

## Editors' Introduction

This issue of *Radical History Review* focuses on the ways in which historically minded scholars and activists have used critical pedagogies to challenge unequal power relations in classrooms and communities. Building on the booming literature in radical and revolutionary pedagogies, a diverse group of scholar-teacher-activists explore how they or others, in the words of bell hooks, “teach to transgress.”<sup>1</sup> Critical educators have long argued that the classroom is an inherently political space in which unequal power relations can either be reinforced or challenged. More often than not, however, schooling at all levels has played an important role in socializing students and faculty in the logics of rule and social conformity, which in our times are intimately linked to capitalist relations of production that reinforce a racialized hierarchy, assimilation, compliance, and traditional gender roles. Instead, critical educators posit embracing a more fluid approach to education that deconstructs hierarchies that can lead to a democratization of the classroom, a redefinition of knowledge and of how it is produced, and a challenging of injustice.

The authoritarian structures of the classroom and that latter’s disconnection from community struggles stems from numerous structural and institutional factors that are reinforced by the educational system. In the university, these factors include the privileging of research over teaching and community engagement. Innovative classroom approaches that K–12 teachers had employed since the 1960s have, in many cases, been reversed with the growing emphasis on high-stakes testing, inadequate funding, and administrative control over the classroom. Institutional structures have also worked to disconnect education from community struggles and universities from K–12 schools, erecting artificial barriers between campuses and communities and universities and schools. We have much to learn from critical and popular educational experiences that are working to democratize society in the midst of the tightening of the reins of global capitalism and imperialism.

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### **From Ivory Tower to Political Engagement**

In the United States, the university developed as an isolated elite institution that prized its disconnection from society. Based on models of cloistered learning, the university often ostracized scholars that sought to transcend it and engage in community-related issues. With the rapid rise of land-grant institutions and public universities throughout the twentieth century, greater public involvement ensued. Nevertheless, there was a hierarchy of public engagement that privileged the role of the public intellectual and that of the government adviser. Most other forms of public engagement were met with deep suspicion, especially in the postwar McCarthy period, during which radicals were routinely purged or silenced. With the civil rights, antiwar, and campus free speech movements, and the growth of revolutionary movements in the 1960s, a more inclusive and radical form of political engagement blossomed.

For scholars, this increased engagement took numerous forms. Many took to the streets to challenge U.S. imperialism in Vietnam and talked about the war in the classroom. Others created innovative community history projects in alliance with social movements. Radical scholars formed collectives to challenge traditional historical narratives and to popularize alternative perspectives for a general audience. A more active, politicized scholar emerged who overtly challenged the image and structure of the ivory tower. As a result, social and critical perspectives on history began to flourish. The fight for women's studies and ethnic studies courses and programs constituted important steps in linking the university to community struggles. Some scholars helped pioneer popular education approaches in their efforts to challenge the structure of the academy. This led many to move from merely providing a progressive analysis to attempting to democratize the classroom and to challenge racial, class, and gender hierarchies in theory and in practice.<sup>2</sup> Some began to demonstrate that "when students have power," exciting things happen that have important political and epistemological ramifications.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1960s, critical pedagogies have developed providing innovative empowering models of education. The popular education approaches of Paulo Freire and other theorists have influenced classroom and grassroots activism, leading many to employ transformational forms of education aimed at linking theory to practice for community empowerment and action. This tradition builds on earlier revolutionary attempts to link education to community. Karl Marx called for an integral education to produce "full human beings," and Mikhail Bakunin urged that integral education would prepare children for "a life of thought as well as of work."<sup>4</sup> Revolutionary communities and organizations practiced a variety of forms of liberatory education. Freire's approach to literacy programs and to education for consciousness raising (*conscientização*) and its connection to social and revolutionary movements in Latin America and Africa opened up new avenues for critical educators. From the Landless Movement in Brazil to Zapatista communities in Chiapas and labor unions in the United States, social movements have developed sophisticated pedagogical

