



How higher education has been weaponized in the age of Trump — and how it can be redeemed

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Trump and the far right have tried to destroy higher education, because it's a zone of democracy and real hope.

Donald Trump's ascendancy in American politics has made visible a plague of deep seated civic illiteracy, a corrupt political system, and a contempt for reason that has been decades in the making. It also points to the withering of civic attachments, the undoing of civic culture, the decline of public life, and the erosion of any sense of shared citizenship.

Galvanizing his base of true believers in post-election demonstrations, Trump has transformed politics of bigotry and hate into a spectacle of fear, divisions, and disinformation. Under President Trump, the scourge of mid-20th century authoritarianism has returned not only in the menacing plague of populist rallies, fear-mongering, hate, and humiliation, but also in an emboldened culture of war, militarization and violence that looms over society like a rising storm.

Under the Trump regime, higher education is under siege. Its oft-stated purpose to produce the civic foundations and literacies necessary to support critical thinking, expand the radical imagination and nurture individual and social agency has been abandoned. For Trump and other political reactionaries, universities are objects of disdain. They have been removed from a vision that highlights the role of education might play not only in a democracy but also at a historical moment in which right-wing and neo-fascist movements are gaining power in alarming fashion. At the same time, a growing crisis in higher education is expanding across the globe. It increasingly echoes H.G. Wells' remark in 1920 that "History is becoming more and more a race between education and catastrophe." Wells' comment is particularly prescient as apocalyptic forms of populism gain in strength in the United States and a number of other countries.

In the current political administration, education is used to abet rather than challenge an ever-deepening ignorance and blind loyalty that newly defines community, if not leadership and governance. Rather than being ashamed of this plunge into the haze of misrepresentation and illiteracy, the Trump administration parades it as a mark of strength and assurance, using it as a weapon to make oppressive power invisible and unassailable. After all, those who rely on arguments and evidence are critically suspect and apostles of "fake news"!

Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again," translates not only into "Make America White Again," but also points to the need to normalize ignorance and white supremacist beliefs. Pressed

into the service of violence, language in this administration is vomited up in waves of hate, racism, insults and cruelty. This language was on full display when Trump partially shut down the government for 35 days in order to get funding for a wall that is less about security, as he claims, than a state-sanctioned endorsement of ultra-nationalism and the long legacy of white supremacy.

In order to get around the will of Congress and fund his wall, Trump has since issued a National Emergency Declaration, which amounts to a gift to his white supremacist followers, and paves the way for a sweeping authoritarianism. Executive authority in this case dovetails Trump's growing legacy of lawlessness and abuse of power. Mark Bray is right in stating that Trump's actions "ought to be resisted as if it were a [further] slide into ... authoritarianism"

Trump's brand of authoritarianism has emerged at a time when there is an overabundance of information, coupled with the rise of new digital and visual media whose cognitive models reinforce the assumption that reality be echoed rather than interrogated and critically comprehended. Language has collapsed into mere utility, a lifeless metric and a market-driven "machinery of social death." Reality TV and celebrity culture are the new models of popular education and mass communication, which when coupled with a society addicted to speed, overstimulation and unchecked self-interest create a powerful mode of public pedagogy that blurs the line between reality and entertainment, fact and fiction, good and evil, pleasure and sadism.

The power of language is now measured against its ability to move crowds, vanquish thought, fuel hatred and flee into a "twittering cacophony of one-liners and promotional announcements." This is the language of intolerance and walls, toxic impulses, and amplifying rather than solving crucial social problems. It is a language in which "words cannot wait for thoughts" and as such the crucial relationship between education and the formation of critical agents is undermined.

This is not only a formula for the death of those public spheres that make a democracy possible; it is also a condition for the growth of authoritarianism. Hannah Arendt was right in insisting that the loss of historical memory and the rise of thoughtlessness is fundamental to the politics of demagogues and totalitarian societies. In the current historical moment, memory has no place in the dark cave of civic depravity. This is a space where freedom in the service of justice is abandoned in an educational ecosystem where nothing is true. The basis for criticizing power, if not evil itself, collapses under the weight of a media spectacle that accompanies presidential bomb-throwing tweets, endless diversions and high-level stretches of newspeak blather.

