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# From a City on the Hill to the Dungheap of History

## An Interview with Peter McLaren

Mitja Sardoč

What you think is the essence of the American Dream, i.e. what it stands for?

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The concept of the American Dream is one of the most recognizable political hieroglyphics of what it means to live in a free market democracy—the standard by which all other countries should be judged. It is emblematic of the successful market democracy built upon the foundations of racial equality, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all. The term also has historically situated value—and if you examine the palimpsest of the American “good life” you will discover ever fading images of a white family, a wood paneled recreational room, a television set tuned to a situation comedy featuring canned laughter, two cars in the garage (a family station wagon and a sports car for the hubby), a home in the peaceful suburbs, amicable neighbors who graciously take in your empty garbage cans for you on days that you forget, and enough savings in the bank account to send your children to a good college—all resting comfortably in the shade of a tree—the tree of liberty, of freedom of expression, of consumer comforts. It is a concept whose roots are firmly planted in the Enlightenment, one that is firmly tethered to the ideals of free enterprise and freedom of expression, and fundamental in shaping the sense of embodied selfhood as American citizens. Those were the 1950s. The concept now serves as a chimera of cynicism, to be manipulated by politicians bought and paid for by transnational corporations—most progressives and radicals in the U.S. recognize this. It is a term that describes frozen ideals rather than contextually specific realities—that the grass is always greener on the other side (and Americans always love to manicure their suburban

front lawns), and that the mission of Americans as divinely ordained innovators and entrepreneurs is to “explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before,” as our good starship Captain James T. Kirk would put it. Kirk’s words echo a futuristic doctrine of Manifest Destiny, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century belief that it was God’s destiny for the U.S. to expand its interests and influence and that all of North America was allotted by God to its inhabitants (apparently, the term was created by a journalist, writing in the 1840s to justify the war with Mexico, and since the 1940s and 1950s it has been embodied in the figure of the iconic American cowboy, John Wayne). Of course, the U.S. has taken this doctrine very seriously; our good Captain Kirk is right in saying that “space” is the “final frontier” as the U.S. is already weaponizing outer space as well as exploring it. While Captain Kirk (who is Canadian by birth) represents the way Americans hope to be seen, it is John Wayne who represented Americans to themselves during the heyday of the American Dream. The notion of the American Dream, that ethos that permeates the fibers optics of the American spirit, can be found throughout politics, technology, religion, culture and values. It has, of course, spread throughout the world, most probably by early American Christian missionaries. There is nothing wrong with a dream of global progress, of upward mobility, of financial security, of consumer goods available to all regardless of race, class or ethnicity, etc. The problem is that today, Americans are still bombarded by television commercials showing them images of happy families in three-bedroom houses and with large kitchens, and more and more Americans have been asking: Why are we seeing these images? They make us feel guilty that we have not achieved this standard of living! Part of the history of the idea of the American Dream can be linked to the days directly following the American Civil War which began in 1861 and ended in 1865. Horatio Alger, Jr. wrote a series of novels which became the template for the classic American “from rags to riches” success story, where any hardworking American could pull himself up by his own bootstraps. Technology was rapidly developing and it seemed as though anyone with a creative imagination and steadfast will and determination could move “up the corporate ladder”, taking full advantage of technological innovations to improve his or her station in society. This idea still infects American life, especially with respect to the concept known as “meritocracy” that is taught in schools of education. Despite the glacial pace of racial and gender equality, meritocracy stipulates that in the United States you are awarded a certain standard of living and level of happiness according to how hard you work, and what individual efforts you make to successfully find fortune and fame. The inverse also is prevalent, even today:

that a failure to achieve the American Dream must be considered a personal failure linked to lack of will, laziness and a weakness of character. After World War II, during times of high economic growth, it became objectively possible for large numbers of Americans to achieve a certain level of comfort and financial security—to secure The American Dream—an achievement which is no longer possible for a majority of Americans.

On a 'standard' interpretation, the American Dream constitutes a symbol of progress and has been synonymous with hope in general. Do you think its emancipatory potential and progressive idealism are still relevant today?

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In 1931, James Truslow Adams wrote “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. That was an idea that was not necessarily an American invention, but it nevertheless became the guiding ethos of the country. In the 1950s and 60s the U.S. it was possible for large segments of the US population to achieve a significant degree of freedom and prosperity that made the United States, as the cliché goes, “the envy of the world”. The concept of the American Dream enshrined in the Declaration of Independence—that “all men are created equal” with the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” was appealing to immigrants who came to the United States from countries that had been ravaged by famine, war, political dictatorships, etc. The words inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty reads: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” The U.S. is a land of immigrants (more precisely settler colonialists who massacred the indigenous peoples and dragged Africans to the divine City Upon a Hill in chains) and there was fierce competition among ethnic groups for access to the American Dream. Some, more than others, would face extremely harsh barriers, such as virulent forms of racism, including beatings, torture and lynchings. The American Dream was built on the foundations of violence, the brutal genocide of First Nations peoples, the brutality of the “middle passage” and the slave economy in the slave-owning states of the Confederacy, the anti-union purges, the persecution of suspected communists during the McCarthy era, the Jim Crow laws in which white politicians mandated the segregation of public schools, public places such as neighborhood swimming pools, churches, public transportation, restrooms, restaurants, hotels, and drinking fountains.

And some would say that today, we still have a type of slave economy (much less brutal than the treatment of African Americans during slav-

ery) where an individual's livelihood is completely dependent on wages or a salary, in order to survive. Here, of course, we get into the Marxist definition of wage labor, and as a Marxist humanist, I could elaborate forever on this concept.

Has the idea of the American Dream evolved?

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Yes, the idea of the American Dream has evolved—for instance today Americans appear to be willing to sacrifice their personal privacy to the National Security Agency for security against terrorists. They are much more suspicious of their neighbors, and carry profound racialized resentment—especially against immigrants outside of Europe—especially those from Latin America. And thousands of Americans today are dying each year because they cannot afford health insurance, and for them the American Dream is the American Nightmare. For them the United States represents a vile menagerie of the most egregious vices and crimes against the poor. Since the end of World War II, the term American Dream has been viewed as an objectively real—and to a large extent it was in the 1960s and 1970s objectively obtainable for a large segment of Americans, including factory workers. Factory workers in, say, industries with strong union backing, could often afford a modest summer cottage by a lake.

In the realm of global politics the concept of The American Dream was used to enforce rigor in the way that it challenged, by military force if necessary, the ideologies of other countries who refused to cooperate with the American Empire, countries, for instance, that were socialist or communist.

I don't think that the 'standard' interpretation of the American Dream is relevant today. The entire concept of "American" is, first of all, problematic. The term "American" also includes the countries of South America, or Latin America and also Canada. But the term "American Dream" is meant to confer a special status on the U.S., a term that was given political ballast during the period of economic growth in the United States after World War II until the 1970s, and which anyone with a fine-tuned understanding of the people's history of the United States recognizes as a fraudulent today, as a will o' the wisp fantasy of the bourgeoisie. Contrast the idea of the American Dream with Evo Morales's commentary on the notion of "buen vivir" (or in the Quechua language as *sumac kawsay* or "living well."). The notion of *buen vivir*—which I learned about years ago when I was working with the Chavistas in Venezuela—is linked to the Andean cosmovisión of the Quechua peoples and basically means living in harmony with others and the environment, the community, and

your neighbors. It doesn't mean the same as the U.S. concept of the American Dream, i.e., making a lot of money, and getting rich so you can compete with Mr. and Mrs. Jones's family living next door.

What you think is the essence of the American Dream, i.e. what it stands for?

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Well, we need to see how the concept of the American Dream has grievously dropped in status. The status of the American Dream has been addressed in the recent Chomsky documentary, *Requiem for the American Dream*. In this important commentary, Chomsky warns us about the deeply embedded and generationally persistent racial inequality and oppression at the center of the nation's economic, legal and criminal justice systems, its surveillance state run by the media, FBI, NSA and those who oversee the police and control its educational and media systems as part of the deep state. The school-to-prison pipeline mainly reserved for African Americans and Latinos. He talks about unprecedented inequality, and asserts that democracy is a professed value that isn't objectively real, since the government fails to carry out the will of the people. One of the country's so-called founding fathers, James Madison, emphasized the protection of the "opulent of the minority against the majority"—the importance of keeping the power in the hands of the wealthy, whom he considered the most capable of making economic and political decisions for the country. The Constitution of the United States was written to protect the wealthy land owners. The powerful, whose wealth has been concentrated to a fraction of one percent of the world's population, hate the idea of democracy. Chomsky quotes Adam Smith's vile maxim: "all for ourselves and nothing for anyone else." Smith hoped that generosity would prevail among the capitalists. Capitalism has metastasized in a way that enables more profits to be made through betting with the hedge funds than with actually producing anything of use value. The financialization of the economy and the offshoring of production has reconstructed the system of trade so that the exploited workers are now in competition with the super-exploited. We live in a world in which we are born old, never having known youth. Our youth today who are forced to take out loans to pay for their college tuitions carry the weight of a home mortgage by the time that they graduate.

