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Questioning the American Dream:
An Essay Review of Marsh's *Class Dismissed*

Curry Malott
West Chester University of Pennsylvania

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John Marsh's *Class Dismissed: Why We Can't Teach or Learn Our Way Out of Inequality* addresses an issue that could scarcely be more relevant or urgent. In his well-argued and researched volume Marsh explores in great detail the debates surrounding poverty and inequality in the United States and the historical development of equating poverty and economic inequality with a lack of education. This book is a must read for not only policy makers and administrators, but also for those who teach teachers, are teachers, or are in the process of becoming a teacher.

In the following review I highlight and offer a few critiques of some of Marsh's central arguments. Drawing on Marx's critique of, and alternative to, capitalism (see Hudis, 2012), and critical or revolutionary pedagogy (Allman, 1999; Freire, 1998; McLaren, 2005; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2010), I then offer some alternative directions regarding this important debate. However, I do not want my criticism here to be mistaken for dismissal. That is, I cannot over-emphasize my praise for the insight and rigor of *Class Dismissed*, and how much students and scholars have to gain from its many strengths, even though many of my comments here will be written from the perspective of a critic. In other words, I am motivated by a deep solidarity with Marsh in addressing the challenges and issues he so passionately engages.

Class Dismissed

Marsh summarizes the central questions *Class Dismissed* addresses in the following introductory excerpt:

> When did the belief in education as an economic panacea arise? Why? More empirically, is it true? If not, why has it proven so attractive? Why do so many people, especially those in power, so urgently want to believe if? And how has it influenced what teachers and students do or imagine what they do? Finally, if it is not true that education will solve poverty and inequality, what might?

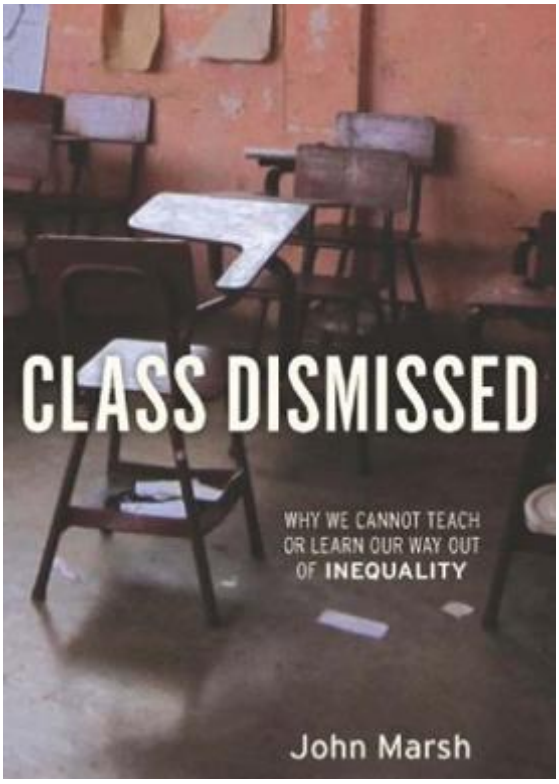
Providing some insight into the conclusions the book comes to in regards to these questions Marsh provides his audience with a more detailed Introduction into *Class Dismissed*:

> I argue that appeals to education have displaced the debate about social class and economic power that Americans need to have if we are to understand the causes of and the cure for sustained poverty and increasing inequality…In order to start that debate, I suggest that we may need to dismiss the belief that all or even most of our economic problems can be solved from the classroom. (pp. 18-19)

The position **Marsh** is taking here is clearly not a popular one. On one hand Marsh is attacking one of the Nation's objects of worship, education, which is viewed as the golden vehicle through which hard work and determination can allow the individual to excel in the free market. Education is viewed as sacred because it represents the literal road to economic and moral salvation.

