

## **Stossel in America: A Case Study of the Neoliberal/Neoconservative Assault on Public Schools and Teachers**

**By David Gabbard & Terry Atkinson**

The ads ran for weeks amid other notable American Broadcasting Company (ABC) television programming efforts including *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *WifeSwap*. John Stossel's *20/20 Report*, "Stupid in America: How Lack of Choice Cheats Our Kids Out of a Good Education," promised to shock and awe the American public with details about "What's going on in American Schools?" Airing initially on January 13, 2006, Stossel's scathing diatribe against the public

schools offered "insider" film clips within school classrooms, outcries from irate parents, and idyllic stories of charter school settings where students sat dreamily reciting words from phonics charts. Indeed, in the midst of dreadfully sagging primetime ratings, ABC seemingly transformed *20/20*'s self-described billing as "one of the most esteemed programs in broadcast journalism" (ABC, 2006) into that of a reality show unlike any other.

Stossel's critical stance against the public schools was not unfamiliar to the *20/20* audience. He was accused of "destroying trust in public schools" (Bracey, 1999) in a 1999 broadcast purporting the merits of private schools that supposedly gained

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exemplary student outcomes for a fraction of what public schools spent. Taken to task for his unsubstantiated claims after *20/20*'s 1999 report was aired, Stossel, again chose to selectively highlight numerous issues that bitterly condemn public schools across America in *20/20*'s January 2006 special.

Particular issues addressed in the 2006 hour-long broadcast of "Stupid in America: How Lack of Choice Cheats Our Kids Out of a Good Education" evoked vocal responses from groups including the National Parent Teacher Association (2006), the National School Boards Association (2006), and the American Federation of Teachers (2006). Stossel drew the ire, not only of the education community, but also of many television viewers whose contributions to *20/20*'s weblogs have been heated and critical (ABC, 2006). Stossel's website (ABC, 2006) features additional details about the "Stupid" special, as well as information about his new book, *Myths, Lies, and Downright Stupidity*, released coincidentally in May 2006, several months after the initial *20/20* broadcast. While offering website visitors the opportunity to read free excerpts from his book, direct orders can be placed through Amazon.com. Further perusal reveals that Chapter Five of Stossel's new release includes a rehash of public school "myths" featured in the "Stupid in America" broadcast. Additional Stossel website features offer related stories, all supporting his claims about the unfortunate state of public schools. Broadcast journalism standards set by the likes of Edward R. Murrow are strikingly absent as no mention of opposing views or challenges to Stossel's claims are evident. Bob Edwards argues that primetime broadcast journalists like Stossel have been corrupted by the "profit era" requisite that news reporting has morphed into a money-making venture for television networks.

When news has to make money, the substance, character, and look of the news changes. In the public service era, the networks produced documentaries. In the profit era, documentaries have been replaced by magazine programs heavy on crime, items about celebrities, feel-good features, and the latest trendy disease. These programs have to compete with entertainment programs in prime time. (Edwards, 2006)

#### **"Stupid in America": Myths or Lies? Facts or Fiction?**

In keeping with Edwards claims, the title of *20/20*'s special, "Stupid in America: How Lack of Choice Cheats Our Kids Out of a Good Education," attempted to rivet and entertain viewers with shocking images of American classrooms. Within the first five minutes of airtime video clips document wild students and those arriving at school in drug-induced stupors. Stossel's negative agenda emerges quickly—promotion of free-market approaches to educational reform; namely vouchers, tax credits, and privatization. Media Matters for America (2006) characterized Stossel's coverage as "a series of misleading claims, a lack of balance in reporting and interviews, and video clips apparently created for entertainment to argue for expanding 'school choice' initiatives such as vouchers and charter schools." Blurring the lines between truth and fiction, public school "myths" featured in ABC's special are cleverly reframed as "lies." This shift in perspective

is documented quite simply with biased and, in some cases, illogical, misinformation—all used as propaganda to support the pro-school choice agenda.

In crafting his tendentious attack on the public schools, Stossel’s “Stupid in America” enlisted tactics that would go unnoticed by typical passive American television viewers. Among these were his selective choice, not only of what to report, but also of positioning this information to imply generalization to all public schools. Out-of context statements and scenarios provided flimsy evidence for claims that supposedly described schools across the nation.

As an example of his biased selectivity, Stossel bemoaned the fact that most schools wouldn’t allow his video entourage to disrupt their school days or invade students’ personal privacy. The public high school featured in his introduction was, indeed, far from average. New York’s Abraham Lincoln High School conducts classes daily within a facility that is operating well over capacity. Excessive crowding has led to increases in school violence, earning the school distinction as one of 11 high schools in New York City (of 270 total) receiving additional police support. While educators might be commended by the media for their teaching efforts within such a challenging setting, “Stupid in America” used this isolated school snapshot to imply that typical U.S. High Schools are equally as “nasty” (American Federation of Teachers, 2006, p. 2). While schools such as Abraham Lincoln High School obviously need improvement, misleading reporting does little to address the real challenges and issues that have led this school (and others like it) into its present situation.

Multiple scenarios within the 20/20 special were devoted to substantiating the notion that American students can be described in one word—stupid. Stossel aired the outcomes of administering questions from an unnamed international test to two small groups of students, one from a New Jersey classroom and one from a Belgian classroom. Reporting that the Belgian students outscored the American students by almost 30%, Stossel discussed the test outcomes with both groups, leading them to conclusions, not only that U.S. students are stupid, but also that public schools are responsible for this reality. The ignorance that Stossel seeks to document is exemplified by his reasoning as he continues to make unscientific claims about the overall academic superiority of students in Belgium. The American Federation of Teachers offered further comment:

As any credible researcher knows, it is meaningless to compare two tiny groups from different countries when we know nothing about the ages, socioeconomic backgrounds or preparation of these students. Further, there is no reason to assume in Stossel’s so-called comparison that the two groups are in any way representative of the two larger groups under study (in this case, all US students versus all Belgian students). (American Federation of Teachers, 2006, p. 9)

Stossel extended his stupidity tirade with claims that American students are hugely inferior to their European counterparts according to “international tests.” Stating that by the time they get to high school, students in the U.S. schools have

