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Circling the Drain

Why Creativity Won't Be Coming to School Today, or Ever

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Abstract

We hear a lot of talk, recently, about America's deepening "creativity crisis" (Sergeant Richardson, 2011) and what schools can do to resolve it. To whatever extent such a crisis is real (Schrage, 2010), we should not expect schools to be part of the solution. From its inception, compulsory schooling in the United States has always served the values of our nation's dominant institutions and the interests of the social, political, and economic elites who own, control, and benefit most from the social arrangements and relations engendered by those institutions. To organize and operate a set of institutions dedicated to promoting critical and creative thought would run counter to those dominant values and interests by developing the cognitive habits among the population that could render them less susceptible to easy government and corporate manipulation. Therefore, so long as those values and interests remain dominant within the larger society, they will remain dominant within schools, thereby limiting the extent to which schools will ever nurture creativity and critical reflection.



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“Allow me to be frank at the commencement. You will not like me.”

John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester
(Malkovich, J. Halfon, L., & Smith, R., 2004)

We hear a lot of talk, recently, about America’s deepening “creativity crisis”(Sergeant Richardson, 2011) and what schools can do to resolve it. To whatever extent such a crisis is real (Schrage, 2010), we should not expect schools to be part of the solution. From its inception, compulsory schooling in the United States has always served the values of our nation’s dominant institutions and the interests of the social, political, and economic elites who own, control, and benefit most from the social arrangements and relations engendered by those institutions. To organize and operate a set of institutions dedicated to promoting critical and creative thought would run counter to those dominant values and interests by developing the cognitive habits among the population that could render them less susceptible to easy government and corporate manipulation. Therefore, so long as those values and interests remain dominant within the larger society, they will remain dominant within schools, thereby limiting the extent to which schools will ever nurture creativity and critical reflection.

Our Sentimental Nihilism

Not what you wanted to hear? Already searching for reasons to dismiss me? I would not be surprised, particularly if you happen to be American and even less so if you happen to be a teacher in America’s system of compulsory schooling. At birth, you were thrown into a society that Cornel West (1999, para. 9), borrowing from Henry James (1907), describes as a “hotel civilization” – a place that is never dark, where the lights are on all the time, and characterized, in part, by a deep obsession with comforting our conscience and our consciousness through sentimentalization and denial. A hotel civilization, in West’s view, that “believes itself to be innocent. Believes itself to be not just the best, but near perfection. It’s an infantile mentality to ascribe any innocence to oneself at the deepest level, and for a nation to believe itself innocent means that you’re going to end up with a sentimental, melodramatic culture that cannot deal with the tragic, and cannot deal with wounds and scars” (West, 1999, para. 10). Moreover, a culture that cannot deal with the reality of its own past, present, and predictable future.

In his aptly titled *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (2009), Chris Hedges discusses famed historian Daniel Boorstin’s recognition of this same tendency “Americans, he (Boorstin) writes, increasingly live in a ‘world where fantasy is more real than reality.’ He warns:

We risk being the first people in history to have been able to make their illusions so vivid, so persuasive, so ‘realistic’ that they can live in them. We are the most illusioned people on earth. Yet we dare not become disillusioned, because our illusions are the very house in which we live; they are our news, our heroes, our adventure, our forms of art, our very experience. (cited in Hedges, 2009, p. 15)

They are also, I will argue, our schools.

One of our grandest illusions rests with the seemingly innocent belief that schools function as benevolent institutions. Psychologically, the parents of school-aged children must find it especially important to maintain this belief. *The Phi Delta Kappan* conducts an annual survey asking the parents of school-aged children a number of questions concerning their

attitudes toward schools. Each year the same pattern emerges. In 2012, for example, when asked how they would grade the school attended by their oldest child, 77% parents said they would give that school an A or a B. Yet, when asked the same question about schools nationally, 77% said they would give those schools a C, D, or F. Only 19% said that schools nationally deserved an A or a B (2012, p. 19).

