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Arturo Rodriguez
Boise State University

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On Democracy and Critical Citizenship

Arturo Rodriguez, Boise State University, Idaho, USA

Abstract: In this essay I fuse narrative, social critique and critical understandings of schooling. Across the writing I argue for an increased critical awareness of print and other forms of news media. For the purposes of this paper I propose two major arguments that support critical awareness, they are: knowing what it means to be an informed citizen and practicing a critical democratic citizenship. As a springboard for discussing the major themes I review how print and other news media are used as propaganda and how a seemingly literate populace more easily accepts what are understood as social norms.

Keywords: Schooling, Learning, Critical Theory, Democratic Citizenship

Consciousness

I AM READING *The New York Times* it is Thursday October 20, 2005. David Kirkpatrick is discussing the Supreme Court nomination of Harriet Mier. He is talking about how she suffered another setback when she was asked to resubmit part of her judiciary questionnaire. The Senate Judiciary Committee faults her for something they find in her discourse because as they say her responses are "inadequate," "insufficient," and "insulting." (Kirkpatrick, 2005) Is that the reason? Without recording here the full text of the article, I have to wonder, how much of their critique has to be because she is a woman or does not fit the current party agenda.

In another article, Sadam Hussein the former leader of Iraq is on trial for as the title of the column reads he is: "Charged in the deaths of 148 men in 1982" (Burns, 2005). John F. Burns goes on to say that this "ousted dictator" was "merciless" and a "tyrannical ruler" (2005). Burns continues by describing his clothes, store-bought, and his age, 68. Mr. Hussein is quoted by Burns as pleading not guilty because Hussein considers the new government pawns of the American "aggressors" and as Hussein states, "all things based on falsehoods are false" (Burns, 2005).

The other articles in the various sections of the newspaper seem to have much of the same "stuff," the columnists describe what to them is insightful though to me it is more incite-full in what the propagandists attempt to do. Rather than report what they study, and reflect the objectivity they profess, the columnists attempt to sway popular opinion. We the readers, American public, look at the scandals, Hussein's trial, the Mier confirmation and other topics (Army abuse of prisoners, and Heart Implant defects) as reflective of our global society. I know how reading the articles makes me feel. I am outraged that Saddam Hussein would kill 148 men and boys, and that implants costing thousands would fail and kill their recipients.

It leaves me awestruck that the Army would abuse prisoners of war and that a nominee to the Supreme Court would "insult" the Senate Judiciary committee. And then I reflect, what else is going on here; am I being socialized, a continuation of schooling, by the many

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cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com

forms of mass media I choose to read and watch? Am I consenting to the rule of law? Power exercised over me as I unconsciously or consciously engage the unseen material; what McLaren and Giroux, Apple and others call the hidden curriculum. This is what McLaren (1993) refers to as the macro level of schooling.

The news articles I mentioned affect me in my day to day existence because each one is a lesson in ideology. The topics covered bear the influence of each writer, their social, cultural, political and lived experience. The way they present and manipulate the data elicits a given response from me the consumer. And I, the consumer, continue in the micro and macro structure of American schooling and the overall rituals of human experience in contemporary American society (McLaren, 1993). These structures are composed of cultural markers that elicit responses from me; a result of the cultural material I add and associate.

The micro structure, cultural markers, is in the day to day lessons that accumulate over time (McLaren, 1993). The lesson here is the way news articles, television commercials and road signage are used to rewrite democracy. My ability to read, and hence "decode" the text, today is affected by, and to some degree controlled, from the earliest reading lessons I had in school. Reading practice then was mundane, drill and kill where my teacher recited instructions that we, her students, repeated on cue. This is the traditional form of literacy instruction that is experienced by many students throughout the U.S. (Allington, 2002b).

This, the project of drill and kill literacy education, has but one objective: children taught to react to the cue via the ritualized performance later become workers with a specific skill set. From the beginning of the industrial revolution literacy projects in public schools have provided students with a minimal literacy experience; preparing them to be workers for steel and paper mills. The United States is still in need of workers but today, as seen in the technocratic push, the need is for workers to be computer literate: to sit at a cubicle behind a computer screen processing information; tapping their lives away as the keys transcribe (incoming information) and transform (output), from what was in the 1920s coal and consumer products, to what is today, filling a work order, request for a product, banking, obtaining a prescription, or buying insurance. It is minimal or worker literacy that masks the late capitalist political agenda.

