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# Beautiful Losers

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## ARTICLE

**Beautiful Losers**

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*All Apologies*

In the months before the 2000 election, full of tenured radical smugness, I had argued that the best vote was a vote for Ralph Nader. I told my friends that all the truly meaningful political changes in U.S. history—abolition, women’s suffrage, the 40-hour work week—had originated in third parties, so it was important to push the Green party vote count above five percent, so they would be eligible for federal funding. Bush and Gore were the same, just like Republicans and Democrats were essentially the same (it was Bill Clinton, after all, and his draconian welfare “reform,” who completed the Reagan Revolution). They were paid by the same people, they went to the same schools, they were members of the same clubs, and they would always protect the same interests. It didn’t matter who won. What mattered was laying the groundwork for the meaningful expansion of true democracy in the future.

Of course I had to spend a lot of time apologizing in the months after the U. S. Supreme Court installed George Bush in the White House. On his first day in office, long before the Iraq war, the Patriot Act,<sup>[1]</sup> and Hurricane Katrina, George Bush sentenced tens of thousands of women around the world to death when he signed the Global Gag Order on abortion. And it has been downhill from there. No one has to strain very hard to imagine the world as a very different place right now if Al Gore were the lame duck president. Soon I was seeking out my liberal friends to say I’m sorry, you were right, this guy is worse. Even in an oligarchy where the mainstream difference between left and right is measured with a cash register and a microscope, it does make a difference which spoiled white Ivy League son of the aristocracy sits on the throne.

But, as we live in the midst of the Bush-Cheney nightmare, we should be careful not to overestimate that difference or to imagine that our predicament is structurally different than it ever has been. I was wrong about the distance between Bush and Gore, but I was still right about the radius of the circle that encloses power in American history. While it may be dangerously utopian to push a gesture toward radical change over the immediate consequences of choosing the greater evil of the available two, it is just as dangerous to nostalgically invoke a democratic past that never existed. The theme for this issue of the *Journal of Educational Controversy* asks us how “we are to fulfill the traditional moral imperative of our schools--to create a public capable of sustaining the life of a democracy . . . in an age of the Patriot Act and similar anti-terrorism legislation . . . all likely to involve violations of civil rights and liberties. . . ?”

Taking the second half of this question first, we should be careful to understand the Patriot Act and all the related collateral damage to civil liberties in an historical context. Civil liberties and due process have never been routinely available to all Americans. Disenfranchisement has always been a fact of life for those below the middle classes, especially people of color, immigrants, and political dissenters. Guantanamo Bay is a daily and obvious transgression against almost all the principles on which U.S. democracy was founded, and almost all of the discussion around it assumes that Gitmo is *sui generis* and a qualitative break from U.S. government behavior. But for people without the influence, access, and means to claim the rights that are supposed to be available to everybody, the Guantanamo travesty is business as usual. Take such institutionalized and legal denials of rights as slavery, the series of government-sanctioned genocidal campaigns against Native Americans, the Chinese Exclusion Act,

the denial of voting rights to various groups, literacy tests, the Alien Registration Act, Jim Crow segregation, Japanese internment, and the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Put them together with such extra-legal but still state-sponsored activity as lynching, Wounded Knee, Pinkerton and FBI violence against labor unions, the activities of the Ku Klux Klan and various other white supremacist militias, the exploitation of illegal immigrants, the Red Summer of 1919, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments, the military rout of the Bonus Army led by George Patton and Douglas McArthur, the police and FBI murders of various Black Panthers, the murder of Attica inmates, the CIA facilitation of the importation of crack cocaine into U.S. inner cities, and the daily police brutality inflicted on poor neighborhoods all over the country. The denial of constitutional rights and civil liberties to people below the middle classes begins to look systematic and continuous rather than episodic and anomalous. In this context, Guantanamo Bay appears a lot less like a Bush-Cheney aberration and a lot more like just another patch in a patterned quilt of traditional U.S. government behavior.

For those in the bourgeois and ruling classes, incursions on civil liberties have ebbed and flowed. Groups in power have seized on opportune moments (usually a war or threat of war) and combined the rhetoric of fear and patriotism to push through legislation or engage in legal or congressional activity that skirts democratic principles, curtails civil liberties, and increases surveillance, all in the name of security. The 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, the 1917 Espionage and Sedition Acts, the House Un-American Activities Committee and Joe McCarthy are all fore-runners of the Patriot Act, and they all have played a role in those rare instances when the oppression of poor people has needed legal cover. But they all have also faced backlash, denunciation, and repeal (this has begun to happen with the Patriot Act), not because they encroached on civil liberties, but because the faction of the political elite in power at those particular moments overreached and used their laws and subpoena power not just to protect the interests of the ruling classes but also to punish political enemies from within the ruling classes. John Adams used the Alien and Sedition Acts to imprison Benjamin Franklin's grandson and various newspaper editors. Eugene Debs was convicted under the Sedition Act for a speech he gave while he was the Socialist Party presidential candidate. Joe McCarthy went after movie stars. Richard Nixon was driven from office not because he killed hundreds of thousands of people in Vietnam and Cambodia, but because he tried to bug Democratic Headquarters. Karl Rove punished even mild dissenters from his own party.

It is only when people of means begin to feel the bite of transgression against the Constitution that the media, academia, and Congress really begin to howl, and those howls and the reforms and transfers of power from one party to the other that follow provide the illusion that access to civil liberties and due process is the norm and that the U. S. system always passes the occasional tests posed by attacks on the Constitution. Thus, mainstream history can tell the story of incursions on civil liberties the same way that it tells the story U.S. political assassination—as tales of exceptional times and lone gunmen, the work of comic book villains like Joe McCarthy, J. Edgar Hoover, and Dick Cheney. But a clear-eyed glance at U.S. history suggests that repression, surveillance, and disenfranchisement are systematic and normal for those lower on the socio-economic food chain and tidal for those further up. So, in considering the topic for this issue of the *JEC*, we should take care not to be seduced by the headlines of our own time. In the same way that, adjusted for inflation, Bill Gates is no richer than John D. Rockefeller, Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld, adjusted for inflation, are no more evil than Hoover and McCarthy. The details are different and the available technology more sophisticated, but the “Age of the Patriot Act” is structurally not much different from any other age in U.S. history.

