

CHAPTER 3



LOCKED OUT: YOUTH AND ACADEMIC UNFREEDOM

Democracy is not an institution, but essentially an anti-institutional force, a “rupture” in the otherwise relentless trend of the powers-that-be to arrest change, to silence and to eliminate from the political process all those who have not been “born” into power. . . . Democracy expresses itself in a continuous and relentless critique of institutions; democracy is an anarchic, disruptive element inside the political system; essentially, a force for dissent and change. One can best recognize a democratic society by its constant complaints that it is not democratic enough.

—Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society*¹

HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER SIEGE

As corporate power, right-wing think tanks, and military interests jointly engage in an effort to take over higher education, the resistance of educational and other democratic public spheres to a growing anti-intellectualism in American life seems to be weakening. Youth and critical education are the first casualties in the war being waged to force universities and colleges to abandon their autonomy along with their critical role in questioning and promoting the conditions that foster democracy. Instead of serving students and young people, who collectively represent the purpose and future of both education and democracy in the United States, higher education is increasingly administered in a corporate fashion, not only enabling a growing elitism by raising tuition fees but also dangerously embracing a narrow set of interests that put at risk the future of young people, education,

and the nation as a whole. Scholarships and programs that enable disadvantaged students to attend and graduate from university and college have been ruthlessly cut back or tied to military service. As higher education increasingly becomes a privilege rather than a right, many working-class youth either find it financially impossible to enter college or, because of increased costs, drop out.² Those students who have the resources to stay in school are feeling the pressure of the job market, increasingly so under the current recession, and rush to take courses and receive professional credentials in business and the biosciences as the humanities lose majors and downsize.³ Under the strain of the current financial crisis, “the rising cost of college threatens to put higher education out of reach for most Americans.”⁴ While the education gap in the United States has been widening for some time, it is being exacerbated by a wealth gap directly tied to the structural inequities fundamental to a social order shaped by the market-driven politics of neoliberalism. While the middle class will be greatly affected by such costs, it is poor and working-class kids who will find they have almost no chance to attend college, further solidifying their status as redundant and expendable. At a time when youth are increasingly constructed and treated as a disposable population, the university needs to play a role in fighting for the future of all young people rather than a privileged few and for the democratic principles and opportunities that will enable them to be active, critical citizens.

Central to higher education’s defense of public responsibility and participation in democratic self-governance is revitalizing its commitment to academic freedom. At one time in history, it may have been unthinkable that university classrooms would be subject to ideological oversight, largely promoted through the interests of outside conservative politicians, foundations, and media. But as more and more teaching positions are contracted out to part-time faculty who have no governance role in the university, and university administrators increasingly succumb to external pressures and intimidation tactics used by conservative think tanks, which actively engage in scanning university departments and classrooms for what they consider left or liberal viewpoints, the classroom is no longer a safe space immune from the corporate and ideological battles being waged and lost at institutional and social levels to a host of neoliberal and right-wing forces.

Overworked and subject to corporate-minded policies imposed by university administrators, many educators are turning away from their responsibility as critically engaged intellectuals, hoping to remain secure in their jobs by blending into the background, minimalizing

their personal and political investments by viewing themselves as detached professionals, and reducing classroom teaching to a mere vocational exercise. Yet several recent cases of universities denying tenure to or firing accomplished scholars and teachers for what is seen as their dissident political views are indicative of an ominous future in which academic positions afford little or no security and the content of research and teaching are tightly controlled and censored by institutional mercenaries who reduce education to a business to be managed in the most cost-effective, consumer-oriented terms. Moreover, some colleges are using the current financial downturn to argue for the elimination of tenure, allegedly as a cost-saving measure, thus promoting their conservative ideology and dislike for shared governance under the pretext of a neoliberal call to efficiency.⁵ Defending the autonomy of teachers and promoting critical forms of education have become inextricable from defending higher education and the rights of young people to quality education. This chapter explores issues confronting higher education with the purpose of reaffirming its significance as both a foundation for society's investment in young people and the sustenance of democracy itself.

Academics, at the very least, have a moral and political obligation to stand up against the anti-democratic forces attacking higher education, to acknowledge that educational institutions wield enormous cultural power and influence, and to identify with their ethical obligation to assert their cultural authority in ways that foster open-mindedness, dialogue, critical thinking, political agency, and public responsibility. Education is the heart of the democratic political life, and the students and professors who people the campuses of universities and colleges are the heart of higher education. What does it mean when a 2008 study entitled *Closed Minds? Politics and Ideology in American Universities* found that "universities generally have all but ignored what used to be called civics and civic education"?⁶ As higher education risks abdicating its role as a democratic public sphere, the hope for a better future for today's youth and the means to fight against the biopolitics of disposability are lost. It is the responsibility of educators, students, parents, labor, and various social movements to organize a collective challenge against higher education's irresponsible and morally indefensible wagering of both young people's futures and the democratic foundations of governance. If left unchecked, the university will be transformed in short order by policies that objectify students and teachers as mere place fillers and reduce learning to a commodity whose value is measured in terms of how it provides economic success rather than how it models the skills to think critically

and participate in democratic processes. Nothing less than the lives of young people and the future of democracy is at stake.

Educating young people in the spirit of a critical democracy by providing them with the knowledge, passion, civic capacities, and social responsibility necessary to address the problems facing the nation and globe has always been challenged by the existence of rigid disciplinary boundaries, the cult of expertise or highly specialized scholarship unrelated to public life, and antidemocratic ideologies that scoff at the exercise of academic freedom.⁷ Such antidemocratic and anti-intellectual tendencies have intensified in recent decades alongside the contemporary emergence of a number of diverse fundamentalisms, including a market-based neoliberal rationality that exhibits a deep disdain, if not outright contempt, for both democracy and publicly engaged teaching and scholarship. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that academia in the United States is often held hostage to political and economic forces that wish to convert educational institutions into corporate establishments defined by a profit-oriented identity and mission. This means that while the American university still employs the rhetoric of a democratic public sphere, there is a growing gap between a stated belief in noble purposes and the reality of an academy that is under siege.

In keeping with the progressive impoverishment of politics and public life over the past three decades, the university is being transformed into a training ground for corporate and military employment and a cheerleader for a reactionary notion of patriotic correctness, rather than being a public sphere in which youth can become the critical citizens and democratic agents necessary to nourish a socially responsible future. Strapped for money and increasingly defined in the language of a militarized and corporate culture, many universities are now part of an unholy alliance that largely serves the interests of the national security state and the policies of transnational corporations while increasingly removing academic knowledge production from democratic values and projects.⁸ College presidents are now called CEOs and speak largely in the discourse of Wall Street and corporate fund managers. Venture capitalists scour colleges and universities in search of big profits to be made through licensing agreements, the control of intellectual property rights, and investments in university spin-off companies. In this new, though recently humbled, Gilded Age of money and profit, academic subjects gain stature almost exclusively through their exchange value on the market. It is also true that students who have scrambled to get MBAs are now taking government and public service jobs as employment opportunities in the banking and financial sectors are drying up.

Not surprisingly, students are now referred to as “customers,” while some university presidents even argue that professors should be labeled “academic entrepreneurs.”⁹ Tenured faculty are called upon to generate grants, establish close partnerships with corporations, and teach courses that have practical value in the marketplace. There is little in this vision of the university that imagines young people as anything other than fodder for the corporation or appendages of the national security state. What was once the hidden curriculum of many universities—the subordination of higher education to capital—has now become an open and much-celebrated policy of both public and private higher education. As higher education is corporatized, young people find themselves on campuses that look more like malls and they are increasingly taught by professors who are hired on a contractual basis, have obscene workloads, and barely make enough money to pay off their student loans. Worth noting is that “both part-time and full-timers not on a tenure track account for nearly 70 percent of professors at colleges and universities, both public and private.”¹⁰

