

The New Conservative Coalition and Education:  
A Pragmatic Analysis of Gabbard's *Knowledge and Power*

For most of the last thirty years, the United States government and culture has been under the ideological influence of what we call, for the purpose of this analysis, the New Conservative Coalition (NCC). As we've discussed elsewhere (Goodman, 2006), this coalition has been made up of many citizens who identify with one or more various groups or classes (e.g., business leaders, the technical intelligentsia, intellectuals at various conservative think tanks, fundamentalist Christians, and up until recently many among the working class - particularly in the South). These classes have been attracted to ideas emerging from what the authors in David Gabbard's book call "neo-liberalism" and/or "neo-conservatism." In light of the repudiation of this coalition in the 2008 U.S. national election, some might argue that Gabbard's latest edition of *Knowledge and power in the global economy: The effects of school reform in a neoliberal/neoconservative age (K&P)* is out of date. We would disagree and encourage our colleagues to read this expanded edition of the original 2000 publication, especially in light of the 2010 election results.

There are several reasons behind our recommendation besides the quality of this book's content. First, in liberal, representative, and constitutional democracies, such as in the United States, we cannot expect monumental changes in all of our institutions with the election of a new President and Congress. Even with the new administration's ambitious agenda, the people, ideologies, and goals of the NCC can still be felt across our nation (especially in our schools) and will not disappear or grow silent just because it is no longer in control of our national government. Given certain, unforeseen events such as another attack by radical Islamists or the failure of the economy to recover during Obama's first administration, the next federal election might very well bring the NCC back into political power. In addition, leaders of representative

democracies rarely can act without some negotiation from those with very different ideological values and agendas. To paraphrase a slogan by the *American Civil Liberties Union*, efforts to make our society more democratic, socially just, equitable, as well as more uniformly prosperous, need constant vigilance. In order to achieve these and other goals, we need a progressive thinking citizenry, not just (as important as it is) a progressive thinking President. For this reason alone, reading this book is certainly warranted. Second, power in the United States is not solely concentrated in the political realm of society, but rather spread out. In democratic, capitalist societies much power is found in the economic sphere (a reason for publicly supported elections) and others such as the educational, religious, and media realms of our nation. All of these realms are interconnected, attempt to influence each other, and are sites of contestation where citizens engage in social struggle (Goodman, 2006). As a result, it is not difficult to find the influence of the NCC's ideas in schools, corporations and other businesses, religious institutions, popular culture, media, and medical organizations (just to name a few) even in light of the 2008 shift to the left within the political sphere of our society (and now the backlash). Especially those individuals who are attracted to socialists or other Marxist inspired viewpoints will find the chapters in *K&P* very affirming. Finally, schools are particularly vulnerable to the NCC's ideological influence. The NCC's educational agenda (which is the primary focus of *K&P*) has not diminished at all as of the writing of this article (Spring, 2010). Due to Bush's NCLB policies teachers are (more than ever) "deskilled," children's learning and schools are being unfairly evaluated, learning is primarily defined as memorizing facts, funding formulas still greatly favor schools in wealthy communities, vouchers and many charter schools (while perhaps helping a few individual families) further undermine the *public* schooling of our nation's children, the curriculum is still being rigidly and dramatically narrowed as a result of

curriculum “standards” and high stakes testing (e.g., the recent Texas school board’s conservative revision of history standards), and the vast majority of our citizens still limit the purpose of schooling to obtaining future jobs rather than, say, ameliorating our imperfect society, expanding children’s understanding of the themselves and world in which we live, and/or creating existential meaning in their lives. As a result, the ideas expressed by the authors in *K&P* are relevant and important.

This endorsement, however, does not mean that we found all the chapters and arguments in this book convincing, comprehensive, or most importantly, useful in our efforts to make the education of our children and our society at large more socially just, democratic, and intellectually engaging. As will be discussed, we take issue with several of the central conclusions written by these authors, many of which (particularly in Part I) are written from a neo-Marxist, anti-capitalist perspective. Someone looking for a wide diversity of viewpoints regarding neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies as well as globalization will be disappointed with this manuscript. Given the framework from which many of these authors (especially the more radical leftists among them) write, it would be impossible to conduct a “value free” analysis of its content. Although we share many values and goals expressed by the authors in this book, our concerns over its content can be attributed, in part, to our own orientation which we describe roughly as progressive pragmatism. Using Hill’s categorization, we believe the world and its problems are best addressed within the framework of a “social democratic” polity. However, for some countries (given their history, culture, and problems) a social democratic polity might not be as fruitful as a socialist or perhaps in some cases even Marxist (or neo-liberal/neoconservative) polity would be most helpful in addressing its needs. As pragmatists, we view the idea that any one ideological orientation will provide ideas useful to all polities no

matter what their current situation or history might be with skepticism. We tend to avoid over-identifying with clearly delineated ideological and theoretical categories and borders, and are more prone to examine particular ideas and issues within specific historical and contemporary contexts in determining their worthiness.

In light of this orientation, the purpose of this analysis is to contribute to the conversation that Gabbard (see Introduction) hoped would be stimulated by the publication of this second edition. Prior to addressing specific ideas and themes found in this anthology, we first briefly place this volume in its historical context. After this laconic discussion, we focus our attention towards the significant contributions that this book makes in our effort to understand the complex times in which live and work, and then address several questions and concerns we have in light of the arguments made by Gabbard's authors. We conclude with a reflection upon the usefulness of *K&P* as progressive thinking academics, teachers, and other cultural workers in making our schools and society more democratic, socially just, uniformly prosperous, and ecologically sustainable.

#### A Brief Historical Context: The New Conservative Coalition

As previously mentioned, prior to exploring its contributions, as well as a few concerns we have, it is useful to place this scholarly collection in a historical context. Neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, the ideological focus of *K&P*, represents the intellectual foundations of the previously mentioned *New Conservative Coalition* (NCC) that has emerged as a potent force during the last 30+ years in the United States. This coalition has advocated for the de-regulation of commercial activities and eliminating trade barriers between countries (i.e., "free" trade), the re-establishment of our nation's European ancestry (While generally supportive of the 1960s Civil Rights laws, the NCC is threatened by the abandonment of our historical "melting pot,"

assimilationist goal in which everyone identifies with this European ancestry and the rise of our nation as “multi-cultural.”), and the re-emergence of fundamentalist (anti-modernist) Christianity as a form of resistance to what is perceived has the “impurities” found in our country (e.g., permissive schooling and parenting, sexualization of popular culture, removal of prayer from schools and religious displays on public property, legal abortions, available birth control, denial of God as the creator of all things).

