

Texas Education Review

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Volume 3, Issue 2, pp. 10- 15 (2015)
Available online at www.txedrev.org

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Across the globe, a new historical conjuncture is emerging in which the attacks on higher education as a democratic institution and on dissident public voices in general—whether journalists, whistleblowers, or academics—are intensifying with alarming consequences. Marina Warner (2014) has rightly called these assaults on higher education, “the new brutalism in academia” (para. 2). It may be worse than she suggests. In fact, the right-wing defense of the neoliberal dismantling of the university as a site of critical inquiry is more brazen and arrogant than anything we have seen in the past. What we are witnessing is an attack on universities not because they are failing, but because they are public. This is not just an attack on political liberty but also an attack on dissent, critical education, and any public institution that might exercise a democratizing influence on the nation. In this case, the autonomy of institutions such as higher education are threatened more by the state than corporate interests.

The hidden notion of politics that fuels this market-driven ideology is also on display in a Western-style form of neoliberalism in which the autonomy of democratizing institutions are under assault not only by the state, but also by corporate elites, bankers, and hedge fund managers. In this case, corporate sovereignty has replaced traditional state modes of governance with mostly powerful corporate elites who despise the common good and who, as the South African Nobel Prize winner in literature, J.M. Coetzee (2013) points out, “reconceive of themselves as mere managers of national economies” (para. 5). They want to turn universities into training schools, equipping young people with the skills required by a modern economy. Viewed as a private investment rather than a public good, universities are now construed as spaces where students are valued as human capital, courses are defined by consumer demand, and governance is based on the Walmart model of labor relations. For Coetzee (2013), this attack on higher education is not only ideological, but also increasingly reliant on the repressive, militaristic arm of the punishing state. This is a response to the democratization of the university that reached a highpoint in the 1960s all across the globe. In the last twenty years, the assault on the university as a center of critique has intensified and has expanded to intellectuals, student protesters, and the critical formative cultures that provide the foundation for a substantive democracy.

Coetzee’s (2013) defense of education provides an important referent for those of us who believe that the university is nothing, if it is not a public trust and social good. That is, the university is a critical institution infused with the promise of cultivating intellectual insight, civic imagination, inquisitiveness, risk-taking, social responsibility, and the struggle for justice. Rather than defining the mission of the university in ways that mimic the logic of market ideology, governance, and policy; the questions that should be asked at this crucial time in American history raises the following issues: how might the mission of the university be understood with respect to safeguarding the interests of young people at a time of violence and war, the rise of a rampant anti-intellectualism, the emerging specter of authoritarianism, and the threat of nuclear and ecological devastation? What might it mean to define the university as a public good and democratic public sphere rather than as an institution that has aligned itself with market values and is more attentive to market fluctuations and investors than educating students to be critically engaged citizens? Or, as Bauman and Donskis (2013) write: “how will we form

the next generation of ... intellectuals and politicians if young people will never have an opportunity to experience what a non-vulgar, non-pragmatic, non-instrumentalized university is like?" (p. 139). As public spheres, once enlivened by broad engagements with common concerns, are being transformed into "spectacular spaces of consumption" and financial looting, the flight from mutual obligations and social responsibilities intensifies and has resulted in not only a devaluing of public life and the common good, but also a crisis in the radical imagination, especially in terms of the meaning and value of politics itself (Kurlantzick, 2013).

What I am suggesting is that the crisis of higher education is about much more than a crisis of funding, an assault on dissent, and a remaking of higher education as another institution designed to serve the increasing financialization of American society. It is also about a crisis of memory, agency, and politics. As politics is removed from its political, moral, and ethical registers—stripped down to a machine of social and political death for whom the cultivation of the imagination is a hindrance—commerce rises as the heartbeat of social relations, and the only mode of governance that matters is Wall Street. Time and space have been privatized, commodified, and stripped of human compassion under the reign of neoliberalism. We live in the age of a new brutalism marked not simply by an indifference to multiple social problems, but also defined by a kind of mad delight in the spectacle and exercise of violence and cruelty. America is marked by a brutalism that is perfectly consistent with a new kind of barbaric power, one that puts millions of people in prison, subjects an entire generation to a form of indentured citizenship, and strips people of the material and symbolic resources they need to exercise their capacity to live with dignity and justice.