Higher education is increasingly abandoning its faith in and commitment to democracy as it aligns itself with corporate power and military values, while at the same time succumbing to a range of right-wing religious and political attacks.¹¹ Instead of being a space of critical dialogue, analysis, and interpretation, it is increasingly defined as a space of consumption, further marginalizing young people without access to financial resources and validating ideas in instrumental terms, linked for example to the ability to attract outside funding. As the university develops increasingly “strong ties with corporate and warfare powers,”¹² the culture of research is oriented toward the needs of the military-industrial-academic complex. Faculty and students find their work further removed from the language of democratic values and their respective roles modeled largely upon the business entrepreneur, the consumer, or the soldier in the “war on terror.” With no irony intended, Professor Philip Leopold argues that it is an “essential part of an academic career” that academics be viewed as business entrepreneurs, trained to “watch the bottom line” and to be attentive to “principles of finance, management, and marketing” and to the development of a “brand identity (academic reputation) that is built on marketing (publications and presentations) of a high-quality product (new knowledge).”¹³ In another statement pregnant with irony, Robert Gates, the secretary of defense, proposed the creation of what he calls a new “Minerva consortium,” ironically named after the goddess of wisdom, whose purpose is to fund various universities to “carry out social-sciences research relevant to national security.”¹⁴ Gates and others would like to turn universities into militarized knowledge

factories more willing to produce knowledge, research, and personnel in the interest of the warfare and Homeland (In)Security State than to assume the important role of tackling the problems of contemporary life while holding dominant institutions—especially those that trade in force, violence, and militarism—accountable by questioning how their core values and presence in the world alter and shape democratic identities, values, and organizations. Since September 11, 2001, the CIA and other agencies have been a growing presence on American campuses, offering federal scholarship programs, grants, and other forms of financial aid to students in exchange for postgraduate service within the intelligence or military agencies.¹⁵ Such incursions by governmental and corporate interests have become highly influential in shaping the purpose and meaning of higher education. Unfortunately, Gates' view of the university as a militarized knowledge factory and Professor Leopold's instrumental understanding of the university as a new marketplace of commerce now parade under the banner of educational reform and produce little resistance from either the public or academics. Even the allegedly liberal Obama administration has bought into this morally disdainful understanding of the meaning and purpose of higher education.¹⁶ Hence, it no longer seems unreasonable to argue that just as democracy is being emptied out, the university is also being stripped of its role as a democratic setting where, though often in historically fraught ways, a democratic ethos has been cultivated, practiced, and sustained for several generations.

Higher education is increasingly being influenced by larger economic, military, and ideological forces that consistently attempt to narrow its legitimacy and purview as a democratic public sphere. Public intellectuals are now replaced by privatized intellectuals often working in secrecy and engaged in research that serves either the warfare state or the corporate state, or both. Intellectuals are no longer placed in a vibrant relationship to public life but now labor under the influence of managerial modes of governance and market values that mimic the logic of Wall Street. As Jennifer Washburn observes,

In the classroom deans and provosts are concerned less with the quality of instruction than with how much money their professors bring in. As universities become commercial entities, the space to perform research that is critical of industry or challenges conventional market ideology—research on environmental pollution, poverty alleviation, occupational health hazards—has gradually diminished, as has the willingness of universities to defend professors whose findings conflict with the interests of their corporate sponsors. Will universities stand up for academic freedom in these situations, or will they bow to commercial pressure out of fear of alienating their donors?¹⁷

As a consequence of this pressure, higher education appears to be increasingly decoupling itself from its historical legacy as a crucial public sphere, responsible for both educating students for the workplace and providing them with the modes of critical discourse, interpretation, judgment, imagination, and experiences that deepen and expand democracy. As universities adopt the ideology of the transnational corporation and become subordinated to the needs of capital, the war industries, and the Pentagon, they are less concerned about how they might educate students about the ideology and civic practices of democratic governance and the necessity of using knowledge to address the challenges of public life.¹⁸ Instead, as part of the post-9/11 military-industrial-academic complex, higher education increasingly conjoins military interests and market values, identities, and social relations while John Dewey's once-vaunted claim that "democracy needs to be reborn in each generation, and education is its midwife" is either willfully ignored, forgotten, or made an object of scorn.¹⁹

The corporatization, militarization, and dumbing down of rigorous scholarship and the devaluing of the critical capacities of young people mark a sharp break from a once-strong educational tradition in the United States, extending from Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey to W. E. B. DuBois, that held that freedom flourishes in the worldly space of the public realm only through the work of educated, critical citizens. Within this democratic tradition, education was not confused with training, nor did it surrender its democratic values to an unquestioning faith in market efficiency; instead, its critical function was propelled by the need to provide students with the knowledge and skills that enable a "politically interested and mobilized citizenry, one that has certain solidarities, is capable of acting on its own behalf, and anticipates a future of ever greater social equality across lines of race, gender, and class."²⁰ Other prominent educators and theorists such as Hannah Arendt, James B. Conant, and Cornelius Castoriadis have long believed and rightly argued that we should not allow education to be modeled after the business world. Dewey, in particular, warned about the growing influence of the "corporate mentality" and the threat that the business model posed to public spaces, higher education, and democracy. He argued:

The business mind [has] its own conversation and language, its own interests, its own intimate groupings in which men of this mind, in their collective capacity, determine the tone of society at large as well as the government of industrial society We now have, although without formal or legal status, a mental and moral corporateness for which history affords no parallel.²¹

Dewey and the other public intellectuals mentioned above shared a common vision and project of rethinking what role education might play in providing students with the habits of mind and ways of acting that would enable them to “identify and probe the most serious threats and dangers that democracy faces in a global world dominated by instrumental and technological thinking.”²² James Bryant Conant, a former president of Harvard University, argued that higher education should create a class of “American radicals” who could fight for equality, favor public education, elevate human needs over property rights, and challenge “groups which have attained too much power.”²³ Conant’s views seem so radical today that it is hard to imagine him being hired as a university president at Harvard or at any other institution of higher learning. All of these intellectuals offered a notion of the university as a bastion of democratic learning and values that provides a crucial referent in exploring the more specific question regarding what form the relationship between corporations and higher education will take in the twenty-first century. It now seems naïve to assume that corporations, left to their own devices, would view higher education as more than merely a training center for future business employees, a franchise for generating profits, or a space in which corporate culture and education merge in order to produce literate consumers.

American higher education is ever more divided into those institutions that educate the elite to rule the world in the twenty-first century and the second- and third-tier institutions that largely train students for low-paid positions in the capitalist world economy. It is increasingly apparent that the university in America has become a social institution that not only fails to address inequality in society but also contributes to a growing division between social classes. Instead of being a space of critical dialogue, analysis, and interpretation, the American university is increasingly defined as a space of consumption, where ideas are validated in instrumental terms and valued for their success in attracting outside funding while developing stronger ties to corporate powers. Those transcendent values necessary to sustain a democratic society and “nurture the capacity for individual conscience” and critical agency are increasingly being subordinated to a corporatism that crushes “the capacity for moral choice.”²⁴ Moreover, as tuition exceeds the budgets of most Americans, quality education at public and private universities becomes a reserve primarily for the children of the rich and powerful. While researchers attempt to reform a “broken” federal student financial aid system, there is “growing evidence . . . that the United States is slipping (to 10th now among

industrialized countries) in the proportion of young adults who attain some postsecondary education."²⁵

Higher education has a responsibility not only to be available and accessible to all youth but also to educate young people to make authority politically and morally accountable and to expand both academic freedom and the possibility and promise of the university as a bastion of democratic inquiry, values, and politics, even as these are necessarily refashioned at the beginning of the new millennium. While questions regarding whether the university should serve public rather than private interests no longer carry the weight of forceful criticism that they did when raised by Thorstein Veblen, Robert Lynd, and C. Wright Mills in the first part of the twentieth century, such questions are still crucial in addressing the reality of higher education and what it might mean to imagine the university's full participation in public life as the protector and promoter of democratic values among the next generation. This is especially true at a time when the meaning and purpose of higher education are under attack by a phalanx of right-wing forces attempting to slander, even vilify, liberal and left-oriented professors, cut already meager federal funding for higher education, and place control of what is taught and said in classrooms under legislative oversight.²⁶ While the American university faces a growing number of problems that range from the increasing loss of federal and state funding to the incursion of corporate power, a galloping commercialization, and the growing influence of the national security state, it is also currently being targeted by conservative forces that have highjacked political power and waged a focused campaign against the principles of academic freedom, sacrificing the quality of education made available to youth in the name of patriotic correctness and dismantling the university as a site of critical pedagogical practice, autonomous scholarship, independent thought, and uncorrupted inquiry.

