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The Continuing Quest for Equal Schools: An Essay Review

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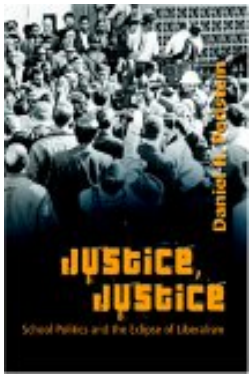
Aaron David Gresson, in his book *America's Atonement*, and Daniel Perlstein, in *Justice, Justice*, both identify the late 1960s as a decisive time in determining the future direction of American social and political life. The civil rights efforts in the 1950s and 1960s along with the women's rights movement, which had resulted in such legislation as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, had a tremendous impact on contemporary societal norms. In addition, the many other social movements of the 1960s, from black power to anti-war, raised issues and concerns that had a widespread effect throughout American society. By decade's end, however, as both Gresson and Perlstein point out, the trend toward liberal politics seemed to many Americans to have gone "too far." Gresson believes the introduction of such acts as Equal Employment



Opportunity was accompanied by a sense of loss for many whites. This sense of loss induced an acute pain for what was taken, or thought to have been taken from them, namely, jobs and status in society. A conservative backlash began to find its feet among the many who saw such movements as an attack on American tradition, and a sentiment emerged that racism had been reversed. Affirmative action, for example, began to be seen as discrimination against whites. Though much of the assumed loss may have been more fear than actuality, the result has been, in many ways, a desire and an effort to reinstate the white male as the undisputed authority. In this essay, I look at what Gresson and Perlstein perceive as a conservative movement in mainstream American society away from the liberal politics of the mid-twentieth century—a movement Gresson terms the "recovery project" (p. 4)—and some of the ramifications of this movement for recent education reforms.

In *America's Atonement: Racial Pain, Recovery Rhetoric, and the Pedagogy of Healing*, Gresson deals with the issues of racism, race relations and "racial pain" in today's society. He discusses the impact such pain has had on the current state of the union. Gresson sees the current political trend as a conservative effort to recover values and rights considered lost as a result of the liberal politics of the 1960's and 1970's. The implications for education, of course, are of particular concern here. To explore some of these implications more fully, I shall turn to Daniel Perlstein's book *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* as it provides a very clear and pointed example of how inextricably linked education is to social and political events of the kind Gresson examines. Perlstein's book is a case study detailing the 1960s struggle for community control of schools in Brownsville, Brooklyn in New York City (the district in which I taught some years later). In his book, Perlstein emphasizes the role schools played as both a battleground for the two sides and a barometer of the social climate. He bears out education's centrality to any such social/political movement and in doing so, concurrently supports Gresson's assessment and depiction of the resulting conservative "backlash" that occurred. To begin, consider Gresson's work, *America's Atonement*, more closely.

America's Atonement

From the Vietnam War to the black power movement, the social upheaval and crises of the 1960s, are the impetus for what Gresson terms 'America's Atonement.' Typically, the word "atonement" is understood to mean the suffering for forgiveness of sins. The front cover of Gresson's book shows a statue from the Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C. of a dying soldier in a woman's arm. What comes to mind are the sufferings of war and perhaps the atonement therein for past sin (it is assumed the reader acknowledges the history of race relations in America as less than equitable). Gresson, however, is using "atonement" in what would seem like a reverse understanding. It is not the atonement of past wrongs towards blacks that he has in mind, but rather "a corrective to so-called political correctness" (p. 2) or, a "recovery project" (p. 4) to regain what was lost, or perceived lost, by whites since the advent of the civil rights movement. Throughout the book, Gresson depicts a number of incidents in support of his assertion that there exists a

feeling among many white people that whites have been wrongly accused of racism and in turn 'done out' of their rightful position due to reverse racism.

