

# *The Rouge Forum*

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# "WHY SO MANY EXAMS? A MARXIST RESPONSE" By Bertell Ollman

## I.

The psychologist, Bill Livant, has remarked, "When a liberal sees a beggar, he says the system isn't working. When a Marxist does, he says it is". The same insight could be applied today to the entire area of education. The learned journals as well as the popular media are full of studies documenting how little most students know and how fragile are their basic skills. The cry heard almost everywhere is "The system isn't working". Responding to this common complaint, conservatives - starting (but not ending) with the Bush Administration - have offered a package of reforms in which increased testing occupies the central place. The typical liberal and even radical response to this has been to demonstrate that such measures are not likely to have the "desired" effect. The assumption, of course, is that we all want more or less the same thing from a system of education, and that conservatives have simply made an error in the means they have chosen to attain our common end. But what if students are already receiving - more or less - the kind of education that conservatives favor? This would cast their proposals for "reform" in another light. What if, as Livant points out in the case of beggars, the system ~ working?

The 17th century French philosopher, Pascal, noted that if you make children get on their knees every day to pray, whatever their initial beliefs, they will end up believing in God. It seems that a practice repeated often enough, especially if it includes particular movements and emotions, can exercise an extraordinary effect on how and what we think. Didn't Marshall McLuhan warn us in the early years of T.V. that "The medium is the message"? What applies to praying and to watching T.V. applies as well to taking exams. If you make students at any rung of the educational ladder take lots of exams, this will have at least as much influence on what they become as the kind of questions that are asked. In short, exams, especially so many exams, teach us even more than they test us. To grasp what it is they teach us is to understand why our system of education already "works" and in what ways conservative proposals for reform would make it "work" still better.

## II.

Before detailing what young people learn from their forced participation in this educational ritual, it may be useful to dispose of a number of myths that surround exams and exam taking in our society. The most important of these myths are -

1) that exams are a necessary part of education. Education, of one kind or another, however, has existed in all human societies, but exams have not; and the practise of requiring frequent exams is a very recent innovation, and still relatively rare in the world;

2) that exams are unbiased. In 1912, Henry Goddard, a distinguished psychologist, administered what he claimed were "culture free" I.Q. tests to new immigrants on Ellis Island, and found that 83% of Jews, 80% of Hungarians, 79% of Italians and 87% of Russians were "feebleminded", adding that "all feebleminded are at least potential criminals". I.Q. tests have gotten a little better since then, but given the character of the testing process, the attitudes of those who make up any test and the variety of people - coming from so many different backgrounds - who take it, it is impossible to produce a test that does not have serious biases;

3) that exams are objectively graded. Daniel Stark and Edward Elliot sent two English essays to 200 high school teachers for grading. They got back 142 grades. For one paper, the grades ranged from 50 to 99; for the other, the grades went from 64 to 99. But English is not an "objective" subject, you say. Well, they did the same thing for an essay answer in mathematics and got back grades ranging from 28 to 95. Though

most of the grades they received in both cases fell into the middle ground, it was evident that a good part of any grade was the result of who marked the exam and not of who took it;

4) that exams are an accurate indication of what students know and of intelligence in general. But all sorts of things, including luck in getting (or not getting) the questions you hoped for and one's state of mind and emotions the day of the exam, can have an important affect on the result. Here, readers only have to think back to exams where you were well prepared and did poorly, or where you knew very little and did extremely well;

5) that all students have an equal chance to do well on exams, that even major differences in their conditions of life have a negligible impact on their performance. There is such a strong correlation between students' family income and their test scores, however, that the radical educational theorist, Ira Shor, has suggested (tongue-in-cheek I think) that college applications should ignore test scores altogether and just ask students to enter their family income. The results would be the same - with relatively few exceptions, the same people would get admitted into college, but then, of course, the belief that there is equality of opportunity in the class room would stand forth as the myth that it is;

6) that exams are the fairest way to distribute society's scarce resources to the young, and hence the association of exams with the ideas of meritocracy and equality of opportunity. But if some students consistently do better on exams because of the advantages they possess and other students do not outside of school, then directing society's main benefits to these same people merely compounds the initial inequality. Between members of this educational elite, of course, a degree of meritocracy and equality of opportunity does exist - though George Bush Jr.'s emergence as President should tell us something about its limits. What is unfair are the material benefits won by the whole of this educational elite by doing better on exams than the rest of the people in their age cohort when it is not the exams but differences in their conditions of life that have determined most of the outcome. Perhaps this is what former President and millionaire, Jimmy Carter, meant when he said, "Life is unfair";

7) that exams, and particularly the fear of them, are necessary in order to motivate students to do their assignments. Who can doubt that years of reacting to such threats have produced in many students a reflex of the kind depicted here? The sad fact is that the natural curiosity of young people and their desire to learn, to develop, to advance, to master, and the pleasure that comes from succeeding - which could and should motivate all studying - has been progressively replaced in their psyches by a pervasive fear of failing. This needn't be. For the rest, if the only reason that a student does the assignments for a particular course is that he/she is worried about the exam, he/she should not be taking that course in the first place; and 8) that exams are not injurious - socially, intellectually and psychologically. This is a big one, and I prefer to deal with it in connection with my analysis of what exams actually do.

### III.

Complaining about exams may be most students' first truly informed criticism about the society in which they live, informed because they are its victims and know from experience how exams work. They know, for example, that exams don't only involve reading questions and writing answers. They also involve forced isolation from other students, prohibition on talking and walking around and going to the bathroom, writing a lot faster than usual, physical discomfort, worry, fear, anxiety (lots of that) and often guilt. They are also aware that exams do a poor job of testing what students actually know. What student hasn't griped about at least some of these things. But it is just here that most of their criticisms run into a brick wall, because most students don't know enough about society to understand the role that exams - especially taking so many exams - plays in preparing them to take their place in it.

Up to this point, my main effort has gone into debunking our most widespread beliefs about exams as so many myths. But if exams are not what most people think they are, then what are they? The short answer, as indicated above, is that exams have less to do with testing us for what we are supposed to know than teaching us what the more formal aspects of instruction cannot get at (or get at as well). To understand what that is we must examine what the capitalist class, who control the main levers of power in our

society, require from a system of education. Here, it is clear that capitalists need a system of education that provides young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for their businesses to function and prosper. But they also want schools to give youth the beliefs, attitudes, emotions and associated habits of behavior that make it easy for capitalists to tap into this store of knowledge and skills. And they need all this not only to maximize their profits but to help reproduce the social, economic and even political conditions and accompanying processes that allow them to extract any profits whatsoever. Without workers, consumers and citizens who are well versed in and accepting of their roles in these processes, the entire capitalist system would grind to a halt. It is here - particularly as regards the behavioral and attitudinal prerequisites of capitalist rule - that the culture of exams has become indispensable. Well, what does sitting for so many exams, together with the long hours spent and anxiety involved in studying for them, and the shame felt for the imperfect grades obtained on them, "teach" students? Here's the short list:

- 1) The crush of tests gets students to believe that one gets what one works for, that the standards by which this is decided are objective and fair, and therefore that those who do better deserve what they get; and that the same holds for those who do badly. After awhile, this attitude is carried over to what students find in the rest of society, including their own failures later in life, where it encourages them to "blame the victim" (themselves or others) and feel guilty for what is not their fault;
- 2) By fixing a time and a form in which they have to deliver or else, exams prepare students for the more rigorous discipline of the work situation that lies ahead;
- 3) In forcing students to think and write faster than they ordinarily do, exams get them ready - mentally, emotionally and also morally - for the speed-ups they will face on the job;
- 4) The self-discipline students acquire in preparing for exams also helps them put up with the disrespect, personal abuse and boredom that awaits them on the job;
- 5) Exams are orders that are not open to question - "discuss this", "outline that", etc. - and taking so many exams conditions students to accept unthinkingly the orders that will come from their future employers. As with the army, following lots of orders, including many that don't seem to make much sense, is ideal training for a life in which one will be expected to follow orders;
- 6) By fitting the infinite variety of answers given on exams into the straitjacket of A, B, C, D and F, students get accustomed to the standardization of people as well as of things and the impersonal job categories that will constitute such an important part of their identity later on;
- 7) Because passing an exam is mainly good for enabling students to move up a grade so they can take a slightly harder exam, which - if they pass - enables them to repeat the exercise ad infinitum, they begin to see life itself as an endless series of ever more complicated exams, where one never finishes being judged and the need for being prepared and respectful of the judging authorities only grows;
- 8) Because their teachers know all the right answers to the exams, students tend to assume that those who are above them in other hierarchies - at work and in politics - also know much more than they do;
- 9) Because their teachers genuinely want them to do well on exams, students also mistakenly assume that those in relation of authority over them in other hierarchies are also rooting for them to succeed, that is, have their best interests at heart.
- 10) Because most tests are taken individually, striving to do well on a test is treated as something that concerns students only as individuals. Cooperative solutions are equated with cheating, if considered at all. Again, the implications of this for how students should approach the problems they will confront later in life are usually taken as obvious;
- 11) Because one is never quite ready for an exam - there is always something more to do - students often feel guilty for reading materials or engaging in activities unrelated to the exam. The whole of life, it would

appear, is but preparation for exams, or doing what is required in order to succeed (as those in charge define "success").

12) With the Damocles sword of a failing (or for some a mediocre) grade hanging over their heads throughout their years in school (including university), the inhibiting fear of swift and dire punishment never leaves students, no matter their later situation;

13) Coupled with the above, because there is always so much to be known, exams - especially so many of them - tend to undermine students' self-confidence and to raise their levels of anxiety, with the result that most young people remain unsure that they will ever know enough to criticize existing institutions, and become even physically uncomfortable at the thought of trying to put something better in their place.

14) Exams also play the key role in determining course content, leaving little time for material that is not on the exam. Among the first things to be omitted in this "tightening" of the curriculum are students' own reactions to the topics that come up, collective reflection on the main problems of the day (like the war), alternative points of view and other possibilities generally, the larger picture (where everything fits}, explorations of topics triggered by individual curiosity, and indeed anything that is likely to promote creative, cooperative or critical thinking. But then our capitalist ruling class is not particularly interested in dealing with workers, consumers and citizens who possess these qualities.

15) Exams also determine the form in which most teaching goes on, since for any given exam there is generally a best way to prepare for it. Repetition and forced memorization, even learning by rote, and frequent quizzes (more exams) leave little time for other more imaginative approaches to conveying, exchanging and questioning facts and ideas. Again, creative and critical thinking are discouraged.

16) Finally, multiple exams become one of the main factors determining the character of the relation between students (with students viewing each other as competitors for the best grades), the relation between students and teachers (with most students viewing their teachers as examiners and graders first, and most teachers viewing their students largely in terms of how well they have done on exams), also the relation between teachers and school administrators (since principals and deans now have an "objective" standard by which to measure teacher performance), and even the relation between school administrations and various state bodies (since the same standard is used by the state to judge the work of schools and school systems). In short, exams mediate all social relations in the educational system in a manner very similar to the way money - that other great mystifier and falsifier - mediates all relations between people in the larger society, and with the same dehumanizing results.

Once we put all these pieces together, it is clear that the current craze for increasing the number of exams for students at all levels has less to do with "raising standards", as the popular mantra would have it, than with developing more extensive control over the entire educational process, control that will allow the ruling class to streamline its necessary work of socialization. Control, then, rather than education, as this is ordinarily understood, is the overriding aim of the Government's current passion for more exams, and it must be understood as such, and not as a misguided effort to "raise standards" that is unlikely to work

Iv.

The question that arises next is - Why now? For it is clear that while exams have been with us for a long time, socializing students in all the ways that I have outlined above, it is only recently that the mania for exams, for still more exams, has begun to affect government policies. The short answer to the question, "Why now?", is probably something we can all agree on. It is -globalization, or whatever it is one chooses to call this new stage at which our capitalist system has arrived. But to which of its aspects is the current drive for more exams a carefully fashioned response? The proponents of such educational "reform" point to the intensified competition between industries, and therefore too between workers world-wide and the increasingly rapid pace at which economic changes of all kinds are occurring. To survive in this new order requires people, they say, who are not only efficient but have a variety of skills (or can quickly acquire them) and the flexibility to change tasks whenever called upon to do so. Thus, the only way to prepare our

youth for the new economic life that awaits them is to raise standards of education, and that entails, among other things, more exams. On this view, exams are there to help students get and keep good jobs.

A more critical approach to globalization begins by emphasizing that the intensification of economic competition worldwide is driven by capitalists' efforts to maximize their profits. It is this that puts all the other developments associated with globalization into motion. And it is well known that, all things being equal, the less capitalists pay their workers and the less money they spend on improving work conditions and reducing pollution, the more profit they make. Recent technological progress in transportation and communication together with free trade and the abolition of laws restricting the movement of capital allow capitalists today to consider workers all over the world in making their calculations. While the full impact of these developments is yet to be felt, we can already see two of its most important effects in the movement of more and more companies (and parts of companies) out of the U.S. and a roll-back of the modest gains in wages, benefits and work conditions that American workers have won over the last fifty years of struggle. There is no question but that capitalists are simply following the goose that lays the golden egg wherever it takes them; they have always done so and will always do so, no matter the social costs, so long as we allow it.

Thus, while capitalists in this new age of globalization certainly need workers with the right mix of skills and knowledge to run their businesses, they need every bit as much - and I believe even more - people across the society and particularly in the working class who will accept their worsening conditions and accompanying fears and anxieties without making waves. Naturally, if changes in education alone (with the main focus on exams) could produce the desired effect, the capitalists would be very pleased. But if - and where - it can't, the capitalists and their government (and their media, and their cultural, educational and social institutions) are quick to supplement it with other tactics. The current rage for more exams, therefore, needs to be viewed as part of a larger strategy that includes the obscene stoking of patriotic fires and the chipping away of traditional civil liberties (both rationalized by the so-called "I war" on terrorism), the promotion of "family values", restrictions on sexual freedom (but not, as we see, on sexual hypocrisy), and the push for more prisons and longer prison sentences for a whole range of minor crimes. Simply put, the "Man" is worried about loss of control at a key turning point in the development of capitalism when the disruption in people's lives is going to require more control than ever before.

If there is any reader out there who still believes that exams have more to do with education than with control, and that increasing the number of exams is motivated by a sincere desire to help people learn, a recent story in the New York Times (Mar. 7, 2002) has something just for you. Poverty, it seems, plays a major role in lowering students' grades on exams. According to studies cited in this story, the prevalence of lead in the homes of poor children produces lower I.Q.s and interferes with children's ability to concentrate. Frequent moves because of the lack of a permanent home also makes it very hard for the young people effected to prepare for exams. Persistent toothaches, due to inadequate dental care - another byproduct of poverty - is another problem related to poor exam results. After listing several such factors (simple hunger from not having eaten enough is not mentioned), the author concludes, "it is curious (my emphasis) that when we see poor children with lower test scores, we fail to consider if improving conditions of poverty, sometimes at relatively little cost, might also have an impact". Well, it would be "curious" (and more, and worse) if raising test scores and providing a good education were the goals of the exercise. But if the main goal of tests is maximizing control and learning how to accept being controlled then the special handicaps under which some students suffer in taking tests is completely irrelevant. Which is it? Examine the evidence, then you decide. (Here's an exam worth taking).

V.