### ***A is for Anglo, B is for Beowulf***

Similarly, we should cast a gimlet eye on the other part of our theme. The implication of “the

traditional moral imperative of our schools--to create a public capable of sustaining the life of a democracy” is that there was once a better time, when schools were driven by that imperative, and that the 9-11 power grab codified in the Patriot Act has taken away the democracy-building function of our schools. This impulse toward imagining a rosier past where public schools were the engines of democracy drives Henry Giroux’s bracing essay “Democracy, Patriotism, and Schooling After September 11<sup>th</sup>: Critical Citizens or Unthinking Patriots?”<sup>[2]</sup> Giroux (2004) writes that “[t]he events of September 11 provide educators with a crucial opportunity to *reclaim* schools as democratic public spheres . . . “ (p. 7; my emphasis). It is easy enough to understand from what (market-driven education, no child left behind, high stakes testing) or from whom (George Bush, William Bennett, David Horowitz, Mr. or Mrs. Cheney) we are to reclaim our schools, but not as easy to understand to what we are to return them. Giroux argues that since 1980 and the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, public discourse and critical debate have shriveled and all but disappeared in our society in general and our schools in particular. Certainly on one level, the level on which Bush is worse than Gore, Giroux is right. In the last twenty-five years “the space of the social has been both militarized and increasingly commodified” (Giroux, p. 20), the mainstream idea of freedom has been more and more defined as the unfettered ability of some to exploit various race and class advantages solely for personal profit, and there has been a strong push to turn “schools into testing centers and teachers into technicians” (Giroux, p. 17).

But it would be historically inaccurate to juxtapose our current predicament with a time when schools were “more democratic and socially relevant” (Giroux, p. 16). Both in theory and in practice, schools have always been as much or more about indoctrination and ideological control as they have been about education. Plato’s academy from his *Republic* (trans. 2003), an extremely influential text in Western history, inaugurated the notion of schools as clearinghouses for the tracking of children into various social roles. And even for those who were chosen to become philosopher kings, Plato was as much concerned with right thinking as he was with free or critical thinking, so much so that he was willing to banish poets. In American history, the two big forces behind creating and mandating public schooling have been anti-Catholicism and child labor laws. Nineteenth-century Protestant elites, fearing that Catholic schools were creating a populace more loyal to the Pope than the President, were the driving force behind the public school system (Franchot, 1994). And in the twentieth century, mandatory public schooling to the age of 16 went hand in hand with the outlawing of child labor (Lleras-Muney, 2002). While schools certainly seem preferable to sweatshops as places for children to spend their days, mandatory public school serves the state not only as a source of education, but also as a warehouse for the suddenly unemployed and unruly, perhaps even revolutionary, mob of children of the laboring classes. This imperative no doubt accounts for the way that most of our schools today that serve those below the middle class share so many features with those other racialized and class-specific institutions--modern American prisons--that organize so many in the reserve army of capitalism. Public schools in the twentieth century are much more concerned with producing employees than they are with producing citizens, and the ideas and practices driving them derive more from John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, and Frederick W. Taylor as they do from Horace Mann and John Dewey. Giroux’s concern about schools as utilitarian factories is well-taken, but is a concern that should look back much further than the Reagan administration. Schools have always been testing centers, tracking stations, and holding pens, and teachers have always been expected to be technicians, indoctrination supervisors, and wardens.

This admittedly bleak view of Western schools in general and U.S. schools in particular depends from a point that Giroux’s essay makes in bold italics: “***Democracy and Capitalism Are Not the Same.***” As hung over as we remain from the Cold War cocktail whose main ingredient was the false opposition between communism and democracy, this is an important point to make. In fact, if we take a moment to step back and look at the two things in the abstract, it quickly becomes clear that an economic

system that demands a significant free or cheap source of labor would also demand that the class of people who provide that labor be denied much meaningful democratic participation in the society. But while the two ideas may be separate and often contradictory, it is just as clear that what we think of as the Western “democracies” that have arisen since the eighteenth century are ineluctably driven by capitalist economic arrangements. Thus, democratic participation has been reserved primarily for the bourgeoisie, and the state has become the agent for the ruling class. Louis Althusser, in his venerable essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” adduces this point as one of the cornerstones of the Marxist analytical tradition:

the State is explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus. The State is a 'machine' of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e., to capitalist exploitation). (Althusser, 1971, p. 137)

Althusser goes on to extend the insights of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci by dividing the state apparatuses into Repressive State Apparatuses (the army, the police, the prisons), which function primarily by violence, and the Ideological State Apparatuses (churches, schools, courts), which function primarily by ideology, convincing the non-ruling classes that it is actually in their interest to give tax cuts to billionaires, worry about who’s having sex with whom and what kind of sex they’re having, and send non-ruling class youth to kill people of color in Southeast Asia or the Middle East. In Althusser’s formulation, schools are one of the most crucial of the capitalist Ideological State Apparatuses, structurally generated as the sites of control that Giroux most fears:

What do children learn at school? They go varying distances in their studies, but at any rate they learn to read, to write and to add -- i.e., a number of techniques, and a number of other things as well, including elements (which may be rudimentary or on the contrary thoroughgoing) of "scientific" or "literary culture," which are directly useful in the different jobs in production (one instruction for manual workers, another for technicians, a third for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc.). Thus they learn know-how.

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the "rules" of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is "destined" for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to "speak proper French," to "handle" the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to "order them about" properly, i.e., (ideally) to "speak to them" in the right way, etc. . . .

In other words, the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches "know-how," but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its "practice." All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, not to speak of the "professionals of ideology" (Marx), must in one way or another be "steeped" in this ideology in order to perform their tasks "conscientiously" -- the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), of the exploiters' auxiliaries (the managers), or of the high priests of the ruling ideology (its "functionaries"), etc. (Althusser, pp. 132-3)

In a U.S. context, we can see this sort of ideological reinforcement in all the things that progressive educators regularly complain about—the pledge of allegiance, learning to line up and respond to bells,

and the trafficking in such curricular “facts” as Columbus discovered America, Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, and wars between imperial powers are really struggles between good and evil. These, along with instruction in such skills as reading, writing, and arithmetic, help to sort the population into the various specialized jobs required by the capitalist division of labor and to create and enforce the boundaries within which “dissent” will be tolerated and controlled.

