

CHAPTER 1

The Times in Which We Work: The Conservative Restoration

During the last twenty-five to thirty years a resurgence of conservative ideology has swept across our schools and society. This latest “conservative restoration” began within the political realm of society with such events as the signing of civil rights and voting rights laws in 1964, implementation of Richard Nixon’s “southern strategy” that successfully incorporated the Dixiecrats into the Republican Party, the subsequent election of Ronald Reagan, which in turn set the stage for the “dixification” of the U.S. economy and culture (Cummings, 1998), and the election of a fundamentalist Christian president. As leftist, school reformers, we are acutely aware of the impact this conservative resurgence has had (and is having) on the education of our children. As Apple (2001) and others (e.g., Miller, 1995) have discussed, the ramifications of this restoration include (among other things): public-supported vouchers for children going to private schools, high-stakes testing, legislation of curriculum content (i.e., standards), emphasis on drilling and memorization, internal racial segregation through tracking, the deskilling of teachers, and a deepening of “savage inequalities” related to the inequitable resources provided to children of wealthy versus those to impoverished children (Kozol, 1992). During the last dozen years, we have studied and worked with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to minimize the negative consequences of this ideological shift in our society and to promote an alternative orientation to school reform rooted in a tradition of leftist reformism. For the purposes of this book, the reformist left refers to a purposefully broad ideological range of both socio-political and educational ideas that are rooted in American pragmatism¹ within intellectual discourses (e.g., Barber, 1998; Dewey, 1920; Fraser, 1997; Galston, 2002; Menand, 2001; Rawls, 2001; Rorty, 1989, 1998) and progressivism within the British (e.g., Giddens, 2003; Lawson and Sherlock, 2001) and U.S. (e.g., Kloppenberg, 1986; Sklar, 1988; Wiebe, 1967) political discourses. Unlike radical leftists scholars and educators (e.g., Brosio, 2004; McLaren, 2000; Rikowski, 1996; Wood and Foster, 1997) who seek to destroy capitalism, otherize the bourgeoisie, discount the importance of representative democracy,

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and have an unfortunate tendency to blame the United States for nearly every problem in the world today, reform leftists seek to authentically alter the institutions and ideology that we have inherited from our ancestors, to substantively address the numerous “problems of (wo)men” (Dewey, 1946 [1929]) found within the various realms or spheres of our society (e.g., economic, political, media, religious, educational, military), and promote reciprocal and equitable international relationships with other societies that currently exist upon this planet we share. Aronson (1992, p. 38) noted that despite its ideological nuances, reform leftists have been drawn together

around four rubrics: (a) we have sought greater equality and human dignity; (b) we have struggled for expanding and deepening the meanings of democracy; (c) we have been a force for social responsibility and solidarity; and (d) we have sought the expansion of and realization of human rights.

Reform leftists in the United States have been associated with attempts to make our democracy more inclusive, advocate for those who are economically marginalized, foster greater awareness of and respect for all citizens and their diverse ancestral heritages, promote policies of equitable access to traditionally powerful realms of our society (e.g., government, business, media services, religion, education), advocate for the secularization of public life, support the development of a prosperous and ecologically sustainable economy, defend individual rights and privacy, and speak out against colonialism and imperialism. Rorty (1989, p. xv), borrowing from the thinking of Judith Shklar, puts it succinctly where he states that reform leftists “are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we [humans] do.” He goes on to suggest that humiliation is the ultimate cruelty, and notes the importance reform leftists have given to the ideals of universal, human dignity. In particular, reform leftists have been at the forefront of calling attention to and resisting all forms of “otherization” that occur within a given polity.²

Just prior to the conservative restoration, several progressive educational critiques, practices, and policies gained momentum in the United States. During the 1960s and 1970s, books such as *Compulsory Mis-education* (Goodman, 1964), *36 Children* (Kohl, 1967), *Death at an Early Age* (Kozol, 1967), *Crisis in the Classroom* (Silberman, 1970), *How Children Learn* (Holt, 1967), and *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Postman and Weingartner, 1969) among others called attention to the dismal state of intellectual activity, racism, and humiliation found within many of our schools (particularly those located in high poverty areas), and offered ideas to make the education of *all* our children (regardless of their wealth, ancestral heritage, or academic talents) and their teachers more personally meaningful, culturally relevant, politically sensitive, inclusive, and intellectually stimulating.

However, these ideas, concerns, and efforts were significantly curtailed after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. As Berlinger and Biddle (1995)

cogently point out, in spite of the fact that this report was filled with misinformation, inaccurate analyses, and war-like jargon pointed against teachers who had little to do with the most significant failings of schools at the time, it initiated a twenty-plus-year conservative attack on progressive efforts to educate the children of our nation. Although the conservative restoration significantly reversed the public orientation towards the schooling of our children, it has not put the efforts of many leftist educators, scholars, and other cultural workers to a complete halt. How have we, as leftist school reformers, struggled to improve the education of our children in light of this conservative resurgence in our society and schools? How have we worked with individual schools, as well as with groups of teachers, parents, administrators, and others from around the country to resist the ramifications of the now fully established conservative schooling of our children and foster progressive ideas and practices in light of the right's current power in this country?

In response to these questions, this book will present an analytical portrayal of our work at the Harmony Education Center (HEC). HEC was founded in 1990 as a collaboration between Harmony School (Goodman, 1992), an independent school created in 1974 (see chapter 2), and Indiana University. However, prior to describing this center in more detail and analytically exploring its work, we believe it necessary to examine more fully, as the chapter's title suggests, the times in which we work. From our perspective, one of the major weaknesses of progressive citizens in our society is their lack of historical understanding. HEC was created within a particular understanding of the temporal landscape we inherited, and thus an explication of this understanding is valuable to other educators and critics who wish to comprehend "where we are coming from." In response, this chapter will first provide a brief review of the contemporary history from which this conservative restoration emerged during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Second, we utilize a significant variation of Marx's class analysis to provide one way of understanding why this restoration is currently so powerful within the United States. This analysis has furnished us with a useful lens through which we can comprehend the struggles facing leftist school reformers and educational scholars, today and in the future.