Although many of the authors in *K&P* would disagree, it seems to us that the 20<sup>th</sup> century has, for the most part, be dominated by “the left.” The rise of Leninist/Marxism in eastern Europe and significant parts of the Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, and the creation of what Hill calls social democracies in much of the rest of the world is a reflection of leftist popularity. This movement to the left in the United States reached its pinnacle during the 1960s/1970s emergence of the “new left” (e.g., Elbaum, 2002; Garfinkle, 1995; Gitlin, 1993; Isserman & Kazin, 2000; Kurlansky, 2004; Rorty, 1998). The new left’s rejection of the old left’s reformist progressivism and adoption of a post-Stalinist, revolutionary Marxism alienated a large number of our fellow citizens (especially from the working class) who previously were supportive the country’s slow but steady move towards more social justice, equity, democracy, and prosperity. The activities of groups such as the Weathermen, Symbionese Liberation Army, Youth International Party, and Black Panther Party were especially offensive to a large majority of citizens. Ambrose’s (1995, p. vii) lament reflected the attitude of many progressive thinking citizens during the 1960s and 1970s who became alienated by the romanticized radicalism of the “new left.” He noted that it

. . . had a chance to create a genuine party of the left in America, but instead it took its opportunity . . . to riot, to scandalize, to do drugs and group sex, to talk and dress dirty, to call for revolution and burn flags, to condemn parents and indeed anyone over 30 years of age, in an excess of free will and childish

misjudgment seldom matched and never exceeded. To the participants, it provided intensity of feeling and was great fun. To the potential antiwar members of the middle class, it was a turn-off.

As some of *K&P's* authors note (e.g., Hursh), the “backlash” that occurred did so with a vengeance starting with the election Ronald Reagan who became an icon for the NCC.

However, the NCC reached the pinnacle of power only with the “election” of George W. Bush in 2000 and this administration’s successful exploitation of Al Qaeda’s bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001. As a result, the NCC pushed the nation far to the right of the typical range of social, economic, and political ideology during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Policies and individuals such as President Nixon who were viewed as conservatives in 1970 were viewed by many in the NCC as “moderates” or even “liberals” by 2008, the year of *K&P's* publication.

As we write this article, the NCC has, at least for now, lost some of its power in light of the incompetency and dismal failures in foreign and domestic affairs of the last Bush administration, and the election of President Obama. The Obama administration has made efforts to change our economy by re-establishing commercial regulations and making agencies such as the SEC actually do the job they failed to do under the Bush presidency, advocating for more health care, proposing a progressive tax structure, strongly rejecting the NCC’s approach to international relationships (e.g., unilateralism), support for scientific study (e.g., stem cell research), and improving the lives of women (e.g., support for family planning), yet it still remains to be seen if the NCC’s educational agenda will be significantly modified or reversed. Early signs are not promising. Obama’s administration has called for more accountability through standardized testing at the national level, more funding for charter schools, and merit pay for teachers based on test scores of students. As a result, many of the educational criticisms of NCLB and the

danger of the NCC's ideology as discussed in *K&P* (see below) are still extremely relevant and insightful as we look into the near future.

### Contributions

*K&P* presents the views of many educators among the academic left, explores why the NCC was able to take advantage of the conservative shift in American politics during the last several decades, identifies a number historical events and people that spawned the NCC's ideologies, portrays the ways in which the NCC has influenced the education of our children, and offers some important alternatives to their agenda. The chapters are well organized, and the writing is universally crisp, clear, and lucid.

### *History, Ideology, Schools, and Society*

One of the most obvious contributions of *K&P* is its effort to connect ideas for implementing progressive pedagogies, leftist ideology/analysis and the relationship between schools and society often within a historical context. The first part focuses on the NCC's history and ideologies as they relate to our schools and society. Next, the text explores more specific educational policies that emerge from what these authors refer to as neo-liberalism (European liberalism) and neo-conservatism such as the standards movement, accountability and high stakes testing, vouchers, charter schools, and school choice/privatization among others. The text then moves on to the negative consequences of these policies on various classroom curricula and learning experiences such as reading and language arts, social studies, and character education. Finally, the text offers several speculations of what education would mean if the United States was much more influenced by socialist and other leftist/progressive ideas.

Given the power the NCC continues to exert on our educational system as well as many other aspects of our society including our personal sexuality, economic opportunities and

limitations, and race, these concise analyses offer those of us who reject this overwhelming conservatism in our schools and society a useful vocabulary and set of ideas that we may use to affirm our own skepticism of the this conservative coalition and its educational agenda. Neo-Marxist and socialist critiques of schooling are rarely if ever part of our public discourse so this text provides a comprehensive resource for these outlier ideas.

As previously mentioned, Part I of the text focuses on ideological critiques of capitalism and schooling. For example, Hill attempts to unify all socialists under one umbrella of a “desire for more equality” (p. 13) and then offered explanations for the differences among “socialisms” across the world. He argues that socialist thought has been demonized in the U.S. which prevents us from understanding it and its claimed benefits to humanity. He ends his chapter by challenging readers to “move beyond superficialities” of labels and insightfully reminds us that to best understand a political ideology, we must observe how it is manifested rather than take the claims of its followers at face value.

Brosio presents a thoughtful analysis of European liberalism rooted in the enlightenment and the emergence of industrial capitalism. Brosio posited that originally liberalism focused on economics by suggesting that European society would be greatly improved if class rights and privileges were replaced by the rights of individuals to pursue their own desires and interests. If guilds and other occupational associations and regulations could be broken and individuals were allowed to freely compete and maximize “their own economic self-interests” (p. 23), it would create conditions for a society to become open and prosperous. As liberalism gained adherents, it evolved into the political philosophy of liberal democracy (e.g., free and fair elections, separation of powers, property rights, freedom of speech and association, equal justice under law, secular government) as imperfectly practiced in many parts of the world today.

In the United States, “liberal,” eventually became associated with individuals who recognized the “built in” oppression/exploitation of *laissez-faire* capitalism, but unlike Marxists, did not think the government (i.e., “the people”) should publically own and control the means of production. Rather, American liberals believed in ideas such as government regulated capitalism (e.g., for fair competition, legalization of independent unions and collective bargaining rights, health and safety laws for workers, environmental protection, preventing monopolies, progressive taxation as a form of income redistribution to provide basic necessities such as health, education, and welfare, individual rights and privacy protection, government pensions, and providing economic opportunities for all citizens). Rather than advocating for the complete re-construction of society via revolution, liberals prefer to change society through step-by-step reforms focused on specific problems (e.g., environment, civil rights, health care).

According to Brosio, American liberalism is best reflected by individuals such as George McGovern and the late Paul Wellstone. As one might expect given his neo-Marxist ideology, Brosio argues that American liberalism simply isn’t radical enough. From his perspective, American liberalism/progressivism and liberal democracy is in reality an iron fist of repression cloaked in a velvet glove. As long as capitalism exists as a powerful force within society, social problems of equity, liberty, race, gender, democracy, and poverty cannot be resolved. Liberals, according to these authors, are too “wishy-washy” (p. 30) particularly in the time of crises, and capitalism and liberal democracy seem to be perpetually in a state of crisis. Brosio ended his chapter with a pointed question for liberals: “What role will liberals play within the contexts, problems, and possibilities presented here in?” (p. 33); thereby, suggesting that American liberals and liberalism are fundamentally ineffective under capitalism and liberal democracy.

