

Promoting Critical Literacy in Social Studies Classrooms: Guiding Students to Remake Themselves and Their World Through a Critical Analysis of Victorian World's Fairs and the Neoliberal Ordering of Today's Social World

by

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During the late-19th and early-20th centuries, US political, economic, and academic leaders charted the nation on a course to embrace the new industrial age and to associate “progress” with the White Anglo-Saxon race creating an overseas economic empire, predicated on the ideals of rugged individualism, on the acceptance of social hierarchy, and on the alleged power of technology and science to *a priori* make the future better than the past (Blee, 2005; Frisch, 2001; Rydell, 1981; Rydell, Findling, & Pelle, 2000). The US powerbrokers utilized world's fairs as a chief cultural medium to garner support for their industrial practices, imperialistic policies, and jaded worldviews. Rather than being viewed as merely benign forms of entertainment that provided leisure for over 100 million fairgoers who explored the exhibits and ventured along the midways in numerous cities across the United States, when the inaugural fair was launched in Philadelphia in 1876 to just prior to the US's entry in World War I, America's fairs, as noted by many cultural historians and sociologists, ought to be viewed as educative sights or “object lessons,” which attempted to inculcate the public to support whole cloth hegemonic ideologies, assumptions, and institutional arrangements (Frisch, 2001, p. 197). However, despite the fact that the political, economic and academic elite held the power to give shape to the displays, events, and practices embedded within the fairs, some female, African American, and working-class activists launched counter-hegemonic movements to position fairgoers and citizens to recognize the unjust byproducts, such as poverty, violence, racism, and ethnocentrism, associated with the elite's notion of “progress,” industrialization, imperialism, unfettered capitalism, and Social Darwinism.

The importance of fostering a critical view in relation to world's fairs during the Victorian Era in the United States serving as contentious sites that ultimately aided the country's economic, political, and academic elite in their quest to promote their vision of “progress,” in their desire to promulgate policies bent on extracting labor power and resources across the globe, and in their desire to quell counter-hegemonic movements generated by working-class citizens against the visions and practices associated with the new industrial age, cannot be underestimated. Teachers who guide and encourage students to go beyond viewing these cultural events purely as entertainment and come to view world's fairs as a set of cultural texts, which need to be scrutinized for the purposes of analyzing “hidden messages or underlying messages and power differentials” (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. XIV), are developing students' critical literacy skills. It is through

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developing a critical attitude toward history that students are enabled to interrogate the socially constructed nature of their own social worlds. That is, they hold an understanding of the inextricable relationship between power and knowledge, the socially constructed nature of their identities and experiences, and the institutions and arrangements that perpetuate social inequalities in their own social worlds, in their communities, and across the global landscape (Johnson, 2007; Shor, 1999). Echoing Freire (1998), having the power to “read the word and the world” is also an essential ingredient in formulating counter-hegemonic movements against the structures of power, unjust practices, and debilitating discourses that fuel greed, hate, hostility, and oppression at today’s historical juncture. Critical pedagogues who position students to question the nature of their social worlds also must foster a sense of hope and optimism that it is, indeed, possible to join other transformative intellectuals and concerned citizens in their effort to redefine themselves and remake society “through alternative rhetoric and dissident projects” (Shor, 1999). Therefore, critical literacy is a form of language use that “challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development” (Shor, 1999).

When we assess the state of social studies education at the K-12 level in the US, there becomes pressing urgency for social studies schoolteachers to remake their classroom practices so as to hone students’ critical literacy skills. Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented in the United States in 2001, there has been a steep decline in the amount of time devoted to social studies instruction (O’Conner, Heafner & Groce, 2007, p. 255). School districts across the US, particularly school communities who are considered “low-performing,” have been forced to focus time and resources on subject areas that are tied to high-stakes, standardized forms of assessment. For instance, at the elementary level, schools have focused their instruction on language arts and science because if students’ test scores “do not meet an arbitrary, quantitative hurdle,” teachers may face reprisals and schools may lose federal funds (O’Conner, et al., 2007, p. 255).

Even in schools where schoolteachers have the professional autonomy to create classroom environments that encourage students to question power differentials in society and the “received interpretations of our history and dominant worldview” (Case & Clark, 1997, p. 20), they often create boring and meaningless classrooms, where students are required to learn irrelevant facts from textbooks about the history of “dead White males” and their military conquests (Kornfeld, 1998, p. 306). Not coincidentally, most K-12 students, regardless of their race, class, or gender, dislike the social studies, find it meaningless, and perceive it to be one of the most difficult subjects in the school curriculum (Kincheloe, 2001; Kornfeld, 1998).