It is "they" and "them" that kill the literacy curriculum, imposing national and state standards that have little or nothing to do with language and literacy acquisition. Whether the they or them refers to neoliberals or the conservative right, what we see are dominant power structures used to exert control over a populace. The change, from what was struggled for by civil rights workers, radical activists and leftist thinkers in the 1960s, is not something new it is the conservative restoration (Apple, 2000).

The old schooling curriculum returns, evident since the colonization of the Americas; that of Christian moral order, paying fealty to a ruler (Shannon, 1989) by continuing as all good U.S. Americans: we contribute to goods or services for the benefit of the nation. This ensures that power is maintained by the few, the elite in contemporary American society, it is they, them with access and control of what forms of knowledge are acceptable and accessible to the rest of us, the supposed "unwashed" masses (Apple, 2000). By controlling what we read, watch and are told, "they" make manifest a population of people without a clear understanding of the limits to our own participation in the United States form of American Democracy.

Knowledge and Capitalism

So let's speculate: what does the United States public know about being "American?" It can be seen, from the focus on living in our society, that we live under a constructed mythology of unlimited freedoms: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and, participation in the governing body; our Democracy. As yet every four years many of us participate in a charade, we pretend that our vote counts for something. We cast our ballots, and assent to the next four years of what our new government wills for the people. Our ballots cast, our participation in democracy is finished. How far past arguing with our friends about which candidate is best do we go in exercising a participatory Democratic action? Do we even question the meanings of the symbols of government; what the big issues debated do for the people? Abortion, tax and education reform, social security, welfare, military spending and many other topics/issues are brought up and argued by the candidates.

The American people also discuss the issues and then seemingly decide which candidates are better according to their persona, how they come off on television and of course their speaking ability.

Throughout the regime change, the transfer of power from one president to the next, and in the ensuing four years, government disguises and equates freedom and participation in democracy with a person's ability to purchase consumer goods (Apple, 2000). The individual in America is then defined by what he or she is able to possess (Apple, 2000). It is clear from our position of socio-cultural dissonance that we become confused about the meanings of personal rights when we begin to equate them with property rights. Michael Apple sees this as a constant struggle; tensions that structure the debate over the point of education: a person's ability to buy tied to the degree of education they attain (2000).

What then of our aim for education? We cannot discuss an aim for education without also discussing what it means to live in a free society. The freedoms we actually enjoy are limited by how power is used, abused and exerted over the citizens of a society (Lukes, 2005). We in the U.S. live under the assumption we are free; as guaranteed by the constitution because, as mentioned before, we supposedly vote our government into office and they in turn ensure that our freedoms are maintained. But it is our elected officials that continue to maintain the seat of power, situated among the super wealthy, by disguising the function of government "they" make it possible to extract maximum benefit, wealth, from the corpus of the American people, what Marx refers to as "surplus value."

It is the body of this society, Foucault, when it is associated with our government and our Democracy, the American identity, that keeps us from challenging the manner in which government is enacted (1972). We do not challenge the status quo so long as the ability to purchase, for each social class, is maintained. It must be understood then that in acting for the people, the free U. S. Americans, the body of this capitalist society, government is actually operating for but a small segment of that same society. Our political leaders seemingly act as agents in our lives to ensure our good; involving themselves in such things as social security, healthcare, schooling, nutrition and housing (Foucault, 1972). And then, government agencies, social workers, psychologists and public school administrators step in to ensure the social order our governmental officials have established (Foucault, 1972).

The "order," as experienced over the last century, is an "America" as a race and class based society. U.S. American power as manipulated reproduces the order: white and wealthy, to a large extent peoples of northern European descent, preside as the ruling class over the

rest of us. Their power is a byproduct of how the social order is maintained through what we are allowed to study in schools. "They" use curriculum as a tool, coupled with our supra-capitalist religion, our U.S. American ethos, and our global-capitalist ideology: we must fulfill manifest destiny. We U.S. Americans are formed vis a vis schooling to understand that capitalism is good, it is our food, it is what we exist for. Purchasing power is the carrot that we follow through our American schooling and it ensures the misunderstanding of simulated versus real power.

