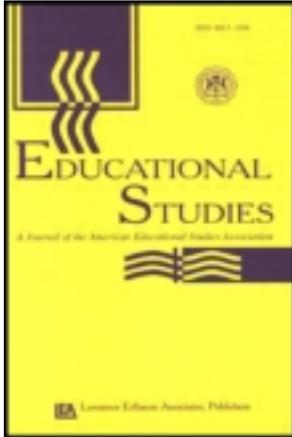


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## Neoliberalism in the Academic Borderlands: An On-going Struggle for Equality and Human Rights

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## THE 2011 GEORGE F. KNELLER LECTURE

# Neoliberalism in the Academic Borderlands: An On-going Struggle for Equality and Human Rights

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The article examines the negative impact of neoliberal policies upon the work of border intellectuals within the university, whose scholarship seeks to explicitly challenge longstanding structural inequalities and social exclusions. More specifically, the notion of neoliberal multiculturalism is defined and discussed with respect to the phenomenon of economic Darwinism and the whitewashing of contemporary academic labor, despite a tradition of progressive struggle within the academy. In response to the current counter-egalitarian climate of neoliberalism, a call is issued for a critical pedagogy that supports a revolutionary vision of human rights and democratic life.

At the heart of neoliberal policies of education is a veiled pursuit to destroy any tacit notion that we in the United States may have once had about the importance of the common good and public education as a human right. Instead, schooling and other public goods have been thrown underhandedly into the up-for-grabs conservative arena of privatization and deregulation. An unrelenting neoliberal culture of rampant greed, wholesale surveillance, and the regulation and monitoring of our humanity have subsumed notions of equality and public responsibility. Similarly, critical notions of multiculturalism and diversity in higher education have been

pushed back by an economic ethos that has rendered difference a whore to its own utilitarian pursuits or an enemy of the state.

In the process, scholarship and activism for structural equality, political inclusion, economic access, and human rights has given way to an emphasis on multiculturalized market niches, the management of an international workforce, a frenetic focus on the globalization of education through technology, and the occasional portrayals of colored faces and celebratory rhetoric for public relations pamphlets and Web sites. In the efficient, cost-effective, and competitive neoliberal world, questions of difference have been neatly conflated and diffused by a hypocrisy fueled by racism, elitism, and a tenacious disbelief in the equality of those who exist outside the narrow rationality of its profit logic. As a consequence, “deficient” subjects of difference, unable to march to the homogenizing and bootstrap neoliberal refrain, are conveniently tossed aside or criminalized and held behind iron bars, without concern for their numbers or their fate. This disregard for those who do not keep step with the dehumanizing accountability system that neoliberalism demands are as much at work within the culture of the university, as they are in the corporate world today.

There is no question that we are in the midst of a disastrous internationalizing project of neoliberalism. As Michael Peters (2001) argues, Neoliberalism has attempted to provide “a Universalist foundation for an extreme form of economic rationalism,” which can be regarded as the latest political–economic formation of advanced capitalism in the West. Furthermore, he insists, “such a philosophy is ultimately destructive of any full-fledged notions of community—national or international, imagined or otherwise” (117). Collective social action, accordingly, is considered a gross obstacle to the freedom of individuals and corporations, with their implacable drive to privatize all that, in another time in our history, would have been protected as a public good. The rampant individualism of neoliberal interests functions as a means to end state regulation and control, considered to be the major culprit in stifling the free-market’s ability to flourish and its capacity to protect private interests—namely the interests of the ruling class.

As such, the logic of neoliberalism provides an intellectual anchor from which *mega-rich* ultraconservatives, conservatives, and liberals alike collaborate together for control of not only the marketplace, but all public and private institutions, including higher education. And even more to the point, as Jodi Melamed (2006) argues in *The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Radical Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism*, “Neoliberal policy engenders new racial subjects, as it creates and distinguishes between newly privileged and stigmatized collectivities; yet multiculturalism codes the wealth, mobility, and political power of neoliberalism’s beneficiaries to be the just desserts of “multicultural world citizens,” while representing those neoliberalism dispossesses handicapped by their own “mono-culturalism” or other historico-cultural deficiencies” (1).