The purpose of this essay is to outline how a critical evaluation of US world’s fairs, events which took place during the Victorian Era, has the potency to revitalize the social studies, so that students are guided to possess the critical literacy skills necessary to make sense of what constitutive forces give rise to their experiences and the experiences of “Others,” to interrogate the hidden agendas proffered in various discursive sites by political, economic, and intellectual leaders, and to recognize the urgency to remake themselves and US institutions and US culture so as to build a society free from hate, hostility, and injustice. The first part of the essay will deconstruct how the political, intellectual and economic elite during the late-19th and early-20th centuries utilized

world's fairs as a form of propaganda. Specifically, we will show how the elite utilized the fairs as "object lessons" to inculcate the public to see the benefits of the US's nascent overseas colonial empire, to believe in 'inherent superiority' of the White Anglo-Saxon race over the "Other," and to discredit working-class citizens who created oppositional movements, which threw light on how the elite's vision of "progress," was not only linked to perpetuating social inequalities in the United States, but also linked to perpetuating human misery across the globe. In the process, we will also examine the cultural work put forth by groups who did not have the power to play a predominant role in relation to how the exhibits were organized and what functions they served. We will illuminate what elements of bourgeois White women's, African American activists', and working-class citizens' activities surrounding the Victorian Era's world's fairs have the power to help today's schoolteachers and students reflect upon how they can uproot systemic barriers as well as unjust practices that create injustice in schools and society. The second part of the essay is designed to capture how the same critical reading of expositions in the past can be done with cultural texts in the present. We capture how today's ruling elite in the US control various systems of discourse to promote the alleged benefits of its military incursions abroad, to inculcate the public to believe in the superiority of the US and its political and economic systems, at the expense of demonizing the Muslim Other, and to lull the public to "blame the victims" for the United States' social and economic problems, which the privileged elite create by enacting policies and practices designed to benefit themselves at the expense of the vast majority of the world's population (Dei, in press). The paper will conclude with several contemporary examples of schoolteachers, teacher educators, and youths joining collectively to challenge the unjust policies and practices implemented by US government officials, business leaders and academics, which are responsible for the stark social and economic realities encountered by most global citizens.

Critically Examining Victorian World's Fairs in the United States: Struggles for Economic and Ideological Supremacy

From the late-19th century through the early-20th century, Victorian world's fairs in the United States were held throughout various regions of the country, including New Orleans, Chicago, Buffalo, Atlanta, Nashville, Jamestown, Portland, St. Louis, and Omaha (Badger, 1979; Downey, 2002; Fojas, 2005; Marling, 1992; Pepchinski, 2001; Rydell, 1983a; Rydell & Kroes, 2005). On the surface, the fairs were magnificent displays of beauty, ingenuity, accomplishment, and hope. Incredible sums of money, labor, and media attention generated optimism amongst many fairgoers that industrialization, science and technology would usher peace and prosperity for US society (Fojas, 2005; Frisch, 2001; Rydell & Kroes, 2005). The world's fairs looked as if they provided an outlet for the nation to clarify the social and economic disparities of the past and configured a worldwide stage for social growth and reconciliation in the future.

However, when we look beyond the fairs' gleaming exteriors and exuberant media coverage, we find that the cultural events promoted the US political and economic leaders' imperialistic policies, visions of "progress," and the nation's burgeoning industrial and commercial culture. The leaders' mandates were responsible for the harsh

realities present in the US and its colonized territories during the Victorian Era, such as racism, sexism, subjugation, domination, and poverty. In essence, the Victorian world's fairs can be viewed as "cultural windows," illuminating life in the United States during the age of new industrialism, immigration, and imperialism. By critically analyzing primary and secondary materials pertaining to several world's fairs during the Victorian Era, it becomes possible to detect how US political and economic leaders' worldviews, policies, and practices coalesced to negatively impact the lives of women, minorities, and working-class citizens. Moreover, through this analysis, it is possible to gain insight in relation to how certain indomitable individuals, despite being located within the incredibly hostile fair cultures, were able to confront the social actors and institutions responsible for their own marginalized subject positions as well as responsible for the poverty, violence, and oppression permeating life outside the cultural exhibitions.

Evaluating Women's Cultural Work and Displays: Promoting and Resisting the Imperatives of Empire, Industrialism, and Social Hierarchy

The world's fairs that took place in Victorian America marked a significant, if somewhat enigmatic, role in the lives of women. Badger (1979, p. 122) paralleled the highly complex and ambiguous role that women played within society to the similarly uncertain role that they played at the exhibitions. During the Victorian Era, the nature of womanhood was in a constant state of flux, especially for the many White bourgeois women who were valued fair workers and fairgoers. For instance, some White bourgeois women challenged hegemonic notions of femininity—that is, women being perceived as domestic agents, wives, and caregivers—by engaging "in remunerative work and political activity or choosing independence and careers over marriage and procreation" (Pepchinski, 2001). Even though the women who challenged socially accepted notions of womanhood faced a negative backlash from many White male and female fairgoers, the women's buildings located at the fairs as well as female produced artifacts held more resonance and repeatedly reinforced that White bourgeois women could perform socially acceptable forms of womanhood outside of the home, so long as they were engaged in stereotypical feminine activities, such as caring for children, the weak, and the unfortunate (Pepchinski, 2001). Unfortunately, the impact of displaying White women's philanthropic endeavors ubiquitously at the world's fairs reinforced the ideal that racialized immigrants and 'Other' downtrodden subjects were intellectually and socially inferior subjects who could only be "saved" by embracing the practices, worldviews, and ideals of the dominant society. As a result, fairgoers did not connect the suffering and misfortune experienced by the million of new immigrants arriving to the United States and racialized minorities who lived in a nation founded upon social hierarchy, to the imperialistic and industrialized policies and practices implemented by White female philanthropic fair organizers' husbands, brothers, or sons.

