

## **Coca-Cola's Global Lessons: From Education for Corporate Globalization to Education for Global Justice**

**By Kenneth J. Saltman**

Recently, critics of school commercialism and the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard Carmona have taken note of just how fat public school students in this country are becoming. While the critics of school commercialism suggest that childhood obesity must be understood in relation to the deluge of junk food marketing infiltrating public schools, the Surgeon General's concern is somewhat different. After addressing the largest-ever conference on childhood obesity in San Diego — attended by doctors, educators, and parents, Carmona was quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as stating, "Our preparedness as a nation depends on our health as individuals" (Severson, 2003, p. 1). He noted that he had spent some of his first months in office working with military leaders concerned about the obesity and lack of fitness among America's youth. "The military needs healthy recruits," he said (Severson, 2003, p. 1). The newspaper article noted that Carmona was careful not to assail the junk food industry for its part in threatening national security by flabbifying the nation's chubby little defenders.

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Many critics do censure marketers of junk food for their part in inundating every private and public space with health-harming products and slick advertisements. I want to focus here on one such company to illustrate how the dangerous influences of corporate ideology on schooling effect much more than public health — they also work to shape the ways

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that public institutions of education serve the private sectors' desire to control the future of work, consumption, culture, and politics. To turn back this corporate assault on the public, I propose that teacher education programs and progressive educators around the country can play a significant role in challenging these lethal corporate pedagogies with more critical, participatory, and democratic ones.

In 1998, Coca-Cola came under criticism from activists, and subsequently in the press, for their efforts to secure exclusive vending contracts with public schools across the nation. The attention began when a student at Greenbrier High School in Evans, Georgia was suspended for wearing a Pepsi t-shirt on "Coke in Education Day" which was part of a larger promotional "Team up with Coca-Cola Contest." The event involved lectures by Coke executives, science classes that focused on the chemistry of Coke, economics classes about the marketing of the product, and Coke rallies; culminating with an aerial photograph of students dressed in red and white spelling out the word Coke with their bodies. It was during this event that student Mike Cameron took off his shirt to reveal a Pepsi shirt underneath, only to be suspended from school for his apparently subversive act (Saltman, 2000).

Though initially most of the press coverage of the event appeared in the business section of newspapers as an episode in the "Cola Wars", an increasing number of writers and speakers assailed Coca-Cola and other companies for working to turn school kids into a captive audience for advertisers, and for making public schools just another place to sell soft drinks, clothing, and junk food by turning hallways, book covers, scoreboards, and school buses into billboards. A number of progressive organizations, such as the Center for Commercialism in Schools and the Commercialism in Education Research Unit, have criticized the ways that large corporations such as Coke have promised under-funded public schools the possibility of cash or resources like sporting equipment in exchange for exclusive rights to sell Coke to kids. It's worth pointing out that often the reward for participating in these collaborative efforts is minuscule. For example, Greenbrier was given \$500 for winning the district-wide competition that pitted schools against each other to create the grandest promotion of Coke. Greenbrier was then granted the opportunity to compete against other schools for \$10,000.

The issue I want to address here isn't simply whether or not Coke is paying enough in money and resources to turn schools into advertisements by infiltrating the curriculum and making buildings into billboards. The critical issue at hand is the way that Coca-Cola and other massive multinational corporations are undermining public institutions, and the public sector more generally, by transforming schools into investment opportunities for the wealthiest citizens at the expense of everyone else. In what follows, I first explore some of Coca-Cola's educational projects. I then discuss how these efforts are related to corporate globalization. And finally, I elaborate on some critical democratic pedagogies that can contest this corporate assault on youth — pedagogies that teach for global justice rather than corporate globalization.