THE RIGHT-WING ASSAULT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Conservatives have a long history of viewing higher education as a cradle of left-wing thought and radicalism. Moreover, just as religious fundamentalists attempted to suppress academic freedom in the nineteenth century, they continue to do so today. Yet in its current expression, the attack on the university has taken a strange turn: liberal professors, specifically in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, are now being portrayed as the enemies of academic freedom

because they allegedly abuse students' rights by teaching views unpopular to some of the more conservative students. The current attack on academe borrows its tactics from right-wing strategists who emphasize the power and political nature of education. This viewpoint has been significant in shaping long-term strategies put into place as early as the 1920s to win an ideological war against liberal intellectuals, who instead argued both for changes in American domestic and foreign policy and for holding government and corporate power accountable as a precondition for extending and expanding the promise of an inclusive democracy. During the McCarthy era, criticisms of the university and its dissenting intellectuals cast a dark cloud over the exercise of academic freedom, and many academics were either fired or harassed out of their jobs because of their political activities outside the classroom or their alleged communist fervor or left-wing affiliations. In 1953, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) was founded by Frank Chodorov in order to assert right-wing influence and control over universities. ISI was but a precursor to the present era of politicized and paranoid academic assaults. In fact, William F. Buckley, who catapulted to fame among conservatives in the early 1950s with the publication of *God and Man at Yale*, in which he railed against secularism at Yale University and called for the firing of socialist professors, was named as the first president of ISI. The current president of ISI, T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr., delivered the following speech to the Heritage Foundation in 1989 that captures the ideological spirit and project behind its view of higher education:

We must . . . provide resources and guidance to an elite which can take up anew the task of enculturation. Through its journals, lectures, seminars, books and fellowships, this is what ISI has done successfully for 36 years. The coming of age of such elites has provided the current leadership of the conservative revival. But we should add a major new component to our strategy: the conservative movement is now mature enough to sustain a counteroffensive on that last Leftist redoubt, the college campus. . . . We are now strong enough to establish a contemporary presence for conservatism on campus, and contest the Left on its own turf. We plan to do this greatly by expanding the ISI field effort, its network of campus-based programming.²⁷

ISI was an early effort on the part of conservatives to “‘take back’ the universities from scholars and academic programs regarded either as too hostile to free markets or too critical of the values and history of Western civilization.”²⁸ As part of an effort to influence future generations to adopt a conservative ideology and leadership roles in “battling the radicals and PC types on campus,” the Institute now

provides numerous scholarships, summer programs, and fellowships to students.²⁹ The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in 2007 that various conservative groups are spending over \$40 million “on their college programs.”³⁰ Tying ideology to student funding is dangerous, if not unethical. It enables right-wing organizations to take advantage of low-income families in an attempt to rear up a new generation of conservatives. More recently, conservative foundations are trying to establish “academic beachheads” for their ideas by funding programs, centers, and institutes, largely run by conservative professors. The journalist Patricia Cohen has written that decades of money from conservative foundations have “helped create a kind of shadow university of private research institutes.”³¹

Perhaps the most succinct statement for establishing a theoretical framework and political blueprint for the current paranoia surrounding the academy is the Powell Memo, released on August 23, 1971, and authored by Lewis F. Powell, Jr., who would later be appointed as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court. Powell identified the American college campus “as the single most dynamic source” for producing and housing intellectuals “who are unsympathetic to the [free] enterprise system.”³² He recognized that one crucial strategy in changing the political composition of higher education was to convince university administrators and boards of trustees that the most fundamental problem facing universities was the lack of conservative educators, or what he labeled the “imbalance of many faculties.”³³ The Powell Memo was designed to develop a broad-based strategy not only to counter dissent but also to develop a material and ideological infrastructure with the capability to transform the American public consciousness through a conservative pedagogical commitment to reproduce the knowledge, values, ideology, and social relations of the corporate state. The Powell Memo, while not the only influence, played an important role in generating, in the words of Lewis Lapham, a “cadre of ultraconservative and self-mythologising millionaires bent on rescuing the country from the hideous grasp of Satanic liberalism.”³⁴ The most powerful members of this group were Joseph Coors in Denver, Richard Mellon Scaife in Pittsburgh, John Olin in New York City, David and Charles Koch in Wichita, the Smith Richardson family in North Carolina, and Harry Bradley in Milwaukee—all of whom agreed to finance a number of right-wing foundations to the tune of roughly \$3 billion³⁵ over 30 years, building and strategically linking “almost 500 think tanks, centers, institutes and concerned citizens groups both within and outside of the academy. . . . A small sampling of these entities includes the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the American

Enterprise Institute, the Manhattan Institute, the Hoover Institution, the Claremont Institute, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, Middle East Forum, Accuracy in Media, and the National Association of Scholars.”³⁶ For several decades, right-wing extremists have labored to put into place an ultraconservative reeducation machine—an apparatus for producing and disseminating a public pedagogy in which everything tainted with the stamp of liberal origin and the word “public” would be contested and destroyed.

Given the influence and resources of this long campaign against progressive institutions and critical thought in the United States, it is all the more important that current educators of the next generation of citizens sit up and take notice, especially since the university is one of the few places left where critical dialogue, debate, and dissent can take place. Some theorists believe that not only has the militarization and neoliberal reconstruction of higher education proceeded steadily within the last 25 years, but it is now moving at an accelerated pace, subjecting the academy to what many progressives argue is a new and more dangerous threat. One of the most noted historians of the McCarthy era, Ellen Schrecker, insists that “today’s assault on the academy is more serious” because “[u]nlike that of the McCarthy era, it reaches directly into the classroom.”³⁷ As Schrecker suggests, the new war being waged against higher education is not simply against dissenting public intellectuals and academic freedom: it is also deeply implicated in questions of power across the university, specifically regarding who controls the hiring process, the organization of curricula, and the nature of pedagogy itself. The expanding influence of conservative trustees and academics within the university is facilitated by the assistance they receive from a growing number of well-funded and powerful right-wing agencies and groups outside the walls of the academy. Joel Beinin argues that many of these right-wing foundations and institutions have to be understood both as part of a political movement that shapes public knowledge in ways unconstrained by the professional standards of the university and as part of a backlash against the protest movements of the 1960s—which called into question the university as a “knowledge factory” and criticized its failure to take its social functions seriously. He writes:

The substantial role of students and faculty members in the anti-Vietnam War movement; the defection of most university-based Latin America specialists from U.S. policy in the Reagan years, if not earlier; similar, if less widespread, defections among Africa and Middle East specialists; and the “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s all contributed to the rise of think tanks

funded by right-wing and corporate sources designed to constitute alternative sources of knowledge unconstrained by the standards of peer review, tolerance for dissent, and academic freedom.³⁸

Subject to both market mechanisms and right-wing ideological rhetoric about using the academy to defend the values of Western civilization and reinforce the dominant social order, the opportunity to assert the university as a space where young people can be exposed to and explore challenging new ideas appears to be dwindling.

While it is crucial to recognize that the rise of a “new McCarthyism” cannot be attributed exclusively to the radical curtailment of civil liberties initiated by the George W. Bush administration after the cataclysmic events of September 11, 2001, it is nonetheless true that a growing culture of fear and jingoistic patriotism emboldened a post-9/11 patriotic correctness movement, most clearly exemplified by actions of the right-wing American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), which issued a report shortly after the attacks accusing a supposedly unpatriotic academy of being the “weak link in America’s response to the attack.”³⁹ Individuals and groups who opposed George W. Bush’s foreign and domestic policies were put on the defensive—some overtly harassed—as right-wing pundits, groups, and foundations repeatedly labeled them “traitors” and “un-American.” In some cases, conservative accusations that seemed disturbing, if not disturbed, before the events of 9/11 now appeared perfectly acceptable, especially in the dominant media. The legacy of this new-style McCarthyism was also on display in Ohio, California, and a number of other states where some public universities were requiring job applicants to sign statements confirming that they do not belong to any terrorist organization, as defined by the Bush-Cheney administration, which would basically encompass any organization that voiced opposition to the administration’s domestic and foreign policies.

In the aftermath of 9/11, universities were castigated as hotbeds of left-wing radicalism, while conservative students alleged that they were being humiliated and discriminated against in college and university classrooms all across the country. The language and tactics of warfare moved easily between so-called rogue states such as Iraq and a critique of universities whose defense of academic freedom did not sit well with academic and political advocates of the neoliberal security-surveillance state.⁴⁰ McCarthy-like blacklists were posted on the Internet by right-wing groups such as Campus Watch, ACTA, and Target of Opportunity,⁴¹ attempting to both out and politically

shame allegedly radical professors who were giving “aid and comfort to the enemy” because of their refusal to provide unqualified support for the Bush administration. The nature of conservative acrimony may have been marked by a new language, but the goal of the attack on higher education was largely the same: to remove from the university all vestiges of dissent and to reconstruct it as an increasingly privatized sphere for reproducing the interests of corporations and the national security state while also having it assume a front-line position in the promotion of an imperialist military agenda. “Academic balance” was now invoked as a way to protect American values and national identity when it really promoted a form of affirmative action for hiring conservative faculty. In a similar manner, “academic freedom” was redefined, both through the prism of student rights and as a legitimating referent for dismantling professional academic standards and imposing outside political oversight on the classroom. If the strategy and project of conservative ideologues became more energetic and persistent after 9/11, it is also fair to say that right-wing efforts and demands to reform higher education took a dangerous turn that far exceeded the threat posed by the previous culture wars.