By examining women's contributions at the US Victorian Exhibitions, we witness firsthand how the White, middle-class, male organizers ensured that White middle-class women would neither launch a significant challenge to their subjugated position within the wider US society nor challenge White America's imperialistic, industrial, and

civilizing domestic and overseas agenda. For instance, White middle-class women who were given permission to speak at the fairs generally supported the racialized rhetoric that US imperial and industrial policies would seemingly produce economic prosperity for US citizens as well as ensure that White America “civilized” the Other in line with the dominant culture’s ideals, beliefs, and values (Hoganson, 2001)¹. Whereas the minority voices of White middle-class citizens who recognized the racist nature girding US political, economic, and foreign policies, the violence and injustice inherent in the aforesaid policies, and the impact patriarchy had on all women across the globe, were purposely kept from sharing their alternative narratives with fairgoers.

The political and economic leaders, in a seemingly progressive gesture that had not been seen in other world’s fairs, awarded women a separate building of their own at the Chicago Exhibition (Downey, 2002, p. 23). The Women’s Building did little, however, to change fairgoers’ perception of womanhood or reconfigure the relationship between the sexes in US Victorian society. The Woman’s Building was the smallest hall and was constructed next to the Children’s Building to propagandize the rightful place of women within society (Downey, 2002, pp. 51, 108). Similarly disturbing, at the Pan-American Exhibition, which was held in 1901 in Buffalo, New York, classes were offered in the Woman’s Building that included, “household work,” “the washing of flannels,” “scouring woodwork, cleaning knives and silver household utensils,” “table setting and window washing,” and, “bed making” (“Women workers meet,” 1901, p. 3). Even most female organizers tried to participate in and reinforce this vision of domestic oppression (Downey, 2002, p. 106). This attitude was easily unveiled when considering the International Council of Women at the Chicago Exposition. Here, Adelaide Hunter Hoodless discussed, among other conservative domestic ideologies, the inadequacies of women as governmental leaders and suggested that women should move more slowly and partake in training instead of attempting to compete with more competent male counterparts (“Women of other lands,” 1901, p. 3). Other prominent associations such as the Board of Lady Managers and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union offered similar viewpoints.

Some female-centered organizations that partook in the fairs not only sought to further the agenda of the ruling elite, but also to lull fairgoers into the fictitious notion that critical social issues such as poverty, racism, and crime could be cured through women’s charitable work. Downey (2002, p. 105) discussed the notion of the “proper” role of Victorian women as those who gave of themselves in order to help marginalized members of society. The media also facilitated this ideology through articles, which

¹ As Hoganson (2002, p. 11) notes, it is only in recent years that scholars have critically assessed the cultural work put forth by White middle-class women suffragists during the Victorian era. These women frequently tapped racist rhetoric to make their case that they should be given the right to vote. Not only did they argue they were more “qualified” to vote than men of color, but they aligned themselves with the “colonizing objectives of the state and claim[ed] power on the basis of race, class, and nationality.” Many White bourgeoisie women also supported the imperialistic and industrial policies developed by economic and political elite leaders in the United States because their families had an economic stake in America becoming a modern industrial overseas empire. They were also complicit in supporting “US commercial empire and expansion” through purchasing goods from US overseas markets (Hoganson, 2002, p. 60). By decorating their homes with goods produced across the globe, White middle-class women were able to “convey their economic standing” and their unearned power to connect with the wider world (Hoganson, p. 61).

praised the establishment of such groups (“Women workers: National League,” 1901, p. 3). The irony seems harshly evident as ever-increasing numbers of middle and upper-class White women signed up to bravely battle the capitalistic-created ills of society, such as joining the Anti-Imperialistic League when the US began its overseas imperial plot by way of defeating the Spaniards in Cuba, while many White middle-class women perpetuated the very existence of such issues by creating erroneous distractions of an improved society through their generous support of a small number of unfortunates (Hoganson, 2001).

Overall, it was strangely incongruous, that through separate women’s spaces and exhibits, freedom, growth, and acceptance by the White male elite was not only discouraged, it was isolated within a space separate from men’s (Downey, 2002, p. 111). Or perhaps this was not so surprising considering the women fair organizers’ exhibits and spaces were not a real threat to the male-centered power existing in US society. Most fairgoers accepted the characterization of women as “less logical than men and less able to take part in the national administration owing to the fact that at some remote period their development was arrested” (“Women of other lands,” 1901, p. 3). Thus the notion of women as token, mindless servants was woven through the fairs from the planning stages, through the creation of architecture, and ending in the discussions and events that occurred every day. Millions of visitors were subjected to this illogical and punitive view of feminine existence. It is not surprising that Pepchinski (2001), who evaluated exhibition architecture at several world’s fairs during the Victorian Era, concluded Women’s Buildings and their vast displays “did not challenge prevailing feminine ideals, but reinforced traditional female roles.”

In spite of the powerful forces that worked against the acceptance, inclusion, and modernization of women into American society, certain women used the fairs as an opportunity to stage resistance against their roles as Victorian caregivers. This indicated that despite the actions of the dominant culture, new roles for women were emerging. Society could not ignore the growing proportion of women who did not fit into traditional Christian ideals. Downey (2002, pp. 104-105) observed that some women were choosing to remain single; others were less fortunate victims of abuse and divorce; still others sought to integrate equally into the workforce. These women were charting a new course, a course which many times came into conflict with the status quo at the world’s fairs.