Capital can move anywhere it wants in the world, but labor is increasingly immobilized. Chomsky quotes Allan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, who in 1997 made the following testimony:

Atypical restraint on compensation increases has been evident for a few years now and appears to be mainly the consequence of greater worker insecurity. The willingness of workers in recent years to trade off smaller increases in wages for greater job security seems to be reasonably well documented.

In 1991, at the bottom of the recession, a survey of workers at large firms by International Survey Research Corporation indicated that 25 percent feared being laid off. In 1996, despite the sharply lower unemployment rate and the tighter labor market, the same survey organization found that 46 percent were fearful of a job layoff.

Basically, Greenspan appears to be saying that the success of the economy depends, at least in part, upon the insecurity of the worker. As Chomsky noted, keeping workers insecure is a way to control them. When you speak out against the exploitation of labor in the U.S. you are often called “anti-American.” Only a totalitarian society would use that term to describe activists who are trying to improve the social and economic conditions of workers, and of the poor. In the 1950s and 1960s the U.S., Americans saw the greatest period of economic growth in its history. So, yes, the idea of the American Dream—owning a house, paid vacations, perhaps affording a cottage near a lake—was true to a certain extent during this period of capitalist growth, but in the 1970s the myth of the American Dream persisted even though the objective conditions were no longer there to support it. Public schools, which Chomsky describes as the “jewels of American society” are disappearing, as most funds now in universities come from tuition and not from the state—and this is also true of so-called public universities. We have in the world of business what Chomsky referred to as “regulatory capture” where the businesses that are being regulated have control over the regulators. In other words, regulating agencies become dominated by the industries they were charged with regulating. But the biggest complaint about the erosion of the American Dream is the crippling costs of medical insurance, and even a good insurance policy can lead you into bankruptcy if you have a serious illness.

I grew up in Canada under a partly socialized medical system and am pretty horrified by the system we have here in the U.S. Canada’s system is very much like Medicare, but for the entire population, which is approximately 30 million people. Medical care is free, but not prescription drugs, glasses, and dental care. Most Canadians that I know have supplementary insurance to cover what the Canada Health Care Act does not, or they pay out-of-pocket, but overall the Canadian system is, in my view,

more cost-effective. I am not pleased that Canada is the only country with a universal healthcare system that does not include coverage of prescription medication although some medications are covered by public funds (or through employment-based private insurance) in some provinces for senior citizens and those with disabilities. Drugs tend to be cheaper in Canada since the federal government negotiates drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. There is a lot of disinformation put out about healthcare in Canada by the Republicans, and I'm frequently criticized because I have always supported a single payer system. In Canada the quality of medical care is maintained by federal oversight but it's not part of the arm of the surveillance state, since the government doesn't collect any information about patients' health, that's strictly confidential information between the patient and his or her physician. Private health expenditure accounts for 30% of health care financing. Not enough coverage is given, in my mind, to mental health care. That said, the most essential care is covered—what would be considered non-essential would be, for instance, cosmetic surgery and some forms of elective surgery. What is good about this Canadian plan is that health coverage is not affected by loss or change of jobs, and there are no lifetime limits or exclusions for pre-existing conditions. I support Canada's publicly funded system, although I recognize that different provinces may differ as what is considered essential or basic care. So, as I mentioned, you do seem some variation across the provinces. In the USA, 13.6 per cent of GNP is used on medical care. By contrast, in Canada, only 9.5 per cent of GNP is used on the medicare system, because there is no profit incentive for private insurers. In addition, there are no means tests and no bad-debt problems for doctors under the Canadian system, Billing and collection costs for doctors are extremely low. Olga Kahzan did an article in *The Atlantic* a few years ago, that did a comparison of the U.S. and Canadian systems.

She reported that the Commonwealth Fund released a ranking of healthcare systems in 11 developed countries, and while Canada's system (it ranked 10<sup>th</sup> out of the 11 systems) did not fare as well as other countries, such as Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, the U.S. ranked 11<sup>th</sup>, dead last, in measures, of access, efficiency and equity, even though it is the world's most expensive healthcare system. According to a report released by the Commonwealth Fund, if Americans had Canada's healthcare, 57 million fewer people would go without medical care because of the cost (although at the time of this report The Affordable Care Act was not fully implemented). Approximately 5,400 fewer ba-

bies would die in infancy, and \$1.3 trillion dollars in healthcare spending would be saved. Although, to be fair, Kahzan reported that 33 percent of Canadians waited six days or more to see a specialist, compared with 19 percent of Americans. The Trumpcare plan has yet to be implemented at the time of this writing, but it looks to be a disaster for approximately 99 percent of the population.

Do you think the understanding of the American Dream primarily in terms of material success has been instrumental in the rise of neo-liberalism? What is the role of the American Dream in neoliberalism's agenda?

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The American Dream, to the extent that it was realized in the 1950s and 1960s, was at the expense of the victims of the American Empire. Americans are shielded from this knowledge in the schools. There was a long build-up to the American Dream as a mythology—it's dark side grew out of and is sustained up to the present by the crimes of empire. The U.S. history of imperialism would take volumes of books to catalogue, and we could begin long before the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (who proclaimed himself as the personal instrument of God, just like George W. Bush would do decades later) William McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt, the U.S. entry into WWI, the rule of the robber barons and the 15,000 mile railway empire of Jay Gould who boasted with conservative mendacity that he could hire one half of the working-class to kill the other half. Enormous tracks of land were stolen from nations, who became client states of the U.S. Unions and radical organizations were attacked during the Palmer Raids, including my former union, the Industrial Workers of the World, countries such as the Philippines were invaded and Colonel Jacob Smith ordered all Filipinos over the age of 10 to be killed. The doctrine of Anglo-Saxon superiority not only helped account for imperialist conquests but created Jim Crow segregations laws inside the U.S. And after WWII, the U.S. has intervened and bombed China 1945-46, Korea 1950-53, China 1950-53, Guatemala 1954, Indonesia 1958, Cuba 1959-60, Guatemala 1960, Belgian Congo 1964, Guatemala 1964, Dominican Republic 1965-66, Peru 1965, Laos 1964-73, Vietnam 1961-73, Cambodia 1969-70, Guatemala 1967-69, Lebanon 1982-84, Grenada 1983-84, Libya 1986, El Salvador 1981-92, Nicaragua 1981-90, Iran 1987-88, Libya 1989, Panama 1989-90, Iraq 1991, Kuwait 1991, Somalia 1992-94, Bosnia 1995, Iran 1998, Sudan 1998, Afghanistan 1998, Yugoslavia – Serbia 1999, Afghanistan 2001 and Libya, 2011, and this is by no means the entire list.



So in your view the idea of the American Dream is largely a myth invented by an imperialist country?

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I am sure that other countries have their version of the American Dream, but because of the power of the U.S. culture/entertainment complex, the idea has been imported to countries all over the world, and it has also been imported through military intervention euphemistically referred to as “humanitarian intervention”. Recall the famous phrase by Thomas Friedman in his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.” Tragically, I have learned in my travels to Mexico, Colombia, and other South American countries that young people who see little or no hope in achieving the financial security and happiness that is associated with The American Dream can find it only through crime, and many young people today dream of growing up and joining the narco cartels. Some of my students in Instituto McLaren de Pedagogia Critica in Mexico, have documented this. This is very true in the United States as well. The great crime families in the U.S. were very much living The American Dream. The Godfather movies which were so popular were very much an illustration of how to achieve The American Dream. The Corleone family in the movies represent the real “First Family” of the United States, as much so as Donald Trump, his wife and sons. Al Capone, the notorious criminal of 1920s Chicago, was aggressively anti-communist, because he feared it would be more difficult for crime syndicates to achieve The American Dream under communist rule. As an objective reality, the American Dream has already been discredited and in its essential features erased by the development of the transnational capitalist class and by what David Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession” where those in the global command centers of financial power centralize wealth in the hands of a few. And they do this basically by robbing the public of their wealth, their landholdings, whatever they can accumulate. Now how different is this from organized crime? Banks are considered “too big too fail” and receive bailouts, and the American taxpayer pays for it. But the government failed to come to their rescue when the mortgage companies came to dispossess them of their homes during the Great Recession of 2008. When corporate leaders and politicians and crime organizations condemn socialism, they do so because they realize that under real existing socialism they will no longer be able to accumulate all the spoils (surplus value) that a free market capitalism affords them. Here,

they camouflage their actions which, in essence, are really just a high tech form of thievery, gangsterism and outlawry, but this must never be admitted publicly. When you confront them directly, they indulge themselves in expressions of shocked surprise. The goal of the transnational capitalist class is accumulation of capital, plain and simple. Now it is true, that the United States government does have a system of checks and balances that have prevented the country from descending into a political dictatorship in the sense of the term that we reserve for totalitarian regimes and military juntas. But it is still a dictatorship –a dictatorship by the global corporate elite. One of the most decorated U.S. soldiers in modern history, Major General Smedley Butler of the U.S. Marine Corps, who served in Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Haiti (earning his Medals of Honor in Mexico and Haiti and is one of only 19 persons to receive the Medal of Honor twice), retired in 1931 and then wrote: “I served in all commissioned ranks from second lieutenant to Major General. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism. I suspected I was just part of the racket all the time. Now I am sure of it.”