How much do these parents really know about the quality of schools nationally? How much time do they spend, on average, investigating schools and school policy? How ridiculous is it for *Kappan* to ask them their opinions on the Common Core State Standards? Amazingly, only 2% had the honesty to report that they didn't know (2012, p. 11). How much do most parents and other citizens even know about the educational platforms of those seeking election to local school boards? We could even challenge the validity of their opinions regarding the quality of the schools attended by their own children. How many parents really inquire into what teachers do in their classrooms? Certainly, some parents involve themselves heavily in their children's school lives, but according to one study, teachers believe only about 19% of parents even check their children's homework (Horace Mann Educator Advisory Panel, 2007, p. 3).

Of course, they want to believe that the schools attended by their children are doing a fine job. Psychologically and emotionally, it would be very difficult for them to think otherwise. After all, they entrust the care of their children to these institutions, purportedly created to serve the value of education. But this is precisely where the illusion of education in America begins. Schools, as I will explain later in this paper, do not exist to educate people, but maintaining the illusion that they do is central to the mission of getting people to conflate the value purportedly served with the existence of the institution. Just because we have schools, however, does not mean that we have education. And the reason why schools do not actually serve the value of education ties directly to my earlier statement that schools will likely never provide learning environments where creativity can flourish.

Creativity: Characteristics and Conditions

Before examining the illusion of public education and its sources more thoroughly, I need to return to the issue of creativity. Teresa Amabile serves as the Edsel Bryant Ford Professor of Business Administration in the Entrepreneurial Management Unit at Harvard Business School. She is widely recognized as an expert in the study of creativity in the workplace, most notably for her componential theory of creativity. By her definition, creativity refers to “the production of a novel and appropriate response, product, or solution to an open-ended task” (2012, p. 3). In her theory, there are three components of creativity that exist within the individual. First, creativity demands *domain-specific skills*. That is, creative people possess “knowledge, expertise, technical skills, intelligence, and talent” in the domain in which they are working. For example, I would love to be creative as a guitar player. Sadly, while I can play a number of songs written by others, I have yet to reach the degree of expertise with regard to my knowledge of the fretboard and the degree of technical proficiency necessary to be creative enough to write my own songs. I'm sure I could write something, but I am not confident that my product would meet Amabile's criteria of being both novel and, especially, appropriate. Not just anything can pass as being creative.

The second component that Amabile recognizes within creative people is *creativity-relevant processes*. Some of these processes, she explains, give expression to elements of a

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person's cognitive qualities, while others relate more directly to their personality. Cognitively, creative persons demonstrate "the ability to use wide, flexible categories for synthesizing information and the ability to break out of perceptual and performance 'scripts'" (Amabile, 2012, p. 4). Personality-wise, they demonstrate a great deal of self-discipline and, because creative tasks are open-ended by their very nature, "a tolerance for ambiguity" (2012). In combination, these two dimensions of creativity-relevant processes allow people to work independently, to take risks, and to bring fresh perspectives on problems that allow them to create new ideas.

Finally, the third component within the individual that Amabile describes is *task motivation*. "A central tenet of the componential theory," Amabile explains, "is the intrinsic motivation principle of creativity: People are most creative when they feel motivated primarily by the interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, and challenge of the work itself – and not by extrinsic motivators" (Amabile, 2012, p. 4).