Through reflecting on interactions he has had with students, colleagues and friends, Gresson theorizes that many whites in this country harbor a resentment resulting from a sense of pain (white racial pain) and loss. This pain and sense of loss, caused by such events as the civil rights movement, affirmative action, feminist movements, and the many other social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s and the resulting alterations to the structures of power that held whites as privileged, is considered by many whites to be in need of recompense. The implication in Gresson's use of the word 'atonement' is that the pain and suffering and the perceived wrongs done to whites--white males in particular--are what must be atoned for. As a movement, or recovery project, Gresson places its beginnings in the late 1970s. Daniel Perlstein's example of whites re-affirming political and social control in *Justice, Justice*, suggests the recovery project, at least in New York City, began as early as the late 1960s.

Justice, Justice

In his work, Perlstein focuses on events surrounding what he considers a turning point not only in New York City's political character but in that of the nation. His book brings to light many of the issues addressed by Gresson. First and foremost, in connection with the atonement or recovery project, is "the eclipse of liberalism in America's political life" (p. 2). Perlstein considers the 1968 teacher strikes in New York City the point when many turned from liberal to conservative politics not only in New York City but across the nation. He notes that New York has not had a single liberal mayor since that time. Secondly, Perlstein exposes how clearly and inextricably linked schooling and education are to the creation of a citizenry. It would seem that whatever the end goal of a given interest group, whether it be the black power movement seeking a black nation or the politicians seeking status quo, what is taught to children in school is integral to the realization of that group's goal.

Justice, Justice begins with an overview of the turmoil that accompanied the struggle for community control of the city's public schools in the mid to late 1960s including the events leading up to the final showdown there in the fall of 1968. Following the ideals of Martin Luther King, Jr., in New York, pro-integrationist Reverend Milton Galamison, sought to continue the fight for civil rights and equal schools through peaceful means. One form of protest he used was boycotting the schools. One day in 1964, according to Perlstein, Rev. Galamison led a school boycott "whose size dwarfed the celebrated 1963 March on Washington" (p. 97). On that day, of the 1,000,000 New York public school students, 450,000 refused to attend As time wore on, however, the activists became frustrated and irritated and turned to violence. David Tyack summarizes the efforts thus: "hope shifted to disillusionment and anger, and bitter rhetoric and violence escalated" (Tyack, 1975, p. 283). By 1967, the failure to achieve anything more than a few tangible results had aggravated

many black leaders and communities. As the struggle for black control over black schools in New York City escalated into vicious anti-Semitism, and the voices of militant activists such as Sonny Carson, who saw "no use for white people" (p. 115), replaced those of people like Rev. Galamison and Bayard Rustin. The large contingent of Jewish teachers began to withdraw support for issues concerning the black community. In response to the summary firings of white school faculty in Brownsville, Brooklyn, the fall of 1968 saw three teacher strikes in that community. In so pitting themselves against the black population, the Jewish and non-Jewish white teachers banded together. Perlstein characterizes the political result by saying the Jews of New York City began to "assimilate into and legitimize a shared white status" (p. 43). Tyack characterized the "bitter strike of 1968" as one that "polarized black and white to an unprecedented degree" (Tyack, 1975, p. 288). Many of the liberal Jewish political views vanished. "Two thirds of Jews" felt that community control was a "smokescreen" for anti-Semitism (pp. 31-32). The New Left, who had arrived in New York City to replace the striking teachers—described by Perlstein as "disproportionately young, male" and "more likely than other teachers to have been born into affluent families" (71)—were seen as outsiders by both sides of the conflict. The end result was a "disenchantment with liberalism" (2004, p. 9). Whites who had been in favor of integration became less so. In *Ghetto Schooling*, Jean Anyon characterizes this period of American history as follows: "By 1968, the issue of race—in busing and affirmative action for example—was tearing apart the Democratic coalition…. In 1966, due to a white backlash vote, Johnson lost his liberal majority in Congress" (1997, p. 106). Instead of liberal politics, whites now focused on self-preservation by way of conservatism and perhaps recovery. Included in the recovery project, in Gresson's view, is "the demonization of affirmative action, multiculturalism, and other ideologies and initiatives aimed at redressing an historical oppressiveness" (Gresson, p. 9).