THE CONSERVATIVE RESTORATION

Space does not allow for, nor is it necessary to present, a comprehensive review of the conservative ideology, policies, and practices that have swept our country during the last thirty years as others have already explored this phenomenon from several perspectives as it has been manifested within education and other realms of society (e.g., Apple, 2001; Barber, 1998; Blau, 1999; Brock, 2001; MacEwan, 1999; Shor, 1992; Sunstein, 1997; Wallerstein, 1995). Nevertheless,

in order to set the context of our analytical portrayal, it is useful to briefly explore this recent ideological phenomenon. We begin with a review of contemporary history, followed by an examination of the power that lies behind this conservative thinking in the United States, and a review of some of its educational ramifications.

Contemporary Historical Overview

The United States has always been a relatively conservative nation. Its creation at the end of the eighteenth century represented the first effort in the West to establish a nation state solely in the tradition of what was then called European liberalism. As we have previously explored (Goodman, 1992), the United States is a nation deeply rooted in individualism, capitalism, and Christianity. However, as Cummings (1998) noted, throughout most of the twentieth century with the exception of the first conservative restoration that took place during the 1920s, this nation's deeply held commitment to classical liberalism began to erode. It is reasonable to trace this second conservative restoration that began in the latter part of the twentieth century, in part, to the relatively modest successes of this erosion brought about by various progressive campaigns. Throughout the last century, these leftist struggles made significant changes in a wide range of societal realms (e.g., economic, political, educational, media, military) of our country. Many of the benefits that emerged from this leftist agitation are unfortunately, today, taken for granted, which has left them vulnerable to successful attacks in our current socio-political climate. It is important to remember that prior to the twentieth century there was little or no government regulation over business, banking, or monetary activities (e.g., antimonopoly laws, Federal Reserve Board, Securities and Exchange Commission); recognition of or laws protecting labor unions (the vast majority of workers remained impoverished), regulation of weekly work hours (60-hour work weeks were common) or prohibitions of child labor; as well as public support for education; income assistance (e.g., social security, medicaid, medicare, minimum wage laws, welfare) or other forms of income redistribution such as a progressive income tax or estate taxes; not to mention more recent successful struggles for civil and gender rights, rights of personal privacy, freedom of information, and election reforms that modestly (and temporarily) minimize the corrupting influence of money in politics. In general, the twentieth century brought about a significant change in the social, economic, and political thinking of Americans, or what conservatives like to critique as the "era of big government" (Willis, 1999). Although relatively temperate by radical leftist standards, these alterations in the United States have been deeply troubling to conservatives who have, in the last three decades, successfully halted the leftist momentum of the nation. Their determination to regain their lost hegemony was given an unforeseen augmentation

by the radicalization of the left that took place in the United States (and other Western countries) during the 1960s and 1970s.

It is useful to remember that most of the leftist campaigns (e.g., the women's suffrage and liberation movements, the public education movement, the labor and antitrust movements, the civil rights movement, the ecology movement, the health and consumer safety movement, the antiwar movement) in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presented their efforts within a context of the national narrative (e.g., Banaszak, 1996; Buechler, 2000; Fox, 1986; Gourley, 1999; Gottlieb, 2005; Himmelberg, 1994; Katz, 1968; Kessler-Harris, 2001; Le Blanc, 1999; Lichtenstein, 2002; Olson, 2001; Rosen, 2001; Schneirov, 1998; Sklar, 1988; Storrs, 2000). That is, prior to the late 1960s, these leftist movements were, for the most part, advocated within a discourse of improving the state of the union, or as the Constitution states, the promotion of the "general welfare" of the people. Specifically, these movements were generated within a national narrative of making the United States a more democratic, open, inclusive, prosperous, ecological, and socially just society. The goal was to improve upon, rather than destroy, the society as it existed. As several scholars have noted (e.g., Elbaum, 2002; Hook, 1975; Gitlin, 1987; Isserman and Kazin, 2000; Kurlansky, 2004; Rorty, 1998), the 1960s "new left" in the United States became radicalized, sparked by the government's unjustified prosecution of the Vietnam War (Ellsberg, 2002) and the pent-up rage among young African Americans that was released in the inner cities in response to our country's racism. As college students began to re-examine our country's history (e.g., its genocide of American Indians, oppression of both voluntary and involuntary immigrants and women, unjustifiable wars against Mexico and Spain, its active support of neofascist dictatorships in many parts of Latin America and Asia), they became deeply disillusioned, having grown up on myths about the United States being the "land of the free" and champion of the "oppressed and dispossessed." As a result, many on the new left became radicalized, believing that the country was totally corrupt, evil, and beyond repair. From the perspective of these radicalized leftists, notions such as social justice, democracy, emancipation, liberation, and freedom were antithetical to the polity of the United States. Many turned (including, for a time, the author of this book) to Marxist/Leninism choosing to ignore the basic flaws in Marx's analyses of capitalism and the inherent oppression built into his and Lenin's visions of how to bring about and build a "socialist society" (e.g., Avrich, 1970; Burgler, 1990; Courtois et al., 1999; Fernández, 2000; Gouldner, 1979, 1980; Hook, 1975; Hosking, 1985; Kornai, 1992; Leder, 2001; Lovell, 1988; Meredith, 2002; Pipes, 1990, 1995) or blaming these flaws and the embedded oppression of Marxist theory on Stalin (e.g., Dunayevskaya, 1992; Mandel, 1973; Marcuse, 1985[1958]; Trotsky, 1972 [1937]). During these times, it became popular among the new left to believe

that building a humane society would be impossible until capitalism (especially in the United States) was obliterated.³ Radical leftists tried to convince Americans that nearly everything about the United States was deprived of nobility, reeked of greed, and lacked any authentic commitment to the common good. No longer was it enough to reform our country, now it must be destroyed for the benefit of humanity and the environment. As the popularity of radicalism died, many who maintained a commitment to radical leftist political and economic perspectives sought and obtained positions in universities given these institutions' historical commitment to critical inquiry, intellectual study, and open discourse.⁴