## Coca-Cola's Global Lessons

Coca-Cola is undermining the public sphere by threatening public health, aggressively pursuing youth in schools as potential new customers, and by encouraging students to understand themselves principally as consumers rather than citizens. Coca-Cola is also undermining the public sector around the world as the company has come under criticism for initiatives such as privatizing water supplies in Chiapas, Mexico (Barlow, 2003; Zinn, 2002) — using support from schools there to do so; undermining workers' rights in Central and South America by threatening union organizers with death (Bacon, 2002; Podur, 2003), using sweatshop child labor to make Coca-Cola soccer balls in Pakistan (Global March against Child Labor, 2002), and failing to provide adequate healthcare benefits to workers with AIDS in South Africa (Lobe, 2002). Coca-Cola participates in undermining democracy by shifting power from people to corporations in four basic ways: (1) by working to privatize public goods and services, (2) by propagating ideologies favorable to corporate management of the planet, (3) by promoting the kinds of education that fail to link the production of knowledge to the wielding of power, and 4) by embracing curricula that actively erase the material and symbolic struggles waged by different individuals and groups over work, consumption, and culture. An example of Coke's anti-public, pro-privatization agenda in education is its involvement in the First Book national literacy campaign ([www.firstbook.org](http://www.firstbook.org)). As part of this campaign, Coca-Cola has joined up with "The Gift of Reading Promotion" in which representatives of the company travel around to public libraries and schools with a gigantic 12 foot book with the stated intent of getting youth interested in reading. There is a distinctly corporate logic to Coke's assumption that what would motivate students to read would be a larger-than-life book. Coke's consumer logic of "bigger is better" was parodied by the newspaper *The Onion* (1996) in an article titled, "Coca-Cola Introduces New 30 Liter Size: Bottle Will Be Unwieldy, Inconvenient." The article begins:

ATLANTA — The Coca-Cola Corporation held a press conference yesterday to announce that its soft drinks will soon be available exclusively in 30-liter plastic bottles. According to company spokespeople, Coke's decision to sell its product in what many consider to be overly large containers is not based on a specific study or survey of consumer demands, but rather on the company's desire to make a resounding display of its corporate might. (p. 1)

In the "Gift of Reading Promotion," Coke joins with a list of companies that reads like a who's who of major supporters of for-profit children's book publishing and distribution: Scholastic, Harper Collins, Disney Publishing, Random House, Simon & Shuster, Hearst Magazines, Universal Studios, the Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler among others, in conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard and Postal Service and PBS. According to its Website: "The primary goal of First Book is to work with

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existing literacy programs to distribute new books to children who, for economic reasons, have little or no access to books" ([www.firstbook.org](http://www.firstbook.org)). What goes unmentioned in the promotion, is what the President and CEO of Coke John Alm makes quite explicit elsewhere: Says Alm, "The school system is where you build brand loyalty" (Leith, 2003, p. 6). According to one marketing specialist at Leo Burnett — the firm that is working on Coca-Cola's current campaigns, the company is increasingly working towards getting the product image placed in all aspects of daily life, including in schools (Leith, 2003, p. 6).

The First Book promotion should raise for the public the question of why it is that school children need to rely on the marketing initiatives of for-profit companies in order to have basic resources like books. Any serious response to this question would have to implicate the depletion of the corporate tax base in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While schools are typically funded from local taxes, the decline in corporate contributions that help relieve the federal tax burden inevitably results in America's poorest schools having to struggle for basic materials while America's wealthiest individuals profit enormously. In the 1940s, corporations paid 33 percent of the federal tax burden. By the 60s this was down to 27 percent; 15 percent by the 80s; and currently corporations contribute less than 10 percent (Saltman, 2000, p. 61). Meanwhile, the U.S. government is engaging in unprecedented levels of debt spending in order to give tax breaks to the country's wealthiest citizens. It is also investing in record levels of military spending — close to \$400 billion (with an additional request for \$87 billion for the prolonged war on Iraq and Afghanistan) — with only about 10-15 percent of this spending tied to new domestic security measures (Welna, 2002). To put the question of school funding in perspective, the cost of a single B-2 bomber employed in the war on Iraq is about the same as the cost of tuition, room, and board for every student in the Chicago Public Schools to attend the University of Wisconsin for four years ([www.teachersforjustice.org](http://www.teachersforjustice.org)).