The problem of "real" power in America is not so much in how we are conditioned or repressed by it, but what it promises; production of things, induction of pleasures, and formation of knowledges and as a consequence the ability to traverse space, place and time (Foucault, 1972). The social network in which we exist suggests that we too can take ownership of power; that we can exercise a political will. Participation in this democracy then would mean that our vote would count for something (Democracy, 2005). This in turn would be possible if the candidates fielded during the elections were representatives of the people. But, as we have seen, our elected officials are children of elitism, more concerned with doing the work of private interests (the will of the empowered majority). They do exercise a will via the many government agencies, organizations and other State apparatuses they run but only in so far as their will benefits private citizens.

Furthermore, in operating these various agencies the State exerts social control over the populace in how it manipulates their respective societal roles. In our world, the army acts as an instrument of death and imperialism; the United States can reach any one and kill them in any corner of the world. Our police and the criminal justice system simply serve their biased and punitive measures "they" extracting those incarcerated from the lowest rungs of society (Foucault, 1978).

Public schooling supports the ideology, superstructure, and social relations that legitimate the dominant society (Giroux, 1983). My critique of the state does not mean I advocate dismantling it, as I believe in a Democratic form of society. It must be clear; however, as currently defined states exist only as a reflection of preexisting power structures (Foucault, 1978).

What then must we advocate for in exercising our democratic freedoms? I am not the only human or critical theorist, to advocate for the dismantling of oppressive power structures. Those structures that inhibit freedom as "they" exert social control must be reconsidered if we are to further re-imagine our Global society and thus begin to discuss a global democracy. It is the dream as visioned by cultural workers Che; Ghandi; Martin Luther King Jr. and many others; they cried out that we become, as Foucault (1997) also posits, more authentically self aware, in knowing how we participate or are absent in our lives and in our oppression. Furthermore in choosing to take part in a society we must decide what our will is, what work we do during our short lives, which domains we promote, the instruments we resolve to employ in those domains; how as a consequence we will continue to exist in our society (Foucault, 1997).

Critical

Historical

At this juncture I am compelled to reflect on some of the events of my life; the actions I have taken and my reactions in and to my experiences. My experiences with schooling, the mass forms of media and my interactions with different social networks have had and are having a profound effect on me since: (a) Like many U.S. citizens I have been socialized to believe in a particular ideology: U.S. American Democracy and freedom, as guaranteed by the Constitution, and (b) I have been subject to my experiences, my own lived cultural history, as I am the observer and actor in my living (Freire, 1970; Greene, 1967; Wittgenstein, 1972). So I believe and believed as a United States citizen that I and we live in a representative Democracy, and our system of government protects us, its citizens, from persecution, moreover it acts as a body to guarantee promotion of the interests of all.

Yet in the U.S. American experience, public schooling served to socialize me to the point, as many Americans and those who seek the "American dream," I became numbed to what Kosik (1976) calls the "pseudo-concrete." In living the "American dream" we become ideologized. This is difficult for us to understand as our indoctrination happens at specific moments in our lived cultural history. The points of indoctrination, to the pseudo concrete of everyday reality, are not isolated events, mere confusion in the chaos of living and being. These points are part of the programme of control. Each event, every moment of every day in our lives contains within it (them) cultural markers and experience. We become accustomed to accepting seeds of culture, of consciousness. Every idea we internalize sprouts and replaces our personal socio-cultural identity with slave culture. We ultimately forget the nagging loss of self; participation in the group brings the happy thoughts: the "right" food, car, home, friends or life will bring Aristotle's final cause: happiness.

Political

My early experience in American schooling, my acts of resistance and the responses of my teachers enacting their view of "Americanism" and Democracy is now colored by what I can currently see in the experience as Wittgenstein (1972) posits, my current experience is another, the memory of my early experiences; an echo of a thought. How I define these terms "American" and "Democracy" over time is continuously transformed. Much as Vygotsky (1978) relates, every word has meaning—sentences are combinations of such words—meaning then is the object for which the word stands as it is contextualized. For words to have meanings we must historicize them. We must situate them in their dialectical, cultural, social, and political frameworks.

