



Raja, M. (2004). Review of *Education as Enforcement: The Militarization and Corporatization of Schools*. *Workplace*, 11, 226-229.

MASOOD A. RAJA

REVIEW OF *EDUCATION AS ENFORCEMENT: THE MILITARIZATION AND CORPORATIZATION OF SCHOOLS*

edited by Kenneth J. Saltman and David A. Gabbard  
RoutledgeFalmer, 2003

*Education as Enforcement* is a much needed and timely response to a totalizingly paternalistic discourse of imperialism that seems to have beset the American consciousness since September 11, 2001. Within the reductive logic of current politics, and buttressed by militaristic approaches to the elusive problem of terrorism, we risk a perpetual warlike situation which, while keeping political dissent at the minimum, grants the present Us government immense power to pursue its interventionist policies worldwide. Hence, what was once done clandestinely now operates as a blatant strategy of world domination aimed at safeguarding global corporate interests. In an era when some have theorized the death of grand narratives, another grand narrative of empire is emerging—and *this* empire—unlike the one envisioned by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri—is not a "center-less" entity, but an empire. How can globalization—a system so blatantly egregious to the poorer parts of the world—be pandered as the new remedy for the world's problems? Why hasn't the U.S. produced a large-scale popular resistance to globalization? The beneficiaries of globalization often retort, What's your alternative to it? *Education as Enforcement* courageously intervenes in this debate, offering viable pedagogical strategies to render the classroom and laboratory sites where we might develop a counterdiscourse to neoliberalism and its ills.

2. Of course, implementing such strategies will not be easy. Within the current climate of uncompromisingly patriotic fervor, dissent is unwelcome and coded as *unpatriotic*. Difficult as dissent is for American intellectuals, it is even less possible for someone like me, a non-citizen graduate student for whom the "wrong" take on a political situation might result in either a ticket home or a visit of indeterminable length to some offshore detention center. Such is the kind of America being made right in front of our eyes. Indeed, a politics of fear can justify anything. Given this climate, how might teachers, intellectuals, students, and citizens resist such trends?

3. *Education as Enforcement* presents a sustained study of the corporatization and militarization of American school systems. In so doing, the volume highlights, analyzes, and questions the agenda behind corporatized education. Furthermore, the work juxtaposes the efficacy of individual agency relative to communal solidarity as vehicles of resistance. Ultimately, *Education as Enforcement* urges us to create a more vibrant public domain where government is properly expected to do more than just police. Regrettably, schools have become the training grounds for complacency, policing, and uncritical consent.

Given that trend, we are called upon to enact what one of the editors calls a "critical revolutionary pedagogy."

4. The contributors to *Education as Enforcement* declare their project quite openly, with the kind of courage and audacity one admires. Here, for example, is how Henry A. Giroux launches this impressive work in his deeply reflective and forthright foreword:

As a wartime president, George W. Bush enjoys incredibly high popularity ratings, but beneath the inflated ratings and the president's call for unity, there is a disturbing appeal to modes of community and patriotism buttressed by moral absolutes in which the discourse of evil, terrorism, and security works to stifle dissent, empty democracy of any substance, and exile politics "to the space occupied by those discontented with the west, and dispossessed by it." (ix)

Giroux goes on to analyze current American policies, and emphasizes the importance of juxtaposing "emergency time" with "public time," a discussion that highlights the role of educators in creating academic environments which could produce critical citizens who would ask more questions of their government, and who would demand more civic investment, rather than just waiting for the market to solve their problems while the state both shrinks in overall significance yet magnifies its police powers.

5. In the subsequent introduction, Saltman addresses yet another aspect of neoliberal policies and militarized education, arguing that militarism in fact permeates American culture. Saltman also details the dark side of globalization, while detailing the absence of popular response to such policies by those who have been co-opted by an education system that enforces militarism, corporate interests, and the neoliberal agenda. For example, Saltman reframes the Columbine shootings to shift emphasis from their source as some breakdown of the family to what he terms the "pervasive culture of violence that structures the lived realities of school for many students" (19). Saltman concludes by calling for a "critical pedagogy" which, along with other counter-hegemonic movements, must "form the basis for imagining and implementing a just future" (21).