## ECONOMIC DARWINISM AND THE UNIVERSITY

Henry Giroux (2011) identifies economic Darwinism “as a theater of cruelty and mode of public pedagogy . . . [that] extends its reach throughout the globe, undermining all forms of democratic solidarity and social structures” (165). He contends that the notion of economic Darwinism well-illustrates the manner in which neoliberal policies within higher education have functioned, overtly and covertly, to support the survival of the fittest. In this instance, policies of deregulation, privatization, and lack of concern for the public good have rendered democratic education an endangered species. Key to this analysis is the manner in which the culture of higher education, today more than ever, functions in the interest of the plutocratic state, by securing the hegemonic consent of professors who, despite their expressed liberal ideals, practice a conservative culture that supports both the corporatization and instrumentalization of higher education. Implicated here, as Giroux (2012) notes, are the values of “unchecked competition, unbridled individualism, and a demoralizing notion of individual responsibility” (16), culprits in the legitimation crisis and moral impoverishment of neoliberal academic players, steeped to the gills in a homogenizing logic that threatens to obstruct the possibility of any genuine form of cultural democracy in the United States.

This disabling logic of neoliberalism has become well-entrenched across the university, but is most evident within graduate school education, where future academics and public intellectuals are initiated into careerist orientations that alienate them not only from one another and from the world, but also from the critical foundations necessary for the construction of democratizing knowledge—knowledge with the potential to challenge advancing inequalities orchestrated by the wealthy elite. Hence, from the moment that graduate students and young professors are initiated as tenuous agents of the neoliberal academy, they are conditioned into a culture of antidemocratic values that shape the expectations of their teaching, research, and tenure process. Similarly, an infantilizing culture of institutional surveillance, carried out by loyal gatekeepers, is rendered commonplace at every level of the enterprise. As a consequence, many graduate students and junior faculty are counseled to abandon their formerly idealistic progressive intentions and position themselves competitively within the knowledge marketplace, in ways that, on one hand, gain them recognition as so-called innovative thinkers; while on the other, they become willing agents of the university, positioning themselves as a good fit within the institution’s neoliberal purpose.

This pernicious contradiction has become ever more intense in the last decade, as colleges and universities have instituted expectations that professors from all disciplines prove themselves to be effective grant writers and fundraisers in their quest for the golden ring of tenure. As a consequence, a good deal of the formation and energies of young professors in major public research universities today is not

directed toward teaching nor public engagement (despite the rhetoric), but rather toward becoming published within refereed journals; getting publicly noticed as stars in the academic conference circuit; and developing effective grant writing skills—all the while, competitively shaping their research agendas in ways that will procure them greater access to private and public funds, along with the institutional benefits and privileges that these resources afford them. This phenomenon of professorial formation is, as one might expect, also accompanied by junior faculty (particularly those of color and working class) who are either left isolated to clumsily navigate their way through the constantly shifting minefields of the tenure-track process or forced into the mind-bending authoritarian dynamics of junior-senior faculty mentorship relationships, often fraught with deep anxieties and traditional expectations that junior faculty accommodate or suffer rejection at the time of tenure.

Although this dynamic has long existed within academe, the decreasing number of new tenure-track positions in the last decade and the increasing competition among new doctoral graduates has proven especially treacherous. Moreover, with the exaggerated emphasis placed on the hard sciences and technology, this has made young faculty in the humanities, social sciences, and education particularly susceptible to conforming to neoliberal priorities. Meanwhile, many senior faculty members, who entered the academy prior to the advent of neoliberalism, can also become targets of academic punishments, if they refuse to acquiesce or reform to neoliberal expectations—irrespective of the quantity, quality, or intellectual reach of their scholarship. It is a new money game, where the high stakes of accountability rears its head in disturbing ways, particularly with respect to university labor. Nowhere is this more evident than for radical education scholars who, in the Gramscian sense, define their teaching and scholarship organically, within the critical moral precepts of social equality, economic justice, and universal human rights.

### NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

In the midst of the antiwar movement and civil rights struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s, the American university was challenged to break with its elite, lily-white, patriarchal tradition. The seeds of the current neoliberal assault on the academic borderlands began with a long-term strategy put in place by conservatives seeking “to win an ideological war against liberal intellectuals, who argued for holding government and corporate power accountable as a precondition for extending and expanding the promise of an inclusive democracy” (Giroux 2007, 142). Those working to democratize the university called for inclusion of more women, as well as working class, and students and faculty of color. Alongside this call for inclusive admissions and hiring practices, pressure was placed upon

colleges and universities to transform their curriculum in ways that would not only be culturally relevant, but that would engage the longstanding historical inequalities and social exclusions that persisted in US society. Hence, the call for a policy of democratic inclusion was also the result of a variety of public struggles that demanded the university make good on its promise of democracy, particularly to those who resided in the margins of mainstream opportunities.