Under the Bush-Cheney administration, the war on terror became a pretext for a war against any public sphere that took responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and residents, including higher education. The neoliberal mantra of “privatize or perish” became a battle cry for a generation of right-wing activists attempting to dismantle public and higher education as democratic public spheres. The right-wing coalition of Christian evangelicals, militant nationalists, market fundamentalists, and neoconservatives that had gained influence under the Reagan administration had unprecedented power in shaping policy under the second Bush presidency. Many academics as well as public school teachers who critically addressed issues such as the U.S. presence in Iraq, the neoconservative view of an imperial presidency, the unchecked market fundamentalism of the Bush administration, or the right-wing views driving energy policies, sex education, and the use of university research “in pursuit of enhanced war making abilities”⁴² were either admonished, labeled un-American, or simply fired. Some of the most famous cases include professors such as Joseph Massad of Columbia University, Norman Finkelstein of DePaul University, Nadia Abu E-Haj of Barnard College, and Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado. Though these cases received wide attention in the dominant media, they represent just some of the better-known instances in which academics have been attacked by

right-wing interests through highly organized campaigns of intimidation, which taken collectively suggest an all-out assault on academic freedom, critical scholarship, and the very idea of the university as a place to question and think.⁴³

In a similar manner, any academic and scientific knowledge that challenged the rational foundations of these antidemocratic worldviews was either erased from government policies or attacked by government talking heads as morally illegitimate, politically offensive, or in violation of patriotic correctness. Scientists who resisted the ban on stem cell research as well as the official government position on global warming, HIV transmission, and sex education were intimidated by congressional committees, which audited their work or threatened “to withdraw federal grant support for projects whose content they find substantively offensive.”⁴⁴ Educators who argued for theoretical and policy alternatives to abstinence as a mode of sex education were attacked, fired, or cut out of funding programs for education. And when the forces of patriotic correctness joined the ranks of market fundamentalists, higher education was increasingly defined through the political lens of an audit culture that organized learning around measurable outcomes rather than modes of critical thinking and inquiry.

In the war being waged by right-wing extremists in order to divest the university of its critical intellectuals and critically oriented curricula, programs, and departments, ACTA produced a booklet titled *How Many Ward Churchills?* in which it insisted that the space that separated most faculty from political radicals like Ward Churchill (controversially fired by the University of Colorado in 2007—a decision reversed by the courts in 2009) was small indeed, and that by protecting such individuals colleges and universities now “risk losing their independence and the privilege they have traditionally enjoyed.”⁴⁵ And how do we know that higher education has fallen into such dire straits? These apocalyptic conditions were revealed through an inane summary of various course syllabi offered by respected universities that allegedly proved “professors are using their classrooms to push political agendas in the name of teaching students to think critically.”⁴⁶ Courses that included discussions of race, social justice, gender equality, and whiteness as a tool of exclusion were dismissed as distorting American history, by which ACTA meant consensus history, a position made famous by the tireless efforts of Lynne Cheney, who has repeatedly asserted that American history should be celebratory even if it means overlooking “internal conflicts and the non-white

population.”⁴⁷ Rather than discuss the moral principles or pedagogical values of courses organized around the need to address human suffering, violence, and social injustice, the ACTA report claimed that “[a]nger and blame are central components of the pedagogy of social justice.”⁴⁸ In the end, the listing of course descriptions was designed to alert administrators, governing boards, trustees, and tenure and hiring committees of the need to police instructors in the name of “impartiality.” Presenting itself as a defender of academic freedom, ACTA actually wants to monitor and police the academy, just as Homeland Security monitors the reading habits of library patrons and the National Security Agency spies on American citizens without first obtaining warrants.

Despite its rhetoric, ACTA is not a friend of the principle of academic freedom or diversity. Nor is it comfortable with John Dewey’s insistence that education should be responsive to the deepest conflicts of our time. And while the tactics to undermine academic freedom and critical education have grown more sophisticated, right-wing representations of the academy have become more shrill. For instance, James Pierson in the conservative *Weekly Standard* claimed that when 16 million students enter what he calls the “left-wing university,” they will discover that “[t]he ideology of the left university is both anti-American and anticapitalist.”⁴⁹ And for Roger Kimball, editor of the conservative journal *The New Criterion*, the university has been “corrupted by the values of Woodstock . . . that permeate our lives like a corrosive fog.” He asks, “Why should parents fund the moral devilezation of their children at the hands of tenured antinomians?”⁵⁰ While relying on the objectification of youth, such anti-intellectualism reveals little understanding of how it does a disservice to young people, who have historically represented insightful and challenging views of social issues. Another example of these distortions occurred when former Republican presidential candidate Reverend Pat Robertson proclaimed that there were at least “thirty to forty thousand” left-wing professors or, as he called them, “termites that have worked into the woodwork of our academic society. . . . They are racists, murderers, sexual deviants and supporters of al-Qaeda—and they could be teaching your kids! These guys are out and out communists, they are propagandists of the first order. You don’t want your child to be brainwashed by these radicals, you just don’t want it to happen. Not only be brainwashed but beat up, they beat these people up, cower them into submission.”⁵¹ Robertson’s comments mask a fundamental fear of young people in the guise of protecting them. The teachers or institutions do not pose nearly as much of a risk to Robertson’s worldview as

the young people themselves—those who could possibly go out into the world and actively try to change it. Most right-wing ideologues are more subtle and more insidious than Robertson, having dressed up their rhetoric in the language of fairness and balance, thereby cleverly expropriating, as Jonathan Cole suggests, “key terms in the liberal lexicon, as if they were the only true champions of freedom and diversity on campuses.”⁵² Inflated rhetoric aside, the irony of such rallying cries against “liberal propaganda” is that they support a conservative project designed to impose more oversight and control of the university, discriminate against liberal students and faculty, legislate more outside control over teacher authority, enact laws to protect conservative students from pedagogical “harassment” (that is, views differing from their own), and pass legislation that regulates the hiring process.

As I have pointed out in *The University in Chains*, one of the most powerful and well-known spokespersons leading the effort for “academic balance” is David Horowitz, president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture and the ideological force behind the online magazine *FrontPageMag.com*. A self-identified former left-wing radical who has since become a right-wing conservative, he is the author of over 20 books and founder of Students for Academic Freedom, a national watchdog group that monitors what professors say in their classrooms. He is also the creator of *DiscovertheNetworks.org*, an online database whose purpose is to “catalogue all the organizations and individuals that make up” what he loosely defines in sweeping monolithic terms as “the Left.”⁵³ As one of the most forceful voices in the assault on higher education, Horowitz has used the appeal to intellectual diversity and academic freedom with great success to promote his Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR),⁵⁴ the central purpose of which, according to Horowitz, is “to enumerate the rights of students to not be indoctrinated or otherwise assaulted by political propagandists in the classroom or any educational setting.”⁵⁵ This rhetoric of student rights, allegedly defending youth, actually destroys students’ access to a range of ideas, including the ones most prevalent among established scholars and validated by rigorous peer-review processes. Horowitz’s case for the Academic Bill of Rights rests on a series of faulty empirical studies, many conducted by right-wing associations, which suggest left-wing views completely dominate the academy.⁵⁶ The studies look compelling until they are more closely examined.⁵⁷ For example, they rarely look at colleges, departments, or programs outside of the social sciences and humanities, thus excluding a large portion of the campus. According to the *Princeton Review*, four of the top-ten most popular subjects are business administration and

management, biology, nursing, and computer science, none of which is included in Horowitz's data.⁵⁸ While it is very difficult to provide adequate statistics regarding the proportion of liberals to conservatives in academe, a University of California at Los Angeles report surveyed over 55,000 full-time faculty and administrators in 2002–2003 and found that “48 percent identified themselves as either liberal or far left; 34 percent as middle of the road, and . . . 18 percent as conservative or far right.”⁵⁹ All in all, 52.3 percent of college faculty either considered themselves centrist or conservative, suggesting that balance is far less elusive than Horowitz would have us believe. Furthermore, a 2006 study by the journal *Public Opinion Quarterly* argues that “recent trends suggest increased movement to the center, toward a more moderate faculty.”⁶⁰ But there is more at stake here than the reliability of statistical studies measuring the voting patterns, values, and political positions of faculty. There is also the issue of whether such studies tell us anything at all about what happens in college classrooms. What correlation is to be correctly assumed between a professor's voting patterns and how he or she teaches a class? Actually, none. How might such studies deal with people whose political positions are not so clear, as when an individual is socially conservative but economically radical? And are we to assume that there is a correlation between “one's ideological orientation and the quality of one's academic work”?⁶¹

