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Matt Damon stands up for teachers

Robert D. Skeels looks at recent comments by former Obama supporter Matt Damon, who is rightfully disappointed by the president's education "reform."

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"[T]he person who wants bold changes in the way our society is going is not going to find them represented by either the Democratic or Republican candidates, and that's still true with Obama and McCain." --Howard Zinn

HOLLYWOOD LUMINARY and social justice-minded Matt Damon is **quoted in the Huffington Post** [2] saying some very profound things about the Obama administration's corporate neoliberal education "reform" policies.

According to Damon, "[Obama's] doubled down on a lot of things, going back to education...the idea that we're testing kids and we're tying teachers salaries to how kids are performing on tests--that kind of mechanized thinking has nothing to do with higher order. We're training them, not teaching them."

Many HuffPost liberals and a handful of like-minded teabaggers were quick to assail Damon with hackneyed "why don't you stick with acting" attacks. What Damon's detractors don't realize is that he is, on average, **far-better educated** [3] than many of them. Moreover, his long friendship and collaborative work with celebrated historian, author and social justice advocate, the late Professor Howard Zinn, demonstrates that Damon had one of the best political mentors around, who taught him to speak truth to power.

Every Huffington Post reader defending President Obama's policies by telling Damon that he should understand that politics is about "realism" and "compromise" is providing political cover for neoliberalism and privatization. They're doing the reactionary right wing's job for them by not standing against **Obama** [4] and **Duncan's** [5] deplorable "shock doctrine" education policies.

Here are my comments as they appeared on the Huffington Post:

Kudos, Mr. Damon. Glad to see more people calling out the president's reactionary education policies. In essence, Race to the Top goes further than No Child Left Behind in terms of unwarranted testing, in that it embraces and encourages widespread privatization via charter-voucher schools. There is nothing progressive about policies that Ayn Rand or Milton Friedman would have espoused, policies that use words like competition, market solutions and choice--all highly discredited ideas at that.

Before anyone defends these policies, let them ponder this. How progressive are this administration's education policies when they are universally lauded by the likes of the American Enterprise Institute, Cato, Heritage, Hoover, Hudson and all the other extreme right-wing think tanks? I would be very concerned about my politics if I found the Birchers were agreeing with me.

I unequivocally support Matt Damon's criticisms of this administration and especially its education policies. All progressives should.

Instead of the highly discredited corporate "ed-reform" policies like No Child Left Behind and Race To The Top, let's ditch high-stakes standardized tests and make the **Zinn Education Project** [6] our national curriculum. It would go a long way toward making public education achieve its true potential.

As Zinn once said:

I'm worried that students will take their obedient place in society and look to become successful cogs in the wheel--let the wheel spin them around as it wants without taking a look at what they're doing. I'm concerned that students not become passive acceptors of the official doctrine that's handed down to them from the White House, the media, textbooks, teachers and preachers.

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[1] <http://socialistworker.org/department/Readers%27-Views>

[2] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/02/matt-damon-calls-out-obama_n_830533.html

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Damon#Early_years

[4] <http://rdsathene.blogspot.com/2010/05/message-to-obama-congress-listen-to.html>

[5] http://www.rethinkingschools.org/restrict.asp?path=archive/23_03/arne233.shtml

[6] <http://zinnedproject.org/>

[7] <http://rdsathene.blogspot.com/2011/03/thank-you-matt-damon-lets-replace-rttt.html>

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