"What Is To Be Done?". Or, more to the point, what should students do about all this? Well, they shouldn't refuse to take exams (unless the whole class gets involved), and they shouldn't drop out of school. Given the relations of power inside education and throughout the rest of society<sup>1</sup> that would be suicidal, and suicide is never good politics. Rather, they should become better students by learning more about the role of education, and of exams in particular, in capitalism. Nowhere does the contradiction between the selfish and manipulative interests of our ruling class and the educational and developmental interests of

students stand out in such sharp relief as in the current debate over exams. Students of all ages need to get more involved in this debate, therefore, in order to raise the consciousness of young people regarding the source of their special oppression and the possibility of uniting with other oppressed groups to create a truly human society.

Beyond this, just remember that **THEY** are few and **~** are many, but the power that comes from our greater numbers only becomes operational when people get organized and work together toward agreed upon goals. Everything depends on the youth of today doing better on this crucial test than my generation did, because the price for failure has never been so high. Will they succeed? Can they afford to fail?

Bertell Ollman is the author of ***How to Take an Exam...and Remake the World***. Black Rose Books; ISBN: 1551641704; (October 2001)



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## “No Child Left Untested”

E. Wayne Ross and Sandra Mathison

In a bipartisan effort, Congress has given final approval to the most sweeping federal reforms of education since Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. The bill, largely written by the White House, dramatically revamps the federal role in education.

Both Democrats and Republicans have hailed the bill, which is largely modeled after Texas standards for testing student achievement. President Bush claims "these historic reforms will improve our public schools by creating an environment in which every child can learn through real accountability, unprecedented flexibility for states and school districts, greater local control, more options for parents and more funding for what works." These reforms, however, are a massive intrusion of the federal government on local schools and states' control of education. The "No Child Left Behind Act" mandates statewide testing in reading and mathematics each year in grades 3-8 and specifies state intervention in any school where children's tests scores are not annually increasing.

While this bill does provide increased flexibility in the way states spend federal education dollars, most of the money is tied to mandated testing and in practice will undermine local control of education by linking federal funding with improvements in test scores.

This bill might be labeled "No Child Left Untested." The continued bipartisan promotion of testing as the solution to problems in education is no more justifiable now than it has been in the past. Rewarding and punishing by test results was discredited in the late 1800s. Current uses of high-stakes state mandated tests, in all but Iowa, violate professional standards for test development and use.

For example, high stakes testing programs (those with serious consequences for students, teachers, schools, districts) use a fallible single standard and measure of student achievement, a practice specifically condemned by the professional code of test developers, test publishers, and educational researchers. Also, states have been and now will be more compelled to prepare and use tests without adequate time and attention to proper and justifiable test development. More bad practices will be heaped on already wide spread bad practices in evaluating student achievement and schools.

The research over the past two decades indicates test based educational reforms do not lead to better educational policies and practices. Indeed, such testing often leads to educationally unjust consequences and unsound practices. These include increased drop out rates, teacher and administrator de-professionalization, loss of curricular integrity, increased cultural insensitivity, and disproportionate allocation of educational resources into testing programs, and not into hiring qualified teachers and providing enriching sound educational programs.

The winners, with the passage of this bill, are advocates of standardized teaching and learning, and the few large corporations that sell tests and test based curricula. Not children.

While the challenges of contemporary schooling are serious, the simplistic application of tests to make decisions about children, teachers, and schools impede student learning. Comparisons of schools and students based on test scores promotes teaching to the test and undoubtedly cause some teachers and principals to cheat, understandably, in order to make their schools look good on the tests. Punitively oriented testing programs do not improve the quality of schools; diminish disparities in academic achievement along gender, race or class lines; or move the country forward in moral, social or economic

terms. We are staunch supporters of accountability, but not test driven accountability that draws teachers and children into a corruption of education.

The most serious problem with testing based educational reform is its singularity of voice, its insistence that education be evaluated and improved in a single way. The practice of high stakes testing in America is an effort to treat teaching and learning in a simple and fair manner, but in a world where education is hugely complex with inequitable distribution of opportunity.

Increased standardization of education begs challenges from multiple viewpoints as to the costs and benefits for the children in our schools. Education does require decisions as to how children, teachers, and schools will be sustained and improved, but test based reforms, especially those mandated at a great distance from local schools and that promote the special interests of big government and corporations, will not do the job.

Author Note: E. Wayne Ross and Sandra Mathison are professors of education at the University of Louisville.

## Age-ism

By: Lindsey Rogowski.

I have looked up the word age-ism in several dictionaries and thesauruses and never found it. What are they hiding? Age-ism is real and there is no way to hide it any more. Unfortunately, it's gotten too big. Every day children are mistreated by adults because the adults think that they have the right. In *Escape From Childhood* by John Holt, he speaks about the needs and rights of children; I'd like to quote him:

"For a long time it never occurred to me to question the institution. Only in recent years did I begin to wonder whether there might be other or better ways for young people to live. By now I have come to feel that the fact of being a "child," of being wholly subservient and dependent, or being seen by older people as a mixture of expensive nuisance, slave, and super-pet, does most young people more harm than good."

Every day, I take a bus home from school. I stop at two other schools on my way. One day, I was looking out of one of the windows in the bus, and I noticed a young man with a skateboard. He was showing some younger kids how to do a kickflip, when a teacher spotted him. The teacher immediately walked over to the young man and confiscated his skateboard. I noticed that he attempted to speak up. But the teacher denied his right to speak and walked away with the skateboard. I immediately thought of how dominant that was. Is it not in the United States Constitution that one has the right to freedom of speech? People look at age-ism as a small problem. Is the Constitution a small thing? No. Adults have broken the United States Constitution by denying us our rights. Does it not say in the United States Constitution all men are created equal? (Although I would prefer to say all human beings are created equal).

A few days ago I was writing an article, and I was using the thesaurus on my computer. I came across the word young. It defined the word young: "immature, childlike, juvenile, adolescent, youthful, inexperienced, infant, callow, green." Then, I looked up the word adult. It defined adult: "grown-up, evolved, bigger, mature, matured, ripe, developed." Well, they left out one word. STEREO TYPE! Why is it that society assumes that if you're an adult that you are mature? I know kids that are far more educated and mature than most adults. Adults tell me that the only reason that kids are judged is because most kids are very immature. And therefore they assume all of us are immature brats. Why should the kids that are mature suffer because of the "other kids"? Why tell me I can't go to a movie because some other kid cannot handle it? If a kid goes to see a movie and was not quite comfortable with the material, he doesn't have to go back.

Kids are financially trapped, I am 11 but I must be 14 or older to get a job. And even at fourteen the jobs that are available to a fourteen year old are not near what would be needed to buy a house, food, and pay the mortgage. Kids are forced to be financially dependent. Age-ism is wrong and hopefully, one day will be stopped.

## Fast Track to Nowhere

by María A. Almanzo

I have seen my three children (21, 15, 6) respond differently to an educational system whose principles have evolved from historical reactions over 'curriculum first' or 'child first' debates in addition to neglecting the intellectual and cognitive needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children, (the NRP report and the launching the "LNCB" campaign), into a series of very shallow experiences for the sake of maintaining those measures that recreate ideas that progress and the welfare of society is shouldered by knowing all this stuff and that it would need to be tested in a laboratory simulated environment to mimic reliable and replicable research conditions.

On a daily basis, I know that my children have enjoyed their teachers and in general had good experiences. But my daughter left high school with extremely low confidence in math which she still needs to address before applying to state college, she is a late bloomer, and I am encouraged with her latest efforts. My son, on the other hand was brought up for resource in jr high, he is now thinking of taking the GED and going straight to junior college, he is the type of person who is not attached to the socially segregated school events, he sees his friends so infrequently in a high school of 3000+ students.

My 6 year old is being trained to collect stars and for every ten he gets for not turning over a series of behavior modification color cards on the wall, he can trade for a reward candy or toy ....yet he loves his kindergarten experiences, although i think it is a little overboard in systematic and sequentially prescribed activities

As a parent, I have tried to managed their survival of bad educational experiences (iep meeting with resource teacher recommending more phonics instruction for my son because his subcategory word attack component of the Woodcock Johnson was at second grade even though his overall reading comprehension was one level below his current grade level) and tried to be reactive to internalize judgements about themselves in regards to the grades they got or didn't through encouragement and discussions for better understandings, (my daughter once did not report a teacher calculated error on her test to obtain more points because then it would have led to a decrease in points with the student whom she check papers with) because grades have become a vortex pool for many statistical uses which intersect issues of bias; multiple factors, race, gender, etc.....it has been because we value being holistic.

Both my sister and my husband were considered failing students in elementary school and high school. Both are now attorneys. I was discouraged by my counselor to apply to UCB [University of California at Berkeley) because of his "if they don't accept blond hair, blue eyed, apple pie girls, what makes you think that they would accept you"response. My high school was so segregated, for all intents and purposes I was directed as white, because I didn't fit the linguistic profile of an ESL student even though I was a second language learner.

I was lucky that my mother spoke only primary Spanish while my father English; although fluent bilingual. I was in the mainstream Spanish club, but it wasn't until I looked at my yearbook did I realize that there was a whole other club with more than 20 Latino students, an ESL club. I had graduated with a 3.4 GPA and with the most credits earned among all of those who were in my graduating class. I enrolled into the 'six yr' plan and went to junior college with half the graduating student population. To say the least I met my husband as a UCB undergrad student.

My husband and I have endured extreme hardship to walk with our conscious, as our past families and future, in order to gain entry to a professional world that is judged by by a hierarchical order, sort and rank visible and invisible system.

My husband and I continue to believe it can be done differently, more responsive to the human potential and hope that it may...I am idealistic, I do not want my children to be competitive on demand but to understand their passions and follow where this energy leads them. We value socio-family relationships, culture, language, and our children's potential for learning over grades.

## WHAT DID YOU LEARN IN SCHOOL TODAY

(Tom Paxton, new words by Pikku Myy)

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?  
What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?  
I learned that I must pass a test  
To sort the learners from the rest  
That winners win and losers lose  
And TAAS test scores is how they choose  
And that's what I learned in school today  
That's what I learned in school

What did you learn in school today, dear little girl of mine?  
What did you learn in school today, dear little girl of mine?  
It matters what my parents earn  
I'll get better grades with cash to burn  
If I don't speak English I can't be smart  
And no more music and no more art  
And that's what I learned in school today  
That's what I learned in school

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?  
What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?  
Teachers fill my empty mind  
So that I won't be left behind  
I'm learning how to play the game  
And all right answers look the same  
And that's what I learned in school today  
That's what I learned in school

What did you learn in school today, dear little girl of mine?  
What did you learn in school today, dear little girl of mine?  
Learning's just a job I do  
From seven thirty til half-past two  
And all my interests have to wait  
'Til I drop out or graduate  
And that's what I learned in school today  
That's what I learned in school

# **Blaming Teachers, Punishing Students: The Standards and High Stakes Testing Revolution**

**Perry M. Marker, Rouge Forum**

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We blame teachers for the “failure” of the schools. We blame them on a lot of levels. We blame their professional education; we blame what they teach; we blame how they teach. The simplistic, and punitive reform efforts regarding high stakes testing reflect the fact that teachers have been blamed for all that is wrong with education, and students are being punished for it.

During the past twenty years in California, we have dismantled the best educational system in the world and blamed it on the teachers. It’s the teachers’ fault that we have an average class size of over 32, and in many cases over 40 students, in classrooms designed for 25. It’s the teachers’ fault that we have educational facilities that are in a dangerous state of disrepair and outdated textbooks. It’s the teachers’ fault that we have chosen to spend less on education, and more on prisons. And, it’s the teachers’ fault that we have a population that is among the most diverse, and the most challenging to teach, anywhere on the planet.

Lost in this seemingly endless cycle of blame is the fact that despite what politicians and the popular press would like us to believe, according to Bruce Biddle and David Berlinger in The Manufactured Crisis (1998), during the last decade standardized scores have been holding relatively steady; with modest increases in both math and reading scores. The most recent reading report on the National Assessment of Education Progress for tests administered in 1992, 1994, and 1998, reflect the steady state of reading scores. Scores from 1998 are equal to, or slightly above, 1992 scores for all tested grades. This despite the fact that more students are taking the tests than ever before whose first language is not English. Biddle and Berlinger conclude that there is no support for the myth that American students fail in reading

achievement, *or any other subject*. Simply put, schools are in better shape than we are led to believe. Teachers have done incredible work despite that fact that the educational system in California has been crumbling around them.

Since teachers are to blame for most of what is “wrong” with education, we now have punished students through the introduction of standards and high stakes testing: a racist, one-size-fits-all approach that is designed to present a singular and simplistic view of knowledge, truth and learning which ignores the diverse needs of our children of color and those who live in poverty. These “reform” efforts in education are intended to blame teachers and punish students for the problems of education by mandating a focus on drill and practice, and “teaching to the test,” instead of fostering students’ critical thinking skills. With efforts to blame teachers and punish students, we are relinquishing control of the classroom and curriculum solely to those who construct the tests.

Perhaps the most astounding thing about standards and high stakes tests is that there is no research evidence whatsoever that their use enhances student achievement and learning. Still, tests have become so all consuming that more than 20 million school days were devoted to them last year. The case for high stakes testing and standards is based on simplistic solutions designed to raise the self esteem of politicians and policy makers, and maintain a classist system of education where a small and select number of schools receive an embarrassment of riches.

Our fixation on high stakes testing was demonstrated when, the day after the tragic killings in Littleton, Colorado, high schools continued their scheduled standardized tests, rather than postpone them and discuss the incomprehensible events that shocked students and adults alike. I wonder how high the scores will be on that day of testing? Will teachers be blamed, yet again?

Things are bound to only get worse with high stakes testing. Schools will be compared to one another regarding how well they do on the tests. Teachers may be subjected to disciplinary pressures, even firing, if their students don’t score well on one test. Schools will lose funding or may even be closed. More importantly, students of color and children in poverty will get an education that doesn’t even begin to compare to that received with wealthier, white



students. And, this doesn't even consider the little mentioned fact that these tests cost big money. The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy says that standardized testing in America consumed more than \$900 million in one year.

The current wave of high stakes, standardized tests are punitive and neglect the notion that assessment should serve the primary purpose of improving student learning. We need be working with teachers to expand the idea of assessment; to provide different, yet rigorous, ways for students to demonstrate what they know. We can develop demanding and yet inclusive proficiency exit standards that combine student portfolios, and performance based projects - not just one high stakes standardized test - to graduate.

Assessments should serve to determine the success of a program, provide information to parents on their child's achievement, and hold schools accountable for how well taxpayers' money is being spent. It's time to demand that our school boards stop relying on a single, standardized, measure of student achievement and adopt a variety of student assessments that:

- are designed to provide feedback that improves student learning;
- involve parents, teachers and the community collaborating for improved student learning and better schools;
- allow a variety of measures that focus on individual student learning;
- do not limit the curriculum to a singular, standardized, assessment based on a high stakes approach.

Let's stop blaming teachers and punishing students for the educational politics of neglect during the last two decades in California. If the last twenty years are any indicator, politicians don't have the solutions to the education reform. Let's demand that those who are most invested in education- families and teachers - have a voice in determining the course of educational reform. Isn't the education of our children is far too important to reduce it to a high stakes game of testing roulette?

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# Free Your Mind And Your Ass Will Follow

## Externalizing the Internalized

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The mothership has landed. George Clinton and his P-Funk bunch, old and new friends, have entered the arena, and have become the temptress - mesmerizing us with their incessant rhythms and infectious melodies, and heralding their battlecry from the high stage: *free your mind and your ass will follow!* Like the rats of Hamelin, we lose control of our senses, forgetting who we are, where we are, what we stand for. We become pawns, doing as they say and praising what they do. We are at dusk in the night of the living dead.