Under the Trump administration, the role of education in cultivating a critical citizenry capable of participating in and shaping a democratic society is being undermined, if not lost. Lost also is an educational vision that takes people beyond the world of common sense, functions as a form of provocation, teaches them to be creative, exposes individuals to a variety of great traditions, embraces the arts, and creates the pedagogical conditions for individuals to expand the range of human possibilities. Under the influence of corporate power and a growing authoritarianism in the United States, education in multiple informal and formal platforms operates increasingly in the service of lies, racism, unchecked market values and a full-fledged assault on critical consciousness and public values.

Moreover, higher education is now dominated by a neoliberal discourse that removes it from its role as a democratic public sphere. Instead, it has become a financial investment and another workstation whose goal “is to insure that young people and society generally, can compete in a global economy.” Under such circumstances, education becomes "vocalized," democracy is cast as the enemy of freedom, and politics turns dark.

These anti-democratic tendencies are evident in the ways in which neoliberalism since the 1980s has reshaped formal education at all levels into an adjunct of corporate power and repository of market forces, and has imposed commercial relations as a template for governing all of social life. Every idea, social relationship, value, institution and form of knowledge runs the risk of being "economized" -- turned into either a commodity, a brand or an ideological adjunct of corporate power.

Increasingly aligned with neoliberal interests, higher education is mostly primed for teaching business principles and corporate values, while university administrators are prized as CEOs or bureaucrats in an audit culture. Many colleges and universities have been McDonald-ized; knowledge is increasingly viewed as a commodity resulting in curricula that resemble a fast-food menu while devaluing curricula that stresses humanistic values and “makes for responsible citizens.” In an age of precariousness and flexibility, the majority of faculty have been reduced to part-time positions and subjected to low wages, have lost control over the conditions of their labor, suffered reduced benefits and become frightened about addressing social issues critically in their classrooms for fear of losing their jobs. The latter may be the central issue curbing free speech and academic freedom in the academy.

Moreover, many of these academics are barely able to make ends meet because of their impoverished salaries. Some are on food stamps. If faculty are treated like service workers, students fare no better and are now relegated to the status of customers and clients. They are not only inundated with the competitive, privatized and market-driven values of neoliberalism, they are also punished by those values in the form of exorbitant tuition rates, astronomical debts owed to banks and other financial institutions and, in too many cases, a lack of meaningful employment.

Oppressive forms of pedagogy are also at work in the broader society. These take place through the educational force of the wider culture and functions through a range of cultural apparatuses, extending from the mainstream and conservative media to digital and online platforms that largely operate in the service of a corporate controlled media sphere that has become what Mort Rosenblum calls a “cesspool of misleading babble.” All the while, Trump fills the Twitter world with ongoing blasts of emotional drivel, and in doing so manages to shape the cultural landscape in ways that have unleashed a poisonous public pedagogy of sensationalism, easy consumption, bigotry, fear and distraction.

Trump’s public pedagogy is largely fashioned through his use of the social media, his support mobilized by conservative outlets such as Fox News, Breitbart News and the Sinclair Broadcast Group, along with the aggressive support of extreme talk radio, all of which function as thinly veiled propaganda and "disimagination" machines. Trump’s unrelenting pedagogical shocks to the body politic and civic culture have done more than lower the bar of civic discourse and the rules of governing; they have also normalized the unthinkable.

Trump's ability to drive the mainstream media legitimizes the late Pierre Bourdieu's insistence that "the most important forms of domination are not only economic but also intellectual and pedagogical and lie on the side of belief and persuasion." In this instance, the call to think, inspire and energize has been replaced by a discourse and pedagogy designed to misdirect rage, deaden the ethical imagination and encourage the collective fog of nihilism, racial purity and a depoliticizing privatism.