Hursh traces the history of “neoliberal” thought. In doing so, he carefully differentiates

classic liberalism from neoliberalism. He notes that neoliberalism is actually an expansion upon “classic liberalism’s faith in the individual as rational chooser within the market” (p. 39). He then contrasts neoliberalism against social democratic liberalism in which Americans focused on improving lives of each other collectively. In this chapter, he provided a historical narrative that included connections to ideologies in the past, and offered examples of how and when these ideologies diverged. This description was more than a list of historical events, rather he insightfully portrays *how* these ideas altered western society. He takes the reader through classical liberalism, social democratic liberalism, and neoliberalism thus providing a necessary background to those unfamiliar with the history of these ideologies. For example, he described the evolution of classical liberalism by portraying the intersection of government action, economical forces, and social theorists and then elucidated the transition of classical liberalism into social democratic liberalism. As previously mentioned, he notes liberalism “operates within a marketplace that includes services such as education, health care, and pensions.” However, as with other authors in Part I, he finds fault in this ideology because it focuses on the workplace causing Americans to confuse employment as our life rather than a means to live life. Hursh then critiqued the policies that shaped our current neoliberal education reforms and pointed to the failures and contradictions of this ideology.

Buras also discussed little known historical information about specific individuals and events that promoted neoliberal/neoconservative ideologies in the United States.

Generally, the story of neoconservatism begins with the 1960s. The new left inspires a new right, including a neoconservative faction focused on the restoration of a common cultural tradition and a disciplined, stable, and socially cohesive nation. But long before they were new rightists, and many neoconservatives were actually old leftists, a fact that helps to explain the synthesis of concerns to both the left and right within neoconservatism (p. 59).

She continues her analysis by tracing the neo-conservative ideology as it matured during the 1980s and 1990s, and offers a critique of how this ideology gets manifested in the works of scholars such as E.D. Hirsch.

There are too many other examples of thoughtful ideological and historical analyses in this book to review them all such as Pinar's discussion of how the NCC's reach extends not only into our schools, but also into our bedrooms and attempts to control our understanding of gender and sexuality. By exploring various ideologies and values of the NCC, *K&P* makes an important contribution to our understanding of the ideas and ultimate goals of this powerful coalition. Gabbard's selection and organization of these chapters presents a common analytical thread that one supposes will convince the reader that the NCC's social and educational ideology and policies are detrimental to schools and society.

### *No Child Left Behind*

Another important contribution of Gabbard's are the critiques of the NCC's more specific educational agenda. In particular, several of Gabbard's authors provide compelling and thoughtful analyses of the classroom implications since the passing of Bush's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) act. Since NCLB represents the ultimate victory of the NCC's educational agenda, as one might expect, it is a topic addressed throughout the text. It's mentioned on the very first page of the *Forward* (p. xiii) and lastly by Four Arrows on page 499 with numerous references to this policy among all 44 chapters.

For example, Anijar and Gabbard explored the historical context for high-stakes testing and "evidence-based" education (EBE). They reviewed the origins of the "accountability movement" during the Reagan administration, and illuminated how it was used to control teachers' work. They make a convincing argument that this so called movement to "improve

teaching,” was in fact a “campaign to undermine teachers’ unions, leading to the eventual reduction of teachers’ salaries and elimination of teacher education” (p. 173). The latter goal represented an effort to minimize or eliminate future teachers’ exposure to progressive views of education.

One of many interesting discussions was Atkinson’s “curious contradictions.” He noted the success of the NCC’s emerging educational agenda even prior to NCLB’s passage. Specifically, the Reading Excellence Act in 1997 was passed despite its obvious contradictions, through its use of flawed information based on questionable “research,” and the use of “specialists” of which the majority were not academics in reading but rather “scientists” called in to voice their opinions about producing global citizens through reading instruction.

Hinchey also discusses the NCC’s effort to control language arts education. She described teachers being forced to use methods that they know are not effective for learning to write thoughtfully and denying teachers power to use their own pedagogical and curricular judgments. This external control produces a situation that “stifles creativity and denies them a sense of professionalism” (p. 342). She goes on to note that this micro management of teachers and their students impact poor areas in particular where they are forced to strictly follow government-created instructional programs. She also illustrates that these policies significantly limits children’s curiosity and threatens to constrain their learning to the mastery of specific literacy skills. The overall impact has been a dramatic narrowing of the curriculum. Teaching something other than math, reading, and writing skills is extremely difficult in many classrooms (especially at the elementary levels). There is virtually no time given to pursuing more stimulating topics of study let alone allowing the interests of their students to inform their curricular decisions. Teachers, she suggests, are simply too busy following legislated curricula

which seems designed to remove all the joy out of schooling.

Bilingual educators, Cadiero-Kaplan and Berta-Avila, raised troubling concerns as a result of NCLB's impact on classrooms by presenting one of the NCC's social agendas; namely, the call for English to be the official language of the country and making it difficult for immigrant children (legal or undocumented) from obtaining the language instruction they need. The NCC's policies have not supported bilingual education that ironically would be the very global citizens they describe as necessary for America to survive in this market-driven world.

Critiques such as these continued throughout the book. Through thoughtful analysis, the reader comes to understand every facet of NCLB including but not limited to: its goals; purposes; views from teachers, parents, and students; the political bipartisan nature of it; corporate influences; distorted and highly selective use of educational research; the political associations; convoluted notions of equity; and its future impact on our children if this policy continues unaltered. By focusing on NCLB from a wide diversity of individuals' experiences, it clearly illuminates the misguided educational thinking of this coalition.

### *Alternative Visions*

Providing alternatives to the education fostered by the NCC is another contribution from this text. Throughout the text and in every chapter in parts IV and V, the authors described alternative visions for our children's education. Most of these chapters encourage educators to not give up hope, to transcend the current expectations of the NCC's schooling agenda, and to evoke passion in teachers and their students. Whether it was Kesson's insistence on involving the community, Atkinson's call for teachers to become more politically active in order to expose "the sleight-of-hand manipulation of the campaign to undermine the future of American schoolchildren" (p. 323), the message is clear. There are ways to educate that go well beyond

the teaching-to-test-mentality that continues to deny our children a meaningful and intellectually engaging education.

One alternative vision in particular is Leaños and Villarreal's discussion of art education, arguably one of the most neglected areas in education as a result of the current NCLB policy. Through their concentration on assessment measures and standards-based instruction, the NCC has attempted to silence art educators. Leaños and Villarreal provided an example of Leaños' course that "engaged students in the history of Chicana/o social art intervention in public spaces" (p. 362). By creating murals and performing street theater, Leaños' students embodied an education of hope. In an interesting turn, this class created an art project on the fallen U.S. Ranger and football star, Patrick Tillman. The class was deemed "anti-American" by the media and an effort was made to change Leaños' teaching strategies. Despite this effort, Leaños used this attack to teach her students about free speech in the classroom. Leaños and Villarreal offered this alternative vision and called for art educators to use the media to create change by "thinking globally but acting locally" (p. 363-364).