For those of us who believe that education is more than an extension of the business world and the new brutalism (educators, artists, workers, labor unions, and other cultural workers), we must stress the educative nature of politics as part of a broader effort to create a critical culture, institutions, and a collective movement that supports the connection between critique and action as well as a redefinition of agency in the service and practice of freedom and justice. We can accomplish this by addressing a number of issues that connect the university to the larger society. To this end, I have outlined several in the next paragraphs.

First, educators can address the relationship between the attack on the social state and the transformation of higher education into an adjunct corporate power. As Stefan Collini (2014) has argued, under the regime of neoliberalism, the "social self" has been transformed into the "disembedded individual," just as the notion of the university as a public good is now repudiated by the privatizing and atomistic values at the heart of a hyper-market driven society. Clearly, in any democratic society, education should be viewed as a right, not an entitlement. This suggests a reordering of state and federal priorities to make that happen. Much needed revenue can be raised by putting into play a limited number of reform policies in which, for instance, the rich and corporations would be forced to pay a fair share of their taxes, a tax would be placed on trade transactions, and tax loopholes for the wealthy would be eliminated. It is well known that the low tax rate given to corporations is a major scandal. For instance, Bank of America paid no taxes in 2010 and "got \$1.9 billion tax refund from the IRS, even though it made \$4.4 billion in profits" (Snyder, 2013, n.p.).

In addition, academics can join with students, public schools teachers, unions, and others to bring attention to wasteful military spending that if eliminated could provide the funds for a free public higher education for every qualified young person in the country. While there is growing public concern over rising tuition rates along with the crushing student debt, there is little public outrage from academics over the billions of dollars wasted on a massive and

wasteful military budget and arms industry. As Michael Lerner pointed out, democracy needs a Marshall Plan (Network of Spiritual Progressives, 2010), in which funding is sufficient to make all levels of education free, while also providing enough social support to eliminate poverty, hunger, inadequate health care, and the destruction of the environment. There is nothing utopian about the demand to redirect money away from the military, powerful corporations, and the upper one percent.

Second, addressing these tasks demands a sustained critique of the transformation of a market economy into a market society, along with a clear analysis of the damage it has caused both at home and abroad. Power, particularly the power of the largest corporations, has become more unaccountable and “the subtlety of illegitimate power makes it hard to identify” (George, 2014, p. 8). Disposability has become the new measure of a savage form of casino capitalism in which the only value that matters is exchange value. Compassion, social responsibility, and justice are relegated to the dustbin of an older modernity that now is viewed as either quaint, or a grim reminder of a socialist past. This suggests, as Angela Davis, Michelle Alexander, and others have argued, that there is a need for academics and young people to become part of a broader social movement aimed at dismantling the repressive institutions that make up the punishing state. The most egregious example is the prison-industrial complex, which drains billions of dollars in funds to put people in jail when such funds could be used to fund public and higher education. We live in a country where the police have become militarized, armed with weapons from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan (Balko, 2013; Nelson, 2000). The United States prison system locks up more people than any other country in the world, and the vast majority of them are people of color (Alexander, 2010). Moreover, public schools are increasingly modeled after prisons and are implementing policies in which children are arrested for throwing peanuts at a school bus or violating a dress code (Giroux, 2012). The punishing state is a dire threat to both public and higher education and democracy itself. The American public does not need more prisons; it needs more schools, free health services, and a living wage for all workers.