Individuals, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucy Stone, used the fairs as opportunities to mount important economic and political reform from the perspective of most feminists in this era (Downey, 2002, p. 106). An example of this form of reform is noted in the concerns for women in the workplace that were highlighted in the *Buffalo Express* (“Of mutual benefit,” 1901, p. 3; “Women workers: National League,” 1901, p. 3). Suffrage, equal rights, fair working conditions, and independence were undercurrents that radiated throughout the fairs. Occasionally, these issues made it into the wider culture through newspapers or music. From token gestures, such as the creation of the completely female Board of Lady Managers who were graced with the notion of showing women’s roles in sculpture, art, and music, through much more radical enterprises, such as the World’s Congress of Representative Women, which provided genuine outlets for marginalized voices, the fairs did provide limited opportunities for reform. The shortsighted volunteer opportunities provided to White women to “uplift” the poor, along with the conglomeration of women who traversed the fairgrounds from

numerous countries, feminists who generated hundreds of newspaper articles concerning equal rights, and White bourgeois women who designed exhibits that influenced millions of fairgoers, threw into flux what constituted socially acceptable notions of femininity in the Victorian Era (Rydell, 1983a).

Creating White America: Trivializing, Demonizing and Erasing the Other at Victorian World's Fairs

The world's fairs were frequently hotbeds for promoting US imperialism and industrialization through the exultation of the White Anglo-Saxon race and culture and the concurrent demonization and trivialization of the "Other." Woven into messages of national pride, modernism, and cultural enlightenment, subtle as well as boldly intolerant contexts of capitalistic, religious, and racial superiority abounded. The most incredulous example of this occurred when minoritized² cultures were put on display to maximize their radical departure from "civilized" Western culture. Powerful additional examples can be seen in the disturbing absence of minority accomplishment and participation at the fairs. In similar fashion to the plight of women, minorities were also discriminated against by the White male culture of the fairs, influential women, and also by other minoritized individuals.

As many scholars have noted, world's fairs reflected the desire of powerful White American leaders to usher in an age based on industry, imperialism, science, and technology (Badger, 1979; Downey, 2002; Fojas, 2005; Marling, 1992; Rydell, 1983a; Rydell, 1983b). Truthfully, in their fervor to establish the fledgling power of the American nation, fair administrators used every means at their disposal, including science, technology, religion, and the media, to shock and amuse the millions of visitors who passed through the fairgrounds with the barbarism, ignorance, and wretched existence that allegedly characterized "uncivilized" peoples in the United States and around the globe.

World fair organizers and sponsors, with the assistance of some of the world's leading ethnographers, created ethnological villages, which, "featuring live displays of predominately non (W)hite people, were intended to give living and visible proof to the proposition that human beings could be divided into categories of civilization and savagery" (Rydell & Kroes, 2005, p. 67). Backed with scientific "credibility," most fairgoers felt comfortable supporting the notion that White American society was the most "advanced" civilization because it embraced scientific initiatives, modern technology, social hierarchy, competition, and industrialization (Fojas, 2005; Rydell & Kroes, 2005). Various minoritized groups were put on display by exhibition leaders to

² The term "minoritized" is borrowed from Solomon et al. (2005, p. 166) to document that Whites "are a member of a racial group[;] however their racialization affords them benefits that are seldom available to minority groups."

demonstrate the superiority of White Anglo-Saxon American culture, but First Nation and African cultures were especially targeted for various political, social, and religious reasons.

Frisch (2001, p. 196) discussed this dramatic difference of White and Other at Buffalo's Pan American Exposition, and noted the manipulation of the dominant culture to portray the "dark" cultures as being "primitive," and ripe for imperial and Christian forces to exploit. Entertainment for fairgoers included "Darkest Africa," the "Old Plantation," as well as the wild, and incarcerated, Indian, Geronimo (p. 197). Therefore, the midway "entertainment" showcased to fairgoers the dominant power of the White elite and provided a modern excuse and direction for furthered actions of "civilization" throughout the world.

At the Chicago Exposition of 1893, modern science was used to enlighten and amuse the public about the Darwinistic superiority of Western civilization while concurrent actions of the fair administration and viewing public polluted the every-day existence of the "backward villagers" with intolerable injustice (Downey, 2002). The media also willingly participated in the atrocities that led to the dehumanization of minoritized peoples. Written coverage was polluted with blatantly racist articulations such as, "savages," "hideous," "guttural," and "pigs" (p. 77). All of this rhetoric lent credence to the religious zeal of the day, namely that Christianity needed to be spread throughout the world (Badger, 1979, p. 96). Although most fairgoers thought that the exposition-created city was named for its incredible and modern use of electricity, Downey (2002, p. 77) accurately highlighted the not-so-subtle nickname of the Chicago Exposition, the "White City."

Similarly, Rydell (1983b, p. 52) discussed the portrayal of the Other at the Philippines Exhibit during the Seattle 1905 world's fair. Here, Igorote villagers were displayed at a primitive village for the amusement of the fair visitors, while the media dared audiences to visit the "dogeaters," and the fair administrators offered exotic pictures of fairgoers with the savages (pp. 52-54). The Seattle fair offered snapshots of additional "uncivilized" cultures as well, including Japan, Egypt, Alaska, and the more commonplace, "southern negroes" (p 55). Each of these inaccurate, racist, and oppressive sideshows flaunted not only the opportunity, but also the obligation, for the American people to transform the world into a place of enlightenment and modernization. This represented raw imperialism in its most blatant form.

