



## 2021 SPECIAL ISSUE: DISRUPTING CURRICULUM HEGEMONY THROUGH COUNTERSTORIES

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### **A Critical Reflection of Civics Education and the Politics of Power**

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*In this paper I fuse auto-ethnography and stream of consciousness to argue for a critical analysis of state power, power to preclude the efficacy of popular social movements and, therefore a more meaningful and engaged civics education project. The global social order as described by Marx, Durkheim and Weber are articulation or distinction of state power by propaganda machines, mainstream media and government held news outlets, this is hegemonic control, or government responses to movements like Black Lives Matter. Furthermore they are articulated as will of the people, when in fact government operates to prevent the efficacy of social movements thereby ensuring global capitalist hegemony and state control.*

#### **THE TRUMP ERA IN THE CURRENT INSURRECTION**

Four years Donald Trump mined the coffers of the state. While MAGA hat wearing Americans chanted make America great again, several trillion dollars of tax payer

funds were siphoned off to line the pockets of the global elite in the form of tax breaks to corporations and upper crust America, development of oil and gas leases off shore and on public lands and worst of all the iron hammer of the courts via the appointment of justices including supreme court justices, those who will define the letter of the law over the next half century. At issue is the global social order, like Nikola Tesla's search for constant energy once the machine of white, global capitalist hegemony gets rolling it is self-perpetuating.

Discussions with diehard Trump fans begin with a familiar salvo, Trump provided jobs for Black and working class America; this while screaming seemingly at the top of his twitter feed that supremacy or white supremacy is null given there are good people on both sides of public protest (Rider & Peters, 2018). How best do we describe the leviathan or the legend that is Donald Trump or Make America Great Again? To re-inscribe the global hegemonic social order or the stranglehold Capital exercises over the poor and the natural environment, we must first define what we mean by

MAGA or Donald Trump.

It would be simplistic, even mean spirited to lay the blame for the several catastrophes we experienced in 2020 at the feet of one man or one movement. Donald Trump, like MAGA, is not hate or who we are. Rather, he represents what America has been thinking and feeling for more than thirty years. Very soon the America we knew with Ozzie and Harriet waving at Beaver and Archie will soon be lost. It is not might that makes right or the idea of whiteness that ensnares or ensures the fair distribution of labor. But, that the economic code, the operating system we accept, you and I, is the global balance of power, the all-encompassing hegemonic order.

This paper is not a traditional research based analysis; rather, it provides an analysis and argument of class or the American and as a consequence global social order. I proceed by arguing that power is socially articulated to preclude the efficacy of, and as a counterpoint to, popular social movements. Mainstream media and government held news outlets provide little help informing civic knowledge and action. They function as propaganda machines that reify the ideological state apparatus (Herman & Chomsky, 2010). These conditions further perpetuate whiteness, race, and class relations they limit class struggle allowing for the manipulation of social relations of power and production. These conditions are layered as institutional structures such as race, debt, the prison industrial complex, social prestige, and generational wealth, which become the mechanisms of class warfare and normalized as realities, the curriculum, for civic life (Brill, 2011). They inform student and teacher experience of the world. For the purposes of American schooling, education or the curriculum, the course of study is how we come to understand our environment, what groups for which we accept belonging

and how we come to define the above-mentioned order (Apple, 2018; Giroux, 2001).

### **THE LONG GAME: SATE APPARATUSES**

When the founders signed the declaration of independence, they were agreeing to shoulder the burdens of government via the social code laid out in its pages. The language of the document, encoded by Thomas Jefferson, that today we uphold almost as a sacred text was tied to the period and its culture. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, all men were created equal,” this truth or manifestation of the times and its epistemology is today interpreted as white, male protestant domination. So-called Constitutionalist justices clamor for us and other Constitution loving US Americans to similarly interpret this document out of time and with the same white ideological lens as that of the founders (Adler, 2011; Berman, 2009). Their nascent message to all of us is that this was the glorious time in American history, and if we returned to the wisdom of these infallible white men, we might somehow recapture their vision (Greene, 2010).