With this grim picture, I invoke *our* America. I invoke what Spanos calls the *Pax Americana*; the peace of the (American) world. I invoke that which I previously referred to as 'the end of thinking', a term of Paul Bove's. Specifically, I wish to address its relation to the project(s) of American sociohistorical education.

When I refer, above, to '*our* America', the italics are not aimed at drama. By 'our', I mean the internal vision of educators in the American system. We are the tempted, the lost, keepers of a peace (Spanos-inferred) that we claim to oppose. Precisely, I refer to this notion of 'reflective practice' among social educators. What a nice package. We claim social activism and a sort of 'academic disobedience', but insofar that it does not impose on our comfort-level *outside* of the school setting. Or *inside*, for that matter.

Yes, I include myself here. And I do not discount the *project* of reflective practice, especially as outlined in 'NCSS Bulletin No. 88'. But I see it more as 'reflective theory', in that a true critical reflection requires the practitioner to be reflective *en masse*. Plainly, reflection requires *consistency*, especially where it hurts the most. Thoreau talked about the impossible dialectic of living as life that is both *honest* and *comfortable*, in the tendency for us to *object* only up to the point where our level of comfort is impinged upon. And then we give. [Thoreau, Gramsci, Mandela, King, Antonio Negri, aside]

For one, we are too quick to accept new approaches to educational discourse. We read Zinn, Loewen, and Nash, proclaiming their brilliance without practicing what they preach. In other words, what makes *their* history the correct one? They constantly are critical of sources and evidence, but do not ask their audience to be critical of *them*. And so, we take their word as the new history - the history that we will teach in the stead of older histories. In *Specters of Marx* (Routledge, 1994), Derrida calls for a heavier weighing of historiography, in place of history, within the academy. Rather than critiquing facts and writers, we should be focusing our attention on the temporal conditions that caused the creation of such facts and writers and, more importantly, the conditions that lead to, what E.O. Wilson refers to as, 'consilience' (internalized group consensus) within the greater society. Trinity College philosopher Avi Tucker claims the similar (in a call for historiography), stating that we should not focus on the determination of 'realist' history (in the singular), since we have no *absolute* access to the past. As *critical* teachers, we need to accept this (very difficult) challenge. If we do not begin to reconceptualize, and continue calling for a simple re-examination of evidence, we are simply changing the color scheme on the same old I Mac. [In a similar sense, the acceptance of Anyon's *Ghetto Schools*, without a closer eye to the essentializing principles contained within the ghettoization of some very 'non-ghetto' problems, plays directly into the false gratification claimed by 'reflective practice'.]

In another sense, we should be concerned with how *we* are certified as fact-bearers. Number one, there needs to be a serious reconsideration of the notion of 'tenure'. In essence, tenure cuts out the heart of reflective practice, in that it requires teachers to be active educators in the first few years of employment

(or, directly within the paradigmatic bounds in which they were *actively* engaged as ‘students of education’), but then allows them to settle into a groove as they become ‘more experienced’, which is precisely when they should be constantly tested and examined, with the temporal passing of new strategies and concepts (not to mention *new histories*).

Secondly, the continued importance placed on child psychology and educational philosophy, rather than a focus on practical training within the specific disciplines (math, social studies, etc), is troubling (and shows a lack of reflection on the part of the ‘higher’ academy). All of that ‘head’ stuff is well and good (and certainly fascinating), but in the field, it amounts to squat. Rather than asking the teacher to deal with the students as non-essentialized individuals who are living in the *real moment*, it forces them to see the student as simply inhabiting some rung of Piaget’s step-ladder. The answer to this lies in more fieldwork, and less bookwork. [This point is partially dealt with in the MAT format.] After all, we are indentured for thirty-some-odd years (until we can retire to the enjoyment of a state pension) - we have tons of time to read about Piaget.

Finally, these day-long ‘child wellness’ workshop requirements (often masked as ‘professional development’) frightens me. It is the same thing as the ‘multicultural education’ or ‘dealing with special needs students’ workshops that plague the teaching profession - where a \$24 fee and five hours of activity makes the State feel confident in sending teachers out to deal with some very specific and dangerous situations. Rather, there needs to be a changing of the guard in teacher education. Emphasis should be placed on what we do and where we are going. Yes, theory and history are very important. Anyone who disclaims Marx or Thoreau or Dewey or DuBois, saying that times are new and they are dead, is a fool. But it does make one wonder why it is that students of engineering, for example, take countless courses in computer-assisted drawing and physical mechanics (practical to their career), while students of education get a heavy dose of theory and history and psychology - and never encounter their main professional target: the students themselves. Learning teachers, in the year 2001, should be facing more courses on practical matters (school violence, home abuse, etc), and less on educational theory. Similarly, students of social education are (as above) bombarded with the call for resistance and rewritten histories, but we are not forced to take part in that resistance or rewriting. During my graduate work, there was no call to attend various social protests and events - including the FTAA protest in Buffalo and the NYSPSC march on Albany (each within a few hours from my school). Again, reflective *in theory*, not *in practice*.

We are told in academic writing to be concise, to the point, and to avoid the bullshit. But, in a sense, I find it very hard to do this with the subject matter at hand. It is a reading of reflective teaching that seeks some ‘between-the-lines’ analyses. And, as a disclaimer, this is not meant to be critical of Zinn, et al (*not* Anyon) - for in many ways, they do call for critical teaching and learning. But, by writing ‘new histories’, they are playing right into the hands of the powers-that-be; the same powers that promote tenure as job security (and not as the opposite to teacher resistance and critical introduction of new methods) and who are confident in having it on record that Mrs. So-and-so took part in a few games of ‘culture bingo’ and a rousing round of ‘Martian anthropology’, thus making them experts in multicultural education. Basically, we need to externalize what has been internalized in all aspects of the teaching profession. We are at a time where the *new* is immanent, and we need to go through our academic community dragging a wooden cart and proclaiming (in the best Monty Python tradition): *bring out your dead, bring out your dead*.

## No More Time for Tooth Stories

I am a teacher, and like all teachers, I believe that the goal of education is to empower every child to develop to his/her fullest potential. I have always had high expectations for my students, but as a result of the mandated “standards” imposed by the state of New York and the relentless testing we subject our children to, something unexpected is happening inside our classrooms that threatens to compromise the things we’ve learned over the years about sound and effective teaching methods, and developmentally appropriate educational practices.

Several years ago, a second grader happily displayed an empty space between her teeth, and I curiously squatted near her to hear the story of how it came out while she was eating ice cream. The story prompted others to share similar stories, and an authentic writing experience resulted, the pre-writing stage having emerged naturally from the spontaneous exchange of ideas.

Today, as the day began, a student approached me with the same news, and as I flew around the room checking homework and reminding another child to hurry up in the bathroom because we had to begin the day’s first lesson right away, I handed him a “tooth certificate” and congratulated him. There were no other stories; there was an assignment that needed to be squeezed in, and I was too distracted by the daunting task ahead: get everything in that I’m supposed to get into a very demanding day in second grade.

Elementary curriculum is bursting at the seams. When the volume of curriculum climbs, the daily pace of the classroom quickens. There is less joy and greater tension. Seconds count. Children are being expected to learn things with shorter periods of exposure, and in many cases, sooner in their development than they would otherwise be asked to do. Under the pressure of increasingly tight time constraints, the nature of the teacher/student relationship is significantly compromised, and the quality of the learning experiences begins to diminish.

I have yet to encounter a soul who isn’t sympathetic to these concerns. We all want the most meaningful educational experiences our money can buy. We say we are sensitive to these issues and to the developmental needs of our children, but as a society, we continue to behave as if we aren’t by forcing more into the education equation, earlier and earlier.

So what is it that compels us to continually add more to the curriculum, and earlier than ever before? The answer, of course, is standardized testing. Not a bad thing in theory, it is one narrow means of identifying children who are at risk of failing later standardized tests, so that additional support can be provided early on. Some districts use them to help make decisions about the effectiveness of their programs, although it cannot be assumed that there is a direct correlation between tests scores and the quality and value of a learning experience. Nor is it necessarily true that test expectations are appropriate for all learners at any given age. But regardless of the validity of an assessment, the focus and frequency of testing changed drastically once newspapers began to publish the scores. It became a high stakes competition between communities, a race to the top of “the list”.

The desire to see our children excel is understandable. Our effort to educate children who will be able to compete in a highly competitive world is commendable. But using standardized tests as a measure of our success is a mistake. First of all, it is not necessarily an accurate measure. Second, the quality of education is suffering because of them.

As a state and as a nation, we must make careful choices about what we want children to learn, and when. In this regard, education is headed in a dangerous direction. We must understand that although a sound, developmentally appropriate academic program is desirable and produces well-educated, strong thinkers and problem-solvers, it does not necessarily produce skilled test takers. Indeed, if being trained to

perform well on a standardized test was the same as being well educated, we could focus our resources on the latter and be done with it. But test-taking skills in the elementary years are beginning to emerge as a separate entity, needing to be taught in addition to the academic skills and understandings that the tests claim to assess. High school students have known this for years, hence, SAT prep courses.

The question becomes this: Do we use our limited classroom time to teach well (yes, we do know how), or do we compromise those more time consuming but highly effective teaching practices to train children to achieve higher scores on tests that carry far too much weight to begin with? Reluctant to totally abandon what we know about good teaching, we are trying to do both, and as a result, less and less of it is getting done well. What results is a school day that would make most adults' head spin.

It is time to look closely at what we are asking our children to sacrifice in the name of test scores. We should never feel so overwhelmed by volume that we must ask our children to give up those moments when they show their class a picture of the fish they caught, or run to the window to see the first flurries of winter. These are the things that connect children to the world around them, encourage inquiry, and make them feel excited about learning. We must always remember that in the midst of a long, busy day at school, there should always be time for a tooth story.

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## Take Prisoners: Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies in K-12

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### Abstract

This research begins with the development of zero tolerance discipline policies in grades K-12 according to Federal and State laws. An investigation of juvenile crime and safe school environments proposes that zero tolerance discipline policies are excluding children from education rather than ensuring student safety on campus. Children of low socioeconomic status and ethnic minority groups are suspended or expelled in much larger numbers than the rest of the student population in schools with zero tolerance discipline policies. Students often face criminal charges in addition to expulsion that tends to increase the risk of incarceration for that student in the future. Disciplinary actions under zero tolerance policies increases the risk that a student will drop out of school, which is effecting the overall drop out rate in grades K-12. Educational professionals report that zero tolerance policies also interfere with healthy psychological and sociological development of children. In contrast, the research also reviews alternative operations and disciplinary practices that have improved the behavior and performance of students while maintaining a safe school environment. Further research is necessary to establish the full range of the effects of zero tolerance discipline policies and the impact these policies have on a child's future.

Take Prisoners: Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies in K-12

### Introduction

In San Francisco, California, a Black middle school student made a bet with his classmate on the outcome of a school basket ball game. The classmate lost the bet and told school authorities that the boy threatened him for payment. Without conducting an investigation, school authorities and law enforcement agencies charged the 7<sup>th</sup> grader with felony extortion and he was expelled (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). In Mississippi, five Black students were throwing peanuts at each other on the school bus one morning. A peanut accidentally hit the White female bus driver in the back of the head. The

bus driver immediately drove to the local police station where the five students were questioned, arrested and charged with felony assault, which carries a maximum five-year prison sentence. Community pressure and legal assistance eventually prevailed on the student's behalf and the felony charges were dropped. However, the junior and senior students lost their bus privileges and suspension from school was recommended. Subsequently, the boys dropped out of school because they were unable to maintain regular transportation for the thirty mile trip to their high school within the low-income, rural community in the Mississippi Delta (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

All students may face obstacles as a result of zero tolerance discipline policies in grades K-12 that tend to be similar to the experiences of the students in the documented cases above. These types of experiences certainly interfere with a student's positive social and educational development. Moreover, zero tolerance discipline policies are more often applied to students from low socioeconomic status (SES) communities in general and ethnic minority students in particular, which limits their educational development and, consequently, effects their personal and social situation in the future.

Christopher Edley, Jr., a co-director of Harvard University's Civil Rights Project, organized a conference in Washington D.C. in June 2000 to address the disparities that exist in the application of zero tolerance discipline policies along economic and ethnic lines (cited in Johnston, 2000). Raymond Pierce, a deputy assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, spoke to participants at the forum about the inconsistent application of discipline policies that have been occurring during the past decade. He also stated that parents and students are largely unaware of their civil rights under the policies and due process of the laws that come into play concerning zero tolerance discipline policies (cited in Johnston, 2000). Bruce Hunter, the director of policy for the American Association of School Administrators in Arlington, Virginia, made a statement at the conference that zero tolerance policies go beyond racial discrimination. Jonathon Kozol, (1991) author of the book Savage Inequalities about conditions in high-poverty schools, maintains that research has shown that these disparities in the application of zero tolerance discipline policies commonly exist in high-poverty schools in low-income communities (cited in Johnston, 2000). A recent report published by Harvard University informs the public that, "Without a change in philosophy, many schools will continue to write off and weed out children, cutting off their educational opportunities" (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000, Lessons section, para 1).



Exclusion from educational institutions is not the only result of zero tolerance discipline policies. Researchers have found significant evidence of institutional racism, especially against Black students, in the practice of zero tolerance policies as well (e.g. Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; see also The Applied Research Center, 2000). The most serious issue in the controversy over zero tolerance policies is the intrinsic referral of children to the criminal justice systems in conjunction with practices of "racial profiling" (Rev. Jesse Jackson cited in Johnston, 2000, 'Major Problem' section, para 7) by school administrators and law enforcement agencies (e.g. Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Brooks, et al., 1998, 2000). Incidents of unreasonable disciplinary actions taken against students frequently include vague explanations for these actions, such as disrespect for authority and disruption of the classroom, leaving interpretation of the terms subject to discriminatory practices (Gordon, R., Libero, D. P. & Keleher, T, 2000).

Under zero tolerance discipline policies students have faced suspension or expulsion for the possession of objects considered to be a threat to the safety of other children. A list of these objects includes, and is not limited to, such items as scissors, plastic knives in lunch bags, nail clippers and toy axes that were a part of their Halloween costume (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). School authorities have expelled or suspended students for possession of drugs because they shared cough drops or Midol with other students (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). The absurd interpretations of Federal and State legislation to protect children from weapons, illegal drugs and violence on campus would be amusing if the conclusions were not so disproportionately exclusive for the children these laws are supposed to protect.

## **The Foundations of Zero Tolerance Policies**

Zero tolerance disciplinary action is more clearly defined as a stance than as a term that can be identified with certainty (Skiba, 2000). Russell J. Skiba of the Indiana Education Policy Center at Indiana University offers this definition, "...zero tolerance has been intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor" (Skiba, 2000, p. 4). Zero tolerance policy originated on a Federal level in 1986 against illegal drugs and the violent crimes associated with them. During the following eight years, schools across the U.S. began to adopt policies of mandatory expulsion for fighting and possession of drugs, alcohol and tobacco

on school campuses in response to the emergent national "zero tolerance" position against illegal drugs, crime and violence promoted by the Reagan administration. By 1993, under the Clinton administration, zero tolerance discipline policies in schools became a Federal policy (Skiba, 2000).

As a result, in 1994 the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress made several amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, usually cited as Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (see U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA>). Among these amendments is Title XIV— General Provisions Part F, the specific Federal law that addresses possession of weapons on school campuses. Part F is cited as the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 and contains the foundations for State laws and local policies that require expulsion of a student for possession of a weapon on campus for a period not less than one year. States must comply with this law in order to receive Federal funds. The State laws must allow any local education agency to modify the expulsion requirement on a case-to-case basis. States must also allow local education agencies to continue to provide education for students that are expelled for weapon possession in an alternative local education agency upon the discretion of these agencies. The official definition in the Federal law defines "weapon" as a firearm. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 also requires local education agencies to refer a student possessing a weapon to a criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system in order to receive Federal funds. Again, the official definition in this section of "weapon" is a firearm (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). The Jeffords Amendment to the Gun-Free Schools Act later expanded the language of the definition for the term "weapon", which allows for interpretation of a weapon to include a knife (Skiba, 2000).