In addition to the shocking creations that were displayed at the fairs to highlight the differences between cultures, the plight of minoritized peoples can be seen in an equally disturbing way when we consider the materials and information that was purposefully ignored concerning minority involvement in the broader American culture. Throughout the fairs, multifaceted accounts of the progress of the American homeland were lauded. Numerous displays were established to highlight the advancement of many different peoples. Unfortunately, these accounts failed to identify the minoritized cultures of the country. Several transformative scholars have identified an utter lack of recognition when it came to the accomplishments of African American and Native American peoples (Blee, 2005; Downey, 2002; Frisch, 2001; Rydell, Findling, & Pelle, 2000). Even in the compilation of data, important minoritized individuals and achievements were completely ignored (Downey, 2002 p. 114).

It was also not helpful for minoritized groups that some of the few mainstream and popular minority leaders lent credence to the false power of White, European superiority. For example, at the World's Fair of 1900, W.E.B. Du Bois was chosen to help create a display that pictorially represented the lives of African Americans. Osborne and Virga (2003, p. 30) critically challenged this account by noting the false sense of tranquility between races, an incorrect account of the societal and employment status of African Americans, an utter lack of realistic photographs that might traumatize the public, and an unrealistic representation of African Americans who were chosen for the pictures based upon their light skin and European clothing.

In similar fashion to the incredible women who had managed to resist being pulled down by the plight of women at the fairs, certain progressive entities as well as a few chosen, valorous individuals forged a passage toward recognition and equality that marked an extreme departure from the norm. At the Chicago Exposition, the Congress Auxiliary, clearly against the wishes and financial support of the mainstream fair culture, included numerous lectures pertaining to, and given by, minority factions (Downey, 2002, p. 134). From an individual standpoint, Mary Logan, wife of Senator John Logan, valiantly fought with multiple boards, on several occasions, for the rights of African Americans to be involved and recognized for their accomplishments within the broader society (p. 109). Perhaps most remarkable was the involvement of Frederick Douglass. Not only did Douglass passionately and realistically address audiences about the "Race Problem in America," he also assisted in the publication of thousands of pamphlets that were distributed to decry the problems of racism not only in society, but also at the fair itself (Downey, 2002, p. 178).

Cementing a New Industrial America at World's Fairs: Industrial Capitalists Subduing the Labor Movement

Not only did the industrial elite during the Victorian Era perpetuate its wealth and power through imperialistic pursuits overseas, but it exploited the labor power of millions of US immigrants and workers, who facilitated industrial expansion by constructing thousands of miles of railroad tracks, digging shafts and portals and engaging in tunnel-blasting to provide power for various commercialized pursuits, and toiling in sweatshops to produce textiles and various pieces of clothing in the US's ever-expanding garment industry (Liebold & Rubenstein, 1998; Author & Hall, 2005). Badger (1979) alluded to this when he discussed the incredible expansion of the railroad system, a system that brought untold thousands to work and play at the fairs and concentrated wealth and power into the hands of US industrial "robber barons." He notes, "...by the 1890s the results of that expansion seemed less to increase the freedom and prosperity for the many than to make millionaires out of a corrupt few, whose power appeared so great as to enslave the democracy itself" (Badger, 1979, p. 117).

The US world's fairs were also reflective of how corporate leaders asserted their power to corral a cheap pool of labor as well as to extinguish the growing unrest of labor unions in the US, who raised their opposition to the fact that industrial capitalists' growing wealth and power were tied to working-class citizens having poor working and living conditions and low wages. At the Portland fair of 1905, fair administrators asserted

their power over labor by garnering union support through the malicious promise to retain organized labor for the construction of every aspect of the fair (Badger, 1979). Not only did the fair organizers betray their agreement with the unions, through the media and in an effort to break the unions, they advertised throughout the Portland area that there were jobs in abundance available for any working man, which kept the labor cheap and the working conditions incredibly unpleasant in the best of situations (Badger, 1979, p. 46). At the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, which was held in Seattle in 1909, the tactics were even more extreme. Here, fair administrators falsely advertised heavily on the East coast causing thousands of workers who could not possibly afford the cost of a return trip to flood the Seattle area (p. 47). Then, when unions and supporters attempted to hold a rally to protest the actions and conditions of the fair managers, the influential managers went so far as to halt and re-route public transportation in order to suppress the gathering (Badger, 1979, p. 48).

Even under conditions of extreme duress, resistance was apparent in the form of organized labor, which sometimes did manage to make a difference (or at least a statement). In Portland, Oregon unions participated in a strike that impacted the fair construction to such an extent that the administration was willing to negotiate for an eight-hour workday (p. 46). This represented a tremendous victory for working individuals who had been, and would continue to be, constantly exposed to extremely difficult and potentially lethal conditions. In Seattle, thousands of union workers and their supporters managed to organize and carry out a Labor Day parade (Badger, 1979, p. 48). This parade drew supporters and attention even though one of the most riveting events in history was simultaneously occurring, a world's fair.