Then, of course, there are the questions that the right-wing commissars refuse to acknowledge: Who is going to monitor and determine what the politics of potential new hires, existing faculty members, and departments should be? How does such a crude notion of politics mediate disciplinary wars between, for instance, those whose work is empirically driven and those who adhere to qualitative methods? And if balance implies that all positions are equal and deserve equal time in order not to appear biased, should universities give equal time to Holocaust deniers, to work that supported apartheid in South Africa, or to proslavery advocates, to name but a few? Moreover, as Russell Jacoby points out with a degree of irony, if political balance is so important, then why isn't it invoked in other commanding sectors of society such as the police force, Pentagon, FBI, and CIA?⁶²

The right-wing demand for balance also deploys the idea that conservative students are relentlessly harassed, intimidated, or unfairly graded because of their political views, despite their growing presence on college campuses and the generous financial support they receive from over a dozen conservative institutions. One place where such examples of alleged discrimination can be found is on the Web site

of Horowitz's Students for Academic Freedom (SAF), whose credo is "You can't get a good education if they're only telling you half the story."⁶³ SAF has chapters on 150 campuses and maintains a Web site where students can register complaints. Most complaints express dissatisfaction with teacher comments or assigned readings that have a left-liberal orientation. Students complain, for instance, about reading lists that include books by Howard Zinn, Cornel West, or Barbara Ehrenreich. Others protest classroom screenings of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* or other documentary films such as *Super Size Me* and *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*. Here is one student's complaint: "This class was terrible. We were assigned 3 books, plus a course reader! I don't think that just because a professor thinks they have the right to assign anything they want that they should be able to force us to read so much. In fact, I think the professor found out my religious and political beliefs and this is why he assigned so much reading."⁶⁴ Another student felt harassed because she had to read a text in class titled *Fast Food Nation*, which is faulted for arguing in favor of government regulation of the food industry. This is labeled "left indoctrination."⁶⁵

What is especially disturbing about these complaints is that aggrieved students and their sympathizers appear entirely indifferent to the degree to which they not only enact a political intrusion into the classroom but also undermine the concept of education and professional academic standards that provide the basis for what is taught in classrooms, the approval of courses, and who is hired to teach such courses. Education is about fostering the conditions in which youth can make up their own minds, not be indoctrinated. Horowitz's view of education as a one-way, top-down learning process is utterly facile, although it is telling: conservatives are most comfortable with precisely this kind of hierarchical authority structure and would like to see it emulated in the classroom. The complaints by conservative students often share the premise that because they are "consumers" of education, they have a right to demand what should be taught, as if knowledge is simply a commodity to be purchased according to one's taste. Awareness of academic procedures, research assessed by peer review, and basic standards for reasoning, as well as an understanding that professors earn a certain amount of authority because they are familiar with a research tradition and its methodologies, significant scholarship, and history, is entirely absent from such complaints that presuppose students have the right to listen only to ideas they agree with and to select their own classroom reading materials. Because some students disagree with an unsettling idea does not mean that

they should have the authority, expertise, education, or power to dictate for all their classmates what should be stated, discussed, or taught in a classroom. What is lost in these arguments is the central pedagogical assumption that teaching is about activating and questioning all forms of knowledge, providing young people with the tools to critically engage what they know and to recognize the limits of their own knowledge. It is also about learning to think from the place of the other, to “raise one’s self-reflexiveness to the highest maximum point of intensity.”⁶⁶

Defending higher education from this brand of anti-intellectualism is not motivated by “political bias” on the part of so-called left-wing universities. It is motivated, quite simply, by a principle informing all academic inquiry and education: intellectual responsibility involves an ongoing search for knowledge that enables a deeper and better understanding of the world. It is on these grounds that higher education must be defended. Neither academics nor students can ignore the democratic principles and conditions that make such knowledge available or even possible, that is, the conditions that enable critical scholarship and critical pedagogy both to survive and to flourish. Critical pedagogy is about teaching students how to hold authority and power accountable, providing them with the tools to make judgments freed from “the hierarchies of [official] knowledge” that attempt to shut down critical engagement. Such pedagogical tools are necessary for what Jacques Rancière calls “dissensus” or taking up a critical position that challenges the dogma of common sense.⁶⁷ As he puts it, “the work of dissensus is to always reexamine the boundaries between what is supposed to be normal and what is supposed to be subversive, between what is supposed to be active, and therefore political, and what is supposed to be passive or distant, and therefore apolitical.”⁶⁸ Dissensus does more than call for “a modification of the sensible”;⁶⁹ it also demands a utopian pedagogy that “provides names that one can give to . . . the landscape of the possible,” a landscape in which there is no room for the “machine that makes the ‘state of things’ unquestionable” and that insists upon a “declaration of our powerlessness.”⁷⁰ In this way, critical pedagogy is about providing the conditions for students to be agents in a world that needs to be interrogated as part of a broader project of connecting the search for knowledge, truth, and justice to the ongoing tasks of democratizing both the university and larger society.

For many conservatives, the commitment to critical thinking and self-governance and the notion of pedagogy as a political and moral practice rather than as a disinterested technical task are simply

outcomes of political indoctrination. Their attack on the university betrays a lack of trust in youth and a desire to retain power and authority in the hands of an unaccountable elite. For instance, Horowitz advocates in his book *The Professors* for a system of higher education that effectively depoliticizes pedagogy, deskills faculty, and infantilizes students, and he supports this position through the charge that a number of reputable scholars who take matters of critical thinking seriously are in reality indoctrinating their students with their own political views.⁷¹ The book, as detailed by a report of the Free Exchange on Campus organization, is an appalling mix of falsehoods, lies, misrepresentations, and unsubstantiated anecdotes.⁷² Not only does Horowitz fail to include in his list of “dangerous” professors one conservative academic, but many professors are condemned simply for what they teach, as Horowitz actually has little or no ammunition against *how* they teach. For example, Professor Lewis Gordon is criticized for including “contributions from Africana and Eastern thought” in his course on existentialism.⁷³ This is an utterly baffling criticism since Lewis Gordon is one of the world’s leading African existential philosophers, a philosopher, moreover, who recognizes that “the body of literature that constitutes European existentialism is but one continent’s response to a set of problems that date from the moment human beings faced problems of anguish and despair.”⁷⁴ Horowitz’s endless invective against critical intellectuals, all of whom he seems to consider left-wing, is perfectly captured in a comment he made on Dr. Laura’s talk show in which he told the listening audience that “campus leftists hate America more than the terrorists.”⁷⁵ This kind of diatribe has more in common with Sarah Palin’s fear-mongering remarks in the 2008 presidential campaign than it does with engaging in serious modes of analysis.

How does one take seriously Horowitz’s call for fairness when he labels the American Library Association in his online magazine as “a terrorist sanctuary,”⁷⁶ or describes Noam Chomsky, whom the *New Yorker* named “one of the greatest minds of the 20th century,”⁷⁷ as “demonic and seditious” and claims the purpose of Chomsky’s work is “to incite believers to provide aid and comfort to the enemies of the U.S.”?⁷⁸ Indeed, what is one to make of Horowitz’s online “A Guide to the Political Left” in which the mild-mannered film critic Roger Ebert occupies the same ideological ground as Omar Abdel Rahman, the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing? Can one really believe that Horowitz is a voice for unbiased and open inquiry when he portrays as activists for “left-wing agendas and causes” the late Peter Jennings, Supreme Court Justice Ruth B. Ginsburg,

Garrison Keillor, and Katie Couric?⁷⁹ But apparently politicians at all levels of government *do* take Horowitz seriously. In 2005, Florida legislators considered a bill inspired by the ABOR that would provide students with the right to sue their professors if they felt their views, such as a belief in Intelligent Design, were disrespected in class.⁸⁰ At the federal level, the ABOR legislation made its way through various House and Senate Committees with the firm backing of a number of politicians and was passed in the House of Representatives in March 2006, but went no further.⁸¹ In 2007, a Senate committee in Arizona passed a bill in which faculty could be fined up to \$500 for “advocating one side of a social, political, or cultural issue that is a matter of partisan controversy.”⁸²

As Stanley Fish has argued, “balance” is a flawed concept and should be understood as a political tactic rather than an academic value.⁸³ The appeal to balance is designed to do more than get conservatives teaching in English departments, promote intellectual diversity, or protect conservative students from the supposed horrors of left-wing indoctrination; its deeper purpose is to monitor pedagogical exchange through government intervention, calling into question the viability of academic integrity and undermining the university as a public sphere that educates students as critically engaged and responsible citizens in the larger global context. The attack by Horowitz and his allies against liberal faculty and programs in the social sciences and humanities such as Middle Eastern studies, women’s studies, and peace studies has opened the door to a whole new level of assault on academic freedom, teacher authority, and critical pedagogy.⁸⁴ These attacks, as I have pointed out, are much more widespread and, in my estimation, much more dangerous than the McCarthyite campaign several decades ago.