The social priorities of the corporate sector are quite clear as corporate media mis-educate the public about the domestic and foreign policy agenda of the current administration — a corporate-friendly Whitehouse that desires to further gut the public sector, create consent to cutting education spending further, keep destructive workfare programs in place, and privatize social security. Consider the political and representational forces involved in First Book: Viacom owns Paramount which owns Simon & Shuster; ABC and Disney — which are the same company — own Touchstone Films, Buena Vista Films and Miramax; and Rupert Murdoch owns Harper Collins, Fox News and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. As Edward Herman and Robert McChesney (1998) among others have shown, the media monopoly is global in scope. The control over information crucial for citizens to make informed choices in their lives is almost completely controlled by massive corporations that have social and institutional priorities contrary to those of the public. For example, there has been very little corporate media coverage of the Federal Communications Commission's recent deliberations led by Michael Powell (Secretary of State Colin

Powell's son) to further deregulate the communications industry. The loosening of controls, as witnessed in the 1996 deregulation legislation, will lead to even greater consolidation of media companies. Corporate control over media, and cross interests between companies such as Coca-Cola and the media giants who depend on their advertising revenue, means that networks and other powerful news sources are far less likely to put resources into investigating or spreading the word about corporate foul play — like when Coke's bottling plants in Colombia hire paramilitary death squads to prevent workers from organizing labor unions. It is important to recognize that the global power of a corporation such as Coca-Cola, with a brand value of \$72.2 billion (U.S.), dwarfs that of many nations.

A new campaign by activists, parents, public health workers, and teachers against Coca-Cola has been picking up speed. The concern over public health has mobilized a number of groups to hold Coke accountable for its unsavory practices in targeting youth. Citing the rapidly rising incidence of obesity and diabetes among U.S. students, opponents of Coke's aggressive marketing in Los Angeles and Seattle have brought lawsuits to boot Coke out of public schools and to break contracts that schools have signed with the company. Another group of activists is focusing in on Coke's promotional deal with Time Warner's *Harry Potter* movie and book franchises. A colorful Website called Saveharry.com offers information on the dangers of Coke, as well as games touting the benefits of the beverage known as water over soda.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while this particular critique of Coke is effective, the site fails to problematize the ideology of Time Warner's *Harry Potter* world that includes celebrating the culture of elite private schooling. Harry is carried away from the middle class by the emissaries of the wizarding world where in a private school for wizards he learns to transcend the constraints of the material world through the consumption of sweet drinks.

This glorification of the private realm feeds into the current representational assault on public education dominant in corporate media that works to justify conservative efforts to privatize schools in general.

Despite this criticism of Saveharry.com, any effort to counter the exploitative interests of Coca-Cola certainly deserves continued attention and support, especially given that these types of marketing initiatives in U.S. schools have hardly slowed. However, the example highlights the importance of cultural politics for teacher educators to resist corporate power. *Harry Potter* doesn't only work to sell junk food by associating colorful characters and stories with a product. These corporate stories educate readers about how to understand social relations in ways that tend to be compatible with a corporate vision for the future. Corporate executives fully understand what they're up against, both in terms of image and financial losses. Self-centered and indifferent to concerns for public safety and health, in one of Coke's videos created to lobby politicians and school administrators, CEO Alm appears and calls the obesity issue "a war that's been declared on our company" (Leith, 2003, p. 19).

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The massive lobbying group for the beverage industry, the National Soft Drink Association, has weighed in with their defense of the soda companies. In a line predictably parroted by Coke, there is, they say, no connection between soft drink consumption and either obesity or diabetes. Kids drinking sodas with 10 teaspoons of sugar per can, they say, can be part of a healthy diet. All that really matters is exercise and activity. When Los Angeles school leaders voted last August to get soda out of schools, Coke responded: "Enough is enough." Concerned only with neutralizing public dissent, Alm asked his senior vice president for public affairs, John Downs, "What is the plan?" (Leith, 2003, p. 18).