Questioning the American Dream, as Marsh does, is an unpardonable sin. While providing a brutally honest picture of educations' inability to eliminate poverty and economic inequality (within capitalism), Marsh's alternative involves radical policy changes and increased unionization (see below). What he is calling for is so far to the left of the United States' twenty-first century Democratic Party, for example, that if he were allowed to enter the mainstream, national debate, the capitalist class would draw upon every resource under its control, including cold-war propaganda techniques, to ensure he was thoroughly dismissed as un-American, against freedom, a dictator, outdated, over-simplified, sexist, racist, fascist, and engaging in class-warfare. Just consider how *Obama-care*, which has provided a major boost to the capitalist health care industry has been vilified by Republican political competitors for being, of all things, *socialist*. However, Marsh is not calling for socialism and, as far as I can tell, he is not a Marxist. *Class Dismissed* is certainly not written from a Marxist perspective. But because he is calling for the redistribution of wealth, his approach is dangerous.

Marsh's place of departure in Chapter One is defining and outlining the difference between poverty and inequality. This distinction sets the stage for the remainder of *Class Dismissed*. Making this comparison Marsh notes that poverty has remained relatively consistent "between 11 and 15 percent since 1966" whereas "economic inequality has been steadily rising for more than twenty-five years" (p. 30). In other



words, a focus on economic inequality looks at economic growth and who benefits from it. Marsh notes that in the last three decades economic growth and working and middle-class incomes began to diverge as US capital gains have increasingly been redirected to the top income earners (i.e. the capitalist class although Marsh does not use that language). Marsh then proceeds to counter the arguments that attempt to blame poverty on growing immigration and single mothers noting that poverty is "mostly a jobs and public policy problem" (p. 44). While Marsh's conclusions are perfectly reasonable and justifiable, *Class Dismissed* never points to capitalism itself as the cause of poverty and inequality (addressed below).

Marsh's discussion of inequality, however, is fundamentally important. In his discussion on the costs of inequality Marsh draws on

research that suggests that it is not just the poor who suffer from such conditions, but indicators such as life expectancy decline for everyone, even for the capitalist class, as inequality increases. Summarizing this point Marsh notes that a nation "growing richer may not lead a country's citizens to live longer; growing more equal might. Conversely, growing more unequal, as the United States has, robs everyone, rich and poor alike, of a few years of their life" (p. 61). As if this were not striking enough, Marsh continues noting:

> Name your social measure, and more equal countries do better than less equal ones: life expectancy; levels of trust in others; women's status in society; percent of national income devoted to foreign aid; percent of population with mental illness; drug use; homicide rates; infant mortality; obesity; math and literacy scores; percent of population completing high school; teenage pregnancy; imprisonment; social mobility….(p. 62)

Again, Marsh reminds us that, "economic growth alone will not solve our health or social problems" (p. 62). These insights shed light on the error of assuming that increasing educational attainment has the potential to eliminate or substantially reduce the rates of poverty and inequality in a given society. Rather, Marsh demonstrates that reducing poverty and inequality through redistributive social reform policies will improve social indicators such as educational attainment. This is an important distinction at the heart of Marsh's critique.

More completely addressing the debates surrounding educational attainment and its relationship to poverty and inequality is the focus of Chapter Two. Like Chapter One, Chapter Two is built around an engagement with the dominant discourse, an effective approach students in my courses would benefit greatly from. What is more, Chapter Two builds upon the conclusions reached in Chapter One. For example, we often hear that a college education is an unavoidable requirement for gaining access to America's consumer culture because many of the middle-class manufacturing jobs in the US have either been outsourced or made redundant from technological developments such as robotics and computerization.

While there is some truth to this reasoning, Marsh notes that these changes, while increasing economic output, have also increased inequality between those who have a college degree and those that do not. For example, in 1974 workers with a bachelors' degree earned 1.73 times more than a worker with only a high school diploma, by 2009 that number had increased to 2.21 (p. 68). What is more, "the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that seven out of the ten occupations that will produce the most new jobs by 2018 will require only on-the-job training" (p. 70). Graduating more students with college degrees will therefore not significantly combat poverty. Summarizing this situation Marsh concludes that, "conferring a degree on someone does not magically generate a job in the labor

market into which the newly credentialed person steps" (p. 72). Increasing the general level of education of a particular society, in other words, would not significantly reduce the average rates of poverty and inequality, even when considered within a global context. If education is incapable of reducing poverty and economic inequality within the world that exists, then when and why did such assumptions emerge? In Chapters Three and Four Marsh explores this history.