History Repeats Itself: US Political and Economic Leaders Use Cultural Texts to Promote their “Visions” and to Trivialize the Other in the Age of Neoliberalism

Turning the trajectory to today's socio-historical moment, we also find that the political, economic, and academic elite are utilizing cultural texts to propagate their agendas, visions of “progress,” as well as to quell any counter-hegemonic movements that may threaten the institutional arrangements cementing their power and their privilege. Although world's fairs are no longer a chief venue for scaffolding “mass support for the government imperial policies” (Rydell, 1981, p. 589), the transnational capitalist class harnesses several corporately-sponsored media outlets to garner support for policies that strengthen its powerbase and to thwart alternative narratives and practices that may subvert the institutional arrangements perpetuating a class, race, and gender hierarchy in North America (McLaren, 2008). Currently, print and online newspapers, magazines, blogs, newscasts, podcasts, and various talk shows function as appendages of the ruling elite to perpetuate the most dominant ideological doctrine of the late-20th and early-21st centuries—neoliberalism. Since the mid-1970s, Western political, business, and academic leaders have pushed “policy and practice in the direction of fully privatizing profits while socializing the social and environmental costs of production” (Author & Malott, in press). To achieve these aims, the ruling elite has effectively kept major media outlets out of any critical dialogue that might highlight its agenda which is inextricably linked to the

swelling of abject poverty, suffering and misery, environmental degradation, the US's permanent "War on Terror," and the Western world's prison-education-industrial complex (Giroux, 2004, p. XVII). The ruling elite also hijack the same media outlets, taking advantage of our times of "crises and trauma," to gain the public's consent to controlling the world's labor power, resources, and privatizing all aspects of social life (Klein, 2007).

A prime example is the Bush Administration preying upon the fear generated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks on US soil by not only launching "The War on Terror" against Muslim people in the Middle East, but also by generating opportunities for private companies to take part in ventures that either supplied weapons, provided services, extracted oil abroad or provided services or equipment for the \$200 billion homeland security industry, which was supposedly created after September 11, 2001 to eliminate evil abroad and eradicate terror at home (Klein, 2007, p. 12). Just as the business, academic, and government leaders during the Victorian Era used the world's fairs as media vehicles to support the new industrial age, expansionism in the Western part of North America, and imperialistic excursions in the Pacific, in Latin America, and in Asia by configuring the "Other" as biologically inferior to White US citizens, showcasing the products from their conquests, and lulling the fairgoers to believe that US economic growth was dependent upon opening trade markets overseas, today's elite control television and radio airwaves and large portions of cyberspace to configure Muslim people in the Middle East as fantastical terrorists who can only be repelled from committing additional acts of violence on US soil by the omnipotent George W. Bush. According to McLaren and Jaramillo (2007, p. 69), the corporately-sponsored media in the United States has ensured that the general populous in the US believe Bush has the power to rid the world of Muslim terrorists because it configures the US military as an altruistic organization designed to liberate people who are shackled under oppressive dictatorships, such as the Afghanistan people living under the draconian Taliban regime. Therefore, the US mainstream media has given a new face to the form of imperialism promoted by US political and economic leaders. There is no need to hide their interest in extricating a country's labor power, oil, or resources, when the US media effectively placates "the public's ontological anxiety about feeling vulnerable to terrorist attacks and sustains the image of the United States as global savior and purveyor of freedom and liberty" (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007, p. 69). Consequently, the media's manipulation has culled support for the Bush Administration to "go ye forth into the world as Christian soldiers to bring God, freedom, and free market capitalism to the heathens around the world" (Kincheloe, 2006, p. XV).

Political and economic supporters of neoliberalism have also utilized dominant media outlets to find scapegoats for the problems they cynically create because their desire to amass unlimited wealth and power comes at the expense of entire populations in the US, who in the age of neoliberalism are viewed as disposable, an "unnecessary burden on state coffers, and consigned to fend for themselves" (Giroux, 2006). Rather than taking responsibility for the concentrated poverty and racial injustices faced by Black residents prior to Katrina-ransacked New Orleans and the suffering and dislocation faced by New Orleans' residents marginalized by race and class after the Category Five storm struck the area, supporters of "bootstrap" capitalism vilified and blamed impoverished African Americans, the elderly, and impoverished members of the

dominant culture for their trauma and for the devastation uncoiled in their city in major media outlets. For instance, newscasters, newspaper columnists, and right-wing talk show hosts across the United States created false reports about impoverished African Americans utilizing the disaster as an opportunity to take property, commit acts of violence, and sell drugs. The media's untrue horror stories of African American "'wildings' gang-raping women and children, looting stores of liquor and drugs, shooting at ambulances, police patrols, and rescue helicopters, and throwing the city into a vortex of violence and anarchy" (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007, p. 9) were similar to how neoliberal supporters in the 1980s utilized the images of the young Black male "gansta" and the Black female "welfare queen" "for selling the American public on the need to dismantle the welfare state, ushering in an era of unprecedented deregulation, downsizing, privatization, and regressive taxation" (Giroux, 2006).

