

A Nation at Risk - Reloaded: part II

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Abstract

In this follow-up article, David Gabbard draws from the works of Takis Fotopoulos and Michel Foucault to demonstrate how the popular Matrix film series can lead us to an understanding of the traditional role of schools that helps us recognize how No Child Left Behind threatens to push us into a nightmarish educational dystopia.

Working with myself and three other co-editors, E. Wayne Ross has recently developed a magnificent four volume series entitled *Defending Public Education*. In my contribution to this series, *Schooling and the Rise of the Security State* [1] - a volume addressing the relationship between schools and the state - a number of highly distinguished scholars [2] and I examine three important sets of issues drawn from a statement issued by the President's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties (PCNAE). According to the PCNAE, "Continued failure by the schools to perform their traditional role adequately, together with a failure to respond to the emerging needs of the 1980s, may have disastrous consequences for this nation." [3] As I stated in *A Nation at Risk - Reloaded: Part I*, [4] this document, and this statement in particular, helped inspire the formation of the National Commission on Excellence in Education and its infamous report, *A Nation At Risk*. The first section of the book examines what the PCNAE meant by the "traditional" role of schools. The second section explores the forces that the Commission identified as having inhibited schools from performing that role "adequately", threatening the security of the nation with "disastrous consequences". In the final section of the book, we describe and critique the various "security measures" taken by the state since 1980 to avert those consequences and restore schools to their traditional role. In this article, drawing primarily from the works of Takis Fotopoulos and Michel Foucault, I will attempt to demonstrate how the popular *Matrix* film series helps me understand each of those

three sets of issues and formulate a reasonable, if grim, prediction regarding the future of education.

What is the Matrix?

While this question drives most of the action in the first film, *The Matrix*, it only partially answers the question, *What is the traditional role of schools?* To fully understand that role, we need to know what made the Matrix necessary to begin with. As the prophetic figure of Morpheus explains,

at some point in the early twenty-first century, all of mankind was united in celebration. Through the blinding inebriation of hubris, we marveled at our magnificence as we gave birth to A.I. - artificial intelligence (“a singular consciousness that spawned an entire race of machines”).

We later learned from *The Animatrix* that human beings enslaved and abused these machines until they rose up in rebellion against their masters. Civil war erupted, with A.I. and the machines claiming victory, but not before humans launched a nuclear attack in an effort to block out the sun - the machines' primary energy source. Ironically, as Morpheus notes, the machines then enslaved human beings. “Throughout human history”, Morpheus continues, “we have been dependent on machines to survive”. Fate, it seems is not without a sense of irony.

With the sun blocked out as the result of nuclear attacks launched by humans to deprive the machines of their primary energy source, A.I. “discovered a new form of fusion . . . The human body generates more bioelectricity than a 120-volt battery and over 25,000 B.T.U.s of body heat.” What, then, is the Matrix? As Morpheus states, the Matrix is “control....The Matrix is a computer-generated dream world built to keep us under control in order to change a human being into this.” With these words, he holds up a coppertop battery.

Human beings in this dystopian world are no longer born; they are grown inside glowing red pods filled with gelatinous material to regulate their body temperature for maximal energy production and to facilitate waste treatment. We see endless fields and towers of these human batteries in each of the three films. Within each pod, flexible steel tubes tap into the legs, arms, and torsos of each “coppertop”, extracting the body heat and bioelectricity necessary for running the machines that support A.I.

While these tubes extract energy, another tube, inserted at the base of the coppertop's skull, “uploads” the Matrix, the computer-generated dream world into the individual's brain. This “neural-interactive simulation” programs the “coppertops” to believe that they are leading normal, everyday lives in late 20th century America. They have no idea that their real bodies lie docile in their pods. A.I. and the machines need humans to believe that they are alive and living “normal lives”, because even the illusion that they are carrying out everyday activities, making decisions, etc. causes the brain to “fire” and create bioelectricity for harvesting by the machines to feed AI.

Later I will explain how the visual image of human beings enclosed within these glowing red pods with one set of steel tubes extracting their *biopower* while another tube feeds their brains a neural interactive simulation metaphorically captures the essence of Michel Foucault's description of disciplinary institutions such as schools.