At stake here is the crucial recognition that pedagogy is central to politics because it is about altering the way people see things. In an age dominated by celluloid and electronically produced spectacles, authoritarianism uses education as a valuable tool in its enforcement of political hierarchy; that is, education is viewed as a serious sphere in the production of values, identities and modes of agency that conform to the status quo. Fascist politics not only concentrates power in the hands of the rich but also colonizes the habits and dispositions necessary for creating subjects who willingly comply with what Wilhelm Reich called the mass psychology of fascism.

What happens to democracy when the three richest men -- Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Jeff Bezos -- together hold more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the domestic population, "a total of 160 million people or 63 million American households"? What happens to a society that has only 5 percent of the world's population, but has more than 25 percent of the world's prison population, making it the world's largest jailer? What kind of society burdens students with thousands of dollars in debt? What are we to make of a society in which schoolchildren, sometimes as young as seven years old, are put in handcuffs and forced into the criminal justice system for acting out, doodling on a desk or violating a dress code?

What forces have allowed education to be undermined as a democratic public sphere, capable of producing the formative culture and critical citizens that could have prevented such a catastrophe from happening in an alleged democracy? What do the presidency of Donald Trump and the rise of illiberal democracies all over the globe suggests about the role of higher education in a time of tyranny? What does it mean to refuse to define higher education as a crucial democratic public sphere in dangerous times?

We get a glimpse of this descent of the U.S. into what Alex Honneth calls an "abyss of failed sociality" in its collapse of civic literacy, education and public values along with the willingness and success of the Trump administration to empty language of any meaning. This emptying of politics constitutes a flight from historical memory, ethics, justice and social responsibility. Under such circumstances, Orwell's "Ignorance is Strength" materializes in the Trump administration's weaponized attempt not only to rewrite history but also to obliterate it. What we are witnessing is not simply a political project but also a reworking of the very meaning of education both as an institution and as a cultural force.

Defunded and corporatized, many institutions of higher education have been all too willing to make the culture of business the business of education, and the transformation has corrupted their mission. Across the United States the landscape and goal of higher education is changing to adopt the mission of business schools. This was made clear by Pat McCrory, the former governor of North Carolina, who argued in a barely veiled warning to faculty that higher education needed to adopt a brand that fits "the ever-changing competitive environment of the twenty first century [while producing] subjects employers need."

Other threats to higher education come from conservative think tanks, far-right groups and right-wing pundits who are monitoring faculty syllabi and urging legislators and college administrators to eliminate tenure and academic institutes that address major social issues such as poverty and voter registration. In some cases, alt-right and neo-Nazi groups are issuing death threats against faculty who speak out against racism and other volatile social issues.

Many of these policies are reminiscent of tactics either used by right-wing groups and ideological fundamentalists over the past century, or mimic a script right out of the Ayn Rand neoliberal playbook. One example of the latter is on full display in the comments of John Allison, the former president of the libertarian Cato Institute, who once insisted that the only educational programs that should be funded are those that “retake the universities [back from] statist/collectivist ideas” in order to align them with an ideology that educates students about the virtues of capitalism, which, as he puts it without irony, are “clearly in our shareholders’ long-term interest.”

This assault on the democratic mission of higher education is not new to the United States. But I believe that what has developed under the reign of Trump is an accelerated attack on all public spheres, especially those whose function is create an informed and critical citizenry, provide crucial social provisions and ensure public health. Under the Trump regime, there has been an intensity and acceleration of this kind of violence. At work here is a deadening and radically dehumanizing neoliberal project, which transforms the individual into a brand, education into a corporate worksite, and promotes a public pedagogy at odds with what poet Tracy K. Smith describes as “feelings of humility, shared vulnerability, doubt and trust.” In this savage political project, public servants are held in contempt, and the notion of the common good is viewed as incompatible with the needs of finance capital — a position supported by many demagogues.

As the social or welfare state is dismantled, the punishing state expands while the state is reduced to serving the interests of the financial and banking elite. Language itself is commodified as words such as *love, trust, freedom, responsibility* and *choice* have been deformed by a market logic that narrows their meaning to either market-based relationships or a reductive notion of getting ahead regardless of the social costs. We do not love each other, we love our commodities. Instead of loving with courage and compassion, and desiring a more just society, we embrace a society saturated in commercial exchanges.