Even in those areas of the curriculum that we might consider “higher” and less utilitarian, those liberal arts that we want to claim are more about creating critical thinkers rather than vocationally skilled employees, we can see schools doing the work of the Ideological State Apparatus. Take, as an example that has received a lot of attention in the last twenty years, the study of literature, that most non-utilitarian of fields (as every English major who has ever been asked, “What are you going to do with that?” knows). Literature and the imaginative arts generally have traditionally been peddled as the subjects that expand and improve our humanity, exposing us to great beauty, tremendous insight, and the “best that has been thought and said.” But as Kwame Anthony Appiah (1995) has convincingly demonstrated in his essay “Race,” “[f]rom its inception, literary history, like the collection of folk culture, served the ends of nation-building” (p. 284). And this nation-building, Appiah argues, is deeply grounded in “the dual connection made in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century thought between, on the one hand, race and nationality, and, on the other, nationality and literature” (Appiah, p. 282). The invention and codification of the pseudo-biological racialized world is more or less concurrent with the rise of both capitalism and the modern formalist notion of a disinterested aesthetics (Eagleton, 1990). The Enlightenment racist taxonomy that always puts white on top and Black on the bottom (with yellow, red, and brown in varying orders in between) proves especially handy in an era of bourgeois democratic revolutions in a capitalist context. When it comes time to mark groups of people for the labor exploitation and lack of access to democratic participation that a capitalist system demands, “natural” racial (and racist) division provides both tool and justification. Appiah points out that as these racialized categories begin to play larger roles in the sciences of biology and anthropology, “the nation comes more and more to be identified as a biological unit” (Appiah, p. 282). With language and literature in place as key components of national identity, it becomes “only a step to the identification of that history [of the nation through its literature] with the history of the race” (Appiah, p. 284). Thus, the most beautiful literature, the literature that comes to form the national canon, naturally derives from the “naturally” superior race that, naturally, becomes representative of the nation. Appiah points to Hippolyte Taine’s influential mid-nineteenth-century *History of English Literature* that sets the direction for literary instruction for the next century:

It is the conception of the binding core of the English nation as the Anglo-Saxon race that accounts for Taine’s decision to identify the origins of English literature not in its antecedents in the Greek and Roman classics that provided the models and themes of so many of the best-known works of English “poesy,” not in the Italian models that influenced the drama of Marlowe and Shakespeare, but in *Beowulf*, a poem in the Anglo-Saxon tongue, a poem that was unknown to Chaucer and Spenser and Shakespeare.

Yet this decision was quite representative. When the teaching of English literature was institutionalized in the English universities in the nineteenth century, students were required to learn Anglo-Saxon in order to study *Beowulf*. Anglo-Saxonism thus plays a major role in the establishment of the canon of literary works that are to be studied in both British and American colleges; and the teachers who came from these colleges to the high schools brought the Anglo-Saxon canon with them. (Appiah, p. 285)

The deployment of aesthetic justifications of canon making leads the eleventh-grader reading his or her

translated copy of *Beowulf* to understand it as simply the beginning and the best. Best poem becomes congruent with best race in the sphere of unconscious and unquestioned assumptions, where school as Ideological State Apparatus does its best work.

The proof of this hypothesis lies in the evidence of what happens when events conspire to bring forth canons not necessarily as well suited to purveying ruling class ideology. In the wake of World War II, as the GI Bill and then the Civil Rights and women's movements gave significant numbers of working class people, women, and people of color access to college, these students, not seeing themselves or their experiences reflected in the *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf canon, begin to ask for, demand, and seek out literature by and about the disenfranchised. Some of these students go on to graduate school and grow up to be English professors who question the assumptions of the traditional canon and begin to offer alternative canons, and thus alternative national histories and identities, to their students. When this phenomenon gains a critical mass, it generates a backlash from an establishment that is collectively at least unconsciously aware that literature instruction is beginning to stray from what it was invented to do. And thus we are treated to the "canon wars" (the literary subdivision of the "culture wars") of the 1980s and 1990s. Even as the sale of university science departments to military and corporate interests is being completed, the shrill speeches and editorials of the likes of George Will and William Bennett are telling us that the most significant thing happening on campus is the death of Western Civilization, signaled by the fact that some '60s leftover English professor (who probably got his or her job through affirmative action) is requiring students to read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* instead of *Hamlet*. This argument is grounded in the false notion that the traditional canon was formed on the basis of aesthetic merit, while the new canons are grounded in demands for inclusiveness and representation, no matter how much that might drag standards down. It was, of course, exactly the kind of identity politics that the right decries that drove the creation of literary canons and literary instruction in the first place.

The level of historical inaccuracy and contradiction in the arguments from the right in this "debate" was so great that more than a few members of the professoriat were able to fuel their careers by lampooning the Wills and the Bennetts. When the rhetorical smoke cleared, one thing was certain: The hysteria of the response to new canons signaled that events had outrun the state and that English departments could no longer be counted on to reproduce racist and misogynist national identity. As the "wars" on the op-ed pages recede, we are left with the inexorable and far more deadly version of the backlash: the genuine persecution of professors like Ward Churchill, attempts led by people like David Horowitz to provoke legislatures into direct partisan control of humanities curricula, and the diverting of already scarce resources away from literature instruction and toward utilitarian technical writing programs and formalist creative writing workshops. If English departments will no longer reinforce the ideology of white supremacy, they can serve the interests of the capitalist state by retooling to produce white collar employees and self-involved aesthetes.