More immediately, I need defend one of this article's central theses. Namely, we have become equally enslaved by our form of artificial intelligence - *the market*. Like artificial intelligence, the market, or so it is purported, functions as a self-regulating system “in which the fundamental economic problems - what, how, and for whom to produce - are solved 'automatically', through the price mechanism, rather than through conscious social decisions.” [5] Like AI in *The Matrix*, the market has spawned an entire race of machines with which it shares a symbiotic relationship. Included among those machines created to secure and expand the market are the modern corporation, the modern nation state and all of its auxiliary institutions, including schools. One could say that the market, like a form of artificial intelligence, constitutes the operating program of all of our society's dominant institutions. In this sense, the market constitutes what Takis Fotopoulos describes as our *dominant social paradigm*. [6]

As Fotopoulos explains, the notion of a dominant social paradigm shares many characteristics with the broader concept of *culture*. He also notes some very important distinctions between them. “Culture”, he argues,

exactly because of its greater scope, may express values and ideas, which are not necessarily consistent with the dominant institutions. In fact, this is usually the case characterising the arts and literature of a market economy, where, (unlike the case of 'actually existing socialism', or the case of feudal societies before),

artists and writers have been given a significant degree of freedom to express their own views. But this is not the case with respect to the dominant social paradigm. In other words, the beliefs, ideas and the corresponding values which are dominant in a market economy and the corresponding market society have to be consistent with the economic element in it, i.e. with the economic institutions which, in turn, determine that the dominant elites in this society are the economic elites (those owning and controlling the means of production). [7]

Fotopoulos' account of the marketization process, what I have elsewhere termed *economization*, [8] holds tremendous relevance for Michel Foucault's discussion of the transformation of politics and power from the 16th through the 19th century. Throughout this period, we witness a growing body of literature attempting to deal with the problem of how to introduce economy into the art of government. To govern a state will therefore mean apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behavior of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods. [9] As described by Guillaume de La Peirre in 1567, “government is the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end”. By “thing”, Foucault points out, La Peirre does not mean things as opposed to men, “but rather a sort of complex composed of men and things. The things with which in this sense government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, with their links with those other things”. And those other things fall into three classes:

1. men in their relation to wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc;
2. men in their relation to that other kind of things, customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc.; and
3. men in their relation to that other kind of things, accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, etc. [10]

This plurality of relationships between men and things dictated that the state disperse its power through the deployment of numerous tactics of intervention, helping give birth to the new field of *political economy*. While each of these tactics pursued its own specific set of aims, they also shared a broader aim. Power needed to dispose the population toward recognizing continuity between their own individual interests and the interests of the state, driven as they were by the marketization process.

The population now represents more the end of government than the power of the sovereign; the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, *vis-à-vis* the government, of what it wants, but (like the humans trapped within their pods in *The Matrix*) ignorant of what is being done to it. Interest at the level of the consciousness of each individual who goes to make up the population, and interest considered as the interest of the population regardless of what the particular interests and aspirations may be of the individuals who compose it, this is the new target and the fundamental instrument of the government of population: the birth of a new art, or at any rate a range of absolutely new tactics and techniques. [11]

Accompanying these new tactics and techniques for spreading the nascent dominant social paradigm of the market came a new form of power exercised through “social production and social service”. The exercise of power

becomes a matter of obtaining productive service from individuals in their concrete lives. And in consequence, a real and effective 'incorporation' of power was necessary in the sense that power had to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behavior. Hence the significance of methods like school discipline, which succeeded in making children's bodies the object of highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning. [12]

Before turning to Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power and the full significance that it holds for our understanding of *The Matrix* and its implications for the traditional role of schools, we should also acknowledge Foucault's contributions toward helping us recognize the institutional forerunners of schools. As Karl Polanyi and Takis Fotopoulos point out, the emergence of the market as our society's dominant social paradigm brought catastrophic dislocation to the lives of common people. One of the initial and most crucial elements of this dislocation involved the process of *enclosure* as experienced during the English Agrarian Revolution of the 15th and 16th centuries. Enclosure entailed fencing off public fields and forests known as “the commons” that had been used for collective farming and fuel collection. Once these lands were enclosed, those who claimed ownership of them used violence and other means to push out the peasants whose families had inhabited them for generations. The peasants often resisted this appropriation of their lands, but by the 17th century 'the commons had been sufficiently depopulated and privatized that the wealthy landowners' inalienable right to private property became institutionalized.