Many of the multicultural gains of the time, made within the larger society and the university, were more consistent with liberal Keynesian-inspired economics still at work during that era, which recognized the importance of federal investment in social welfare programs, in order to stave off the downside of corporate capital investments. However, the conservative ideas of classical macroeconomic, which began to gain public currency with the deregulatory policies of Reaganomics, became the powerful precursor to the era of the *New Economy*, with its dramatic economic shift to the current neoliberal values and the ruthless consequences of inequality that we are grappling with today.

More to the point, as a larger number of border intellectuals from cultural, racialized, economic, gendered, and sexual borderlands began to penetrate graduate education, the entrance of their politically distinct voices and dissonant perspectives began to cause a clear backlash, whose consequence is being felt forcefully today. This phenomenon is juxtaposed with the ascendance of neoliberalism and the predominance of the economy as the most worthy concern of the nation. In concert, profit-logic not only shaped the priorities of capital, but also began to recast the very purpose of higher education.

Some of the most potent first public stirrings of neoliberalism's creep into educational policies and practices can be found in *A Nation at Risk*, a national report issued by Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. The proposed recovery for the doom and gloom of public education and the forging of global economic superiority were best articulated in the report's assertion that the American public school system should function as an economic engine. The sprouting neoliberal vision of the ruling elite who manned the Reagan commission, including then Secretary of Education William Bennett, began to also forcefully tug at diversity debates that were underway within higher education. Thus, it's not surprising that by the early 1990s, the politics of difference had suddenly become well entrapped in the hyperbolic discourse of political correctness.

Within the university, growing conservative backlash to the politics of difference extended beyond simply ethnic studies faculty, but also to women and gender studies, sexuality studies, Marxists, structuralists, and poststructuralist scholars who, according to Roger Kimball (1990), in *Tenured Radicals: How Politics has Corrupted Our Higher Education*, had become the new "establishment." Similar public assaults on higher education were found in Allan Bloom's (1987) *Closing of the American Mind* and Dinesh D'Souza's (1991) *Illiberal Education: The Politics*

of *Race and Sex on Campus* that alleged liberal bias at the university and pointed to the destructive impact of multiculturalism to the integrity of the Western canon and the whole of American society.

Mean-spirited attacks associated with such politically repressive rhetoric began to gnaw away at the evolving counterhegemonic visions of equality and inclusion within the university—visions that had been inspired by the civil rights movements and antiimperialist struggles for self-determination. A variety of legal battles also ensued over three decades, beginning with the Bakke decision in 1978, eroding the delicate fabric of university affirmative action practices meant to remedy the historical impact of discrimination on communities of color. In concert, political correctness debates across the university underhandedly promoted an adherence to both a whitewashed and politically lukewarm scholarship, seeking to snuff out the dissenting voices of critical academics whose work aimed to critique, challenge, and transform the intellectual life of higher education, as well as the traditional academic formation of university students.

In place of values rooted in a critical vision of difference, the conservative multicultural proponents of economic Darwinism focused attention on the beneficiaries of neoliberalism in such a way that the formerly unattended inequalities associated with racism and other social exclusions were negated, ignored, or sidelined. This gave rise to the phenomenon that some scholars in the field now refer to as *neoliberal multiculturalism* (Darder 2011; Melamed 2006, 2011; Fisk 2005), a conservative ideology of multiculturalism that deploys a meritocratic justification, linked principally to economic benefit, to justify inequalities. As such, those who practice neoliberal multiculturalism enact a structure of public recognition, acknowledgement and acceptance of multicultural subjects, based on an ethos of self-reliance, individualism, and competition, while simultaneously (and conveniently) undermining discourses and social practices that call for collective social action and fundamental structural change.

Accordingly, in a culture where punitive values of victim-blaming readily adorn the scholarship of economist, social scientists, and educational theorists alike, decolonizing discourses that emphasize the recognition and complexity inherent in a politics of difference, along with the amelioration of poverty and others forms of social, political and economic inequalities, are deemed disruptive to the prevailing neoliberal order of the university. This is particularly so, when progressive efforts by border scholars become too closely aligned with larger social movement struggles for democratic public life and universal human rights. As a consequence, many border intellectuals who entered the academy during the *multicultural era* have found themselves further marginalized and derailed, at the very moment when their scholarly and political maturity could serve to more effectively challenge the forces of neoliberalism, as well as forge a more promising democratic vision. In light of this homogenizing neoliberal impetus, serious public

pedagogical efforts for transformation are not only seen as professionally suspect, but politically dangerous.