To gain footholds in areas of life that were once considered social goods until the late-20th century, the ruling elite has, once again, utilized the media to gain public support for its profit-making agenda. For example, Hursh (in press) notes that since George Bush's No Child Left Behind Policy was enacted in 2001, his Administration has created debilitating discourses in media outlets to make the public fear that the US will "lose jobs to economically competitive countries," unless its public school system enacts commercialized pedagogies and arrangements, such as high-stakes testing, scripted curriculum, accountability measures, vouchers, and charter schools. Unfortunately, the power of media-generated discourses blocks the public from recognizing that the implementation of commercialized practices in US schools has no power to prevent corporate leaders from outsourcing labor, corporate practices, and corporate logics from North America to so called "Third World" regions, where US multinational corporations find cheaper sources of labor, often in the form of young women and impoverished working-class citizens, to manufacture products or to sell services (Hart-Landsberg, 2002). Recently, the Bush Administration has stooped to even more devious levels to control the media for the purpose of gaining public support for privatizing education. Bush paid conservative talk show host Armstrong Williams over \$200,000 "to promote the controversial law in op/ed pieces and on his nationally syndicated television show "The Right Side," to urge other black journalists and producers to "periodically address" NCLB, and to interview Education Secretary Rod Paige for radio and television spots promoting the legislation" (Spivak, 2005).

What Bush and his paid media puppet purposely left out of their characterization of NCLB is that the legislation has further exacerbated the marginalization of students who are oppressed on the structural axes of race and class. For example, this legislation is responsible for some of the most qualified teachers leaving urban schools because they are forced to implement "drill and kill" curriculum to help ensure their students and schools do well on corporately-produced standardized examinations, for more and more urban students failing to graduate on time or dropping out of school entirely, and for creating militarized school zones, where army recruiters are given free rein to cajole minority and poor students, who are desperate for funds to attend college, to join the imperial armed forces (Kozol, 2007; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007). The politicized reports of NCLB also fail to highlight the "real winners" of the implementation of NCLB: corporations. For the past several years, corporations have acquired the power to provide textbooks, test preparation services and materials, curriculum guides for schools, to take

taxpayers' dollars to run charter schools, and to hire test polluted, high school graduates who are blinded from thinking about how the world functions outside of the orbit of social relations predicated on greed and on inequity (McLaren, 2005).

Resisting the Political and Economic Elites' Political and Economic Agendas: Counter-Hegemonic Movements Providing Schoolteachers Hope and Inspiration for Today's Historical Moment

Like the women's groups, African Americans and other working-class fairgoers who succeeded in infiltrating their counter-message during the turn of the last century World's Fairs, and despite the trenchant efforts of US political and economic leaders to control media culture and acquire the support of working-class peoples across the globe for neoliberal policies and practices earmarked to extract resources, control territories, and create an international division of labor (McLaren, 2008), some global citizens in the age of predatory capitalism have recognized that elite leaders' hidden agendas are bent on perpetuating more suffering, misery, violence, and environmental degradation. For instance, over the past two years, thousands of students, teachers, and teacher educators have "rallied against racism in Jena, LA" (Au, 2007/2008) as well as staged walkouts in schools to end the economic exploitation of over 11 million illegal immigrants who serve as cheap source of labor for US business leaders (McFadden, 2006). In addition, in opposition to the Iraq War, to the dismantling of public education, and to military recruitment in schools, students and teachers across the US have forged protests, sit-ins and walkouts. For example, recently in Seattle, several hundred demonstrators, organized by Youth Against War and Racism, a student-led group founded by Socialist Alternative, an organization that opposes "the global capitalist system," halted traffic and forced a military recruitment center to close for an afternoon, when they targeted President Bush, racism, the US involvement in Iraq, and big business (Iwasaki, 2007).

Many other schoolteachers and teacher educators across the US, who have witnessed firsthand how corporate-driven mandates have taken the joy out of teaching and learning, and consequently, positioned marginalized youth into "mindless little robots" (Kozol, 2007), have initiated social justice and study groups and have held "strategy talks about resisting standardized testing and pacing guides. They are no longer looking for ways to teach between the cracks of scripted curriculum. They are putting the scripts down and writing their own" (Au, 2007/2008). Outside of the classroom, groups of public school educators, like New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE), have "worked with community, parent, and student organizations" ("New York Core," 2008). They have attempted to bring about social justice and equity in schools by developing curricula, holding events, and launching workshops, which collectively have educated teachers and the public about how neoliberal policies, such as high-stakes examinations, military recruitment, and zero-tolerance initiatives, as well as racism, sexism, and homophobia hinder the social and academic development of K-12 students.

Clearly, the cultural work generated by schoolteachers, youth, and social activists to eradicate corporate imperatives in US schools, and to stop "The US from invading

more countries” (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007, p. 56), are important for ameliorating some of the deleterious effects emanating from the hegemony of neoliberal globalization. However, social movements formulated to eliminate a particular form of injustice or a specific set of unjust policies or practices are not capable of building sustained institutional arrangements, which are predicated on building life forms resting upon the ideals of equity, love, justice, and fairness. To build a new social world free of oppression, concerned citizens’, teachers’, and activists’ cultural work must attempt to eliminate neoliberal capitalism, since it’s *the raison d’être* behind the proliferation of social maladies and institutional forms of oppression pervading social contexts across the globe. Neoliberal capitalism is also responsible for “a crisis of overproduction, a crisis of legitimacy of democratic governance, and a crisis of overextension that has dangerously depleted the world’s material resources” (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007, p. 47).