6. After the foreword and introduction set the tone for this collection, the remaining essays address various strands of corporate and governmental appropriation of the social and the political. Importantly, neither the editors nor the contributors subscribe to standard Marxist or neoliberal views of government. Rather, they envision a government that is—and must be—capable of a benevolent enabling function; and it is this emphasis that makes the work unique.

7. An interview with Noam Chomsky leads off the collection. "The Function of Schools: Subtler and Cruder Methods of Control" describes in accessible language the oppressive and ideological apparatuses that induce the school system to "perform its institutional role" (25). Saltman and Goodman's essay, "Rivers of Fire," follows Chomsky's strategic engagement of education as enforcement with a tactical focus on the corporatization of schools by BPAmoco. In this brilliantly argued piece, the authors juxtapose the public and "benevolent" face of BPAmoco with the destructive impact of its corporate greed and mismanagement of the public domain. Hence they present an impassioned indictment of a corporation that "seduces school kids with the lure of fun knowledge . . . [but] is also actively engag[ed] in practices that directly undermine the public" (42). Goodman's second contribution to the book, "Dick Lit," analyzes popular detective fiction and traces the itinerary of the U.S as "World Cop," a role she suggests seems to entail "creating new narratives that allow an ethics of war to make sense in popular consciousness" (260).

8. David Gabbard's "Education *Is* Enforcement" exposes the historical roots of public education, and clearly links the "centrality of compulsory schooling to the enforcement of market society" (62). Just as the church used the doctrine of original sin to claim its centrality in human life, according to Gabbard's

brilliant historical analysis, now the compulsory schooling is used as a "ritual for enforcing a market society" (63-64). Hence, in Gabbard's words:

In order to effect the formation and exercise of conscience, the church had to present a *benevolent* (emphasis mine) image of itself to the world, an image that would define its institutional mission in terms of some universal moral imperative that the church had assumed responsibility for serving. . . . The "doctrine of original sin" provided the church the moral imperative that it needed. . . . The church however did not pretend to be able to provide people with grace itself, only the means of achieving it. People could only acquire those means through their subsequent participation in its rituals. (63)

Gabbard also traces the deep impact of market values as they are enforced throughout the school system. Hence, "through the formation of a 'consumer conscience' individuals learn to judge their own degree of salvation according to market standards" (71). He then goes on to analyze the very imperialistic nature of the market and concludes that "the market has never been an option for the colonized. It has been imposed on them by the developed nations who conquered them" (77). This form of colonialism, suggests Gabbard, still exists in the form of the present global economic order. (The recent debate over agricultural subsidies at the WTO meeting in Cancun clearly supports Gabbard's assumptions about the nature of modern global economics and the role that compulsory education plays in creating such consciousness amongst metropolitan citizens.) Gabbard concludes by suggesting that "compulsory schools function to enforce a set of conditions where people have value only to the extent that they are useful and necessary to the market" (78). This provocative essay may not present an alternative to such enforcement at schools, but that seems not to have been the author's main concern. Gabbard's contribution clearly accomplishes its principal goal: laying bare the dark side of the "benevolent" face of compulsory education.

9. While Gabbard unveils the very enforcing nature of compulsory education, Pauline Lipman, in "Cracking Down," traces the impact of the Chicago Public School (CPS) system's accountability policies and centralized regulation on minority students, hence shifting our attention from broad—but equally important—abstract concepts to the real life consequences for schools and their students. Lipman focuses on "the relationship of school policies to the cultural politics of the race in the city" (82). Mixing a theoretical approach with an empirical study of three minority schools, Lipman follows the impact of centralized educational policies on the performance of minority students in Chicago. She places her research within the larger context of Chicago economics, which has shifted from an emphasis on local production to a transformation into a global city—a city suitable for the potential workers of globalization. Within this context, Lipman suggests, economic disparity tends to be racialized, especially since most of the schools that are administered centrally happen to be located in poor parts of the city. Thus, in order to avoid probation, these schools become test-prep institutions that cannot afford to offer a more vibrant and critical education to their predominantly African-American and Latino student populations. Backed by an incisive and detailed empirical study of three such schools within the Chicago school system, Lipman's essay clearly identifies the very determinacy of minority students as low-skilled workers within an economic system dominated by the "neoliberal, managerial discourse" (85). This incisive essay would be an eye-opener for anyone hoping to understand the dark implications of neoliberal policies on the future of minorities, and may serve as a warning to the people of New York, who just recently have become the inadvertent recipients of the same kind of "enlightened" educational overhaul.