Unfortunately, by 1980, the unforeseen consequences of this leftist radicalization were ready to leap upon our country. In particular, this radicalization deeply alienated the electorate in the United States. Like every other polity on earth, the United States has a sordid history and continues to pursue policies that, from a leftist perspective, should cause shame in our collective consciousness. However, the radical left completely discounted that this same nation has, to a certain degree and throughout its history, supported efforts to make life on this planet more democratic, socially just, and equitable. Rorty (1998) notes that modern nation states (i.e., their economic, political, cultural systems) are best viewed as complex, collective subjectivities that reflect a wide range of both humane and inhumane activities, values, ideas, and policies. By focusing only on those aspects of the United States that illuminated the latter, and completely discounting the nation's efforts at the former, the radical left alienated many who might otherwise be sympathetic to our progressive history as a nation (Wolfe, 1998). Most disturbing was the ability of conservative politicians and intellectuals to link the reform-leftist tradition in the United States to the radical leftists of the 1960s and 1970s. Few on the left who were adults then can forget Reagan's success at scorning the term "liberal." While the radical left had already weakened this concept by chiding those who would dare call themselves "liberal" for not being radical enough, Reagan was able to successfully demonize the term and those associated with it. His election paved the way for the eventual ascendancy of conservatives in both houses of Congress, but more importantly, was his success at fundamentally shifting the ideological orientation of the country away from the reform-leftist agenda, not only within politics, but in nearly every sphere of society (e.g., media, business, education, religion).

The conservative restoration represents the popularity of particular values and ideas within the United States (and other nations) that include (among others): an expansion of capitalist, industrial production around the world, the stimulation and utilization of scientific and technological knowledge and products within Western and Pacific Rim nations, an increased distrust in government regulation of business and publicly funded social justice activities

(including education) resulting in a push for budget cuts and privatization of these programs, and an intrusion into the private lives of individuals based upon Christian values. One does not need to be a scholar to recognize the ways in which the restoration of conservative ideas have been manifested within the United States during the last three decades. Perhaps most obvious has been the proliferation of conservative success in state and national elections. Political ideas, policies, and officials that used to be considered “moderate” or “centrist” are now considered “liberal” (e.g., Easton, 2000, Wallerstein, 1995). Other examples of this restoration include: the rise of conservative and fundamentalist, Christian talk radio such as Rush Limbaugh, Oliver North, Gordan Liddy, and Dr. Laura and conservative television networks such as *Fox News* and shows such as *The O’Rielly Factor*, *Hannity and Colmes*, and *Scarborough Country* (Andersen, 1995; Durham and Kellner, 2001), the establishment of numerous well-funded, conservative “think tanks” and institutions such as the Heritage Foundation, John Olin Foundation, Hudson Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Free Congress Foundation (Stefancic and Delgado, 1996), and the public promotion of conservative intellectuals such as Milton Friedman, William Bennett, and Diane Ravich. Although the effort to globalize (modernize) the world economy, telecommunication, and transportation has been in active operation since the end of World War II as a way of preventing wars by intermeshing the world’s economies together, the conservative restoration has successfully pushed (some would charge “forced”) for the adoption in “third world” societies of *laissez-faire* rather than for the carefully regulated (by a democratically elected government) capitalism that proved so successful in post-World War II Europe, the United States, and the Pacific Rim countries (e.g., Ambrose, 1971; Barber, 1995; Friedman, 1999; Korten, 1998; Soros, 2002).

Although the election of Clinton was able to temporarily arrest the conservative restoration and succeeded in putting together a relatively mild reformist agenda (e.g., high employment; modest gains in income; more equitable distribution of wealth, less crime, reduction of racism; greater prosperity; foreign policy based upon internationalist cooperation rather than unilateralism; more support for the social needs of marginalized citizens; celebration of our ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual diversity; and greater inclusivity) palatable to the electorate, the initial “election” (and re-election) of George W. Bush and subsequent focus on national safety from external attacks in light of 9/11 has significantly dampened and has reversed many of Clinton’s modest successes. However, these manifestations of the conservative coalition do not illuminate the source of its power. Although the distribution of power is labyrinthine in highly complex societies such as the United States, it is important for the purposes of understanding the times in which we work to briefly explore the unique congregation that serves the engine behind this resurgence of conservative ideas, policies, and practices.

THE CONSERVATIVE COALITION: A NEO-CLASS ANALYSIS

As previously mentioned, to gain an understanding of the power behind the conservative restoration we utilize a substantively altered notion of class analysis. Although certainly not the only lens one can use to gain insight into the power dynamics of a given society, it does offer a particularly compelling way to think about this phenomenon. However, due to the liberties we have taken with Marx's analysis, it is necessary to articulate our departure from its common conceptualization.

Economic Structuralism

Our first point of departure from Marx's understanding of the way power is distributed in modern society concerns his assertion that power is based upon a society's economic structure. In light of history, it seems clear that Marx was mistaken (reductionist) in his contention that all other aspects of society such as the political and legal systems, education, the media, popular entertainment, the arts, and religion are merely epiphenomenal to its economic "base." Both contemporary Marxists and reform leftists assume that the structure of modern society and thus the distribution of power within it is more complex than advocated in Marx's *Das Kapital* (e.g., Bell, 1973; Gramsci, 1971; Habermas, 1975; Jay, 1973). However, some Marxists (e.g., Althusser, 1972; Aronowitz, 1992; Cohen, 1995) and Marxist educational scholars (e.g., Allman, 2001; Brosio, 2004, McLaren, 2000; Rikowski, 1996) have held on to a milder form of economic determinism referred to as "relative economic autonomy." Although economic structure is not viewed as omnipotent, it is considered, in nearly every case, to be the most powerful societal force "in the last instance" or "in the final analysis" (Hunt, 1992, p. 52). In our analysis, the economic realm is a significant center of power in all known cultures; however, the economy is only one of several societal realms (e.g., political, media, religious, education, legal) among which power is dispersed and manifested. After all, in theocracies such as the one that currently exists in Iran, the economic realm of society, while powerful, is subservient to the religious sphere in this country. In modern, capitalist societies with a functioning liberal democracy such as the United States, Japan, Australia, Taiwan, South Korea, and Western Europe, these different realms (and the people who work primarily within them) compete with each other for dominance over the culture as a whole.