A Battleground: School in Society

In *America's Atonement*, it becomes clear that many whites today do not acknowledge or are unaware of oppression of racial and ethnic minorities in the past. One reason may be the lack of exposure to racial politics, in particular, prior to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. An example in the book tells of a woman who was unaware of the treatment Japanese-Americans received during the World War II. Upon learning of the violence directed toward them, she came to believe the past must be fully revealed and acknowledged in order to move forward with addressing societal concerns today. Others appear not to acknowledge inequalities and injustices to the same extent. James Novak, for example, is quoted as saying both black and white men vote Republican for the same reason. The implication seems to be that black and white men face similar societal concerns and outlooks. In an article on backlash.com, he lists "more than seventy infractions against men" in general (Gresson, p. 7). Towards the end of the list, however, a number of complaints are found against affirmative action and being called racist for recognizing adequate skills over race in hiring. From where such sentiments emerged is made evident by Perlstein.

Historically the United Teachers Federation (UFT) had a race-blind policy. It saw poor black and white as having more in common with each other than with rich and poor within the same race. This clashed with the view of black activists who saw such a policy as one that "abetted racial inequality" (Perlstein, p. 15). By 1966, the New York civil rights movement had splintered, and "activism shifted increasingly from city wide organizing for integration to neighborhood activism for Black Power" (Perlstein, p. 3). The UFT, along with the Teachers for Community Control (TCC) which was 90% white, was also initially behind the push for community control of schools; and in 1967, the New York City Board of Education experimented with the concept in three districts: one in Harlem, one in lower Manhattan, and Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn. What was not expected, and what ultimately derailed the experiment, was the dramatic swing from centralized power to not just local but radicalized power. The school board in Brownsville summarily fired fourteen teachers, five Assistant Principals, all of whom were white, and one Principal. While the board was still debating the potential firings, the minutes noted, " 'the community walked into the meeting.' The matter was decided" (Perlstein, p. 5). This heavy handed approach by the militant element of the community would lead to the demise of local control as it gave ample excuse to those who feared black power to retake control. Perlstien comments that "in the eyes of many, race had replaced merit in hiring. A mass exodus from the district...began. A third of the teachers and five secretaries transferred out of the district, and all twenty-one of the district's assistant principals applied to leave" (Perlstein, p. 5). The fear that white citizens would be at the mercy of black militants sent shivers through the population of New York City and beyond. As a result, a turn toward the safety of the status quo began to occur among many city residents. Although the TCC remained in support of community control, politically it had little sway having been linked to the "Communist-led Teachers Union" (Perlstein, p. 17). After being targeted and shut down by McCarthyism, the Teachers Union (TU) regrouped as the Teacher's Guild. The much larger and politically formidable UFT, on the other hand, had begun to withdraw its support of community control.

The post-McCarthy liberals, the New Left, were of the belief that teachers were privileged and believed the schools to be oppressive. According to Perlstein the New Left argued that "the UFT's alliance with school administrators reflected teachers' privileged social position" (p. 73). He gives the example of Liz Fusco, a veteran of both civil rights activism and the Freedom Schools of Mississippi. Her experience in Brownsville exemplifies why the liberal strains of New York politics became disenchanted and even skeptical of black community control. Fusco, as were the New Left in general, was opposed to school hierarchy, bureaucracy and what she considered a racist curriculum (Perlstein, p. 68). She would have supported the view of activist Sonny Carson who sought a curriculum that "would offer students 'lessons that have some pertinence to his every-day struggle'" (Perlstein, p. 119). She recounted going to Brownsville, " 'solely for the politics of it'" (and so on, p. 65). Fusco had been teaching in Brownsville for three years when a student's mother came to her classroom and struck Fusco in the face in front the kids. Offended more than outraged, Fusco reported the incident to the principal and he "offered her [the mother]

a job in the school" (2004, p. 65). Feeling betrayed, at year's end Fusco left Brownsville and New York City for "a small town in New England" (2004, p. 66). Incidents such as this, and the fact that the New Left "were unable to articulate a rationale" for teaching, given their view of teachers as privileged and oppressive within the system, the New Left moved on and the UFT reclaimed the schools wholesale after the strikes.