By the late 1990s, major economic booms were the daily fare of morning newscasts, as the push toward the internationalization of capital became the universal magic bullet of the new era—as the gap between the rich and the poor began to quickly widen. Within higher education, this shift in the economy also led to several major shifts in the labor of academics, in a variety of ways. The globalization discourse permeated the halls like wildfire, as universities began to fashion themselves like multinational corporations and the use of computerized technology became a mandatory facet of academic life. The first served nicely to undermine gains made in the nation's multicultural arena by diverting resources and attention away from domestic diversity demands to the global, while the second initiative further intensified the labor of academics across the university, despite the time-saving rhetoric that promised greater efficiency.

Key to this discussion, as Giroux repeatedly asserts, is the political and economic tyranny that neoliberalism incarnates, through policies and practices that seized control of higher education and bludgeoned a critical multicultural vision of university formation, along with critical pedagogical efforts to cultivate and nurture values tied to social justice, economic democracy, universal human rights, and the political self-determination of oppressed populations. Not surprisingly, the educational advances of the era of difference proved to be but a short-lived moment in the history of American higher education, for as more students and faculty from the margins began to find their way into the seats of university classrooms, faculty meetings, and governance tables, the more aggressive conservative and neoliberal forces became in their efforts to swing the pendulum back to a more homogenous cultural moment, where an economically-driven meaning of freedom and justice prevailed and the marketplace was herald as the only true purveyor of equality.

### WHITEWASHING THE BORDERLANDS

By now it should be no surprise to learn that neoliberal multiculturalism, with its economic Darwinist bent and incessant drive to quantify worth, value, or fit by perceived capital return, did not prove friendly to the academic borderlands—that intellectual terrain of struggle where the mixing of cultures, philosophies, histories, spiritualities, and everyday practices of life defied “the transcendent character of the traditional canon’s exclusion—notably of women and people of color—marked as the product of the white male imagination” (Aronowitz 1991, 205). Two of the most significant juxtapositions to the aforementioned economic shifts of the 1980s and ‘90s were the increasing number of women and students of color entering colleges and universities and, as a consequence, the quick flourishing

of critical scholarship from borderland intellectuals. Much of this liberatory-inspired scholarship—tied to concerns generated by the civil rights movement, anti-imperialist struggles, the politics of difference, and feminist discourses of intersectionality—pushed forcefully against centuries of racializing patriarchal values and bourgeois priorities so prevalent in higher education.

Hence, a notable feature of the academic borderland was the overwhelming presence and alliances of dissenting voices calling for greater transparency of government and greater avenues for public democratic action, both within and outside of the university. The contentiousness this created resulted in the mean-spirited conservative attacks to the academic borderland, mentioned earlier. Attacks against border academics often centered on both administrative and disciplinary efforts to delegitimize cultural-centric philosophies and oppositional discourses, as well as stifle the tendency of many border intellectuals to gravitate toward unorthodox research designs, whose validity was often seen as highly questionable. In response, border intellectuals pushed more forcefully for community-centered participatory approaches or critical ethnographic and narrative designs, more closely aligned to political struggles for voice and democratic participation. As would be expected, this rankled mainstream faculty, including those from the hard sciences, who privileged quantitative approaches to knowledge construction. Some complained bitterly about the lack of objectivity and hard empirical evidence, as well as the sloppiness of investigations executed by border academics.

Meanwhile, as border intellectuals were transgressing positivist boundaries in a variety of traditional disciplines, rising neoliberal imperatives were making their way into the university just in time to conveniently push back, fiercely, against critical interventions initiated by radical intellectuals—whose projects were precisely designed to challenge the structures of inequality and reinvigorate the democratic potential of higher education. In many colleges and universities, administrators strategically defused so-called *cultural wars* and attempted to whitewash the borderlands by imposing cries of fiscal exigencies to cut programs, institute hiring freezes, harass tenured radical faculty, reject tenure cases, and move to eliminate entire departments.