Just as many railroad workers, coal miners, and lumberjacks in the US at the turn of the 20th century forged social movements to overturn the economic system that was at the root cause of social inequalities, some working-class citizens across the globe have spoken out and taken action to free the world from capitalists’ social relations. For example, several hip hop artists have been vociferous in naming neoliberal capitalism as the culprit behind the suffering and oppression spanning the global landscape as well as trenchant in their support of a socialist universe. Oakland-based hip-hop artist, Boots Riley of the Coup, has followed in the footsteps of former Oakland Black Panther activists. Since the early-1990s, he has been involved in organizing youth to vote, spearheading movements to eliminate racism in schools, and joining labor unions to fight for a living wage in various service-oriented industries. He has also been a firm advocate for building movements to provide a socialist alternative to capitalism. Not coincidentally, he has spoken out against US imperialist military incursions in Iraq, and has problematized the “obscure provision of the No Child Left Behind Act that forces public schools to supply high school students’ names and private contact information to military recruiters” (“Boots Riley of the Coup,” 2006). He believes that “Public schools can’t, out of one side of their mouth, tell students that they want them to have a bright future after high school and out of the other side of their mouth tell them that it’s okay for them to go kill and die for a profit-making war machine” (“Boots Riley of the Coup,” 2006).

On a global scale, several hip-hop and punk pedagogues have similarly expressed their rage and built a worldwide movement against the unjust byproducts emanating from neoliberalism such as racism, classism, police brutality, homelessness, unemployment, political prisoners, imperialism and corporate control of knowledge. For example Rap Conscient (2008) is a French website that highlights the music, lyrics, and videos of rap and punk pedagogues who link global capitalism to suffering and environmental degradation across the globe. The site also provides information on other global social activists and groups who are committed to building a society free from repressive globalist capitalist relationships (<http://www.rap-conscient.com/>).

Outside of the US, states, trade unions and farmers have sparked social and political movements against “a transnational elite protectorate stage managed by Washington” (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007, p. 106). For instance, in Latin America, radical popular governments in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Argentina were elected in opposition to neoliberalism, US imperialism, and corrupt national governments who promulgated policies set into play by Western politicians and business leaders. Since

taking office, the popular governments have been irritants to US and European imperialist countries, as they have set up state companies to regain control over oil and gas industries and airlines and issued limited reforms in health care, in education and in distributing food (Saunois, 2006).

Calling on Teacher Educators and Social Studies Teachers: Resuscitating Social Studies via Critical Literacy Projects

Through our critical reading of the US world's fairs of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, we find that US political, academic, and political leaders were able to lull most of the US populous to embrace their worldview, imperialist pursuits for creating an overseas empire, and a new industrial age. This led collectively to the exploitation of workers, intensification of poverty, and an extraction of wealth and resources from dependant territories in the Pacific, in Latin America, in Asia, and Western lands of North America. The neoliberal world order of today is, arguably, having even more of a pernicious impact on peoples across the globe and on our planet. For instance, in the United States, neo-liberal policies and practices have undermined the ability of workers to unionize, reduced workers' benefits, gutted social programs and entitlements for the impoverished and elderly, intensified the workday, and fueled mass incarceration of minoritized populations, while concomitantly aiding and abetting the country's richest families in their quest to concentrate their wealth and power (Crow & Albo, 2005; McLaren, 2005; Nolan & Anyon, 2004; Scipes, 2007). Outside Western nations, the ruling elites' pro-capitalist agreements and organizations have pushed more and more working peoples to live in the throes of poverty, pollution, and hopelessness. Since their labor-power is often worthless from the boss' perspective, they are often left with grim prospects, such as "selling their organs, working the plantations or mines, or going into prostitution" (McLaren, 2005, p. 5). The political and economic leaders' drive to conquer the world's resources, labor power and privatize life is also responsible for America's "War on Terror," which has left over a million Iraqi men, women, and children dead, and left thousands of US soldiers as capitalism's "collateral damage."

The Neoliberal ordering of schooling is the key reason why the social studies are failing to provide youth in North America a rigorous examination of past historical events. The growing intensification associated with preparing K-12 students to pass an array of corporate-generated examinations leaves social studies educators without the time, opportunity or knowledge to guide students to possess a critical perspective of how social and economic institutions function at today's sociohistorical moment, of how power mediates their lived experiences and social relationships, and of how political, economic, and academic leaders configure cultural texts to propagate their interests and worldviews and to stymie oppositional thoughts or movements capable of challenging their privileged positions. We believe our critical examination of the US Victorian World's Fairs provides direction to K-12 schoolteachers and teacher educators, particularly individuals, such as those mentioned above, who are committed to resisting corporate and government mandates to help learners "challenge disciplinary borders, to create a borderland where new hybridized identities might emerge, to take up in a problematic way the relationship between language and experience, and to appropriate

knowledge as part of a broader effort at self- definition and ethical responsibility" (Giroux, 1997, p. 176). It will help them guide our youths to "read the word and the world" and understand the importance of struggling against the globalization of capital.

We now call on other teacher educators and social studies teachers to provide similar critical readings of the past, so that social studies are untangled from perpetuating the status quo and are focused instead on uncovering the policies, practices, and institutions responsible for fueling the social relations responsible for violence, inequity, and oppression. Capitalism has tarnished the history of the United States and is responsible for the irrepressibly bleak state of the contemporary world (McLaren, 2008). Let us prevent it from tarnishing our future.

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