Confined to the principles of a market fundamentalism, freedom now means removing oneself from any sense of social responsibility so one can retreat into privatized orbits of self-indulgence and unbridled self-interest. Under Trumpism, it is easy to forget Martin Luther King Jr.’s insistence that freedom is not simply freedom from outside interference, but must be viewed as the freedom to intervene in the world in order to embrace the principle that an “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” and that “freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

Democracy is now plagued by the acceleration of a toxic form of illiteracy, one that is more than an absence of learning, ideas or knowledge. On the contrary, it is a willful practice and goal used to actively depoliticize people and make them complicit with the forces that impose misery and suffering upon their lives. In the age of Trump and the rise of illiberal democracies all across the globe, we see that James Baldwin was certainly right in issuing a stern warning decades ago that “Ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.” Trump’s ignorance lights up the Twitter landscape almost every day.

He denies climate change, along with the dangers it poses to humanity, shuts down the government because he cannot get the funds for his wall -- a grotesque symbol of nativism -- and heaps disdain on the heads of his intelligence agencies because they provide proof of the lies and misinformation that shape his love affair with tyrants and the danger his foreign policy poses to the U.S. and the rest of the world. Trump's serial lying has become normalized in the United States, removed from the legacy of a fascist politics that produced massive acts of violence, war and genocide.

I am reminded of a comment by the historian Benjamin Carter Hett, who argues in his book "The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic" that the "key to understanding why many Germans supported [Hitler] lies in the Nazis rejection of a rational, factual world ... Hitler's thinking the unthinkable [and his] ability to give voice to [a] flight from reality as could no other German politician of his time" covered over what eventually turned into the Holocaust.

The drumbeat of fascism is no longer a mere echo of the past. Manufactured lies are never far removed from a deepening abyss of state-sponsored ignorance. This is a kind of ignorance drunk on power and is comparable to a bomb with a fuse that is about to explode in a crowded shopping center. This is a type of ignorance that is dangerous, fused with a reckless use of state power that holds both human life and the planet hostage.

What happens to democracy when the president of the United States labels critical media outlets as "enemies of the people" and derides the search for truth by endlessly tweeting lies and misrepresentations? What happens when the American public forgets that the last time the critical media was termed as a threat and enemy, it was a charge made by hardcore racial segregationists during the early stages of the civil rights movement in the 1960s? What happens to democracy when individuals and groups are demonized based on their religion? What happens to a society when critical thinking and facts become objects of contempt and are disdained in favor of raw emotion or undermined by an appeal to what presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway called "alternative facts"?

What happens to a social order ruled by what Jeffrey St. Clair calls an "economics of contempt" in which the poor are blamed for their immiseration and subject by a right-wing government and media to a culture of shaming? What happens to a public that retreats into private silos and becomes indifferent to the use of language in the service of a panicked rage that stokes anger but is not about issues that matter? What happens to a social order when it treats millions of illegal immigrants as disposable, potential terrorists and criminals? What happens to a country when the presiding principles of a society are violence and ignorance? What happens to a society when the social fabric is fragmented by a neoliberal ideology that preaches a reductive notion of individual responsibility and celebrates social atomization and the "connected isolation of the wireless age?" What happens is that democracy withers and dies both as an ideal and as a reality.

What work do educators have to do to create the economic, political and ethical conditions necessary to endow young people and the public with the capacities to think, question, doubt, imagine the unimaginable and defend education as essential for inspiring and energizing the citizens necessary for the existence of a robust democracy? What might it mean to make pedagogy meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative? In a world in which there is an increasing abandonment of egalitarian and democratic impulses, what will it take to educate young people and the broader polity to challenge authority and hold power accountable?