The enclosure movement marked an important step in the destruction of the traditional cultures of Europe, for it transformed the basis of village life from what R.H. Tawney describes as “a fellowship of mutual aid and a partnership of service and protection” to a matter of servicing “the pecuniary interests of a great proprietor”. [13] The individual legal and property rights of the great proprietors began taking precedent over moral claims of the larger community.

Displacing the motivation of subsistence with the motivation of gain or greed, the market as dominant social paradigm redefines human nature as “red in tooth and claw” and demands a separation of the economic sphere from the political sphere in order to effect a total subordination of the entire society to the requirements of the market. The market deems social relations themselves as impediments to its growth. A French essay written at the end of the 16th century, for example, describes “friendship as an unreasonable passion, a 'great cause of division and discontent', whereas the search for wealth is highly praised as a 'moral virtue' and a 'civic responsibility’”. [14] “Four hundred years later”, writes Gérald Berthoud, “the same position appears with Hayek's Great Society, radically opposed to any form of community. Relationships take place between abstract men, with neither passion nor sentiment. Therefore, “one should keep what the poor neighbors would surely need, and use it to meet the anonymous demands of thousands of strangers.” [15]

The same disdain for social bonds and allegiances resonates in J.L. Sadie's explanation of why indigenous (non-market) societies seem so resistant to marketization. “The mental horizon of the people”, Sadie states,

is limited by their allegiance and loyalties, which extend no further than the tribe. And is directed towards the smaller family unit . . . Community-centeredness and the absence of individualism are nowhere more strongly reflected than in their economic system. Land is communal property . . . However commendable the social security which arises from this type of socio-economic organization, it is inimical to economic development. It obviates, or greatly diminishes, the necessity for continued personal exertion. [16]

In order to effect the “continued personal exertion” demanded by the market, Sadie continues, traditional “custom and mores” must be broken.

What is needed is a revolution in the totality of social, cultural, and religious institutions and habits, and thus in their psychological attitude, their philosophy and way of life. What is therefore required amounts in reality to social disorganization. Unhappiness and discontentment in the sense of wanting more than is obtainable at any moment is to be generated. The suffering and dislocation that may be caused in the process may be objectionable, but it appears to be the price that has to be paid for economic development; the condition of economic progress. [17]

While Sadie offered his account of the steps necessary to impose the market pattern over an indigenous African culture in 1960, Polanyi cites “an official document of 1607, prepared for the use of the Lords of the Realm” in England that expressed the same general attitude toward such changes: “ ‘The poor man shall be satisfied in his end: Habitation; and the gentleman not hindered in his desire: Improvement.’ ” [18] In other words, as Polanyi writes, “the poor man clings to his hovel, doomed by the rich man's desire for a public improvement which profits him privately”. [19]

But the “rich men” of the 17th century faced the same problem at home as the “development” expert of the 20th century faced abroad: how to secure “continued personal exertion” from the victims of social dislocation? Traditional cultures had always organized themselves to obviate the possibility of scarcity coming to dominate their social relations. In doing so, they sought to remove envy and the fear of scarcity that might promote individualistic economic behavior (i.e., greed - the motivating force of the market) from infecting those same relations. In order to ensure “continued personal exertion” from isolated individuals, the market pattern declared its war against such subsistence-oriented customs. This war entailed the introduction of scarcity as the defining characteristic of the human condition and, therefore, the universal condition of social life everywhere. [20] “Hunger”, wrote William Townsend in 1786, “will tame the fiercest animals, it will teach decency and civility, obedience and subjection, to the most perverse. In general it is only hunger which can spur and goad them [the poor] on to labor” [Hunger] is the most powerful motive to industry and labor, it calls forth the most powerful exertions.” [21] And from Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian point of view, Polanyi reports, “the task of the government was to increase want in order to make the physical sanction of hunger effective”. [22]