The narrative that I am sketching here, about both the pervasiveness of oppression and the function of schools as ideological state apparatuses, is, like most Marxist-inflected analyses, necessarily broad and vulnerable to charges of overheated conspiracy theory. It doesn't consider or give enough credit to the way that capitalism as a system of production and distribution has delivered a higher material standard of living to more people than any other economic arrangements in history. It doesn't account for all the genuine and humanely motivated good that various people in power have done across U.S. history. It erases the influence of individual personality, religious conviction, and chance. And it certainly doesn't acknowledge the selfless and hopelessly undervalued work of hundreds of thousands dedicated teachers who have genuinely transformed millions of peoples' lives. But if we understand conspiracy in the sense of its Latin root, *conspirare*, meaning "to breathe together," then I think my analysis is very relevant for how we, as teachers who want our work to contribute to greater democracy, are to proceed. Behind all of the individual and collective acts of heroism, behind all the real albeit glacial

progress in human rights, behind the moments of actual victory, the dissenters who are allowed to be heard, the pantheon of uncompromised heroes from Sojourner Truth to John Brown to Malcolm X, behind the influence of individual will, fortuitous circumstances, what someone had for lunch, and how the weather broke that day, lies the inexorable and ineluctable sigh of power breathing together. Various battles may be spectacularly won, but the war is always lost, and the historical record is clear about that. The Civil War ended legal slavery, but Reconstruction ended in 1876 (and if the Hayes-Tilden compromise had broken the other way, it might not have ended exactly the way it ended, but it would have ended), and the use of race for the purposes of labor exploitation and social exclusion continues to this day. The Civil Rights, Black Power, and Women's movements gained some ground in the '60s, but the real winners by the end of the decade were the Nixons, the Rockefellers, and the Reagans. Corporate television helped to end the Vietnam war, but it has never stopped aiding and abetting the ongoing U.S. program of imperialist adventure directed against people of color around the world. The demands of new classes of people in college dramatically changed institutionalized literary canons, but those changes will soon enough be the backwater of English departments.

If we are to answer the question we've posed in this issue—How are we as teachers to do our jobs in a way that actually serves the expansion of democracy?—then I think it is crucial to hear the steady breathing of power, to understand the continuity of the age of the Patriot Act with the rest of U.S. history and to know the truth about the institutions in which we teach. Otherwise, we're likely to do the teaching equivalent of voting for Ralph Nader. My vote for Nader was romantic and dumb, just as Giroux's call for us to take back our schools and turn them into institutions that serve "the unending project of democratic social transformation" is romantic and dumb (Giroux, p. 35). Even if the Green Party had received the right number of votes and matching funds, my vote would have been wasted. The fundamental nature of U.S. elections will not be changed by voting in them, just as the fundamental nature of U.S. educational institutions will not be changed by teaching in them. So, having decided to participate in the election, I should have recognized the nature of the institution from a radical perspective and put aside symbolic radical action and made a choice from among the liberal and conservative options that were genuinely available. Understanding that votes were not going to abolish buying elections or the electoral college or the U.S. system of one party with two wings, I should have soberly chosen mild reform, centrist compromise, and moderate competence over religious zealotry, arrogant anti-intellectualism, and bumbling ineptitude. (Although, in mild defense of myself, again, who knew that the Bush crowd was going to be this bad?)

Similarly, having made the choice to be teachers, we should not make ourselves utterly irrelevant and ineffectual by buying into the historically false platitude that teachers or the educational institutions of the state can transform the society. The revolution will not be televised, it will not be elected, and it will not take place in school. If we want to move beyond being bourgeois academics who at best understand a radical interpretation of U.S. history and become actual radicals or working revolutionaries, we should quit our comfortable and rewarding day jobs and get involved in real grass-roots, off-the-corporate-state-grid organizing. This is not to say that, living in the belly of the leviathan Ideological State Apparatus that is public school, we can't teach in ways that will help our students and may even nibble around the edges of creating the conditions for structural change. In that spirit, I would offer a few modest proposals for teaching as if democracy matters.

### ***The Missionary Blues***

For one year I was a white, middle-class boy from the Silicon Valley suburbs who taught English at a high school in a working-poor section of South Central Los Angeles, where the student population was 98% Black and 2% Hispanic. I learned a lot in that short time, far more, no doubt, than my students learned from me. Two things became very clear very quickly. The first was that there is a direct

relationship between how overtly a school embraces its role as Ideological State Apparatus and how far down the socio-economic food chain its students find themselves. Control and indoctrination are far more important in the schools of the dispossessed.

The school where I was assigned had recently come under the direction of one of those vigilante principals that they make Hollywood movies about. He didn't carry a baseball bat, but he did walk tall with a lot of Bill Cosby talk about personal responsibility, dress codes, and test scores. He was very popular with his administrative bosses because he did not push very hard for money (to repair the broken windows and leaky roofs or replace the crumbling textbooks and unusable desks), and he dramatically raised the school's test scores in his first year. He achieved this by simply throwing the bottom 15 percent of the students out of school. During his first week on the job, he scanned the rolls and identified those students with the highest rate of truancy and disciplinary problems, and the lowest grades and scores, deemed them all to be incorrigible gang members, and told them not to come back. The somewhat startled school counselor made an effort to reroute some of these students to the district's "alternative school," but the numbers were too great for that program to accommodate, so the majority of these students were just put on the street, denied access to public education, and probably on their way to one of the other warehouses for the poor—prison, McDonald's or the military. But at the end of the year, the principal did receive an award for most improved test scores.

One of the things that surprised me when I began work was how much of my time was devoted to police work. Each day I was expected to patrol the before- and after-school bus area to make sure that no one was fighting, making out, or completing illicit transactions. Between classes I was supposed to inspect the boys' bathrooms to make sure that no one was using them for anything other than relieving themselves. And my "prep" period was devoted to calling the homes of absent students to inform their parents or guardians (or whoever answered the phone) that the kid hadn't made it to school that day and inquire as to why.

In the classroom, I was circumscribed by an imposed curriculum and regular surveillance by administrators. In department meetings and on in-service days, we were told very explicitly what to teach and how to teach it. There was a lot of talk about "dangerous" topics and lines of inquiry that "just wouldn't do these kids any good." The strong emphasis was on skill acquisition, right thinking, and understanding that conforming to a white, middle class standard of dress, behavior, and speech was a student's best hope for escape from his or her own inferior culture. Teaching eleventh-grade American literature, even with the 1950s curriculum, naturally created some tensions for this project. What happened on the day I taught e. e. cummings provides a representative example.

It was the day that the principal himself was scheduled to "observe" my class, and the assigned text for the day was a poem by e. e. cummings. I don't remember which one, but, it being e. e. cummings, it was a poem devoid of capital letters and full of creative punctuation. As you might expect with a group of students encountering cummings for the first time, as soon as we had finished a stumbling reading of the poem, one young man raised his hand and asked how someone who knew so little about writing had managed to get his poem into a book. With great gusto I launched into a lecture about the conventional nature of capitalization and punctuation, how cummings had mastered the rules before daring to break them, and how breaking rules creatively and with specific purposes in mind often produced brilliant results. Some of my students were interested, some just shook their heads, and some kept looking out the window or sleeping or whispering among themselves. But as soon as the class was over, the principal immediately took me aside to tell me how concerned he was that I was telling students that rules could be broken in his school. If I was to have a future at this institution, I had better clean it up.