Given the crisis of education, agency and memory that haunts the current historical conjuncture, educators need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which there is an unprecedented convergence of resources -- financial, cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological -- increasingly used to exercise powerful and diverse forms of control and domination. Such a language needs to be self-reflective and directive without being dogmatic and needs to recognize that education is always political because it presupposes a vision of the future, legitimizes specific forms of knowledge, values and social relationships, and in doing so produces particular forms of agency.

Educators need to recognize that people have to invest something of themselves in how they are addressed. In addition, they must be attentive to the notion that that any mode of education, argument or idea has to speak to the everyday conditions that shape people's lives. Such interventions must provide both a moment of recognition and offer a critical and rupturing mode of analysis.

Thus, there can be no authentic politics without what I call a pedagogy of identification. Lacking this understanding, pedagogy all too easily either becomes a mode of symbolic violence or is reduced to a form of academic jargon, one that assaults and shames, in one instance, and confuses in the other. What it does not do is educate a broader set of publics.

At the same time, if academics are going to function as public intellectuals, they need to combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen. In doing so, they should not only address their work to a broader public and important social issues, they also need to develop a language that connects everyday troubles to wider structures and presses the claim for economic and social justice. Taking a term from the scholar Ariella Azuay, educators need to practice what might be called a form of pedagogical "citizenship" with a "focus on its ability, when practiced thoughtfully, to remind us of our mutual responsibilities." In addition, such intellectuals can develop modes of pedagogy along with a broader comprehensive vision of education and schooling that are capable of winning struggles against those who would deny education its critical function. This applies to all forms of dogmatism and political purity, across the ideological spectrum.

One of the challenges facing the current generation of educators, students and others is the need to address the question of what education should accomplish in a society. More pointedly, what is the role of education in a democracy? What pedagogical, political and ethical responsibilities should educators, musicians, artists, journalists and other cultural workers take on at a time when there is an alarming rise of authoritarian regimes across the globe, especially in formally democratic countries such as Turkey, Hungary, Poland and Italy? How can educational and pedagogical practices be connected to the resurrection of historical memory, new modes of solidarity, a resurgence of the radical imagination and broad-based struggles for an insurrectional democracy? How can education be enlisted to fight what the cultural theorist Mark Fisher once called neoliberalism's most brutal weapon, "the slow cancellation of the future"?

Such a vision suggests resurrecting a democratic project that provides the basis for imagining a life beyond a social order immersed in massive inequality and endless assaults on the environment, and that elevates war and militarization to the highest and most sanctified national ideals. Under such circumstances, education becomes more than an obsession with accountability schemes, testing, market values and an unreflective immersion in the crude empiricism of a data-obsessed market-driven society. In addition, it rejects the notion that

colleges and universities should be reduced to sites for training students for the workforce — a reductive vision now being imposed on public and higher education by high tech companies such as Facebook, Netflix and Google, which advocate what they call the entrepreneurial mission of education. Education and pedagogy should provide the conditions for young people to think about keeping a democracy alive and vibrant, not simply training students to be workers.

A critical education recognizes that learning skills for the workplace is no excuse for purging from education what it means to teach students "how to think critically, embrace the common good, exercise a sense of social responsibility and support for those values, ideas, and the ethical and political foundation necessary for a democratic society."

Yes, we must educate young people with the skills they need to get jobs. But as educators we must also teach them to learn "to live with less or no misery [and] to fight against those social sources" that cause war, destruction of the environment, "inequality, unhappiness, and needless human suffering." As Christopher Newfield argues, "democracy needs a public" and higher education has a crucial role to play in this regard as a democratic public good, rather than defining itself through the market-based values of neoliberal capitalism.

There is an urgent political need for both the United Kingdom and the United States, among other countries, to understand what it means for an authoritarian society to weaponize and trivialize the discourse, vocabularies, images and aural means of communication in a variety of educational and cultural sites. Education is never innocent and is always implicated in relations of power and specific visions of the present and future. In spite of the conservative character of education to reproduce the status quo, it does not have to be tied to power relations immersed in forms of domination. As we know from the 1960s and more recent university protests, education is also a site of struggle and contains the promise of higher education as a democratic public sphere and pedagogy as a form of educated hope.