Domain-specific skills, the cognitive and personality dimensions of *creativity-relevant processes*, and *intrinsic task motivation* make up three of the components of Amabile's theory. They do not, however, exhaust it. They constitute only the internal (internal to the individual) components. She also identifies a fourth component essential to creative work that is external to the individual; namely, the social environment. To maximally nurture creative work, the social environment should stimulate

a sense of positive challenge in the work; work teams that are collaborative, diversely skilled, and idea-focused; freedom in carrying out the work; supervisors who encourage the development of new ideas; top management that supports innovation through a clearly articulated creativity-encouraging vision and through appropriate recognition for creative work; mechanisms for developing new ideas; and norms of actively sharing ideas across the organization. (Ibid)

These traits, however, seldom characterize the social environment of schools to encourage creative work among teachers, particularly since the rise of high-stakes testing and accountability in the 1980s. Under those pressures, an increasing number of districts have imposed scripted lesson plans on teachers, further restricting the professional autonomy they may have ever enjoyed in their work environments. Even more frequently have those traits been missing from the classroom learning environments created by teachers for students.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Creativity, Creative Students, and Change

I would like to submit two mutually reinforcing reasons why the learning environments found in the vast majority of compulsory school classrooms have never and, in all likelihood, will never demonstrate these characteristics. The first of these reasons actually stems from the second and larger reason for why compulsory schooling will never actively encourage creativity. To be blunt, most individuals who teach in those classrooms do not value creativity, at least not in the children they teach. As Westby and Dawson (1995) explain, "One of the most consistent findings in educational studies of creativity has been that teachers dislike personality traits associated with creativity" (Ibid, p. 1). Instead, "teachers prefer traits that seem to run counter to creativity, such as conformity and unquestioning acceptance of authority" (Ibid). Though the sentimental nihilism within the traditional left that typically shields teachers and defends our beloved public schools with their hallowed democratically-elected school boards from the evils

of corporate take-over and privatization, Westby and Dawson help us recognize that there is a rich tradition of research supporting their conclusion. Among the studies they cite, we find works by Louise M. Bachtold (1974), Arthur J. Copley (1992), Peggy Dettmer (1981), Jacob W. Getzels and Phillip W. Jackson (1962), as well as Robert E. Meyers and E. Paul Torrance (1961).

In addition to citing Westby and Dawson, Kyung Hee Kim (2008) draws upon an equally impressive body of literature to support her conclusion that “research has shown that teachers are apt to prefer students who are achievers and teacher pleasers rather than disruptive or unconventional creative students” (p. 236) As she elaborates,

Scott reported that teachers see creative children as a source of interference and disruption. Westby and Dawson found that teachers’ judgment of their favorite students was negatively correlated with creativity. Teachers prefer students to exhibit traits such as unquestioning acceptance of authority, conformity, logical thinking, and responsibility that make students easy to manage in the classroom. Teachers’ images of the ideal student emphasize traits that were conformist and socially acceptable. (Kim, 2008, p. 236)

Drawing upon the work of Everett E. Hagen (1962), as well as that of Myers and Torrance (1962), Ronald Urick and Jack R. Frymier (1963) help us extend beyond recognizing how teachers’ attitudes have historically contributed to the creation of classroom norms that are hostile toward creativity. Their work helps us understand why those same attitudes work to ensure that the learning environments in our nation’s system of compulsory schooling will likely never change. The majority of teachers deplore and resist change as much as they deplore and punish creativity.

With regard to people’s attitudes toward change, Hagen (1962) distinguished between two different personality types: innovational and authoritarian. His account of innovational personalities, it turns out, aligns neatly with Amabile’s componential theory of creativity. Hagen described the innovational personality as demonstrating “an openness to experience, a confidence in one’s own evaluations, a satisfaction in facing and resolving confusion or ambiguity, and a feeling that the world is orderly, and that the phenomenon of life can be understood and explained” (cited in Urick and Frymier, 1963, p. 109). Conversely, Urick and Frymier explain, Hagen viewed the authoritarian personality as “characterized by a fear of using his initiative, an uncertainty concerning the quality of his own judgment, and tendency to avoid frustration and anxiety, an uneasiness in facing unresolved situations, and a tendency to see the world as arbitrary and capricious” (and therefore in dire need of management) (Ibid).