The essence of educational curricula especially in the Social Studies supports this thinking; it seems natural and correct, at least to those in power (Ross, 2014; Stanley, 2005; Urrieta, 2005). However, beyond extoling the founders (who achieved many important milestones) and legitimization of the application of history as Constitutionlists see fit, this narrative fails to reveal that it was white landowners who would be allowed to participate fully in government and in society. By putting forth such a narrative, we are asked to put aside oppression and adopt a hegemonic ideology (Lyotard, 2000; Santiago & Castro, 2019). Without question, these realities permeate

social thinking in the US and cause many white US Americans to believe that what is currently taken from them was theirs at the founding of the country, and what was taken from them was not already part of a system of privilege.

### *Hegemonies of the State*

In the US, wealth is defined by property, what one owns determines their position or stature on the pecking order in society. Given the above establishment of hierarchy with white, male, Protestant at the top or taking pole position in equality all other designations are subordinate. Those not codified by the Declaration and later determined to be full bearers of rights, as was the case with the three fifths compromise, which subordinates people of color and the traditional treatment of women, subordinate to men (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Political power or hegemony of the state is the ability of one body to control the present and future possibilities of another as Lukes (1974) might say in an exercise of power over. We might add the ability to rewrite history as is the case with providing alternative facts or narratives to describe historical truths that may affect the latest course of events.

MAGA then is synonymous with Donald Trump, the white knight and savior, as are light skin, blue eyes or purity and power. Any challenge to the white male right to work is seen as a threat to the establishment. Or the constitution of the United States, which paradoxically during the period of its founding meant those persons who owned and could own property, land owners and the owners of slaves. Circa 2020 America and the current order, property is increasingly held by transnational corporations and American domestic real estate holding companies, once simply real estate firms, post 2008 they became investment bodies, to gobble up

distressed properties in reemerging areas of the US. Corporations, especially those who hold the bulk of wealth in the US, are increasingly viewed as people, especially in the courts, but they are people whose voice is amplified as owners of capital or power (Spring, 2015). Like their transnational counterparts, they ensured more affluent or white dominate areas like New York, Florida, Seattle or Los Angeles where capital could recover quickly from events like the real estate bust of 2010, while working class and communities of color experience feudal, cutthroat forms of capitalism with limited access to housing, healthcare or potable drinking water. Economic downturns allowed corporations and who the Banks deemed solvent to purchase assets at bargain basement prices, which would be valuable once corporations once again artificially inflated the market.

White persons who were left behind, working and middle class, champion MAGA and their icon Donald Trump then rail about the invasion of foreign bodies, immigration and black and women's liberation to maintain white male superiority, superiority, which has never been threatened. While bank loans for white male persons are typically approved, applications for loans by people of color and women receive greater scrutiny or are typically denied (Turner & Skidmore, 1999), making it impossible for women and minority community members to build generational wealth or the accumulation of surplus value or capital. Government then is a reflection of the leisure class; the hierarchical class and racially based pyramid evident in all sectors of society (Marx, Engels, & Adler, 1990). To put it bluntly and to use the American vernacular of the everyday, the whiter you are the more easily you access the tools to build wealth and privilege: access to top schools, bank loans and the next step on the rung of the career ladder.

## CLASS STRUGGLE

Marx's (1989) analysis of capital, the accumulation of surplus value and its relationship to class struggle and its antagonisms might best be understood as the bodies that compose human nature and how culture, especially popular culture defines existence. Superiority or domination is evident in the above-mentioned sectors of society. From who sweeps the barroom floor, to who occupies the trading floor, the American and global caste structure is reflected along class and race based lines. Mind, as Vygotsky (1980) might say is the zone we occupy as we are taught in school to accept belief, culture and power, consciousness and identity affected by peer group affiliation. Noted above, for the purposes of American schooling, education or the curriculum, the course of study is how we come to understand the world, what groups for which we accept belonging and ways we come to define social reality (Freire, 1995 & 1998 & 2000).