Most importantly, the structures within a given society and power that is invested in each of them are dynamic, not static. From our perspective, there is no ultimate, architectonic foundation to society through which power is manifested. Depending upon unique, contingent events, and as a society

becomes more densely populated and complex, the relative power located within its various structural spheres change. For example, the most powerful spheres in Europe during the early Middle Ages were the family/military and the religious realms of society (e.g., Duby, 1968, 1980; Hay, 2001; Huizinga, 1967). Individuals obtained power based more on their familial heritage or “station in life” than on their wealth. Most family domains were self-contained. There was no separate realm of society called a government, as these functions were assumed under the responsibilities of the family (i.e., the court). In addition, there was little commerce outside of small towns and villages. Each family estate was largely self-sufficient and determined its own economic rituals, regulations, and currency. As a result, those who lived outside these family estates (e.g., independent craftsmen, merchants, traders) often had less power than aristocrats. Similarly, the educational realm had little autonomous influence in feudal Europe. Prior to the printing press and the production of cheap rag paper, the distribution of knowledge was extremely limited, and children were taught by their family or the clergy, and scholarship in the early Middle Ages was confined to monasteries.

However, by the mid-twentieth century, the structural realms through which power was exerted in Europe had changed dramatically. By this time, the political, economic, and media spheres of society had become more powerful (e.g., Habermas, 1975; Merriman, 1996; Palmer, 1965). The religious and military spheres still exerted significant influence over society as a whole, but much less than during the early Middle Ages. Education, as a sphere of society that emerged with the formation of universities in the thirteenth century and then the Enlightenment, has continued to gain power during the last four centuries (Haskins, 1972 [1923]), and the family estates have receded from public power in modern European nation states. As a realm of society gains power, it increasingly becomes a site for contestation and struggle to dominate the discourse (Foucault, 1970; Gee, 1990) within it, which in turn influences the national narrative or what Foucault (1970) would call a culture’s “regimes of truth.”

From a reformist perspective, perhaps the most important alteration in the balance of power has been the emergence and increased power of an imperfect, democratically controlled political realm in Western cultures (e.g., Gilbert and Gilbert, 1989; Willis, 1999). It is important to remember that during the early Middle Ages, the government was predominantly a tool for the aristocracy and the church. After the Enlightenment and with the rise of liberalism, the political sphere began to represent the interests of the bourgeoisie and the emerging intellectual and intelligentsia classes. In the United States, it was not until the twentieth century that the political realm of society started to become more accessible to the interests of the urban working class and other previously marginalized and otherized groups (e.g., women, Jewish, African, Asian, Latino Americans). The emergence of a political

sphere that is accessible to diverse interests, and the government's new power to directly influence and regulate (although not control) the economic sphere of society for the benefit of its citizens has been a significant struggle throughout the twentieth century.

As Habermas (1975) noted, these realms of society are deeply intertwined. Each realm of society significantly influences the others to various degrees depending upon the social phenomena in question. With this understanding, it is possible to view, for example, Leninism as the consolidation of societal power into the political realm of society. Lenin established a political system that eventually controlled all other realms (e.g., the media, education, recreation, religion, military) of the Soviet society. In functioning liberal democratic societies, the political realm has limitations on its power (e.g., freedom of speech and association, separation of church and state), but can potentially exert significant influence over the economic (e.g., work safety, minimum wage, disclosure of information, over-time laws) and other realms (e.g., education, media) of society (Zakaria, 2003). Although from a reformist perspective, the right of a democratically elected political realm to directly influence the other spheres of society is central for the promotion of social justice and economic fairness (e.g., Barber, 1998; Fraser, 1997; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1989; Rorty, 1998), it also embraces the concept that this political realm should not become all powerful. Ideally, no single sphere of society should completely dominate the others.

The structural basis for the distribution of power within the United States is fluid. It shifts and moves in and out of different realms of society that are constantly gaining and losing power relative to the other spheres at various times and over specific phenomena. Currently, schools are under mounting pressure from the political realm of society, as state and federal legislators assume greater control over the curriculum, nature of instruction, and assessment of children's learning through the establishment of official "standards" (i.e., areas of content and skill development) and high-stakes testing. As we discuss below, the political realm is, in turn, greatly influenced by the economic and religious realms of society. As educational reformers and scholars, we obviously devote most of our energies working within the educational sphere of society, but in order to adequately respond to the challenges facing teachers, administrators, students, and their families, it is necessary to understand that schools do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in a complex web of structural interconnections.

Class and Class Struggle

In addition to moving away from Marx's economic determinism, we have also taken liberties with his conceptualization of class and class struggle. As Gouldner (1979) insightfully noted, Marx's analysis of class struggle was rooted in an inaccurate economic dualism.

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another. . . . Our epoch . . . has simplified the class antagonisms . . . into two great hostile camps . . . : [the] Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (Marx and Engels, 1977 [1848], p. 222)

However, according to Gouldner and others (e.g., Lachmann, 2000), throughout western history, the primary struggle between classes has not been between the weak and the strong (e.g., serfs against aristocracy), but between the two most powerful classes at the time (e.g., clergy vs. the aristocracy during the early Middle Ages, the bourgeoisie vs. the aristocracy at the end of the Middle Ages; the intellectuals and intelligentsia vs. bourgeoisie during modernism).

In addition, economic class interests have never been uniform. As Bernstein, Engels' protégé, noted by the turn of the last century, "The bourgeoisie is a highly complex class which is composed of a large number of strata with very divergent . . . interests" (quoted in Gay, 1979 [1952], p. 216). As will be discussed later in this chapter, several individuals within the English bourgeoisie and intellectual classes joined industrial workers in their advocacy to establish unions and collective bargaining rights, create a progressive tax system, redistribute wealth to fund government programs aimed at alleviating the cruel working conditions of early industrial capitalism, and revise capitalism in ways to produce wealthier middle and working classes (e.g., Hobson, 1900, 1920; Webb, 1901). Equally divergent interests could (and can) be found among intellectuals, intelligentsia, industrial workers, farmers, and even the aristocracy that still exists in some regions of the world.