The Federal laws do not require mandatory State laws of suspension or expulsion of students for possession, distribution or use of illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Title IV of the same Act does contain statements of Federal desires for punitive reforms in grades K-12 and offers financial support to the States for education and prevention programs that inform students about substance abuse and positively intervene in a crisis situation (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). However, in practice students are regularly suspended or expelled under zero tolerance policies for reasons that defy logic. For example, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student in an Ohio school district faced expulsion for purportedly sniffing whiteout that she was using during class. Although the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati verified with experts that whiteout is not a drug, the student was suspended for nine days. Her official school records now indicate that she was suspended for drug abuse (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

An examination of State laws that went into effect before and since the amendments to Federal education laws in 1994 offers a partial explanation for this phenomenon. In addition to State laws local school districts may enforce policies and punishments on students, which further complicates the controversial aspects of zero tolerance discipline policies. As the Federal law mandates, all States have laws that expel students from school for possession of a firearm. Besides this common basis, grounds for expulsion of a student varies from State to State<sup>1</sup>. 18 States have laws that demand expulsion of students who use, possess or distribute drugs on campus. 10 States have laws of expulsion for willful and continued defiance of authority and two States have laws that require a student to be expelled for habitual use of profanity (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). Students, then, may be suspended according to various State and/or local laws for arbitrary reasons. In total, 41 States have laws concerning suspension and 49 States have laws covering expulsion (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

43 States have laws that require school authorities to report students to local police departments and/or juvenile courts if they violate certain school disciplinary policies. In many instances, distortions of the basic Federal law of 1994 results in criminal charges in cases where the student did not commit an actual crime on campus. For example, Maryland law compels school authorities to report a student to local law enforcement agencies for possession of a pager on campus (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

In recent years more and more school campuses across the United States are beginning to have an atmosphere similar to a juvenile detention facility. In many urban school districts, metal detectors and/or security cameras are in use on campus (Tyre, 1998). In some schools, either police or a school district's private security officers monitor the halls and common areas of campuses (Department of Education, 1998). Surprise locker and school bag searches complete with drug-sniffing dogs have become frequent experiences for students in grades K-12 (e.g. Brooks, et al. 1998, 2000; The Times Online; Tyre, 1998). Zero tolerance policies seem to make schools safer for children, which is a growing concern of parents in light of the incidents of violence on campuses that result in serious injuries or deaths of children (Brooks, et al. 1998, 2000; CNN, In-Depth, 2000). Yet, do zero tolerance discipline policies contribute to school environments that are safer for students?

### **School Safety and Zero Tolerance Policies**

The phenomenon of school shootings in the past decade has understandably been influential in the development of zero tolerance discipline policies. Parents are anxious about their children's safety while attending school. Still, according to the U.S. Department of Education (1998) school shootings are "relatively rare" (CNN, 1998, School Shootings Have High Profile But Occur Infrequently, para 1). Only 10% of all schools and 8% of rural schools reported [2] serious violent crime during 1996-97 (CNN, 1998). Parental anxiety may also be increased by the frequent media reports of violence among children and teen-agers in general (Brooks, et al. 2000). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports in 1998 that homicide accounts for 20% of all deaths in the 10-24 year old age category (CDC, cited in Johnston, 1998). Although, this age category is rather deceptive because a person is commonly considered an adult at 21 years of age.

Often, the way that the news media presents the reports of school shootings gives parents the impression that mass shootings, such as at Columbine, occur more frequently in U.S. schools than confirmed by the actual facts. This is not to say that any death due to violence is not a tragedy, however it may occur, but often the news media aims for a reaction on an emotional level and does not distinguish details in the reports. This kind of reporting tends to confuse the issue of violence in U.S. schools (e.g. Brooks, et al., 1998, 2000, Skiba, 2000).

ABC news published a list of school shootings over a period of 16 months in the years 1997-98 on the Internet [3]. Of the 14 incidents listed, two were written threats of violence only and one was a report of a gun that accidentally went off in a student's backpack, wounding another student. Granted the student should not have been carrying a gun to school, but the shooting was not intentional. Two shootings took place on campus outside the school building during after-school hours and were attributed to rivalries that originated between the students within the community that were not school related. Seven shootings actually took place during school hours and one shooting took place at a school graduation dance. Of these eight incidents, five shootings were on a massive scale, such as Columbine, and three were directed at one, or at the most, two people (ABC news, 1998). ABC news headlines the list as "An Explosion of Violence" (ABC news, 1998). Again, any violent death is a tragedy, but not all of the 14 reports were actually random, massive violence erupting from out-of-control juveniles.

Professionals who collect and analyze data on school shootings according to scientific methods maintain that premeditated murder within U.S. schools has a very low incidence rate overall (CNN,

1998).The CDC (1999) reports that less than 1% of all homicides among 15-19 year olds take place in/around or on school grounds or on the way to and from school.In the same report, CDC notes that five multiple victim deaths on school grounds have occurred in the school years 1995-98 (CDC, 1999).Also, Skiba (2000) notes that the most publicized school shootings took place in suburban or rural communities of high to middle-income levels and in schools with a relatively low percentage of low-income and ethnic minority students.Yet, the general perception of the public is that schools in low-income urban communities with a high percentage of low-income and ethnic minority students are the most dangerous schools in the U.S. (Skiba, 2000; Tyre,1998).

Recent studies by academics and journalists (e.g. Education Weekly, 2000; Gordon, et al. 1999; Mayer & Leone, 1999) has generated questions about the effectiveness of zero tolerance discipline policies in relation to safe school environments.In contradiction to stories in the mainstream media about youth violence in schools and communities, professional researchers (Brooks, et al. 2000) report a significant decrease in violence among adolescents on and off campus in recent years.The latest data published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1998, 1993, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000) collected from 1993-98 shows a 56% drop in juvenile homicide arrests[4].This reality of the statistical information on juvenile crime was noted in a recent report published by the Justice Policy Institute/Children's Law Center in Washington D.C.[5].In the journal, the authors (Brooks, et al. 2000) note that the most current data shows that the number of arrests of children under 13 years of age for juvenile homicide is the lowest since the FBI began collecting this statistic in 1964.The authors (Brooks, et al. 2000) report that the number has dropped by nearly one half, from 41 in 1993 to 22 in 1998.Crime has also decreased among youth under 18 years old.From 1993-98 the number of youths arrested for rape was down 29%, robbery dropped by 47% and aggravated assault declined 27%.In all, the juvenile crime rate has dropped 30% since 1993 (Brooks, et al. 2000).

In 1999, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) did a joint study of the change over time in student reports of crimes in and out of school (1999, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000).Their study was based on data collected in the National Crime Victimization surveys that are conducted by the BJS from a category on school crimes.The findings of the BJS/NCES study (1999, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000) showed a 29% decline in the total number of school crimes reported from 1993-97 (3,795,200 to 2,721,200).The number of serious violent crimes reported were

down 34% (306,700 to 201,800) and violence such as fighting decreased by 27% (1,438,200 to 1,055,200) (Brooks, et al. 2000).

According to the statistics on juvenile crime over the long range it may appear to advocates of zero discipline policies that these policies have been a factor in the reduction of, at least, serious violent crimes on school campuses. CNN correspondent Peg Tyre (1998) relates how New York City school officials took measures to improve student safety. She states that New York City schools, often cited as some of the most dangerous in the U.S., are considered a model of the outcomes of zero tolerance discipline policies accompanied by physical deterrents, such as metal detectors and video surveillance cameras (Tyre, 1998). Physical deterrents, constant police surveillance on campus and zero tolerance discipline policies were applied in the city's schools in response to a school shooting in a Brooklyn high school in 1992. The article cites that during the years 1996-98 the number of guns confiscated from students in New York City schools dropped by 69.7% and attacks on teachers were down 24% (Tyre, 1998). Tyre (1998) claims that the effectiveness of the zero tolerance policies in New York City schools is difficult to measure because a drop in the overall crime rate in the city is inseparable from the drop in school violence. Still, representatives from the United Federation of Teachers and The Center for Educational Innovation in New York City were quoted in the article as attributing the reduction of overall violence in the city's schools to the implementation of zero tolerance policies and physical deterrents (Tyre, 1998). Ironically, Skiba (2000) relates in his journal that Columbine High School had video cameras that recorded all of the horrific scenes of the mass murder, but did not prevent it (Skiba, 2000).

A current study<sup>[6]</sup> by the Department of Special Education at the University of Maryland does not support the conclusion of New York City school officials concerning school safety and zero tolerance discipline policies. Using data from the National Victimization Survey of 1995 by the BJS, Matthew J. Mayer and Peter E. Leone (1999, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000) separated the responses in a sample of 9,000 students<sup>[7]</sup>. The sample was divided into two categories, students who attended schools with rigid surveillance, i.e. metal detectors, personal searches and locked doors and students who attended schools where campus rules were stressed and the consequences for breaking the rules were clearly understood by the students. Then, the relationships between the two different methods of discipline on school campuses and the rates of victimization reported by students from schools in each category were measured (Mayer & Leone, 1999, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000).

The authors (Mayer & Leone, 1999, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000) of the study discovered that there was less disorder and reports of victimization in the schools where the rules and the penalties for breaking them were understood and disciplinary action was applied fairly. In the schools with metal detectors, locked doors and security guards or staff monitoring the hallways students reported more victimization. Students also reported more acts of self-protection and a feeling of fear in schools with an atmosphere of harsh restrictions. Mayer and Leone (1999, cited in Brooks, et al. 2000) suggest that maintaining an environment of juvenile detention tends to promote the disorder and violence that zero tolerance policies seek to eliminate. An environment of open communication that emphasizes personal responsibility seemed to significantly decrease violence and disorder (Mayer and Leone (1999), cited in Brooks, et al. 2000).

Russell J. Skiba, (1999, 2000, 2001, cited in "Offenses Up," 2001) director of the Safe and Responsive Schools Project at Indiana University, came to a similar conclusion. Skiba (2001, cited in "Offenses Up," 2001) claims in a new study published in May of 2001 that expelling children under zero tolerance policies does not significantly change student behavior. He argues that data from his latest study reveals that zero tolerance policies do not ensure school safety<sup>[8]</sup> (Skiba, 2001, cited in "Offenses Up," 2001). Skiba (2000) also notes that very few empirical studies exist on the effectiveness of various security measures, such as metal detectors, police officers in school, etc., that are often associated with zero tolerance discipline policies.

There is also indication in the mainstream media that zero tolerance policies may be losing some of their credibility with parents. Center Grove High School in Johnson County Indiana took action to revise their zero tolerance discipline policies when pressured by parents who opposed some aspects of the local school board's discipline policies. The school board revised its policy to include alternatives to expulsion, such as counseling, which will take effect in the Fall 2001 school year ("Offenses Up," 2001). On July 1 of this year a new Indiana law went into effect that allows students with serious and chronic diseases, such as asthma, to legally carry prescribed medication on their person and self-medicate when necessary (Domschke, 2000). At a school board meeting in Hartford, Wisconsin, 550 parents and community members protested the mandatory expulsion of students for possession of drugs and alcohol in local schools (Skiba, 2000). Although, the recent protests against zero tolerance policies are possibly secondary reactions to the initial mass protest by low-income and minority parents in Decatur, Illinois in

response to the expulsion of seven Black students for engaging in a fistfight during a high school football game. Definitely, parents and educational professionals are now criticizing the growing rates of suspension and expulsion of students in grades K-12.

### **Exclusion of Children from Education**

Data on suspension and expulsions are difficult to analyze because local schools do not collect data in a uniform manner, but according to State and local procedures (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). Often access to this data is difficult to obtain; such as in Indiana where a pin number must be used to access certain records even though they are published on the Internet for easy access by Indiana education administrators. For an estimate of the quantity and rates of suspensions and expulsions that occur in U.S. schools there are several sources on a national level to examine.

In a report titled "Violence and Discipline Problems in US Public Schools: 1996-97" published by the National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES, 1998) principals were asked to complete a survey about the discipline policies and actions within their schools [9]. Among other questions, the survey asked principals to state how many times students were disciplined for particular offenses, i.e. the possession or use of a firearm, the possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm, the possession, distribution or use of alcohol, drugs or tobacco and physical fighting. The survey also asked principals to indicate specific actions taken against the student, i.e. expulsions, out of school suspensions lasting more than five days, or referral to an alternative school or program (NCES, 1998). The data from this survey offers an estimate of suspensions and expulsions occurring in grades K-12 on a national level for the school year 1996-97 in relation to zero tolerance [10] discipline policies. NCES notes that these disciplinary options were only those actions that were measured by the survey and not all schools necessarily experienced any of the offenses listed in the survey and, consequently, none of the actions may have been taken against students (NCES 1998).

75% of all schools had adopted zero tolerance policies for the offenses listed in the survey (Appendix II). According to the survey, rates of suspension for five or more days were the highest among any of the actions or combinations of actions taken against students. For possession or use of a firearm about 16,578 actions were taken against students, 49% of the actions were suspensions, 31% expulsions and 20% were transfers of students to alternative schools or programs. For possession of a weapon other than a firearm [11] about 58,000 actions were taken against students, 55% of the actions were suspensions,



23% expulsions and 22% were transfers. For possession, distribution or use of alcohol, drugs or tobacco about 170,000 actions were taken against students, 62% suspensions, 18% expulsions and 20% of the actions were transfers. About 130,000 actions were taken against students for physical fighting, 66% suspensions, 15% expulsions and 19% were transferred to alternative schools or programs. The survey also revealed that schools with no crime reported were less likely to have a zero tolerance policy for violence (74%) than schools reporting one or more serious crimes (85%) (NCES, 1998). (Appendix II).

The latest figures released by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights from the Individual School and District Summary Compliance Reports show an increase in suspensions and expulsions in US schools. This is the first time specific data was collected by Federal government agencies on expulsions in grades K-12. The annual suspension rate for all students in 1978 was 3.7%; in 1998 that percentage rose to 6.9%, (Johnston, 2000) representing 3.1 million students suspended during that school year (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). Academics and journalists are crediting the nearly double rate of suspension in grades K-12 to zero tolerance discipline policies. 87,000 students were expelled during the 1997-98 school year, 50% White, 31% Black and 16% Hispanic. The percentages become even more alarming when you compare these groups of children by ethnicity. White students made up 63% of all students in 1998-99, Black students made up 17% and Hispanic students 16% (Johnston, 2000). Clearly, zero tolerance discipline policies tend to increase rather than decrease exclusion of children from educational opportunities during the fundamental and formative years of their education, especially ethnic minorities. It should be noted for clarity in relation to the increase in suspensions and expulsions that often these actions occur for unwarranted reasons, such as the various examples cited earlier in this paper. Another relationship that is being researched in the subject of exclusion of children from educational development is the effect of zero tolerance policies on drop out rates.