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“fallen way behind” (ABC News transcript, 22:06:12), his representation of the truth about testing data is pitifully reported and patently biased. Stossel, like many of the educational experts he references, including Jay Greene and other well-known voucher advocates, report that American student achievement has demonstrated consistent decline. However, testing data documented by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that “reading achievement has remained relatively stable for thirty years” (Allington, 2002). Furthermore, as documented by Berliner and Biddle (1996) and Kibby (1995), gains in reading achievement have been steady since the early 1900s. Data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement also contradict the claims of Stossel and his cronies. Comparison of international fourth-grade reading achievement scores reveals that American school children ranked second worldwide, outperformed only by students from Finland (Ellery, 1992). Numerous additional sources, such as the 2003 Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), indicate that while fourth- and eighth-grade student scores improved in the U.S. between 1995 and 2003, scores for students of the same ages declined in the very country that Stossel featured as exemplary, Belgium (TIMSS, 2003).

#### **“Stupid in America”: Money Doesn’t Matter**

Throughout ABC’s one hour special, Stossel characterized the public schools as wasteful, failing, and much less efficient and effective in educating the students whom they teach than private or charter schools. Kansas City is featured as an example of a failed system that lost its accreditation after spending \$2 billion on swimming pools, state of the art gyms, and computer labs to attract White students to inner-city schools. Jay Greene (mentioned earlier as Stossel’s closely-aligned school choice advocate), immediately offers statements indicating that public school spending has doubled during the past 30 years. Implication? Public schools across the United States are throwing away money—“Kansas City style.” Again, in attempts to misinform and bias viewers, Stossel and Greene fail to mention that while spending for American primary and secondary education has increased in recent years, the amount of additional spending is similar to that of other industrialized nations including France, Denmark, and Japan (OECD, 2005). Within the United States, however, spending increases have not focused on students in regular education settings. Compliance with local and often federally imposed mandates has meant that large portions of school spending increases funded services for special education students and English Language Learners (Rothstein, 1997).

In example after example, Stossel juxtaposed claims about public school wastefulness with repeated stories of private and charter school success achieved for a fraction of what public schools spend. Alternative charter schools, parochial schools, charter middle schools—all supporting student success in ways that public schools can’t. Stossel states,

Many charter schools are succeeding. Friendship Charter High is located in the same

dangerous part of Washington, D.C. as Bellew High, one of the city's poorest performing schools. The student populations are similar, most poor and minority. But at the charter school, there is order. The kids are on task and doing better. 95% of the graduates get into college. (ABC News transcript, 22:54:28)

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) does not corroborate Stossel's claim that charter schools are "doing better." NAEP data document that charter school students in fourth grade have consistently posted lower reading and math test scores than their public school counterparts. According to most recent 2005 NAEP data, public school eighth graders also scored five points higher in math and twice as high in science as students in charter schools (NAEP, 2005).

Moreover, Stossel's claims that money simply "doesn't matter" when considering the relationship between spending and student achievement are refuted by the facts. "Of Course Money Matters: Why the Arguments to the Contrary Never Added Up," a comprehensive review of extant research on school spending, documented a direct relationship between increased spending and higher student achievement (Rebell & Wardenski, 2004). As documented in this report, rural North Carolina Judge Howard Manning's comments offer a succinct and unquestionable conclusion to the empirical findings detailed in the 2004 review: "Only a fool would find that money does not matter in education" (North Carolina, 2000).

Even if common sense were considered, Stossel's claims that "money doesn't matter" simply defy logic. This notion contradicts the reality that public schools in areas with huge property tax coffers are those with premium student achievement scores (Hoff, 2004). The common sense notion also applies outside the public school setting. Affluent parents in exclusive areas of the northeast United States pay in excess of \$25,000 for tuition in elite private schools (CSC, 2006). Reason would suggest that such schools continue to prosper by justifying their tuition charges with guarantees of exceptional student academic success.

"Stupid in America: How Lack of Choice Cheats Our Kids Out of a Good Education" continues with more unfounded claims than an article of this nature might examine. Additional assertions suggest that teachers' unions thwart student achievement and propose the simple solution that mere competition, as provided by school vouchers or tax credits, would cure the problems inherent in educating all of America's school children. In dealing with vastly complex problems such as meeting the educational needs of a national student population that grows more diverse by the day, simple answers to complex problems are inevitably wrong. Stossel's lame claims in this "stupid" broadcast offer substantial credence to this notion, leading us to ponder whether his program serves some other agenda.

### **The Evolution of a Larger Agenda**

The following sections of our article aim to help those who support the pivotal role of public education in promoting a critically informed and actively engaged

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democratic citizenry understand what the American Federation of Teachers (2006) somewhat inaccurately describes as “The John Stossel Agenda.” We do not deny that “Stupid in America” carried an agenda, but we cannot overstate the importance of recognizing that it does not belong to John Stossel. Stossel functions as an agent of that agenda, but he is not its source. In his role as a widely-known television personality who falsely presents himself to his audience as a journalist committed to the highest professional standards of ethics and objectivity—and even “likes to cast himself as a learned scholar” (Rose, 2000), Stossel’s services have been highly valuable to those driving the school voucher/choice/ privatization movement as part of a much broader agenda. As we will reveal, other Stossel reports (see FAIR, n.d.) have served different facets of that same agenda.

The agenda in question pursues the pragmatic aims of two mutually reinforcing ideologies: neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Automatically, we understand, some readers will recoil at the thought of a liberal and conservative ideology reinforcing one another. Years of conditioning have taught us to think of them as inherently conflicting ideologies on opposing ends of what is an exceedingly narrow spectrum of permissible political thought. As Noam Chomsky (1992) observes, “one of the great achievements of contemporary ideological warfare has been to debase the terms of political discourse so thoroughly that . . . [it] has undermined the possibility even of talking sensibly about what is happening in the world.” To overcome this debasement of the broader society’s political vocabulary and understanding, we must begin with an exacting analysis of the specific variety of liberalism advanced by the forces of neoliberal ideology. We must ask, “What makes neoliberalism liberal?”