I understand now that my struggle in public education had to do with American Democracy and some major problems that exist in our society; (e.g. race, class and power). Yet I understood this at an early age as many of us do. We see flashes of reality, tears in the fabric of existence, we aren't crazy. The flashes are points of contact between our original critical eye and the pseudo-concrete, Kosik (1976) of the everyday. I knew what my teachers meant when they called me uncooperative; they were unwilling to work with me in ways that supported my learning. I also understood what they meant in "helping" me become more "American;" they were subtracting my cultural and ethno-linguistic identity, Valenzuela

(1999), and replacing it with their understanding of true culture. What I have come to understand is that the subtraction of your lived cultural reality is never complete. The possibility for reclaiming the self will always exist. This is a problem of memory for the slave-masters. We never completely forget our humanness, our original child's mind: human beings come into the world free to choose.

For me the Chicano movement provided a tear in the Wachowski brother's Matrix, and its effect on my upbringing helped provide the impetus for a counter-hegemonic living project since the movement coincided with my early experiences in schools. Growing up during the early seventies I shared "other" experiences with many of my Chicano contemporaries; my brown sisters and brothers provided a challenge to the system of socialization. The Chicano movement, in thwarting the efforts of the government to "Americanize" us, was reaffirming my personal identity and promoting a cultural heritage and a cultural identity with which I could relate. I was in grade school in the post civil rights era, not old enough to become an activist, but the social messages I received from my peers, which were reinforced by my family, were that I should name oppression. As I viewed it then, and as I understand now, the Chicano movement was part of the larger struggle for worldwide liberation (Mariscal, 2005).

It was during grade school I first attempted to exert my independence, to free my self, by butting heads with my teachers; teachers who were replacing mi cultura with an oppressive U.S. American identity. My socialization into the Americano was formalized as I was continuously chastised for using Spanish. It continued when I was forced to act patriotically by singing the national anthem, reciting the pledge of allegiance and participating in plays that extolled the virtues of "our" U.S. American forefathers. Running parallel to this cycle of socialization, Freire (1970) and Foucault (1972) was a spiritual and cultural awakening; the subversive means my parents used to maintain our cultural heritage, teaching us Spanish at home and taking us on extended visits to Mexico, ensured that I did not become completely acculturated: accustomed to living out my assigned culture, color or caste.

My mother's love for her children and my father's desire for us to understand our origins ensured that I never completely bought into the U.S. American, white, capitalist, patriarchical system. Knowing I had another life on the other side of the border, and understanding that reality aided me in becoming somewhat critical of the society in which I was raised. I knew Mexico, in the flesh, so why should I believe the racist and classist garbage I was being taught in school about my heritage.

Accepting the Critical Voice

Today 'they" consider me a researcher. If you look at my curriculum vitae you will see my interests are in the areas of language acquisition, literacy, culture and power. The American academy recognizes the research I conduct as belonging in the area of "Reading" and "Bilingualism." Yet, the focus of my inquiry, be it in educational policy, No Child Left Behind; teacher education, teaching and learning in schools; or in philosophy and the nature of existence, is meant to support an understanding of life: Why are we here, how did we get here and what if anything can or should we do to change the existential course and outcome of our lives? Because for all of us the physical outcome is the same; we are born, we grow and we die.

It is the interim I am concerned with, the state of our existence, the in-between space, as Kurt Vonnegut called it, "between blackness and blackness." Consider what we are made to believe and how we are made to believe: we were not all born racist, capitalist or sexist. Ever wonder why people treat you differently because of your hair, skin color, gender or a perception of how much you own. The something we are made to believe or adopt, as Marshal MacLuhan and Neil Postman have argued is inserted into what we read in novels, popular magazines and newspapers. It is prevalent in the images we see on television or in movie theatres. It is the stuff of American socialization that many of our teachers feed us every day. All of this adds to the portrait of what a U.S. American is and who is "other:" Who belongs to mass culture and mass society.

Our understandings of the neighbor, the farmer, the doctor, the lawyer, the politician, or the teacher are tainted by the mass of images and sounds "they" unleash on us. To them cultural icons like Black and Brown are meant to provoke ideas about skin color: it is in predetermining what these icons indicate that inhibits the possibility of our acquiring and engaging a critical I: as a consequence, where and how one begins to view critique acted out in American schooling.