The Massachusetts education crusader of the mid-nineteenth century, Horace Mann, is the figure Marsh points to as the first significant figure connecting education to individual and national economic *benefits*. Before Mann's explicit connection between education and economics, it was argued that *virtue* or *character* was the most significant factor in determining if a person achieved upward social mobility. However, I would argue that this is one of those places that Marsh's approach reveals its shortcomings. That is, departing from Marsh, we can view the colonization of the Americas as the expansion of England's emerging capitalist economy. When we proceed from here we are reminded that the first permanent English settlement in Jamestown Virginia in 1607 was not inspired by grand visions of a new society, but rather, it was a business venture exploiting the Native American crop, tobacco, as the highly profitable, and therefore primary, commodity. The great diversity of workers toiling on tobacco plantations, sometimes in a stone's throw from the far more democratic and thus appealing (from a workers point of view) local Indigenous civilizations, were in need of social control (from an investor perspective) to prevent desertion thereby ensuring the investment/colony was profitable/successful. What tools did the colonists already have at their disposal? Religion. Schools used religion to scare workers into passivity thereby manufacturing the consciousness needed for exploitation and domination (Malott, 2013). From this perspective, contrary to Marsh, we might say that education has always had an economic motivation — a necessary form of social control under the partial freedom afforded by an emerging capitalism.

Essentially, what I am advocating is an approach to the history of education that examines how the purposes, scope, and understanding of education can best be understood from the historical development of capitalism. Simply stated; schools change as the needs of capitalism change (Malott, 2012). This line of reasoning could help situate Marsh's brilliant insights into a larger context. For example, Marsh observes that one of the reasons so little attention was paid to education (especially higher education) as a way to escape poverty before the twentieth century was the simple fact that few people attended school beyond the eighth grade. According to Marsh, "if you wished to be a doctor, lawyer, engineer, or businessman, you did not need a college degree — you did not even need a high school degree…. Like a butcher, your learning mostly took place on the job" (p. 109). Marsh observes that as these professions began including higher

education as a requirement, schools gradually began to be viewed as a way to paternalistically improve poor people through skills and character enhancement, which would enable the children of poverty to succeed in the labor market and not succumb to the drink, vise, and idleness of their degenerate parents.

Situating this change within the historical development of capital draws our attention to the massive technological developments giving rise to the second industrial revolution around the 1870s leading to an explosion in capital's need for highly skilled workers. This was the beginning of monopoly capitalism and the birth of a new industrial mega-rich capitalist class made possible by a growing urban, super-exploited under-class. That is, this new era of inequality and suffering in the face of mind-numbing exuberance, gave birth to a militant labor movement. Schooling therefore became increasingly important to the capitalist class not just due to the increasingly complexity of production, but because of growing unrest and the need for social control and a class of managers that Howard Zinn referred to as *loyal buffers against trouble* (see Malott, 2012; Malott, 2013). While Marsh does allude to these connections, he stops far short of pointing to the historical development of capitalism, a system based upon perpetual growth, expansion and cyclical crisis, as driving the history of education.

However, despite such shortcomings, Marsh offers valuable insights into the complexity of this history often absent from histories of education. For example, Marsh notes that there were social scientists and even a Commission on Industrial Relations created by Congress in 1912 that called for more economic equality between employers and employees as a way to combat poverty. Marsh notes that as early as the beginning of the twentieth century academics and other researchers acknowledged that it was poverty and unemployment that created idleness and alcoholism instead of the other way around as was commonly believed. Consequently, neither source gave much importance to education as a means to overcome human suffering. Rather than supporting and enhancing the wellbeing and independence of workers as the Commission on Industrial Relations advocated, Marsh argues it was the paternalism of industrial capitalists such as Andrew Carnegie who really set the stage for education emerging as the panacea for all of society's problems. Here Marsh suggests the history of education is more the result of the preferences of individual capitalists rather than either a larger trajectory of a capitalist system guided by an internal, competitive logic, or the interplay between the laws of a system and the human agency of the antagonistically related working and capitalist classes.