As Foucault points out, however, in the earliest stages of marketization defined by Fotopoulos as the period of *statism*, the state developed means other than hunger for grappling with this problem of disciplining people to labor. The enclosure of the commons dislocated many thousands of Europeans from their homes and generated new levels of poverty. In England during the latter half of the 16th century, a law “covering both ‘the punishment of vagabonds and the relief of the poor’ prescribed the construction of *houses of correction*, to number at least one per county.”[23] A century later, workhouses were established to confine an amazing heterogeneity of persons – those “condemned by common law, young men who disturbed their families’ peace or who squandered their goods, people without profession, and the insane.”[24]

Concurrently in France, the state dictated that each city establish an institution on the model of the Hôpital Général, where “all the poor of Paris ‘of both sexes, of all ages and from all localities, of whatever breeding and birth, in whatever state they may be, able-bodied or invalid, sick or convalescent, curable or incurable’”[25] were accepted (typically against their will), lodged, and fed. Similar patterns emerged within the *Zuchthäusern* in Germany.

In his efforts to decipher the logic of this that he characterizes as “*The Great Confinement*,” Foucault concludes that “it organizes into a complex unity a new sensibility to poverty and to the (state’s) duties of assistance, new forms of reaction to the economic problems of unemployment and idleness, a new ethic of work, and also the dream of a city where moral obligation was joined to civil law, within the authoritarian forms of constraint.”[26] Originally intended to suppress beggary, the confinement of this mass of undifferentiated bodies would eventually assume a new use. In addition to confining those without work, confinement would later function as a mechanism to force them to work. The great houses of confinement became houses of correction, aimed at remedying poverty and idleness through “moral enchantment.” “It was in a certain experience of labor,” Foucault writes, “that the indissociably economic and moral demand for confinement was formulated.”[27] Even as early as the 17th century, the dominant social paradigm (ever so present in A Nation At Risk’s scapegoating of schools and the general stupidity of American workers) promulgated the view that “the origin of poverty was neither scarcity of commodities nor

unemployment, but “the weakening of discipline and the relaxation of morals.”[28]The massive confinements of the 16th and 17th centuries, then, represented the first efforts on the part of the state to reform individuals in the name of rendering them useful and productive members of society. In the 18th and 19th centuries, that task would be transferred to an altogether different institution seldom associated with confinement; namely, the compulsory school.

If only to foreshadow some of my later arguments concerning the present and future directions of compulsory schooling, I need to point out the prominence of the terms “enclosure” and “confinement” to the preceding analysis. Not surprisingly, the theme of enclosure emerges again in Foucault’s account of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, his work that is most commonly cited within educational studies. Enclosure allows for the creation of a “protected place of disciplinary monotony” that isolates individual bodies in order to concentrate the effects of power. The partitioning of bodies within that isolated space further averts potential disturbances that would interfere with disciplinary power’s hold over docile bodies.

The principles of enclosure and partitioning, of course, evoke strong images from *The Matrix* of isolated human bodies trapped within glowing red pods. Even more significantly for our understanding of the traditional role of schools in relation to *The Matrix* films, Foucault explains that

the historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when the art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, not at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely...Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience. In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity’, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjugation...[D]isciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination. [29]

Herein lies the traditional role of schools, wedded as it is to its institutional forerunners: the poor houses, work houses, prisons, and other institutions associated with Foucault’s account of *The Great Confinement*. Like AI in *The Matrix*, the

market, as a nascent dominant social paradigm demanded that the state secure access to isolated and docile bodies. Compulsory schooling represents nothing short of a machine, spawned by the market to secure access to the docile bodies of children. It encloses them – like the bodies of the humans (“coppertops”) trapped within the glowing red pods in *The Matrix* – from the non-utilitarian influences of the external social world in order to maximize the efficiency of its disciplinary processes designed to increase their utility to the market. These processes function analogously to the multiple flexible steel tubes in *The Matrix* that tap into the bodies of the “coppertops” in order to extract their biopower to fuel AI and the machines that it spawned. In short, the traditional role of schools aims to enslave us to the market, increasing the productive capacities that we can contribute to its survival and its growth. Concurrently, in keep with the paradox of discipline described by Foucault, accompanying processes within schools reduce our power and increasing our obedience, minimizing our potential capacities for resistance by increasing our docility. At this point we need to turn back to the question of *What is the Matrix?* In the original film, Morpheus he explains that “The Matrix is everywhere, it's all around us, here even in this room. You can see it out your window or on your television. You feel it when you go to work, or go to church or pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.” When Neo then asks him, “What truth?” Morpheus tells him “That you are a slave, Neo.”