#### ***What Makes Neoliberalism Liberal?***

In the most general of terms, the various manifestations of liberal thought emerged from a complex confluence of forces at work in Europe across many centuries. The scientific revolution of the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century gave birth not only to a concomitant technological and industrial revolution that fueled the growth of capitalism and the rise of a nascent merchant class, but also an Age of Reason and a period of Enlightenment that provided this same merchant class with much of the philosophical scaffolding to support their political struggles against the traditional authority of the monarchy and church. In combination, these various material and ideological movements produced what we know as Modernity or *Liberal* Modernity. In epistemological terms, Modernity privileged the authority of the individual and her/his powers of reason and rationality over the power of established institutional authorities of crown and church to determine Truth. This epistemological liberty helped lay the basis for the *political liberalism* that, as David Hursh (forthcoming) explains, “reconceptualized the relationship between the individual and the secular and sacred state, aiming to free individuals from state interference and portraying individuals as rational choosers pursuing their

self-interest, which served societal interests and promoted social progress.” Hursh adds that

Such political views soon influenced economic theories, and the idea that society could best be served by individuals pursuing their self-interest was reflected in Adam Smith’s (1759) notion of the ‘invisible hand.’ Smith argued that the individual ‘intends only his own gains, as he is in this, as in many others, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intentions’ (Smith 1976/1759). For Smith, the individual pursuing their own interests in a ‘market system was the best mechanism of the allocation of resources in a society’ and ‘brought economic gains to each party, and ultimately to the nation as a whole.’ (Olssen et al., 2004, 88)

This, then, accounts for some of the intellectual history behind the economic brand of liberalism embraced under the ideology of neoliberalism. We now turn to the question of what makes neoliberalism *neo*.

#### **What Makes Neoliberalism Neo?**

Philosophically speaking, we find it tempting to deny that there is anything *neo* or new about neoliberalism. The proponents of neoliberal policies embrace the same brand of economic liberalism as their 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century forbearers. Neoliberalism is “new” only in the sense that, as a political movement, it signals a resurgence of economic liberalism. The economic liberals behind this movement seek to effect a reclamation of the dominance they enjoyed prior to the global crisis of capitalism in the first half the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the United States, that crisis took the form of the Great Depression and ushered in a period of state intervention and regulation of the economy that leading industrialists and financiers—those who benefited most from the shocking inequalities of income, wealth, and political power during America’s Gilded Age—opposed widely and bitterly. Though there were previous interventions such as the passage of the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment authorizing the taxation of the primary source of the robber barons’ massive profits and incomes—capital gains—the various components of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal incited their ire the most.

The New Deal, we must remember, did not come about strictly as an exercise in government beneficence. Massive populist pressures stemming from the growing labor movement demanded some form of protection from the ravages of the market system. Similar and stronger movements toward state planning and intervention took hold in Europe, leading the “captains of industry” there, particularly in Germany and Italy, to fund and otherwise support the creation of fascist states to protect and enhance corporate interests. Both Hitler and Mussolini, readers should recall, smashed the trade unions and imprisoned or assassinated many of their leaders. As Jules Archer describes in *The Plot to Seize the White House* (1973), similar plans were set in motion in the United States, with leading industrialists sending agents to Europe to study and bring back lessons from the ascent of fascist corporatism in Italy and Germany. General Smedley Butler, an extremely popular

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and populist Marine Corps officer who'd been awarded two Congressional Medals of Honor, foiled the plot when he reported having been recruited in 1933 by Gerald C. MacGuire on behalf of Grayson Mallot-Prevost Murphy to lead the American Legion in staging a coup against Roosevelt. Murphy, Archer reveals,

not only operated one of Wall Street's leading brokerage houses but was also a director of Guaranty Trust, a Morgan bank, and had extensive industrial and financial interests as a director of Anaconda Copper, Goodyear Tire, and Bethlehem Steel. A West Point graduate, Murphy was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and World War I with the rank of colonel. (p. 12)

Even more disturbingly, General Butler discovered that Murphy "had been decorated by Benito Mussolini, who had made him a Command of the Crown of Italy."

While the story of what John L. Spivak described in 1935 as "Wall Street's Fascist Conspiracy" to overthrow Roosevelt never fully entered America's collective memory, readers should know that much of the information presented in Archer's book comes directly from the recorded testimony of Butler and other witnesses called before the McCormick-Dickstein House Committee on Un-American Activities. This same Committee would later come to be associated with the anti-communist crusades of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Its origins, however, remain crucial for our understanding of neoliberalism as a reaction against the New Deal. For while Butler may have foiled the fascist plot against Roosevelt, the fascist tendencies of its perpetrators remain characteristic of the neoliberal/neoconservative agenda under consideration here. Those tendencies, in fact, help us introduce a further question in our analysis of that agenda. Namely, what makes the economic liberalism of neoliberal ideology conservative? Our considerations of the conditions that neoliberals would wish to "conserve" will allow us to address the role of neoconservatism in the agenda under consideration here.

#### **What Makes Neoliberalism Conservative?**

While neoliberals love to invoke the name of Adam Smith in support of their project which David Harvey (2005) so aptly characterizes as a project aimed at "the restoration of class power," we should consider their reading of Smith's *The Wealth of Nation* as selective at best. They demonstrate a special reluctance to discuss those aspects of Smith's book that offer us crucial insights into why the doctrine of economic liberalism would eventuate in a "new conservatism" marked by a strong authoritarian/anti-democratic temperament. "It cannot be very difficult," Smith wrote, "to determine who have been the contrivers of this whole mercantile system; not the consumers, we may believe, whose interest has been entirely neglected; but the producers, whose interest has been so carefully tended to; and among this latter class our merchants and manufacturers have been by far the principal architects" (1776, p. 288). And these "principal architects," Smith noted, though "incapable of considering themselves as sovereigns, even after they have become such . . . , by a strange absurdity regard the



character of the sovereign [the state] as but an appendix to that of the merchant, as something which ought to be made subservient to it" (ibid, p. 277). Part of the dominance that economic liberalism enjoyed in America throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries was its dominance over state power.