In response to this attack on academic freedom, unfortunately even the most spirited defenders of the university as a democratic public sphere too often overlook the ominous threat being posed to what takes place in the classroom, and, by extension, to the very nature of pedagogy as a political, moral, and critical practice.⁸⁵ The concept of balance demeans teacher authority by suggesting that a political litmus test is the most appropriate consideration for teaching, and it devalues students by suggesting that they are happy robots, interested not in thinking but in merely acquiring skills for jobs. In this view, students are rendered incapable of thinking critically or engaging knowledge that unsettles their worldviews and are considered too weak to resist ideas that challenge their commonsense understanding of the world. And teachers are turned into instruments of

official power and apologists for the existing order. Teacher authority can never be neutral; nor can it be assessed in terms that are narrowly ideological. It is always broadly political and interventionist in terms of the knowledge effects it produces, the classroom experiences it organizes, and the future it presupposes in the countless ways in which it addresses the world. Teacher authority suggests that as educators we must make a sincere effort to be self-reflective about the value-laden nature of our authority while rising to the fundamental challenge of educating students to take responsibility for the direction of society.

It should come as no surprise that many religious and political conservatives view critical pedagogy as dangerous, often treating it with utter disdain or contempt. Critical pedagogy's alleged crimes can be found in some of its most important presuppositions about the purpose of education and the responsibility of educators. These include its central tenet that at the very core of education is the task of educating students to become critical agents who actively question and negotiate the relationships between theory and practice, schooling and everyday life, and the larger society and the domain of common sense. At stake here is a notion of teaching that refuses simply to serve government power, national interests, a rigid social order, and officially sanctioned views of the world. Also at stake here is the recognition that critical pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critical agents; that is, it provides a sphere where the unconditional freedom to question and take a stance is central to the purpose of the university and also to democracy itself.⁸⁶ In this discourse, pedagogy always represents a commitment to the future, and it remains the task of educators to point the way to a more socially just world, a world in which the discourses of critique and possibility in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom, and equality function to better, as part of a broader democratic project, the grounds upon which life is lived. This is not a prescription for political indoctrination; rather, it is a project that gives education its most valued purpose and meaning. In other words, critical pedagogy forges both critique and agency through a language of skepticism and possibility and a culture of openness, debate, and engagement among students and teachers—all elements that are now at risk in the latest and most dangerous attack on higher education. Not only is academic freedom defended in the justification for critical pedagogical work, but it is also importantly safeguarded through the modes of academic labor and governance that connect the search for knowledge with increasing the capacity for all members of society

to acquire the freedom to learn and to engage in mutual criticism that is “based in the quality of their ideas, rather than in their social positions.”⁸⁷

While liberals, progressives, and left-oriented educators and youth have increasingly opposed the right-wing assault on higher education, they have not done enough either theoretically or politically. While there is a greater concern about the shameless state of non-tenured and part-time faculty in the United States (actually, an under-the-radar parallel alternative to the traditional tenure system), such concerns have not been connected to a full-spirited critique of other antidemocratic forces now affecting higher education through a growing managerial culture and a neoliberal approach to university governance.⁸⁸ Neoliberalism makes possible not only the ongoing corporatization of the university and the increasing militarization of knowledge but also the powerlessness of faculty, staff, and students who are increasingly treated by administrators as replaceable populations. It is well known that power relations within universities and colleges today are top-heavy, controlled by trustees and administrators and removed from the hands of those who actually do the work. Power has instead become centralized largely in the hands of administrators, who are close to business, industry, and the national security state. If it is going to have a future as a democratic public sphere, higher education must divorce itself from those knowledge forms, underlying values, practices, ideologies, social relations, and cultural representations associated with the intensification and expansion of corporate and military culture. With respect to the latter, it is clear that higher education has no legitimate or ethical reason for engaging in practices that are organized largely for the production of violence.

It is important to reclaim higher education as a site of moral and political practice whose purpose is not only to introduce students to the great reservoir of diverse intellectual ideas and traditions but also to engage those inherited bodies of knowledge thorough critical dialogue, analysis, and comprehension. As students increasingly find themselves part of an indentured generation, there is a need for educators and others to once again connect matters of equity and excellence as two inseparable freedoms. Students’ right to access higher education, to participate in the governance of the university, and to freely express and debate their ideas in the classroom must be defended intellectually and financially. Unless parents, labor unions, students and concerned individuals mobilize to protect the institutionalized relationships between democracy and pedagogy, teacher authority and

classroom autonomy, higher education will be at the mercy of a right-wing revolution that views democracy as an excess and the university as a threat to society at large.

Pedagogy must be understood as central to any discourse about academic freedom, but, more important, it must be understood as one of the most crucial referents we have for understanding the politics of education and defending the university as one of the very few remaining democratic public spheres in the United States today. As Ian Angus rightly argues, “The justification for academic freedom lies in the activity of critical thinking”⁸⁹ and the pedagogical and political conditions necessary to protect it. I believe that too many notions of academic freedom are defined through a privatized notion of individual freedom, largely removed from the issue of collective democratic governance, which is the primary foundation enabling academic freedom to become a reality. Right-wing notions of teaching and learning constitute a kind of anti-pedagogy, substituting conformity for dialogue and ideological inflexibility for critical engagement. Such attacks should be named for what they are—an affirmation of thoughtlessness, a disservice to young peoples’ ability to question and be self-directed, and an antidote to the difficult process of self- and social criticism.⁹⁰ In spite of what conservatives claim, this type of pedagogy is not education, but a kind of training that produces a flight from self and society. Its outcome is not a student who feels a responsibility to others, but one who feels the presence of difference as an unbearable burden to be contained or expelled. In this way, it becomes apparent that the current right-wing assault on higher education is directed not only against the conditions that make critical pedagogy possible but also against the possibility of raising questions about the real problems facing higher education and youth today, who should be given opportunities to engage knowledge critically, to make judgments, to intervene in the world, and to assume responsibility for what it means to know something.

Higher education is increasingly becoming unaffordable for all but the most prosperous of students. At its best, higher education should be free for all students simply because it is not an entitlement but a right, one that is crucial for a functioning democracy. Hence, the call for strategies to retake higher education also argues for making higher education available to everyone, regardless of wealth and privilege. Higher education has to be democratized and cannot be tuition-driven, a trend that reinforces differential opportunities for students based on their ability to pay. At the very least, student loans must be replaced with a combination of outright financial grants

and work-study programs, thus making it possible for all individuals who want to obtain higher education, and especially for those marginalized by class and race, to be able to do so. Moreover, making higher education free would eliminate the need for those who cannot afford higher education to volunteer to serve in the military and put their lives in danger in order “to gain the educational opportunities that arguably would be the right of every citizen in a less shameless democracy.”⁹¹

The ongoing vocationalization of higher education, the instrumentalization of the curriculum, the increasing connection between the military and universities through joint research projects and Pentagon scholarships, and the transformation of students into consumers have undermined colleges and universities in their efforts to offer students the knowledge and skills they need for learning how to govern as well as for developing the capacities necessary for deliberation, reasoned argumentation, and the obligations of civic responsibility. Higher education has become part of a market-driven and militarized culture, imposing upon academics and students new modes of discipline that close down the spaces to think critically, undermine substantive dialogue, and restrict students from thinking outside of established expectations. The conservative pedagogical project, despite paying lip service to the idea of “balance,” is less about promoting intellectual curiosity, understanding the world differently, or enabling students to raise fundamental questions about “what sort of world one is constructing.”⁹² On the contrary, its primary purpose is to produce dutiful subjects willing to sacrifice their sense of agency for a militaristic sense of order and unquestioning respect for authority. All this leads toward a society in which there is no end to the increasing role of part-time labor, the commodification of knowledge, the rise of an expanding national security state, the hijacking of public spheres by corporate and militarized interests, and the increasing attempts by right-wing extremists to turn education into job training and public pedagogy into an extended exercise in patriotic xenophobia. This is more than a pedagogy for conformity: it is also a recipe for a type of thoughtlessness that, as Hannah Arendt reminds us, is at the heart of totalitarian regimes.⁹³