### **Zero Tolerance Policies and Drop Out Rates**

The Department of Education's NCES report on high school drop out rates in 1999 recounts that students whose families are in the lowest 20% (\$20,000 annually or less) of the income categories in the U.S. are five times more likely to drop out of school (Department of Education, 1999). A U.S. Census Bureau report published in 2001 [12] states that students from families with an annual income of \$20,000 or less dropped out of school in 1999 at a rate of 9.0% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Of all income levels in 1999, White students dropped out at a rate of 7.3% and made up 65.6% of all students enrolled in

1999. Black and Hispanic students dropped out at a rate of 12.6% and 28.6% respectively and made up 16.2% and 37.7% of the population of students [13]. NCES reports that low-income (lowest 20%) students made up 13.9% of all students and dropped out of school at a rate of 11% as compared to middle (5%) and high (2.1%) income students enrolled in 1999 [14]. The Department of Education also cites that the drop out rates have remained relatively steady since 1990 when zero tolerance policies were beginning to develop in U.S. schools (Department of Education, 1999).

One could argue that zero tolerance policies have not affected drop out rates significantly judging by the statistics over the long range, but there are other factors to consider when examining drop out rates that may not be revealed by statistical data alone. NCES notes that the high school drop out rates are based on the Current Population Survey sent out by the U.S. Census Bureau, which does not include persons in prison and persons not living in a household (Department of Education, 2000). According to Indiana Department of Correction statistics, the current population of juveniles incarcerated is 1,382. The average age of this population upon entry is 15.9 years old. The minimum average sentence for serious violent crime is listed as 12 months. The adult population incarcerated is 20,125 persons. The average age of the adult population upon entry is 30.5 years with the highest percentage (28%) of people serving a 5-10 year sentence (Indiana Department of Corrections, 2001). Judging from the totals of just one State, clearly there is a large population that is not being counted in the NCES reports of high school drop out rates that has the potential to change these rates significantly.

In a report published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory [15], (SEDL) "Rural Students at Risk", authors Thompson and Deloney (1994) argue that school practices effect drop out rates as well as personal variables of students, such as family income, etc. School practices tend to increase the risk that a low SES student will drop out of school [16] (Thompson and Deloney (1994). Studies done by the SEDL have found that elementary school teachers tend to separate students of low SES into low-ability groups according to their perceptions of stereotypical attributes of low SES students (Thompson & Deloney, 1994). Pertaining directly to zero tolerance policies, high numbers of suspensions in a school correlate with higher drop out rates as well (Wheelock, 1986). Frequent suspensions of an individual student also significantly influences that student's decision to stay in school or to drop out (Catterall, 1986).

Students referred to the criminal and juvenile justice systems by zero tolerance policies are even more likely to drop out of school due to their experiences within this system and the associations that they may make with peers in a similar situation (Skiba, 2000). Author John Kozol (1991) spoke with Education Weekly (Johnston, 2000) in a recent article about the problems of unruly students in relation to school discipline. Kozol (1991) claims that students in low SES communities often struggle with conditions of overcrowding in classrooms and a lack of physical comforts, such as air conditioning during periods of extreme heat. These students typically deal with inexperienced teachers who are apt to over-react to restless students coping with unrewarding curriculums and physical discomforts in general. He explains that it is easier for students in this academic environment to lose control and act out their frustration and discomfort in a disruptive or disrespectful manner (cited in Johnston, 2000). Under policies of zero tolerance, students are then subject to suspension and/or expulsion for their behavior more often than they are referred to alternative programs, (NCES, 1997) such as counseling or mentor programs. When schools suspend and expel students who are already struggling with obstacles like low SES, racial discrimination and meeting the demands of high stakes mandatory testing, the educational institutions must take more responsibility for student failure to complete a high school program. Under zero tolerance policies, it appears that the schools are failing to meet the needs of students already at risk of dropping out.

### **Racial Discrimination and Zero Tolerance Policies**

The "Decatur Seven" (Brinkman, 2000) case in Decatur, Illinois had the effect of bringing racial discrimination in relation to zero tolerance discipline policies in U.S. schools out of the closet and into the mainstream media. Children have struggled with institutional racism in U.S. schools for many decades according to Ernest R. House in his journal "Race and Policy" published in 1999. The journal covers race and policy in education from the formation of the United States and includes coverage of race and policy in the current educational system. A quote from the abstract of this journal sums up the gist of his research and sheds some light on the darker aspects of zero tolerance discipline that have recently become a subject of heated debate among social activists and those who set education policy in the U.S.

Racial beliefs are embedded in the national identity in complex and disguised ways. These beliefs attribute presumed character traits to African Americans and other minorities, who are thought of as different in character and ability, especially the ability to govern themselves. These beliefs lead to education policies which separate, differentiate, and mandate different curricula and treatment

for minorities, policies justified as being fair and democratic. These beliefs influence not only curriculum content, but how the schools are organized, financed, and administered at a deeper level than is commonly understood (House, E.R., 1999, Race and Policy abstract)

The Decatur Seven case in the school year 1999-00 brought national attention to an continuing issue (Brinkman, 2000) among social activists that zero tolerance policies violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial discrimination in any public or private institution which receives Federal funding (see also the Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). In Decatur, Illinois Eisenhower High School officials originally expelled seven students for two years over a fistfight that broke out among them at a high school football game. According to Dave Aaronson, a spokesman for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, besides sparking an ongoing national debate over racial discrimination in zero tolerance policies, the Decatur case moved this commission to hold a hearing in Congress about national school disciplinary procedures in February 2000 (Brinkman, 2000). Social activists from around the U.S. marched together in solidarity that went beyond diverse political perspectives to protest the two-year expulsion of the students. The mass demonstration was the apparent effect of the cumulative experiences of students and parents of low SES and minority status in the U.S. who regularly experience the exclusive and biased effects of zero tolerance discipline policies [17]. The Rainbow/PUSH coalition filed a lawsuit against the Decatur school on behalf of the seven students, but in January 2000 a Federal judge ruled against the students. Perhaps because of the mass protest and national debate, six students' sentences were reduced to a one year expulsion and an offer of alternative schooling and one student was allowed to withdraw (Brinkman, 2000). The Decatur case brings into question the amount of similar harsh punishments that take place, past and present, which are not as well publicized as that event.

For example, a Black student in Merrillville, Indiana faced expulsion from school under questionable circumstances for possessing a mixture that was alleged to be wine and apple juice in an open bottle (Lach, 2000). The honor student claimed that the bottle was given to her to hold by a former student of Merrillville High School whom she conversed with briefly that morning at the school's entrance. The student said that she did not drink any of the contents of the bottle and intended to throw it away, but a teacher confiscated the bottle from her when she went to class. The 15-year-old stated to school authorities that she thought the bottle contained only apple juice. She was given a breath analysis test and

passed it, but was immediately suspended and then expelled for the remainder of the school year according to the school's zero tolerance discipline policy.

A general atmosphere of suspicion surrounded this case as some in the community felt that the judgement and immediate suspension of the student was a stereotypical reaction based on the student's ethnicity. Operation Push tried to intervene on the student's behalf but was denied access to the student's hearing by school administrators. The superintendent of Merrillville School Corporation upheld the school's decision to expel the student even though she was a model student and this was her first offense of any kind. He justified his support by saying that if a student is excused for a first offense it may increase the use of drugs or alcohol on campus ((Lach, 2000). The superintendent's statement is typical of the philosophy of zero tolerance discipline policies in general. Those who believe that it interferes with the healthy psychological and sociological development of juveniles criticize this philosophy.

### **Personal and Social Development of Children Under Zero Tolerance Policies**

The general debate among education professionals and childhood development professionals is whether any of the supposed benefits of zero tolerance policies outweigh the harmful effects on the personal and social development of children (e.g. Baxter, 1999, Skiba, 2000). Bethany M. Baxter, a former teacher and secondary school principal, presents her views in the debate based on her career experiences in an article published by CNN news. Baxter (1999) claims that current policies promote intolerance of other people in children and not the behavior of other people in social situations. She also acknowledges that zero tolerance policies tend to spread detrimental behavior among students instead of deterring it (Baxter, 1999). Baxter (1999) argues that zero tolerance policies and discipline are not the same thing. She maintains that discipline is a process that teaches a child correct social behavior and, in a school environment, this depends on a close connection between teachers and students, which zero tolerance policies effectively erode.

Baxter (1999) gives an example of a student who was told to write her feelings in a journal as a class assignment and was encouraged to be candid about exploring her feelings because the journal was confidential, meaning only her teacher would read her entries. Based on what the student wrote about her feelings of anger, her teacher felt obligated by school policy to show the journal to school authorities, resulting in the child's suspension. This type of action, according to Baxter and other professionals, (e.g.

Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000) destroys the integrity of the student/teacher relationship and causes children to mistrust adults (Baxter, 1999).

Applications of zero tolerance policies most often separate children from their peers and teachers when they are suspended/expelled. In effect, this type of action suggests to children that their peers are expendable rather than teaching children to value, counsel and correct their peers in a supportive manner when they are socially misbehaving. Baxter feels that zero tolerance policies are also sending a message to children to be intolerant of others who are different from themselves and that people who are different from themselves should be "sacrificed for the common good" (Baxter, 1999, Sending the Wrong Message section, para 6).

A child's self-esteem and value judgements are damaged by the punishments meted out to them under zero tolerance policies (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Brinkman, 2000). The seven students in the Decatur case had negative reactions to their experience. In a follow-up interview one year after the expulsion one student reported feeling stigmatized and felt that people now judged him according to the publicized accounts of his actions in and the subsequent events surrounding the case. Although some of the students involved enrolled again in high school or college classes, one of the students dropped out of school entirely and no mention was made in the article that he would pursue a GED or further education in the future. Two of the students reported feeling that they could have done better in school and had a more promising future if they had been given a reprieve by the school and a chance to atone for their actions instead of the harsh punishment applied to them. Now these two feel they want to leave Decatur, Illinois where they feel outcast and persecuted despite the national support they received. (Brinkman, 2000).

Four of the students were arrested during their expulsion from school. Three students were arrested for another fight that broke out at a friend's house and one was arrested for possession of marijuana. At least two of the students still face a trial on charges of mob action and assault of a school employee stemming from the original fistfight at their high school's football game. Another student had already performed community service and served his 12-month probation for criminal charges incurring from the initial fight and expulsion. The repeated arrests in this case seem to give support to Skiba's (2000) argument that juveniles tend to develop harmful associations with peers who are not in school and who

may have been arrested themselves. Students also risk getting into trouble again because they have more hours of free, unstructured time once they are expelled from school (Skiba, 2000)

Alternatives to zero tolerance discipline policies have proven to be successful in schools located in low-income communities with a high percentage of ethnic minority students. In a few of these schools, which are usually cited in the category "dangerous", zero tolerance policies have been replaced and administrators, teachers, staff and parents are now involved in schools that have totally restructured their operations (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000). Some of the new methods of operation include improving physical comforts for students and changes in academic programs designed to make the curriculum more interesting and allow students more creativity and self-expression in their assignments (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

Also, these schools are offering more extra curricular activities, fostering parental involvement in the school and creating mentoring programs consisting of teachers and staff. In some schools, rules are posted around the school along with signs that remind students that the teachers, staff and parents care about their academic performance and appreciate their good behavior and efforts to learn. In other schools, a student's mentor is made aware that a student is misbehaving and in danger of suspension or expulsion and is encouraged to communicate with the student to see what might be causing the behavior and to offer her/his support and guidance. In these schools with alternative structure and discipline policy suspensions and expulsions have dropped dramatically, in some cases to less than 1% of the student population during one school year (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

In essence, the examples in this paper show zero tolerance discipline policies to be a philosophy of maximum punishment for violation of established rules regardless of the past behavior of a student that are supposedly applied to all students equally. Justification for this attitude is improved student safety on campus, which according to research may not be accomplished by zero tolerance policies and their physical supplements per say. Further research is necessary to prove that zero tolerance policies improve school safety because crime in all schools is inseparably connected to crime in all communities throughout the nation. Also, examples of actual cases illustrate that not all reports of crime in U.S. schools are instances of an actual crime, violent or not.

The quantity of students of low SES and ethnic minority groups who are suspended, expelled, or fail to complete a high school program due to zero tolerance disciplinary actions show that the applications are not equal and possibly in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The documented cases reveal that irrational and racial discriminatory actions are commonplace and if these actions are questioned the U.S. State and Federal courts uphold them. What is accomplished directly from suspension and expulsion or indirectly from drop out rates is student intimidation and exclusion from education. In addition, the mass alienation and exclusion of children from grades K-12 in an inconsistent and biased manner tends to develop intolerance of other children, distrust of adults and erodes a child's sense of fairness and justice. More seriously, zero tolerance policies criminalize children. More research is necessary in this area to establish the long-term psychological and sociological effects on children charged with a crime in grades K-12 and processed through the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

Alternative academic programs and discipline policies in schools do produce positive results. However, the majority of children of low SES and ethnic minority groups in the U.S. will continue to be excluded from educational development until zero tolerance discipline policies in grades K-12 are abolished. Knowing the devastating effects of zero tolerance policies, why do those who implement educational policy in U.S. schools and the general public support them?

A false perception among parents of violence in U.S. schools tends to contribute to the popularity of zero tolerance policies. Basic economics also tends to influence those who set education policy. The NCES states that a high school diploma or GED is essential for employment in the current, global high-tech economy (Department of Education, 2000). In market economies regulated by supply and demand, subsidies and cost-effective practices designed to increase profits, labor is also a regulated market. Education is a key regulator of the labor market along with competition for a share of the labor market that is supposedly unbiased according to merit, or individual competence. Even in ideal economic cycles of high production and consumption employment opportunities never equal the amount of people seeking employment. Those who are not as well educated do not have the same opportunities or no opportunities in certain employment markets. Tracking students by ability, high stakes mandatory testing and zero tolerance discipline policies effectively regulate the amount of people who will be competing for employment on every level of income and ability. To use an analogy, dairy farmers are paid economic subsidies regulated by law and so dispose of gallons of milk to balance supply and demand and regulate



prices. Certain policies in the educational institutions effectively dispose of a particular class of students' future opportunities in the employment markets and also regulate wage scales. These are just two of the factors that tend to influence educational policy in U.S. schools. In respect to the evidence of exclusive outcomes for low SES and ethnic minority students, more research and action according to the conclusions of further research should be applied to the purpose and function of zero tolerance discipline policies in U.S. schools by those who seek means that will improve the future of this class of students.

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1 See Appendix III of "Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies," Harvard Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, (2000) for explanation of grounds.

2 "Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97", U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1998). Serious violent crime is defined in this report as murder, rape, sexual battery, suicide, robbery or an attack with a weapon.

3 See ( <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/shootingslist980521.html#map> ).

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9 "Principal/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence", FRSS 63, 1997. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System.

10 "Zero tolerance policy" was defined for the survey "as a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequence/s or punishments for specific offenses" (NCES, 1998, Zero tolerance section, para 1).

11 The survey defined this variable as "any instrument or object used with the intent to threaten, injure, or kill, including knives, razor blades or other sharp-edged objects, ice picks or other pointed objects, baseball bats, sticks, rocks, or bottles" (NCES (1998), Possession of a weapon other than a firearm section, para 1).

12 See report P20-553 "School Enrollment in the United States-Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1999".U.S. Census Bureau<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/school.html>

13 The Department of Education notes that the high drop out rate for Hispanic students may be due, in part, to immigration/emigration to and from their countries of origin.

14 These figures are taken from the 15-16 age category.For complete chart see Table 1 of Department of Education report of Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999.Source:U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, October 1999.

15 SEDL is a private, non-profit corporation based in Austin, Texas concerned with research and practice of educational development in grades K-12.

[16] Other school practices identified by researchers that put any student at risk of dropping out of school are conflict with teacher(s), student retention, (Roderick, 1993) and ability grouping or "tracking", (Wheelock, 1986) .