As a form of educated hope, education in this sense is not an antidote to politics, a nostalgic yearning for a better time or for some allegedly unthinkably alternative future. Instead, as Terry Eagleton has written, it is an "attempt to find a bridge between the present and future in those forces within the present which are potentially able to transform it." Unlike optimism, which suggests that change for the better will inevitably come about, educated hope believes that substantive changes for justice and a better future can only take place in collective struggle and that such change must begin by making power visible, connecting the dots, and confronting the conditions of injustice locally while thinking globally. It is also important to remember that education as a form of educated hope is not simply about fostering critical consciousness, but also about teaching students how to live up to one's responsibilities, be they personal, political or global.

One of the most serious challenges facing administrators, faculty and students in colleges and universities is the task of developing discourses and pedagogical practices that connect classroom knowledge, values and social problems with the larger society, and doing so in ways that enhance the capacities of young people to translate private troubles into wider systemic issues while transforming their hidden despair and private grievances into critical narratives and public transcripts. At best such transcripts can be transformed into forms of public dissent or what might be called "a moment of rupture."

Such ruptures can speak to the pedagogical conditions for rethinking the meaning of politics and public action in a time of impending tyranny and authoritarianism. In taking up this project, educators and others should attempt to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and the civic courage necessary to make desolation and cynicism unconvincing and hope practical. Democracy cannot work if citizens are not autonomous, self-judging, curious, reflective and independent — qualities that are indispensable for students if they are going to make vital judgments and choices about participating in and shaping decisions that affect everyday life, institutional reform and governmental policy.

Resistance in this sense begins with the refusal to accept a crudely functional view of education that only values those modes of research, knowledge and teaching that can turn a profit. It rejects educational views that consign administrators, faculty and students to the prison house of common sense and cynicism. In this instance, education becomes a terrain of struggle, which refuses one's erasure and the dictates of an audit culture. It is a type of resistance that speaks out against the power of bean-counters to align educational research with the idolatry of data, which attempts to define the unmeasurable, promotes a deadening instrumental rationality that suffocates consciousness, and rewards empirical frenzies that turn courageous ideas into ashes, all the while degrading civic virtue and ignoring the dark shadow of a fascist politics engulfing the globe.

The major challenges facing higher education today are rooted in the ideological and affective wasteland of neoliberalism. The great Czech dissident Vaclav Havel once argued that politics followed culture. That is, he argued that politics is inextricably connected to how individual and social consciousness are shaped, experiences are narrated, and investments organized so as speak convincingly to people's needs, anxieties, and hopes.

We live in a historical moment in which cultural institutions, political power and everyday life create a new historical configuration of power and repression. Overt repressive practices now find their match in powerful forms of subjective and ideological control. A culture of privatization, unchecked individualism, spectacularized violence, suffocating narcissism, sensationalism and immediacy has produced modes of agency that promote both a retreat from any sense of civic culture and shared citizenship and opens the door for demagogues to manipulate the feelings of isolation and rage of the most vulnerable. The mix of power, culture and everyday life imposes new educational demands on those of us who want to breathe life and hope into a future that refuses the authoritarian impulses of the present.

Let me conclude by pointing to several recommendations, however incomplete, that provide an alternative to some of the oppressive conditions now shaping higher education.

First, higher education needs to reassert its mission as a public good in order to reclaim its egalitarian and democratic impulses. Educators need to initiate and expand a national conversation in which higher education can be defended as a democratic public sphere and the classroom as a site of deliberative inquiry, dialogue and critical thinking, a site that makes a claim on the radical imagination and a sense of civic courage. The project of defining higher education as a democratic public sphere can provide the platform for a more expressive commitment to developing a social movement in defense of public goods. What is crucial to recognize here is that higher education mimics a neoliberal logic that views education largely as a commodity to be bought and sold for private advantage, while undermining the power of faculty and students to live up to and resurrect the demands of global citizenship.