In light of this right-wing assault on critical thought and youth, educators have a political and moral responsibility to critique the university as a major element in the military-industrial-academic complex. At the very least, this means being attentive to the ways in which conservative pedagogical practices deny the democratic purposes of education and the role of young people in fostering democracy, and

so undermine the possibility of a critical citizenry. Yet such a critique, while important, is not enough. Academics also have a responsibility to make clear higher education's association with other memories, brought back to life in the 1960s, in which the academy was remembered for its "public role in developing citizenship and social awareness—a role that shaped and overrode its economic function."⁹⁴ Such memories, however uncomfortable to the new corporate managers of higher education, must be nurtured and developed in defense of higher education as an important site of both critical thought and democratization. Instead of a narrative of decline, young people need a discourse of critique and resistance, possibility and hope. Such memories both recall and seek to reclaim how consciousness of the public and democratic role of higher education, however imperfect, gives new meaning to its purpose and raises fundamental questions about how knowledge can be emancipatory and how an education for democracy can be both desirable and possible.

What needs to be understood is that higher education may be one of the few public spheres left where knowledge, values, and learning offer a glimpse of the promise of education for nurturing critical hope and a substantive democracy.⁹⁵ It may be the case that everyday life is increasingly organized around market principles, but confusing democracy with market relations hollows out the legacy of higher education, whose deepest roots are moral, not commercial. In defending young people's ability to access and to learn from educational rather than corporate institutions, we must heed the important insight expressed by Federico Mayor, the former director general of UNESCO, who insists that "[y]ou cannot expect anything from uneducated citizens except unstable democracy,"⁹⁶ or, what is becoming increasingly apparent, something even worse. As the free circulation of ideas is replaced by ideas managed and disseminated by the corporate media, ideas become banal, if not reactionary; intellectuals who engage in dissent are viewed or dismissed as either irrelevant, extremist, or un-American; and complicit public relations intellectuals dominate the media, all too willing to internalize co-optation and reap the rewards of venting insults at their alleged opponents. What is lost in these antidemocratic practices are the economic, political, educational, and social conditions that provide a supportive culture for democracy to flourish. This is, in part, a deeply pedagogical and educational issue that should not be lost on either intellectuals or those concerned about the purpose and meaning of higher education and youth. Only through such a supportive and critical educational culture can students learn how to become individual and

social agents—rather than merely disengaged spectators—willing not only to think otherwise but also to act upon civic commitments that “necessitate a reordering of basic power arrangements” fundamental to promoting the common good and producing a meaningful democracy.⁹⁷

The current right-wing assault on higher education is in reality an attack on the most rudimentary conditions of democratic politics. Democracy cannot work if citizens are not autonomous, self-judging, curious, reflective, and independent—qualities that are indispensable for students if they are going to make vital judgments and choices about participating in and shaping decisions that affect everyday life, institutional reform, and governmental policy in their own country and around the globe. This means educators both in and outside of the university need to reassert pedagogy as the cornerstone of democracy by demonstrating in our classrooms and also to the broader public that it provides the very foundation for students to learn not merely how to be governed but also how to be capable of governing. What is even more crucial, as Stuart Hall points out, is the urgent need for educators to provide students with “[c]ritical knowledge [that is] *ahead* of traditional knowledge . . . *better* than anything that traditional knowledge can produce, because only serious ideas are going to stand up.” At the same time, there is also the need to recognize “the social limits of academic knowledge. Critical intellectual work cannot be limited to the university but must constantly look for ways of making that knowledge available to wider social forces.”⁹⁸ If Hall is right, and I think he is, educators have a pedagogical responsibility to make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative. Such knowledge would expand the range of human possibilities by connecting what young people know and how they come to know to instilling in them both “a disgust for all forms of socially produced injustice”⁹⁹ and the desire to make the world different from what it is.

ACADEMICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Addressing education as a democratic endeavor begins with the recognition that higher education is more than an investment opportunity; citizenship is more than conspicuous consumption; learning is more than preparing students for the workplace, however important that task might be; and democracy is more than making choices at the local mall. If higher education is to reclaim itself as a site of critical thinking, collective work, and public service, educators and students will have to

redefine the knowledge, skills, research, and intellectual practices currently favored in the university. Central to such a challenge is the need to position intellectual practice “as part of an intricate web of morality, rigor, and responsibility” that enables academics to speak with conviction, use the public sphere to address important social problems, and demonstrate alternative models for bridging the gap between higher education and the broader society.¹⁰⁰ Connective practices are key: it is crucial to develop intellectual practices that are collegial rather than competitive, to refuse the instrumentality and privileged isolation of the academy, to link critical thought to a profound impatience with the status quo, and to connect human agency to the idea of social responsibility and the politics of possibility.

Connection also means being openly and deliberately critical and worldly in one’s intellectual work. Increasingly, as universities are shaped by a culture of fear in which dissent is equated with treason, the call to be objective and impartial, whatever one’s intentions, can easily echo what George Orwell called the “official truth” or the establishment point of view. Lacking a self-consciously democratic political focus, teachers and students are often reduced to the role of a technician or functionary engaged in formalistic rituals, unconcerned with the disturbing and urgent problems that confront the larger society or the consequences of one’s pedagogical practices and research undertakings. In opposition to this model, with its claims to and conceit of political neutrality, I argue that academics should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen. This requires finding ways to connect the practice of classroom teaching with the operation of power in the larger society and to provide the conditions for students to view themselves as critical agents capable of making those who exercise authority and power accountable.

Education cannot be divorced from democracy; and as such, it must be understood as a deliberately informed and purposeful political and moral practice, as opposed to one that is either doctrinaire or instrumentalized, or both. In a society that remains troublingly resistant to or incapable of questioning itself, one that celebrates the consumer over the citizen and willingly endorses the narrow values and interests of corporate power, the importance of the university as a place of critical learning, thoughtfulness, moral responsibility, and social justice advocacy becomes all the more imperative. Moreover, the distinctive role that faculty play in this ongoing pedagogical project of democratization and learning, along with support for the institutional conditions and relations of power that make it possible, must

be defended as part of a broader discourse of excellence, equity, and democracy. As Sheldon Wolin points out, “For its part, democracy is ultimately dependent on the quality and accessibility of public education, especially of public universities. Education per se is not a source of *democratic* legitimacy: it does not serve as a justification for political authority, yet it is essential to the practice of citizenship.”¹⁰¹

For education to be civic, critical, and democratic rather than privatized, militarized, and commodified, the work that academics do cannot be defended exclusively within the discourse of specialization, technological mastery, or a market-driven rationality concerned about efficiency and profit margins. On the contrary, academic labor is distinctive by virtue of its commitment to modes of education that take seriously John Dewey’s notion that democracy is a “way of life” that must be constantly nurtured and defended, or as Richard Bernstein puts it:

Democracy, according to Dewey, does not consist exclusively of a set of institutions, formal voting procedures, or even legal guarantee of rights. These are important, but they require a culture of everyday democratic cooperative *practices* to give them life and meaning. Otherwise institutions and procedures are in danger of becoming hollow and meaningless. Democracy is “a way of life,” an ethical ideal that demands *active* and *constant* attention. And if we fail to work at creating and re-creating democracy, there is no guarantee that it will survive. Democracy involves a reflective faith in the capacity of all human beings for intelligent judgment, deliberation, and action if the proper social, educational, and economic conditions are furnished.¹⁰²

Education should not be decoupled from what Jacques Derrida calls a democracy to come, that is, a democracy that must always “be open to the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticizing and indefinitely improving itself.”¹⁰³ Democracy is not cheap and neither are the political, economic, and social conditions that make it possible. If academics believe that the university is a space for and about democracy, they need to become more attentive to addressing the racial, economic, and political conditions that fill their ranks with adjuncts, remove faculty from exercising power in university governance, and work towards eliminating the economic conditions that prevent working-class and middle-class youth from getting a decent post-secondary education.