Marsh therefore spends a fair amount of time outlining Carnegie's beliefs, such as the view that capitalists should not hoard their wealth, but rather, redistribute it throughout working-class communities with directed philanthropy. For Carnegie this meant constructing libraries where the poor could improve themselves. Carnegie was

adamantly opposed to redistributing wealth to workers in the form of wages for fear that workers would squander the wealth and deteriorate into depravity. Summarizing Carnegie's position here in one of his many skillfully worded and brilliantly conceptualized passages Marsh Notes that,

> Carnegies' argument led to a bizarre if inescapable conclusion: the poor and working poor must remain poor so that the rich could help them. The rich had to impoverish the poor in order to save them. (p. 96)

It is therefore not surprising that Carnegie was a violent strikebreaker and overall militant opponent of unionism and any form of worker democracy. One way Marsh might have situated Carnegie's views in a larger context would have been to connect them to the larger process of colonization/Westward Expansion/the historical development of capitalism. For example, Marsh might have observed that Carnegies' paternalism toward *his* workers is the same paternalism of the European colonizers' white mans' burden that viewed the act of colonization as a necessary, if burdensome, favor to Native Americans. As Carnegie dominates workers for their own good, so too do the colonizers colonize in benevolence. Marsh argues that the United States has become a nation of Carnegies with education rather than libraries serving as the primary vehicle through which workers would be saved from themselves. Again, Marsh's analysis here could have easily been deepened by considering the larger ideology that Carnegie was a *product* of, not the *creator* of—the ideology of capital itself. Historically, the ruling ideology has been designed to convince workers of the wisdom and righteousness of the bosses and private property. It is this paternalism that we can trace back to the earliest forms of religious education in the colonies, which portrayed workers as sinful and in need of the wisdom and superiority of the elite.

Ironically enough Marsh argues that it was Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, in their quest to secure a prosperous future for recently emancipated African Americans that made the most concrete and sustained case for education as the pathway to economic advancement, and therefore to pave the way for *a nation of Carnegies*. The disagreements between DuBois and Washington stemmed from the type of education they advocated for. Where Washington argued for an assimilationist-oriented industrial education, DuBois cried for a more academic and *critical* education for the most intellectually advanced African Americans who would serve as leaders in the struggle against racism and oppression.

But it was the vocational approach to education that would come to dominate national education policy allowing schools "to claim to serve all young people, regardless of their class background, and, just as important, claim to offer opportunities to all, not just those who intended to go on to college" (p. 121). However, college began to become increasingly important for a growing number of Americans as professions

increasingly adopted it as a requirement. Marsh notes that one of the effects of the Great Depression was to shift Americans' thinking about education. Before the Depression education beyond the eighth grade was viewed as an unnecessary luxury or simply a waste of one's income generating years. As the importance of a college education began to escalate during the 1930s, "unemployed workers…blamed their misery…on their earlier decision to leave school and go to work… As a result, many resolved that their children would not make the same mistakes they did" (p. 122).

While Marsh explains the sharp rise in high school enrollments (from five to fifty percent) and the educational attainment of youth between the ages of fifteen and nineteen between 1890 and 1940 as a result of shifting attitudes among workers, as argued above, I would say that this shift in attitude reflects not just the desperation of the Great Depression, but the changing needs of capital and the growing demand for a more highly skilled workforce. While the percentage of the population graduating from college doubled, Marsh argues that its growth comes nowhere near the growth in high school enrollment, suggesting that many historians have greatly exaggerated the association between opportunity and higher education during this era. What is significant is where Marsh takes his audience from here. Rather than higher education serving as the primary vehicle for upward mobility, Marsh points to unions noting that,

> …working people…imagined and took advantage of other opportunities, especially those presented by organized labor…from 1916 to 1926 workers conducted, on average, about 2,500 strikes per year, and each year some 1.3 million workers went on strike…Over a four-year period, from 1916 to 1920, 2.3 million workers joined a union, bringing total membership to slightly over 5 million, or about 25 percent of all employed wage earners…By 1945, over half of all employed wage earners belonged to a union. (pp. 125-126)

Because unionized workers, on average, make significantly more than non-unionized workers, it is no wonder that education, from a capitalist point of view, would come to represent the path to economic advancement for workers in the U.S. In other words, Marsh suggests, and I agree with him, that it is no coincidence that educational attainment, or a focus on workers improving themselves, would dominate discussions concerning reducing poverty because the alternative, unionization and radical economic policy represent a direct attack on the capitalist class's profit margins. In Chapter Four Marsh argues that the Nation's growing tendency to identify educational attainment with upward social mobility coincides with a shift in attitude or perception. For Marsh, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling best represents this shift. Making this important point Marsh observes:

> …the Supreme Court condemned racial segregation not only or even primarily because segregation violated moral decency in American democracy but because it harmed something even more valuable, equality of educational opportunity. In doing so, the court championed education in a way that it had rarely been championed before…The lesson was clear. Segregation harmed African Americans because in denying them an equal education, it had denied them equality of opportunity. (p. 138)

The paternalism that follows this shift is predictable enough. Marsh points to 1962 and President Johnson's *War on Poverty* as offering educational opportunity as a panacea for fixing poor folks assumed to be culturally deficient and therefore in need of *help*. What Johnson's Administration downplayed were structural factors (i.e. policies and tax codes) causing poverty and inequality. Again, as Marsh argues throughout the book, the most appropriate way to eliminate poverty and inequality is not by fixing people, but by fixing or transforming policy (i.e. raising the minimum wage above the poverty line) and creating jobs. Making one of his more compelling arguments Marsh notes that this obsession with education actually does significantly more to increase inequality than one might guess. That is, making higher education increasingly necessary to achieve an above-poverty lifestyle works to further exclude those least privileged workers (i.e. immigrants, African Americans, Latinos/as, Native Americans, etc.) from upward mobility.

While Nixon dismantled the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1974, Marsh argues it was Reagan that symbolizes the complete retreat from the government's social commitments and the return to education as the sole path out of poverty. Reagan also symbolizes the beginning of the on-going process of de-industrialization and de-unionization and thus growing inequality and poverty. Summarizing his position on the forces of power behind these negative shifts for workers, Marsh notes, and I summarize at length here due to the centrality of these arguments:

> …businesses and their lobbies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in the fight against organized labor. They have made less of a fuss about education.

Thus one should not underestimate the possibility that opportunity gradually came to mean educational opportunity in the United States because the owners of things — and the payers of wages — preferred it that way. It cost considerably less — and it might even turn a profit — to provide an education, even of college education, for the children of workers than it did to pay their parents more wages, especially when everyone in a community assumed the burden of paying for schools whereas employers alone signed the paychecks.

So, as the Marxists might put it, did the capitalists do it? Perhaps, but unless you believe in a particularly thorough form of

false consciousness, and I suppose one cannot rule that out…why so many ordinary people — and so many well-meaning reformers — also heard the good word about education. A less sinister explanation, then, might focus on the fact that for a while, and especially in recent decades, ordinary people came to believe that the path to prosperity wound through schoolhouses and colleges because in fact it in fact did…

> Few people paused to consider whether education was a necessary or sufficient solution to the problems they and their communities faced. (pp. 164-165)

There is certainly much that can be said in response to this passage. However, for the purposes of this review, I might focus on Marsh's comment that "Marxists" believe that "capitalists did it" or gave people false consciousness. As one of the only places where Marsh mentions Marx, his quick dismissal is significant. First of all, there is no indication that Marsh is referring to any specific tradition of Marxism since he only mentions "the Marxists." This is important since different Marxisms would answer Marsh's question differently (see Hudis, 2011). Marsh is suggesting here that "the Marxists" believe that capitalism is a system directed by the capitalists. While there is a certain degree of deceptive truth to this position, given the power and wealth of the capitalist class, Marx himself was well aware of the complex interplay between the internal logic of competitive capitalism and the human agency of individual capitalists and workers.

After what I believe was a reckless dismissal of Marx, Marsh brings us back to his central position; placing too much hope in education detracts us from the more effective actions to combat inequality and poverty, which are policy and unionization. However, because he acknowledges that in the current political climate radical policy changes and a resurgence of unionism seem rather hopeless, it makes little sense to me why Marsh would not revisit Marx and the challenge to capitalism itself, not just greedy or paternalistic capitalists. From here I will begin to make a more solid case for Marx.