Even authors in fields that have received significant financial support from the NCC's educational policies such as math, science, and language arts education, also provide an alternatives to the NCC's conservative agenda. For example, Munk in a subtle way described a similar vision to Leaños and Villarreal's for math education. He expects the students and teachers will act to address social problems through our educational system. Similarly, Dystra has visions of alternative science education. He simply stated, "society has changed in the past. It will change in the future" (p. 394), and he called on teachers and students to be at the center of these efforts.

Several authors described situations where their alternative vision has already been manifested. For example, Cadiero-Kaplan and Berta-Avila, pointed to Californians who worked to advocate for educational equity. They have been successful in informing policy on bilingual education and teacher preparation programs. In this way, Gabbard and the more than 50 other authors inspire not only hope but presented examples of how these alternative visions are currently being manifested in spite of the NCC's power over our country's education.

### Questions and Concerns

Although we found many of *K&P's* essays illuminating, we also have several questions and/or concerns in response their the authors' analyses. In some cases, these concerns emerge from simply having a different perspective, ideology, or view of history than several of the authors found in this text. In other cases, our questions arise from speculations related to the efficacy of such a collection for convincing educators and lay people that progressive ideas and values related to schools and society are superior then the ideas that have emerged from the NCC. Due to space limitations, we focus our discussion on two interconnected issues: 1) The rhetoric and terminology used by many of these authors, and 2) the problems embedded in situating our desires for a more socially just and democratic education and society within the "Marxist tradition." We conclude this review with a brief speculation about the efficacy of this book in fostering more progressive views of our schools and society.

### *Rhetoric*

As pragmatists (Goodman, 2006), we question the rhetoric used by many of *K&P's* authors. The language we use is not merely, as many like to think, semantics. Words (like knowledge) have power. They can be used to inspire and give direction to our actions. They can

encourage change or the status quo. They can also be alienating if too far removed from the lives and values of the intended audience.

Given the power of language and the audience identified by Gabbard in his introduction, we question the wisdom of generating a critique of neo-liberal/neo-conservative ideology that implies the alternative lies in Marxist inspired, socialisms. As Hill notes, this terminology has been demonized in the United States. Contextualizing efforts to resist and offer alternatives to the NCC's educational agenda by implying that "socialism" offers a much improved context for progressive educational practices, curriculum, and organization seems to us counter-productive. In doing so, these authors leave the impression that "capitalism" is monolithic, inherently evil, and thus needs to be completely destroyed and replaced by a socialist economic system. Short of this radical alteration in our economics, many of these authors suggest that progressive educational reform is doomed. An analogy to this rhetoric might be found in efforts to reform the politics of the Middle East by suggesting that Islam needs to be completely removed in order for these nations to become "healthy." To imply that capitalism and liberal democracy must be replaced in order to create a more socially just society, even if accurate (which we doubt), makes little sense given the ideological history of the United States. As Rorty (1998, pp. 48 & 51) argued, the United States has its own history of striving for social and economic justice.

We . . . did not need Marx to show us the need for (income) redistribution, or to tell us that the state was often little more than the executive committee of the rich and powerful. . . . It would be a good thing if the next generation of American leftists found . . . little resonance in the names of Karl Marx and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. . . . It would be even better . . . if the names of Ely and Croly, Dreiser and Debs, A. Philip Randolph and John L. Lewis were more familiar to these leftists. .

. . . For it would be a big help to American efforts for social justice if each new generation were able to think of itself as participating in a movement which has lasted for more than a century, and has served human liberty well. . . . Each new generation of students ought to think of American leftism as having a long and glorious history. They should be able to see, as Whitman and Dewey did, the struggle for social justice as central to their country's moral identity.

It is useful to remember that promoting "the general welfare" of our citizens was one of the reasons given for replacing the *Articles of Confederation* with the *Constitution*. Throughout our history the most successful progressive movements (e.g., abolition, workers' rights, women's suffrage and rights, ecology movement, civil rights) in our history have been contextualized within the narrative of "our values" and improving rather than destroying our nation (e.g., Banaszak, 1996; Buechler, 2000; Kline, 1997; Staggenborg, 1998). We question the wisdom of *K&P's* authors expressing their desire to create a more socially just society that seems to be unnecessarily "alien" to our nation's history, values, and ideals. As pragmatists, we would argue that looking at our own nation's efforts to become more socially, economically, and politically just and inclusive would be a better context for confronting the current neoliberal/neoconservative educational and political agendas.

Perhaps drawing upon the Marxist tradition to make their argument would be worth the difficulties it presents for a U.S. readership if we felt that this tradition offered a significantly superior polity than that found in the tradition of liberal democracies of Europe, the Americas, the South Pacific, and Asia, but we were not convinced by the authors in Gabbard's book that it does so. Like Dewey (Moreno & Frey, 1985), we reject the claim that the Marxist tradition is clearly the best one to draw upon in critiquing and providing alternatives to *laissez-faire* (neo-

liberal) capitalism, liberal democracy, and the education of young people. Similarly, we had a difficult time reconciling the inclusion of the European Union and its “social democracies” within the “socialist camp.” As we discuss in greater detail below, the differences between these polities and 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist experiments is too great from our perspective to suggest that they are all within the “Marxist tradition” in spite of the attraction Marxism has had among intellectuals.

Although we agree with Hill and others that oppression is built into capitalism and that liberal democracies are frustratingly slow and incomplete in addressing problems of social and economic justice, as Gouldner (1979, 1980) convincingly argued (and as we will discuss in more detail in the next section of this review), there is also much oppression “built into” Marxism. While Gabbard’s authors make efforts to distance themselves from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marxist experiments, none offer a persuasive case that efforts to “build socialism” outside of liberal democracies won’t end up in creating polities that are totalitarian at worst and authoritarian at best. Schooling in Marxist inspired nations actually reflect much of the neoliberal/neoconservative agenda including: high stakes testing, nationally standardized curricula, an emphasis on rote memorization, placing curriculum decisions in the hands of politicians, an emphasis on children learning “correct answers” to even complex, moral issues, an emphasis on their nation’s “exceptionalism,” and repression of any educators who challenges the country’s economic and political leadership. Put simply, we found the rhetorical implication that “Marxist” inspired education (or society in general) is inherently superior than the education found in liberal democracies unconvincing and counter-productive.

Another concern we have about the rhetoric in several of the chapters is related to their “tone.” In particular, it seemed to us that many of these chapters are written with a “voice of authority” that we find problematic. Of course, speaking with the “father’s voice” has a long history among academics. Within the scientific community, individuals recognize that current ideas (truths) will likely be supplanted by other ideas as scholars continue their research. Yet, when written, research often has a tone of absolutism. Unfortunately, many scholars outside of the scientific arena have adopted this “voice of authority” even when discussing highly complex, theoretical, and contradictory social phenomena. Take some of the following quotes as just a few of the many comments stated with great certainty that we found dubious.

