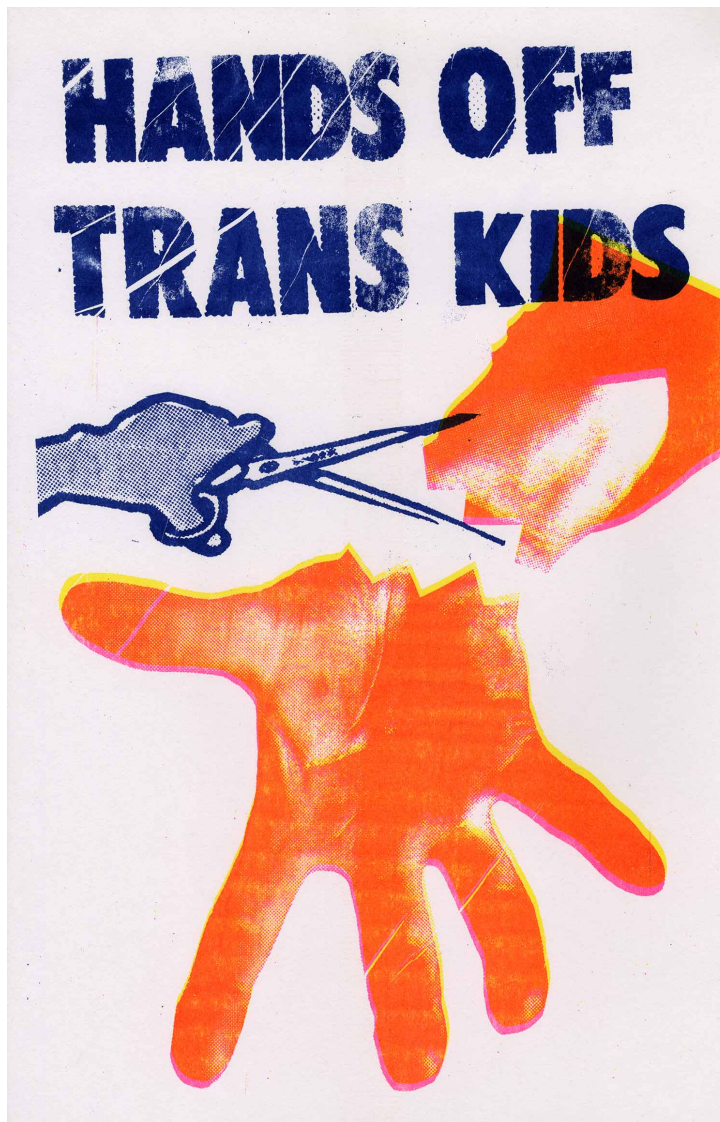
RADICAL TEACHER

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Poetry

Quiet Wisdom

by Tansy Julie Soaring Eagle Paschold



ARTWORK BY JOSH MACPHEE, "HANDS OFF TRANS KIDS" 2022

Quiet Wisdom

Often it is the silent one
that has the most wisdom
I know humans are quick
to judge
and that we like to base opinions
on knowing only part of the story
I know success
is not always measured
in wins and losses
especially for the junior
just starting a sport
who is taking on opponents
that have practiced since preschool
I know gender is not sex
and being a woman
has nothing to do
with the ability to breastfeed
or carry a baby in your womb
especially for the woman
born without a functioning uterus
whose breasts will never feed a baby
I know biology does not work
in concrete binary situations
and there are exceptions
to every social cultural norm
we try to draw in the sand
especially for the person
born with a female body
who wants to play with creepy crawlies
and dig in the soil
or the person born as a boy
who wants to wear a skirt
and play with dolls
or the baby born prematurely
with unknown chromosomes
whose parents decided
to accept a doctor's recommendation
to choose a girl over a boy
because, unformed,
the sexual organs were easier
to surgically create
Know what is fact
and what is opinion
Realize every judgment you make
may be affecting the person
sitting right beside you
Do not assume you know
it all
Be open to learning more
and to changing your view
with better information
if it should come along
But above all
please
be kind to one another
we here on this earth
are all
each other's
keeper



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Poetry

Predator

by Christopher Hirschmann Brandt



ARTWORK BY ERIC J. GARCIA, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PINATA, DE-MIL-I-TA-RISE DISSENTERS PORTFOLIO VIA JUSTSEEDS

Predator

These are my wings,
I bought them with my taxes.