A Marxist Departure

"The *contract* between capital and labor can therefore never be struck on equitable terms…The social power of the work[ers] is their number. The force of numbers, however, is broken by disunion. The disunion of the work[ers] is created and perpetuated by their *unavoidable competition among themselves*. Trades' unions originally sprang up from the *spontaneous* attempts of work[ers] at removing or at least checking that competition…The immediate object of trades' unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities…for the obstruction of the incessant encroachments of capital, in a word, to questions of wages and time of labor. This activity of the trades' unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary…If the trades' unions are required for the guerrilla fights between labor and capital, they are still more important as *organized agencies for superseding the very system of wages labor and capital rule*…Apart from their

original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organizing centers of the working class in the broad interest of its *complete emancipation*. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction." (Marx, 1866/1990, pp. 33-35)

While it is absolutely necessary to legislate, when possible, against the immiseration of capitalism, and to obstruct the dominant arguments and positions apologizing for the concrete conditions of social life in the twenty-first century, as Marsh has so eloquently and skillfully done and advocated, it is equally important, as Marx (1866/1990) suggests above, to simultaneously depart from capital itself, which includes disrupting the assumptions underlying the social and material relations of production, namely, that capitalism is inevitable. Bluntly stated, *Class Dismissed* is written from the unstated assumption that capitalism is an unavoidable given, explaining his above mentioned approach to overcoming poverty and inequality. However, in my view, accepting the permanence of capital thesis represents a dangerous shortcoming.

Not falling victim to the hopelessness of the inevitability thesis situates Marsh's solutions to poverty and inequality in a radically different light. For Peter Hudis it is Marx who offers the most complete vision of the alternative to capitalism, and therefore the most compelling argument against the end of history assumption embedded within the inevitability thesis. Opening our interpretive frameworks to the possibility of transcending capital itself as a solution to poverty and economic inequality, immediately presents us with a challenging question: Are we to accept the assumption that the most offensive or dehumanizing consequence of capitalism is poverty and economic inequality?

In Hudis' study of Marx's alternative to capital it is argued that issues of distribution (i.e. poverty and inequality — exchange relations) were not Marx's primary concern or critique of capitalism. In other words, when our critique of capitalism is limited to the true fact that it is offensive because it exploits human labor power and therefore causes poverty and inequality, solutions tend to be limited to issues of distribution, which leaves the social relations of production unchallenged. This is highly problematic for Marx, because for him, even if markets and private property were abolished (which would be a remarkable achievement indeed) and distribution or wages were equalized, the social relations of capitalist production (i.e. the subsumption of concrete labor into abstract labor) would remain unchallenged. Consequently, the dehumanizing, self-estrangement (i.e. alienation) of capitalism would persist. In the following summary Hudis highlights the difficulty of comprehending the importance of abstract labor as a defining aspect of capitalist production:

> Since value can only show itself as a social relation between one commodity and another, it all too readily appears that relations of exchange are responsible for value-

> production. So powerful is that appearance that even Marx does not explicitly pose the difference between exchange-value and value itself until quite late in the development of capital.
>
> That Marx ultimately makes this distinction is of critical importance, since it suggestions that attempting to ameliorate the deleterious aspect of value-production by altering the exchange-relation is fundamentally flawed. Since exchange-value is a manifestation of value, whose substance is abstract labor, the essential problem of capitalist production can be addressed only by altering the nature of the labor-process itself. (p. 151)

In other words, altering exchange-relations, that is, redistributing wealth to workers directly through wage increases, or indirectly through taxation and social programs, as Marsh advocates for (which of course would be a huge victory for labor), leaves production relations intact, and thus the substance of value, abstract labor, unacknowledged and thus unchallenged. In other words, Hudis argues that it is not issues of distribution (i.e. poverty and inequality) that so offends Marx regarding capitalism, partly because they are but mere consequences of the alienating nature of the social relations of production within capitalism.

In other words, Marx objects to the alienation or self-estrangement of capitalism (i.e. abstract labor, the substance of value) because it excludes the possibility of the full, healthy, normal, cultural-social development of the human being. Because abstract value represents the substance of capitalism, the only way to transcend the alienation of capitalism is to transcend capitalism itself. Even if markets and private property were abolished and wages were equalized, as suggested above, alienation and dehumanization would continue if the social relations of capitalist production represented by the existence of socially necessary labor time, or the generalized standard separating thinking from doing, persisted. Working toward a post-capitalist society that is humanized might include a critical education against capitalism focused on imagining a world without abstract labor. This is the foundation needed for a world of inclusion, or a world inclusive of humanization and against dehumanization.