Members of the capitalist class do recognize that they survive in dominance *as a class* (author’s emphasis) whatever their skin color, or dreams, or multicultural subjectivities and histories of hurt and triumph - they survive precisely because they do know they are a class. . . *for* themselves. . . . And they govern in their own interests. (pp. xv-xvi)<sup>1</sup>

This analysis (Marxist) . . . demonstrates that class conflict, which is an essential feature of capitalist society, will result in an overthrow of capitalism . . . and the coming to power of the working class. (p. 18)

. . . working conditions under capitalism ruined human beings as well as the natural world around the work sites - and beyond. (p. 32)

Never before in American history has the United States been so distrusted and held in less credibility in the international arena. (p. 79)

*Only* (our emphasis) a conscious working class can end the rationale that greed is good, that war is necessary evil . . . . There is no solution without a revolution by the workers of the world. (p. 481)

Do all business owners and stock holders always place their individual economic interests before other potentially progressive public concerns (e.g., racial and gender justice and equality, more equitable distribution of wealth, fair and honest treatment of employees, support of progressive

politicians and media outlets, support for homosexuals). Are all individuals in a particular economic class monolithic in their public interests? Given the environmental record of Marxist experiments, can we really believe that the ecology of our world would be safer under single party, socialist polities? Are there really no class conflicts in “socialist” nations? Do countries dislike the United States because it is capitalist or because it (at this particular time in history) is the most powerful nation in the world and pursued a reckless foreign policy under the second Bush administration? Is the “industrial working class” really the “savior” of all humanity rather than just another self interested class of people? Throughout the text, we found the tendency to speak with certainty. As we look back, we see this “voice of authority” in our own work from time to time. As a result, we would all benefit from Rorty’s (1989, pp. 73-74) insight . . .

that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, . . . (which) puts them (liberal ironists) in the position which Sartre call “meta-stable:” never quite able to take themselves seriously because they are always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.

Too many Marxian scholars, from our perspective, speak and write as if their view of the world and history explains what is “really occurring” rather than expressing a perspective based upon limited and selective information.

Our final rhetorical concern is that several of the authors write as if there is nothing redeeming about the United States (or Great Britain). Their work reflects a type of “exceptionalism” (the United States is exceptionally evil) we find counter productive given Gabbard’s stated purpose. Although there is much to criticize about the United States (as there is

about all nation states), there is a tone of unmitigated damnation found in several chapters of *K&P*. This tone leaves these authors open to the charge of being blindly anti-American. Several authors leave an impression that the United States is beyond redemption, and that the world would be much improved if our current political and economic systems were destroyed. For example, as previously mentioned, Hill's assessment that the United States and Great Britain are so conservative that they should not be considered a "social democracy" in spite of these nations' extensive (although as always, incomplete) welfare systems, laws to protect worker rights, expansion of voting rights, progressive income taxes, anti-monopoly laws, environmental protection laws, government pensions, anti-discrimination laws, and international aide among many other policies. Although each of these policies can be criticized for not "doing enough," are these two countries' politics and economics so different from those in France, Canada, Spain, Italy, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Germany, Poland, The Netherlands, or Scandinavia, just to name a few, as to be singled out as pariahs?<sup>2</sup> Are the corporations (and laws governing these corporations) in these countries (and even those in socialist China) significantly different than those found in the United State and Great Britain?

Suggesting that the United States is the "great villain" of the world seems unconvincing at best and propaganda at worst. For example, Britt's characteristics of fascism that he finds in the United States could easily be found, more or less, in every nation of the world. Although we agree that neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies is a danger to the freedoms, civil rights, and inclusivity that we desire for our country, to suggest that the United States is "fascist" seemed absurd to us. Our reading of history suggests that communism and fascism are far more similar than fascism and contemporary, liberal democracies with their multi-party and

dependable elections, regulated capitalist economies, and social welfare programs. As Furet (1999, p. 191) argued in his comprehensive history of communism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

Bolshevism (Leninism) and National Socialism shared a religion of power, the most openly professed in the world. To conquer and retain power, any means were good, not only against enemies but against friends as well, even assassination - a common practice for both parties, regimes, and dictators. Nevertheless, even this precious power originated in a superior logic - the end it was intended to fulfill, that of fulfilling history, hidden in the tumult of conflict, revealed by ideology. Terror, no longer reserved for real or imagined reprisals against the enemy, became a daily practice of government. The purpose was to impose universal fear, the key to realizing the future, whose secret was the exclusive possession of the Supreme Leader, followed by the Party. The fact that Communism and Fascism assigned contradictory roles to history and reason - the emancipation of the proletariat versus the domination of the Aryan race - mattered little. Though not insignificant on a philosophical level, that distinction detracts nothing from the similarity of the nature and workings of the two political systems.

Although he (1999, p. 209) recognized that communists were also “anti-fascist” who viewed “fascism as a mere variation of bourgeois capitalist dictatorship,” these two ideologically based socio-political systems were actually very similar (at least during the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Both communism and fascism openly express contempt individual rights, civil liberties, and “disdain for liberal democracy, along with the revolutionary conviction that the age of the bourgeoisie was over” (Furet, 1999, p. 191). Although there are fascist (and neo-fascist) thinking citizens in the United States (e.g., race supremacists, right wing militias) and quasi-fascist policies occasionally get passed by a state or the federal government such as Arizona’s recently passed anti-immigrant law and G.W. Bush’s suspension of habeas corpus (which was overturned by the conservative Supreme Court), if the United States was anywhere close to being “fascist” in the tradition of mid-20th century Germany, Spain, or Italy, then *K&P* would never have been published. Although the United States might one day might embrace fascism, we were not

convinced by Britt's efforts that we were close to that point even during the last Bush administration. Of all "isms" tossed around these days, fascism is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and overused labels. Those who seek to describe the United States in these terms are certainly presenting a very narrow vision of this nation and its people.

Words are extremely important in liberal democracies where citizens must be convinced of the worthiness of ideas rather than merely told what to think by their government. In this light, the rhetoric used by many of Gabbard's authors seems counter productive if our purpose is to provide a discourse that our citizens can embrace and that can foster a more progressive orientation towards our schools and society. We agree that every aspect of the United States can and should be critiqued. However, unless one believes that, on a fundamental level, the United States is an illegitimate polity due to its shortcomings, then we would be wise to be extremely careful about the rhetoric we use to critique our nation and schools when engaging our fellow citizens in conversations regarding the education of our children. We suspect that the rhetoric used to critique capitalism and the United States in *K&P* will not appeal to many outside a relatively small number of radical leftists intellectuals and "true believers." We fear that much of the rhetoric found in several chapters of this book will likely result in unnecessary resistance and play into the hands of those who seek to delegitimize many of the sound, progressive ideas found in this volume due to contextualizing them in the Marxist tradition.