I always believed the goal of education should be the creation of critical citizenship, and to create class consciousness for class struggle, a struggle to forever end classes, and a struggle that would bring about freely associated labor, and reciprocal relations of solidarity and social justice. This is direct opposition to the role that the state has created for its citizens. The last thing that democracy wants is a critical citizenry. It wants a consumer citizenry, where intellectuals are reduced to metaspectators, and measured by their ability to sift out difference rather than explain dialectical contradictions. Capitalism views the emancipated, cosmopolitan consumer citizen as free to make purchases at the shopping mall, which is the true church of capitalism, and bears the stamp, as do most religious institutions, of the coloniality of power, and we can see asymmetrical relations of power and privilege at work throughout the globe—manifested in the global shopping mall—planet mall—which in some ways is symbolic of the American Dream, of the ability to shop endlessly, to acquire status through particular designer signatures and power, both social power and economic power. I’ve seen this form of both external and internal colonization in countries all over the world where segregation is based on somatic, economic and cultural characteristics—on the rifts and fissures created in the cultural realm by social relations of production throughout the broad expanse of what William Robinson calls the transnational capitalist class. About a decade ago, I met Robinson, a sociologist at UC

Santa Barbara, who invited me to speak at one of his conferences on global studies. I have followed Bill's work since that time, and we have corresponded about how to resist and transform the capitalist system and I believe that Robinson makes some important points, they make sense to me. First, Robinson notes that there is a direct correlation between the escalation of global inequalities and the freeing up of global markets, deregulation, free trade, etc., since the 1980s and on. According to Robinson, this is an empirical fact that belies neo-liberal claims. Witness the incredible escalation of worldwide inequalities, within and among countries—there is some pretty dramatic data from the Oxfam annual reports on global inequalities, released each January the past few years to coincide with the WEF meetings in Davos. Second, Robinson notes that the countries worldwide in this neo-liberal age that have registered the highest growth rates and rising prosperity are precisely those that have *not* followed the neo-liberal prescription of deregulation and a withdrawal of the state, in particular, China. A third point argued by Robinson, is that, historically, those countries that have become industrialized and developed have never done so through free market policies, not the United States, not Europe, not Japan, and now not China. All have followed heavy state intervention to guide market forces, public sectors, protection of industry and so on. There is, in other words, a historical correction between development and rejection of the neoliberal policies, and no historical evidence to support neoliberal policies. Fourth, Robinson makes the claim that many other environmental activists have made, that we are on the verge of an ecological holocaust, as confirmed by 97% of scientists and all the evidence, and any salvation requires a massive intervention of states to redirect (if not suppress) market forces, which is anathema to neoliberals and free marketeers. Even if neoliberalism is shown to increase growth, which is unlikely, the type of unregulated growth it generates is creating ecological havoc. Using empirical data, Robinson argues that there is a direct correlation between liberating capital and markets from state and public control and regulation, on the one hand, and an actual increase in green house gas emissions and in environmental destruction over the past few decades of neoliberalism.

So I don't think the rise of neoliberalism is connected in a linear historical fashion to the concept of the American Dream. I think the idea or the myth surrounding capitalism and the American Dream is still alive today to a certain extent even though it clearly doesn't exist as an objective reality that can be lived by more than a small percentage of the population. It is still very much present as an ideology, an ethos, and seen as a natural condition of the world. Roland Barthes talked about myths as

more than a genre, but rather as a type of speech, in other words, as a way we tell stories about ourselves to ourselves, or to others as if it were the natural way the world works, rather than as a perspective generated by human beings as social constructions but given legitimacy as naturally occurring social relations—a natural state of the way the world is. Myths are expressed through a wide range of media and populated by other people's intentions, desires and prejudices that permeate the culture, mass media and institutional life of societies. But I think of the American Dream more as a zeitgeist that dominates what I call the macrostructural unconscious of the United States, the pervasive set of ideals and beliefs that give intentionality to the actions of the American public and gives direction to American foreign policy. This zeitgeist that inflects our macrostructural unconscious needs to be unpacked critically in order to understand why we acquiesce to the root-and-branch deceptions of our political and religious leaders and to abuses of power by the government and its corporate courtiers and masters of officialdom. It manufactures loyalty and is part of what I call the hidden catechism of American identity. Marx and Engels understood this well when they wrote that the "ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force," exercising "control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who *lack* the means of mental production are *subject* to ... nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas ... the ideas of its dominance." This insight still holds true today and is perhaps more consequential for humanity than at any other time in world history, with the potential nation states now have for destroying the world through nuclear catastrophe and through ecocide. Trump uses his thrasonical hyperbolic rhetoric of the fascist imaginary to suture the notion of the American Dream in a way that plays upon fear and insecurity, heightened of course since September 11, 2001 and after the Great Recession of 2008. The macrostructural unconscious keeps the popular majorities from remembering the genocidal history of the United States; it keeps it repressed or entirely out of view. For instance, in schools we disattend capitalism's economic, cultural, social, and geopolitical attributes. The reason for the existence of the macrostructural unconscious can be related to the primary challenge faced by the ego, which is to resolve the contradiction between the claims of ideology and the actual structure of social power and the need to defend oneself against socially constructed antagonisms. The function of the macrostructural unconscious is to reconcile reality and ideology

at the level of the nation state, and this requires conceptual structures to help citizens adjust to its genocidal history—and the myth of the American Dream, which has become the zeitgeist of our age, has helped us to justify the United States as a great democratic nation despite the fact that it is the greatest threat to world peace in the world. The American Dream has been instrumentalized to serve as one of many coping strategies provided by the myth of democracy as “the white man’s burden”. President Teddy Roosevelt was particularly inspired by this poem by British writer, Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands” (1899), which helped give weight to Roosevelt’s expansionist excursions into the Philippines, at a time when Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba had been placed under U.S. control. A few lines of the poem read:

Take up the White Man’s burden—  
 Send forth the best ye breed—  
 Go send your sons to exile  
 To serve your captives’ need  
 To wait in heavy harness  
 On fluttered folk and wild—  
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
 Half devil and half child  
 Take up the White Man’s burden

Today in the United States, racialized violence serves as the domestic expression of the American macrostructural unconscious, whose function is to provide psychic power to the myth of America’s role of taking up the White Man’s Burden, and this requires an untrammelled devotion to the God of violence, and the worship of the military who support imperial wars of aggression in the service of what is known as America’s “providential history”—a version of history taught in spin overdrive in many Christian evangelical communities—that the United States has been chosen by God to keep the world safe for democracy. This myth of American Providential history keeps the American people in thrall to the aggrandizing ordinances of a Trump, for instance. This is why Howard Zinn’s famous book, *The People’s History of the United States*, is banned in many school districts. This is why, for instance, I was placed on top of a list of “the most dangerous professors” in 2006, when I was teaching at UCLA, during a time when a right wing group was offering to pay students 100 dollars for a secret audiotape of my lectures, and 50 dollars for notes they took of what I was teaching in my classes. Personally, I think it would be good

for the country if we faced our crimes of empire. We must not forget that Martin Luther King called the United States “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today” and warned that “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” We were being warned by King in the 1960s that Americans had already achieved ideological affinity with the dark side of the American Dream. And clearly, the country didn’t listen.

Neoliberal capitalism is an adjustment that capitalism had to make in the face of overproduction and remains a form of state-guided cartelization. If we examine the founding moments of the United States critically we come to realize that the very idea of the American Dream could only have been made possible by the extermination of the indigenous population, the enslavement of African Americans, and the exploitation of rural and industrial workers. In this process we squander human nature, we allow new technologies to displace workers and it’s the case today that many middle-class jobs and college degrees, if the right kind, might give an edge—but only a slight edge—to recent college graduates who are resigned to a grim enslavement to the corporate wage. But what about non-union workers, and the labor laws designed to constrain labor relations and workers’ rights that prohibit the right to organize and act collectively?

Tell me more about Donald Trump and his relationship to the American Dream?