We would do well to recall that America's "founding fathers" were among the richest men in the former colonies, and that the Revolution itself was motivated by their desire to liberate their economic activities from the arbitrary power of the British crown. Furthermore, in establishing the new republic, they took special pains to limit democratic governance to their own class. At the Constitutional Convention, for example, James Madison argued that "our government ought to secure the permanent interests of the country against innovation, putting in place checks and balances in order to protect *the minority of the opulent* against the majority" (Madison, 1787, cited in Gonsolves, 2001). Alternatively, in the words of John Jay, "the people who own the country ought to govern it" (Monaghan, 1935, p. 323). Consequently, the "founding fathers" limited voting rights to White males of sufficient property. Later, as private power evolved into its modern corporate form, the Supreme Court ruled in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* (1886) that private corporations possessed the same rights of "personhood" as individual citizens.

As Howard Zinn has written, Smith

understood very well how capitalism could not survive a truly free market, if government was not big enough to protect it. He wrote in the middle of the Eighteenth Century: "Laws and governments may be considered in this and indeed in every case, a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods, which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor, who if not hindered by the government would soon reduce the others to an equality with themselves by open violence." (Zinn, 1999)

"Big government" only became a threat to economic liberalism when it succumbed to popular pressures from the masses to redress their grievances or expand their own political liberties. Economic liberals, then, have always regarded democracy as a threat to their exclusive control of state power. It is this control which, along with the wealth that affords them their privilege, they seek to conserve.

### ***The Means of Conservation***

Prior to the New Deal, economic liberals succeeded mightily in conserving their hegemony over state power. Owing to this hegemony, the captains of industry were left free to deal with popular unrest as they saw fit. The struggle for an eight-hour workday, for example, met tremendous resistance from the ownership class, and that resistance sometimes took violent forms. There was also strong elite resistance to popular suffrage, and the recent records of voter suppression in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004 reveal that elites continue to oppose widespread

participation in the electoral process. Writing in 1909, Graham Wallace and A. L. Lowell warned that popular elections ““may work fairly well as long as those questions are not raised which cause the holders of wealth and power’ to make 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”” (cited in Carey, 1996, p. 21). That same year, a vice-president of AT&T described what he termed “the public mind” as “the only serious danger confronting the company” (cited in Chomsky, 1989, p. 30). To control the danger posed by the public mind, those “holders of wealth and power” dedicated considerable resources to buy the “skills” needed for the “production of emotion and opinion” favorable to their interests. The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, then, marked the origins of the science of propaganda.

One of propaganda’s pioneering theoreticians was Walter Lippmann. In his view, “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 (see Chomsky, 1991, p. 367). It is not for the public, Lippmann held, 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” (ibid, pp. 367-368).

Lippmann’s name holds significance for the evolution of neoliberalism in the wake of the New Deal for one primary reason. His ideas inspired the convening of the Colloque Walter Lippmann in Paris in August of 1938. Two of the founders of neoliberal ideology from the original Austrian School of Economics, Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek attended this colloquium and based many of their ideas for neoliberal tactics on Lippmann’s ideas on propaganda and the role of the “responsible men.” Immediately afterward, Hayek would attempt to assemble a group of responsible men, noted for their commitment to the principles of economic liberalism under the banner of the Society for the Renovation of Liberalism. Though World War II would stymie their efforts, Hayek would renew them in 1947 when he convened the first meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society. Lippmann also attended that meeting.

We should not underestimate the significance of Lippmann’s associations with Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society. In 1944, Hayek published *The Road to*

*Serfdom*, in which he appropriated and applied an pseudo-Darwinian argument to explain that social history reveals a pattern of “natural selection” very similar to that revealed in natural history. Hayek used this argument to contend that only the “fittest” institutions survived. Older and more primitive institutions, he argued, suffered from a “collectivist” or “communal” orientation that inhibited individual liberty. Ignoring the corporate power behind Italian and German fascism, Hayek equated this “collectivist” principle with both fascism and socialism. He used this rhetoric to attack the anti-liberal policies of John Maynard Keynes and Roosevelt’s New Deal, arguing that any form of state intervention or planning would lead society toward fascism. Returning to his theory of social evolution, Hayek contended that history had proven three institutions to be of greatest value to humanity: the family, the church, and the free market.

Hayek, of course, recognized that economic liberalism had fallen into disrepute after the Great Depression. To facilitate its restoration and, thereby, to liberate the market from state control, Hayek advocated waging a war of ideas through the carefully planned and calculated use of think tanks such as the Foundation for Economic Education in the United States that provided a model for Hayek’s own Mont Pelerin Society. As Philip Kovacs and Deron Boyles explain, “think tanks are nonprofit organizations that both produce and rely on research and expertise to aggressively influence the public, political leaders, and policy” (2005, p. 2). Hayek advanced the idea of think tanks as institutions that would assemble and hire scholars dedicated to the resurgence of economic liberalism through a slow but steady effort to establish hegemony for neoliberal ideology over the whole of society. In many regards, Hayek’s proposals appear strikingly similar to Lippmann’s advocacy for the cultivation of a “specialized class” of “responsible men” to manage people’s ideas and perceptions on the world. Chief among those influenced by Hayek’s ideas was British millionaire Antony Fisher, who would go on to create the Institute for Economic Affairs in 1955. According to the National Center for Policy Analysis,

No single person was more important in encouraging the spread of think tanks than Sir Antony Fisher. An RAF pilot in World War II who went on to become successful in business, Fisher sought advice from Nobel Laureate Fredrich Hayek on how to stop the spread of collectivism and encourage a resurgence of 19<sup>th</sup> Century classical liberal ideas. Don’t go into politics, Hayek advised. Focus instead on the world of ideas. (Goodman, 2005)

Hayek’s ideas also had a lasting influence on Milton Friedman, perhaps the leading American figure in the history of neoliberal economic theory. Students of education, of course, will recognize Friedman as the originator of the idea for school vouchers, a position obviously promoted by Stossel’s “Stupid in America.” Friedman worked closely with Hayek when the latter moved from the London School of Economics to the University of Chicago. With this move, what had once

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been known as the Austrian School of Economics became the Chicago School, and Hayek, Friedman, and others came to be known as the “Chicago Boys.”