10. In "Freedom for Some, Discipline for 'Others'" Enora Brown, while focusing on the Chicago school system, compares two schools in particular to highlight the inherent advantages and disadvantages of rich and poor schools respectively. Her comparison of Mountainview High School (located in an affluent neighborhood) to Groundview Technical High School (a poor neighborhood institution) distills the stark differences between the very cultures of these schools—the kind of differences that decide and determine different futures for the students. In Brown's view the poor schools seem to have a "culture of militarism," while the affluent area schools accentuate a "culture of privilege." It becomes obvious that while students

at the affluent schools are provided with numerous possibilities for a better future, the kids in poor neighborhood schools have very few possibilities, and the military—through JROTC programs—seems one of the few redemptive organizations available to them. While one approach emphasizes possibility, the other seems to enforce discipline and restrictions. Like Lipman's, Brown's essay clearly points out the inherent disparities built into public school systems, and highlights the racist and class biases of that entire arrangement.

11. David Gabbard and William Reynolds' "We Were Soldiers: The Rewriting of Memory and The Corporate Order" traces the changing face and character of the traditional Hollywood war hero from that of a loner to the God-fearing father/soldier figure of today. This essay clearly details the complicity of media corporations (Paramount Pictures in this case) with neoliberal agendas of globalization and corporate control. It also emphasizes the official need for such films and highlights the process by which Hollywood has been incorporated into the myth-making machine to support the current U.S./corporate global strategy. Besides being an attempt at rewriting the history of the Vietnam War, such films also reinforce the notion that "individual heroism is a way to obtain a military victory no matter what the cost, which is consistent with the corporate order's notion of success of the individual and overcoming adversity individually" (294). The authors' conclusion proves especially pertinent, suggesting as it does that teachers and intellectuals need to respond to this cultural recasting by the media with their own reconstruction of memory as a "progressive past of struggle for social justice" (297).

12. Haggith Gor's contribution to this collection is the only essay that does not directly deal with American education. "Education for War in Israel: Preparing Children to Accept War" deals instead with the mythology of war in contemporary Israel. In this brief piece, Gor mixes archival research with personal testimony to build a case against the martial biases of the Israeli educational system. Of extreme importance within the larger context of the collection, Gor's essay provides an intimate and well-researched account of a society built on the mythology of war—a direction in which the American schools seem to be headed. Gor's incisive argument serves as a tangible warning for what might become of American schools—and society—if the militarization and corporatization of schools is left unchecked and unchallenged.

13. Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur contribute the last essay of the collection, entitled "Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy at Ground Zero: Renewing the Educational Left after September 11." A suitable conclusion to this volume, their essay provides a nascent, but quite practicable, approach to countering the militarization and corporatization of American schools. As the earlier essays in the collection suggest, since schools *are* the very sites of neoliberal appropriation, they must become locations of resistance, through what McLaren and Farahmandpur term a "critical revolutionary pedagogy" (322). Such a critical pedagogy envisages a more dialectical approach to the study of problems like terrorism—which is currently being posited in pathological terms only—as well as a new approach to fostering a more "substantive citizenship" that would challenge globalization and militarization. The essay ends with the following words from Michael Parenti:

Those who believe in democracy must be undeterred in their determination to educate, organize, and agitate; in any case, swimming against the tide is always preferable to being swept over the waterfall. (325)

An apt parting message, insofar as those swept up within the torrential tide of globalization and militarism—sold to them under numerous misleading registers—need to know that what they consider the global mainstream does not really lead to an ocean of endless opportunities, but, rather, to a waterfall of human tragedy.

14. *Education as Enforcement* should be read by people of all political leanings, for it advances a daring narrative aimed at preserving the American achievement of democracy—one in which dissent is welcome; citizens are productively critical of their world; government is capable of regenerative, redemptive functions, and is not hamstrung by corporate interests; and schools remain places of possibility.