### *Marxism*

As previously mentioned, the Marxist rhetoric used in *K&P* would not be of concern if we agreed that this tradition offered a significantly superior understanding of and ideas upon

which to base our children's education. With all due respect to the authors in this text, we find ourselves in agreement with Rorty (1998, pp. 41-42),

It is impossible to discuss leftist politics in the twentieth century, in any country, without saying something about Marxism. For Marxism was not only a catastrophe for all the countries in which Marxists took power, but a disaster for the reformist Left in all the countries in which they did not. . . . For us, Americans, it is important not to let Marxism influence the story we tell about our own Left. We should repudiate the Marxist insinuation that only those who are convinced capitalism must be overthrown can count as leftists, and that everybody else is a wimpy liberal, a self-deceiving bourgeois reformer.

Although we agree with many of the specific criticisms leveled against the NCC's socio-political, economic, and educational policies and practices, we were not convinced, in light of history, that basing our society and schools on "the Marxist tradition" will result in a socially just, prosperous, equitable, environmentally sustainable, or democratic society/schools.

One question worth raising concerns the socially constructed dualism created by several of *K&P's* authors between capitalism and socialism. These authors often seem to conflate the NCC's view of capitalism with capitalism per se. To many of these authors, "capitalism" appears as an architectonic, uniform, and destructive economic system, and they tend to ignore the historical development that (with perhaps the exception of North Korea) the few remaining 20<sup>th</sup> century, "socialist" states now have market economies to some degree. Put simply, there are as many "capitalisms" being practiced in the world today as there are "socialisms."

One doesn't need to be an economist to recognize that *laissez-faire* capitalism advocated by the NCC is different than the capitalism found in many European nations, and the capitalism found in the United States during the "New Deal" and "Great Society" periods of our history of which many elements are found even today despite the NCC's attempts to destroy them (e.g.,

privatizing Social Security, removing and not enforcing regulations over business). Keynesian capitalism is far different than the economic ideas of Friedrich Hayek. No country's economic "system" remains constant over time. The vast majority of modern nation states now have "mixed" economies where the state owns and operates some commercial enterprises and others are privately owned and managed. (Even in the former the Soviet Union, this economic mixture was the core idea behind Lenin's *New Economic Policy* of 1921.) For example, socialist China has encouraged private ownership of businesses for over two decades, and as a result, millions of Chinese have escaped generations of extreme poverty (e.g., Faure, 2006; Shirk, 1993). Vietnam has also promoted capitalist enterprise (Nguyen, 2009), and it seems that Raul Castro, as the new leader of Cuba, is slowly moving this island nation in a similar direction (Bardach, 2009). On the other hand, as several authors noted, a number of nations in Latin America are moving in the direction that the Atlee government established in England after WWII (Booth, 1995) in which the state appropriates the major natural resources and businesses of the country (what Lenin called the "commanding heights" of the economy), but otherwise the country's economy remains capitalistic.

As pragmatists, we agree with Hill that what a country (or national leader) calls its economic system (e.g., socialist, communist, capitalist, market socialism, socialist capitalism, state capitalism) matters little to us. These debates boil down to how much of and in what ways a given nation's economy is owned, controlled, and/or regulated by the government, and how the people in this government are selected (e.g., single party hierarchies, multi-party electoral democracy, theocratic democracy, military dictatorship, monarchies). History suggests that if an economy is overly regulated or controlled by the government, it is often extremely difficult or

impossible for individuals to start and develop their own businesses and often in these polities, the economy stagnates (De Soto, 2000). History also suggests that in the vast majority of nations in which the government owned and controlled most of the economy, the standard of living for the population languishes and even falls over time. On the other hand, if a given government doesn't regulate enough, or when needed for the common good, appropriate (or become the lender of last resort for) some businesses, then it is likely to result in a situation in which only the rich live comfortably at the economic expense of the vast majority of a nation's population (Keynes, 1926). Similar to Rorty (1991), we also think that establishing a strong, liberal democracy (Barber, 1998; Sen, 1984, 2000; Zakaria, 2003) takes precedent over building a society based on a given economic ideology. All working governments establish rules and regulations for conducting economic activity, and we do not presume to know the ideal mixture between private and direct government ownership, control, and/or regulation of commercial activity at any given time in history. However, we do question the wisdom of socially constructing a sharp divide among the economies of the world into two opposing camps. To us, the dualism advocated by several of *K&P's* authors seem unnecessary and turns scholars into little more than cheer leaders for the "good guys" (i.e., people and nations that call themselves "socialists").

Another concern we have regarding these authors' attraction to the Marxist tradition is their lack of discussion regarding the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marxist experiments. This non-discussion is certainly the "elephant in the room." Clearly, these authors reject the totalitarianism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist inspired experiments. They attempt to distance themselves from the extreme cruelty perpetrated by these nations at various times in their history. Most of these authors might

be called Gramscian (Gramsci, 1971) or “critical theory” Marxists (Jay, 1973). As such, they reject much of what Marx wrote in *Das Kapital* such as his assertion that he was a “scientist” who would explain the meaning and purpose of all human history (i.e., the final reconciliation of wo/man with wo/man), his belief in historical teleology (i.e., the inevitable hegemony of communism throughout the world), his base/superstructure construction of modern society, his reductionism (i.e., all human cruelty and social problems are ultimately due to capitalism), his economic determinism (although several authors seem to embrace “relative economic theory” which argues that while the economy is not “all powerful” it is “in the end” the most influential sphere of society), and his utopianism. It can, of course, be asked if one can reject so much of Marx’s most ambitious work and still be working within the “Marxist tradition” (Hook, 1975).

Their stance seems similar to that of Rosa Luxemburg (1962 [1918]), Emma Goldman (1923), and Herbert Marcuse (1985 [1958]), namely, that these totalitarian states represent an aberration from Marxism rather than as a problem built directly into Marx’s theory. In short, the argument goes: Lenin (or for some, Stalin) and those who followed in their footsteps (e.g., Eastern Europe; Mao’s China; Fidel’s Cuba; Mugabe’s Zimbabwe; Arab socialism of Hussien’s Iraq, Nasser’s Egypt, al-Assad’s Syria, & Gaddafi’s Lybia) just didn’t understand Marx enough or contingent conditions prevented them from “getting it right.” Similar to Gouldner (1979, 1980), the “outlaw Marxist” (Chriss, 1999), we find this position unwarranted. Given our concern that the historical failures to put Marxism into practice is rooted in the theory itself, makes it necessary to briefly explore what Gouldner referred to as its “nightmares.”

Gouldner (1980) argued, all grand social and political theories (and the societal structures that are manifested from these theories) contain within them hidden conceptual and practical

implications which have not been recognized by the theoretician(s). Philosophical “nightmares” are anomalies that undermine the very core of the parent philosophy and yet are embedded in it. Given space limitations, we focus on a four of Marx’s nightmares.

