EDUCATION
Still under Siege

Second Edition

Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux

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This book is dedicated to our children:
Nona Brett Willis-Aronowitz
Brett Brady Giroux
Chris Brady Giroux
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Some of the chapters in this book appeared in slightly or substantially altered form in the following journals: *Harvard Educational Review, College English, Curriculum Inquiry, Journal of Education, Educational Theory, Issues in Education, New Education* (Australia). An altered version of Chapter 2 was written for a colloquium at Suffolk University on "Creativity and the Implementation of Change: Liberal Learning in the Practical World," February 20–21, 1985. For the past fourteen years, the two of us have been involved in a collaboration over the relationship between pedagogy and politics and the evolving vision of emancipatory and transformative education. During that time, some of the articles in this book initially were written and published under separate authorship, though they had almost always been mutually discussed and influenced by our joint work. In writing the book itself, we jointly authored a number of chapters, and in other instances rewrote and edited work that we incorporated, but, in all cases, each chapter was the final product of an editing and writing process that allows us to view the book in its published form as a strictly collaborative effort. It is an effort characterized by a warmly held friendship as well as a deeply shared belief in the need to struggle for a better world for all human beings.

Contents

Introduction: Beyond the Melting Pot—Schooling in the Twenty-first Century

During the twelve years of the Reagan/Bush administrations the educational system in the United States was the object of a massive reform movement, led mainly by conservatives. During these years, the meaning and purpose of schooling at all levels of education were refashioned around the principles of the marketplace and the logic of rampant individualism. Ideologically, this meant abstracting schools from the language of democracy and equity while simultaneously organizing educational reform around the discourse of choice, reprivatization, and individual competition. Consistent with a broader attack on all notions of democratic public life, schools became a prime battleground for removing the language of ethics, history, and community from public discourse. Within this approach, schools became the quintessential institutions of bureaucratic individualism. Under the incentive of school choice, market relations asserted themselves with a vengeance on public schools and higher education. Devastated by the recession, diminished local tax bases, and drastic cutbacks in federal expenditures, school systems around the country were forced to increase class size and decrease teaching staffs, while using fewer resources.

On a policy level, the conservative reform movement of the Reagan/Bush era resulted in instituting state legislation that increasingly promoted standardized curricula, increased testing for entry-level teachers, and removed equity considerations from the discourse of excellence. Lacking any social strategy for addressing the crisis of public schooling, the Reagan/Bush administrations essentially attempted to dismantle public schooling by turning it over to the imperatives of choice, business, and reprivatization.

Politically, the Reagan/Bush attack on public schools manifested itself in further reproducing a two-tier system of schooling designed to privilege

upper middle-class whites, on the one hand, while containing the working class, the poor, and students of color, on the other. The policy of racialized, class containment had devastating consequences for public education and the social problems that both informed and were exacerbated by the attack on public schooling. In the midst of a growing division between rich and poor, the dropout rate for nonwhite children in major cities such as New York exceeded 70 percent during the 1980s. Buttressed by policies that refused to adequately fund programs such as Head Start and Chapter I, schools increasingly were unable to address a growing population of students from poverty-stricken families. This failure is especially relevant in light of the fact that 25 percent of all children under the age of 18 lived in poverty during the Reagan/Bush years.

At the same time, the working conditions of teachers became worse during those twelve years. Teachers have become increasingly deskilled through an emphasis on accountability schemes, teaching to the tests, and management by objective approaches that reduce their work to reductionist, instrumental, and demeaning procedures. Demoralized by their working conditions, increasingly alienated by the heavy-handed imposition of reforms initiated through the growing corporatization of the schools, and left out of the dynamics of educational reform, teachers were reduced to clerks of the empire under the reform movement of the Reagan/Bush administrations.