While the natural environment may speak otherwise in distinguishing genetic code, the ephemera of humanity is articulated vis-a-vis schooling along class lines and their distinctions. Schooling in capitalist America beyond an analysis by Bowles and Gintis (2011) is assurance of struggle or to preclude any challenge to the color line. While David Backer (2021) denotes the critical turn in education, the legacy of Giroux (2001) and Apple (2018) is the distinction between reproduction and social transformation. Class struggle in capitalist America is a foregone conclusion. Production or capitalist control over the means and the worker class is designated by the apparatchik, the functionary teacher, the policeman, the judge and the politician.

Is it any wonder the black and brown people are sitting together in the cafeteria in much the same way they are grouped by

neighborhood, church and sexuality (Tatum, 2017)? Culture and inclusion is representative in schooling, used only to access markets, curb social unrest, and consolidate power. In the social and literary cannon we might accept the eccentricities of black and brown cultural codes while only accepting the definition of white and male as the purview of the heterosexual hierarchy. Administration of the curricula via policy and enforcement in the literature afforded to students by teachers and staff then serves to reinforce the social and class codes students are coerced into endorsing (Apple, 2018; Giroux, 2001; Reay, 2006). That is the male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and white and black binaries (Andrus, Jacobs & Kuriloff, 2018); with privilege existing of and for white male heterosexual domination (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). Diversity then may exist but is subsumed by hegemonic structures or social codes. Indeed by tying leadership or administration of government from the local to the federal level, the American ethos replicates the divine right of kings. Since god is white and male, women and people of color and those who reject binary identities are relegated to the margins of public life and of society at large.

The origin of the family according to Engels (1978), is the articulation of codes of conduct, wealth, the cementing of social arguments to delineate and designate class lines. By tying government to Christianity and the idea of God, government appeals to higher power, the establishment of a perceived natural hierarchy (Kotsko, 2018). While nature or the scientific cannon might disagree since the last universal common ancestor (LUCA) is neither white nor male and may have been single celled and for that reason sexless, the idea of domination then is a counterargument for a naturally occurring harmony (Labedan, Xu & Skidmore, 2008). What is misunderstood as selection for hierarchy, power or domination

are naturally occurring contrasting categories. Convergence or existence is not propagated by increasing balances of power or dominate hierarchies but by ensuring genetic and as a maddening consequence, at least to the functionary politician, therefore, cultural diversity.

### **POPULAAR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

When the people lack bread they take to the streets. Marx and Engels (1968 & 1990) indeed many late twentieth and twenty-first century politicians understand people are only three meals away from revolution. In the massification of society, we have parallel occurring phenomena, widely available resources and the need to organize their distribution. Without balance all societies devolve into increasing forms of systemic oppression or chaos. Whether capitalist or socialist/communist when governments move toward fascism or authoritarianism, violent struggle soon follows.

Black Lives Matter, like many popular social movements from the late fifties to the early seventies, is an attempt to leave the order. George Floyd's murder by Derek Chauvin was the tipping point; it ignited the flame for the televised revolution. We would see it every day as the people stood in opposition to systemic oppression. While they lifted their arms and burned buildings, state police forces and politicians took heed, and notes. Orwell (1984) predicted and later Gil Scott-Heron (2004) echoed this paradox. While phone-based applications and internet-based cloud repositories serve to guard against police tampering with evidence as bystanders and protesters record police brutality, they also serve as a tip off for the state. Big brother is surely watching using stingray and cell phone tower dumps or simply asking cell phone companies for user data.

Patriots, the government and the police agencies, do it for the children, as the popular conservative meme goes, to keep everyone safe from the poor black or brown or immigrant bogeymen. And while rights to privacy are routinely violated in the name of containing the revolution of the colored masses, white America offers another paradox: the people politicians most look to for consent, white middle class Americans, are increasingly marching arm in arm with those protesting for civil rights. Ozzie and Harriet have decided they don't want to hang with Archie Bunker any longer, as they have a name for the lies they have been fed. One may not have felt the sting of systemic racism if one has been raced white by contemporary American social politics. But the crime of watching Derek Chauvin asphyxiate George Floyd is hard to deny. Knee on the neck or "I can't breathe" would reverberate for the coming months among Black Lives Matter, it's how we feel, how we've always felt, the sting of racism, the tyrannical mood white America always seems to be in, makes us flinch without anything happening. In other words, we people of color know what is expected, we have to tip our hats, give the road, accept the world as it is.