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Americans who still worship the American Dream believe deep in their hearts that a billionaire is better equipped than anyone else to guide the economy. They believe that Trump exceptionally gifted as a deal-maker, since he has enormous wealth. Understanding this, Trump is cannily using the concept of the American Dream with white-knuckled rage and weapons-grade vitriol to conjure images from the 50s of what was crafted by the then nascent media apparatuses as a white ethnostate. Trump wants workers to believe that such a long ago defunct world, born from the swamp of laissez-faire capitalism in the pre-imperialist epoch—can be recreated once Trump kicks the “illegal immigrants” out of the country and rewrites his “free trade” deals with Canada and Mexico. This will, he believes, give him the leverage for his imperial coronation. He has already become a cult hero, an ethnographic spectacle for scholars to study, the inflammation of history—dedicated to the vapors of the awaited prophet of the working class—he, the self-fashioned populist strongman born with

a silver spoon in his mouth who prefers a U.S. 3.79 McDonald's "quarter pounder with cheese" to expensive French food. He is, in my mind, a little more than an angry boil on the hairy arse of history (I only saw him once, in person, very briefly, during his appearance at the Museum of Television & Radio [now the Paley Center for Media], where he whined childishly that his show, *The Apprentice*, didn't receive an Emmy Award). He is not a libertarian but a libertine disguised as a populist, with tanks, armies and nuclear weapons at his disposal, engaged in a *bellum omnium contra omnes*—the war of all against all. And he has an administration so skilled at obscurantism that his ideas march unmediated from his mouth to the brains of his millions of drooling twitter followers.

Trump and the wall he proposes to build to keep out "illegal immigrants" from Mexico, betrays the values inherent in the original American Dream. I will always remember what my Chicano comrades would tell me during protest marches in East Los Angeles—"we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." Imagine Mexicans entering California without documents. Historically, this was their land before the United States invaded it and exterminated the *pueblos originarios*. There is something repugnant about referring to these border-crossers as "illegals" when in fact that term should more truthfully be attributed to the Anglo-Americans who perpetrated genocide in their conquest of the land. This attitude, common among *gringos*, echoes what the great Latin American philosopher, Enrique Dussel, refers to as the "ego conquiro"—I conquer you therefore I am, which is related to the "ego exterminus"—I exterminate you, therefore I am, two forms of consciousness that Dussel claims creates the conditions of possibility for the arrogance of the Cartesian concept, "I think therefore I am." As Luis Martinez Andrade has noted, white people in the peripheral countries of Latin America experience a certain form of "double consciousness"—the pain of not being European and the pride of not belonging to what they believe to be 'inferior' races. Trump likes to justify the unjustifiable and that is part of what some to believe to be the reason why so many Anglo-Americans appreciate what they perceive to be the candor of his politics. But this strange candor associated with Trump's actions are dangerously deceptive since by repeating time and time again that we need to be on guard and vigilant against terrorists and undocumented immigrants, and to create a ban on allowing Muslims into the country, and to rebuild the infrastructure of the country and keep companies from outsourcing their workforce, his critics bring themselves to believe that Trump cannot possibly follow through on his threats, threats that they perceive as simply part of his clown car parade down Main Street, his hair resembling a Walmart lampshade drawn tightly over his head, on the way to the carni-

val. This is what makes him so dangerous, because he does, in effect, have immeasurable power to do significant damage to the country, and to the world. As intellectuals, we lure ourselves into celebrating our own critical reading of Trump, thinking each article we write for an academic journal will turn the tide against Trump, while at the same time making an unconscious double move to normalize Trump's antics because they make such great fodder for our critiques. In doing so we unwittingly provide a smoke-screen that hides the necessity of major revolutionary struggle.

How does this relate to race relations?

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The civil rights gains that people of color have made during the 1960s, have infuriated white folks who have been conditioned to hate the unemployed (they're simply "lazy" and get free food stamps paid for by their hard-earned taxes) and immigrants, especially immigrants from south of the border (the "murderers" and "rapists" that Trump wants to keep behind his giant wall). When Obama was elected president, this became the last straw for the white nationalists. The white nationalists believe that it is progressive factions of "the mainstream liberal progressive" media, and the political elite that are responsible for exposing the role that white privilege plays in the country. They blame these institutions for putting white people under siege, and some, remarkably, consider themselves as the new oppressed because people of color and their white allies are demanding resistance to white supremacy, patriarchy and homophobia. When Barack Obama served two terms as president, racism in the United States expanded into new species of vile. Personally, I've received hate mail from white nationalists for my activism, and for being married to a Chinese national who now resides as a permanent resident with me in California, and some of my colleagues—professors of color—have been verbally assaulted in public spaces. Before you think I am unsympathetic to the poverty of white people, I'd like to share with you some work that is about to be published in which I try to capture sympathetically the grievous economic plight of the white worker—which is real—all too real?

Yes, of course.

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Here is what I wrote:

The U.S. was shaken out of electoral somnolence, as more Trump supporters than expected crawled out of the woodwork to vote, fomenting a Whitelash of extraordinary proportions. They came from former railroad towns where the Rust Belt meets Appalachia, from dirt poor white neighborhoods adjacent to petrochemical processing refineries,



where parents grew tired of their children coughing up blood-flecked blackened phlegm. To get to the polling stations, they passed through ghost towns in rural Tennessee, where shuttered general stores and demolished dime-a-dance halls held nothing but empty memories of earlier generations. They came from neighborhoods in Iowa where plants were no longer producing tower cranes and had laid off thousands of workers. Supporters of the Orange Leviathan included spindle-shanked retirees in eastern Kentucky living behind the eight ball on straw mattresses in abandoned horse trailers, angry at the immigrants passing them by on the ladder. Even those laid-off coal plant workers forced down railroad tracks with their bindlesticks flung over their shoulders, fighting graybacks and a disposable future with nothing left but a ten dollar bill hidden in the heel of their boot, wore Trump's trademark red cap, emblazoned with the now famous phrase, "Make America Great Again" (Trump had blamed environmental regulation on the loss of coal mining jobs, without mentioning the country's pivot to the exploitation of another fossil fuel, natural gas, that can even be a worse generator of greenhouse gas than coal). Hapless young vagrants and itinerant workers huddled in abandoned coal-loading stations, shooting up OxyContin (known locally as "hillbilly heroin") with nothing left but to Catch the Westbound (as the saying went during the Great Depression), were all behind Trump, even if they were too stoned to cast their ballots. With medically uninsured arthritic knees and aching kidneys, the laboring poor embedded in capital's extractive essence—immiseration and privation—marched to the beat of nationalism, bemoaning the appearance of brown faces in the industrial yards and agricultural fields that spoke a language they couldn't understand. They trekked through the dirt roads of Beauford County, South Carolina, and Duplin County to the north, past acres of pasture-raised Berkshire pigs. They travelled to where they had last registered to vote, even if it meant a trip across the North Georgia mountains, through Clayton and Dillard, all the way to Chattanooga. Truckers for Trump drove their eighteen wheelers through the low country of Louisiana, gator teeth swinging from the rearview windows, so they could put the man in the red cap into office.

For those who were experiencing city life, you didn't have to be on the rocks, or live on the nickel in penthouses made out of cardboard strewn through the streets of skid row, "with cupped hands round the tin can" as John Hartford or Glenn Campbell might put it, in order to be a Trump supporter. Although generally risk-averse, many in the wage-labor-rich

-class, including socially registered suburban dwellers who loathed plebian sociabilities and were often unforgiving of the errors of their own employees, pushed for a Trump win, hoping that a further deregulation of the business world might bring them some fast cash, at least enough to stoke their meager retirement savings before the system eventually fell apart like it did in 2008. Some folks were just looking for a good luck charm in the man with the Midas touch, without anticipating that Trump's economic plan would raise taxes on 8 million low and middle class families while providing massive tax breaks for the rich. It's no secret, especially in the hinterlands of the unemployed, that the internet and its burgeoning platforms of automation are poised to cut half of US jobs in the very near future. All of these Trump supporters, both the bedraggled and bon-vivant, were feeling trapped in Palookaville with Trump their only hope for reaching Xanadu as they followed "the Donald" like a mesmerized Sonny Malone running after a roller-skating Terpsichore played by Olivia Newton John. After all, Trump could sing a good populist tune, and it was music to the ears of those down-on-their-luck and fearful of being left behind. Perhaps on the wings of a foul-mouthed billionaire playboy, factory ghost towns could be replaced by Vegas versions of Fourier's Phalanstères.

For many of those hooked on drugs, it was too late to enjoy a Trump victory, or to see what kind of health care program Trump would put in place of Obamacare. In Stark County, Ohio, people down on their luck shoot up meth mixed with carfentanyl, an animal tranquilizer that is normally used on elephants and tigers, and is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl. There are so many overdose fatalities that the coroner's office in Canton has to borrow a 20-foot long cold storage mass casualty trailer, known as the "death trailer", normally used for victims of airplane disasters, since their morgue facility in the county jail complex on Atlantic Boulevard, that holds about a dozen bodies, can't deal with the body count. The coroners in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga and Summit County have to do the same thing—call in the death trailers. In Montgomery County, to the south, the coroner calls local funeral home directors for help.