However, before I turn my attention to critical pedagogy and Marsh's position in *Class Dismissed* on a critical or transformative education, I will provide a brief summary of Marx's conception of the alternative to capitalism because it will help to flesh out exactly what abstract labor is and it will more concretely offer a very specific purpose for the critical education advocated for below. Providing a transition into Marx's "late writings," making the case that they offer the most explicit vision of a post-capitalist society, Hudis summarizes:

> According to Marx, the amount of time engaged in material production would be drastically reduced in the new society, thanks to technological

> innovation and the development of the forces of production. At the same time, labor, like all forms of human activity, would be *freely* associated and not subject to the autonomous power of capital that operates behind the backs of individuals.
>
> Here is the most important determinant in Marx's concept of the new society: social relations must cease to operate independently of the self-activity of the associated individuals. Marx will oppose any power—be it the state, a social plan, or the market itself—that takes on a life of its own and utilizes human powers as a mere means to its fruition and development. Marx's opposition to the inversion of subject and predicate constitutes the reason for his opposition to all forms of value-production. It is also what grounds his conception of socialism. Human power, he insists, must become a self-sufficient end—it must cease to serve as a means to some other end. He will project this concept even more explicitly in his last writings, which contain his most detailed discussion of the content of a postcapitalist society. (p. 182)

Hudis points to the Paris Commune of 1871 as the single most important event in pushing Marx to revise and deepen his concept of a postcapitalist society. Making this point Hudis argues that "the Paris Commune led Marx to conclude, more explicitly than ever before, that the state is not a neutral instrument that could be *used* to 'wrest' power from the oppressors. *Its very form is despotic*" (p. 185). That is, because the new society will consist of freely-associated producers democratically "allocating social wealth" (Hudis, 2012), the means of achieving this must therefore too be non-coercive, which, for Marx after 1871, was no longer the state, but rather, the commune. However, the commune here is not socialism, but it could lead to it if it were allowed to survive and develop. We know that this was not the case with respect to the Paris Commune of 1871, and we know that it has never been since. That is, workers' self-directed programs (i.e. revolutionary movements) have always been the primary targets of the capitalist class' military aggression. A postcapitalist society is therefore something that will almost certainly have to be bitterly fought for in the streets, cites of production, and schools across the world.

For Marx, a new society can only be born from the womb of a preexisting one therefore only gradually shedding the traces of the old social relations. In this respect Marx identified two phases of a new society. From the outset, however, for Marx, the central defining feature of capitalist production must be abolished, which is the subsumption of actual labor time with socially-necessary labor time. Socially necessary labor time, or a generalizable average dictated by technology and consumer markets, is therefore distinct from actual labor time, and comes to dominate concrete labor by serving as the universal standard allowing different products of labor to be mutually exchangeable.

Hudis (2012) therefore summarizes Marx's concept of a new society as being based upon "the *replacement of the dictatorship of abstract time with time as the space for human development*…" (p. 191). In a new society a market where products of labor are equally exchangeable ceases to exist because "there is no substance that renders different magnitudes qualitatively equal" (Hudis, 2012, p. 192). In the highest stage of socialism, for Marx, individuals no longer learn to produce for production, but that the development of the human species is an end in itself. From this framework then, Marsh's failure to delve deeper into the source of dehumanization (i.e. abstract labor) represents a major shortcoming. From here we can return to the question regarding the potential role of education in capitalist societies in transcending capital's social relations themselves.

Considering a Critical Pedagogy

If education cannot eliminate poverty, then what can it do? Marsh's response to this question provides a useful place of departure. Pointing to Thomas Jefferson's position on public education Marsh acknowledges an educational purpose designed to assist students in developing the critical thinking skills needed to be able to detect lies and defend themselves against tyrants and oppressors, but rather quickly downplays its potential potency by arguing that the development of intellectual skills cannot guarantee a critical perspective or the development of a critical consciousness.