Studies by Myers and Torrance (1962) reveal that teachers who resist change demonstrated the characteristics of “authoritarianism, defensiveness, insensitivity to pupil needs, preoccupation with information-giving functions, intellectual inertness, disinterest in promoting initiative in pupils, and preoccupation with discipline” (cited in Urick and Frymier, 1963, p. 109). This latter authoritarian preoccupation with discipline reveals itself in the feedback received by teacher education programs on surveys of their graduates in response to the question, “If you could have had more instruction in one area during your years spent in teacher training, what would that area have been?” Invariably, in my twenty-years of experience in teacher education, across four different institutions in four different states, the most frequent response to that question has always been “classroom management.”

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This tells me, in light of all the research revealing their authoritarian personality that most teachers must view the work they demand of students as being a kind of necessary drudgery. They also view it as immutable. The nature of the work is not up for questioning or challenge. It's a given. It's not going to change, but why should it? The program worked for them when they were students in school. They went along with it, and their teachers rewarded them with gold stars and praise and, ultimately, high grades. How could there be anything wrong with the program? The problem must be with the students, particularly their motivation. Perhaps the gold stars don't work to motivate these students. We need to increase the extrinsic rewards to get them to work harder at completing their assigned tasks. Unfortunately, as Amabile and Kramer's research (2010) demonstrates, people tend not to be motivated by extrinsic rewards.

Ask leaders what they think makes employees enthusiastic about work, and they'll tell you in no uncertain terms. In a recent survey we invited more than 600 managers from dozens of companies to rank the impact on employee motivation and emotions of five workplace factors commonly considered significant: recognition, incentives, interpersonal support, support for making progress, and clear goals. "Recognition for good work (either public or private)" came out number one. (Amabile and Kramer, 2010, p. 1)

Unfortunately, those managers are wrong.

Likewise, most teachers also believe that motivational issues need to be managed by external stimuli, rather than addressed through the intrinsic qualities of the work they ask students to undertake. They, too, are wrong, and the learning / working environments they create in their classrooms frequently reflect many of the same traits Amabile (1998) associates with creativity-killing environments.

The Cycle of Compliance

Earlier, I stated that I would submit two mutually reinforcing reasons why the learning environments found in the vast majority of compulsory school classrooms have never and, in all likelihood, will never nurture creativity. I began by covering just a small portion of the literature dating back to 1961 documenting the antipathy that a majority of individuals attracted into the teaching profession feel toward students who demonstrate creative characteristics. Some of that literature also provides evidence that the authoritarian dimensions of their personalities lead them to create learning environments that are antithetical to the freedom and openness to innovation requisite to creative work. In Melissa Engleman's study (2007) of 213 graduate students in education with a median of 4 years of classroom teaching experience, for example, she found that more than half of her respondents fell into either the ISFJ (25%) or ESFJ (28%) personality type on the Humanmetrics "Jung Typology" Test. Another 6% fell into the ESTJ type and 10% fell into the ISTJ type, making a total of 69% of the teachers fit the SJ temperament profile.

In his *Learning Patterns and Temperament Styles* (1982), Keith Golay characterized SJs as "Actual Routine Learners" (ARLs). These people feel a need to establish and preserve social units, which fits with their demand for clear expectations and specific, clearly defined procedures for accomplishing a task. These traits align with their tendency to be meticulous as well as highly industrious. As students, ARLs also display a very strong need to please and receive approval from authority figures, including and especially their teachers. In turn, they hold authority figures in reverence, deferring to that authority through obedience and conformity (Golay, 1982, NP).

If we can accept Engleman's numbers as fairly representative of the broader population of those people who chose to enter teaching as a career, we can hypothesize that 70% of the classroom learning environments in America's system of compulsory schooling are created and maintained by *Actual Routine Teachers*. We can further hypothesize that those environments most heavily reward children who learn to revere the authority of teachers and who work diligently at their assigned tasks to win their approval through their obedience to and their conformity with the teacher's values and expectations. Because they experience these rewards from their teachers in these environments, ARLs / SJs might be more disposed toward choosing teaching as a career, but the *cycle of compliance* does not begin or end here.