The overt turn towards militancy by the end of 1967 did little to help the image of black activists in the eyes of the wider public. Militant activist Sonny Carson replaced Galamison's church based movement, Perlstein points out, with "those whom Blyden Jackson called 'the guys downstairs—from the streets, the poolrooms, the gangs, the reform schools'" (2004, p. 117). Carson related school to prison and prison to school (2004, p. 116). He never rejected his criminal activities and viewed his own education as a "miseducation" (2004, p. 116). Carson sought to take over the system, not integrate it. Upon being "released from prison, Carson became active in CORE's militant Brooklyn chapter" (2004, p. 116). Before Galamison's Downstate debacle and the militant approach, "Brooklyn CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] was half-black, half-white; afterward it was overwhelmingly black" (2004, p. 116). Furthermore, when a Jewish principal said he "sympathized with blacks," a CORE member responded by crying out "'You Jews do what's best for you'" (2004, p. 117). The superintendent and UFT President Al Shanker responded publicly by referring to the incident as a case of " 'racial or religious bigotry…bullying and name-calling'" (2004, p. 117). Reported by the media as growing anti-Semitism and "concerned with Carson's suggestion of quotas in teacher hiring" (that 50% of teachers be black), the city began to see black militants as anti-Jewish and anti-white. Carson may have helped to fuel fear himself by characterizing disruptive students as more spirited and blamed irrelevant and "racist curricula" (2004, p. 118) for any unruly students. Carson demanded community control along with curricula that would "rely on the knowledge that existed in the community and which would offer the student 'lessons that have some pertinence to his every-day struggle' " (2004, p. 119). The militancy now espoused by the leaders of the black community, however, would be met with a militant response.

When the principal of JHS 117 was "beaten up by black youths who, in the New York Times' account, sported 'Afro-style haircuts' and 'Black Muslim crescents symbols,' CORE attracted some of the blame" (2004, p. 119). Instead of the $3 million demanded by CORE for new programs, the city "earmarked $1.25 million for added ghetto school security" (2004, p. 119). There was also the case of the "Harlem Six" (2004, p. 122) in which six black youths were arrested for rioting with police over an incident at a fruit stand and then blamed with the murder of a Harlem shopkeeper. According to Perlstein, *The New York Times* enflamed fear by reporting "the Fruit Stand riots had 'set the stage for the expansion of anti-white youth gangs'" (2004, p. 122). The paper traced these gangs, creating one supposedly called the Blood Brothers, back to "Malcolm X, the Black Muslims and 'black nationalist movements'" (2004, p. 122). Such sensational reporting fostered the instinct of whites to self-protect and, by quelling liberal views, helped make way for the movement to recover.

Race Relations

Gresson's purpose in *America's Atonement* is clearly aimed at causing us to re-evaluate and re-characterize the condition of race relations in American society. The issues of pain, loss and atonement, which are the main and overriding themes of this book, stem from such events as those already discussed. Gresson is careful to examine each thoroughly. How such events played on the minds of the average white citizen leads Gresson to believe that the racial pain felt is real and must be addressed. As is shown by both Perlstein and Gresson, however, this pain that emerges from apparent loss has been shaped and nurtured by fear. The media, as is clear in the case of the Fruit Stand riots, has played no small role in the process.

Media and its coverage of news and popular culture strongly influences our views and perceptions of all aspects of society, including race relations. Gresson points out, "media 'mediates' messages and meanings" (2004, p. 6) and so all encompassing is "media saturation" (2004, p. 8) in the modern world that it is inescapable. Gresson reminds us of the media's presence in such cases as the O. J. Simpson trial and the Rodney King beating and the social climate "in which such media flourish" (2004, p. 7). The very nature of racism and how it has changed, in Gresson's opinion, is in large part due to the media as well as "the global political economy" (2004, p. xiii). He notes that "we are unified but complicatedly so" (2004, p. xiii). The condition of systemic racism that exists alongside appointments of black men and women, such as Colin Powel and Condoleezza Rice, to high governmental and even corporate positions creates a complex and peculiar state of race relations. Notwithstanding such displays of inclusiveness, as a nation, Gresson posits, we are bent on creating an "other.'" Since September 11, 2001, we oversee, for example, the seemingly contradictory acts of dropping bombs and food on the same land. Despite the ever-widening division between rich and poor, and the recovery of what Gresson categorizes as "white power" domestically, he notes that we, nevertheless, see ourselves as a nation that is unified in opposition to "the terrorists." Media's role in relaying, and in turn how we perceive the events around us, is so dominant that often it determines the very ways in which we come to understand such events.