models that build on (and sometimes center) the knowledge in communities to help them resist capitalist expansion, patriarchy, and erasure.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the growing practice of critical pedagogies, the hegemonic nature of the educational system has sought, often successfully, to tame radical approaches to educational practice. By the 1970s and 1980s, the academy in the United States demonstrated its ability to incorporate most of these programs created in the midst of opposition movements into the conservative folds of the university structure. In the best-case scenario, ethnic, labor, and women's studies became alternative spaces on campus; in the worst, they became just another academic unit, with more radical educational practices suppressed.<sup>6</sup> The structure of the university privileges research and systematically devalues teaching through large class sizes and the lecture format. Hence, despite much lip service, there are few real structural incentives to provide an equitable and humane balance among teaching, research, and community work. Since the 1980s and 1990s, the neoliberal university, with its increased search for private and corporate funding in the wake of budget cuts and shifting tax structures, has led many to fear that academic freedom and the gains of the past are being further eroded. While strides have been made in democratizing curricula and the study of the history of society, the structures of education and the classroom still reinforce hierarchy and inequality.

This is even truer in the K–12 educational system. Under the guise of budgetary crises, there have been significant efforts to defund, privatize, and micro-manage the educational system, as uniform curricula are imposed from above. The increasing reliance on foundations and corporate funding shifts the mission of the educational system. The result has been a growing emphasis on testing, accountability, and efficiency and a near abandonment of critical thinking and creative teaching and learning. The class implications of these policy changes are great, with working-class communities and communities of color subject to an increasingly rigid curriculum. While teachers, students, and parents are resisting these trends, centralized control of the classroom has greatly hindered learning and critical thought.

Despite the growing authoritarianism of and private-sector influence on the education system, radical educators have worked to link critical perspectives on content to radical democratic efforts to challenge hierarchies and transcend the classroom to help link the school or university to community struggles. Recent notable efforts created critical perspectives on content and developed practical strategies for working to democratize and even decolonize educational practices.<sup>7</sup> This issue of *Radical History Review* seeks to center different ways in which teachers, students, and activists are employing critical approaches in the classroom.

### **Critical Pedagogies and History in the Classroom and Community**

This issue opens with a forum. We asked a range of individuals from very diverse walks of life—academia, education, community activism, labor organizing, to name a few—to reflect on the term *radical* or *revolutionary pedagogy* and to share with

us what they understood it to mean and how it was integrated into their political and professional practice. Several common themes immediately became apparent.

One such theme was democratization: of knowledge and of the classroom itself. Not surprisingly, these questions weighed more heavily for those working in university and other formal educational settings, where the teacher-student encounters are steeped in a long history of inequality. And yet, in the opening reflection, Margaret Power suggests that when teaching democracy to students whose understanding and experience of democracy is tenuous at best, classroom democracy becomes not only a political but also an intellectual imperative. Power works to build students' trust in her classroom as a space in which ideas can be freely exchanged and the learning process negotiated. Alfonso Valenzuela-Aguilera revisits the life and critical pedagogy of Ivan Illich to challenge traditional classrooms and to argue that true learning is connected to the pursuit of freedom and not tied to the economic system. For Kevin D. Lam and Carlos Tejeda, democratization in the classroom must also extend to historically marginalized groups the opportunity to create knowledge in the form of explanatory, generalizable narratives about their experience—in other words, to participate in the creation of theory. History becomes indispensable to this endeavor. While regressive educational reforms might make this process increasingly difficult at the K–12 levels, it is by no means impossible. Sara Quezada suggests that what is required is both a thorough understanding of popular history and a willingness to think creatively when setting out to meet mandated curricular goals.