Despite the struggle to build counterhegemonic spaces, academic legitimacy, and greater culturally democratic solidarity within the academy, neoliberalism's world-flattening force worked to undermine discourses of difference—whether these were predicated on class, skin color, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, or political ideology. Through neoliberalism's neat and orderly morality of the marketplace and its professed cultural superiority, all historical forms of political-economic inequalities and social exclusions seemed washed away in the pristine belief in the sanctity of individual private interests and the doctrine of free enterprise, within a political system that has long equated capitalism with democracy. Faculty resistance to enter or defend this totalizing neoliberal vision of the marketplace was often met with slanderous character attacks that

sought to brand radical scholars, whose scholarship and pedagogy countered allegiance to the status quo, as egotistical or narcissistic, or of questionable intellect or moral ineptitude.

As the liberal democratic purpose of higher education became more and more obfuscated, universities across the country become more deeply aligned with the narrow rationality of neoliberal objectives. Accordingly, border intellectuals teaching against the grain were pushed further and further into the margins with respect to their teaching, research, participation in the life of their departments, and the governance of the university. High-level administrators, now functioning like corporate CEOs, were less and less concerned with past ideals of liberal educational leadership as they spent more of their time hobnobbing with corporate executives, foundation officials, and other big business advocates, who potentially could assist these university presidents to make up for the increasing cuts in public monies. In the process, the values, priorities and private interests of those who held the reigns to research dollars also began to redefine the purpose of higher education, heavily tilting the public enterprise toward the neoliberal mission. With respect to the construction of knowledge, this turn has been attached to an overdependence on scientific interpretations, evidence-based rhetoric, and overarching imperatives strategically deployed to sustain the legitimacy of neoliberal ideals.

In the alluring economic fumes of a commonsensical rhetoric that equates profit, progress, and prestige with policies and practices of deregulation, privatization, competition, and bootstrap economics, universities have been too easily herded into the fold with promises of dollars to build new facilities, shore up technology, support homogenizing curriculum, and hire faculty that could carry out the aggressive neoliberal agendas of public and private funders, whose primary vested interest in difference has been motivated by expanding markets and the management of workers at home and abroad. With a sharp eye toward profit and the control of resources—including people as reserve armies—the neoliberal rhetoric of difference functioned strategically as a means to increase production, maximize commerce, and support the growing needs of US militarization worldwide. Hence, through both covert and overt means, the political values and financial priorities of a neoliberal world began to seek greater control of the intellectual formation of graduate students and young faculty, who represent the legitimating research pool for the successful mobilization of new enterprises.

As would be expected, the widening impact of neoliberalism also made its way into the academic borderlands. Some ethnic studies programs, for example, were forced to dodge efforts of university administrators to terminate or undermine their future influence on the campus by compromising the historical vision and integrity of their emancipatory intellectual agenda. In some instances, faculty in the borderland jumped on to the neoliberal bandwagon, moving toward scholarship considered more acceptable, legitimate and fundable by university officials. Oftentimes, this required a shift to research interests aimed toward more traditional

interpretation of scholarship and research design, in ways that permitted them to more successfully pursue science, technology, mathematics, and engineering (STEM) monies—which currently postures as the new panacea for recovery of global educational and the economic superiority.

In concert, funding for faculty positions and research projects that might serve as countervailing forces has become scarce. This resulted in radical intellectual projects being pushed further into the margins. Fewer opportunities and resources were to be found for studies that sought to examine public social issues, such as the democratic responsibility of the welfare state, policies of wealth redistribution, impact of the corporatization of the media, educational benefits of bilingual education, or disabling impact of high-stakes testing on the education of working class and students of color, just to name a few. In fact, funding waned across the board for critical scholars, even those working within area studies where borderland intellectuals were once more able to enjoy some political respite. Where monies were attained for such research, the language and political center of gravity of the discourse had to remain so camouflaged within neoliberal objectives that the actual conditions and data derived from these studies became distorted to unrecognizable proportions, by conclusions that ignored longstanding structural inequalities.

In a similar vein, border scholars are now expected to align themselves more staunchly within their particular disciplines of study, whether history, anthropology, sociology or economics, in contrast to the more revolutionary ideals that were once at the heart of teaching and scholarship in the borderlands. It seems that in the world of economic Darwinism the disciplinary tradition provides a much neater and tidy picture of intellectual alliances, than does the messiness of transdisciplinary or even postdisciplinary border scholarship, often associated with ethnic, feminist, postcolonial, and queer sensibilities. In contrast, the traditional disciplinary mechanism works well to police and monitor the scholarship of exiled intellectuals, by means of disciplining values at work, particularly in the evaluation and credentialing of graduate students and junior faculty. This process serves well to weed out those considered not to be a good fit. And as previously noted, a good fit today is strongly associated with the capacity of junior faculty to bring in dollars. This newly instituted requirement of tenure in many universities serves to ensure that nonconforming academics, whose scholarship exists outside the priorities of state and federal agendas and the guidelines of public and private funding sources, will experience a difficult time remaining viable candidates for tenure.