I was fresh out of college, confident that I would soon be on my way to graduate school, and without a

mortgage to pay or kids to feed, so I responded, telling him that if it had been up to me, we wouldn't even have been reading the poem that had created the transgression. Given that the text had been imposed on me, and that the student had asked the question that he did, it seemed to me that I had three choices. I could have said, "You're right, John, e. e. cummings was illiterate." Or I could have said, "Shut up you little bastard, I'm not going to answer that question." Or I could have said what I did, risking a punctuation revolt and the chaos sure to follow. Not long after that day the principal and I agreed that it would be best if I didn't return the next fall.

Having seen punctuation described as convention recognized as a threat to the moral order, it became easy to understand why the history teacher who exchanged the day's lesson on Abraham Lincoln for an impromptu lecture on John Brown was fired almost on the spot, and why the very new music teacher who proposed a field trip to the UCLA building where Black Panthers Jon Huggins and Bunchy Carter were shot was soon transferred to an administrative post at the district office. The students who wanted to make a film about Malcolm X for Black History Month had their request for funding turned down, while on almost the same day a different group of students were granted money to build a working model of Apollo 11. The principal refused to allow a copy of a local community activist newspaper called *Left Out* to go on the shelf in the library, but made sure that there was always money for subscriptions to *Ebony* and *JET* magazines.

It may be that the school where I worked was particularly zealous in its commitment to rigid ideological control. But I have no doubt that similarly situated schools are always on the same continuum. By contrast, in all of the public and private universities where I have taught since leaving that high school job, no one has ever even twitched in my direction as I have spent countless hours in the classroom expounding on the insights of Marxist analysis, railing against the history of U.S. oppression of radicalism, and extolling the virtues of the Black Radical tradition. I have been left alone in these activities not because the institution is genuinely committed to academic freedom (I have certainly drawn the disapproving attention of administrators when I have asked questions about budgets or participated in organizing a faculty union), but because the institution, breathing together, knows that what I do in class doesn't really matter. My students at these universities have been overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly middle-class and suburban. They tend to be self-selected as interested in leftist politics by the time they arrive in my classes, and they bring a tremendous amount of interest and enthusiasm to the material. I hope that what they learn may indeed help to shape their values and actions as they go on, but I am sure that teaching my classes is not, as some of my fellow leftist colleagues claim, a political act. At least not in any but the most abstract sense of politics. My students, by and large, are not from a potentially revolutionary class or likely to end up in one. Most of them will graduate and go on to the same kind of white collar and professional jobs that their parents have. Despite their genuine interest in what we do, there is very little danger of their using it to disrupt the arrangements in which they will ultimately find themselves. Universities must live up to their obligation to produce competent, skilled, and interchangeable employees, but most of the indoctrination of students has been accomplished before they arrive on campus, so a university need not be nearly as attentive to its role as an Ideological State Apparatus as an inner city high school must be.

This educational inversion takes an even more ironic twist when we face the second thing I realized in my year of teaching high school. Even if I had been allowed to preach the radical gospel to my students, the most perceptive of them would not have been that interested. Or, as one of my students put it to me after patiently listening to me describe the lessons to be learned about community organizing from David Walker and the Black Panthers: "That's all very interesting, but, due respect, right now I need you to help me get paid." The weary and slightly bemused look on his 16-year-old face cast a stark light on my fatuousness and presumption. Neither I nor anyone from my neighborhood, no matter how steeped we might be in Marx, Gramsci, and Fanon, could tell him or

anyone from his neighborhood anything about oppression and racism in the neglected regions of capital that they hadn't forgotten long ago. Were he to take an interest in my books and theories, he could no doubt study them in a more relevant context in some more organic spot in his community that would be utterly unrelated to school. In the absence of some structure of activism or rebellion, my analysis was at best confirmation of what he already knew about how the pie was cut, and it was of no use whatsoever in his attempt to get even the smallest piece of it.

In a range of possibilities that included menial minimum-wage jobs, the military, prison, selling drugs, taking drugs, or school (rational actors would tend to shy away from rebellion as history shows that rebellion almost always ends in death), this student had at least provisionally chosen school. Unlike me, he had no illusions about the limits of school, and was looking to me to provide the kind of skills and behavioral pointers that would allow him to squeeze through the keyhole that stood between him and larger economic and social opportunity. Luck and dogged determination allowed one or two each year to make that transition, and flogging those examples allowed Hollywood and my principal to perpetuate the illusion that character and education are the keys to social mobility.

In the job that I have now, I have the opportunity to work with a lot of students who are training to be teachers. A significant part of that training falls under the rubrics of "diversity" or "multiculturalism," which have become the euphemisms available for mostly white students to use in mostly white classrooms when talking about non-white people. Thus, these budding teachers will often speak of diverse or multicultural, meaning non-white, students. And they will talk about schools like the one where I worked as diverse or multicultural. Of course as the resegregation that people like Jonathan Kozol describe becomes more and more entrenched, those schools become some of the nation's least diverse and most monocultural. But the language of diversity and multiculturalism does its job in the post-Civil Rights, post-Affirmative Action era by commodifying students of color as dyes that bring very valuable diversity when they are introduced into an all-white classroom or school, and by hiding historical and structural racism and economic inequality behind broad notions of culture. Instead of learning about U.S. racialized capitalism, the brutal histories and ongoing inequalities it has created, and the role that schools have historically played in reinforcing inequality, these mostly white, mostly middle-class teacher apprentices hear a lot about cultural differences, learning styles, and strategies for "connecting" with "multicultural" students. The Ruby Payne phenomenon is just one example of the way that a lot of blather about how understanding the group psychology of poor people, Black people, etc. is the key to becoming a successful teacher in a multicultural environment. Before you can teach multicultural students to read and add, or how to mimic the universal and normal customs and values of the white middle class, you must first gain the trust of your young charges by understanding the aberrant makeup of poor or Black people and learning their codes. Give them tough love and play some hip-hop now and then.