Nor can class interest be scientifically determined as Marx originally implied. Even today, several contemporary Marxist scholars articulate what is in the "interest" of the working class (and by extension the vast majority of people in society) that is highly debatable (Gouldner, 1979). For example, ecological considerations of producing paper goods might be in the long-term interests of workers in paper mills (living with clean air and water), but against their short-term interests (losing jobs due to changes in the way paper is produced). In some cases, international trade is "good" for some and "bad" for other members of the working class. War serves the interests of some capitalists and is contradictory to the interests of other capitalists. Most importantly, people, as individuals or as members of a particular class, act upon what they perceive as their common interests, not on what can supposedly be scientifically determined as in their interest. The notion that if the working class, at a given moment, is not acting in accordance to what Marx viewed as in their interest and that they are thus victims of "false consciousness" is particularly anathema to reform leftists who question the wisdom of anyone, including intellectuals, identifying the public interests for other classes or individuals.

Most important, for the purposes of this book, is the perspective that class should be liberated from its economic roots. Rather than viewing class as emerging directly from the economic structure of a society, we have found it more useful to understand it as a form of collective identity that may emerge from either proprietary or nonproprietary public interests. While Marx argued that one's class (as a form of collective identity) was determined by his/her occupation, from a reform-leftist perspective, people have historically formed themselves into classes (i.e., collective public identities) based not only upon economic interests, but also on interests rooted in, for example, ethnic and geographical origins, religious beliefs, language, age, gender, and most recently, sexual orientation.⁵ Understanding class as a manifestation of collective identity is especially relevant in nation states that have taken steps since World War II to legitimize the existence of diverse group identities.

As people who share a given collective public identity become aware of their common concerns, they form organizations (e.g., labor unions and interest groups such as the AFL-CIO, NOW, AARP, Christian Coalition, NAACP) and coalitions (e.g., political parties, political action committees) to promote their "discourse" (e.g., Foucault, 1970; Gee, 1990) and struggle over public life within any one or all of the previously discussed realms of society.

The manifestation of power is made more complex in diverse societies because individuals often are members of several (and at times competing) classes. An elderly African American, retired business woman might identify herself as belonging to any number of classes, including senior citizens, Christians, Blacks, women, and the bourgeoisie. Her ideology and public support for various policies and projects would likely depend upon this complex web of class identities (e.g., Maalouf, 2001; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Wolfe, 1998; Zou and Trueba, 1998, Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1991, 1998). As we enter the next century, there is little doubt that new classes will emerge and exert their influence on society. For example, marriages between people from different ancestral heritages is commonplace in the United States now, and these unions are producing offspring that within a few generations will no doubt result in the emergence of new collective identities. Although the bourgeoisie has remained the most powerful class in the United States during its 200-year history, the influence of other classes, such as intellectuals and intelligentsia, women, industrial workers, the elderly, Asians, African Americans, and Latinos can easily be recognized especially since the end of World War II. There is always a class within any given society that will, at any given point in history, have more power than other classes. For example, as previously indicated, in Iran the most powerful class is the clergy while in the twentieth-century Marxist experiments, the individuals with the most power were members of the intellectual and intelligentsia classes (e.g., Gouldner, 1979; Konrád and Szelenyi, 1979; Kornai, 1992). Finally, history clearly indicates that the power (or even the existence) of any given class will not automatically continue indefinitely.

Most importantly, reform leftists do not view any one class as having an inherently moral positionality over other classes. Neither the industrial working class, intellectuals, nor the bourgeoisie are intrinsically more ethical, insightful, or beneficial for a given society than any other class. Reform leftists reject the notion that a particular class is innately evil and thus entitled to be otherized. In particular, although reform leftists often are at odds with the desires of and thus struggle against the bourgeoisie, they also recognize their fundamental value to society as a whole. In particular, reform leftists often support the interests of the petty bourgeoisie while they are ever watchful and often critical of large corporations due to the influence they wield in many spheres of society (Schumacher, 1973).⁶ However, we strongly agree with Marx's view that differences between classes do not reflect legitimate relations of superiority or inferiority among the individuals who, for whatever reason, find themselves in one aggregate versus another. All occupations in a given society are important and should provide those who work full time (even if unskilled), in societies that have solved the problem of scarcity, with a prosperous livelihood;⁷ all people who live in a given society should have the same civil and political rights, and all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity. From a reformist perspective, no one should assume that because they have more wealth, are of a specific gender, or have a particular ancestral heritage, that they are "better" human beings than those who have less property or a different gender or heritage. As a result, reform leftists often speak out against racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty, and other forms of human oppression.

However, because classes do not possess, at any given time, equal power within a given polity, it is crucial for leftists to understand the importance of coalition-building in struggles for social justice within various realms of society, and for the continued reform of democratic rituals and structures to broaden the participation of marginalized citizens. History teaches reformers that when classes join together to form political parties, generate social movements and campaigns, and push for and support social litigation, they have often been successful (Buechler, 2000). However, it is crucial to remember that these coalitions are not forever bound together. For example, during the past century, intellectuals and the proletariat in the United States have often worked together; however, they split over this country's pursuit of the Vietnam War (Gitlin, 1993; Isserman and Kazin, 2000; Rorty, 1998), the women's movement (e.g., Kessler-Harris, 2001; Rosen, 2001, Staggenborg, 1998), and the ecology movement (Gouldner, 1979; Gottlieb, 2005). Even today, as Bush's proposal to drill for oil in Alaska demonstrates, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie at times form a coalition against intellectuals, the intelligentsia, and women to promote economic development over ecological conservation.