People's attitudes stem from their beliefs and values. We arrive at birth, however, with none of these things already intact. None of them are natural. They are social – created and evolved by other members of our species who preceded our arrival and who took part in some portion of our society's history. The majority of those people died long before we came upon the scene. Before they did, they generated ideas, beliefs, and values that evolved as they were transmitted across numerous generations until, finally, they reach us. To become members of the society into which we are born, we must undergo a process of socialization through which we learn those beliefs and values that comprise the shared social stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Which beliefs and values we make contact with most regularly is not a matter of caprice. As social animals, humans create and reproduce far more than just beliefs and values. We also produce institutions to provide a set of prefabricated patterns for guiding our behavior. For those who inherit a set of institutions from previous generations, the origins and meanings of those institutions do not appear as transparent. They require legitimations, a set of beliefs to explain the necessity of a given institution, the values it was created to serve, and how a particular institution fits within the larger network of institutions. The legitimations created for public dissemination, however, do not necessarily align with the real reasons why an institution was created and the values the institution actually serves. The case of compulsory schooling provides a powerful example of this. It also points to the second reason why the learning environments found in the vast majority of compulsory school classrooms have never and, probably, will never nurture creativity.

Our system of compulsory schooling was never intended to serve the value of education, though we seem incapable of recognizing or admitting this to ourselves. The origins and meanings of our institutions are not transparent to us, and very few people actually study the history of compulsory schooling. This leaves the vast majority of people vulnerable to being propagandized into blind acceptance of the illusions created to manufacture their consent. They are taught to believe, for example, that schools are inherently benevolent institutions. In fact, to speak legitimately about education in this country, one must present the school as a messianic institution capable of delivering the individual and/or society into some condition of secular salvation. Pastoral images of kind, loving, virtuous, and motherly female teachers serve to mask the more authoritarian reality.

Though a full accounting of its history lies beyond the scope of this article, compulsory schooling has always functioned as a social technology designed to discipline the population into compliance with the beliefs, ideas, and values requisite to reproducing society's dominant institutions. To gain some appreciation for the origins of schools, we simply need to consider the fact that they emerged alongside the system of workhouses and poorhouses throughout Europe to cope with the massive levels of homelessness and unemployment created by the Enclosure

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Movement that privatized land into property and the Industrial Revolution that transformed people into labor. The emerging factory system could not absorb the entirety of the population displaced by the agrarian reforms of the Enclosure Movement, but learning to labor within factories did not come naturally to people. A whole series of Poor Laws were created that criminalized charity – even charity from churches. The merchants and manufacturers of the 17th, 18th, and even 19th centuries used many of the same arguments used by their modern day equivalents against welfare today, contending that charity undermined people’s incentive to work, i.e., – your incentive to rent yourself to another person in exchange for a wage. Those same Poor Laws also criminalized unemployment and homelessness. If apprehended for being jobless, you were sent to a workhouse or a poorhouse to be reformed so as to learn to appreciate the value of work (see Foucault, 1979; Gabbard, 2007; 2012, & 2013; & Polanyi, 1944).

Schools served a more pre-emptive role, seeking to discipline children into proper work habits and render them “useful” or “productive” members of society before they could become vagrant delinquents. Yes, they were taught to read and write, but only to make them more useful and more productive. This new disciplinary regime also gave birth to the modern prison. Note how we sometimes refer to prisons as “corrections facilities.” The modern prison, it turns out, took its design from schools, not – as I’d always expected from the time I was a student in elementary school – the other way around.