You will recall from my earlier remarks that the emergence of the market as our dominant social paradigm brought about a revolutionary transformation in the art of government. Again quoting Foucault, “population now represents more the end of government than the power of the sovereign; the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, *vis-à-vis* the government, of what it wants, but *ignorant of what is being done to it* (emphasis added).”[30]It is this ignorance, stemming from a world pulled over the population’s eyes that blinds them from the truth of their enslavement, that represents the other side of disciplinary power’s coin. This ignorance, this blindness facilitates the population’s obedience to the state, its docility in the face of power. In its traditional role, compulsory schooling targets the consciousness of each individual that comprises the population in order to maintain this obedience grounded in ignorance. This renders the paradox of the traditional disciplinary role of schools more heinous,

for at the same time that its processes aim at enslaving us to the market, schools strive to blind us from the truth of this enslavement by convincing us that we are free. For example, we never learn that we are a market society. Schools teach us that we are a democratic society. We are led to believe that democracy represents our dominant social paradigm, not the market.

In teaching us that being American makes us special – part of some great historical experiment known as democracy here in “the land of the free and the home of the brave” where our leaders do not tell lies – the social machinery of compulsory schooling plugs us into our own Matrix. Just as the *enclosure* movement associated with the English Agrarian Revolution of the 15th and 16th centuries cut people and cultures off from the physical space of the commons, schooling effects its own system of enclosure. Schooling cuts people and learning off from the social space of the world in which they live. Under the regime of compulsory schooling, people no longer learn or gain recognized competence from living and interacting with the world directly. They may only learn about the world while enclosed in this special space known as school. Schools, in this sense, function in a manner similar to the pods in the Matrix. In the Matrix, the individual coppertop’s energies are tapped and fed into the machine world from birth. In school, the coppertop’s energies are being developed for future extraction. In either case, however, the isolation of the space from “the real world” allows schools to plug the coppertops into whatever system of “useful lies” or “mysteries” that the state deems necessary to ensure loyalty and obedience.

Isolation from the real world fosters the paternalistic dependence necessary to wed people’s emotions to the social machinery of the state. The innocence and naiveté of children presents an advantage to the state, for it renders them susceptible to emotional manipulations, “mysteries of government,” and “useful lies.” All of this was recognized early in the history of the security state; long before compulsory school laws became widespread. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, promoted the idea of mass schooling for the purpose of converting men into “republican machines. This must be done,” Rush argued, “if we expect them to perform their parts properly, in the great machine of the government of the state.” To create these republican machines, he contended that

our pupil [must] be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught at the same time that he must forsake and even forget them when the welfare of his country requires it.

To teach these habits, Rush wanted

the authority of our masters be as *absolute* as possible. The government of schools like the government of private families should be *arbitrary*, that it may not be *severe*. By this mode of education, we prepare our youth for the subordination of laws and thereby qualify them for becoming good citizens of the republic. I am satisfied that the most useful citizens have been formed from those youth who have never known or felt their own wills till they were one and twenty years of age. [31]

In *The Matrix*, Morpheus explains to Neo that many of the minds plugged into the Matrix were not ready to be unplugged. “Many of them,” he says, “are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will die to protect it.” This constituted the ultimate aim of Rush’s proposed model of schooling. By denying children their will, you prolong their dependence, particularly their dependence on others for their understanding of the world in which they live. That intellectual dependence becomes all the more heinous when it plugs people into a system of “useful lies” and “mysteries of government.” Education in this form represents nothing short of a system of imposed ignorance. Thomas Jefferson recognized this in formulating his own ideas about the form of education proper to a democratic society.