This emphasis on culture and psychology works at the institutional level as the education plank on the individual side of the longstanding individual versus structure debate about poverty: Before we simply throw money at failing schools we need to focus on the culture, character, and individual responsibility that students need to succeed. For many white student teachers, this program creates a missionary zeal. Inspired by the stories of both Hollywood and actual inner city teachers, and armed with their classroom discussions of difference and some out-of-context Paolo Freire, they announce that low salaries be damned, when they graduate they want to get a job at an inner city school and make a difference and really help those students. And I do not mean to mock them here, for they are completely sincere, and it is certainly not their fault that their training does not include much in the way of historical accuracy or analysis. They are, of course, being set up to become part of the problem or simply miserable. When they arrive at their inner city school and encounter hostile students who resent being patronized and disrespected, they will either blame the students or blame themselves, become department heads or transfer back to the suburbs.

State education of the disenfranchised will always serve the interests of the state. Insofar as those interests require people with skills and occasional Horatio Alger success stories, many students will learn to read and write and add, and a few will be able to use school as a ladder out of the labor exploitation and social exclusion they were marked for. The only way that this could change would be if the schools were to fall into the genuine and unfettered control of the local community. If that were to happen (and from where we are now, it's hard to imagine how it could), those communities would quite likely find themselves no longer in need of middle-class white teachers. And they would probably say to those white teachers what the Black Power movement said to white liberals in the mid-1960s: Thank you for all your genuinely brave and selfless work in the past, but perhaps you would best serve the cause if you were to go organize and educate your own kind. All things considered, that's not bad advice. Teaching in a school where there is a little bit more ideological room to move and trying to make structural inequality and white privilege visible to white students will not transform the society, but it might incrementally help create the conditions for change.

### ***No Claim to Honor, Nor Any Claim to Honorable Attention***

Telling the truth in those schools that serve the loftier regions of capital, where the methods of control are subtler but perhaps more effective, is not an easy task. The middle-class values that cluster around concepts like "humanity" and "civil discourse" have been deployed to reinforce the rightness of power relationships as they stand, while masquerading as ways of potentially facilitating change or reform. Both in the moments when we insist on universality and simplicity, and those times when we try to show our students the webs of complexity and ambiguity, the end result always seems to be that winners stay winners and losers remain losers.

Some of these chickens came home to roost with me the first time I taught *The Confessions of Nat Turner* to mostly white students in an African-American Studies course at a state university. Nat Turner was a slave who led a rebellion of about 50 slaves in Southampton County, Virginia, in August of 1831. The rebellion was put down within two days, but not before Turner and his comrades had killed the white people at over a dozen farms. After his capture and before he was executed, Turner was visited in jail by Thomas Gray, a white lawyer who committed Turner's confession to paper. *The Confession of Nat Turner* survives as a problematic (because of Gray's role as amanuensis) first-person account of a slave rebellion. In this manuscript, Turner announces that "'twas my object to carry terror and devastation wherever we went," and thus "neither age nor sex was to be spared" (Greenburg, p. 48). Calmly and in detail he describes killing white men, women, and children, going out of his way to recall that they had to return to one house to murder an infant they had forgotten in its crib.

In their initial responses to the text, my students expressed sympathy for Turner's goal of striking a blow against slavery, but they all qualified their remarks with some version of the caveat: "Of course, nothing justifies killing an innocent infant," or "I think he should have chosen who he killed more carefully." They went on to speculate about Turner's mental health. They argued that killing the innocent was counterproductive to what he was trying to achieve, that the horror of the dead babies would overshadow the injustice of slavery, especially among those whites "who may have been sympathetic to his cause." The discussion went on like this for about twenty minutes until finally one of the three Black students in the class raised his hand. "So far in this class," he said, "we have learned that one-third of the Africans captured by European slave traders died on the middle passage and were thrown overboard. Slave women were raped all the time by white men. Slaves were beaten to death, families were destroyed, and children were sold away from their mothers. Next to all that, one white baby with an axe in his head just doesn't seem like that big a deal to me."

The discussion ground to a halt as most of the white students looked at their shoes. But their

discomfort was nothing compared to my own. I was ashamed. I should have been the one to say what the Black student had said. All of the atrocities that he had listed he had indeed learned in my class, from me. And yet I had been willing to stand there while received platitudes about cute white babies and the ultimate and inconceivable horror of their deaths had piled up. I had stood there, calling on one student after another without even gently asking why their outrage did not extend to the millions of murdered Black slaves. In the face of a platitudinous, but very powerful discourse of Good and Evil, I hadn't been able to say to my students that they were wrong. I hadn't even bothered to complicate their thinking.

This type of failure informs much of our academic response in the Age of the Patriot Act. In his trenchant critique of the mainstream response to 9-11, Giroux feels compelled to offer the same sort of disclaimer that everyone on the left except Ward Churchill uses: "Nothing justifies the violence by terrorists committed against those innocent people who died on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Americans should be unified against that type of terror, and rightly so . . ." (Giroux, p. 7). Churchill's now infamous and probably still mostly unread essay, "On the Justice of Roosting Chickens," proclaims, without caveat, that the 9-11 attacks were predictable, inevitable, and, from a non-white, non-Western point of view, utterly justified. His argument follows the logic of Malcolm X's in his "chickens coming home to roost" remark after the assassination of John Kennedy, and Martin Luther King when he identified "my own government" as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" in his "Beyond Vietnam" speech. Churchill feels that a country responsible for "the more than 3 million people killed in the war in Indochina, those who died in the U.S. invasions of Grenada, Panama and elsewhere in Central America, the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, and the indigenous peoples still subjected to genocidal policies" should expect the payback of 9-11 and should not be surprised when many in the non-white, non-Western world fail to mourn the Twin Tower dead with the same shrill piety that Americans do.

Giroux and many others make a gentler version of the same argument when they suggest that we should look for possible causes of 9-11 in U.S. foreign policy or the history of Western colonialism. But they avoid Churchill's notoriety and persecution by always wrapping their suggestions in the disclaimer, the obligatory condemnation of the killing of the people who went to work that day in the World Trade Center. The effect of this is, of course, to undercut the argument: We should think about investigating and debating and mulling over a long and documented history of U.S. violence, imperialism, and genocide, but we should with one unified, unequivocal, and unqualified voice categorically condemn the killing of two or three thousand mostly professional class Americans.