The forum participants also question the academic truism that “knowledge is power” by pointing out that power is above all action and that knowledge alone does not result in its exercise. Reflecting, with the help of Søren Kierkegaard, on the lives of individuals he has met while organizing in labor and academic contexts, John Delloro forcefully asserts that knowledge is powerful only in its application; that is, in its use to effect change in individual and collective circumstances. For Ian Christopher Fletcher, critical pedagogy is necessarily “edu-active:” it uses community history as a way to reach communities at the same time that it recognizes that historical knowledge and analysis can help think strategically and organize to scale. Lillian Taiz and Daniel Horowitz Garcia remind us that this power can be found in great victories, but also in the small ones: history can provide everyday inspiration to help local activists continue their work in the face of impossible odds by offering a framework that makes their work meaningful. This thought is brought vividly to life in Mary Babington's reflections on the reenactment of a lynching. Her piece requires us to broaden our notion of what constitutes action. It also forcefully and uncomfortably makes us recognize that for historically informed practitioners of revolutionary pedagogies, the process of empowerment of marginalized and oppressed populations will sometimes mean confronting our own place in the making of inequalities and accepting roles that may seem less than heroic.

The next section, “Critical Classrooms: Current Approaches and Strategies,” is meant to highlight current practices that radical educators—at both the secondary and university levels—are successfully pursuing. The praxis our collaborators discuss in their essays is clearly linked to many of the features that our forum participants identified within critical and revolutionary pedagogies. Thus, time and again, our contributors highlight the importance of collaborations in bringing about the creative and democratic critical encounters that radical pedagogies seek to create. These collaborations take place across disciplines; among and between educators and their students; and with individuals, groups, organizations operating in communities, but often with city, regional, and/or national recognition.

The first four articles resonate with the forum’s concerns about the relationship between knowledge and power. Gilda L. Ochoa and Daniela Pineda remind us that the process of creating critical and democratic classrooms is not without conflict itself. Their piece thoughtfully addresses how the students’ differing social locations and commitments to change can complicate the learning encounter and provides effective strategies to address the problem. Through their successful collaboration with local community groups and institutions, Holly Blake and Melissa Ooten have created a powerful opportunity for their students to examine history as not only a conflict among groups but also as something created through a dynamic tension between the past and the present. Lisa Blee, Caley Horan, Jeffrey T. Manuel, Brian Tochtermann, Andrew Urban, and Julie M. Weiskopf demonstrate the radical and creative potential of educational praxis when students have power to shape the curriculum. They also underscore the potential of public history in connecting with community struggles, as well as the numerous institutional obstacles for successful, mutually beneficial collaborative projects. Finally, Jesse Hingson’s classroom and community uses of declassified documents from the National Security Archive afford the opportunity to explore in depth the institutional and deliberate mechanism put in place to erase conflicting accounts and perspectives from official histories and to ask how we can challenge such practices.

Dramatization and performance figure prominently in these collaborations as a means to highlight how conflicts and questions of perspective are central to the creation of history. Rachel Mattson, David G. García, and Corina Benavides López, through their collaborations with theater professionals, persuasively convey how dramatization can be used simultaneously as a method of inquiry and as a means for introducing and eliciting alternative, critical narratives in the study of history. Mattson’s use of the *tableaux vivants* technique offers high school teachers a powerful tool through which to reencounter, investigate, and interpret images from the civil rights movement. García and Benavides López’s work with the nationally renowned performance group Culture Clash created an innovative, and indeed radical, learning environment in which students were introduced to historically and ethnographically informed methods of theatrical inquiry, which they could employ

when investigating their own histories as members of oppressed communities in the United States.

The interview section expands the discussion of how counternarratives and radical pedagogies can democratize knowledge production. In Gilda L. Ochoa's interview with the noted Chicano historian Gilbert G. Gonzalez we learn how his early "history lessons at the kitchen table" and on family trips, coupled with his travels and the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, shaped him as a person and as a historian. His life and family experiences working in Mexico and in the United States helped make him a pioneering historian of transnational Mexican history. In recounting the deep struggle of the citizens of the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, to reclaim the lands that the U.S. Navy took from them, the longtime activist and educator Ismael Guadalupe emphasizes to Edgar Iván Gutiérrez the importance of confronting the monopoly on information, history, and the educational system that those in power have. Guadalupe demonstrates the importance of persistence and the slow yet powerful impact that these approaches have over the long term. In her interview with Enrique C. Ochoa, Sonya Mehta of the San Francisco-based Young Workers United discusses how her organizing builds on activism of the past to forge connections with young workers to effect change. Challenging the notion of apathetic youth, Young Workers United addresses the concerns of young people through an open and inclusive participatory style and has been successful in forging coalitions to win back wages, increase the minimum wage, and secure the only paid sick day–leave law in the country through the ballot.