Schools, workhouses, poorhouses, and prisons, then, share common origins as disciplinary institutions created to serve the market institutions that were rising to dominance in the 17th and 18th centuries. The dominance of market institutions, initially through the patterns of colonialism and imperialism, has now grown global. Very little has changed, however, with regard to the beliefs and values required to reproduce those institutions and maintain their dominance. If anything, the propaganda system required to insulate them from greater public awareness and dissent has grown stronger. People, for example, no longer view schools in terms of their compulsory nature and how they are tied to society’s dominant institutions. They have learned to conflate schooling with education and to confuse that which is compulsory with a fundamental human right.

This is why we can’t view the teaching of creativity in our schools as a social justice issue and why we should never expect those institutions to promote creativity. The latter would require a fundamental shift in the values served by schools, a shift in what Takis Fotopoulos defines as our “dominant social paradigm” (2003). In his analysis, the values of our present system stem from “its basic principles of organization: the principle of heteronomy and the principle of individualism which are built-into the institutions of the market economy and representative ‘democracy’. Such values,” he says, “involve the values of inequity and effective oligarchy (even if the system calls itself a democracy), competition and aggressiveness” (Fotopoulos, 2003, para. 2).

When viewed in these terms, we can recognize how the values and beliefs of the majority of teachers align with the values and beliefs of our society’s dominant institutions. Those authoritarian traits of Actual Routine Teachers described earlier are not simply the expression of their individual personalities. Originally, women were recruited into teaching precisely because the dehumanizing forces of sexism could demand obedience from them. This partially explains why the teaching profession remains so deeply disrespected by our political and economic elites through the verbal assaults they launch against schools – berating them for not producing a sufficient number of the right kinds of workers to satisfy their demand for properly disciplined

and trained labor. Those Actual Routine Teachers of both genders have internalized the values and beliefs of our dominant institutions. Through their routinization of those values in the authoritarian learning environments of their classrooms, they obviate the dangers of creativity and change, rewarding obedience and conformity while punishing any threat to the established order.

In Freirean terms, students in authoritarian classrooms stand in relation to their Actual Routine Teachers as the oppressed stand in relation to their oppressors. “The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be human; but for them, to be human is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity” (Freire, 1971, p. 30). Actual Routine Teachers, moreover, beget Actual Routine Learners, many of whom grow up to become Actual Routine Teachers, and so the cycle continues. I don’t see much hope of our breaking it any time soon.

Conclusion: Toward A Post-Apocalyptic Theory of Hope

Do I see any hope that our system of compulsory schooling will ever promote creativity? No, I don’t. As I said, that would require a radical transformation of our dominant social paradigm, but that paradigm won’t change until the institutions it props up are overthrown or wither away. I don’t see any hope of that happening, either. The vast majority of Americans have simply internalized these values much too deeply. But I don’t mind being proven wrong. And in this case, I hope to be. While it may be illusory to believe that our species will rework its patterns of social organization in time to avert ecological disaster, illusions can be powerful things. I also do not mean to disrespect or discount those teachers and schools that do try to nurture creativity. I just think we need to be honest with ourselves. They have always been in the minority, and they have always had to swim upstream against the currents of mind-numbing conformity. What evidence can we honestly see to suggest otherwise?

When I first entered into teacher education, I suffered from many of my own illusions. I still believed that the United States was a democracy and that I could play a role in some populist movement that would insist that our schools conform to something like what Everett Reimer presents here as the definition of education:

Education entails the conscious use of resources to increase people’s awareness of the relevant facts about their lives, and to increase people’s abilities to act upon these facts in their own true interests. Of major importance to most people are the laws which govern them, the ideologies which influence them and the institutions, and institutional products, which determine the impact of their laws and ideologies upon them. (1976, p. 49)

Now, having spent more than twenty-five years working in teacher education, I’ve joined the late George Carlin in terms of my evaluation of “The State of Our Species.” It’s tragic to see just how badly we’re wasting our potential. Evolution granted us a tremendous gift in giving us the capacity for rationale thought and the ability to shape our own environment, but look at what we’re doing with those gifts. Precisely because of the values of our dominant institutions, we’re destroying that environment. On the one hand, we treat it like it was an infinite resource created solely to satisfy the corporate demand for profit. On the other hand, but relatedly, we treat it like a corporate landfill. We continue to pollute our air and water because it’s too expensive not to. Some scientists predict that our oceans will go extinct by the end of this century, and that we’ve

already crossed the tipping point in terms of global warming. If they are right, we've blown it. And Carlin is right. We're "circling the drain" (Cooper, 2001).