This is my gyroscope,
I bought it with my taxes.

This is my remote-
controlled guidance system,
I bought it with my taxes.

These are my eyes,
super-high-resolution lenses,
I bought them with my taxes.

This is my forty-inch monitor
and this is the air-conditioned
trailer that houses it
forty-five miles north of Las Vegas,
I bought them all with my taxes.

This is my pilot
staring at my monitor
in the air-conditioned trailer
forty-five miles north of Las Vegas.
I bought him with my taxes.

This is my high-definition
image of six humans, taken
from several thousand feet over
the Hindu Kush and transmitted
to Nevada in less than a second,
I bought it with my taxes.

This is my Hellfire missile
which I bought with my taxes,
tucked under the wing of my
Predator drone, which I bought
with my taxes, and which drops and ignites
at the touch of a finger by the pilot I bought with
my taxes.

This is my explosion,
I bought it with my taxes.

These are my six corpses,
two of them are children,
I bought them with my taxes.
(Sorry about the kids, they
were not supposed to be there.)

And these are my bribes,
my renditions, my tortures
my Bagram, my Guantánamo Bays
my temporizing lawyers
my executive decisions,
I bought them all with my taxes.



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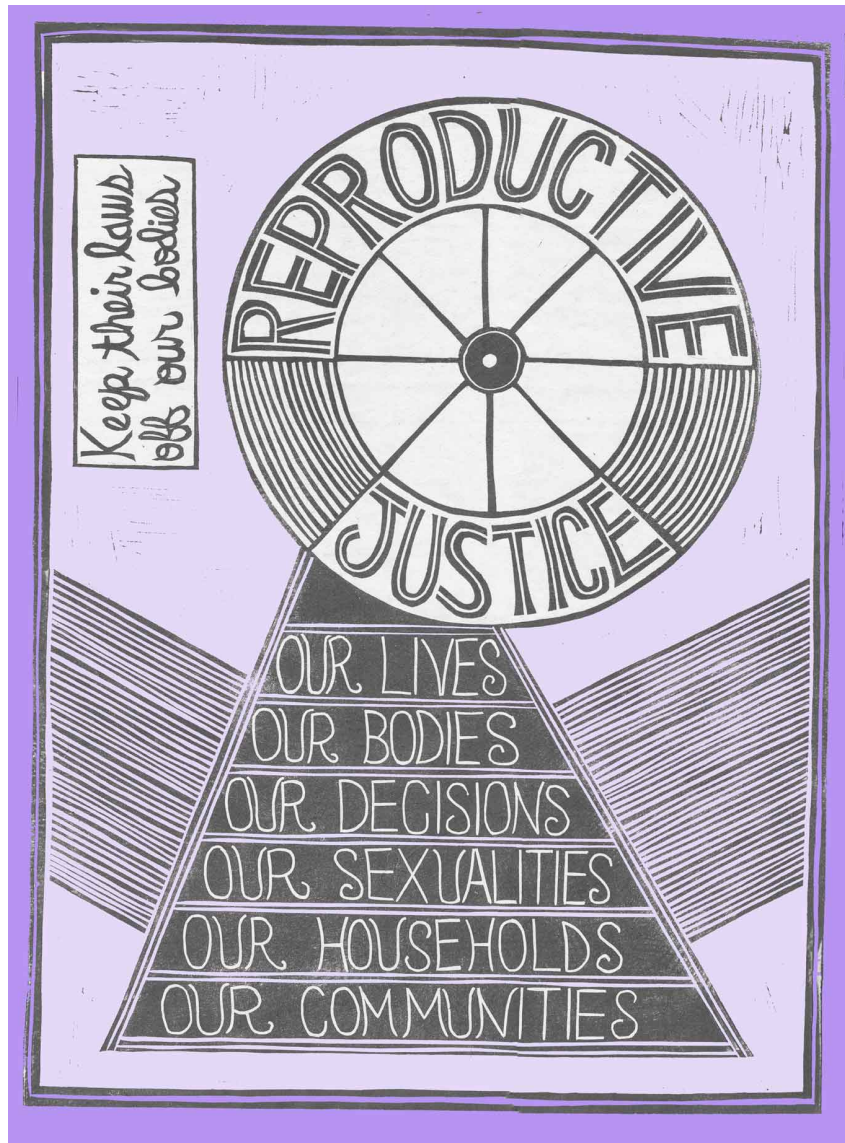