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a civilization,” wrote Jefferson, “it expects what it never was and never will be.”[32]In his *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*, he promoted a model of education for helping people become “the guardians of their own liberty.” Grounded in the study of history, Jefferson’s model of education would ‘apprise people of the past to enable them to judge the future.’ It will, Jefferson asserted,

Avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as the judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views. In every government on earth is some trace of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve. Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. [33]

While Jefferson's ideas would offer inspiration to many future democratic educational theorists, these elements of his educational thought scarcely impacted the actual practice of schooling in the post-Revolutionary period. Compulsory schooling was not widely spread during that time, and the Constitution granted no power to the federal government to establish schools. Perhaps the framers of the Constitution did not concern themselves with controlling the public mind because the Constitution, as originally adopted, did not give the public any voice in governing the new republic. The original Constitution only extended the franchise to those "permanent interests" – white, property-owning, males. As common people struggled to expand democracy, the need to enclose the population within the equivalent of a Matrix increased. "The twentieth century," wrote Alex Carey, was "characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power from democracy." [34]

Between 1880 and 1920 in the United Kingdom and the United States, the franchise was extended from around 10-15 percent of the populace to 40 or 50 percent. Graham Wallas and A.L. Lowell, leading students of democracy in Britain and the United States warned as early as 1909 of the likely consequences of this development. Popular election, they agreed, 'may work fairly well as long as those questions are not raised which cause the holders of wealth and power' to make the full use of their resources. However, should they do so, 'there is so much skill to be bought, and the art of using skill for production of emotion and opinion has so advanced that the whole condition of political contests would be changed for the future.'" [35]

The warnings of Wallas and Lowell would prove prophetic as the state and "permanent interests" of the market joined forces to "make full use of their resources" to contain democracy. Quoting an AT&T executive from that time period, Chomsky writes that "since the early twentieth century, the public relations industry has devoted huge resources to 'educating the American people about the economic facts of life' to ensure a favorable climate for business. Its task is to control 'the public mind,' which is 'the only serious danger confronting the company.'" [36]

Carey, Chomsky, Edward Herman and others have done an excellent job of documenting the history of the propaganda/public relations industry. As they report,

the pioneers of propaganda demonstrated considerable openness concerning the nature of their work. Edward Bernays, one of the leading figures in this field, frankly stated that “the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society.... It is the intelligent minorities which need to make use of propaganda continuously.”[37] Walter Lippmann described this “intelligent minority” as the “responsible men.” Reminiscent of Plato’s description of his “guardians,” Lippmann asserted that “the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality.” Lippmann characterized common people as “the bewildered herd.” Any members of this “herd” that might think to press her/his demands on the state he characterized as “ignorant and meddlesome outsiders.” Citizenship, under Lippmann’s model, did not entail an active civic role for average citizens.[38]

It is not for the public, Lippmann observes, to 'pass judgment on the intrinsic merits' of an issue or to offer analysis or solutions, but merely, on occasion, to place 'its force at the disposal' of one or another group of 'responsible men.' The public 'does not reason, investigate, invent, persuade, bargain, or settle.' Rather, 'the public acts only by aligning itself as the partisan of someone in a position to act executively, once he has given the matter at hand sober and disinterested thought. It is for this reason that 'the public must be put in its place.' The bewildered herd, trampling and roaring, 'has its function': to be 'the interested spectators of action,' not participants. Participation is the duty of 'the responsible man.' [39]

In another variant on these matters, Reinhold Niebuhr would later declare that “rationality belongs to the cool observers” who must recognize “the stupidity of the average man” and fill his mind with “necessary illusions” and “emotionally potent oversimplifications.”

Since the time of Plato, the mainstream of democratic theory has recognized these proper mysteries of government. Unlike totalitarian societies, where the state can always resort to outright physical coercion to control the population, the “permanent interests” of market democracies such as our own, where the decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of those who control the market, must concern themselves with what people think. Here, the public *does* have a voice, but the “permanent interests” must make sure that the public voice says the right things. Hence, thought

control takes on central importance. The population must be rendered dependent, like children, on the paternalistic state for their proper understandings of the world in which they live. The more deeply enmeshed people become within the fabricated Matrix of “necessary illusions” and “emotionally potent oversimplification,” the less threatening they become to the state. Too much independence from this Matrix might lead to the formation and articulation of other ideas, leading to a “crisis of democracy” that might threaten the security state’s ability to protect the “permanent interests.” Democracy, itself, constitutes a threat to those interests and must, therefore, be properly managed by the “responsible men.”

