

*Comments and Arguments*

## Political Sociology and Anthropology in Education: A Manifesto for Subversive Education

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Paulo Freire strongly believed through cultural and political literacy it is possible for communities collectively to empower the powerless democratically within their own communities. History out of context is not history. The separations of History, Sociology and Anthropology into separate departments leads to a corrosion of an awareness of the connections between human suffering and power. We professors must engage in seditious sabotage within the ranks of the university and call everything into question, including higher education. We must explore the historical and sociological roots of all academic departments. We must examine who benefits and who doesn't by the underlying assumptions about how we teach sociology, anthropology and history of America. We must ask, "How does what we teach fit into the ideology of hegemony?" Education that is not subversive is not education. Thus by embracing Critical Pedagogy, built upon an activist model, we can begin to fight back.

We can do this by creating a sociology that re-examines a science of society that carefully scrutinizes what in fact is the social reality in a changing historical context. Then we use this knowledge to help the powerless to empower themselves. Political sociology that embraces anthropology and history

can be used as a tool to further the ongoing struggle for democracy. Below is offered a brief review of Marxist Political Sociology. The uses of this tool will help a community understand the origins of its social malady.

Political Sociology is the study of power in a social setting. Power is the use of political capabilities to achieve particular goals. This political contest is carried out in a competition between diverse groups, over things like economic resources. Power is used to pursue a course of action against the interests of others. In doing this, cultural symbols charged with emotional significance are central. Political sociology explores the everyday experiences of people and the shaping of their economic position in a particular society, and the world economy that molds most political issues. The state is the tool of the dominant class or classes. Under capitalism, the class that owns and controls corporate capital clearly dominates; either directly by providing leadership, or indirectly by defining the issues.

Sociology analyzes the historical juncture between worldwide trends and local issues. Anthropology gives this analysis a historical and cross-cultural reference point, supplementing sociology. Social movements are domestic affairs of local or national substance,

created out of national manifestations of international trends. The fate of a social movement must resonate with the local situation, but is ultimately determined by global events. The capitalists and their supporters gain the means of support for their economic and political dominance by maximizing the illusion that their narrow interests are the same as the national interests as a whole. This is done not only by control over economic production and distribution, but through the physical means of coercion and education. Thus, capitalism betrays its democratic justification.

Because class is the relationship between the means of production and distribution, competing classes have competing interests. Competition between capitalists is minimized through the state. The state is able to have a long-range view, not limited by short-term profits of the individual capitalist. The state can make concessions to rebellious sections of the working class to preserve capitalism, even when many capitalists may disagree.

Control over the labour of direct producers by the elite leads to resistance of domination. Ideologies of legitimacy lessen the problem, but imperfectly, because suffering is real. People create their lives through conscious action. Insight into inequalities and oppression may exist, while knowledge of possible solutions is often hidden.

Social equilibrium is always threatened. While the dominant ideology legitimates existing inequalities, different classes will develop different interpretations of this ideology. These diverse interpretations of traditional dogma develop into rival opinions.

The state is the organized control over the classes, class factions or ethnic groups. In this contest, competing groups do not have equal power. The dominant group controls the resources necessary for production, and they define the logic of stability. The rules of political behaviour are agreed upon, and to go beyond the rules is to undermine the security of the whole society. All institutions within the state including education are marshalled to limit dissent.

Market relations are taken for granted, in most economics courses. The social and behavioural sciences help create a national identity of mythic proportions, of democratic equality and economic

advancement toward the end of want within the borders of the United States, while defending these same attributes around the world, only masking a relationship of dependency and privilege. This allows educators and researchers to carry out studies that strengthen and not undermine inequality.

Any collective action by the masses, short of social revolution, requires strengthening the existing state institution and the economy upon which it rests. Every government strives for social, political and economic order. The rules that protect the ruling class are the only acceptable political behaviour, to that end.

The claim is that the state is erected, outside of the daily needs of any element within society, to protect the social whole. In fact, it is the capitalist class that is protected from individual capitalists and other classes antagonistic to capitalism. Laws reflect these relationships. This is what gives the states its measure of autonomy.

Through the control of the popular media, schools and churches, the capitalists make their interests appear to be that of all society. Popular culture supports much of the upper class values. Morality is culturally defined in this way. When education fails, coercion will be used to maintain order.

Capitalism incorporates other economies to meet its needs. The logic of capitalism redefines other moral traditions to support private property and production for profit. Alternative visions are neutralized, incorporated, or defined as subversive. Through hegemony all other ideologies seem frivolous. At present, those who would challenge the logic of capitalism are weak and poorly organized.

The political and economic institutions supporting capitalism ultimately control the universities, for the benefit of capital. The anti-government and anti-intellectual business leaders mask the fact that the university, like government, exists for the benefit of big business. Dissent among government employees or university intellectuals have, at times, been defined as irresponsible and unprofessional.