This rhetorical package runs parallel to the second most used disclaimer in the Churchill brouhaha, the one available to the staunch defenders of academic freedom: "I disagree with what Churchill says, but I think he has the right to say it." This is the free speech equivalent of "Well, I'm not gay, but I don't have a problem with people who are." What difference does it make whether or not we agree with Churchill and why do we have to say that first? The required disclaimer reduces the sound of the leftist analysis of 9-11 to a purr in the corner. It also reveals how susceptible even the left is to the shibboleths of the state and how much academic discourse is conditioned and constrained by the class construction of the school as an institution. For the real threat posed by Churchill is that he was willing to take the point of view of the colonized, the non-white, and the dispossessed. Giroux and others on the genteel left are certainly willing to criticize American government and foreign policy, but always from within the values and visions that define the middle and ruling classes. Churchill is willing to write from the place where those who regularly pay the price for those visions and values are positioned to understand their limits. He's willing to write from the place where a couple of thousand dead middle-class white people aren't that big a deal. It is this, and not his bombast or his alleged personal exaggerations or his faulty footnotes or his pictures with machine guns or his hair, that has led to his vilification by a veritable army of little Eichmanns.

The fiat of “Nothing justifies the violence,” the final word of “and rightly so,” the willingness to speak in the flat cadences of Truth, are discordant in an academic essay by someone like Giroux. This is the kind of talk we expect from politicians. As academics we pride ourselves on our nuance, our commitment to questioning all theses, our willingness to hear all sides and permit open-ended debate. In class we would never say “Nothing justifies the U.S. invasion of Iraq,” or “Nothing justifies millions of U.S. children without access to health care.” We might think those things, but in our work we would be careful to objectively present various arguments and let our students make up their own minds. We are committed, as Giroux says later in his essay, to “a politics . . . that perpetually questions itself as well as all forms of knowledge, values, and practices that appear beyond the process of interrogation, debate, and deliberation” (Giroux, p. 35). This commitment has been so strong that the right has recently been able to interest various state legislatures in a caricatured version that would punish teachers for ever suggesting that a student might be wrong or uninformed.

The ease with which we are willing to abandon our commitment to seeing all sides and adopt platitudes about the sanctity of life and the tragedy of individual deaths when the victims are First-World technocrats suggests that there may be something hollow or ultimately cowardly about that commitment in the first place. If we serve the interests of the state when we get in line with the received and “simple” Truth, might we also be doing the same thing when we insist on nuance and complexity? Consider this indictment of white liberalism from James Baldwin’s *No Name in the Street*:

I think it may have been my own obsession with the McCarthy phenomenon which caused me to suspect the impotence and narcissism of so many of the people whose names I had respected. I had never had any occasion to judge them, as it were intimately. For me, simply, McCarthy was a coward and a bully, with no claim to honor, nor any claim to honorable attention. For me, emphatically, there were *not* two sides to this dubious coin, and, as to his baleful and dangerous effect, there could be no *question* at all. Yet, they spent hours debating whether or not McCarthy was an enemy of domestic liberties. I couldn’t but wonder what conceivable further proof they were awaiting: I thought of German Jews sitting around debating whether or not Hitler was a threat to their lives until the debate was summarily resolved for them by a knocking at the door. (Baldwin, p. 372)

This is the flip side of the coin whose face is “Nothing justifies the violence,” where heads was ruling-class value turned into universal and unified truth, and tails is endless hours of pseudo-intellectual dithering over the pros and cons of something blatantly evil. A simple truth told outside of school becomes endlessly complex in the classroom, as in this example that Baldwin gives about Malcolm X:

I was the host, or moderator, for a radio program starring Malcolm X and a sit-in student from the Deep South. I was the moderator because both the radio station and I were afraid that Malcolm would simply eat the boy alive . . . . Never has a moderator been less needed. Malcolm understood that child and talked to him as though he were talking to a younger brother . . . . What struck me was that he was not at all trying to proselytize the child . . . . “If you are an American citizen,” Malcolm asked the boy, “why have you got to fight for your rights as a citizen? To be a citizen means that you have the rights of a citizen. If you haven’t got the rights of a citizen, then you’re not a citizen.” “It’s not as simple as that,” the boy said. “Why not?” asked Malcolm. (Baldwin, p. 410)

“It’s not as simple as that” is the excuse that we give students as they cross the schoolhouse threshold. The valuable skills of abstraction, quantification, and close reading become the tools that help us build the echo chambers of rationalization that obscure how much our world is arranged to keep millions of people in misery.

Obfuscation through “complexity” is a primary component of ruling class ideology. It is how we explain to children why we don’t roll down the windows of our air-conditioned Volvos to give a quarter to people with cardboard signs. It is business school justifications for the shortage of AIDS drugs in Africa. It is how we rationalize our jobs and daily lives. It is the Roberts Supreme Court and its formalist legal justifications of a punishing agenda. It is how we create differences between Democrats and Republicans. Even the most rudimentary self-knowledge should let us recognize our own “hours debating” subjects that appear obvious to others less advantageously placed. These others, those who have been Othered by the state, enter schools whose job is to “correct” as much of that “other” thinking as possible.

In the last thirty years, with the academic rise of ethnic studies, women’s studies, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, multiculturalism, and diversity, the study of those people made Other by Euro-American patriarchal white supremacy has proliferated in U.S. colleges and schools. But rather than fundamentally changing those schools or the society, this proliferation has merely demonstrated how elastic and resilient schools are as Ideological State Apparatuses. The minority cultures that were always an integral part of U.S. society have been co-opted into the curriculum and celebrated with holidays, special months, and ghettoized graduation requirements. Meanwhile the illusion of the progress that everyone talks about on Martin Luther King Day masks the hard social reality of a widening gap between rich and poor, a growing prison system that is over half people of color, and an ongoing backlash against women’s rights. Since 1980, Black enrollments in colleges have been going steadily downward while K-12 public schools have been resegregated. Long before the Roberts court began to chip away at it, *Brown vs. Board of Education* had failed to integrate our schools in particular and our society in general. The illusion of integration has been maintained by filling the classroom space that *Brown* earmarked for Black bodies with Black texts.