Social and Racial Pain

Although speaking in terms of race and racial pain emerging from the denial of "self-display" in opposition to an "other," Gresson is careful to avoid essentializing black or white. Regarding the very notion of racial pain and self-display, Gresson writes, "Let me be clear: whites do not hold a monopoly on this need" (2004, p. 13). He discusses racial pain as something both black and white feel, suggesting "it can be viewed as a felt absence of power and the strong presence of guilt and shame" (2004, p. 14). He also considers the possibility that white racial pain may well be caused less by perceived or actual loss of jobs or status than by a reaction to being villainized. White males are, and have been, in charge of society and, thus, are seen as responsible for all society's ills. He mentions one white student who

spoke begrudgingly, "I come here to learn about what an asshole I have been throughout history" (2004, p. 2). Rick Breault, in an article entitled "Dewey, Freire, and a Pedagogy for the Oppressor" would seem to second Gresson when he points out that attempting to send the oppressors on a guilt trip simply leads to "self-defensive resentment" (2003, p. 3).

As example that blacks too experience racial pain, Gresson recounts an effort to sell his house. He felt a certain powerlessness and insult after an Asian man commented on how neat he kept his house and a neighbor pondered the possibility that the slow sale was due to his being black. He had thought that thought himself and felt racial pain. This pain emanating from powerlessness could be seen as the fuel behind the militancy of the late 1960s. And while the frustration behind black racial pain may be more easily understood, as Gresson sees it, white racial pain cannot be ignored or go un-validated. It must be understood and addressed. He feels that there has been a "failure" to adequately deal "with the emotional underside" (Gresson, 2004, p. 3) of racial pain. Breault suggests treating it as a disability. Speaking in particular of "upper-class white students," Breault suggests they are "culturally-impaired" and comments on the need to deal with such a disability with "sensitivity" (Breault, 2003, p. 3). Unlike black racial pain which arises from a sense of helplessness or emasculation, white racial pain arises from the dethroning, of sorts, from the undisputed authority in society to a position where that is questioned. 'Reverse racism,' in the form of equal opportunity employment and affirmative action, is blamed for this loss of status. The white racial pain that results is the source of the anguish that fuels the recovery project, or atonement. When such sentiments are coupled with the appearance of an increasing black or female representation at all level of society, (e.g., Powel and Rice) the fear of white displacement appears very real and excoriation unjustified. The result is the complex current racial climate.

Also drawing from events in recent history, Gresson continues to give examples of racial pain, as well as more general social pain, and manifestations thereof in everyday life. In light of the loss in Vietnam, Gresson speaks of the Gulf War in 1991 as a "fulfillment of the psychological needs of the American people as much as it was a political need of the government" (2004, p. 63). The war on terror and the current occupation of Iraq are also used by Gresson to display the role media plays in creating an "other" against which America can self-display. In the end, the question becomes what can be done to address these issues of pain, loss, and racism at all levels of society.

Going Forward: School in Society

In answering this, Gresson proposes the idea of treating racial pain in all its forms as a way to initiate a "transformative mourning" (2004, p. 104). In so doing he calls upon critical pedagogy as a framework within which to work. He says, "some correctives to white pain may be achieved by linking critical pedagogical ideas and therapeutic strategies. By critical pedagogical ideas I mean largely instructional strategies aimed at transformation" (2004, p. 94). In effect, Gresson proposes that through a critical pedagogy and critical