#### **Enter Neoconservatism**

By the time Hayek came to the University of Chicago in 1950, Leo Strauss already occupied a position in its philosophy department. Though we have thus far discovered no evidence to suggest even a meeting, much less an exchange of ideas, between the two men, Strauss’ ideas have proven central to the neoliberal movement. In her two books (1997/2005; 1999) on his philosophy, Shadia Drury presents Strauss as the intellectual godfather of the neoconservatives now running the administration of President George W. Bush.

Strauss’ neoconservatism begins to align with neoliberalism at the point where he would agree with Hayek and Lippmann that a society’s population must be controlled through the careful management of ideas and beliefs by a specialized class. Holding great antipathy toward Modernity, Strauss claimed to have derived his own wisdom from the Ancients, especially Plato. For Strauss, the class of men best suited to serve as the specialized class were philosophers or, in Plato’s terms, philosopher kings. Not only are the philosophers the only ones capable of discerning the truth about the world, they are also the only ones who can bear the truth. And they, if they are to observe their self-understood role in society, must keep that truth secret from the rest of the population. Ironically, that sacred truth is that there is no truth, only socially-constructed representations of reality. This nihilism, for Strauss, represents the root of the human condition, and only through their wisdom can the philosophers bear that condition. Through the “gentlemen” whom the philosophers must advise in governing the republic, for the philosophers must always and only govern from behind the curtain, they dispense noble lies to the rest of the population in order to maintain their allegiance to the state and those institutions that provide society its structure and order. Strauss regarded patriotic nationalism and religion, along with the inculcation of irrational fear and hatred of enemies both foreign and domestic, as crucial to this task. Just as he denied the existence of truth, Strauss himself also viewed morality as nothing more than a human construct, though requisite for building the sort of emotional attachments to family, church, and other institutions that would ensure the preservation of social order.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of Strauss’ thought for neoliberalism, however, lies in the philosophical justification that he provides for economic elites ruling society. He claims to find this justification in Plato’s *Republic* in the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus on the nature of justice. Conventional readings of Plato would lead us to believe that we should listen to the advice given by Socrates, but Strauss views it the other way. For Strauss, Thrasymachus provides the guidance on justice that Plato wanted the philosopher kings to receive. Justice, Thrasymachus tells them, arrives through whatever actions serve the interests of the powerful.

To repeat an earlier passage from *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith once

observed that the chief beneficiaries of economic liberalism, “by a strange absurdity regard the character of the sovereign [the state] as but an appendix to that of the merchant, as something which ought to be made subservient to it” (Smith, p. 277). For Strauss, this is no “strange absurdity” but only the outcome of *natural right*, wherein the superior few rule over the inferior many. Elite rule by the most successful merchants is not only *just*, but it is *just* because the elite possess a natural right to rule by virtue of having demonstrated, through their accumulation of wealth and power, their natural superiority. Justice serves them in *conserving* their power to rule. Likewise, even the noble lies serve them, for those lies aid in *conserving* their rule and the stability of social order. As we shall demonstrate in our final section on Stossel and his connections to them, the think tanks advocated by Hayek have played a vital role in fabricating and distributing noble lies on behalf of economic elites and the advancement of the neoliberal agenda to restore their class power over the state and society. We will also suggest that those same elites perceive the proper role of schools and universities as functioning toward those same ends.

#### ***The Rise of the Think Tanks***

We must acknowledge that institutions such as the National Association of Manufacturers, the Hoover Institution, and the Foundation for Economic Education predated and certainly provided prototypes for Hayek’s ideas on how to best restore economic liberalism’s dominance over the state and society. We must also point out that the formation of the Mont Pelerin Society and Fisher’s Institute for Economic Affairs did not generate an overnight proliferation of think tanks. That proliferation did not begin until the early 1970s, when leaders in business and government confronted the massive populist movements of the 1960s. The title of Samuel L. Huntington’s entry in the 1973 report of the Trilateral Commission—“The Threat of Democracy”—perhaps best characterizes their perceptions of the high levels of popular activism demonstrated by the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-war movement, the environmental movement, the consumer protection movement, and the feminist movement among others (see Sklar, 1980). Each of these movements symbolized, of course, an expression of the same *political liberalism* that gave rise to Roosevelt’s new deal—the idea that government should respond to needs and concerns of the general population, not just the “minority of the opulent” as dictated by economic liberalism.

At the behest of Eugene B. Sydnor, former National Director and, then, Chair of the Education Committee of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Lewis F. Powell wrote a secret memorandum (1971) for the Chamber which many regard as a catalyst for the proliferation of right-wing, neoliberal/neoconservative think tanks over the past 35 years. As a corporate attorney for the tobacco industry, Powell had worked diligently to protect tobacco firms from government regulation. We take no surprise, then, in discovering that his memorandum, “The Attack on American Free Enterprise System,” reflects the strong influence of Hayek’s ideas. The principles

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of economic liberalism deem any form of regulation as an abridgement of the individual's/corporation's economic "liberty," even when that regulation occurs on behalf of the public interest.

Powell began his memo by expressing alarm over the "dimensions of the attack" against the "American economic system." On the one hand, and reflective of his reputation as political moderate, he acknowledged an established American tradition of dissent against that system, even admitting that some criticisms of the system were "wholesome and constructive so long as the objective was to improve rather than to subvert or destroy." Powell regarded even more severe dissent as safely benign when confined to "a relatively few extremists or even from the minority socialist cadre." By 1971, however, the problem of dissent had grown more malignant. No longer confined to a small number of individuals, "the assault on the enterprise system" had, in Powell's view, become "broadly based and consistently pursued, . . . gaining momentum and converts" (1971).

The breadth of the mounting dissent led Powell to address his concern over the "sources of the attack." The malignancy of the problem for Powell rested not in the mere fact that an increasing number of individuals had begun criticizing the "American economic system." The problem was that it had spread to "perfectly respectable elements of society," including the college campus, the pulpit, the media, the intellectual and literary journals, the arts and sciences, and . . . politicians." He claimed that this trend was also "increasingly evidenced in the high schools" (ibid).