Of course, it was during this decade, too, that conservatives and neoliberals launched a major assault on the democratization of the curriculum spurned by the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas various interest groups that are organized around racial, class, gender, and sexual orientation have demanded curricula responsive to their histories, experiences, and voices, conservatives have attempted to transform the schools into cultural beachheads for imposing not simply corporate ideologies but also the Eurocentric imperatives of a narrowly defined nationalism. Under the Reagan/Bush administrations, schools became institutions for moral regulation and character education in which family values, moral fundamentalism, and a Great Books ethic reasserted a nostalgic and mythic view of what it meant to be a citizen in the New World Order. The language of selfishness, competition, consumption, and success spawned a meanspiritedness toward those who were victimized in the Reagan/Bush world order. The sentiment was elitist and racist. Within this discourse, nationalism and Eurocentrism combined as part of a broader attempt to promote and legitimate a "common culture" in which cultural diversity rather than intolerance was seen as the "enemy" of democracy. The result was a notion of schooling that was at odds with educating all students to learn how to govern rather than be governed.

The great waves of immigration to our shores since 1980 provide a startling case study of the failure of social and educational policy. We are in

the midst of a veritable sea change in the demographic, social, and cultural composition of the United States. In brief, the nation is experiencing a new wave of immigration which, by the end of this century, may exceed in volume and importance the last wave at the turn of the twentieth century. Key geographic areas within the country—chiefly large metropolitan regions of the Northeast and Southwest, including California—and major public institutions, especially those of social welfare and education, are grappling with entirely new populations that are bringing with them new needs.

From 1985 to 1990 some 5 million immigrants came to the United States, exceeding the annual rate in the great second wave of immigration that took place between 1880 and 1910 when 20 million people, primarily from southern Italy and Eastern Europe, came to this country. In this, the third great wave, migrants from Central America, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia—especially Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China—are the most prevalent, although important immigrant cohorts from Eastern and Southern Europe continue to arrive. Given the worldwide movement of populations from the peripheral, rural regions to the metropolitan centers, this trend is bound to accelerate, especially in the cities.

While there are similarities between the current immigrant cohorts and those of the last great wave, particularly their preponderant rural origins, the striking differences between them have barely been confronted. Perhaps the most important of these differences is that the earlier migration occurred in the context of a dramatic, long-wave economic expansion in the United States. Immigrants were recruited in the millions for the burgeoning mines and mills, the garment and shoe factories, and performed the bulk of the unskilled labor in the growing transportation and construction industries. Pay was low, hours were long, and working conditions were abominable. Yet, many of this generation of newly arrived workers shared the tacit belief that, even if they themselves were destined to economic insecurity, if not abject poverty, their children were certain to do better. And many actually moved up the social and economic ladder within their own lifetimes.

Certainly, the American dream of material well-being and social mobility lives today in the hearts and minds of many immigrants. But they have come to this country in large numbers in two decades (1970–present) when the American economy has entered a prolonged era of stagnation, punctuated by short-term growth spurts. Since 1970, millions of jobs were lost to capital flight, and technological change wiped out millions more. From 1970 to 1990 the U.S. economy lost more than 5 million jobs in the manufacturing sector. In this period, it gained more than 10 million service and clerical jobs, but these were, in the main, unavailable to workers who were undocumented and whose mastery of English was still evolving. Moreover, on the average they paid only 60 percent of the wages and

salaries in the manufacturing sector. After 1987, growth in the service sector ended, and the number of jobs, especially in retail and clerical trades, is declining rapidly.

More to the point, among the greatest losses were precisely those in industries where immigrants have traditionally found entry-level jobs: the needle trades, textiles, shoes, and, more recently, plastics. For example, in the 1980s the needle trades and textiles lost half a million jobs; the shoe industry was virtually wiped out to imports; and the auto industry, an important source of employment for African-Americans, lost 300,000 jobs, mostly among assemblers and machine operators. General Motors' recent announcement of layoffs for 70,000 additional employees and IBM's aggregate reduction of its labor force by 65,000 in 1992 have accelerated the trend toward the elimination of highly paid jobs. In the next decade, native-born workers who would have taken these jobs will be competing with immigrants, women, and native-born minorities for lower wage work.