multiculturalism, we can engage students individually to enact a transformation in both their acknowledgement and reaction to social and racial pain. Ideally, a transformative mourning would come about through students recognizing the link between their current position in society and the past. Oppression, racism and classism that have benefited the heritage and, thus, the current position and privileges of some have, needless to mention, hurt and hindered others. The pain or mourning that accompanies or follows the uncovering of such realities would ideally be used to transform the individual rather than blame the individual. At the same time, Gresson is "troubled" by the sentiment shared by many that " 'I have done nothing to anybody—the past is not upon my head'" for the simple reason that such utterances "delay the transformative shifts we need if society is truly to become more democratic and righteous" (2004, p. 127). Gresson believes that recognition of past race relations and their effects on the present condition is vital to any progress towards social and racial healing. The current curricula, however, avoid such issues. As a result we are left with a curriculum that continues to isolate and fails to recognize the experience of students. This is the very problem the black communities in the 1960s had and that which the activists were seeking to overcome.

What was evident to people like B. Rustin, a founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), close associate of Martin Luther King, Jr. and director of the March on Washington, to Rev. Galamison, and to the black population of New York City as a whole, was the systemic racism imbedded in society. Nowhere was this more apparent and critical than in school. Notwithstanding, Rustin believed and hoped that schools should and would help one overcome, rather than affirm inherited "particularities" (Perlstein, p. 82). As it was, however, schools were seen to not only neglect the heritage and history of the black population but also, and perhaps more importantly, neglect to equip the children of black communities with the tools needed for societal progression. When Sonny Carson speaks of his "miseducation" it is this sentiment in part that is being expressed. He wished for relevance in education. Such a wish is not radical or liberal or even new. Many years ago John Dewey wrote that it is essential to begin with a child's impulse and that school must relate to the daily life of the child. In *My Pedagogic Creed,* he observes that to neglect this principle is to throw the child into a passive, receptive, or absorbing state not allowing the child to follow the law of his or her nature. The result is friction and waste (Dewey, 1897).

It is also unfortunate, I believe, that the desire to tap the potential of the child's mind is labeled as liberal. When this happens, those opposed to the idea of liberalism in any form reject a more complex understanding of what it means to educate based on party platforms and the like. In addition, one might say that it is not even particularly liberal to seek an education that encourages one's innate curiosity and instinct to interpret the world. Rather, one might say it is morally and ethically sound to do so. According to Susan Ohanian, in *One Size Fits Few*, the real problem is that conservative politics have simply neglected the individual for corporate gain. She gives the example of Louis V. Gerstner, one time CEO of IBM, who puts his ideas this way: the "business" of schools is "the distribution of information" (Ohanian, 1999, p. 111). In words reminiscent of the social efficiency model of

Taylor in the 1890s, he says to teachers: "know what your job is; know what your outcomes should be; know how you will measure output" (Ohanian, 1999, p. 111). Yet one may ask, what, for example, do output, distribution, production and so on, have to do with encouraging a child to become interested in learning? Joe Kincheloe in his book, *Teachers as Researchers*, points out that "In these politico-educational arrangements, students – the poor and racially marginalized ones in particular – face the consequences of this pedagogical irrationality" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 5). It was because of such realizations that the activists talked about in *Justice, Justice* all seemed to agree that American schools almost completely refused "to educate black children" (Perlstein, 2004, p. 149) and that " 'The Community' needed some means of controlling the education of its children" (2004, p. 117).

Many educators today, including Kincheloe, Ohanian and Kohn, see the same fundamental injustice in public schooling as perceived by those who fought for community control. Centralized and standardized curricula and testing have ensured that a child's school day consists primarily of test preparation. Such curricula could be categorized as an absence of education for their impetus and direction is contrived and removed from the children in the class. To believe that a child can come to discover, debate, consider and question the complex world in which they live through a process of bubbling in the essentially 'correct' answer to a given question is nothing short of ludicrous.

Lawrence Cremin, in an article entitled "The Progressive Movement in American Education," spoke of how Joseph Mayer Rice in 1892 once encountered a school curriculum that was based on rote learning. According to Herbert Kliebard, Rice expressed concern over such a curriculum on grounds it was "of no interest and of no value" to the population (Kliebard, 1987, p. 90). Had he listened to his own advice, we may have different schools today. As it is, however, we have done no more than return to what Rice found over a hundred years ago. Given the advantage of hindsight, the negative implications of a concept such as social efficiency, and the need to move beyond it, are clear. Social efficiency disregards the impulse and interests of the child. With this in mind, it becomes evident that to remand school as a place where the child is not the center of his or her curriculum, but rather information that has been compiled to be learned, is not merely conservative, it is unconscionable.