But, while we may be willing to use our classrooms to celebrate and commodify the cultures of the oppressed, we remain generally unwilling to violate the taboo on occupying the radical political perspective that grows from the same experience as those cultures. We will proclaim the wisdom embodied in Native American storytelling traditions, but we will not suggest that Ward Churchill is right. We will sing the blues, but we will not adopt James Baldwin’s clear-eyed view and dismiss Dick Cheney as a coward and a bully. Ultimately, we will not consider the question that Baldwin asks in *The Fire Next Time*: “Do I really *want* to be integrated into a burning house?” (Baldwin, p. 340), because a major part of the house on fire is the part we work in.

The part of “On the Justice of Roosting Chickens” for which Churchill has been most attacked is the section in which he describes the “technocrats of empire” who died in the World Trade Center as “little Eichmanns.” His explanation that “Adolf Eichmann was not charged with direct killing but with ensuring the smooth running of the infrastructure that enabled the Nazi genocide” somewhat downplays the historical Eichmann’s direct role in formulating the final solution, but the basic comparison is apt. The real problem with Churchill’s claim is that it does not go far enough. As employees of the educational institutions of the state, we are all (even Professor Churchill) little Eichmanns. No matter how transgressive and iconoclastic we may think we are in the classroom or outside of our jobs, we are still structurally implicated in the state we denounce. Every department meeting we attend, every grade we assign, every letter of recommendation we write, every tenure vote we cast helps to lube the machinery of empire. And if we are genuinely interested in avoiding that kind of complicity we should go get different jobs.

But if we are to remain in the teaching jobs we have, and we want to make a difference from within the institution, we should take the small but meaningful step of telling the truth. And that should start with owning up to our status as little Eichmanns. If, as we regale our students with visions of radical change and democratic vistas, we also describe the compromised position from which we speak, we

stand a chance of making a small difference. By telling an obvious if somewhat uncomfortable truth, we perhaps gain our students' trust and respect. And then we may help them to understand that the compromised lives they are likely to go on to lead do not have to come with a vow of silence. Most of them, like most of us, will eventually be situated in the world of mortgages, automobiles, patriarchal family arrangements of one sort or another, gardening on the weekend, and the general incremental grinding of the gears of capital. This world will tempt them to assuage their guilt over this inevitable compromise by either turning their back on the simple and brutal truths about inequality or by obscuring those truths in narratives of complexity that explain away their complicity. Our message should be that living an imperfect life does not have to mean that you have to lie to justify that life. If we drink a Coke, buy an I-Pod or a pair of Nikes, or drive a single occupant vehicle, our principles may be compromised in our daily lives, but they are no less true. If we vote for Al Gore, we don't have to stop talking about the Democratic party as a fundamentally flawed institution. If we choose to become teachers, we don't have to pretend that our work can exist outside of the Ideological State Apparatus. In fact, we should make the contours of that apparatus and our role in it as clear as possible to our students.

Perhaps then when we talk about the insights of those from beyond the institution, those who the narratives of complexity are meant to disappear, we can do so with a clear enough conscience to give us a clear-eyed perspective. Along with all the cultural richness of the oppressed we might also be able to hear some political home truths. When those voices tell us that William Faulkner is nothing more than a racist, that Abraham Lincoln was a manager of the interests of the ruling class, that George Bush is without honor and unworthy of honorable attention, that one white baby with an axe in his head isn't, all things considered, that big a deal, maybe we will be able to hear them without adding a caveat, creating a complicated explanation, or insisting that there are two sides to the coin. Maybe we will be able to say, yes, that's probably right.

### *Towards Giving Up Hope*

The last section of Giroux's essay is entitled "Towards a Politics of Hope." He writes:

Educators, scholars, and policy makers can make an important contribution politically and pedagogically in the current crisis in revitalizing a language of resistance and possibility, a language that embraces militant utopianism while constantly challenging those forces that seek to turn such hope into a new slogan or punish and dismiss those who dare look beyond the horizon of the given. Hope, in this instance, is the precondition for individual and social struggle . . . (Giroux, p. 33)

This is inspirational stuff, but perhaps we should consider where we'll be when the inspiration wears off. Militant utopianism is still utopianism and thus it may be useful in defining goals, but those goals will, by definition, be unattainable. An eye to the stars will get you nowhere without the other eye on the ground. We cannot usefully "dare [to] look beyond the horizon of the given" without understanding what the given is. Thus, in the world we find ourselves in, hope is not so much the precondition for struggle, but the precondition for giving up.

If, for example, one of our students were to commit herself to the struggle against racism or misogyny or poverty, one of the first things she would have to come to grips with is that she will die a loser. The state of the given is that, no matter how heroic her efforts, racism, misogyny, and poverty are not going to end in her lifetime, her children's lifetime, her grandchildren's lifetime. No real understanding of current arrangements could predict otherwise. So if our student were to embark on her commitment full of hope, when the realization that she was certainly going to lose inevitably set in, when the two

steps back followed the one step forward so regularly as to be impossible to deny any longer, she would be tossed ineluctably into the pit of hope's flip side, despair. And that's when she, like so many hopeful young activists before her, would give up, get a job in advertising or mediation, and buy a new car and some insurance.

Hope is teleological, it imagines dreams someday coming true, not just forever receding on the horizon. If you hope to win a game where the playing field and rules are fixed so that you always inevitably lose, chances are you'll eventually stop playing. But if you give up hope, you can also give up despair. If we want our students to commit to a better world, we should be honest about what that commitment entails. We should make it clear to them all of the ways they will die having failed, so that failure does not become a reason to quit. With the possibility of winning off the table, they will have to come up with different reasons to get up each morning and continue the struggle. Meaning, dignity, and purpose will have to come from the daily struggle itself, and losing will be nothing more than confirmation that they are still pointed in the right direction.

In what Giroux calls our "current crisis," schooling as if democracy matters may just mean schooling as if losing doesn't matter. Teaching our students to be beautiful losers may even turn out to be a lot more than just the best we can do.

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## Notes

[\[1\]](#) USA PATRIOT ACT is an acronym for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing

Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism. Except for the first letters of each word, it appears in lower case throughout this essay.

<sup>[2]</sup> Giroux's work was first published in 2004. All citations of Giroux in this essay refer to the version in this issue of the *JEC*.