Perhaps our most significant divergence from Marx's conceptualization of class analysis lies in his proposition that the abolishment of capitalism would

result in the demise of classes and the end of class struggle. While on the surface Marx's notion of a classless society appears noble—even utopian—as Gouldner (1979, 1980) indicates, in reality it represents potential nightmare. Specifically, what does this universal class do with those individuals who do not, for whatever reason, identify with it? A social theory that advocates for the end of classes and class conflict is potentially treacherous in that it provides a moral justification to squelch opposition since, in the ideal society, there should be no class antagonisms. If there is only one legitimate class in society, then anyone who disagrees with those who claim to represent this all-inclusive class (and who have the power to defend this representation) can easily be otherized as outlaws, rather than people who merely have different perspectives or collective identities. The freedom for an individual to select or create his/her own collective identity, and the existence of a *public* and peaceful struggle between classes are essential aspects of a democratic society, and should, therefore, never come to an end. Now that the notion of class has been clarified for the purposes of this chapter, we turn our attention to the current right-wing coalition that has dominated the educational policy debate in the United States for the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The Conservative Coalition

The coalition behind the conservative restoration consists primarily of four traditionally powerful classes of people in our society: the bourgeoisie, the technical intelligentsia, fundamentalist Christians, and Euro-American males. On the surface, it is easy to see why this restoration has been so successful. The interests of these classes not only reflect deep historical U.S. traditions (e.g., capitalism, Christianity, individualism, science, and technology), but they also represent the two wealthiest classes in America, and thus have had ample funds to promote their agenda.

The dominant, educational discourse in the United States continues to be driven, as it has throughout most of its history, by market forces. As Apple (1996, 2001) and others (e.g., Barber, 1992; Giroux, 1999) have noted, the most powerful class within the conservative coalition (and the country, at large), the bourgeoisie, has successfully framed the educational discourse during most of the twentieth century within an economic context. Throughout western history, the goal of the bourgeoisie has been to create conditions favorable for doing business. The primary concern of this class has always been the generation and accumulation of wealth. In addition, the bourgeoisie has an individualistic orientation towards wealth entitlement. Most members of this class believe that they are entitled to the wealth they acquire during their lives, and all attempts to redistribute this wealth is a form of oppression. This stance is often justified in their belief in a meritocracy. Rather than viewing their accumulation of wealth as the result of a complex web of arbitrary and contin-

gent circumstances,⁸ they believe it is due to their individual or familial efforts and talents. For example, as we have discussed elsewhere, during the first half of the twentieth century, members of the bourgeoisie argued that their place of power and privilege in society was an example of Darwin's theory of evolution (Goodman, 1992). These individuals argued that their power and wealth indicated their natural superiority over others, and thus represented an evolution of the species (a concept known as Social Darwinism). By having the strongest (best businessmen) dominate over the "less-worthy" members of society, the species as a whole will more likely evolve towards perfection.

As one might suspect, since the advent of public schooling in the United States, the bourgeoisie have argued that schools should operate as a business. Rather than build more school houses, as public education spread, their architecture and operations resembled those found in industrial factories rather than homes. Rather than focusing most of our attention on the welfare and unique talents of children as individuals and members of a community, the bourgeoisie consistently advocated that our primary concern be with the *products* of education (e.g., technical skills, academic content), efficiency of operations, and accountability that the money spent on the education of children is not wasted. The results of this influence can easily be witnessed by spending just a few hours in most public classrooms (e.g., Apple, 1986; Duffy et al., 1987; Goodman, 1988). In response, during the last three decades, many school districts have adopted prepackaged instructional programs as the basis for the classroom curriculum. These programs are specifically designed to raise pupils' scores on state and/or national standardized tests, and they come complete with specified objectives (i.e., content), step-by-step instructional procedures (dominated by workbooks and drills), and quantitative exams to measure exactly what pupils learn. Instead of establishing relevant and meaningful curricular goals, identifying intellectually stimulating topics of study, and designing thoughtful learning experiences based on an intimate knowledge of their own and their pupils' interests and talents, teachers have been relegated to a managerial rather than educative role. In the vast majority of schools, teachers' work resembles that of shop floor managers who coordinate the day's work (schedule time for each subject, organize children into ability groups, assign seat work, maintain paperwork on students' completed assignments, administer programmatic tests, and discipline pupils to keep them on task when necessary), rather than intellectually engaging children about the world in which they live and will inherit. Getting the children through these programs on time in a smooth, quiet, and orderly fashion has become the main criterion upon which teachers are evaluated. As Zeichner (1986, p. 88) noted more than fifteen years ago,

[N]umerous analyses, conducted from a variety of ideological and political perspectives, have concluded that the effect of many of the recent policies

affecting teachers has been to promote greater external control over the content, processes, and outcomes of teachers' work and to encourage teachers to adopt conformist orientations to self and society as well as technical orientations to the role of teacher.

One does not need to be a scholar of labor studies to see that schools have, during the last century, adopted an industrial organizational structure found in corporate business. From this perspective, principals are building executives, responsible for the physical plant and staff; teachers are shop floor managers who oversee the activities of students; and students are assembly-line workers who must keep up with the work schedule. Under recent legislation passed by the Bush administration, scores on standardized, high-stakes tests are now the school's "product." If a school cannot produce this product in a cost effective manner, then it is threatened with sanctions just as an inefficiently run business suffers consequences when it doesn't perform.

As Solo's (2000) analysis of several economies during the twentieth century indicates, wealth is most successfully created as a result of the symbiotic relationship between markets (which produce funds for research and marketing) and technological development (i.e., the application of scientific information for improving the everyday material condition of humans). For example, the last two decades have been similar to what transpired during the 1920s with the electrification of the country, the development of the telephone, and the expanded use of automobiles and trucks (e.g., Ling, 1992; Nye, 1990; Potter, 1974). Technological advancements in communications and transportation have significantly altered the type, quantity, and manner in which products and services are produced, delivered, and consumed in the United States. Just as electrical production required workers to obtain more education and skills, the products and services being developed within this technologically advanced environment require significantly more education than was the case with older types of industrial production.

As a result, members of the bourgeoisie have advocated for specifically defining and raising academic skills (e.g., written and oral expression, reading comprehension, basic reasoning and logic, ability to locate and compile information, math computation) prior to graduating high school and for greater accountability (through standardized testing) to ensure these graduates can perform these utilitarian tasks (e.g., Allington, 2002). Although their calls for improved education are now situated in a universal context such as President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation, given the conservative policy recommendations and lack of funding for improving public schools, their concerns are rarely geared towards those children who are most marginalized in our society. (After all, their primary concern is with having a significant number of workers, rather than the population as a whole, who are educated to be members of the technical intelligentsia.) Having a pool of

poorly educated individuals in society is not particularly worrisome to this class, given the need for low-skilled, poorly paid service jobs that also make the U.S. economy work.