Rhody McCoy, who worked in the 600 schools (a school for unruly students), sees it in much the same way. Given an irrelevant, preconceived, rigid curriculum, he rejected the notion that his students evidenced problems of their own making. He believed the way to empower, to give visibility and self worth to the black population was through an inclusive curriculum. He saw addressing racial oppression in school and society as "the preeminent task facing educators" (Perlstein, p. 129). David Tyack concurred saying "effective reforms today will require reassessment of some cherished convictions about the possibility of finding a one best system, about the value of insulating the school from community influence, about the irrelevance of ethnic differences" (Tyack, 1975, p. 290). He went on to

write that we will need "to develop many alternatives within the system" and "correct the many dysfunctions of the vast bureaucracies" (Tyack, 1975, p. 291).

By contrast, today in Brownsville, and New York City as a whole, even the token community control granted in 1969 to quell activism has been revoked. The one Department of Education has subsumed all 32 community boards, issued a standardized curriculum, and demands as many as eight tests a year. The infamous "year-end" test, which determines whether or not a student has retained enough information to move on to the next grade or be held back, is enforced as early as third grade. This puts the Mayor very much in line with the conservative's view of education. In light of what many scholars tell us about testing, whether or not it is beneficial for the students of New York City would seem to be of little concern. Alfie Kohn, in *The Case Against Standardized Testing,* for example, recognizes that such tests are often not sensitive to the very students being tested, primarily those of "minority cultures" (Kohn, 2000, p. 35). He posits that if states persist in making a student's fate rest on a single test "we will be facing a scenario that might be described without exaggeration as an educational ethnic cleansing" (2000, p. 41). "Research has repeatedly found that the amount of poverty in the communities where schools are located, along with other variables having nothing to do with what happens in classrooms, accounts for the great majority of the difference in test scores from one area to the next" (2000, p. 7).

Despite the jargon and catchphrases designed to confuse the non-questioning citizen and supplant actual curricular reform, students are taught to listen and regurgitate facts. In *Getting Beyond the Facts*, Kincheloe addresses the very issue of presenting information as facts and the importance of realizing that these facts demand further investigation. The democratic educator (the teacher who wishes to promote a functioning democracy), he suggests, has the responsibility of engaging students critically; one cannot simply present information, one must critically examine information. To do otherwise is to leave unquestioned the "hidden agendas that move events, structures of power that undermine the quest for democracy, and the subtle working of oppression in its various expressions" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 13). It is also to leave unaddressed the question of atonement as characterized by Gresson and the pressing educational issues it raises for us all. Similarly it leaves unanswered the challenge raised by Perlstein when he insists that the city and country still struggle with many of the same issues present in the 1960s.

According to Perlstein, the fiscal crisis that hit New York City hard in the 1970s resulted in 10,000 teachers—"most of them white"—(Perlstein, 2004, p. 154) losing their jobs and split many teachers and the UFT from the plight of the poor. Perlstein also notes that Mayoral takeovers in Chicago and Boston yielded few results favoring school desegregation or quality improvement. He further comments that Mayoral control may "foster coalitions rather that conflicts…however," Perlstein continues, "it is equally plausible that mayoral control will contribute to the further erosion of public schooling" and that race-blind standards promote racism under the guise of equity (2004, p. 158). As we enter the 21st century with the widening gap between rich and poor, one is forced to assess the

health of the nation. The standardizing of curriculum and enforcement of testing to determine who will rise and fall in the realms of education and, thus, society could be seen as attacks on the students' ability to question and understand. If so, what happens to the discerning citizen and the voice of the people? The trend towards conservativism and standardization may satisfy the designs of conservative politicians, but does it encourage or provide an education that will ensure the stability and longevity of democracy?

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