[17] I attended this march in Decatur. My statement is based on my interactive observations and conversations with the people who organized and attended the mass protest.

# **Press Release**

February 12, 2002

## **I-780 — CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE TAKE THE WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning)**

A group of Washington State educators has filed an initiative, I-780, that requires any candidate running for any local or statewide office in Washington to take the same high stakes test required of all tenth grade students, and to post their scores in the Voter's Pamphlet and on the Secretary of State's web site. The details of the I-780 (full text of I-780 at: [www.democracy.org](http://www.democracy.org)) are:

Anyone running for any local or state-wide office in the state will take all sections of the tenth grade WASL, (the Washington Assessment of Student Learning) at their own expense. The tests will be offered in proctored sites around the

state and will be scored by the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Scores will be posted in Voter's Pamphlet provided before elections and on the Secretary of State's web site.

There are no requirements that candidates must pass all or any sections of the test, but they must complete the WASL and post their scores.

The educators filing the initiative—Bob Howard, David Marshak, and Doug

Selwyn—are taking this step for several reasons:

**(1)** The legislature has defined the WASL as basic education. Passing the WASL is what it means to be well educated and ready to move into the adult

world, and it is the only measure of that status. This is true for all

students, no matter what their backgrounds, interests, skills, language

bases, or any other factors are.

We are asking anyone running for office to be measured alongside

the yardstick defined by our state legislature, to see how they measure up

against those standards set for basic education, for high school students, for 10<sup>th</sup> graders, for 16 year olds. If the WASL has validity for the students, it should certainly have validity for the

candidates and voters. If the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL is a measure of what adults need to know and be able to do to be successful in our world, then would this not be the case for elected officials, too?

**(2)** A single test cannot be an accurate, defining measurement of any student's knowledge and skills. There is no single test that can accurately and fairly measure what someone knows and can do. All it can reflect is what the student knew on a particular day, through the limited and inevitably biased medium of a particular test.

We agree that students should have some common knowledge base and some common skills to graduate from high school. However, we believe that given the diverse nature of human beings and the diverse resources that students gain from their families and communities, we need to provide students with a variety of ways through which they can demonstrate that knowledge and these skills.

**(3)** We know that there are many people in our society who are bright,

capable, and gifted people who do not perform well on standardized, paper and pencil tests. We know that there are people with gifts who do not perform well under the kind of pressure created by high stakes tests.

The WASL privileges people who are good test takers and harms those who are not good test takers. But the activity of taking tests has very little value in and of itself in our society. Who makes a living or contributes to society or helps other people simply by being good at taking tests?

What remedy do we propose? **No single high stakes test. No one measure should determine a person's future opportunities.**

**An array of assessments that really communicates who a student is and what he or she knows and can do.** The assessments should help students, teachers, and parents to know what the student's strengths and weaknesses are, and they should lead to more effective teaching and learning.

**Adequate resources and support to meet the needs of each student.**

Putting educational dollars into the pockets of test makers does not serve the best interests of the students or society. More than a hundred million dollars has gone into the development and implementation of the WASL; this is money that could have been used to better educate our students. Now even more money will be spent on the WASL if we have to give it every year from grades 3-8, as required by new federal legislation just passed by Congress and signed by the President.

The proponents of this initiative are committed to gathering the required 200,000 signatures to put the measure before the voters in November. This is an entirely volunteer effort; volunteers can download petitions for I-780 at [www.democracy.org](http://www.democracy.org) and they can also contact the initiative authors at that site.

The initiative's authors may be contacted by the press at the following telephone numbers: David Marshak (206 329-1282); Bob Howard (206 374-2414); Doug Selwyn (206 268-4616).

By Doug Selwyn

The “Nation at Risk” inspired test hysteria is with us here in Washington State as students, teachers, parents, and educators struggle to make sense of the educational reform movement

One of our major objectives in filing Initiative 780 was to stimulate public debate about education reform and, in particular, the high stakes testing component that requires all students to pass the tenth grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning tests in order to graduate. We have grave concerns about what has happened in schools around the state as a consequence of this high stakes policy, and we are concerned that there is an absence of real dialogue about the very serious damage being done to our students in the name of education reform.

Our purposes for filing Initiative 780 are relatively simple.

First, we want an end to high stakes testing. The current law states that students must pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL in order to graduate from high school, no matter what else they may have done in their school careers. There is no one test or measure that can accurately reflect who someone is or what he or she knows or can do. No one mandatory measure should determine a person's future opportunities.

Second, we want the educators who actually work with students to make use of an array of assessments (for example grade point average, classroom evidence, tests, projects, group experiences, community work, service to the school, etc.) to make decisions about who will graduate. We want those who make this crucial decision to consider as much information as possible about each student so that they can make the best possible decision.

Third, the educational resources of the state should be focused on serving the educational needs of our students and educators rather than lining the pockets of testing companies and consultants. The state has spent around 100 million dollars in pursuit of the development and scoring of the WASL, even as funding per student has gone down when adjusted for inflation. We can either continue to pay for these tests, which are not useful assessments, or we can put more money into directly serving the students in ways that lead to better teaching and learning.

The legislature has defined the WASL as the measure of basic education. WASL scores have made it clear that those who do well on this test are, on average, white (or perhaps Asian), from homes of middle income or higher, from homes where English is the major language spoken, from homes where the culture is closely aligned to the culture of the schools and tests, and from stable homes (where students are in the same classroom all year). So what exactly are these tests measuring?

We all know many people who are highly intelligent, highly skilled, and highly functional even though they do not score well on paper and pencil tests, especially in high pressure situations. This likely includes many of those who would be running for

office, or who currently hold office in our state, and it's also true for our students. If we are so worried about humiliating or embarrassing adults, why aren't we concerned in those same ways about how we treat our own children?

We are not arguing against assessment, and we are not arguing against high expectations. Teachers must assess students in ways that help both the teacher and student to recognize areas of strength and areas in which they need to grow. Teachers can then design curriculum and approaches that support students to make that growth. Assessment should guide instruction and help both students and teachers to recognize the learning that is happening (or that is still required). WASL does neither. The WASL was never intended to be used to assess individual students, and it was most certainly not designed to be used as a graduation requirement, but that's exactly how it is being used.

There is no single measure that can accurately sum up a person, be they candidate or high school student. We hope those who oppose the mandatory testing of politicians will bring that same logic to the students in our schools and support initiative 780. You can find more information about the initiative at [www.democracy.org/wasl](http://www.democracy.org/wasl).



## A Tale from the Texas Outback

It was a dark and stormy night. Hm. Nah, that's a little too corny. Besides, that statement's not true anyway. It was actually a gorgeous spring day when I loaded our ten-year-old Explorer with camping equipment, my son, a cooler full of water, and my fat little dog . We then headed West to the desert country between Big Bend National Park and the Guadalupe Mountains for a breath of fresh air that one can breathe without coughing. One tire blowout (we didn't flip over or anything), one wrong turn (forgot to take the loop or some street in Del Rio and almost ended up in Mexico; oops), six hundred hot miles, and eleven dusty hours later we reached our destination. We pitched the tent and got settled with still enough daylight left to swim in the spring and enjoy the brilliant sunset, which was made even more spectacular by the lightning from thunderstorms on the horizon. Then the stars came out one by one, hundred by hundreds, and million by millions. Perfect.

The wind blew . The loose sides of the tent flapped along with it. The wind slowed. The tent flapped without it. Weird. Very weird. Much too weird. Trying to suppress thoughts of the Blair Witch Project, I grabbed a large flashlight, turned it on and saw the silhouette of a strange, toothy head. Flashlight in hand, I noisily left the tent (hoping I didn't have to clobber any huge, vicious animals to make them run away), and tried to make myself look and sound ever so much larger than life. Luckily, the javelina was gone by the time I got there (I think that's what it was), so I stumbled back to the inside of the tent, griped at the dog for not barking and protecting us, and crawled back into my sleeping bag, which was placed on the tent floor instead of the cot because I just couldn't figure out how to put the silly thing together. Oh well. Can't have everything. There have been many people much wimpier than I am who have slept on the ground in West Texas and lived to tell about it, so, anyway...The stars were lovely. Perfect.

And so was the sunrise the next day. By some happy accident the tent door faced east, so I yawned and stretched, put on my sweatshirt and glasses, got out of bed, and fired up the campstove. It gave me very little grief, so soon we had coffee and breakfast along with plenty of time to eat it. Wonderful. This was the life.

However, sometimes one must leave idyllic surroundings to take care of business, so we cleaned up and headed to the ranger station to see if anyone could direct us to a tire shop. I had removed my sweatshirt by this time (geez it was getting hot), so the ranger was able to notice my anti-taas t-shirt and made a comment.'Oh, you don't like that taas stuff either?'

"No, it's awful."

"Yeah, my (female relative) is a teacher in Amarillo, and it's just about all they do in school nowadays..."

And so we gabbed about the testing craziness for a while. Seems like you just can't get away from it anywhere, if you have school-age kids. Nope.

But then it was time to drive to Pecos and get a tire, two new tires really. No sense in taking a chance on having a blowout up in the mountains, not to mention the six hundred mile drive home a few days down the road. So away we went. We finished our errand in no time at all, not that time seems to matter as much out in West Texas. In fact we still had plenty of time to go to the

McDonald Observatory, swim, admire the scenery and enjoy not having to hurry for any reason. Another glorious sunset after another fine day. There weren't even any rocks under my sleeping bag. Ah, comfort.

Another chilly morning accompanied by another glorious sunrise. Another pot of coffee made with the spring water that goes to several local towns. Very nice. We swam again after the sun warmed us up enough and went back to the mountains when it got too hot. It was another great day.

It was dinnertime and the sun was going down. There was yet another spectacular lightning display on the horizon. But soon I realized that the thunderstorm was coming closer, and before we knew it a gust of wind came howling through the campground. Tents rolled away like tumbleweeds, and objects flew off picnic tables. The sky had an eerie greenish cast. Although my son and I were both calm, it was clear that we had a problem and needed to move. The dog wasn't calm at all.

"Son, help me put this stuff in the truck. We need to go to the bathhouse."

"But Mom, I'm not finished with my pork chop!"

"Put your plate in the truck and help me. We have to move it, NOW."

So off we drove to the sturdy bathhouse by the pool and waited. Lightning was all around, but eventually the wind slowed enough to indicate that we wouldn't have to make a run from the Explorer to the relative safety of the building. We drove back to our campsite, where our tent still stood, giving me hope that we might be able to sleep in it when the storm was completely gone. A run through the rain. No such luck. The tent was open and torn, everything was soaked. I grabbed the suitcase, which luckily kept a few articles of clothing dry so we could at least stay warm. Back to the truck. Something hit the roof. What was that? Again, something hit the roof. Hail?

Here it came. Lots of icy marbles came hurtling through the air, so many we could hardly see. Back to the bathhouse, where I parked under a tree hoping to minimize hail damage to the Explorer. The poor terrified dog shivered, while my son moved as far away from the windows as possible. The noise was awful, but I couldn't dive to the floorboard like I wanted to. Had to watch, just in case that terrible wind came again, just in case we had to run through the hailstorm to take shelter. My son tried to assess the gravity of the situation.

"Mom."

"Yes, Son?"

"Should we pray?"

"I have been for the last twenty minutes. You don't have to make a big pretentious show for god to hear you."

"I know."

The hail started to pile on the ground and showed no sign of letting up.

"Mom?"

"Yes, Sweetheart?"

“What would you rather be doing now, this, or taking a TAAS test?”

“I think I would rather be taking a TAAS test!”

I laughed, he grinned, the dog began to settle down, and the hail let up after falling for about thirty minutes. We walked into the dark bathhouse (the electricity was knocked out), used the restroom (boy did we ever have to go), chattered with some other people who had taken shelter there, and watched the bats flying around (it was kind of creepy, but kind of cool too). We then drove back to our campsite and slept as comfortably as we could (or couldn't) . The lightning continued all night long, but it wasn't as ominous any more. The rain stopped. We cleaned up in the morning and were able to make a comfortable bed in the back of the Explorer that night, which was nice because we had to drive home the next day, sans tent, a swimsuit , and a vinyl tablecloth. I found out later that three funnel clouds were spotted over the nearby towns of Balmorhea and Saragosa. None of them touched down, so we (that being my son, my dog, the local residents, and yours truly) were all fortunate, if tentless. It could have been bad. Really bad. But it wasn't, so we drove home, bought a new tent, and are now living happily ever after.

The end.

No. It isn't the end. A new school year has begun, and the testing craziness continues not only in Amarillo but all over Texas. And not only in Texas but all over the country. And to top it off our children have to cope with additional pressures because of recent world events. Is this the right thing to do to them? The winds of school reform continue to blow the wrong way, but if enough of us resist high-stakes educational monstrosities...

Carol M. Holst Parents United to Reform TAAS [Testingkceh@airmail.net](mailto:Testingkceh@airmail.net)

**I Pledge Allegiance to the Tests**

I pledge allegiance  
To the tests Of the McGraw-Hill  
Corporation  
And to the clone makers  
For which they stand,  
In control,  
Under greed  
Life destroying  
With pencils and scantrons for all.

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

## **The Good News: The US Rulers' Military and Economic Sky is Falling**

### **The Bad News: The Universe of Capital is Not**

*"Capital investment is an act of deep faith..." G. W. Bush (7-7-02)*

## **The Lingering Lure of Irrationalism : The War of Ideas**

*(Part One of a Series)*

George Bush was shocked, simply shocked. Arthur Anderson lied. Worldcom lied. Enron lied. Corporate scandals pile up, the stock market rushes down. At the same time, the Catholic Church stands exposed as a haven for rapists and thieves, robbing the poor box to pay hush money to victims while it, so reluctantly, supports the endless Oil War.

In each instance, the media treats the dual crises as flukes, aberrations within otherwise decent well-meaning systems still deserving of popular support--which will result in popular comfort. No.

The US economy, which is not *our* economy but the property of a ruling class that is ever more naked and ruthless, and the techno-based military force that allowed the rich to enjoy an era of unprecedented greed and debauchery, are both in deep crises. The executive committee of the rich, the government, has provoked what they say is a perpetual war on the world, not for justice but for oil, while their economy collapses from the weight of its own pillars: greed, fear, and opportunism.

The world capitalist economy is a shambles, and failing fast. The Nasdaq virtually disappeared. The Dow is down 3000, to about 8,000, and plunges. Predictions about the Dow reaching 35,000 in the land of bottomless profiteering are drowned in speculation about the date of the beginning of the depression. The collapsing value of the dollar is discouraging foreign investors who helped fuel the myth of the endless party. Big fish, as always, are eating little fish, but all the fishes are dying--and so is the sea.

In a world divided by social class inequality, what makes the notion of *our* economy, *our* nation, *our* religion, etc., possible is irrationalism, the decision to stop thinking, to choose to believe that some questions, unresolved problems, can only be answered by mysticism, usually embodied by someone who seeks pay or privilege for the revelation. Mysticism, breaking the chain of evidence, dispensing with tests for truth in favor of a leap of faith, becomes profitable—and virtuous.

The impact of irrationalism, which is commonly set up with promises of greater personal freedom, here or in heaven, and more autonomy, greater insight, is in fact to tie people even more to the ruling class and to make them more subservient to it—even though most working people and the elites have only opposition in common. Virtue then becomes the fear of knowledge, and a fetter, chaining people of opposing interests, classes, in the same cells, with only the Masters holding the keys.