Third, academics, artists, journalists, and other young people need to connect the rise of subaltern, part-time labor—or what we might call the Walmart model of wealth and labor relations—in both the university and the larger society to the massive inequality in wealth and income that now corrupts every aspect of American politics and society. No democracy can survive the kind of inequality in which “the 400 richest people...have as much wealth as 154 million Americans combined, that’s 50 percent of the entire country [while] the top economic 1 percent of the U.S. population now has a record 40 percent of all wealth and more wealth than 90 percent of the population combined” (DeGraw, 2011, para. 8). Senator Bernie Sanders (2014) provided a statistical map of the massive inequality at work in the United States. In a speech to the U.S. Senate, he stated:

Today, the top 1% owns 38% of the financial wealth of America, 38%. And I wonder how many Americans know how much the bottom 60% own. They want people to think about it. Top 1% own 38% of the wealth. What do the bottom 60% own? The answer is all of 2.3%. Top 1% owns 38% of the financial wealth. The bottom 60% owns 2.3%...there is one family in this country, the Walton family, the owners of Wal-Mart, who are now worth as a family \$148 billion. That is more wealth than the bottom 40% of American society. One family owns more wealth than the bottom 40% of American society...That’s distribution of wealth. That’s what we own. In terms of income, what we made last year, the latest information that we have in terms of distribution of income

is that from 2009-2012, 95% of all new income earned in this country went to the top 1%. Have you all got that? 95% of all new income went to the top 1%, which tells us that when we talk about economic growth, which is 2%, 3%, 4%, whatever it is, that really doesn't mean all that much because almost all of the new income generated in that growth has gone to the very, very, very wealthiest people in this country (para. 3).

Democracy in the United States has been hijacked by a free-floating class of the ultra-rich and corporate powerbrokers and transformed into an oligarchy “where power is effectively wielded by a small number of individuals” (McKay, 2014, para. 2). Similarly, Gilens & Page’s (2014) study confirmed these conclusions regarding the exclusivity of the elite and powerful.

Fourth, academics need to fight for the rights of students to get a free education, to be given a formidable and critical education not dominated by corporate values, and to have a say in the shaping of their education and what it means to expand and deepen the practice of freedom and democracy. In many countries such as Germany, France, Denmark, Cuba, and Brazil, post-secondary education is free because these countries view education not as a private right, but as a public good. Yet, in some of the most advanced countries in the world, such as the United States and Canada, young people, especially from low income groups have been excluded from getting a higher education and, in part, this is because they are left out of the social contract and the discourse of democracy. They are the new disposables who lack jobs, a decent education, hope, and any semblance of a life better than the one their parents inherited. They are a reminder of how finance capital has abandoned any viable vision of a better future for young people. Youth have become a liability in the world of high finance, a world that refuses to view them as an important social investment.

Finally, there is a need to oppose the ongoing shift in power relations between faculty and the managerial class. Too many faculty are now removed from the governing structure of higher education and as a result have been abandoned to the misery of impoverished wages, excessive classes, no health care, and few, if any, social benefits. As political scientist Benjamin Ginsburg (2011) pointed out, administrators and their staffs now outnumber full time faculty, producing two-thirds of the increase in higher education costs in the past 20 years. This is shameful and is not merely an education issue but a deeply political matter, one that must address how neoliberal ideology and policy has imposed on higher education an anti-democratic governing structure.

We may live in the shadow of the authoritarian corporate state, but the future is still open. The time has come to develop a political language in which civic values and social responsibility—and the institutions, tactics, and long-term commitments that support them—become central to invigorating and fortifying a new era of civic engagement, a renewed sense of social agency, and an impassioned international social movement with the vision, organization, and set of strategies capable of challenging the neoliberal nightmare that now haunts the globe and leaves the meaning of politics and democracy empty.

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on Higher Education (Haymarket Press, 2014), *The Violence of Organized Forgetting: Thinking Beyond America's Disimagination Machine* (City Lights, 2014), *Zombie Politics in the Age of Casino Capitalism*, 2nd edition (Peter Lang 2014), *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of the Spectacle*, co-authored with Brad Evans, (City Lights Books 2015), *Dangerous Thinking in the Age of the New Authoritarianism* (Routledge 2016). The *Toronto Star* named Henry Giroux one of the 12 Canadians changing the way we think.

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