Okay, what I described above consists of Appalachia and the "heartland" of the country, the Midwest, where I lived and taught for 8 years. Where is the American Dream in these places? Instead you have the American Death Trailer. My family is from Canada where I spent the first 35 years of my life—and my grandparents and great grandparents lived in a part of the Canada that some consider the Canadian Appalachia, Ap-

ple Hill, near Cornwall, along the St. Lawrence River and in the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, not far from the Mohawk Territory of Akwesane. Eventually, my family relocated to Toronto, where I lived until I immigrated to the United States in 1985. I realize that the rural/city divide is like a saber slash across the face of the American Dream. When I think of the American Dream today, and its tragic side, I think of the brilliant play, *Sweat*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright, Lynn Nottage which addresses poverty in the U.S. and has been described as “working-class naturalism.” Or I think of earlier plays of Eugene O’Neil like *The Hairy Ape* and Arthur Miller’s, *Death of a Salesman*, and *A View from the Bridge*.

What are the statistics on rural and urban poverty in the United States?

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A recent survey by the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation found that two-thirds of rural residents rate local job opportunities as fair or poor, compared with about half of urban residents. Nearly 6 in 10 rural residents encourage the youth in their communities to leave the rural areas and head to cities in order to find more opportunities for a better life. The Great Recession of 2008 hit rural areas very hard, and these areas still have not recovered, with the total number of jobs down 128,000 from pre-recession levels. While it is true that suburban and urban counties have each gained about 3 million jobs, according to an analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data, these jobs don’t pay much, and large numbers of people are living at the poverty level. The rural unemployment rate 5.3 percent while in the urban centers it’s about 4.8 percent. But in rural areas the workforce is in decline as people just give up or move to the cities, while the workforce has grown in suburbs and cities.

But Census Bureau data reveal that the poverty rate in both cities and urban areas is similar, about 16 percent in cities and 17 percent in rural areas. What made Trump so popular in the rural areas is because residents there believed that the problems that were affecting them the most could be remedied with infrastructure investments, better trade deals, the deportation of undocumented immigrant workers, lower business taxes and more market liberalization, that is, more deregulation of the economy. More rural residents believe that people of color receive unfair privileges, and they believe that the government is giving minority groups a free ride, like food stamps, and so there is great mistrust in the government and more belief in free enterprise. According to the poll, 56 percent majority of rural residents say that the federal government treats city dwellers bet-

ter than rural residents. And rural communities, predominately Republican voters, worry more than Democrats that Christian values are under assault.

Trump's American Dream is very much like that of his father—Fred Trump—who was the focus of a song written between 1950 and 1952, but never recorded, by the legendary American folk singer, Woody Guthrie, who was a major influence on Bob Dylan. During that time Fred Trump was Guthrie's landlord, when Guthrie moved into the exclusively white Beach Haven public housing complex, near Coney Island, after returning from his World War II service in the Merchant Marine. Here is how the song opens:

I suppose  
 Old Man Trump knows  
 Just how much  
 Racial Hate  
 he stirred up  
 In the bloodpot of human hearts  
 When he drewed  
 That color line  
 Here at his  
 Eighteen hundred family project (Cited in Moyer, 2016)

Later, in 1954, Fred Trump would be investigated by a U.S. Senate committee for profiteering from public contracts. Old Man Trump also refused to sell homes to blacks. That his son, Donald Trump, has been accused of racial discrimination in operating his properties should come as no surprise. Clearly, with Trump, America wants its empire back. Forget multilateralism and globalization since, in the eyes of Trump and his supporters, such twin evils have taken everything away from America's white working class.

Over the past year Americans from all social class fractions, but especially white constituencies, rewarded Trump with frenzied, awe-struck receptions to his presence in sports stadiums packed to suffocating capacity. The intensity of this reception is unprecedented, only matched by the vileness and viciousness of Trump's speeches. His supporters wait for hours in long lines that snake around city blocks in order to be able to be close to their savior, a billionaire real estate tycoon, playboy and foul-mouthed reality television star. Admixed with trepidation and barn burning enthusiasm, crowds seemed to absorb his energy as he circles the stage, as if animated by a giant solenoid, their cult-like devotion rising to a perverse crescendo of hate-filled delirium baited by the promises of a man

whose cabinet is now packed to the brim with billionaire bankers and hedge fund hucksters.

Maybe we are suffering from some kind of hubristic insanity, the result of the slow erosion of democracy over the decades, where decency suddenly became unhinged, something that was, *mirable dictu*, foreseen over half a century ago by the Frankfurt School theorists. In some recent works, I've compared Trumpism to Bonapartism, to a type of fascism that hides behind the screen of democracy. And, Mitja, since this year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Das Kapital*, the most important work of that great world-historic personage, Karl Marx, it would be useful in this current Trump era to draw attention to another of his essays, the 18<sup>th</sup> *Bru-maire of Louis Bonaparte*. Marx is referring to the coup d'état in 1851 involving the nephew of Napoleon I. This is the focus of Marx's essay, the rise to power of Charles Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, the third son of Louis Bonaparte, the brother of Napoleon I, and his staging of a December 2, 1851 coup. Louis-Napoleon's coup enabled him to remain in office and implement a series of reform programs. His justification for his seizure of dictatorial powers was his universal popularity throughout France. In November 1852 he was confirmed as emperor. Trump is well on his way to crowning himself emperor of the United States. I have never seen anyone so brazen and adept at exploiting the economic anxieties of the American worker, including the middle class, by fomenting hatred of the 'lesser' races (i.e., anyone other than white) and sowing seeds of nationalism. His followers pine: If only Trump could be allowed to persecute the politically correct feminists, gays and lesbians, the elite Washington politicians, and those who believe in climate change and are allowing environment regulation to hold back the economy, if only he could crush Black Lives Matter and Idle No More groups, if only he could destroy the mainstream media that produces fake news, if only Americans could act upon his "alternative facts", then he could make America great again! Millions still swoon over Trump's succulent silk suit populism, gleefully cheering his dark demagoguery, and pompous threats. It remains for many a case of mass stupefaction. White supremacists are in rapture, holding meetings and giving the Nazi salute. "Blood and soil! Close borders! White nation! Now we start the deportation!" the American Knights of the Klu Klux Klan, the American National Socialist neo-Nazis, White Aryan Resistance, and the White Lives Matter members chant, raising their shields and pumping their fists into the air turned toxic with the poisonous acrimony of racism and deep-throated cries for a purified white nation. White nationalist pastors offer the protection of Jesus in their prayers. Does anybody remember the time in U.S. history when 20,000 Nazis filled New

York's famous sports arena, Madison Square Garden, in a rally organized by the German American Bund in 1939? And now, in 2017, American Neo-Nazis can be found tracing their ancestry from all across Europe (as if Germany's Third Reich had won World War II), waving Confederate flags, robes and pointed hoods, warning Anglo-Americans of the perils of "mongrelizing their seed." Will the U.S. become the home of some kind of Fourth Reich? During Trump's inaugural presidential address, at the Capitol's West Front, one of his signature themes—America First!—caused some anxiety among onlookers old enough to remember the America First movement of 1941, a movement headed by aviator Charles Lindbergh that campaigned against U.S. involvement in World War II while blaming Jewish Americans for trying to push the United States into a war with Germany and at the same time expressing sympathy for the Nazis. From the podium Trump exhorted: "From this day forward, it's going to be only America first," he said. "America first." Watching the television footage, it reminded me of a McDonald's hamburger rendition of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Trump's hypocritical solidarity for the poor can be contrasted with his hyper-solidarity for everything military. He loves generals, he loves to be surrounded by high-ranking military officers and has given the Pentagon *carte blanche* to do what it wants in Afghanistan. Contrast this attitude with that of Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower, America's top general throughout World War II. In 1961, Eisenhower famously warned the U.S. public about the dangers of the military industrial complex:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together. Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.

Here Eisenhower calls for an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry”, which sounds like it is right out of the critical pedagogy playbook. Although it merits mentioning that Eisenhower is warning us against a dangerous military industrial complex that he himself was largely responsible for creating. To his credit, however, Eisenhower understood that only citizens who are critically literate and politically astute could hold at bay the rapidly rising military industrial complex. History has proven his warning to have been futile. Students in public schools don’t study this passage and few have ever even heard about this speech, which would sound out of place if uttered by a Republican president today, especially by Trump. Fortunately it’s available on the internet.

This sounds like a deeply divided society.

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Mitja, the country is split basically between globalization movements (consisting of the transnational capitalist class, elites, the middle-class and some fractions of the petit bourgeoisie) and the anti-globalist movement that appeals to those who have been brutalized by austerity capitalism, and people with autocratic instincts, like Trump, who are pursuing an isolationist politics. Trump claims to be anti-globalist and certainly in many respects he is. But his policies are reactionary anti-globalist.