Racism is irrational. Sexism is irrational. Nationalism is irrational. The fear of sexuality is irrational, as is the fear of freedom and friendly connections between people. Capitalism, serving a few at the expense of many, that is, structural inequality, is irrational. People create gods; gods do not create people. Wealth does not create labor. Labor creates wealth. Religion is irrational—a dangerous turn to faith that has a long history of consequences: death, parallel to capitals' infinite wars. In each instance, the defense of nonsense requires violence: religious war and imperialist war.

There is nothing consistent with the ideas that defend irrationalism, but there are consistent practical tendencies. Irrationalism in defense of capitalism consistently seeks to divide people, yet at the same time to claim to false forms of unity, as in the cases of racism and nationalism. Both are vital life-lines of profits. Irrationalism in defense of religion proclaims one-world, after death, but a sectarian world in life—convert or die. War, for oil, water, or the cheap labor of humans—is quite legal.

Capitalist and religious irrationalism offer no logic but the logic of opportunism. For example, in the midst of recent revelations involving the entire Catholic hierarchy in promoting, then covering-up, a centuries' old practice, child rape by priests, church officials went to court demanding protection from grand juries under the constitution, the separation of church and state. At the same time, the priesthood was in court demanding state funds for school vouchers.

Capitalism in its higher stages reaches a point where the sole purpose of capital is to produce more capital, finance capital, rather than to produce things that are useful to people. For example, the chief of what was once US Steel Corporation won wage concessions from his workers, “in order to save the company and our nation's steel industry.” The United Steel Workers Union made concessions, 25 % pay-cuts (without telling the workers). With the concession money in hand, the chief of US Steel then bought Hublein Corporation, a Canadian liquor company. Confronted with the deception by reporters, the boss said, “Look, I am not in business to make steel. I am in business to make money.”

This distancing of profiteering from production is what caused the pretense of a boom in the 1990's. The NASDAQ, the technology stock exchange, boomed with nearly nothing of value behind it at all. Mergers substituted for production. Only Microsoft and a few other techno-agencies actually produced profits. The remainder of the NASDAQ was simply a ponzi scheme, borrowing heaped on borrowing, that eventually collapsed. Each company had its priests, its auditors and toadies in the press, lying about its true state.

At the same time, basic industry in the US nearly vanished. The steel industry, key to war production, sank against foreign competition. Only huge agri-businesses actually continued to produce a product successfully inside the US, achieved by driving people off their land, a worldwide stratagem that supplies capital with jobless workers in huge cities, driving down the wages of the employed.

The media is focused, on the one hand, on what they seem to think are aberrations in the process of capital, and in the church. But rapist priests, cheating accountants, lying bosses, and capital's wars are not flukes. They are the logical working out of irrational systems that necessarily lead to where they are today, deep social and spiritual crises. What has happened to the economy is not just the auditors' lies, which are themselves built into capital's greed, but the fact that capital necessarily drives down wages to the point where people cannot buy what they produce, a crisis of unemployment and over-production that is now international. The big picture is that capital cannot work. So, capital is divorced from production, indeed turns back on production and destroys it in war, while the mystics place themselves between the people and god, really the people and a better world on earth. But capital thrives on crises, just as priests thrive on people who do not believe they can comprehend and change the world.

This refusal to connect capitalism with financial collapse and war, which is written on every page of capital's history, and the church with child abuse, then leads to a variety of transubstantiations: one day Ghodoffy and Libya are the Devil and the Evil Empire, the next day it's Saddam and Iraq. Rapist priests come and go, but the Pope and the Church persist. Flags wave over all.

Just as there is no way to resolve religious differences, so is there no way to restrain the incessant demands of the capitalist system: high-profits, cheaper labor and raw materials, markets to sell (always at an advantage). War and fascism are the necessary outcomes of capital's requirements. Every significant human advance, in knowledge or technology or reproduction, has come despite religious beliefs. Civilization progresses by rejecting irrationalism of all forms, but especially religious irrationalism. The test of any society is how it treats its majority: the workers. Capital can never pass this test. In addressing any reform, we must connect that reform to the social whole, capital, and discover ways to go beyond it.

As long as we are ensnared by the irrationalism of capital and religion, which do offer us both the organization (an interconnected world with sufficient technology so all could live fairly well) and values (do unto others) which can assist us in creating a more just world.

Capitalism will not be overcome by ideas alone. But every effort to go beyond capital so far has been poisoned from within, by nationalism, elitism, racism, sexism, and more. If we are to find ways to a better world, and we must, we will need to understand, and surpass, capital's big lie: Irrationalism.

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

## The Deepening Crises of Capital: Economic Collapse

“They have gotten a little vulgar, haven’t they?” (Lady Astor, October, 2001)

### Tyranny Through the Terror of the Market

(second in a series)

*"Everyone became obsessed with money and went higgledy\_piggledy scampering after their fortunes," she said. "People with money used to often care about the people who had no money. Not always, but often. Now, it is rare to find people with money who care at all about people with no money." (Lady Astor)*

**Lady Astor**, through inheritance and serial marriages, accumulated more than \$100 million. Before her 100 birthday she complained about the outlook of the younger members of her class. They cared nothing about others, and nothing about production, nothing about the plants and the people working in them. The corporate leaders looted the place, then fled. She foresaw the bubble bursting, at least in terms of reaping the result of bad manners. She did not see the equal inevitability of war.

From January to July 2002, the stock market dropped 30%, plunging down to 8,000. The NASDAQ virtually evaporated. The US dollar began to collapse against foreign currency, chilling key foreign investors. Unemployment boomed. Terror in September 2001 threw a steady decline into hyper-speed. The patriotic presidential call to shop, travel, and buy stocks as forms of resistance met a nation raised on sheer selfishness, and fell flat. At the same time, the US military began to invade the world.

In 1999, a *Rouge Forum Broadside* said, “If you are teaching ninth grade, you are looking at the troops in the next oil war.” It was easy to see this coming, but it was not easy to see *this* coming. The dual crisis of war and economic collapse was foreshadowed by booming inequality forged in six ways: through sharpened exploitation at the work place, massive international unemployment, over-production caused by the impoverishment of the work force, bitter international competition for even cheaper labor, raw materials, and markets, deepening segregation—all elements of a capitalist system that manufactures war—and international misery. The UN predicts that 15 million people will starve in Africa in 2002.

Inequality in the US is common knowledge. In 1900, the richest 1% of the people controlled 60% of the wealth. Following two World Wars came two revolutions (USSR and China), a series of worker uprisings including the communist-inspired labor movement in the US. The tax system in the US shifted some burden onto wealth, the ratio became the top 17% controlling about 25% of the wealth in the late 1960s. While government had never stopped being an executive committee for the rich, the Warbucks class decided to tighten the reins. By 1999, the top 1% controlled 45% of the US wealth.

The 1990s bubble was *their* bubble. Sheer greed dominated management ranks. CEO’s inflated salaries from 1960, when they averaged pay 11 times that of their workforce, to 1999, when their pay rocketed to 592 times the average worker. While bosses of all industries demanded concessions from the workforce, in order to “save our industry in the national interest,” rather than reinvest in US productive capacity the owners shifted work to cheap labor sites, ran shell games of mergers for a cloak of profitability, and gave themselves golden parachutes to protect against the crisis ahead.

Labor creates all wealth. Despite plunging capital reinvestment, slight increases in US industrial productivity were won by speed up campaigns and technology used not to make work more creative or interesting, but to lay people off. In 2002 Ford announced a multi-billion profit, and 21,000 layoffs, the closure of 5 North American plants, promising more profits still. Daimler-Chrysler, born of a government



bailout, then sold to Germans, reported profitability, achieved by laying off 26,000 people. Evidence of the downward spiral: 250,000 were laid off in Mexico's maquiladoras from 2000-2002.

With the government in the hands of the rich, actual production subordinated to fake profits, corporations inflated profit figures for stockholders and deflated those figures for the IRS. In 1960 companies paid 25% of all US taxes. By 2000, the corporate share was less than 8%.

And they lied. To set up a spectacle of results, CEO's borrowed money from cooperative banks, counting the loans as corporate profits. They built multiple tiers into their own corporations, divisions, which borrowed from one another, staying one move ahead of the few interested investigators. Some companies, like Enron, which never produced anything of value but merely moved energy sources (often fictitious) from one state to the next, had more than 2000 divisions, most of them off-shore; this in comparison to 7 divisions at General Motors. Accountants and the press served as cheerleaders.

Non-financial industrial companies borrowed \$1.22 trillion between 1994 and 1999. Of that, the owners reinvested just 15.3 per cent for capital expenditures. They used 57 per cent of it, \$697.4 billion, to buy back stock and thus enrich themselves. (Robert Brenner, "The Boom and Bubble," 2002).

With real national production decaying, but international over-production rising, good manners lost in the desperate fight to get one more dollar, Warbucks looked to profiting from the public domain; energy consortiums, water, social services, education, prisons, pensions, and social security. Entrepreneurialism became a fetish—masqueraded as the common good. "De-regulation," flourished. Deregulation is actually the more powerful market imperative: Big fish eat little fish.

For-profit companies took over the prisons, which filled with 2 million people, inordinately black. Marketeers flooded the schools. Children became commodities.

Worker debt at 1.5 times the average annual family income saved banks with credit card fees.

Enron and other energy companies smashed and grabbed the California budget, the world's sixth largest economy which held, in 2000, at \$25 billion surplus. By June 2002, budget analysts predicted a shortfall of, at minimum, \$35 billion, foreshadowing a profound crisis of higher taxes, slashed services.

None of this could have been made possible without the liberals, mostly Democrats, in high office. Jimmy Carter made possible the profitability of mental institutions. Bill Clinton shattered the welfare system, throwing recipients into forced-work projects. Liberal California legislator Steve Peace fashioned the deregulation profits that Democrat Gray Davis gave to Enron, for campaign contributions.

Inequality Talibanized the world. Superstition born of ignorance and poverty became a petri-dish for fascist movements, each nurtured by the processes of finance capital mothered in the US.

Left alone as a superpower, the US has found that to rule the world, its military must invade and occupy it, a strategy that has overwhelmed everyone who ever tried it. The perpetual war offered to US citizens, not a war about terror, but a continuation of the international war of the rich on the poor, is a bipartisan war, as is the economic debacle and harsh attack on workers, ahead. Republicans and Democrats will unite against the people who, by voting, try to choose oppress them least.

Capital is a revolutionary system, out of human control, giving not a whit about who rides it. Capital is not defeated by crises. Capital thrives on war, destruction. Its pillars, fear, greed and opportunism, cause it to collapse of its own weight, only to be reborn more ruthless, somewhere else. Not inert oil, but cheap human labor to give oil value, is the fuel of capital's fire.

Capitalism did overthrow feudalism. Capital has united the world through systems of production, exchange, communication, transportation, and technology. We have abundance, where all could live fairly

well, if we shared. At the same time, the Warbucks profit from the divisions they have created among people, by nation, race, sex, disability, etc., while they fervently deny the primary division that was obvious to Lady Astor: Class. In the current period, there is no gentle form of capitalism possible, no way that capital can serve most people. Capital's time is more than passed.

It is no longer reasonable to suggest the reform of capital. The evidence is that the government is a weapon of the Warbucks. In the face of crisis, working people need to consider going beyond all of the forms of capital, overcoming it, to create a society where love, work, and rational knowledge can combine to offer people reasonably free and creative lives connected in friendly ways, the source of all human advances. At issue is a popular change of mind, new ideas and organizations, and action.

### **A Rouge Forum Broadside**

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

## The Camps Are Already Open

### Perpetual War and Tyranny or Social Justice?

(Third in a series)

***“If there's another attack by Arabs on U.S. soil, not too many people will be crying in their beer if there are more detentions, more stops, more profiling, There will be a groundswell of public opinion to banish civil rights. There will be internment camps.” (Peter Kirsanow, Bush appointee, US Civil Rights Commission speaking to Arab-Americans, July 19 2002).***

***“US troops must ready for pre-emptive military action against Iraq, a massive assault against President Saddam Hussein could be likely at short notice.” (George Bush, July 21 2002).***

***“Every time they say that they will coordinate more,” Mr. Muhammad said, referring to American commanders. “They killed my people in Oruzgan, and they said they would not make a mistake again and that they would contact us first. Then they did it again.” (New York Times, July 21 2002)***

There will come a time when an international community of people, connected in friendly ways, will lead reasonably free, creative, humane, lives where they do not have to split life from work, where a society based on a war of all on all seems a distant memory, and where love, labor, and rational knowledge are seen as centerpieces of the key idea of a new way of governing, all for all, equally, inclusively, and democratically.

That time will be born from social conditions that exist today, and the choices we make. US rulers promise citizens a perpetual pre-emptive world war, wrapped in tricky language that equates battles for cheap labor, raw materials, and markets with freedom and democracy. Our true social condition must be named: capitalism.

Capitalism expands or dies: imperialism. Greed, racism, and hubris kept things going. In WWII, the Soviet Red Army and Chinese Communists stopped the fascist advance from Germany and Japan. 20 million Russians died, and untold millions of Chinese, compared to 500,000 US casualties. After WWII, the US allied with known fascists worldwide, restoring them to power, as in Germany, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Latin America, and South Africa, and many more—playing the ‘great game’ against the Soviet Union, a nation which quickly restored capitalist relations (exploited, alienated labor, imperialism) following their anti-Czarist revolution.

Both world wars bore revolutions. In China, in 1949, a mostly egalitarian and democratic Red Army drove the fascist Kuomintang into the sea. But the ‘socialist’ Chinese government quickly restored inequality and tyranny, on the job and in daily life. By 1955 it was clear that socialism, which merely nationalized the work force and promised better times ahead under a benevolent party dictatorship, had failed to meet its promises—a lesson that cost the lives of millions of people who fought for freedom.

Since 1945, the imperial US battled the world, and usually failed. In Korea, US troops (backed by jets and naval bombardment) fled in panic for 120 miles, from an enemy of about equal size, only lightly armed. Despite a policy of “Kill All, Burn All,” the US government lost the war in Vietnam, abandoning its allies, costing about 2 million Vietnamese lives and 55,000 US casualties. People’s victory in Vietnam, caused in part by US troops’ refusal to fight, transformed the world. The US stood exposed as a paper tiger at home and abroad. Citizens everywhere knew the US government, an executive committee of the rich, could not be trusted. The US economy nearly collapsed.

The US challenged the Soviets to a war of military spending. The Soviet economy fell apart. With capital in full bloom in the once-USSR, doctors dig roots for food. US military spending grew to 50.5 % of the budget (2002). Now, US rulers seek to resolve the contradiction of the unyielding international demands of capitalist relations and the necessity of a national armed military base for specific capitalists in power. The US overseers invade the world, and try to make fascism popular at home. September 11, which evidence says was predictable, surely served their purposes.

**“Exterminate All the Brutes”**

*or*

### **Organize to Comprehend and Change the World?**

This is a partial list of places where US troops (and CIA) are now active: Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan, Georgia (USSR), Turkey, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Palestine, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Brazil, Argentina, Iraq, Iran, Paraguay, Mexico. At issue is the survival of US capitalism, mainly in the form of cheap labor, but also in the battle for key raw materials like oil, as well as the battle of ideas—they key weapon being the idea that there is no other way to live. US leaders no longer bother to tell troops they are fighting for democracy. The only motivator: fight or you and your buddy will get killed. Only despair, rooted in no clear alternatives, makes that believable.

Still, the US military, as in Vietnam, cannot surmount US strategic and political weakness. US rulers cannot be friends to the majority of people. The oil war in Afghanistan, initiated long before September 11, is already a failed war. The enemy slipped away, the US re-installed dope-dealer warlords as the government. They are killing each other. US military leaders, knowing its troops are quickly unreliable, are left with a techno-war, blindly bombing civilians with drones. The US is a very fragile power.