Powell was particularly concerned over the role of the media and the college campus in providing a platform for anti-corporate dissent, for these institutions play a "predominant role in shaping the thinking, attitudes and emotions of our people" (ibid). He also expressed bewilderment over the paradox that these particular institutions, insofar as they are effectively owned and controlled by corporations, would "tolerate, if not participate in" the destruction of capitalist system. "The campuses," he wrote,

from which much of the criticism emanates are supported by (i) tax funds generated largely from American business, and (ii) contributions from capital funds controlled or generated by American business. The boards of trustees of our universities overwhelmingly are composed of men and women who are leaders in the system.

Most of the media, including the national TV systems, are owned and theoretically controlled by corporations which depend upon profits, and the enterprise system to survive. (ibid)

Most revealing of his familiarity with the ideas of Hayek and his associates, in Powell's discussion of the tone of the attack, he cites two of the leading figures within the neoliberal movement. He first cites Arthur Shenfield's lectures at Rockford College to support his argument that "members of the intellectual community are waging ideological warfare against the enterprise system and the values of western society" (ibid). Shenfield worked closely with Hayek as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago, chairing the Mont Pelerin Society's

Conference in 1962. He would go on to become the Director of Antony Fisher's International Institute for Economic Research and the President of Hayek's Mont Pelerin Society. Immediately after citing Shenfield, Powell cites Milton Friedman's assertion that

It (is) crystal clear that the foundations of our free society are under wide-ranging and powerful attack—not by Communist or any other conspiracy but by misguided individuals parroting one another and unwittingly serving ends they would never intentionally promote. (ibid)

To counter these attacks, Powell, in broadest terms, contended that

A significant first step by individual corporations could well be the designation of an executive vice president (ranking with other executive VP's) whose responsibility is to counter-on the broadest front—the attack on the enterprise system. The public relations department could be one of the foundations assigned to this executive, but his responsibilities should encompass some of the types of activities referred to subsequently in this memorandum. His budget and staff should be adequate to the task. (ibid)

Demonstrating how neoliberal ideology opposes “collectivism” for the larger society while holding it as central to corporate domination of that society, Powell went on to add that

independent and uncoordinated (sic) activity by individual corporations, as important as this is, will not be sufficient. Strength lies in organization, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and national organizations. (ibid)

Through this joint action, Powell argued, corporations should use think tanks to monitor schools and universities, the media, the courts, and politics for anti-business ideas, and aggressively target them for the distribution of pro-business/neoliberal ideas.

Distributed only to members of the Chamber of Commerce, the Powell Memo remained secret for two years. A leaked copy sent to columnist Jack Anderson would later provide this neoliberal manifesto with abundant publicity and widespread interest from various corporations and business groups. Shortly afterward, former Secretary of the Treasury William Simon openly championed the creation of the necessary counterintelligentsia for waging the war of ideas. In a report highlighted by Media Transparency, the National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) observed that “waging the war of ideas has required the development of a vast and interconnected institutional apparatus. . . . This apparatus was appropriately described by moderate Republican and author John Saloma as the ‘new conservative labyrinth’” (1997). According to NCRP, that labyrinth today has grown so large and sophisticated that it is

increasingly able to influence what gets on—and what stays off—the public policy

agenda. From the decision to abandon the federal guarantee of cash assistance to the poor to on-going debates about the federal tax structure to growing discussion of medical savings accounts and the privatization of social security, conservative policy ideas and political rhetoric continue to dominate the nation's political conversation, reflecting what political scientist Walter Dean Burnham has called the 'hegemony of market theology.' (1997)

That hegemony quickly extended to educational policy as well (see Gabbard, 2000; Siebold, 2005; Saltman, 2005; Kovacs & Boyles, 2005; Johnson & Salle, 2004). Reflecting the same nervousness over the "threat of democracy" posed by the populist activism of the 1960s and early 1970s, Jimmy Carter's President's Commission for an Agenda for the Eighties concluded that America's public schools suffered from a "temporary confusion of purpose" (cited in Gabbard & Ross, 2005, pp. xxvi). "Continued failure by the schools to perform their traditional role adequately," the Commission stated, "together with a failure to respond to the emerging needs of the 1980s, may have disastrous consequences for this nation" (ibid, pp. xxvi-xxvii). Only months later, after the neoliberals and neoconservatives helped win election for Ronald Reagan, who entered office promising to eliminate the Department of Education, neoliberal ideologues began a propaganda campaign to prepare the public mind to receive the essential messages of "A Nation At Risk" (1983). While the "temporary confusion of purpose" that had led many Americans to look to schools as a means of strengthening the foundation of democracy, the National Commission for Excellence in Education's (NCEE) "A Nation At Risk" report represented the first stage in restoring schools to their traditional role of servicing the demands of economic elites. In addition to unfairly blaming schools for the economic recession that would only worsen under neoliberal economic policies, "A Nation At Risk" also blamed liberal reforms of the 1960s and 1970s for school failure. Shortly after stepping down from his position as Executive Director of the NCEE, Milton Goldberg went to work for the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), one of the earliest propaganda machines for the corporate elite, and now operates as a member of the Business Roundtable (see Gabbard, 2003). Together, NAM and the Business Roundtable have been two of the most powerful proponents of privatizing Social Security and other planks of the neoliberal agenda.

For the staunchest of neoliberals, however, the propaganda campaign initiated by "A Nation At Risk" to condition the public into viewing education solely as a vehicle for increasing their economic use value was not enough. As suggested by ominous title of the neoliberal education magazine, *EducationNext*, operated out of the Hoover Institute, also home to the notorious neoconservative David Horowitz commissioned to lead the assault against liberalism in higher education (see Johnson, 2003), they seek nothing short of school privatization. Through the "high stakes testing" and "accountability" imposed under No Child Left Behind, neoliberals have adopted an effective strategy for eliminating the democratic threat posed by liberal education policies. Anthony Carnevale, a Senior fellow at the National Center on



Education and the Economy, sheds much on this strategy now being enforced when he stated: “You tie their teaching methods to standards so that in a very aggressive way they learn to teach to the results of those tests, like a soldier. . . .The voluntary military,” he added, “didn’t always get the best of human capital. But what you did was make the training so rigorous it didn’t matter” (cited in Hartocollis, 2005). Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings could not agree more: “Good education has always been about good testing. . . . Teaching to the test is fine and dandy, keep on” (Lucadamo, 2006) And if schools and teachers don’t teach to test well enough, if their students don’t meet standards, they expose their schools to the risk of being placed under the management of a private corporation. We should read Stossel’s “Stupid in America” as part of this strategy.