What remains part of the left parties, such as the Democratic Party, are solidly neo-liberal and globalist. Which makes it vulnerable to anti-globalist, populist-nationalists like Trump and his minions. As much as the Republicans feel that Trump is out of control with his tweets, he nevertheless is achieving with his tweets what the Republican Party itself confesses to having been unable to achieve—a direct and visceral line on communication to its constituent base.

How can the Democratic Party pretend that it takes the side of the victims of globalized capital when it promotes it? Bernie Sanders is one of the few members of the government who identifies as socialist but he has no viable plan for the country beyond redistributing capital to labor, to make capitalism less brutal, since he must work with other politicians who believe capitalism is untranscendable and untransformable. Which, while still pitiful, is a much preferred option to those offered by Trump. But to suggest to the average American factory worker, the middle class insurance clerk, or the board of directors of hedge fund that the real battle must be waged against the festering system that has grown out of the globalization of capitalism (such as overproduction, deindustrialization, and the expansion of multinational corporations), is to spit into the wind and to get drenched in the process. The left here in the United States is

not only bankrupt—with some emerging strands appearing downright reactionary—it has no viable alternative to capitalism. All that it is capable of doing at the moment is to try to blunt the sharpest and most deadly instruments of transnational capitalism, usually with earnest arguments about the dangers of ecocide and climate change. And it is losing this battle. This is especially troublesome as it is Trump who is seen as the enemy of neoliberalism, and the Republican and Democratic elites as its champion.

Recently, I've written about some of the ludicrous conspiracy theories emanating from the right. These conspiracy theories form part of the dark side of the American Dream. For the last several decades one of the most pernicious conspiracies revolves around the role played by Frankfurt School theorists in the United States. The theory has been picked up by the extremist Tea Party and other alt-right groups, including white nationalists, libertarian Christian Reconstructionists, members of the Christian Coalition, the Free Congress Foundation and neo-Nazi groups such as Stormfront. They maintain that blame for the cultural degradation and corruption of the United States can be placed at the feet of the Institute for Social Research, initially housed at the Goethe University in Frankfurt and relocated to Columbia University in New York during the rise of Hitler in 1935. Philosophers Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse were some of the luminaries of this group, whose works are still frequently studied in philosophy, political science, literary theory and cultural studies classes. Peddlars of this crackpot theory about the role played by these thinkers include Michael Minnicinio, Paul Weyrich, Pat Buchanan, Roger Kimball and other prominent conservatives. They maintain that these "cultural Marxists" (whom unsurprisingly they are fond of mentioning are all Jewish) promoted modernist forms of cultural pessimism that shaped the 1960s counterculture—and this "cultural Marxism" set the stage for "political correctness" that has destroyed the cultural and moral fabric of U.S. society through the development of feminism, anti-white racism and revolutions in understanding sexuality. But it is the fringe writings of William S. Lind in particular that have had the most chilling effect. In 2011, Lind's writings inspired Norwegian neo-Nazi mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik to slaughter 77 fellow Norwegians and injure 319 more. Lind and his ilk blame the Frankfurt School theorists for a litany of crimes that include the deindustrialization of America's cities, neoliberal free trade policies, affirmative action, immigration, sexual liberation, gay marriage, multiculturalism, political correctness, the welfare state, and the privileging of the concerns of



African Americans, feminists and homosexuals over those of white heterosexual citizens. Anyone familiar with critical pedagogy knows that the writings of the Frankfurt School are foundational to its theoretical framework. Lind and the views of his followers have certainly influenced the thinking of Donald Trump who is notorious for berating political correctness and feminism and for his general disregard for African American groups such as Black Lives Matter. There is a reasonable fear among university professors on the left that Trump could marshal a powerful assault on what can or cannot be taught in university settings.

Violent clashes have occurred on college campuses and other locations between anti-fascist protesters and pro-Trump demonstrators. Many of these pro-Trump supporters claim to be part of the “alt-right.” The alt-right works mainly through social media sites such as Breitbart News and Fox News and peddle conspiracy theories. Steve Bannon, chief strategist and Senior Counselor for the presidency of Donald Trump, was formerly the executive chair of Breitbart News. Basically the alt-right represents a white nationalist perspective against the globalists, immigrants, bankers, elites, the mainstream media and progressive ideas. These groups are not atypical of fascist movements throughout history. They write anti-Semitic screeds against Jewish members of the media, attack feminists and those whom they consider “politically correct” and people of color, especially black civil rights groups such as Black Lives Matter. They create conspiracy theories about almost anything, and incite their followers to engage in a war against gays, lesbians, transgender people, immigrants, and others who are critical of Trump and his administration. Groups of militant nationalists are training for street violence against anti-Trump protesters, serving as what they call the “tactical defense arm” of the pro-Trump, pro-West nationalist groups, such as The Fraternal Order of the Alt-Knights and the Proud Boys, and the DIY Division, a neo-Nazi fight club, all of which reminds me of Alex DeLarge and his “droogs” out of *Clockwork Orange*. Except in this case the gangs are fighting for the creation of a white ethnostate. Violence has also occurred among anti-Trump groups. The most vicious example to date occurred in a baseball field in Alexandria, Virginia, when House Majority Whip Steve Scalise and four others were shot by someone who was virulently anti-Trump. According to a 2016 Pew Poll on partisanship and polarization:

More than half of Democrats (55%) say the Republican Party makes them “afraid,” while 49% of Republicans say the same about the Democratic Party. Among those highly engaged in politics – those who say they vote

regularly and either volunteer for or donate to campaigns – fully 70% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans say they are afraid of the other party.

In a society where 22% of American adults are gun owners, and the average number of guns per American household is eight, is it any wonder that these different versions of The American Dream play out so violently? As a critical educator I would surmise that the lessons learned by Trump supporters throughout their formal and informal education were gravely successful in creating a practiced inattention to history—a motivated social amnesia necessary for Americans to live outside of historical consciousness—unaware of the crimes of their forebears who held slaves, exterminated the indigenous peoples, and who participated in imperialist wars, all in the spirit of Manifest Destiny and the nation’s providential mission—in other words, all in the name of America First! The ideological state apparatuses and the corporate catechism embedded in the state’s media apparatuses—which confirm Marx’s dictum that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas—are to be congratulated on a job well done. And while I would single out Breitbart News and Fox News as the worst offenders, since they are two of the most egregious examples of right-wing network propaganda, I would also include all the mainstream corporate media as participants, willing or unwitting, and to a greater and lesser degree as responsible for legitimizing Trump since in the final instance they eruditely pander to their masters in the service of their corporate owners: the capitalist class. As Thomas Jefferson (who was also a slave holder) noted: “The only security of all is in a free press.”

So what can be done?

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I would begin an answer to your question with another question:

Can whatever is left over of democracy after it has been ravaged by the corporate capitalists, be salvaged and made beneficent once it becomes liberated for social use by a United Front of the working-classes? The transnational state has made democracy into roadkill. Just leave it on the side of the road. That is always the question, but strategies, tactics and systems of intelligibility that once worked—that is, before the societies that past revolutionaries forged turned into their opposite—need to be rethought on different terms today. We need to work with inventiveness and piquancy, conviction and commitment and the strength to endure the challenge of Golgotha and be born anew. In my own work as a Marxist humanist who draws from Catholic social teachings that are being developed in liberation theology, this means developing a philosophically grounded perspec-

tive of an alternative to capitalism, grounded in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*. I am also examining the Christian gospels and the teachings of Jesus as an expression of communism. This has stirred up quite a controversy here and I won't digress into that debate for lack of space. What I feel deserves emphasis today is public pedagogy, a term developed by Henry Giroux. By that I mean actions by public representatives in public venues—that includes reporters, professors, and intellectuals of various stripe and sundry—mustered by political courage and steered by critical analysis on behalf of the oppressed majority. For me, the purpose of such public pedagogy would be, as the saying goes, “to speak truth to power,” that is, to challenge political orthodoxy when such orthodoxy is used as a weapon to stifle dissent and reproduce policies and practices that keep the ruling class in power at the expense of the popular masses. “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act” is a phrase attributed to George Orwell. Paulo Freire has said that there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is, as Freire notes, to transform the word. Orwell also said that “freedom is the right to tell people what they don't want to hear.” At this particular historical juncture, it's important that we re-tread our habit-sodden pedagogies and start to develop activist pedagogical approaches to challenge the lies and deceit of the Trump administration. This can be accomplished in many ways: creating blogs, and publishing policy critiques through social media and, to the extent that it is possible, publishing through the mainstream media, and joining and/or forming revolutionary social movements. To the extent that some news outlets are challenging the Trump agenda, he tries to shut them down by ridiculing their reports as “fake news” and polls have shown that vast numbers of Americans who support Trump tend to increase that support the more that Trump is attacked in the mainstream media. In other words, his followers haven't thought very carefully about how he has rationalized his policy proposals. He has also threatened to change existing laws on libel, so that he will have the ability to sue media outlets who publish stories critical of him, his acolytes or his administration. And he is seeking to institute harsh penalties for government whistleblowers. Trumpsters see the mainstream media as supporting the views of the elite Washington political establishment and the views of “Hollywood” which they loathe because they see Hollywood as one of the sword arms of cultural degeneracy and anti-Christian bias.