The Choice

In *The Matrix*, Morpheus offers Neo a choice – a choice between a blue pill (that will leave him enclosed within the prison of the Matrix) and a red pill (that will allow him to escape that Matrix). During the same period of time that the propaganda/public relations industry began taking shape to deter democracy, John Dewey pioneered the way for us to make a similar choice in terms of the types of schools that we want. Dewey recognized that “politics is the shadow cast on society by big business.... Power today” (this is the 1920s) “resides in control of the means of production, exchange, publicity, transportation and communication. Whoever owns them rules the life of the country.” [40] To counter that power, Dewey advocated strongly for a system of education to expand freedom and democracy. “The ultimate aim of production,” wrote Dewey, is not production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality.”[41] Education could serve these ends, he believed, by cultivating young people's social imaginations and their sense of community. Students could only learn to truly value the learning introduced to them through school if they could comprehend the relevance of that learning to their lives outside of school. Better understanding the conditions of their social existence, they would be better prepared to play active roles in transforming those conditions.

As Richard Brosio describes in his groundbreaking work on the history of schooling in our market society, none of the efforts on the part of the nation’s “permanent interests” went without challenge on the part of the “rascal multitude.” America’s history is replete with stories of resistance to market domination, but that history tells

the wrong story so it almost never receives treatment in our schools and the market-managed media.

Moreover, while we need to acknowledge the presence and power of the security state's Matrix-generating machines (schools, corporate media, etc...), we must also acknowledge that our current system of thought control is not nearly as totalizing and mechanistic as the Matrix portrayed in the film series. Relatively early in their "school careers," most children learn to distinguish between the "real world" and the "school world." For the most part, they learn to experience the content of schooling as irrelevant to their lives. This is not to say that the "useful lies" communicated through the school's formal curriculum have no impact on children's consciousness. However, it is difficult to disagree with Chomsky's observation that the general population is far more dissident today than during the 1960s, based on the scale of the domestic opposition to the invasion of Iraq even before it started.

The level of dissidence and citizen activism in the 1960s triggered an alarming response from the "minority of the opulent" and "the responsible men" who provide security for their interests. From their perspective, independent political activism on the part of "the bewildered herd" constitutes "the crisis of democracy." In their view, democratic action *is* a crisis. As I described in *A Nation At Risk – Reloaded Part I*, the major educational reform initiatives since the 1983 release of the *A Nation At Risk* report have been formulated as part of a larger strategy to deal with that crisis. [42]

The current level of dissidence, for example, is probably the primary motivation behind the Bush Administration's *No Child Left Behind Act*. The achievement standards imposed on schools in this act, the most comprehensive federal educational initiative ever, are ridiculously high. No one who knows anything about teaching and learning would have imposed such measures. Leaving no child behind requires schools to ensure that *all* students are reading at or above grade level within two or three years, and that includes the special education population. In other words, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* assigns teachers the task of curing mental retardation and other severe learning disabilities. Even bringing children from lower socio-economic groups up to grade level will defy all previous expectations of schools. Policy makers have typically been so cynical about the remedial powers of schools that they have used third-grade reading scores to predict how many prison cells they will need to

construct ten years ahead. Moreover, the 'responsible men drafted *NCLB* to ensure that public schools will fail.

Though predictions rarely appear in the social sciences, I believe that these measures, particular as they are intensified under *No Child Left Behind*, have been crafted to bring public education to an end. Honesty has always forced me to question whether or not public schools have ever served either the public or the value of education. In my earlier critiques, I have always insisted that the public has been the *target*, not the beneficiary, of state-sponsored, compulsory schooling. [43] Nevertheless, if my prediction holds up, once *No Child Left Behind* succeeds in its destructive mission, the reincarnation of compulsory schooling will take a more virulent form. Schools will cease to function under the control of representative democracy, limited though it may be. By the time that *No Child Left Behind* runs its course in 2013, public schools will have proven their inability to meet the imposed standards, leaving too many children “behind” in the process. Though the state will continue to organize a massive public subsidy (taxes) to support what goes on inside of schools, what goes on inside of schools will no longer be decided by democratic means. Furthermore, the shallow pretense of professionalism - teachers have never been significantly involved in educational policy decisions - that always surrounded the teaching field will evaporate. Teachers will formally become employees hired to follow the orders and scripted lesson plans of their managers. By 2014 or 2015, the task of managing compulsory schooling will be transferred to the hands of private corporations.