Unless the vertically integrated state oppression reaches suburbia, it's hard to deny when the police murder people of color and its televised, it's impossible to deny when they also murder white children; unless you believe in vacations from domination, which is the case with other social movements like Occupy Wall Street (OWS) or the Tea Party. OWS had little effect on the World Bank or how corporations would transform post 2008. They lacked the strength of solidarity and commitment that sustains revolutionary struggle to transform social conditions; Wall Street reemerged from the melt down stronger than ever (Cohan, 2009). The Tea

Party coincided with the largest threat to white American domination, the loss of real estate and the shrinking of pensions and the 401k. Together they formed the largest base for the coming of Donald Trump and the increasing stranglehold of the financial conglomerates, the birth of MAGA.

### **FOIL AND COUNTERPOINT: THE LONG ARM OF THE STATE**

Bankruptcy, the student loan debacle and the loss of property especially among black and brown property owners and the working poor are the propaganda and policy machine reacting and emplacing the trenches of future class warfare. The banking system is not designed to ensure persons thrive. It, like the division of class via schooling measures, is merely a sorting and money-making machine. That banking systems replicate judicial and corporate systemic racism is well documented (Arundel, 2017). As mentioned above, this ensures white, Protestant and middle-class generational wealth. In cases where the working poor might need to tap into money reserves for healthcare, to fund upward mobility via higher education or to rely on when markets change and labor too must adapt, they lack the reserves necessary to survive (Stanley, 2017).

Like Andrew Carnegie employing armies to suppress organized labor (Zizek, 1989/ 2012), the modern nation states' paramilitary are the city and state police forces who employ intimidation tactics when they cannot coerce the population into obedience. They know the system all too well, they likewise know the cameras are rolling and will shout stop resisting even when suspects are in full compliance, they are playing to the camera and the audience knowing full well the majority white and middle-class juries will side with them once the transcript is served up on the large

screen. Surveillance in the form of the above-mentioned stingray, cell tower dumps and GPS monitoring ensure our every move is tracked (Dyer-Witford, Kjosen, & Steinhoff, 2019; Foucault, 1972 & 2012). Add intimidation of witnesses, suspects and coerced confessions and it is little wonder many Americans end up on judicial lists for suspicion, traffic violations or any incident that might require the police give one a second look.

The criminal justice system then serves as double and triple jeopardy. Those convicted of crimes must serve out their sentences, which are often the cure worse than the malady. The prison system functions as an indoctrination camp where minor criminals become violent offenders (Kim, Losen, & Hewett, 2010). The criminal record in turn works to preclude access to fair housing well-paying jobs and education. The criminalization of traffic court together with substance abuse becomes feeders for an already broken carceral pipeline. Remember one cannot pull themselves up by their bootstraps if they lack access to education, work, or adequate healthcare. These operate in tandem, without education to break into well-paying jobs and without the pay to fund adequate healthcare and education the matter becomes cyclical. Those who have been incarcerated, especially in the American criminal justice system, have a high rate of recidivism. One has to eat or feed their children.

### **A THEORY OF HEGEMONY**

Antonio Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony especially on a global scale in developing from the Marxian definition of class struggle. Domination is a byproduct of the haves articulating the rules of exchange or the game, property owners, owners of culture and privilege accepting lower caste persons into its membership only when it

suits them. The masses claim Oprah or Barack Obama examples of the dismantlement of racism. But hegemony is more pervasive; it is possibility aborted or extinguishing prior to taking root in the fissures of society. In the hearts and minds of the people who struggle to make sense of the world and transform the codes by which they survive, they look to icons for solace, icons serving as a bait and switch for the ideal that movement on the social ladder is possible. The academy, the judicial system, media and the political establishment all play a role in ensuring stagnation instead of movement of the classes.