With its crises of overaccumulation and declining rate of profit, capitalism feeds global destruction, through war, through ecocide, through genocide, and epistemicide that follows the most brutal forms

of colonization. As individuals, the patriciate of the transnational capitalist class are as likely to be as honest, fair-minded and upstanding as any other group you might meet at the local pub. Again, and this deserves to be emphasized, it is not the individuals themselves, but the system of asymmetrically structured social relations of exploitation reproduced by capitalism, that is the problem. The problem is not the capitalists—who doesn't know some very nice, caring, and benevolent capitalist in their family?—but capitalism. You cannot succeed in the capitalist world without exploiting workers. But no capitalist will admit to this because nobody wants to believe that they are participating in an immoral and repugnant system that leads to immiseration, pauperisation, casualisation, the gutting of the welfare state, neo-imperialism, etc. But some of capitalists (what Trump refers to as the “winners”) are clearly more successful than others. But even the “winners” face an uncertain future (albeit a more certain future than ours, to be sure) since capitalism cannot avoid systematic crises, which have been witnessed in the 1930s, 1970s, 1980s, and 2008, and they will be witnessed again by succeeding generations unless we put a stop to it through our collective efforts at resistance followed by a plan for emancipation. Clearly we need to re-pristiniate the locus of self-questioning advocated by my mentor, Paulo Freire, and other educators who have an understanding of global political economy. Whatever strategy we employ to fight the continuation of Trump's neoliberal agenda will require the participation of the global working class.

How would radical pedagogy tackle the failure of upward social mobility (the 'opportunity gap') that constitutes the very promise associated with the American Dream?

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Education is embedded firmly in the notion of the American Dream which is why education has always been in bed with the value form of the commodity and also, of course, in the social production of labor power. Every decade capitalism demands that successive generations of workers re-legitimize the structural contradictions of the internationalist capitalist system as the limits to human possibility. In this way workers will be always already susceptible to the notion that there is no alternative to capitalism. One way the transnational capitalist state accomplishes this is to fashion pedagogical approaches that re-encrypt justifications for capitalism throughout the education system. And, as Glenn Rikowski notes, schools are interested in manufacturing and reinforcing the skills, personal attributes and other labor power attributes of students as potential

workers—as part of bolstering the capitalist labor process itself. Institutions of education demand compliance as an axiomatic attribute of the student’s labor power, since capitalism needs agents with specific types of labor power attributes that can remain mystified as to the ways in which they help capital grow and expand not for the worker but for the capitalist. Education becomes an instrument of divine pettifoggery—insinuating the idea that with hard work and imagination, workers can construct themselves in a myriad of playful and sublime ways. Labor power utilization by capitalists demands acquiescence to a certain type of training or pedagogy, that could be described as a pedagogy of domestication, as education takes on a particular commodity form. Today, business models of education are specific commodity forms supported by the transnational capitalist class and they are expanding at a ferocious rate and in the U.S. they promote private or charter schools to replace public schools. In the U.S. competition is fierce for jobs that pay living wages as job creation for high school graduates is mostly in the service industry in which there are no medical benefits and little pay. Schools have been insinuated into the logic of neoliberal economics administered by means of a market metric macrophysics of power and set of governing tactics that submits everything in its path to a process of monetization and that simultaneously transforms everything and everyone within our social universe to a commodity form

Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education, is a Michigan-based philanthropist who, along with her husband Richard DeVos, supports the privatization of public schooling and is noted for her attacks on the LGBTQA community, including undermining their hard-won anti-discrimination protections in the state of Michigan. Proselytizing for private schooling is a growth industry, and Betsy DeVos has been at the forefront. But the increasing antipathy expressed by their bloviating flag-bearers towards public schooling reveals a motivated amnesia surrounding the history of the relationship of public education to the expansion of democracy throughout United States. The health of the public education system should be foundational to the generative process of being and becoming fully human, and this is true not just in the United States, but in most democratic countries. Betsy DeVos’ plan to spend \$1.4 billion on the Trump administration’s expanded school choice agenda, was called an “assault on the American Dream” by John B. King, Jr. who served as Obama’s Secretary of Education and now leads a think tank, Education Trust.

We need to expand the scale of struggle. It is natural that we should want both to conserve and to create cosmovisions and social relations of production in which the fetish of the commodity no longer rules. After

all, the winds that flow within the self sometimes come from other, less commodity-driven worlds—is this not part of our divine entelechy? Capitalists prefer to hide behind their innocent and guileless minds, claiming that they remain untouched by the unctuous urges that affect so many persons of power. After all, who would want to belong to a cabal that thrives upon aggressively exploiting workers? I hear a lot from liberals and fellow Catholics that in order to change the world we need to change ourselves. In one sense this is self-evident sophomoric advice. But maybe the best way of changing ourselves is working to change the society—beginning with action and then reflecting upon such action. We need to avoid an antiseptic cleavage here, between self and society. Some students and colleagues, have, over the years, told me that they won't be ready to change the world until they've mastered the classics in sociology, psychology, pedagogy, political theory, etc. Well, the word 'master' is relative, but the task of reading and understanding everything that might make you a good change agent could take several lifetimes—and in the meantime these folks want the world to hold still or wait until they are ready. This is falling prey to what Sartre called, the "liberty of indifference." Let the world be damned until I fashion myself accordingly—and this whole idea of self-fashioning reeks to me of too much emphasis on autoplaticity, a bit like Foucault's practice of the self—forging individual identity out of the conflictual social relations of power/knowledge, and at the most resisting being made into a docile, compliant subject. And maybe there is an echo of this in Saint Augustine's wayward prayer, Lord make me pure but not yet! (When I was a doctoral student in Toronto, I audited a class with Foucault, and while I was giving him a tour of some of the best bookstores in the city, I asked him his opinion of Toronto and he replied—"it's not decadent enough for me." He was brilliant, a wonderful teacher, but I couldn't find a hint of any politics of transcendence in his work). I don't think you can change the world only to suit yourself, that is, to suit your idiosyncracies, needs and desires—you need to take into consideration the needs of the people, all of their basic needs for food, shelter, dignity, health. And course, what is "basic" in terms of basic needs is also a relative term. While we can't stop the continuum of history, we can certainly put up a roadblock, perhaps evening hiding ourselves away in the cave of Adullam with a band of renegades to give ourselves a better understanding of the bias against the poor in today's social universe so that we can submit ourselves to a political disposition, one revolutionary enough to embrace a politics of emancipation. I have written recently on Christian communism, and made a case for "comrade Jesus" and for Marx's sympathy for some of the gospels (not surprisingly, and quite rightly, he was an-

ti-clerical and vehemently opposed to religious institutions that served as opium for the people. Who could blame him?) Rosa Luxemburg quotes passages from Saints Basil the Great, John Chrysotom and Gregory the Great in her essay on Socialism and the Churches. And of course, as Andrew Collier notes, while it would be foolish today to wish a “Reign of the Saints”, favoured by Calvin, Munzer, Wyclif and the Fifth Monarchy Men, those professing to be, say, Christian, are obliged to support secular movements that their principles would lead them to support—and, of course, politically I follow a Marxist humanist path and one that I am trying to intersect with the tradition of liberation theology. My ideas on liberation and emancipation appear perhaps hopelessly quixotic. But to me, liberation and emancipation are two different processes. It’s more than the multitude versus the people—*pace* Hardt and Negri. We can sometimes liberate ourselves from oppression but to emancipate ourselves we need a viable alternative to the current capitalist system that transcends liberal nebulosities. We need, in other words, a socialist system. And the most pervasive argument against socialism in the U.S. is that it contradicts our human nature and that it also leads to totalitarianism, lack of freedom, and violent state repression. Which has been the most powerful tactic on the part of Republicans for making the case that there is no alternative to capitalism. Too often we remain locked in abstract universals, and we need to concretize our dialectics so that they have a formidable impact on the realm of actuality, but this is not as easy as it might seem.