It must be understood, hence, no one can name the world for us, that is, if we are to embrace the possibility of change for human emancipation. We must therefore engage our humanist voice in the language of critique; Of What? Let us begin with a critique of our global capitalist societies, as have others such as Noam Chomsky, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Donaldo Macedo and Roberto Bahruth. It will be thus that being a critical humanist, a psychoanalytical and existentialist concept, we can understand and work toward the origin of more than concept, a more organic struggle over liberation.

The Need for Change

This human experience, our current understanding of living viewed in the western tradition, is one in which citizens of a state are subject to the whims of the elite and the powerful (Foucault, 1972, Sartre, 1957). It is argued, however from among the people, philosophers like Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, Emmanuel Kant, Peter McLaren, and Jean Paul Sartre to name a few, that in breaking away from apathy or quietism, where we sit silently allowing the world to objectify us and do with us what it will, becoming critical of the world and its society is a doctrine of possibility in which, "every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity" (Sartre, 1957, p. 14). And further, we realize; we can break from the quiet of subordination, dominance and oppression.

Living in the world then we come to define for ourselves how to live, to be, to enact our lives, and to define them as we will in what language we will. What happens to us in social settings shapes, changes and sometimes oppresses our will (Nietzsche, 1999). Human beings, sentient and emotional, are charged by external action (social circumstance). We will sit quietly or act according to what affects us, and we will then take a position based on how we view the world. Being human, requires of us that we share in acting publicly a social, moral and ethical consciousness. It is in choosing how we live and act, what we set our minds to and how we negotiate a problem, that we are defined (Sartre, 1957). We cannot divest ourselves of our actions nor can we deny that our actions are the result of who we are socially, culturally and politically (Freire, 1985): in the actions we take we reveal our subjectivity, the consequence of our individual existence meeting our social lives.

It is thus I argue we must be critical of the world and responsible for enacting our freedom (Sartre, 1957), and our liberation (Freire, 1970). Knowledge, our growing understanding of being, consciously knowing, deciding what for us is truth and how it affects or composes our freedom to act, might be enough. But we must understand and be critical of ourselves and what it means to be free to act.

As we have seen, the freedom to act cannot be taken for granted as an, "impersonal or supra-personal force that presides over history, freedom can only be the result of the free efforts of human beings (Abagnano, 1969, p. 89). It is the people, who exercise critical agency in a Democacy, that shape and create freedom (Freire, 1970, 1985). Furthermore, freedom cannot be guaranteed either by rulers, organizations or the establishment of a free country or territory (Abagnano, 1969). In the case of education and educators it is a shared principle where authority over it resides not in teachers alone but is mutually exchanged between a teacher and the pupils she works with (Freire, 1998).

This must needs be understood as a dialectical experience between students and teachers and students and the world. It is in the socially acquired exchange with history we become, taking our place in the fullness of humanity. Eyes open the illusion of what is "real" our social, cultural or historical affiliation is unmasked. We see before us the nakedness of enslavement. Take the phrase "Real America" an attempt to establish ownership of the term America, for the dominant population in the U.S., as if all other Americas were false Americas and any social, cultural, or political affiliation not related to "Real America" is void. It is the cultural affirmation, belonging, to the right club that negates any possibility for an authentic or socio-critical grasp of freedom. Being a "Real American" then you must "think", talk, act and vote like a "Real American."

Possibility for Change

What the U.S. needs in a bad way, is freedom and a critical will to reconceptualize Democracy; to think critically about our fears of Power and disrupting the status quo where an elite middle and upper class exert power over the masses. But, the citizens of the United States have increasingly been numbed by status and materialism. What matters more today than say forty years ago is that you live in the right neighborhood in the right size house with at least two cars in the garage (Boorstin, 1969). As mentioned before, the print and television news media and popular culture push us into redefining our identity. We display it in what we say how we act and what we wear. The labels on our clothes, or the design, are a mark of our socioeconomic status announcing our personal worth and confirming our standing in society. For this reason we can tie the clothes we wear to the ideologies we share and begin to see how our society has become increasingly stratified.