### **John Stossel and the Labyrinth**

John Stossel’s transformation into a neoliberal mouthpiece must perplex those who recall his early career in television broadcasting as a strong consumer advocate who was willing to expose business scams and frauds. In public interviews, he explains this transformation as an honest awakening to a new perspective:

I had an unusual ringside seat on the regulatory state as a television consumer reporter. . . . I’m a little embarrassed about how long it took me to see the folly of most government intervention. It was probably 15 years before I really woke up to the fact that almost everything government attempts to do, it makes worse. . . . Top-down central planning is never as effective as free individuals making their own choices, because free individuals will adapt to reality every second, but the central planners can adapt only when they get together to vote. (cited in Sigall, 2006)

In more private settings, such as during remarks following a speech before the Federalist Society, he gives a different explanation: “I got sick of it [consumer advocacy]. I also now make so much money I just lost interest in saving a buck on a can of peas” (cited in Mokhiber & Robert Weissman, 2004) Responding to kidding from one of his friends and former colleagues over his change, Stossel said he “liked the idea of making real money. So I started looking at things a little differently.” Another of his colleagues remarked that “they (ABC) let him get away with a lot here”, . . . “but they don’t call him a journalist anymore” (cited in Dowie, 2001/2002).

Stossel has established a consistent pattern over the years of using researchers from the “conservative labyrinth” of think tanks, institutes, and foundations as “experts” to support the ideological message of his reports. His reliance on Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, whose “research” has been discredited by academics such as Gerald Bracey (2005, p. 3), for his arguments in “Stupid in America” offers us a recent case in point. Stossel’s associations with discredited, corporate-sponsored activists such as Greene date back to the 1990s. In 1997, for example, he relied on Michael Fumento, a Senior Fellow of the Hudson Institute, to make his case against governmental environmental regulation (see

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Keeler & Sterling, nd). Not only does the Hudson Institute now employ Lewis “Scooter” Libby, the former former Chief of Staff and assistant for National Security Affairs to U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and who is now under indictment by a federal grand jury for his involvement in the Valerie Plame affair, it also lists the Center for Global Food Issues as one of its many projects. Apart from having originated an “Earth Friendly, Farm Friendly” product label that the Union of Concerned Scientists describes as falsely implying “sustainable food production” (see SourceWatch, n.d.A). This Center also receives hundreds of thousands of dollars in support from giant agribusinesses such as DuPont, Proctor & Gamble, ConAgra, and Monsanto. When *Business Week* (Javers, 2006) revealed that Monsanto had paid Fumento to write a book favorable to its biotechnology interests, Scripps Howard News Service announced that it was dropping Fumento’s column. He remains a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, which has also supported the work of school-voucher advocates such as Denis Doyle, John Chubb, Terry Moe, and Chester Finn.

In 2000, the Center for Global Food Issues’ Dennis Avery supplied Stossel with his primary source material for “The Food You Eat”—an industry-friendly attack on organic foods (see Dowie, 2001/2002B). When Stossel cited a non-existent study to support his claim that neither conventional nor organic foods contained residue from pesticides, he came under heavy fire from the Organic Trade Group and the Environmental Working Group. Because of his flagrant violation of ABC’s editorial policies, the network forced Stossel to issue an on-air apology to his audience. Sensing that their media-star was in trouble, the Competitive Enterprise Institute created a “Save John Stossel” website (see Borowski, 2002) to help him keep his job and warn their supporters that “‘politically correct causes and special interests’” were threatening Stossel’s “‘free speech rights’” (cited in Berkowitz, 2006). In that same year, perhaps to bolster his damaged reputation, the American Legislative Exchange Council named Stossel the recipient of its Warren Brookes Award for Excellence in Journalism.

A year later the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) would once again come to Stossel’s aid as he was putting together a report entitled “Tampering With Nature,” which Marianne Manilov (2001) accurately described as “part of a five-year right-wing effort to discredit and defund environmental education.” Stossel’s problems with this show began when Michael Sanera, director of CEI’s Orwellian-named Center for Environmental Education Research sent an email to members of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment that read:

A producer for John Stossel is working on a program on environmental education. He needs examples of kids who have been ‘scared green’ by schools teaching doomsday environmentalism in the classroom. ... He has some examples, but needs more. Would you send out a notice to your group and ask if they know of some examples. Then contact Mr. Sanera ... Let’s try to help Mr. Stossel. He treats industry fairly in his programs. (Berkowitz, 2006)

Stossel's troubles only deepened. As reported by SourceWatch:

Apparently neither Stossel nor CEI applied similar standards of fairness toward the schoolteachers and students they interviewed. Prior to the program's air date in July, several California parents of children interviewed by Stossel filed a complaint with ABC, stating that they had been misled about the nature of the program and the types of leading questions their kids would be asked. Seattle teacher John Borowski also reported being approached by ABC producer Ted Balaker, who attempted to trick him into appearing on camera by claiming that he was making a documentary about Earth Day, while denying that he was working with Stossel and Sanera. (cited in Berkowitz, 2006)

Everyone who cares about the future of our schools needs to be aware of the heavy influence of neoliberal think tanks on Stossel's "reporting" and the sorts of reforms promoted through programs such as "Stupid In America." In all likelihood, he will continue his attacks on public schools as part of the previously-mentioned neoliberal strategy of pressuring schools to teach to high-stakes tests or risk having their schools placed under the management of a private corporation. For neoliberals, this presents a win-win situation. So long as teachers succeed in maintaining satisfactory test scores by teaching only to the tests—and even sometimes from scripted lesson plans aligned with the tests—they will have little opportunity to engage students in activities that might be destructive of their allegiance to the corporate order. If they fail to maintain satisfactory test scores, this failure serves to rationalize handing over the management of schools directly to private corporations. By 2014-2015, when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act comes up for full reauthorization by Congress, we can expect to hear arguments for the complete privatization of America's public schools. In this event, teachers will cease functioning as public servants and become corporate employees. Stripped of what little professional autonomy they now retain, they will be made to teach a corporate-approved curriculum in accordance with a corporate model of instruction.