With the institution of the Patriot Act, which negates most key constitutional freedoms (longtime myths for many poor, especially black, citizens), and the Homeland Security Act, the structures of fascism are in place inside the US. Untold thousands of people are held, now, without rights to attorneys, without trials, in US gulags. But fascism is only the institutionalization of capital's war of all on all. Fascism implodes, cannot prevail—often at great cost to those citizens who were its more fervent supporters.

Capitalism diminishes everyone it touches. It creates horrors: a modern holocaust, the likely starvation of 15 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2002 (UN estimate) The Taliban was a logical outcome of capital's processes: ignorance and irrationalism coupled with violence and death.

Capitalism's injustice also spawns resistance. People are fighting back. In Venezuela a CIA coup was defeated, temporarily, by popular uprisings. In Argentina, millions of people are taking to the streets in opposition to government-imposed cut-backs. South Africans are beginning to mobilize to demand the equality and democracy the ANC promised them. 200 million homeless people in China, peasants driven from their land to create a massive urban workforce, repeatedly battle the “Red” Army, as do those left in the hinterlands. General strikes hit Greece, Italy, and Spain in 2002. A similar fight is afoot in London.

Inside the US, fascism is popular. With the economy in crisis, the possibility of large numbers of troops returning in body bags from Iraq, the memory of Vietnam may cause popular discontent. But a culture steeped in selfishness for years is not likely to produce significant mass organized resistance quickly.

Even so, there is no way out in the long run but to get beyond capitalism. 350 years of capitalist history demonstrates that it leads to war and impoverishment. Reforms, without overcoming capital as a strategic goal, just urge people into blind canyons. Everything connects in the real world. Any reform effort should combine an important social change, like free health care or sane schooling, with new methods of organizing, tactics that meet the strategy, going outside the exclusive hierarchies of most reform movements, to the goal that each person fully grasp methods of understanding and changing the world.

Reform organizations in the US, however, are not even seeking reforms, and are incapable of the kind of organizing that even a reform movement requires. All of the trade unions *support* capital's war.

The industrial working class, which civilized the US, winning reforms like rights to free speech, to organize, to strike, social security and the 40 hour week, is largely gone, deindustrialized outside the US. Those who remain are trapped in unions which will never be democratic, will never oppose capitalism, because they were organized to support capital, not transcend it. But things will change. A fair world is possible.

The people who are most oppressed, who are most likely to lead resistance, are excluded from most unions. Immigrants, black people, poor peoples' lives are now organized around schools, not industrial work sites. Because schools are now the central organizing point of US life, because a key product of schools is new ideas, because action in schools can spark action elsewhere, it is reasonable to suggest that the focal point of organizing for people who are serious about change should be in US schools. Such is the path to a fair world.

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

*A Rouge Forum Broadside*

***How Can We Build a Better New World From the Ashes of the Old?***

**Overcoming Capitalist Schooling: Revolutionary Education for Freedom**

(Fourth in a Series)

*“When we try to educate our children we confront a billion dollar industry that is more important than the lives of children. The Civil Rights Movement was a slave rebellion. But we cannot use guns because they have guns and they are waiting for us. Still, before each slave rebellion, there was non-cooperation. We could begin with the schools, and take our children out of the schools. How can you expect racist people who cannot educate their own children to educate anyone else? Our trump is action, non-cooperation, and patience.”(James Baldwin,1979)*

*“We got freedom schools. You form your own schools. Because when you come right down to it, what is it that you learn in their schools? Many Negroes can learn it, but what can they do with it? What they really need to learn is how to be organized to work on the society in order to change it. They can’t learn that in schools.” (Robert Moses, leader of the Mississippi Freedom Schools, 1963)*

**Why Have School?**

US schools serve at least these purposes: (1) technical training which reproduces social relations mostly as they are, (2) skill training, like reading and math, (3) ideological training suggesting that the rule of US capital is democratic rule, the best of all possible worlds, (4) centers of hope where people send children believing they will be better off because they will learn to struggle for what is true. Schools are contradictory places. Competing interests always come into conflict, teachers vs textbooks, real estate agents and local employers versus critical thinking. As on any job, employers seek to diminish the work force, to strip them of their minds, to divide them, shatter their dignity, in order to pay them less and to control the work place. School workers invariably resist. Schools, different from places that make widgets, deal with children. Teachers care about kids, often at odds with the boss.

**The Central Role of Schools in the US Today**

The industrial working class civilized the US in the 1930s. Their illegal battles led to laws that won the 40 hour week, rights of assembly, organization, and speech, the social security act, and child labor laws. Today, however, the US industrial working class has nearly disappeared, their jobs easily out-sourced for cheap labor. For now, industrial workers will not take the lead in struggle for justice.

Those workers whose jobs remain in the US are fairly well-off compared to workers in other nations. US industrial unions are organized to divide people along lines of race and occupation. They mimic the undemocratic privileged hierarchies and habits of their employers. US unions, led by the AFL-CIO, have always believed that they will do better if workers in the rest of the world do worse, so they support the cornerstone notion of the fascist corporate state: the unity of business, government, and labor bosses in the national interest. Every major US union, including the school unions, is now supporting Capital’s war for oil and cheap labor, masqueraded as a war against terror.

Factories and craft unions were once the centerpieces of the lives of the most progressive people in the US. Now the central organizing point for the lives of most people, and surely those people who are most oppressed and therefore most likely to lead resistance (immigrants, black people, etc) is school. There are more than 3.5 million educators in US public schools, three times the size of any large industry. While industrial production is easily out-sourced, schooling is not.

Other than the military, where youth will learn that to die for Exxon is no honor, that their officers are not their allies, nor allies of the people; the site of impending struggle in the US is school.

Rulers in an inequitable nation who want to invade the world desperately need to control the schools, whose key product is ideas. Ideas about the source of inequality, or the deadly myth of nationalism, must be contained. Domination, social control, is won through fabricated consent, nationalism, racism, sexism, irrationalism, opportunism, and every razor-sharp division that the elite's sham science can manufacture. Teachers, collectively, create terrific value, the minds of the next generation of workers. Educators are the most free of all working people, able to exercise considerable control over their labor. At issue is: Can school workers exert control over the value they create in order to overcome capitalist education, to educate for freedom for the majority—the workers? Is it enough to try to teach well, inside segregated schools, promoting lies?

### **What is the Social Context of Schooling Today?**

There never has been a single public school system, but five or six, each representing the parental income and race of the kids in the school, each reproducing their birth-classes. As the economy rots, schools tamp down the hopes of most kids, who never will do as well as their parents. Most schools now teach lies to children, using methods that make life seem incoherent. Kids learn indifference to learning, despair. Many honest educators swim upstream, seek to struggle for the truth, using methods that demonstrate how that process works. Still, these are the primary tendencies in schools: *\*Booming inequality tied to escalating segregation, racism, sexism, exclusion.*

*\*Irrationalism rising—religious fundamentalism (vouchers) and witless nationalism.*

*\*Regimentation via spectacles, surveillance, and the suspension of common civil liberties.*

*\*Regulation of knowledge via partisan standards and Big Tests.*

*\*Rising authoritarianism as some schools became mirrors of prison life.*

*\*Militarization—an invasion of ROTC and lying military recruiters.*

*\*Technology, mainly used to mesmerize, not liberate or unite.*

*\*A cultural attack, designed to re-heorize the military and to eradicate memories of Vietnam.*

*\*Marketization: children, educators, and schools are commodified, sold to Pepsi.*

*\*Takeovers of entire school systems (Detroit, Chicago), overthrowing local control.*

*\*Talibanization: organized decay of learning at every level of schooling: phonics first.*

After September 11, this became fascist tyranny. Schools teach children in a society promising them perpetual war. Teaching always mattered, but what teachers do now counts more than ever before.

### **Who Will Resist? Resist What? How? For What?**

No reform organization has linked the standards, Big Tests, segregation, economic collapse, war, and capitalism—except the Rouge Forum. School unions support the war, wrote the standards and tests. The unions structurally exclude students, parents and others. Their quisling leaders earn CEO salaries, forming a class that serves elites in controlling school labor. They reroute on-the-job or community action into hopeless electoral campaigns, dead-end legal actions, to divert people from taking effective collective action to control their working lives. Many teachers, middle-class and vacillating for now, support that leadership. But many do not. They fight to defend their own dignity, and their kids'. They matter. They need new organizations.

The main attack on education is the Big Test. Attached to dishonest standards, the tests perform a dual purpose: to destroy wisdom and divide people. Honest educators must not be capital's missionaries. Resist.

Teachers, students, and community people now fight back: the Detroit teachers' wildcat of 1999, the Ontario educators strike in 1998, the Oakland student strike in 2000, test resisters everywhere, community battles in Philadelphia against privatization. There is a long history of struggle for academic freedom, a fair tax system, caps on class size, books and supplies. No one in the US, however, has attempted pedagogy for freedom—to go beyond the system of capital which ensnares everything. Real life is connected, as are the tests and war. To disconnect reform struggles from overcoming capital ensures that reforms will fail—and buttress capital in new ways. Without strategic vision, opportunism and fear will defeat any movement for justice.

Inclusive, anti-racist school workers organized *with* community people and students, can control their working lives by controlling their work places. The way to do that is to prepare for united direct action: boycotts, walkouts, strikes, sit-ins and sit-downs, prepared by one-to-one education, friendship, with the goal of each person fully understanding what is being done, why, and each having a chance to openly reflect on what is being learned. This is reason connected to power, for power only retreats in the face of more power. The test of any worker's power: Who, other than the boss, can open and close the workplace, or nearby streets?

School strikes and boycotts are not new. Freedom Schools of the civil rights movement offered alternative, critical schooling in the midst of civil strife. The interplay of reason and power, which on-the-job action and Freedom Schools represents, serves as a beacon of hope.

Hope for what? For a world where people can be reasonably free and creative, at work and play, connected with others in friendly ways by sharing, all for all, from each according to commitment, to each according to need. How much will be lost before we make the decision to get there?



# Why Do You Call it the Rouge Forum?

The River Rouge runs throughout the Detroit area. Once a beautiful river bounteous with fish and plant life, it supported wetlands throughout southeast Michigan. Before industrialization, it was one of three rivers running through what is now the metropolitan area. Today the Rouge meanders through some of the most industrially polluted areas in the United States, past some of the poorest and most segregated areas of North America, only to lead some tributaries to one of the richest cities in the U.S.: Birmingham, Michigan. The Rouge cares nothing for boundaries. The other two Detroit rivers were paved, early in the life of the city, and now serve as enclosed running sewers. Of the three, the Rouge is the survivor.

The Ford Rouge Plant was built before and during World War I. By 1920, it was the world's largest industrial complex. Everything that went into a Ford car was manufactured at the Rouge. It was one of the work's largest iron foundries and one of the top steel producers.

Early on, Henry Ford sought to control every aspect of a worker's life, mind and body, in the plant and out. Using a goon squad recruited from Michigan prisons led by the infamous Harry Bennet, Ford instituted a code of silence. He systematically divided workers along lines of national origin, sex, race, and language groupings—and set up segregated housing for the work force. Ford owned Dearborn and its politicians. He designed a sociology department, a group of social workers who demanded entry into workers' homes to discover "appropriate" family relations and to ensure the people ate Ford-approved food, like soybeans, voted right, and went to church.

While Ford did introduce the "Five Dollar Day," in fact only a small segment of the employees ever got it, and those who did saw their wages cut quickly when economic downturns, and the depression, eroded Ford profits.

The Rouge is the site that defined "Fordism." Ford ran the line mercilessly. Fordism which centered on conveyor production, single-purpose machines, mass consumption, and mass marketing, seeks to heighten productivity via technique. The processes are designed to strip workers of potentially valuable faculties, like their expertise, to speed production, expand markets, and ultimately to drive down wages. These processes seek to make workers into replaceable machines themselves, but machines also capable of consumption. Contrary to trendy analysis focused on globalization and the technique of production, Ford was 1930s. Ford was and is an international car-maker, in recognized the need to shift to smaller cars, and built early globalism.

Henry Ford was a fascist. He contributed intellectually Hitler. Ford accepted the German equivalent of the operate in Germany, untouched by allied bombs,

At its height, more than 100,000 workers held jobs at in huge caverns under the plant. It was the nation's It was also the worst polluter. The Environmental Pro- violations. Today there are 9,000 workers, most of them

Ford ruthlessly battled worker organizing at the Rouge. during the depression, leading to massive street dem- armed goons on UAW leaders, a maneuver which led to ing monument to what was once the largest UAW local



and materially to fascism. His anti-Semitic works inspired Medal of Honor from Hitler, and his factories continued to throughout WW II.

the Rouge. Nineteen trains ran on 85 miles of track, mostly largest computer center, the third largest producer of glass. tection agency, in 1970, charged the Rouge with nearly 150 working in the now Japanese-owned iron foundry.

His Dearborn cops and goon squad killed hunger marchers onstrations. In the Battle of Overpass, Ford unleashed his the battle for collective bargaining at Ford, and was the found- in the world, Local 600, led by radical organizers for years.

On 1 February 1999, the boilers at the aging Rouge plant blew up, killing six workers. The plant, according to workers, had repeatedly failed safety inspections. UAW local president made a statement saying how sorry he was for the families of the deceased—and for William Clay Ford, "who is having one of the worst days of his life." Papers and the electronic press presented the workers' deaths as a tough day for the young Ford who inherited the presidency of the company after a stint as the top Ford manager in Europe. The steam went out of Local 600 long ago. The leaders now refer to themselves as "UAW-FORD," proof that they have inherited the fascist views of the company founder.

When environmentalist volunteers tried to clean the Rouge River in June 1999, they were ordered out of the water. It was too polluted to clean.

So, why the Rouge Forum? The Rouge is both nature and work. The Rouge has never quit; it moves with the resilience of the necessity for labor to rise out of nature itself. The river and the plant followed the path of industrial life throughout the world. The technological advances created at the Rouge, in some ways, led to better lives. In other ways, technology was used to forge the privilege of the few, at the expense of most—and the ecosystems which brought it to life The Rouge is a good place to consider a conversation, education, and social action. That is why.

While we chose the name, Rouge Forum, we selected Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch.

We would like you to join us. You can reach the Rouge Forum at:  
[http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge\\_forum/](http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum/)

Key Sources: Working Detroit by Steve Babson, American Odyssey by Robert Conot,  
Tales of Uncle Remus by Julius Lester



**The Rouge Forum is interested in teaching and learning for a democratic society.**

**You are invited to join us.**

**Brer Rabbit**

The *Rouge Forum* is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach—or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community which understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless.

We hope to demonstrate that the power necessary to win greater democracy will likely rise out of an organization that unites people in new ways—across union boundaries, across community lines, across the fences of race and sex/gender. We believe that good humor and friendships are a vital part of building this kind of organization, as important as theoretical clarity. Friendships allow us to understand that action always reveals errors—the key way we learn. We chose Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch.

We had modest success in defeating the standardized test, the MEAP, in Michigan. We work in faculty organizations and unions to deal with the racism and sexism in academia. We try to press forward questions of class size, curricular freedom, anti-racist pedagogy, real inclusion, and a just tax system. As part of the *Whole Schooling Consortium*, we have sponsored forums in the U.S., uniting hundreds of people for democracy and equality.

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There are no dues to join the Rouge Forum. Just email [wross@binghamton.edu](mailto:wross@binghamton.edu)  
or send your name, address, email, and phone number to:

E. Wayne Ross, School of Education & Human Development, SUNY Binghamton, 13902

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