Many immigrants have remained unemployed, have become low-wage workers in the legal economy, or have been condemned to casual and seasonal labor. But others are helping to create an entire new sector of the U.S. economy. The new immigrants have become the core workers for a growing "underground" or informal economy. Today, in New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and other large cities, tens of thousands make garments, shoes, plastic novelties, toys, and other products. Others drive non-medallion, extralegal cabs and unlicensed trucks, many of which serve their own community. Those who enjoy legal status may work in the informal or above-ground economy, but they usually earn income at or below the minimum wage. In communities such as the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and south central Los Angeles, it is not unusual to find entire extended families, including grandparents and young children, working long hours, making garments or toys in their homes or in dimly lit lofts.

In the face of extremely limited prospects for economic growth over the next period of U.S. history and, perhaps equally saliently, the rapid decline of well-paying jobs, even in the technical and professional spheres, schools are facing an identity crisis. The long-held assumption that school credentials provide the best route to economic security and class mobility may prove to have been a truth confined to the industrializing era, and, at that, available to perhaps half the population. The labor market is becoming increasingly bifurcated: organizational and technical changes are producing a limited number of jobs for highly educated and trained people-managers, scientific and technological experts, and researchers. On the other hand, we are witnessing the disappearance of many middle-level white-collar subprofessions. Teaching and technical and professional categories in the health industry remain reasonably viable options, but, since the fiscal crisis of the late 1980s, budget cuts have restricted new hiring in many cities and towns. Even employment in computer programming has become

subject to its own technology. Computer-aided software programming, not yet widely disseminated, threatens to eliminate programmers. And in the face of sharpening competition, employers typically hire a growing number of low-paid, part-time workers; in this connection, temporary substitutes are becoming more common in teaching. Even some professionals have become free-lance workers with few, if any, fringe benefits. These developments call into question the efficacy of mass schooling for providing the "well-trained" labor force that employers still claim they require. Educators must reexamine the mission of the schools in the light of these shattering shifts. While the two major teacher organizations claim some 2.5 million members and now represent more than 75 percent of the profession, there is little evidence, beyond their general support for multiculturalism as a *supplement* to the standard curriculum, that the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers have come to grips with these issues.

Although most immigrant groups have settled in the large cities of the East and West coasts, in the past five years new immigrant populations have increased markedly in the Midwest and the Southeast as well. Twenty-four percent of New York City's population is foreign born. By the year 2000 more than a third of the city's residents will have been born in another part of the globe. Even more dramatic figures may be adduced for Los Angeles, and somewhat smaller, but significant, proportions of the residents of Chicago, Detroit, San Diego, and San Jose are recent immigrants. Characteristically, most are under 25, and a heavy proportion is of school age. Indeed, New York's schools—both at the elementary and secondary levels and higher education—are struggling to understand the implications of the entrance of large numbers of Latino and Asian immigrants for their curricula, for the provision of support services, and for the management of schools.

Most school systems lack basic information about students of migrant (students from other parts of the United States and Puerto Rico) and immigrant backgrounds: they have little organized knowledge of their countries of origin, their families' socioeconomic position, the specific features of their native culture(s), and their expectations of schooling. While the new multicultural curricula have made some impact and some change has taken place in the culture of some urban secondary schools to take account of the changes in the school population, still strong counterpressures exist at the highest levels to retain and strengthen the uniform curriculum. The idea that equality of opportunity means the expectation that students may master a definite Eurocentrically based body of knowledge by the completion of high school is based on the assimilation assumptions that guided the early twentieth-century school reforms and still dominate the thinking of many "progressives" in education. For example, the education program of the Governors Conference in 1989, of which President Clinton was then

a leader, favored strengthening the standardized curriculum and national testing. Similar views have been expressed by President Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers.

Moreover, most multicultural reforms such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and "rainbow" curricula provide, at best, a template whose applications are often too mechanically conceived. Few efforts are being made to rethink the *entire* curriculum in the light of the new migration and immigration, much less develop entirely different pedagogies. In secondary schools and community colleges, for example, students still study "subjects"—social studies, math, science, English, and "foreign" languages. Some schools have "added" courses in the history and culture of Asian, Latin American, and Caribbean societies, but they have little thought of transforming the entire humanities and social studies curricula in the light of the cultural transformations of the school. Nor are serious efforts being made to integrate the sciences with social studies and the humanities; hence, science and math are still being deployed as sorting devices in most schools rather than as crucial markers of a genuinely innovative approach to learning.