Not only does the work of John Stossel give us great cause for concern over the future of journalistic standards, but for curriculum standards as well. With the help of the Olin Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Koch Foundation, and the Palmer R. ChitesterFund, many of Stossel's programs are packaged and sold to more than 200 public and private schools as curriculum materials. According to Media Transparency,

The Palmer R. Chitester Fund is a 501-c-3 public foundation doing business as In the Classroom Media and Free to Choose Media. Its emphasis is on examining the relationship of economic, personal, and political freedom. In the Classroom Media is currently distributing selected television specials by John Stossel for classroom use. Free to Choose Media has just begun work on a television biography of Milton Friedman. Along with Milton and Rose Friedman, Mr. Chitester is the managing partner of Free To Choose Enterprise. (Media Transparency, n.d.)

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Syndicated columnist and John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University, Walter E. Williams serves as one of Chitester's board members. Not only is Williams a significant on-air presence in the "Stossel in the Classroom" videos, he also oversees the work of two full-time visiting professors, Thomas Rustici and Alan Koczela, who create the classroom materials for the series. David Mastio (2000) writes that "many, if not most, of the 35 to 40 footnotes accompanying each guide cite predictably conservative sources like the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Hoover Institution, the Young Americas Foundation and the Wall Street Journal op-ed pages."

One of his early producers lamented that "the sad thing about Stossel and his ascendancy is that he is the future. He symbolizes the transformation of news into ideological entertainment" (Dowie, 2001/2002A). Those of us in teacher education, having already suffered the loss of NCATE's commitment to "social justice" under pressure from those pushing the neoliberal/ neoconservative agenda, must face the possibility that he might also symbolize the pending transformation of education into corporate indoctrination.

### **Conclusion: What's at Stake?**

Given that teacher educators comprise the target audience of this journal, the editors naturally expect us to address the ramifications that our analysis holds for teacher education. We know that pressures from inside the labyrinth led the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to remove any mention of "social justice" from its standards (see Powers, 2006). Those pressures came from the National Association of Scholars, which is home to some of the major figures in the neoliberal/neoconservative movement, including Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Irving Kristol, and Chester Finn. Those pressures also came from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, "a major proponent of the 'intellectual diversity' movement which aims to dismantle the so-called liberal bias in higher academia." David Horowitz, of course, serves as the leading figure of this movement from his Center for the Study of Popular Culture at the Hoover Institution. He regularly appears on FoxNews, which functions as the primary propaganda arm for the neoliberal/neoconservative agenda.

The pressure on NCATE to drop its commitment to social justice also stemmed from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), an institution founded by Lynne V. Cheney, wife of Vice-President Dick Cheney. In November of 2001, ACTA issued a report titled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It" that launched what Joel Beinin describes as "The first post-September 11 expression of the link between the neo-conservative political agenda and the attack on critical thinking about the Middle East" (Beinin, n.d.) In Beinin's words,

As the title suggests, ACTA maintained that criticism of the Bush administration's

war on Afghanistan on campuses across the country was tantamount to negligence in 'defending civilization' and proof that 'our universities are failing America.' ACTA alleged that American universities were brought to this sorry state by inadequate teaching of Western culture and American history. Consequently, students and faculty did not understand what was at stake in the fight against terrorism and were undermining the defense of civilization by asking too many questions.

The original version of 'Defending civilization' named and quoted comments by 117 university faculty members, staff, and students in reaction to the September 11 attacks. ACTA's ire was aroused by my statement that, 'If Usama bin Laden is confirmed to be behind the attacks, the United States should bring him before an international tribunal on charges of crimes against humanity.' Other remarks in the report's list of unacceptable speech included 'Ignorance breeds hate' and '[T]here needs to be an understanding of why this kind of suicidal violence could be undertaken against our country.' (ibid)

All three of these organizations that pressured NCATE receive significant funding from the same Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation that support "Stossel in the Classroom."

Our point in this article has been to demonstrate how the attack on public schools represents a small part of a much larger attack on the public and its role in a liberal, constitutional democracy. David Harvey (2005) has characterized neoliberalism as a project aimed at the restoration of class power. When we take the neoconservative elements of that project into account, we might more accurately describe it as being aimed at the restoration of total class domination. While we laud the open letters written to ABC in protest of Stossel's "Stupid in America" by the National Parent Teachers Association (2006) and the National School Boards Association (2006), as well as the report issued by the American Federation of Teachers, we would urge everyone concerned with the future of our schools to look beyond John Stossel. As we said at the outset and, hopefully, have demonstrated, Stossel serves as an agent of a larger agenda, but he is not its source. To borrow a phrase from Walter Lippmann, Stossel has assumed a role as one of the "responsible men." In Straussian terms, he has come to appreciate the notion that justice derives from satisfying the interests of the powerful.

We would hope that teachers and teacher educators everywhere can now understand that the neoliberal/neoconservative agenda places more than the future of public schools at risk. As Michael Parenti has written,

When the power of capital is increasingly untrammelled, all of us are put at risk: the environment, the sacred forests, the beautiful and mysterious creatures of the sea, the ordinary people who, with their strength and brains and inventiveness create community and give to life so much that's worthy of our respect. The real burden to society is not the poor, but the corporate rich. We simply can no longer afford them.

Conservatives complain whenever we fight back; they say we're engaging in 'class war.' Well, I believe it is class war, but I also have another name for it. When people unite against the abuses of wealth and privilege, when they activate themselves and

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militantly attack the hypocrisies and lies of the powers that be, when they fight back and become the active agents of their own destiny, when they withdraw their empowering responses and refuse to toe that line, I call that 'democracy.' (1995, p. 6)

We agree with Parenti that, in light of all we see happening around us and to us, we must all “get a lot angrier and a lot more determined. They want everything, and everything is at stake. Many people are getting angry; our job is to see that they direct their anger at the real perpetrators of their misery, and not against the very people who want to make common cause with them” (ibid). In order to do this, those of us in teacher education need to “call them out” and reveal the anti-school movement for what it is. The question is, will we find the courage to do so?

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