It is a hallmark of the elite experience, those that have, to attend the right universities; such schools as Berkeley, Stanford, Yale, Harvard, UT and MIT. Attendance at these institutions will increase the possibility of continued access to the social networks and social capital with which to recreate a dynastic position. "They," those favored by the establishment, work and play in the same fields; they exercise their *habitus* and resultant socially acquired capital to manipulate power (Bordieau & Wacquant, 1992). The empowered majority population, an actual minority, uses the social capital they acquire through the relationships they form, networking, to build a structured/positivist ideology in which things are as they should

be; things, otherwise known as human beings, or objects in such a society can be quantified, labled and categorized.

The dominant population then begins to believe in its "sameness." And hence, as Bordieu & Wacquant posit, "In highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e., spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields (Bordieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). The persons then in these individual cells or fields owe their inter-subjectivity, their allegiance, to the "father" ideology, in the United States and elsewhere to capitalism. Their shared power stems from the intra-communal architecture. The spaces in the field are, in theory, objectively defined and manipulated to access or allocate a type of power (or social capital) used to reproduce a supposed homogeneous society (Bordieau & Wacquant, 1992).

Furthermore belonging to the culture, citizenship or party affiliation also further demarcates and further stratifies U.S. American culture. Children reciting the pledge of allegiance, hand over their hearts and facing the American flag can be heard almost daily in American schools. They are seen and heard using the same language, English. [More than for communication, the language is used to begin their socialization into a common belief system as to what exists (a Christian God) what to think (capitalist Democracy) and believe (freedom) (Therborn, 1978).] The world reality hence becomes a one party system, some call it global capitalism, which claims to be founded on democracy and thus is a legacy of U.S. America.

Clarity of Focus

In the United States the processes of socialization and stratification are more and more evident throughout our schooling. The capitalist ideology becomes a byproduct of our Americanization; which, is further linked to the growing relationships we develop. As we begin to consider our self identity we also subsequently consider that "other" person we relate to in everyday life (Buber, 1967; Ortega y Gassett, 1967). How we consider them, like or unlike us, further challenges our U.S. American identity in that we either see ourselves, and who we are, in our contemporaries, our shared social identity, or we objectify them as "other" (Freire, 1970; Greene M., 1967, McLaren, 1995). Some of us, at some point in our personal history, our critical social consciousness, (concientizaçao (Freire, 1970), begin to consider what is fair in U.S. American society or just about being a U.S. American.

Enacting our lives, our self defined role play: teacher, student, or parent, makes us aware of whether or not, as elaborated in a democracy, the rules set out for this society allow for the participation of all that reside within it (Guinier, 1994; McLaren 1995; Shannon, 2000). In a society, where in theory a majority decides policy for all, the question becomes; do we want to play according to the rule of the majority? And, what happens to the minority that either: doesn't vote, or, voted against what was voted for; current issues that eventually are made public policy or law?

The most basic codes of conduct in the United States of America were decided over two hundred years ago by the supposed representatives of the citizens that resided within its borders. Many U.S. Americans can describe basic human rights guaranteed in the American Constitution and as amended in the Bill of Rights. As described in the open source online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, "The Bill of Rights includes rights such as freedom of speech, of press, of religion, and of assembly" (2005). Furthermore there aren't qualifications in the

constitution for the guarantees to citizens other than naturalization or native birth. As understood by her originators what democracy can mean is a free association of a people.

We the masses know it thusly, government by and for the people and not the elite (Lummis, 1996). How we define Democracy, however, has become a weak copy of the original idea. In times past it was a revolutionary term, one defined by masses of people critical of how social goods and services were distributed and the many social injustices that occurred in society (Lummis, 1996). Today, we discuss Democracy solely in terms of whether or not we have access to material capital, the freedom to buy and the freedom to ascend socially from the lower or middle classes to the upper echelon (Lummis, 1996). If we reify the term Democracy our discourse becomes radical, one of inclusion; a discourse where rule by the people is as a collective identity; meaning all of us and not just the wealthy or the politically powerful. Global power then is transformed it becomes an inter-subjective consciousness, the point of our participation in society whereby we can be critical of individual and social injustice.