In short, multiculturalism has severe limits. In order for it to be a real help in educational transformation, concrete social, cultural, and, equally important, intellectual contexts must inform innovation. These not only are subject-centered, but they also refer to the specific conditions of school life—the administrations, teacher abilities and background, the socioeconomic profile of students and their already acquired knowledge.

The multicultural curriculum should seek to develop a context-dependent series of learnings that will take account of student experiences. But, on the whole, the currency of this approach seems to be limited to elementary education. By the time most students reach junior high school and certainly high school, context-dependent education is rarely practiced. Of course, some teachers try to make their classrooms places that build on the cultural knowledge that students already possess and is woven into learning. But in most places teaching remains articulated with performance tests, most of which is tied to standardized curricula. Despite the growing diversity of college students, we can cite few examples of sensitivity by administrators and teachers outside language arts to the multiplicity of economic, social, and cultural factors that bear on a student's educational life in higher education. At best, some urban colleges and universities created ethnic studies programs in the 1970s that recognized diversity, but they strictly separated these programs from the traditional academic disciplines which, overwhelmingly, today remain bound to the old assumptions. As a result, there is a surprising paucity of courses and programs that integrate new student populations and their needs into the curriculum, counseling, and placement activities.

As the evidence is increasingly showing, the historic assumption of im-

migrant "meltability" no longer obtains because many, if not all, immigrant groups hold fast to important elements of their native cultures while the prevailing economic situation gives them little reason to accept the standard curriculum as the key to a better life. The crucial culture war today is between, on the one hand, education institutions that do not meet the needs of a massively shifting student population and, on the other, students and their families who perceive schools as merely one more instrument of repression.

Occupying the front line of the education crisis are teachers and administrators. Even when school authorities and teachers understand the importance of change, most still experience everyday life in the school as an uphill battle to achieve minimum order. In 1991 one New York City principal proudly told an in-service trainer that the halls in "his" school were finally quiet enough to permit classroom teaching and learning. But he acknowledged that, despite gestures of change such as a small pre-professional program that had effected a significant turnaround among a small group of students, the course offerings and the pedagogic practices for the vast majority were, for the most part, conventional. In this school, where the student population is, overwhelmingly, of Caribbean origin—particularly Haitian and Dominican—average daily attendance was about 70 percent of the enrolled students, and the principal reported this statistic as a sign of progress!

In areas of high-immigrant African-American and Latino populations in major cities, daily attendance of 50 percent of enrolled students is far more typical and dropout rates are similarly high. Although some school authorities and politicians recognize that the "problem" is complex and that responsibility must be placed squarely on the shoulders of the institutions of governance, education, and the economy, there is still a strong tendency to blame the victims of the centrifugal forces that account for school failure.

Next to the students and their families, perhaps teachers are the most severe casualties of the crisis. In many of these schools, when not bewildered or in despair, many have grown cynical about the chance that anything can be done to reverse the situation in their schools. We have spoken to teachers who experience fear that they will be attacked or caught in the crossfire of gang warfare every day of their working lives. Others admit that they do not expect to do much "teaching" in the classroom but have settled for maintaining order most of the time. They have remade themselves, against their own social and political beliefs, into harsh disciplinarians—rule makers without an ultimate goal—as a strategy of self-defense.

Some of the more hopeful and enterprising teachers and administrators beat the bushes for funds to start special programs, often in conjunction with corporations and public agencies willing to work in schools. These are usually language, culture, and occupational programs that invariably

report high-retention, graduation, and college admission rates, largely because they are small, run by dedicated teachers, and often produce jobs or educational advancement for students. Typically, the director and teachers in these alternative programs—both within and outside large schools—are able to address many of the social, cultural, and curricular needs of students. Staff usually works long hours, have tacit understandings of the students' life-situation, and are willing to devote attention to individual educational and personal needs.