This agenda, they claim, is necessary in order to maintain our country's prosperity in light of the increasingly interconnected and competitive global market place. Young people who do not have access to quality education, a history of well-educated family members, or wealth to pay for tutors, as well as those who are not academically inclined or talented, or who do not have command of the current dialect of power (i.e., TV English) suffer greatly as a result of the sorting that takes place due to this accountability agenda (Spring, 1989). In addition, many individuals within the bourgeoisie have traditionally viewed government involvement in people's lives, such as the education of children and other government-sponsored programs and policies (e.g., economic opportunities for marginalized classes, progressive tax system), as antithetical to individual freedom and liberty, and thus have championed calls to minimize public support for those children who lack access to quality schools and support calls to fund education through vouchers; thus privatizing the schooling of children.⁹

Another powerful class in the conservative coalition is the intelligentsia. As Gouldner (1979) notes, this class is made up of people who have obtained a post-secondary education and utilize the current cultural capital in performance of their occupations. Many of these occupations are in the relatively well-paid service sector of the economy such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, nurses, accountants, therapists, politicians, government bureaucrats, and clergy. Of course, many members of the intelligentsia work in industry. Today, nearly all managers, sales personnel, and technicians who work in business are members of the intelligentsia rather than the industrial "working class" (individuals without post-high-school education and who work primarily with their hands in the manufacturing of products). In fact, as Galbraith (1987) and Gouldner (1979) note, even the top managers of corporations are often members of the intelligentsia rather than the bourgeoisie class. In fact, with the exception of the petty bourgeoisie, this class, which was so public in the nineteenth century (Himmelberg, 1994), is difficult to identify in today's corporate structure (Garten, 2001). Rarely is there a single individual who owns and runs his/her own large corporation. Today, most CEOs are employees of a corporation who are professionally educated and trained for these responsibilities. They are hired and fired by a board of directors who own significant amounts of stock in the corporation. One could argue that the greatest beneficiaries of the conservative restoration has been the intelligentsia. This is perhaps obvious in an economy based, not upon muscle power or the amount of land one owns, but rather upon the ability to acquire and utilize knowledge. An economy that is based (especially its growth) upon scientific and technological developments will naturally reward those who are talented in these

domains. For example, the significant rise in income inequality that began in the 1970s and has continued until today (with a brief closing of the gap during the Clinton administration) is due primarily to the increased wages given to members of the intelligentsia who work in corporate culture. Since the emergence of the “post-industrial” service economy in the United States (Bell, 1973), there has been an increased demand for individuals who have obtained and who can utilize the current and evolving cultural capital. As a result, many (especially young adults) within intelligentsia have been strongly supportive of the previously mentioned conservative economic, political, and most importantly, educational policies, and their membership in the conservative coalition has been central to its exercise of power.

The third class in this coalition is composed of various sects of fundamentalist Christians in our society, or what some refer to as the “Christian Right.” Although the most recent class to join the conservative coalition, they represent its most ardent, grassroots activists. Unlike the bourgeoisie or the intelligentsia, the public interests of this class are not primarily economic. At a time when other religious fundamentalists around the world are attacking the United States as a symbol of decadent excess, the Christian Right in this country has accepted much of what modernism has to offer a society, namely, its consumerism and prosperity. However, they are highly critical of what they view as the “crassness” of modern society. Their concerns are focused chiefly upon what they perceive as the moral degradation of the United States due to the influence of secularism, humanism, feminism, homosexuality, science, immigration, and unfettered access to a wide range of information (especially anything associated with sex outside of heterosexual marriage). They want a nation (and one suspects the world) based upon a fundamentalist interpretation of Western, Judeo-Christian traditions (Hunter, 1991). As Buchanan (2002) demonstrates, this class is particularly concerned about the undermining of the Euro-American identity as the standard of what it means to be a citizen of this country and institutions which they argue should be based solely upon this particular ancestral heritage. If government is to play a role in the lives of its citizens, it should be used to promote these traditions, and to discourage the legitimization of contrary narratives, images, rituals, myths, values, and/or beliefs.

Within the educational realm of society, this class strongly supports an agenda to control the scientific and social content of our children’s curriculum. For example, they have proposed (and in a few places successfully passed) laws that would either bar the teaching of evolution or present “creation science” or “intelligent design” as a theory of equal validity (e.g., Binder, 2002; Fraser, 1999). This class has also been deeply involved in struggles over what is taught in our history courses given the importance this subject has in forming our collective national identity (e.g., Nash et al., 1997; Symcox, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002). They are especially concerned about “multicultural education” in

which children are encouraged to respect and even celebrate the diverse ancestral heritages of our people (Sleeter and Grant, 1999) and bilingual education (Crawford, 1991, 2000) which they see as a direct threat to children who should assimilate the dominant, northern European cultural influence on our society. They have been vocal supporters of the previously mentioned “skills-based” curriculum due to their desire to keep what they perceive as “humanistic values” from being taught in public schools. Their support for vouchers is rooted in their desire to have their tax dollars support religious schools, which they believe are more likely to teach “American” (i.e., conservative) ideas and values (Doerr, 1996).

The final class within this coalition is made up of people that many fail to see as a class with particular public interests. This class consists of males who identify themselves with the Euro-American heritage in the United States. This class has felt “under attack” throughout most of the second half of the twentieth century. The gains in political, social, and economic power of women and people of color during the last five decades has often been viewed by many Euro-American males as “at their expense” (Zou and Trueba, 1998). Prior to this time period, the privileges enjoyed by Euro-American males were taken for granted by nearly everyone. Although still dominant, it was not too long ago that this class had exclusive access to the most powerful realms of society, namely, business, government, and the media (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1991, 1998). As a result, they resent the access that other classes have won to these societal spheres. They are particularly threatened by efforts to alter the traditional identity of what it means to be an American, which has historically been based upon mythic images of individuals like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton. As one of their most outspoken advocates notes (Buchanan, 2002), until recently, all immigrants who came to the United States were strongly encouraged to assimilate themselves into this Euro-American tradition and identity. To become American, from this perspective, is to adopt (as much as possible) the appearance, characteristics, values, traditions, ideals, knowledge, and mannerisms associated with having an ancestral heritage rooted in the male dominated history of northwestern Europe. Those who had difficulty doing so, such as people of color or women, were simply expected to “get by” the best they could.