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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Contributors' Notes



ARTWORK BY MEREDITH STERN, "REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE" (2014) VIA JUSTSEEDS

Salsabel Almanssori is a doctoral student at the University of Windsor. She is interested in feminist and critical pedagogies and how disruptive narratives can be used to address student resistance to learning the politicization of education.

Pam Annas is Professor Emerita of English at University of Massachusetts, Boston, where she taught courses on American working-class literature, modern and contemporary poets, science fiction, and writing. Recipient of a Mina Shaughnessy Fellowship and an NEH Seminar, she has published articles on feminist approaches to teaching writing, on working-class literature, and in feminist criticism. Books include *Sylvia Plath: A Disturbance in Mirrors* and, with Robert C. Rosen, four editions of a textbook/anthology, *Literature and Society*. Her poetry has appeared in anthologies and journals. She directed a lively residential American Studies program, Semester on Nantucket, for three fall semesters, and was recruited by students at Goddard Cambridge Graduate School for Social Change to teach seminars in feminist writing. She has served on the *Radical Teacher* editorial board since 1979.

Christopher Hirschmann Brandt is a writer, political activist, translator, carpenter, actor, and theatre worker who teaches poetry workshops and Peace and Justice courses at Fordham and Pace Universities. His poems, essays, and translations have been published in Spain, France, and Mexico as well as in US journals and anthologies.

Sarah Chinn teaches in the English Department at Hunter College, CUNY. She's currently finishing a book project on white antiracist radicalism and representations of amputation after the Civil War.

Joseph Entin teaches English and American Studies at Brooklyn College, CUNY. His most recent book is *Living Labor: Fiction, Film, and Precarious Work* (forthcoming, 2023). Richard Ohmann was his undergraduate thesis advisor.

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Doris Friedensohn is Professor Emerita of Women's Studies at New Jersey City University. She is the co-creator, with Barbara Rubin, of the "Generations of Women" photo and oral history project, the author of *Eating as I Go: Scenes from America and Abroad; Cooking for Change: Tales from a Food Service Training Academy*; and most recently *Airports are for Waiting and Other Traveler's Tales*, 2018.

Reamy Jansen was a Professor of English and Humanities at SUNY Rockland, a founder of *Radical Teacher*, and co-editor with Susan O'Malley for the first 13 years of the journal. He is the author of the memoir *Available Light: Recollections and Reflections of a Son*. His essays, poems, and interviews with poets have appeared in *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Gargoyle*, *LIT*, and the *Evansville Review*, among others. Reamy died on April 21, 2019.

Pat Keeton is Emerita Professor of Communication Arts at Ramapo College of New Jersey, where she taught media and film studies and focused research on Latin American and global media. She is a longtime activist and has served for

many years as a member of the Steering Committee of the MLA Radical Caucus.

Paul Lauter is emeritus professor of literature at Trinity College (Hartford). His most recent book is *Our Sixties: An Activist's History* (Rochester).

Sharon Leder is Associate Professor Emerita at SUNY-Nassau Community College, where she taught English Literature, Women's Studies, and Jewish Studies. Among her books are *The Fix: A Father's Secrets, A Daughter's Search and the Language of Exclusion*, and *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti*. She was a member of the *Radical Teacher* editorial board for several years.