But the alternative schools and special programs, while providing some hope that high schools and community colleges may reverse the reproduction of school failure, succeed precisely because they involve a relatively tiny proportion of the school population. They give corporations and other outside organizations the opportunity to take some social responsibility without, at the same time, obliging them to address the larger student population. The point is, that as long as alternative education remains just that—programs geared to a tiny minority of either upper class kids or dropouts, their two major constituencies—school systems that are otherwise failing the vast majority can proudly wrap themselves in the mantle of innovation and change without altering the larger context of schooling.

In this perspective, high dropout rates, low reading scores, absenteeism, drugs, boredom, and student resistance have become categories that serve as cultural markers to let Americans know that students who are poor, black, ethnic, or the "devalued other" do not count for much. School failure in the neo-conservative era was defined as a matter of poor character, stigmatized as a poverty of values rather than understood through the widespread poverty of resources and human compassion. Equity was disarticulated from the notion of social justice and was transformed into a radical scheme to cheat rich white kids out of an opportunity to get into an Ivy League school. Pedagogical authority was invoked as a major policy consideration when the Reagan/Bush administrations talked about troubled schools in urban areas.

During the last decade, schools became the new scapegoat for the American economy's increasing failure to compete in the new global marketplace. They were reimagined by the neo-conservatives as the new launching pad for injecting into the school curricula the kind of patriotic and commercial fervor that would serve up future generations of adults who would shut up and serve in the new army of service sector workers or simply disappear into the ranks of the unemployed and homeless.

Under the Reagan/Bush administrations, the notion of schooling as a vehicle for social justice and public responsibility was trashed for the glitter of the marketplace and the logic of the spirited entrepreneur. Making it in schools became a marriage between trying hard (real individual effort) and being in the right place at the most opportune time (the suburbs). For Reagan/Bush conservatives, the construction of a New World Order in

foreign policy was to be matched by the emergence of a New School Order driven by the ideology of corporate capitalism and the structuring principles of institutionalized racism. The discourse of a multicultural and multiracial democracy had no place in the educational reforms of the Reagan/Bush era. Instead, its guiding reform principles were respect, order, and submission. One of the most ominous results of the conservative reform effort was the emergence of an educational reform movement that viewed democracy as a political liability and public schooling as an obstacle to the demands of the marketplace. In this instance, the historic but unfulfilled relationship between schooling, democracy, and public life was junked in the interest of a world order in which public values became a burden rather than a condition for democratic public life.

With the election of Bill Clinton as president of the United States in 1992, many have assumed that the concerted attack on public education and other spheres of democratic public life will be replaced by a new language of possibility grounded in the imperatives of social responsibility, compassion, and critical citizenship. It is hoped that the new administration will not view the problems of schooling as merely procedural, but will reformulate them as a crisis of citizenship and ethics. It is in the spirit of such hope that we would like to suggest some general guidelines for rethinking the language of educational reform and possibility for the rest of the 1990s.

As we stated in the preface to the first edition of this book, we believe that any viable educational reform program must return schools to their primary task: to serve as places of critical education in order to create a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise power over their own lives and especially over the conditions of knowledge acquisition. Central to any such reform effort is the recognition that democracy is not a set of formal rules of participation, but the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority. At one level this means that the Clinton administration needs to reinsert the language of moral, political, and civic conscience into the discourse of educational reform. We are not merely interested in equality, but in empowerment for the vast majority of students in the United States who need to be educated in the spirit of a critical democracy. Equality is essential but inadequate as a basis for educational reform. The Clinton administration needs to extend the principles of social justice to all spheres of economic, political, and cultural life. Within this context, the experiences that constitute the production of knowledge, identities, and social values in the schools will be inextricably linked to the quality of moral and political life within the wider society. Hence, the reform of schooling must be seen as part of a wider revitalization of public life.

Accordingly, the Clinton administration must link the reform of schools to the reform of other social spheres. For instance, any viable policy of educational reform must be matched by the guarantee of full employment