The first nightmare is the contention that the abolition of private ownership over the means of production will result in a classless society and eliminate the dominance of society by a relatively small, elite class of individuals. Gouldner (1979) documents that the real class struggle of the modern age has not been between the industrial working class and the bourgeoisie, but between the bourgeoisie and the intellectual/intelligentsia classes.<sup>3</sup>

Although Marx constructed a philosophy which stated that the industrial working class should assume the central power in society, it was a theory that in reality was attractive to and in the interest of the intellectual/intelligentsia class. Rather than have capital be the most powerful influence in modern society, Marx implied that “reason” and “scientific judgment” assume this role. Gouldner (1979) thoughtfully asks, whose interests are served in a society where power is distributed mostly to those who understand and participate in the creation and re-creation of theory formation, philosophy, science, and social analysis? He provides compelling evidence that it is the small class of those individuals in any given society who have talent for intellectual rather than physical work. Gouldner (1979, 1980) notes that communist revolutions and the subsequent governments that were formed in these countries were initiated and controlled by this intellectual/intelligentsia class; not the industrial workers of society. As Lenin (1988 [1902]) argued, Marx’s “working class” simply was not able to move beyond “trade union consciousness,” and as a result, a professional party of people who studied and believed in

Marxism was needed in order to lead workers in overthrowing capitalism and building socialism. Few, if any, leaders of Marxist revolutions were authentic proletarians (Gouldner, 1979).

The nightmare of Marx's theory is that it does not result in a workers' utopia, but in a society governed by a different (not the bourgeoisie) but equally small, elite class (intellectuals/intelligentsia). What makes this nightmare particularly frightening is Marx's call for a transition period of "crude communism" prior to the emergence of his utopian vision (Avineri, 1974). During this transition, a super-powerful state (dictatorship of the proletariat) is created for the purpose of nationalizing the means of production, making everyone an employee of the government, and educating the masses to reject bourgeois ideology and recognize their "true" socialist natures (i.e., the new man). Marx believed that there was nothing to fear from this all-powerful government because once private property is destroyed, people (within a generation or two) will no longer be victims of "false consciousness" and the state would simply "wither away." However, as Habermas (1975), Gouldner (1980), and even at one time Marx (1977 [1851]), himself, noted, the state never "withers away." The result is not only a society governed by an elite group, but one that quickly becomes totalitarian in nature.<sup>4</sup>

A second nightmare embedded in Marx's philosophy is closely related to the previous discussion. For the purposes of this paper, we'll refer to it as the "ultimate stakes" justification. Marx was filled with moral outrage by the oppressive and powerless conditions under which the vast majority of humans lived during his lifetime. The masses of people were excluded from political power, and when they organized (e.g., unions) to improve their fortune through civil disruptions (e.g., strikes), they were often repressed by force. From Marx's perspective, the only recourse was revolutionary (rather than piecemeal) change that would completely do away with

capitalism and bourgeois ideology. More important, this revolution would usher in a totally new and humane epoch, free from class division. It would be an epoch in which people's "true" nature of love, kindness, and selflessness would be allowed to finally blossom, and their avarice, self-interest, and greed would no longer exist.

Unfortunately, immediately after this proletariat revolution there would be an entire generation contaminated by the previous social order. People who could not adjust or who would resist this new world order would either have to change their ways (and thoughts) or be removed from society (i.e., flee, be ostracized, or killed). History, after all, is filled with cruelty and violence during revolutionary change. This brutality, it was believed, was (is) warranted because it is for the ultimate and eternal emancipation of the entire human race. Implanted in Marx's philosophy is the nightmare that an entire generation (or two or three) might be intellectually, morally, and physically sacrificed, but this offering is sanctified because it will result in the end of oppression. Given this embedded justification for revolutionary change, not just of society but of human nature, it is easy to understand the abuses of power by the leaders of those countries that experimented with putting Marx's philosophy into practice during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gouldner (1979, 1980) convincingly shows that in the single party, Marxist states' repression of political dissent, free speech, independent group associations; terror campaigns, killing of real and imagined enemies of the state; and the establishment of slave labor camps emerge ironically from the Marxist/Leninist goal of "ending history," the domination of one class over others (e.g., Burgler, 1990; Courtois, Werth, Panne, Paczkowski, Bartosek, & Margolin, 1999; Dolot, 1985; Meisner, 1999).

Third, and as previously mentioned, the Marxist proposition that the abolishment of capitalism would result in the creation of an all-encompassing working class and the end of class struggle. While on the surface Marx's classless society appears idyllic, it is, as Gouldner (1980) remarked, another potential nightmare. Specifically, what does this "universal" class do to those who do not, for whatever reason, identify with it? A social theory that asserts the end of classes and class conflict with the changing of an economic or political system seems potentially treacherous in that it provides a moral justification to squelch opposition since, in the ideal society, there should be no class antagonisms. However, if there is only one legitimate class in society, then anyone who disagrees with those who claim to represent this all-inclusive class (and who have the power to defend this representation) can easily be condemned as outlaws, rather than people who merely have different perspectives or collective identities. The contention that people should have agency to create their own individual and collective identities is anathema to the classical Marxist vision of society.

Marxist inspired states often "otherized" citizens who voiced dissent from the state's sanctioned ideology (Lenin, 1934), and justified the implementation of "eliminationism" (Goldhagen, 2009). Otherization refers to degrading a sub-group of the total population and defining them as outside the circle of legal and even moral obligation. Eliminationism justifies the removal or killing of an entire sub-group of society by suggesting they are not really worthy of living in the "new world." American Indians during the European colonization of the continent, industrial workers at the beginning of the industrial revolution, Jews in much of Europe prior to the end of WWII, black South Africans under apartheid, and persons of color prior to the civil rights legislation in the United States are just a few of many obvious examples

of people who have been otherized or suffered eliminationism in feudal and capitalist societies. However, the otherization and elimination of people occurred often in 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marxist inspired states. The clearest illustration is the fate of the *bourgeoisie*. From a Marxist perspective, merchants did not have a right to exist in a “socially just” society. This practice of otherization eventually encompassed anyone who disagreed with Marxist rulers in these states such as the Kulaks in the Soviet Union, non-Maoist during the Cultural Revolution in China, or urbanites in Pol Pot’s Kampuchea. The otherization of citizens based on religion, ethnicity, and ideology significantly undermined Marxism’s viability as a progressive political project.

The last nightmare to be discussed concerns the illusion that “Marxism” will solve the problem of scarcity and establish prosperity for all. Marx argued that the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century developments in science and technology (which fueled the industrial revolution) created a totally new situation in which scarcity and thus the moral justification for the unequal distribution of wealth and power would soon be eliminated. Marx believed science and technology, rather than the capitalist mode of production, made it possible to create prosperity.