In the decades following the civil rights movement in the United States, university intellectuals were drawn to post-structuralist thinkers and anti-humanist intellectuals and universities became filled with their miasma of different indifference. The neo-baroque rhetorical formations and fanciful logic of postmodern theory has, in our contemporary space, replaced reason with opinion, explanation with observation, knowledge with opportunity, facts with the way one thinks about them, and understanding of an idea with its tacit approval—all of which has been slanderously reflected by social media into a defense of the notion of “fake news”. Fake news corrodes the factual basis of democratic debate by insinuating that there exists no truth, there is only an ever-emptying cistern of opinion and all opinions are always already populated with the intentions of others—everyone is either a lout or a madman—and these opinions in themselves are merely illusion in the Nietzschean sense. It puts everything into a state of a cynically reasoned agnosticism, giving ballast to a person whose sense of self feels under siege, yet who lacks an explanatory language of analysis, but still believes one can “imagineer” one’s existence outside the conundrums wrought by capitalist relations of exploita-

tion. Fake news also creates an antipathy towards reason and debate, and a penchant for preferring the exchange of opinions over submitting to a debate with adjudicators and public deliberation. Researchers have also identified what they call the “illusory truth effect”, which basically asserts that the more familiar a story or event becomes, the more a person is likely to believe it is true.

We need to remind ourselves, again after Marx, that the opinions of those in power are those that dominate and influence the political system. For poststructuralists, structures are not real but exist only as mental categories; they are simply language-effects contaminated by regimes of truth. Now there are some useful ideas that emerged out of this debate, but unfortunately at the same time there was a move away from class struggle, socialist humanism or Marxist humanism, and an emphasis placed on the politics of difference, epistemological idealism and the perverse aesthetics of self-display. These resplendently conjured radial antihumanist forms of thought, freighted with ultra-interpretivism, and frothy aerosol discourses that largely abandoned the dialectic are, fortunately, in decline, largely as a result of the Great Recession and the global justice movement. We can certainly claim to know truth, even indulging in granular understandings of social life in its minutiae, certainly we can, but we cannot *exhaust* the truth.

Is the answer to make us all into Marxist humanist critical pedagogues?

Critical pedagogy does not have *ipso facto* transformative power. It is not some negative moment of pure white hot antagonism, opening a positive logic in the politics of knowledge. It is not separated from dialectics—but on the contrary is shot through with a dialectical humanism, creating a condition of possibility for bringing about a new social universe; it is also accompanied by a broad decolonial approach to the emancipation of “the people” very likely with people of color leading the way. Those of us who remain outspoken in our politics will always face a retribution-fuelled academy and society-at-large. Clearly we need to resituate teacher and learners as productive agents who understand that there is a critical agency that they can develop that lies beyond the mystifications of class contradictions and attempts by bourgeois intellectuals to deconstruct the material basis of class relations. Reading in the critical tradition is one way to help teachers re-understand their roles. What I am advocating is that we move beyond what Italian Marxist theorist and politician Antonio Gramsci referred to as *passive revolution*. William Robinson describes Gramsci’s passive revolution as dominant groups undertaking “reform from above that



defuses mobilization from below for more far-reaching transformation”. So we need to think beyond limited economic redistribution and a restored role for the state, according to Robinson. He makes a good point that we should be less concerned with regulating accumulation and more focussed on administering its expansion in more inclusionary ways. Or else we are left with producing a new wave of capitalist globalization “with greater credibility than their orthodox and politically bankrupt neoliberal predecessors”. Reproducing neoliberalism is bad enough, we don’t need more legitimate forms. We need to move past the bourgeois limits of redistributive reform. Robinson is correct that we need substantial structural transformations. And these structural transformations need to address the root causes of poverty and inequality. It’s foolish to think that the transnational capitalist class won’t use its structural power in the global political economy to defuse any challenge to its rule. We need a stronger rupture from the politics of liberal accommodationism. We need to do more than change our ideological wardrobe.

Revolutionary critical pedagogy, which I developed in my book, *Pedagogy of Insurrection* is a transmodern response to U.S. imperialism, the coloniality of power, racism, sexism, white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism and economic inequality that locates its politics of liberation on the subaltern side of colonial difference in solidarity with minoritized and oppressed groups. It looks to develop a consistent plan to develop a social universe outside of capitalist value production and in the pursuit of cognitive democracy, and economic, racial, gender and sexual equality. Those of us who are involved in this project try to envision a pluriversal world consisting of a multiplicity of political projects that are bound together through horizontal forms of dialogue and self-managed socialized production and distribution systems operationalized by communities of solidarity and reciprocity—but which have not abandoned the importance of class struggle and projects of emancipation that carry universal relevance. Reorienting the default mode of our neural pathways so we can discover more creative ways of constructing fully informed citizens able to resist the neoliberal empire, does not mean we are looking for a customized, one-size-fits-all blueprint. What we require is a new dialectical vision and a new consensus of how to move forward, a wider-than-customary range of alternative ideas, not alternative facts. Critical consciousness or the creation of the self-knowing subject is not a precondition for transforming the world but an outcome of a praxis of solidaristic engagement with others in which we are braided together as social actors, healing our damaged subjectivities while searching for ways to fight poverty, to achieve economic and national sovereignty, to rid the world of the hunger and

the destitution that has arrived at our doorsteps, and to create a viable alternative to capitalism which has the possibility of achieving hegemonic ascendancy, where direct production meets the needs of all citizens for food, clothing, shelter, medical treatment and human dignity. Begin now! Start working to build the social movements! The New American Dream that I envision is nothing short of co-creating with our international comrades global democracy—The Internationalist Dream.

It's important to remember, Mitja, that the process of propaganda, developed by Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, was perfected in the U.S. and Britain (Hitler, for instance, greatly admired British propaganda) although the term is usually associated with closed societies, that is, with totalitarian societies. Propaganda in the U.S. is generally camouflaged by euphemisms, such as public relations, advertising, public diplomacy and advertising. Mark Crispin Miller has written extensively on this. The CIA helps to fund certain films, and has infiltrated many news media organizations. Even abstract expressionist art in the 1960s was funded by the CIA because they saw it as political ambiguous, and not starkly political like the social realism of Soviet propaganda art. The U.S. has one of the most sophisticated propaganda complexes the world has ever seen, far surpassing what any totalitarian regime could establish. Recently, as a way to sell the idea that the American Dream is still realizable for hard working and determined Americans who have the courage to overcome racial, ethnic, and gender barriers, etc., The Public Broadcasting Service for South California has developed a numerical "score" for people who take their American Dream "quiz" and you receive a percentage number of where you stand in having achieved the American Dream. Here is what the website says:

Spend five minutes taking this quiz, and you'll find out what factors were working in your favor and what you had to overcome to get where you are today. At the end, you'll receive an overall score and a personalized summary of the results (and probably a big dose of pride and gratitude).  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/chasing-the-dream/your-american-dream-score/>

Perhaps we should let the artists lead the way because they often give us things that we do not know that we need. In Oakland, California, a Museum of Capitalism has recently been established by a group of artists, and the inaugural show features works by over sixty artists, who have produced powerfully inventive explorations of capitalism, including critiques of the contradictions that bedevil the capitalist system, along with ideas of what a social universe not dominated by capitalism could be like. The ex-

hibit features a machine with a hand crank that shoots out pennies at the same rate as the minimum wage; there's a series of miniature toy figurines based on the 2008 bailout of Bank of America, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, and other banks, by the Obama administration's Department of the Treasury. These were banks bailed out with taxpayer dollars; they were deemed too big to fail. But taxpayers who lost their homes as a result of the Great Recession were ignored by the government. This is similar to socialism for the rich and unremitting exploitation of the poor. There is also a special exhibit about American imperialism. The exhibit includes an interactive installation by Christy Chow of Hong Kong, in which visitors jump on a treadmill while they watch the grueling process of assembling a garment in a Chinese factory. Gabby Miller, a Vietnamese-American artist, displays a steel container used to send supplies by boat, reminding viewers of the containers used by the American military to send supplies from the port of Oakland to South Vietnam during the U.S. invasion of Vietnam. There is also a feature documentary about a theater collective known as Rimini Protokoll infiltrating the annual shareholders meeting of German carmaker Daimler, where the theater group sells "tickets" to a performance, where the tickets consist of small amounts of Daimler stock, inviting participants to attend the annual shareholders meeting.

I like to think that the world as we experience it is always in a superposition, a term used in quantum mechanics, meaning a fuzzy liminal state that becomes real only when we participate in making an observation. Likewise, no world is complete until we participate in it and no world will change until we engage in struggle with it.

That we need to retrain ourselves as activists is clear. Too many of us remain desperate, convinced that no matter what we do, our unjust world will not yield to our mighty efforts. We become lulled to inaction by an elegiac cry in the icy solitude of the sepulcher where revolutionary souls are encysted in the crusted dampness of political despair or paralyzed by certitude and self-righteousness and a fervent belief in the apodicticity of action that in time—in the case of the United States roughly 241 years—sets crisp barriers to insight and de facto chokes our voices with the winter catarrh of defeat. We enter a strange cavern of subtle reality, where contours of everyday life are infinitely adjusted and where possibilities can never be realized. We enter the American Dream.