Was it a surprise for those of us in the academy to learn about the recent legacy and pay-to-play scandals where the wealthy paid for their children's admittance to top tier Universities? We in the academy are well aware the academy replicates class and color lines. Without belaboring data, the data supporting this thesis is widely available; the elite professions replicate the class structure of the society via the gatekeeping mechanisms they employ, and who is successfully mentored through existing programs of study. If then access to upward mobility via the academy is limited to those already in power, white and middle-class Americans and those increasingly raced white, those deemed white by popular culture, then successfully acquiring generational wealth and its accouterments, access to healthcare, a fair and just judicial system and participation in democracy is null.

Hegemony is the interplay between the superstructure and the structure of society, power articulated by those who have it, political and economic will and those who do not, those who engage in class struggle and pine for revolution (Gramsci, 1971; Marx, Engels, & Adler, 1990; Ollman, 1976). Unlike Lenin (2012) who identifies

hegemony as interrelated structures, Gramsci (1971) describes hegemony as competing social and economic structures, whose ebb and flow are marked by the tide of the times. In other words, hegemony is most evident in social or class politics, as is the case with the balkanization of the major political parties in the US and their counterpoint the above mentioned popular social movements. Hegemony furthermore is characterized by those in power setting the rules of the game. For Marx (1990) and Lenin (2012) the matter is fixed as the rules are articulated by capitalism for Gramsci (1971) and noted in ancient Greece the matter is dynamic, it is the interplay between those in power and class struggle those who would accept or oppose state oppression.

But what is a teacher to do, especially teachers of history, the social studies or the social sciences? The act of teaching is a relationship of co-discovery but one must begin with the end in mind, elaborated elsewhere carrying a framework of praxis (Gramsci (1971)), creativity (Csikszentmihalyi (1996)) and personal and social transformation (Freire (1970)). What I mean is, discovery of truth and the aim of learning, agency, to act upon the world must adhere to the human contract. Acting in a vacuum, the teacher and student might give free reign to curiosity and desire, when none might be affected. However, the nature of isolation is that nothing occurs in a vacuum; we must speak to environmental or social factors. Our debt to truth is a careful read of ourselves, of external dynamics and of the phenomenon. As I see it, the scientist or philosopher must apply a logico/ethico personal framework, or code of conduct, and analysis to their read of phenomena and their antecedents.

## **THE SOCIAL WILL TO POWER: THE WILL TO TEACH**

Teachers do not define the world. A teacher is a philosopher; their student, one who they would mentor. The act of teaching then is to engage the world and its problems, discovery, and to find creative solutions if any to what we might change. The student is not as Freire said merely a receptacle accepting the latest operating system or the world's garbage (1970). I say garbage because any reproductive scenario or vehicle for education that does not accept agency is of course a limit to epistemology and, since it would preclude transformation personal or social including environmental transformation, a dead end for ontology.

The human will to power is first understanding the self (Nietzsche, 1968). This is not knowing our limits but knowing our likes and dislikes and how they impact our agency in the world. The will to power then is tied to social transformation of the aforementioned self and the person as active participant in society (Nietzsche, 1968). What other reason is there for participation than to exercise who we are in relationship with others; that is not to say free of the bonds of personal or social morality, the human exchange then not predetermined. The teacher as Freire (2000 & 1998), Dewey (1908) and many others, including hooks (2014) engages in a relationship of becoming where the teacher and the student are transformed by how they engage the world and each other. That is what they share of themselves and how the world acts upon them. And this is not a passive or active dichotomy of beings engaged in defining existence or experience. Teaching and learning are about knowing, analysis and understanding. We first come to know the world through experience, the object of teaching and learning is aesthetic first and creative second. We may transform the

world as we appreciate its qualities and ways if any to improve on what may be a natural order.