Similarly, as targeted scholarships and fellowships for underrepresented students and faculty have dwindled, opportunities for working class students and faculty from underrepresented communities have become fewer and fewer. In concert, border intellectuals who persist in their work with disenfranchised communities, or anchor their teaching and research on questions of social inequalities,

or push against the boundaries of traditional methodologies and epistemologies are often marginalized and derisively dubbed as *activist* scholars. As such, radical scholars can find themselves exiled from meaningful participation in the evolution of university programs and departments by an antidemocratic wave that silences and banishes their contributions to the wasteland of irrelevancy. In a climate where the international control of knowledge and the maximizing of profits is the greatest concern, public universities seem to have fully surrendered to the siren call of neoliberalism.

### CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC LIFE

In *Academic Labor in Dark Times*, Giroux (2009) argues that

At the very least, academics should be more responsible to and for a politics that raises serious questions about how students and educators negotiate the institutional, pedagogical, and social relations shaped by diverse ideologies and dynamics of power, especially as these relations mediate and inform competing visions regarding whose interests the university might serve, what role knowledge plays in furthering both excellence and equity, and how higher education defines and defends its own role in relation to its often stated, though hardly operational, allegiance to egalitarian and democratic impulses.

With this, he insists that a political project of democratic public life must be central to our efforts to defy the impact of neoliberalism. Also significant here is concern over the potential of critical pedagogy to serve as an effective educational force in the emancipatory struggle for universal human rights. For without the presence of a larger social struggle for change and a critical pedagogical space to engage our lived histories, many border intellectuals—born and reared in the margins of a classed, racialized, gendered, and heterosexist borderlands—would have been excluded, given that the politics of difference and dissent often predominate our scholarly projects. Many are, in fact, children of dissent, for our presence in the university was spawned directly by counterhegemonic struggles that pushed against the once impenetrable walls of its discriminatory orthodoxy.

For critical intellectuals living in the borderlands of academe, the classroom represents a significant terrain of struggle and a key political space in the forging of a public pedagogy. This is often directly tied to critical pedagogical efforts by professors who seek to create political links between the classroom, campus, and community, in ways that foster a more seamless political democratic understanding of theory and practice. As such, critical pedagogical approaches are effective in creating emancipatory conditions within the classroom that support meaningful critical reflection and dialogue, the development of alternative and dissenting

voices, collective participation, and the building of solidarity among university students.

In fact, as just mentioned, if it were not for critical pedagogy, many scholars of color sitting in this room today would not have found a place to flourish in the academy, despite legitimate critiques that have been launched and the need for ongoing interrogation. It has been through classroom practices firmly anchored upon critical principles—where transdisciplinary and postdisciplinary understandings are sought, through engaging simultaneously questions of culture, history, economics, politics, hegemony, critique, dialogue, and consciousness—that critical educators have worked with students to not only engage conditions of exploitation and alienation academically, but also cultivate intimate relationships of teaching and learning that break through the *violence of abstraction* (Nearby 2005) so prevalent in university classrooms.

A critical pedagogy requires that we create the conditions for university students to grapple rigorously not only with theories and practices of democratic life as cognitive phenomena, but also to tackle in the flesh the meaning and consequences of material and social conditions of exploitation and domination. From this place, the possibility of constructing grounded knowledge and integrating practices of social activism can emerge, as critical reflections and dialogues evolve organically in the process. However, there is no question that this pedagogical potential to support the exercise of dissent, through the political evolution of student voice and social agency, can also easily become a point of contention within the neoliberal university. This is so, not only because the ethical values of a critical democratic praxis are in conflict with the underlying ethos of neoliberalism, but also because there is far more utility in the domesticating pedagogy that Paulo Freire (1971) terms *banking education*—an appropriate pseudonym for neoliberal academic formation.