In "(Re)views," Tara J. Yosso and David G. García examine several recent feature films that deal with education to show how Hollywood "teaches about students of color and their communities." In their essay, they deconstruct the Hollywood formula and then show how the film *Walkout* challenges that facile construction and centers on a student movement, rather than just one heroic (white) teacher.

In "Critical Communities: Historical Lessons and Present Challenges," we close with two articles that help contextualize the historical experiences and struggles for democratic critical educational praxis. William L. Niemi and David J. Plante examine the connection between democracy and self-education in the historical movements of the Chartists, the Populists, and the Industrial Workers of the World. By focusing on these prefigurative movements, they reinforce many of the themes discussed in the previous sections, including issues of the democratization of education and that latter's connection to action. Donal E. Mulcahy and Judith Irwin underscore the obstacles to critical pedagogy in the K–12 classroom, especially in this test-crazed era of No Child Left Behind and centralizing educational policy. By emphasizing the extent of the privatized corporate control of the curriculum, they lay out some of the real challenges that critical educators face.

Conor McGrady's "Curated Spaces" section features the work of Ashley Hunt. Hunt is an artist and activist who engages the ideas of social movements, of

public discourse, and of the intersections between politics and subjectivity. His “As Flowers Turn toward the Sun” is a mapping project that explores policing, surveillance, and the control of urban space and low-income populations. We close this issue with Jim O’Brien’s and Joshua Brown’s tributes to historian and popular educator Roy Rosenzweig. Roy’s radical scholarship and commitment to collaborative education embodies the spirit of this issue.

We hope that this is the first of many issues that examines how history-minded scholars and activists have employed radical pedagogical approaches in classrooms and communities. In an era of increasing isolation, it is important that communities of teachers and activists share their approaches to and methods for “teaching against global capitalism and the new imperialism” and the values that it perpetuates.<sup>8</sup> We would like to thank the collective of the *Radical History Review* for its support, as well as the inside and outside reviewers for their contributions. We are especially thankful for the patience and work of Tom Harbison and Matt Vitz.

— Enrique C. Ochoa and Yvonne M. Lassalle

#### Notes

1. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Boston: South End, 1994).
2. See Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, *The Feminist Classroom: Dynamics of Gender, Race, and Privilege* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); Gilda L. Ochoa and Enrique C. Ochoa, “Education for Social Transformation: The Intersection of Chicana/o and Latin American Studies with Community Struggles,” *Latin American Perspectives* 31 (2004): 59–80.
3. Ira Shor, *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
4. Marx and Bakunin quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Edinburgh: AK, 2006), 15.
5. Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva, *Escaping Education: Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); Linda Delp et al., *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Labor and Research, 2002).
6. Michael Soldatenko, “Radicalism in Higher Education: How Chicano Studies Joined the Curriculum,” in *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*, ed. Eric Margolis (New York: Routledge, 2001), 193–212.
7. See, for example, the work of Bill Bigelow, a high school teacher and the editor of the magazine *Rethinking Schools*, *The Line between Us: Teaching about the Border and Mexican Immigration* (Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2006); also see Edith Wen-Chu Chen and Glenn Omatsu, *Teaching about Asian Pacific Americans: Effective Activities, Strategies, and Assignments for Classrooms and Communities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).
8. Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur, *Teaching against Global Capitalism and the New Imperialism: A Critical Pedagogy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