However, with the benefit of history, Marx’s claim that technology alone could become the source of potential prosperity can no longer be given credence. As Gouldner (1979, 1980) and others (e.g., Kornai, 1992; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Miller, 1989; Sen, 1984; Wlodzimierz & Laski, 1989) have argued, central planning and control of the economy largely failed. Initially, economic accomplishments were made under Marxism while the population was filled with revolutionary passion.<sup>5</sup> However, as zeal abated, the central planning of the economy led, in every experiment, to gross inefficiencies, environmental abuse, bureaucratization, poor quality control over production, extremely inept uses of resources (including human labor), cronyism

and nepotism, extensive worker alienation, and eventually economic stagnation (Kornai, 1992). In light of history, Gouldner (1979, 1980) suggested that scarcity and prosperity require the continual revolutionizing of the means and mode of production, and these conditions have been evinced only in capitalist systems. Marxism's dream of creating a society in which the rational planning of the economy would lead the way out of scarcity eventually tuned out to be an illusion. As Gouldner (1980, p. 382) stated,

Private property [private control over the means of production] *really* [his emphasis] turns out to be the basis of civilization.... It is the *rise* [his emphasis] of the bourgeoisie that is the turning point of history, not their expropriation.... [S]ocialism does not mean that the proletariat becomes the ruling class, but that the state becomes the dominant force—the infrastructure—and its bureaucracy the new ruling class.... [T]his new collectivist state brings a new stagnation to the economy, rather than a new productivity.

He goes on to note that prosperity requires a proprietary class, and as Hobson (1900, 1920) argued long ago, capitalism and the bourgeoisie (along with a progressive tax system and government programs designed to redistribute wealth and prevent the exploitation of workers) are central to creating prosperous and humane societies. As Aronson (1992, p. 27) asked, “Where is a prosperous and democratic alternative to capitalism?”

There are many other nightmares found in Marxism as there are with any all-encompassing ideology. We are perplexed by those authors who seem to think some type of “re-tooled Marxism” (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000, p. 32) is possible outside of liberal democracy. Marxism as presented by several of Gabbard's authors is not particularly different from leftist social analysis in general. Its central concerns of economic injustice, equity, cultural hegemony, the role of government in society, and the individual's relationship to nature and society have long since become part of leftist social theorizing. As Roemer (1986, p. 2) stated,

Why should this kind of work be called Marxist? I am not sure that it should; but the label does convey at least that certain fundamental insights are viewed as coming from Marx. Coming from Marx? Perhaps in a vague manner, but these ideas are certainly not unique to Marx or the tradition that bears his name.

As we previously suggested, this effort to keep Marxism central to our shared concern for the weak, oppressed, and impoverished seems unnecessary and counter productive. In the United States, Marxism, socialism, and communism all have too much baggage left over from the Cold War to be given such a central role in addressing problems of marginalization, democracy, and equity. If, as we previously stated, there was something particularly beneficial to be found in “the Marxist tradition,” we would understand these authors’ desire to give this nomenclature such a prominent position in their analysis. However, as Tuchman (1986, p. 251-252) noted,

History played her greatest betrayal on Karl Marx. Never was a prophet so sure of his premises, never were believers so absolutely convinced of a predicted outcome, never was there an interpretation of history that seemed so foolproof. Analyzing the riddle of the nineteenth century: that the greater the material progress, the wider and deeper the resulting poverty, a process which could only end, he decided, in the violent collapse of the existing order brought on by revolution. . . . Marx’s analysis was so compelling that it seemed impossible history could follow any other course. His postulates were accepted . . . as if they had been graven on the tablets of Sinai. . . . Its (Marxism’s) influence was tremendous, incalculable, continuing. The founder’s facts were correct, his thinking logical and profound; he was right in everything but his conclusions. . . . The working class grew progressively better, not worse, off. Capitalism did not collapse. Revolution came in the least, not the most, industrialized country (ies). Under collectivism the state did not wither but extended itself in power and function and in its grip on society. History, ignoring Marx, followed her own mysterious logic, and went her own way.

As a result, we, like others (e.g., Moreno, & Frey, 1985) question the effort to maintain “Marxism” as the core theory for generating American educational scholarship and practice.

## Conclusion

We conclude our review with a few words regarding this text's usefulness as a source of understanding and as an attempt to encourage others to engage in scholarly discourse around the NCC's educational and social agenda. First, this book will be useful to anyone interested in radical leftist or socialist scholarship. The authors of these chapters are knowledgeable and articulate. They offer insights into the NCC's history and ideological orientation as well as the ramifications of its educational centerpiece, namely, Bush's NCLB policy that the Obama administration seems determined to largely continue even in the face of its obvious failures and negative consequences for the education of our children and democracy (Ratvitch, 2010). However, since many of the authors contextualize their analyses and ideas within the Marxist tradition, we wonder if Gabbard's desire to reach out beyond those who are already working within this highly problematic tradition will be successful. Many of the chapters will be useful in both undergraduate and graduate courses in schools of education and/or departments of sociology, but we are doubtful that outside of academia, it will have much impact largely due to many of his contributors' socialist rhetoric and ideology. This limited impact is, from our perspective, unfortunate. Although impressive intellectually, *K&P* represents a missed opportunity. One of the failures of the radical, scholarly left in the United States has been its inability to generate a progressive educational discourse that appeals to the majority of our citizens rather than merely affirming the ideology of other radical academics. Of course, we understand the tradition of "spectatorship" that Dewey (1920) argued against in which scholars are "freed" from the ramifications of making their ideas relevant to the everyday lives in a given polity. Although many of the chapters in this book reflect this positionality of "spectator," there are many other authors that do seem cognizant that their work should appeal to the wider

audience that Gabbard mentions in his introduction. Perhaps the next generation of progressive thinking educational scholars will be more successful than our generation has been in convincing our fellow citizens of the benefits of providing children with a progressive education and a more progressive society.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We found this view of a unified class acting in consort difficult to accept. As Bernstein, Engels' protégée, noted by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "The bourgeoisie is a highly complex class which is composed of a large number of strata with very divergent . . . interests" (quoted in Gay, 1979 [1952], p. 216). For example, many in the English bourgeoisie and intellectual classes joined industrial workers in their advocacy to establish unions and collective bargaining, create a progressive tax system, redistribute wealth to fund government programs aimed at alleviating the cruel working conditions of early industrial capitalism, and revise capitalism in ways to produce wealthier middle and working classes (e.g., Hobson, 1900, 1920; Webb, 1901).

<sup>2</sup> As Zakaria (2008) notes, in a relatively short time, the United States will be just one of several (6-8) "centers of power" around the world. In addition, the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, now ranks Canada as "more free" (less socialist) in terms of the economy than the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Intellectuals typically include individuals who participate directly in scholarly discourse such as professors, philosophers, theologians, scientists, authors, and other researchers. Intelligentsia include those people who utilize the information found in scholarly discourses in their work such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, social workers, engineers, journalists, musicians, artists, film makers, and politicians among others.

<sup>4</sup> Under totalitarianism politics, economics, education, media, religious practices, cultural ideology, sports, recreation, travel, and many other aspects of living are directly controlled or greatly influenced by a centralized, hierarchical, well coordinated, and relatively small, group of powerful individuals (Arendt, 1951).

<sup>5</sup> As Fernández (2000) notes, Marxist inspired, single party states must consistently excite the population's passions against various enemies and call upon their citizens to passionately proclaim the "victories" of the state in order to maintain control and hinder any opposition to their party's rule.

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