Moreover, a critical pedagogy that values a democratic and open society should be engaged at all levels of schooling. It must gain part of its momentum in higher education among students who will go back to the schools, churches, synagogues, and workplaces in order

to produce new ideas, concepts, and critical ways of understanding the world in which young people and adults live. This is a notion of intellectual practice and responsibility that refuses the insular, overly pragmatic, and privileged isolation of the academy while affirming a broader vision of learning that links knowledge to the power of self-definition and to the capacities of students to expand the scope of democratic freedoms, particularly those that address the crisis of education, politics, and the social as part and parcel of the crisis of democracy itself. This is the kind of intellectual practice that Zygmunt Bauman calls “taking responsibility for our responsibility,”¹⁰⁴ one that is attentive to the suffering of others and “will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep.”¹⁰⁵

In order for pedagogy that encourages critical thought to have a real effect, it must include the message that all citizens, old and young, are equally entitled, if not equally empowered, to shape the society in which they live. If educators are to function as public intellectuals, they need to provide the opportunities for students to learn that the relationship between knowledge and power can be emancipatory, that their histories and experiences matter, and that what they say and do counts in their struggle to unlearn dominating privileges, productively reconstruct their relations with others, and transform, when necessary, the world around them. Simply put, educators need to argue for forms of pedagogy that close the gap between the university and everyday life. Their curricula need to be organized around knowledge about communities, cultures, and traditions that give students a sense of history, identity, and place. Said illuminates this process when he urges academics and students to accept the demands of “worldliness,” which include “lifting complex ideas into the public space,” recognizing human injury inside and outside of the academy, and using theory as a critical resource to change things.¹⁰⁶ Worldliness suggests that we must not be afraid of controversy and that we must make connections that are otherwise hidden, deflate the claims of triumphalism, and bridge intellectual work and the operation of politics. It means combining rigor and clarity, on the one hand, and civic courage and political commitment, on the other.

A critically engaged pedagogy also necessitates that we incorporate in our classrooms those electronically mediated knowledge forms that constitute the terrain of mass and popular culture. I am referring here to the world of media texts—videos, films, the Internet, podcasts, and other elements of the new electronic technologies that operate through a combination of visual and print culture. Such an approach not only challenges the traditional definition of schooling as the only

site of pedagogy by widening the application and sites of education to a variety of cultural locations but also alerts students to the educational force of the culture at large, what I have called elsewhere the field of public pedagogy.

Any viable notion of critical pedagogy should affirm and enrich the meaning, language, and knowledge forms that students actually use to negotiate and inform their lives. Academics can, in part, exercise their role as public intellectuals via such approaches by giving students the opportunity to understand how power is organized through an enormous number of “popular” cultural spheres, including libraries, movie theaters, schools, and high-tech media conglomerates that circulate signs and meanings through newspapers, magazines, advertisements, new information technologies, computers, and television programs. Needless to say, this position challenges neoconservative Roger Kimball’s claim that “[p]opular culture is a tradition essential to uneducated Americans.”¹⁰⁷ By laying claim to popular, mass, and alternative cultural spaces as important sites of public pedagogy, educators have the opportunity, if not the responsibility, to raise important questions about how knowledge is produced, circulated, and taken up in different pedagogical sites. They can also provide the foundation for students to become competent and critically versed in a variety of literacies (not just the literacy of print), while at the same time expanding the conditions and options for the roles students might play as cultural producers (as opposed to simply teaching them to be critical readers). At stake here is an understanding of literacy as both a set of competencies to be learned and a crucial condition for developing ways of intervening in the world.

I have suggested that educators need to become provocateurs; they need to take a stand while refusing to be involved in either a cynical relativism or doctrinaire politics. This suggests that central to intellectual life is the pedagogical and political imperative that academics engage in rigorous social criticism while becoming a stubborn force for challenging false prophets, fighting against the imposed silence of normalized power, and critically engaging all those social relations that promote material and symbolic violence.¹⁰⁸ There is a lot of talk among social theorists about the death of politics brought on by a negative globalization characterized by markets without frontiers, deregulation, militarism, and armed violence, all of which not only feed each other but produce global unlawfulness and reduce politics to merely an extension of war.¹⁰⁹ I would hope that, of all groups, educators would vocally and tirelessly challenge this ideology by making it clear that expanding the public good and promoting democratic

social change are at the very heart of critical education and are pre-conditions for global justice. The potential for a better future further increases when critical education is directed toward young people. As a result, public and higher education may be among the few spheres left in which the promise of youth can be linked to the promise of democracy.

As the dark times that characterized the Bush years have come to an end and the promise of a more progressive model of governance and respect for education seems possible under the presidency of Barack Obama, it is worth remembering that higher education, even in its crippled state, still poses a threat to the enemies of democracy; it holds the promise, if rarely realized, of being able to offer students the knowledge and skills that enable them not only to mediate critically between democratic values and the demands of corporate power and the national security state but also to distinguish between identities founded on democratic principles, on the one hand, and subject positions steeped in forms of competitive, unbridled individualism that celebrate self-interest, profit-making, militarism, and greed, on the other. Education in this instance becomes both an ethical and a political referent; it furnishes an opportunity for adults to provide the conditions for young people to become critically engaged social agents. Similarly, it points to a future in which a critical education, in part, creates the conditions for each generation of youth to struggle anew to sustain the promise of a democracy that has no endpoint, but rather must be continuously expanded into a world of new possibilities and opportunities for keeping justice and hope alive.

I want to emphasize that how we view, represent, and treat young people should be part of a larger public dialogue about how to imagine a democratic future. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Protestant theologian, believed that the ultimate test of morality resides in what a society does for its children. If we take this standard seriously, American society has deeply failed its children and its commitment to democracy. The culture of neoliberalism and consumer culture rest on the denial of both youth as a marker of the future and the social responsibility entailed by an acceptance of this principle. In other words, the current crisis of American democracy can be measured in part by the fact that too many young people are poor, lack decent housing and health care, and attend decrepit schools filled with overworked and underpaid teachers. These youth, by all standards, deserve more in a country that historically prided itself on its level of democracy, liberty, and alleged equality for all citizens. For many

young people, the future looks bleak, filled with the promise of low-paying, low-skilled jobs, the collapse of the welfare state, and, if you are a person of color and poor, the threat of either unemployment or incarceration.

We have entered a period in which the war against youth, especially poor youth of color, offers no apologies because it is too arrogant and ruthless to imagine any resistance. But power as a form of domination is never absolute, and oppression always produces some form of resistance. For these reasons, the collective need and potential struggle for justice should never be underestimated even in the darkest of times. To confront the biopolitics of disposability and the war on young people, we need to create the conditions for multiple collective and global struggles that refuse to use politics as an act of war and markets as the measure of democracy. Fortunately, more and more young people nationally and internationally are mobilizing in order to fight a world dominated by corporate interests and are struggling to construct an alternative future in which their voices can be heard as part of a broader movement to make democracy and social justice realizable.

Education, when connected to social change, can help provide the knowledge, tools, and hope necessary to further motivate these young people, many of whom recognize that the world stands at a critical juncture and that they can play a crucial role in changing it. For many young people, social injustices that extend from class oppression to racial violence to the ongoing destruction of public life and the environment can no longer be tolerated. We have watched young people all over the globe march against the injustices of negative globalization in recent years. What needs to be stressed is that these are political and educational issues, not merely economic concerns.

Hannah Arendt insisted that making human beings superfluous is the essence of totalitarianism, and the war against youth and critical education suggests that a new form of authoritarianism is ready to take over if we cannot work together to develop a new politics, a new analytic of struggle, and, most importantly, a renewed sense of imagination, vision, and hope. The great abolitionist Frederick Douglass bravely argued that freedom is an empty abstraction if people fail to act, and "if there is no struggle, there is no progress."¹⁰ We live in a historic moment of both crisis and possibility, one that presents educators, parents, artists, and others with the opportunity to take up the challenge of reimagining civic engagement and social transformation, but these activities have a chance of succeeding only if we also defend and reinvigorate the pedagogical conditions that enable the

current generation of young people to nurture thoughtfulness, critical agency, compassion, and democracy itself. I realize this sounds a bit utopian, but we have few choices if we are going to fight for a future that enables young people to escape from a political order in which living either as a commodity or as part of the growing refuse of human disposability are the only choices through which they can make a claim on the future. Young people deserve more, and adults should embrace the responsibility to help make it happen.