What is absent in Marsh's discussion of the relevance of an education not diluted with false beliefs about its ability to eliminate poverty and inequality within an assumed inevitable capitalist system, as alluded to above, is an engagement with the rich tradition of critical pedagogy, which emerged in the US in response to Reagan's attack on teachers in his administrations' education report, *A Nation At Risk*, and the growing poverty and suffering associated with the return to free-market fundamentalism associated with *trickle-down economics*. With the publication of the English edition of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's (1998) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the 1970s, U.S. critical educators had a well-developed model and mentor to guide their way. Early and influential figures in North American critical pedagogy include Donaldo Macedo, Henry Giroux, Joe L. Kincheloe, Ira Shor, bell hooks, Peter McLaren, and many others, often in close collaboration with Freire himself. Marsh mentions none of these educators or this tradition. Critical pedagogy, at its finer and more relevant moments, represents an educational sub-tradition designed to create learning experiences and understandings to transcend capitalism.

That is, Freire's critical education for humanization was informed by the Marxist understanding that the alienation of abstract labor disconnects thinking from doing. Freire therefore stressed the importance of students and educators being engaged in a life-long practice of reflecting on their consciousness and perpetually changing their practice as their understanding develops and their commitments deepen.

Critical education here is not merely designed to help workers advocate for a higher wage, but to be engaged in the process of *becoming* (in the Hegelian sense), leading workers, collectively, toward the transcendence of capital. This critical pedagogy is therefore purposeful and directed by the educator while simultaneously designed to engage students as active learners and transformers of history. This is a revolutionary pedagogy; it is prescriptive because it is directed (toward revolution), but it is democratic in that is based on a deep commitment to humanization. Offering an insightful connection between Freire and Marx, the late British revolutionary educator, Paula Allman (1999), in *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education*, elaborates:

> At the level of prescription, which suggests what educators "ought" to do, [Freire] is unequivocal. This, in turn, links back to the essential prescription that he shared with—and probably came to through his readings of—Marx. Both of them think that it is our human vocation to become more fully human. In Marx's terms, this would mean being at one with our "species being" or that which makes our species distinct from others. According to this analysis of human ontology, human beings are alienated from their human potential. Marx and Freire urge human beings to engage in a revolutionary process that would deliver human history into "human hands,"—that is, making it the critical and creative product of all human beings. (p. 92)

From the perspective that the most desirable way to abolish poverty and inequality is by transcending capitalist production completely, including socially necessary labor time, as Allman (1999) and Hudis (2012) allude, a directed, purposeful critical education could not be more important and therefore a missed body of rich insights on the part of Marsh. While supporting our unions and advocating for more equally distributive policies are important and necessary struggles, failing to come to understand the substance of value, abstract or indirect labor, diminishes our vision and movement against human suffering and its root causes or structures.

What might education look like in a post-capitalist society? Marx's concept of poly-technical education represents a model designed to function in a society after capitalism when thinking and doing are re-united. That is, when laboring is no longer done to satisfy other needs, but rather, when work itself satisfies both material and human needs simultaneously. This approach to education is worth considering because it sheds light on the social relations beyond value and its substance, abstract labor (see Small, 2005, for a detailed analysis of Marx's concept of polytechnical education). While this discussion is beyond the scope of this review, I mentioned it as a final suggestion pointing toward the development of an increasingly useful critical or revolutionary pedagogy.

Conclusion

While *Class Dismissed* is an important volume offering an indispensible contribution, Marx's work and legacy, including key aspects of Freire's critical pedagogy, continue to offer invaluable tools for transcending the true capitalist cause of today's manifestations of poverty and inequality Marsh so rigorously and passionately exposes.

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About the Reviewer

Curry Stephenson Malott is Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations at West Chester University of Pennsylvania in the Department of Professional and Secondary Education. His most recent books include *Radical Voices for Democratic Schooling: Exposing Neoliberal Inequalities* (Palgrave) with Pierre Orelus; and *Teaching Marx: The Socialist Challenge* (Information Age Publishing) co-edited with Mike Cole and John Elmore. He is founder and co-organizer of Critical Theories in the Twenty-First Century: A Conference of Transformative Pedagogies (West Chester University of Pennsylvania) (www.ct21.org).

Editors
David J. Blacker
blacker@edrev.info
Gustavo Fischman
fischman@edrev.info
Melissa Cast-Brede
cast-brede@edrev.info
Gene V Glass
glass@edrev.info