Second, educators need to acknowledge and make good on the claim that a critically literate citizen is indispensable to a democracy. This suggests placing ethics, civic literacy, social responsibility and compassion at the forefront of learning so as to combine knowledge, teaching and research with the rudiments of what might be called the grammar of an ethical and social imagination. This necessitates taking seriously those values, traditions, histories and pedagogies that would promote a sense of dignity, self-reflection and compassion at the heart of a substantive democracy.

Students need to learn to understand how power works across social, cultural and political institutions so that they can learn how to govern rather than merely be governed. Education should be a place where students realize themselves primarily as critically engaged and informed citizens contributing not simply to their own self-interest but to the well-being of society as a whole.

Third, higher education needs to be viewed as a right, as it is in many countries such as Germany, France, Norway, Finland and Brazil, rather than a privilege for a limited few, as it is in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. When education is not free, it not only limits access to those who lack the wealth and resources to gain access to higher education, it also allows higher education to function as a sorting machine that largely reproduces social, racial and class distinctions. Moreover, free access to higher education enriches a student body through its diversity and the richness of its possibilities to promote dialogue across a range of identities, backgrounds, religions, gender, class and ideological positions. Such diversity keeps alive the critical function of higher education at the level of everyday classroom and social interactions. In addition, by not saddling young people with crippling debt, it gives them the opportunity to choose careers based on their interest, and in many cases their desire, to engage in expanding public services. High levels of debt often force students into seeking the highest-paying jobs rather than seeking out jobs that enhance the public good.

Fourth, in a world driven by data, metrics and the replacement of knowledge by the overabundance of information, educators need to enable students to engage in multiple literacies extending from print and visual culture to digital culture. They need to become border-crossers who can think dialectically, and learn not only how to consume culture but also produce it. This presupposes learning how to situate ideas, facts and knowledge historically and relationally. Not only does history become a consequential resource for thinking and acting, it also enables students to connect isolated issues to a comprehensive vision of society that does not rely on banking modes of education, technical issues, insular disciplinary narratives and deadening forms of instrumental learning. At stake here is the ability to perform a crucial act of thinking, that is, the ability to translate private issues into larger systemic concerns.

Fifth, I want to argue for pedagogy as the practice of freedom. To assume its critical function, pedagogy should shift not only the way people think but also encourage them to help shape for the better the world in which they find themselves. Pedagogy should not be confused with therapy or reduced to zones of emotional safety. As the practice of freedom, critical pedagogy arises from the conviction that educators and other cultural workers have a responsibility to unsettle power, trouble consensus and challenge common sense. This is a view of pedagogy that should disturb, inspire and energize a vast array of individuals and publics.

Such pedagogical practices should enable students to interrogate common-sense understandings of the world, take risks in their thinking, however difficult, and be willing to take a stand for free

inquiry in the pursuit of truth, multiple ways of knowing, mutual respect and civic values in the pursuit of social justice. In the current moment, there is a tendency for resistance to emphasize trauma, micro-aggressions, and triggers in ways that appear to replace oppression, repression and subjugation. Robin D.G. Kelley is right in arguing, "Trauma is real ... But reading ... experience through trauma can easily slip into thinking of ourselves as victims and objects rather than agents." Trauma can be a starting point for resistance, but it cannot fall into the trap of viewing the personal as the only politics that matters.

Critical pedagogy comes with the responsibility of educators to view intellectual work as public, assuming a duty to enter into the public sphere unafraid to take positions and generate controversy, functioning as a moral witnesses, raising political awareness, making connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from public view and reminding us, in Edward Saïd's words, of "the moral questions that may be hidden in the clamor and din of the public debate." Students need to learn how to think dangerously, push at the frontiers of knowledge, and support the notion that the search for justice is never finished and that no society is ever just enough. These are not merely methodical considerations but also moral and political practices, because they presuppose the creation of students who can imagine a future in which justice, equality, freedom and democracy matter and are attainable.