Bill (Wilbur) Miller retired from the history department at Stony Brook University just before Covid struck, so he missed Zoom teaching without regrets. He has taught courses on the Civil War and Reconstruction, Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the history New York City, and the history of crime and criminal justice. This last is his specialization, focusing on the history of policing. He has published *Cops and Bobbies* (Chicago 1977), a comparison of New York and London Police in the mid-19th century. He also published a study of pre-prohibition moonshiners and federal revenueurs in the mountain South, *Revenueurs and Moonshiners* (North Carolina, 1991). Most recent is *A History of Private Policing in the United States* (Bloomsbury, 2019). He also edited a five-volume encyclopedia, *The Social History of Crime and Punishment in America* (Sage, 2012). He was an undergraduate at Berkeley during the Free Speech Movement and graduate student at Columbia during the 1968 strike. Both experiences made him very aware of policing and how the student movement changed within four years.

Richard Ohmann (1931-2021) was Professor of English at Wesleyan University, long-time editor of *College English*, and a founding member of the editorial board of *Radical Teacher*. Among his books are *Shaw: The Style and the Man*, *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century*, *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions, and Print Culture*, and *Politics of Letters*.

Susan O'Malley was one of the founders of the *Radical Teacher* in 1975. She is Professor Emerita, City University of NY, where she taught composition, Shakespeare, Women's Studies, and Liberal Studies (Kingsborough, Graduate Center) for 37 years. The recipient of Fulbright, NEH, Huntington, and Folger Library grants, she has published in early modern women's studies (*Custom is an Idiot: Jacobean Pamphlets on Women*, University of Illinois Press), disability, higher education, and civil rights. She was on the executive committee of the Professional Staff Congress for 9 years and Chair of the CUNY Faculty Senate for 4 years. For the last 11 years she has served on the Executive Committee of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women at the UN. She plays cello in the UN Symphony Orchestra.

Tansy Julie Soaring Eagle Paschold lives in Norfolk, Nebraska. They are self-described as an anxious alcoholic gender fluid queer poet and artist with C-PTSD, sensory sensitivity, and borderline lupus who likes critters, plants,

and soil. They are a twin and a mama. Former Nebraska poet Laureate William Kloefkorn was one of their mentors. They have two degrees in soil science. Julie has tried their hand as pizza maker, telephone operator, soil science technician, homeless shelter overnigher, ruminant nutrition researcher, water quality advocate, statewide art coordinator, town development assistant, composting supporter, 911 operator, and agronomist. They grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. Julie has been published in AKA's *Advocate*, *Fine Lines*, *Plainsongs*, *The Awakenings Review*, *The Nebraska Writer's Guild*, and two publications on medium.com. Julie sells their sketches at the Ravenwood Art Gallery. For more, read <https://medium.com/@jpaschold> or <https://jpaschold.blogspot.com/>.

Bob Rosen taught English at William Paterson University for 43 years and has served on the *Radical Teacher* editorial board since 1976. His most recent books (no longer very recent) are *Class and the College Classroom: Essays on Teaching* and, with Pamela J. Annas, *Literature and Society: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Nonfiction*, 4th edition.

Ellen Schrecker is Professor of History Emerita at Yeshiva University. A leading expert on McCarthyism, her many publications on the subject include *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (1998), *The Age of McCarthyism: A Short History with Documents* (1994, rev. ed. 2002), and *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (1986). She also writes about higher education and, from 1998 to 2002, edited *Academe*, the AAUP's magazine. Her latest book is *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom and the End of the University* (2010). She is now looking at faculty politics in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Louise Yelin taught literature and chaired the School of Humanities at Purchase College, SUNY. She began her career as a specialist in Victorian literature and subsequently migrated beyond Britain and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She is the author of *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (Cornell University Press, 1998) and numerous essays on feminism, narrative, and contemporary literature and culture.



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