In the last three decades, we have seen neoliberalism steadily negate the hard-earned opportunities of disenfranchised people in this nation. Economic Darwinism has made endangered species of education and the public good, leaving borderland intellectuals scrambling to regain political equilibrium, following repeated assaults. Unfortunately, the presidency of Barak Obama did not turn out to be the great panacea that so many had imagined. Instead, the Obama administration's policy decisions on public education, the economy, health care, and the military, to name a few, have left many feeling disappointed and betrayed. Nevertheless, or because of it, everywhere there are struggles being waged for dignity, freedom, and democratic life.

Across the country, thousands of people have congregated in a new show of collective dissent. Occupy Wall Street has inspired a movement of people who are quickly expanding and creating new forms of both communal and autonomous formations of dissent. This has left ample room for regional groups to bring specific attention to local issues in ways that are meaningful to its members. In

New Mexico, for example, activists call themselves *(Un)occupy Albuquerque* and *(Un)occupy Sante Fe*, which speaks more accurately to the realities of indigenous history and politics in the region. No matter the case, this national movement is spreading organically and in numbers that we have not seen since the civil rights and antiwar movements of the '60s and '70s took to the streets. And despite regional differences, this burgeoning social movement is calling for solidarity across the nation, as everyday folks join to push back the ruling class.

### THE MOTIVE FORCE OF REVOLUTION

History well-confirms democracy is never guaranteed, even during great movements of people. As such, we are reminded that democracy is never a given, but rather entails an ongoing emancipatory struggle for political voice, participation, and social action. With this in mind, higher education continues to exist as a formative contested terrain of struggle, given the potential of public education to serve as a democratizing force for the evolution of critical consciousness and democratic public life.

Yet, in light of the furtive nature of neoliberalism within higher education, border intellectuals cannot challenge its perils and pitfalls, if our work is not firmly grounded in a coherent and revolutionary political vision that critically embraces universal human rights—a vision that privileges the needs of the many, in place of the few. Hence, our struggles against all forms of inequality must recognize that *there is no liberation without a revolutionary transformation of the class society*. Which, incidentally, is exactly what the occupy movement is demanding!

C. L. R. James, writing in *At the Rendezvous of Victory* speaks dialectically of capitalism and its impact on the intellectual.

Production, which should be [our] most natural expression of [our] powers, becomes one long murderous class conflict in which each protagonist can rest not for a single minute. Political government assumes totalitarian forms and government by executive decree masquerades as democracy. . . . The Intellectual is cut off from the world of physical production and the social organization of labor. The divorce between physical and mental labor is complete. The Individual, worker or Intellectual, is no more than the sport of vast forces over which he [or she] has no control. The senses of each are stimulated without possibility of realization. The resentments, the passions of frustrated social existence take revenge in the wildest of individual aberrations. Before these forces psychoanalysis is powerless, and voting every four years becomes a ghastly mockery. Facing the disintegration of society, capital mobilizes all available forces for the suppression of what is its own creation—the need for social expression that the modern productive forces instill into every living human being. The explosion of this suppression is the motive force of revolution (James 1984, 69).

How do we nurture “the motive force of revolution” in our everyday lives, pedagogy, and scholarship? How do we bring this dialectical dynamism to bear in our scholarship? How do we remain consistently committed to not only speaking and writing about these issues, but immersing ourselves in collective social movement work? These fundamental questions must inform the labor of all border intellectuals—questions that require our labor within the university to be informed and aligned to the material and social conditions at work in the communities in which we live and teach; and to connect these conditions to the life conditions of workers around the world.

Moreover, in contrast to neoliberal multiculturalism, we must consistently struggle for a notion of social recognition that embraces a revolutionary understanding of equality, with grounded political projects of action within and across communities. This entails a critical democratic process that encompasses, as Milton Fisk (2005) so rightly argues, “a social recognition . . . beyond the cultural recognition promoted by neoliberalism and its international institutions. It leads to a struggle from below [and in the flesh] for equality. This struggle engages the cooperation of each of the various components of a diverse society. The struggle becomes a common effort to establish public goods that reduce poverty and inequality” (28); and while so doing, confront uncompromisingly racism and other social crimes against humanity.

Raya Dunayevskaya (1989) wrote in *Philosophy and Revolution*: “Thought can transcend only other thought; but to reconstruct society itself, only actions of men and women, masses in motion, will do the ‘transcending,’ and thereby ‘realize’ philosophy, make freedom, and whole men and women, a reality” (415). It is this unquestionable Marxist ethos of equality and human rights that must continue to inform our labor within and without the university.

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