Similar to evangelical Christians, this class is primarily interested in the content of our children’s social curriculum. They fear the evolution of an American identity that reflects the authentic cultural and gender diversity of its citizenry (Lynch, 2002). To this class, notions of an America that has incorporated and benefitted greatly from the ways in which this nation is Native American, Asian, African, Latin, and female (except as supporters of their men) is anathema to their conception of what has made this country “great.” They desire a curriculum that encourages children from various ancestral heritages (and genders) to recognize the unique and overwhelmingly valuable contribution to this

country that has come directly from the patriarchal, Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition in Europe (e.g., our Founding Fathers).

One does not have to be a sociologist to recognize the power of these classes in our society. Their public interests have extremely deep roots in the history of the United States. Capitalism, Christianity, patriarchy, European Puritanism, individualism, and a suspicion of government have, among large numbers of our population, been sacrosanct in the United States. Given the make-up of this coalition and the similarity of their values to the deeply rooted, dominant heritage of America, we should not be surprised at the success of their agenda. The power of this coalition makes working for the progressive education of our nation's children more difficult than perhaps at most other times in our history. However, the idea that this coalition is "all powerful" is a myth we should strongly contest.

Unfortunately, many leftist academics fail to see that there is a coalition of classes that oppose much of the conservative resurgence (e.g., Apple, 2001; Giroux, 1999; McLaren, 2000). This coalition is composed of many intellectuals (e.g., professors, scholars, artists) who, in the West, have a long history of advocating for the "universal good" and for public decisions to be made based upon the intelligent generation and deliberation of information; many individuals within the intelligentsia (particularly lawyers, political activists, journalists, educators, nurses, entertainers) who believe power and influence should rest in the hands of those who utilize academic and artistic knowledge in everyday life; unionized industrial and low-wage workers who want decisions based upon employment security and job opportunities; the majority of African, Jewish, non-Cuban Latino, Asian American, and women who have over the last several decades seen the benefits that come from a society that legitimates and honors the cultural diversity and peoples of our population; and even a few members of the bourgeoisie (e.g., Soros, 2002) who recognize that it is in their long term, economic self-interest to have a more democratic and socially just society.

While opposing much of the conservative agenda, this coalition is considerably weaker due, in part, to its lack of relative wealth and ardor. Unfortunately, many within this opposing coalition have failed to resist significant parts of the conservative educational agenda. For example, many members of these classes are supportive of efforts to define and raise academic standards since they recognize the material and political benefits that can be found in societies with a well-educated work force and citizenry, and have only just begun to question the use of high-stakes testing and standards as the best way to improve the education of our children. Adding to their support for the conservative educational agenda is the failure of leftist educators to articulate and/or obtain a public forum in which to express a compelling, alternative vision of schooling based upon a noneconomic (e.g., democratic, existential) rationale.¹⁰

As school reformers, we work primarily with members of the intelligentsia (e.g., teachers, administrators, school support staff). Unfortunately, these members of the intelligentsia are not particularly powerful. First, the educational sphere (in which we all work) is not nearly as powerful as the political, economic, or media realms of society. Second, many of these individuals do not have a long history of being members of the intelligentsia. In most cases, the parents of the teachers and administrators with whom we work were (are) members of the working class. In addition, due to the fact that the education of children is viewed as “women’s work,” educators are not afforded the same respect and stature as members of the intelligentsia who work in industry or government (Apple, 1986). Third, we also work closely with two classes of people who have virtually no power in our society, namely, poor children and their parents. Although we have worked with and tried to influence the thinking of politicians, business people, and those in the media, the resources we have to do this type of work has been extremely limited. Given the lack of power these classes have relative to the other classes mentioned in this chapter, some may ask, “why bother?” However, it would be a mistake to assume that alterations in a complex society must flow from the top down. To the contrary, it has been our experience (as discussed in chapters 3–6) that, while difficult, much can be accomplished at the “grassroots” level.

CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS ON CHAPTER 1

This chapter has examined the socio-political context in which progressive educators are currently working. It is not a particularly supportive environment. The public discourse on education and recent government policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act can undermine our spirits and encourage us to retreat into our private thoughts. However, it is crucial that we do not become overly discouraged. As we look throughout history, we find it filled with dark times only to be followed by new breakthroughs and progressive leaps. In spite of the conservative nature of our society, there are many educators who are not giving up, and who are determined to provide more meaningful and socially responsible schooling for our children. These individuals are resolved to collaborate, and through this collaboration, deepen the education of their students in spite of the current atmosphere of mistrust and fear that has been generated by the previously discussed conservative coalition of classes in our country.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, our own efforts to foster the education of children based upon values of democracy, social justice, and existential meaning have taken place primarily among those who actually work in school buildings (e.g., teachers, administrators, parents, students, support staff). Although we have, on occasion, entered into both the political and

public spheres of society (e.g., speaking at legislative committee hearings, lobbying for legislation, organizing public forums, writing for professional and public magazines), our paramount efforts have been focused on the occupational discourse that occurs among those who work in and send their children to schools.¹¹

This book represents an attempt to portray our work, and in light of this portrayal, raise several issues that have emerged as a result of our efforts. The purpose of this book is to contribute to the current progressive, educational discourse on school reform that is occurring throughout the United States in spite of conservative efforts to denounce and misrepresent its historical and current efforts (e.g., Ravitch, 2000). Toward this goal, in the next chapter, we explore the origins and ideological foundation of the Harmony Education Center and describe the steps we took in generating the topics discussed within this book. Chapters 3 and 4 illuminate our efforts to alter the culture of several individual schools in an attempt to make them more democratic and, once established, use these democratic rituals, values, and governance structure to stimulate progressive curricular and pedagogical reforms. Chapter 5 examines the substance of the deliberations that emerged from our work with the previously mentioned schools in the context of the current conservative educational agenda. The final chapter provides a commentary on our ongoing struggles to work toward the progressive reforming of schools in an increasingly conservative United States.