That explains why we need a post-apocalyptic theory of hope, which refers to a hope that whatever members of our species that might survive our implosion will have learned something from our mistakes. Or, if none of our species survives, that whatever intelligent life forms might supersede us, we should hope that they make a better, less-violent, less-stupid run at it than we did.

But our schools won't help us develop any creative solutions to these problems at this point. Carlin's right on that count, as well. He says,

But there's a reason. There's a reason. There's a reason for this, there's a reason education SUCKS, and it's the same reason it will never, ever, EVER be fixed.

It's never going to get any better, don't look for it, be happy with what you've got.

Because the owners, the owners of this country don't want that. I'm talking about the real owners now, the BIG owners! The Wealthy... the REAL owners! The big wealthy business interests that control things and make all the important decisions.

Forget the politicians. They are irrelevant. The politicians are put there to give you the idea that you have freedom of choice. You don't. You have no choice! You have OWNERS! They OWN YOU. They own everything. They own all the important land. They own and control the corporations. They've long since bought, and paid for the Senate, the Congress, the state houses, the city halls, they got the judges in their back pockets and they own all the big media companies, so they control just about all of the news and information you get to hear. They got you by the balls.

They spend billions of dollars every year lobbying, lobbying, to get what they want. Well, we know what they want. They want more for themselves and less for everybody else, but I'll tell you what they don't want:

They don't want a population of citizens capable of critical thinking. They don't want well informed, well educated people capable of critical thinking. They're not interested in that. That doesn't help them. That's against their interests.

That's right. They don't want people who are smart enough to sit around a kitchen table and think about how badly they're getting fucked by a system that threw them overboard 30 fucking years ago. They don't want that!

You know what they want? They want obedient workers. Obedient workers, people who are just smart enough to run the machines and do the paperwork. And just dumb enough to passively accept all these increasingly shitty jobs with the lower pay, the longer hours, the reduced benefits, the end of overtime and

vanishing pension that disappears the minute you go to collect it, and now they're coming for your Social Security money. They want your retirement money. They want it back so they can give it to their criminal friends on Wall Street, and you know something? They'll get it. They'll get it all from you sooner or later cause they own this fucking place! It's a big club, and you ain't in it! You, and I, are not in the big club.

By the way, it's the same big club they use to beat you over the head with all day long when they tell you what to believe. All day long beating you over the head with their media telling you what to believe, what to think and what to buy. The table has tilted folks. The game is rigged and nobody seems to notice. Nobody seems to care! Good honest hard-working people; white collar, blue collar it doesn't matter what color shirt you have on. Good honest hard-working people continue, these are people of modest means, continue to elect these rich cock suckers who don't give a fuck about you.... they don't give a fuck about you... they don't give a FUCK about you.

They don't care about you at all... at all... AT ALL. And nobody seems to notice. Nobody seems to care. That's what the owners count on. The fact that Americans will probably remain willfully ignorant of the big red, white and blue dick that's being jammed up their assholes everyday, because the owners of this country know the truth.

It's called the American Dream, because you have to be asleep to believe it. (2005)

Carlin humbles me here. In one three-minute and fifteen-second schtick, he summarizes nearly everything I've written over the past twenty-five years. And he does one other thing as well. As a high school drop out, he helps us all recognize that there might be more creativity going on in school than we might think, but that creativity is happening in spite of school, or in resistance to it, not because of it.

I am John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester and I do not want you to like me. (Malkovich, J. Halfon, L., & Smith, R., 2004).

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