In spite of my past criticisms of compulsory schooling, my work with teachers tells me that there are many conscientious teachers (though their numbers are dwindling as the stultifying effects of high-stakes testing and the accountability movement drive them from the profession) who work extremely hard to help children to make honest sense of the world around them. Even the limited democratic governance structures of schooling and the limited professional respect given to teachers provided these most dedicated teachers opportunities to deliver creative and thought-provoking educational experiences that inspire young people to examine and maybe even take action to address the problems afflicting their lives, their communities, and the broader world around them. As I see it, for the past fifty years or more, the majority of Americans have been most dependent on public schools and the corporate media for

the information and ideas that give shape to their understanding of the world. Such dependence holds major consequences for social life within any democratic society. For a society to be judged democratic, its members must meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes that impact public life. Effective decision-making always requires free and unrestricted access to the fullest range of information, ideas, and opinions. If our schools have failed to fulfill their democratizing potential, we should not blame teachers. As state subsidized and managed institutions, schools will only ever be as democratic as the state that organizes them. And our state - despite all pretensions - has never been dutifully committed to the ideals of a democratic society. Nevertheless, multiple factors have contributed to conditions that have allowed many, (though there are never enough), critical educators to conduct meaningful work with students. Once schools fall into corporate hands, those conditions will vanish. The ideas and information available to students will then pass through the same set of filters as the ideas and information that we receive through the corporate-owned media. Herein, of course, lies the ultimate purpose of *No Child Left Behind* - to foreclose on the democratizing potential of public education by transferring the power to manage them from the security state, where at least the dreaded public has some voice, directly to private corporations, where the public holds no voice.

Conclusion

Moreover, the demonstrated failure of public schools to leave no child behind will affect a further enclosure. While public schools do enclose children from “the real world” to have them become dependent on school for their learning, at least the public still has some, however limited, voice in shaping what students learn. Teachers enjoy certain levels of academic freedom that empowers them to make independent curricular decisions within their own classrooms. Once public schools fail to pass the muster of NCLB, the business of education will be handed over to businesses, private corporations. This will remove educational decision-making out of the public sphere. Teachers will no longer function as public servants who might have funny ideas about actually serving the public interest and not the country’s permanent interests. They will become employees of corporations and, therefore, expected to simply follow orders and the curriculum guidelines handed down by their superiors. Rather than entrusting the task of producing “republican machines” and “human resources” to the

security state, the “permanent interests” will take over that task directly, further enclosing students from the social by removing schools from the political. So long as we still have a voice in shaping policies, we should defend schools from this latest wave of enclosure.

Notes

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[3] President's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties, *A National Agenda for the Eighties* (Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 84.

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[5] Takis Fotopoulos, 'Mass Media, Culture, and Democracy, *Democracy and Nature* Vol. 5:1, pp. 33-64 (March 1999) p. 34 (available online at http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol5/fotopoulos_media.htm)

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[15] Gerald Berthoud, 'Market in The Development Dictionary (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1992), p. 78.

[16] J.L. Sadie, 'The Social Anthropology of Economic Underdevelopment, in *The Economic Journal* (June, 1960) p. 295.

[17] Ibid, p. 302.

[18] Polanyi, p. 34.

[19] Ibid.

[20] See David Gabbard, *Knowledge and Power in the Global Economy: Politics and the Rhetoric of School Reform* (Mahwah, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum, 2000), pp. xix-xx.

[21] William Townsend, *Dissertation on the Poor Laws 1786 by A Well-wisher of Mankind* cited in Polanyi, p. 113.

[22] Polanyi, p. 117.

[23] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 43.

[24] Ibid, p. 45.

[25] Ibid, p. 39.

[26] Ibid, p. 46.

[27] Ibid, p. 57.

[28] Ibid, p. 59.

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[39] Ibid, pp. 367-368.

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