There is a resistance, by people in authority, to real emancipation of the oppressed classes. In modern society, continual use of power combines ideology with concentrated and organized use of force, to a point where citizens do not always know where one

begins and the other stops. The state creates the government to establish policies, the administration to carry out policies, and the military or police to ensure conformity. Because of the monopoly on the legitimate use of force controlled by the state, any revolution would require the elimination of the existing state. The old state would reflect certain relationships of exploitation; when these relations change, the old state could no longer function properly.

In US history, immigration laws have been enacted and employed to keep out or expel dissidents. During the Red Scare after World War I and the Cold War following the World War II, immigrant groups were particularly targeted, patterns very similar to what is happening today. The extensive denial of due process and exaggerated use of police powers were widespread. Trials by exhibiting rumour, at the expense of legal procedures, were common throughout the 20th century. Public hearings to ruin the reputations of either the defendant or witnesses who failed to provide what the government expected, were a major strategy. The use of covert police surveillance is still common. Every time working people in the US gain more control over parts of the state, capitalist control becomes despotic over all parts of the state.

The totalitarian power of capital flourishes in bourgeois democracy. Capital becomes more politically powerful than government, and somewhat independent of the state. Capital is free to move anywhere, but the state is limited by geography. The needs of the bourgeoisie in a capitalist state deform and limit political democracy. Hostility and violence, supported by liberals who espouse democracy, are directed against anyone who, in reality, defends authentic democracy. Liberals played a vital role in the suppression of civil liberties in both the Red Scare of the 1920s and the Cold War, and continuing to the present. Institutional violence, used against democratic movements in the US, has been central to the formation of “American” political culture. Political parties and elections become the sum total of democracy. To move beyond the two party electoral process is considered subversive.

Law and order have become the main justification for violating basic human rights in the US. Any group that is perceived as a threat to private property,

or questions the assumptions of a capitalist economy, is treated as seditious. Mass culture has been manipulated to create popular demand for the suppression of alternative views of life. The open support for neo-colonialism around the world, with violence as the official policy to preserve a world empire, is one example. Life in liberal society is mystified in a way that creates a total culture of support for a capitalist economy.

Ignorance is the main goal of liberal education. Education, at its core, is a lie. Liberal education is designed to limit debate. Education supports the ethics of private property, market economy and an elite hierarchy. Education is mis-education. The moral foundations of the core values of “American” society need to be openly questioned and debated in the classroom. Professors must join the intellectual struggle against the highbrow millstone around every student’s neck. If education is to become a medium of liberation, the university must be exposed as an agent for class oppression.

Giroux points out in *Fugitive Cultures* the role of education is to maintain the power elite, and it is this we must challenge. A siege mentality is fostered, in the name of patriotism, against the poor, unions, non-Anglo citizens, non-white people, and anything not defined as “American” culture. Giroux asks, what is the educators’ role in empowering those victimized by the dominant ideology? National identity is founded upon the false need to embrace the common similarity. This shared identity is not only one of forced assimilation, but where that fails, of trivializing the deep cultural differences between diverse groups within any larger nation state like the US. This is done with multi-cultural studies that do not deal with economic, social or political inequality between these different groups.

The cooperation of many university professors with policy-makers, during the cold war, seriously compromised the moral justification of higher education. The university participated directly and indirectly in worldwide aggression and state-supported terrorism. The primary concern of many administrators was to protect the university’s source of income, thus maintaining a loyal slave of the empire. Early Civil Rights of the 1960s began as a utopian dream that

America should honour its commitment to freedom for all. The realization that groups were left out of the American dream and the violence of those in authority left many struggling with the question why in the freest country on the planet were the youth who questioned authority treated like criminals. With the war in Vietnam, to many Americans the conflict looked like just another Colonial Power bullying its control over its commonplace subjects in a foreign dependency. The moral mask of America was ripped off the face of empire.

Because government and the international business community support the university financially, we professors are expected to become the shock troops of the international capitalist economy. The thought control of the 1950s and 60s black listed innovators. Today between tenure review and the pressure for grant writing the breath of the debate is continuously being limited.

Community colleges were created at the other end of the system, to “cool out” working aspirants, who received an education that did not threaten the elite. The facts are, simply, that good paying jobs have been declining over the past few decades. Most jobs created since the mid-1970s have been unskilled jobs requiring little or no education. Education has taken on the role of helping us “cool out.” Education now helps us adjust to the powerlessness the working class faces in a market economy that sees workers, educated or not, as labour costs to be lowered by either eliminating jobs, or lowering the wage costs as much as possible.

However, the movement personified by Paulo Freire called Critical Pedagogy uses the concept of “Boring from Within” to create a beachhead of liberation through our schools. With the tool of Political Sociology we are better equipped to help people to take control of their communities and their lives.