### ***Civics Education***

Democracy is an exercise of personal will with an interesting caveat- it must be accepted by our neighbors. This is the dichotomy Gramsci (1971) argues in *The Prison Notebooks*. Schooling is the purview of government; its funding, education or learning must be determined by and within the purview of the people. Government is not simply about the distribution of goods, wealth or power nor does it describe purely what can be referred to as the good life nor does it secure them. Democracy is an act of agency where citizens engage the local economy and distribute the welfare of the state according to what they deem just (Allman, 1999; Church, 2003). In education, especially in American public schooling mentioned above regarding Bowles and Gintis's (2011) arguments, education becomes indoctrination where we accept color codes and class lines. It is as if once we enter schools, we receive a cryptogram that interprets how we are perceived by all others we engage across our lifespan.

Civics education then is not assurance hegemony of the proletariat or to ensure working class women and men seek to overthrow governments or take positions of power to then exercise political will. The point of revolution is perpetual change, dare I say, from the better angels of our nature, to an improved future for all. This is what Freire described, that pedagogy of the oppressed necessitates pedagogy of the oppressor (1970), if the point of revolution is community (Gramsci, 1971). Violently overthrowing regimes has one of two ends for a society: the new organization in power must maintain power via increasing forms of authoritarianism or resign itself to perpetual struggle. This might be the aim all along of the two-party systems. I say system since, as



mentioned above, hegemony is focusing power among a bloc, the wealthy, while ensuring everyone else must live under the superstructure it determines (Gramsci, 1971).

Among Dewey (1910), Freire (1970) and Gramsci (1971) there is agreement that education serves the will of the people, it helps society understand and transform their world, and education is a service of government that ensures the domestication of the working class. The intellectualization of the working class was a particular concern for Gramsci, which differed from Dewey (1903) who explored education as discovery of one's specified role in society. Gramsci (1971) theorizes praxis as the means by which the working class comes to understand struggle. Freire, echoes Gramsci but where Dewey and Gramsci took a systems approach to education, where they examine systems affecting teaching and learning, Freire (1976) reignited the philosophers flame echoing Marx (1990), to interpret the world in order to transform it, in this case to interpret the human condition to ensure the transformation of humanity from class struggle to personal and social transformation.

### **CONCLUSION: TRANSFORMATION AND THE STATUS QUO**

The world is finite. Humanity defined ecologically or through the natural environment is fixed. Though there may exist a biological and social link human experience develops culturally not zoologically. In the above arguments I mention two competing parallel truths; in the massification of society, government, or administrative bodies, must distribute or balance resources. They must articulate the means for social exchange of what Marx (1968) calls class antagonisms and what

Engels (1968) referred to as peer group affiliation, division and exchange. To maintain the order, ensuring the balance of power must go untouched or we must accept diversity; that is alternate views of collective exchange. However, this may also ensure government ceases to function as it has with one body maintaining power over another.

In its stead we might find diversity is not the hobgoblin government claims but a naturally occurring phenomenon necessary for the survival of all species. Indeed at the very least without diversity we can only hope for stagnation. Economics like genetic diversity or cultural diversity need and expect transformation. None may exist without change. Human and social power is nothing without humans or society. To retard our human potential and possibility for the sake of capitalist antagonisms which promote economic exploitation has been the hegemonic model for centuries. However, we now face the extinction of the species and are rejecting alternative ways of being and social movements that might otherwise allow the types of democratic conversations which could ensure human survival. While natural resources may be finite, at least on this planet, the limits of human imagination and creativity are still being explored.

Teacher and student philosophers will bring about the new society. They and we will experience the world and knowledge in ways that ensure equitable and loving forms of social exchange they will inscribe the world to come. The civics curriculum then is a curriculum of living and working together in the world. It is about recognizing antagonisms and systems and working with others to ensure they support or uphold democracy. Not democracy in the US sense, or in the Founder's sense, but as Gramsci (1971) and Freire (1976), where we and our neighbors decide on conditions together. Finally, it is about controlling our own lives, labor, bodies and dreams. The curricula are

all those factors that make participation possible.

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