Becoming socially or critically conscious alone, in this capitalist society, will not be enough to reconcile what are perceived differences of race, class, ethnicity or ideology. We need alternatives to the current discourse regarding participation in U.S. American Democracy, which asserts a "for or against, win or lose" mentality. If we truly believe in the idea of Democracy, upon which a new social experience can be founded, then we must also seriously consider what it means to participate in democracy: "In a racially divided society, this principle does better than simple majority rule if it accommodates the values of self government, fairness, deliberation, compromise, and consensus that lie at the heart of the democratic ideal" (Guinier, 1994, p. 5).

What Guinier describes is an exchange in which individuals, minorities also read as "the people," share in the decision making process with the majority. More than an exercise in making public policy, it is a dialogical exchange where the majority recognizes and respects the rights of the minority. Moreover the minority influences and participates in decision making which legitimates majority decisions instead of the usual process where minority silence implies its consent (Guinier, 1994). This does not mean that we become traders in power or that we exchange rulers and become rulers and oppressors ourselves. What I see is a gathering of a free people in a public space without a paternal leviathan, government, nor a maternal society. Instead the people stand for what they will; transforming what it means to be free to speak, choose and act (Lummis, 1996).

Becoming critical is a philosophy of possibility as Abagnano elaborates, "Everything that man comes to be, to know and to do is a possibility that he finds within and without himself, a possibility that places him before the alternatives of success or failure, of destruction or preservation, of life or death" (Abagnano, 1969). By theorizing critical possibilities related to power, rule and class, we connect the dots relating who I am and who we are individually and socially to the ideas of critical freedom and critical choice. Further an understanding of critical consciousness aids us in becoming more critically self aware. In choosing to play out or exchange our societal roles we may become more fully human and more capable then to seize possibilities of what a global society can be.

Conclusion

Never in the history of this planet has there been a greater need for change and for citizens across the planet to act and unite. The United States is not the only country that is currently on the brink of chaos: war, famine, and economic turmoil are everywhere. Yet we have before us a moment in time where history has caused much needed change.

Everywhere we see signs of a global population ready to act: in the US people watched as Barack Obama assumed the office of the Presidency. Critically aware, we must ask ourselves; are we seeing a new form of government, where our elected leaders are held accountable for their actions? Or do we see evidence, as in the case of the latest political appointments, of what we have known all along, one dynasty transitions from one place on the ladder of success to another? We can wait on the sidelines and claim neutrality or we can wave the banners of ideology claiming we only support the actions of what we have known.

My position has been, and continues to be to act, in accordance to my perceptions of the meaning of free human being. I live, I love, I laugh, and I care knowing that my fellow human beings will be affected by my actions and my inactions. The teacher I am in history as we have seen through the examples of El Che, Martin Luther King Jr., and Ghandi must remember the student. In taking the name teacher, we cannot believe that we are merely handing out pearls of wisdom, ideologies students are free to choose from and act upon or not. Teachers like all social human beings are potentially agents of history. We must act out our *praxis* knowing the fullness of the realities of our experience: struggle; life and death are the direct result of our teachings.

How then can we reconcile the received madness in culture; our ideological differences? The arguments we experience in our respective "developed" societies over territory, objects or ideas are more than mere distractions; they ensure we live out our inherited color, culture or caste. Yet, what can we find in the supposed simpler societies, from the furthest reaches of the arctic, across the deserts of sand and in the hearts of jungles, where people struggle to survive, we do not encounter battles over objects or things. The places people gather, around the campfires of humanity, are meant to share the experience of existence; to celebrate the living moment. It is here as agents meting out the spirit of sisterhood, brotherhood, indeed humanity our eyes spring wide. We become fully conscious and fully human not as a product of leave [noblesse oblige] someone allows us to be, but as an outcome of the fullness of the human experience.

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About the Author

Dr. Arturo Rodriguez
Arturo Rodriguez is Assistant Professor of Bilingual Education at Boise State University where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in Bilingual Education and is an advisor for student teachers. His research and teaching interests include: Intercultural and democratic education; language and literacy acquisition; bilingualism and biliteracy; literacy and bilingual education; district, state and federal school language policy; inquiry and research design and methodology.

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