Sixth, on opposition to increasingly dominant instrumental views of education, I want to argue for a notion of education that is viewed as inherently political -- one that relentlessly questions the kinds of labor, practices and forms of teaching, research and modes of evaluation that are enacted in higher education. As my late colleague Roger Simon once observed, pedagogy is "an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life and always presupposes a vision of the future." Nevertheless, it does more; it also "represents a version of our own dreams for ourselves, our children, and our communities. But such dreams are never neutral; they are always someone's dreams and to the degree that they are implicated in organizing the future for others they always have a moral and political dimension."

While such a pedagogy does not offer guarantees, it defines itself as a moral and political practice that is always implicated in power relations because it offers particular versions and visions of civic life and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others and our physical and social environment. Neutral, objective education is an oxymoron. It does not exist outside relations of power, values and politics. Education is inextricably connected to the related issues of power, inclusion and social responsibility.

Ethically, educators need to cast a critical eye on those forms of knowledge and social relations that define themselves through a conceptual purity and political innocence, clouding the fact that the alleged neutrality on which they stand is already grounded in ethico-political choices. Any viable notion of critical pedagogy must challenge the image of education as neutral and removed from the related realms of power and politics. Higher education can fulfill its political responsibilities, in part, by joining with other groups and institutions to engage in political education whose aim is the radical restructuring of both higher education and the wider social order.

Higher education is a crucial space for creating engaged citizens, developing modes of moral witnessing, and addressing the historical legacies of racism, economic injustice, and class exploitation. But alone it cannot change the deep ideological and structural failings of a neoliberal

social order. Nor can it assume that struggle takes place solely in the classroom or on college campuses.

Seventh, another serious challenge facing educators is the need to develop both a discourse of critique and possibility. Critical analysis is necessary to break through the stupor of ignorance, hold power accountable, and reveal the workings and effects of oppressive and unequal relations of power. However, critique without hope is a prescription for cynicism, despair or civic fatigue. A culture of questioning is crucial to any viable notion of teaching and learning, but it is not enough. Students also need to stretch their imagination to be able to think beyond the limits of their own experience, and the disparaging notion that the future is nothing more than a mirror image of the present.

In this instance, I am not referring to a romanticized and empty notion of hope. Hope means living without illusions and being fully aware of the practical difficulties and risks involved in meaningful struggles for real change, while at the same time being radically optimistic. The political challenge of hope is to recognize that history is open and that the ethical job of education, as the poet Robert Hass has argued, is “to refresh the idea of justice going dead in us all the time.”

The late world-renowned sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman insisted that the bleakness and dystopian politics of our times necessitates the ability to dream otherwise, to imagine a society “which thinks it is not just enough, which questions the sufficiency of any achieved level of justice and considers justice always to be a step or more ahead. Above all, it is a society which reacts angrily to any case of injustice and promptly sets about correcting it.” While hope has fallen on hard times under the dark shadow of an emerging illiberal democracy, a sense of collective passion and struggle is far from a historical relic.

A sense of collective passion is on the rise in the United States and elsewhere, and much of it is taking place among young people who refuse to be written out of the script of democracy. I may be taking liberties here but I believe that there is a desire among many young people to reject the notion that capitalism and democracy are synonymous and to embrace the power of the civic imagination, political will and the promise of a substantive democratic socialism. In this instance, education not only becomes an essential element of politics but is also viewed as the foundation for rethinking the relationship among power and collective resistance practiced as a form of social hope. It is precisely such a collective spirit that informs a resurgent politics that is being rewritten by many young people today in the discourses of critique and hope, emancipation and transformation.

We live in dangerous times and there is an urgent need for more individuals, institutions and social movements to come together in an effort to construct a new political and social imaginary. We must support each other in coming to believe that the current regimes of tyranny can be resisted, that alternative futures are possible and that acting on these beliefs will make radical change happen. The inimitable James Baldwin captures the depth which both burdens hope and inspires it. In "The Fire Next Time," he writes: “The impossible is the least that one can demand. ... Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them. ... [T]he moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.” It is the task of educators and higher education, among others, to keep the lights on and the fires burning with a feverish intensity.