In March of 2001, Coca-Cola appeared to be giving in to critics of school commercialism in the U.S. when the company announced that it would "encourage bottlers not to require exclusive beverage contracts with schools" (Leith, 2003, p. 15). In response to the growing public health campaign, Coke — while cutting its up front cash payments to schools — was telling salespeople to give schools more choices in what kind of beverages they carry.

Meanwhile, the company is planning a more vocal defense of its business. This includes elaborating on the claim that obesity and diabetes are about lack of exercise. As part of this effort, Coke's corporate executives are investing in a new exercise promotion called "Step with It!" to advertise Coke in schools in a way that associates the product with healthy activity. Deeply implicated in the blatant hypocrisy, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recently accepted one million dollars from Coke allowing the company to help the AAPD to "create public and educational programs, based on science, that promote improved dental health for children" (Norton, 2003, p. 7). This is quite at odds with the words of Dr. Michael F. Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, "Coke's idea of education is spending billions 'educating' kids to consume caffeine- and sugar-laden soda" (Norton, 2003, p. 8).

Working diligently on its public image, Coke participates in community and educational programs in order to portray the company as concerned with inspiring "responsible corporate citizens." For example, Coke's Website has a section titled "Citizenship" in which it loosely describes what it means to be civic-minded. What is clear here is that 'citizenship' is being linked to consumption. In fact, part of what is destructive in the pedagogies of corporate media is the extent to which students are defining themselves through their consumption choices rather than through their civic duty in a democratic society: taking seriously concerns over what kind of world one wants to live in and work towards, and what kinds of values one wants to choose beyond consumption.

Part of Coke's new public relations campaign is a program called "Your Power to Choose," emphasizing student consumer choice. This line about 'choice' is being pitched to legislators and school leaders. Coke suggests to young people that they can express their individuality through consumption of the company's products — a clever tactic given that this myth is already deeply ingrained in the society. As

Mike Cameron, the student suspended in Georgia, put it upon revealing a Pepsi t-shirt, "I like to be an individual" (Saltman, 2000, p. 58). Politics and personality are thus reduced to brand choices.

If choice were really a priority of conservative corporate and political groups, it's an odd contradiction that enforcement-oriented school reforms characterized by the renewed Elementary and Secondary Education Act or No Child Left Behind (Bracey, 2003; Karp, 2001) undermine students' and teachers' choices with regards to the content of the curriculum, how learning will take place, and how their time will be used. The business model of education, with its language of accountability, efficiency, and competition embraces scripted lessons, standardized curricula and high-stakes tests that not only limit the power of teachers to decide what happens in their classrooms, but gravely suppress the possibility of creating a critical environment where students can question the social world around them (Saltman & Gabbard, 2003). Tightened controls over teaching in these enforcement-oriented reforms are specifically designed to prevent critical questions about, for example, the kinds of social and labor relations that are actually behind the glossy image of Coca-Cola: What are the working conditions of the drivers of Coke trucks, or bottling and sugar processing plant workers? What sorts of geopolitics underlie the history of Coke's success at guaranteeing a regular supply of sugar? What are the ethical and political visions embraced by such corporations?

Instead of engaging in this type of critical inquiry, conservatives are celebrating the relationships that corporations can and do have with public schools. For example, Paul Vallas (1999), former "CEO" of the Chicago Public Schools, and a champion of enforcement-oriented reforms, (who, following a failed bid for governor of Illinois, became "CEO" of the Philadelphia Public Schools), insists:

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an example of how businesses can work together with educators to truly make a difference....The program is innovative in that students at risk of dropping out and often failing are tutoring younger students, and both groups are reaping the benefits of increased attendance, improved academic performance, and decreased disciplinary problems. In this program everybody wins. (p. 3)

Though it is unclear why public schools need Coca-Cola's stamp on peer tutoring programs, especially ones taking place in predominantly Latino communities at schools such as Benito Juarez High School, J.C. Orozco Community Academy, and Pilsen Elementary School, it is clear from the materials and strategies used in these programs that Coca-Cola is targeting Latino/a students with advertising and public relations schemes.

At the same time, the image of a wholesome and benevolent company produced through active involvement in community activities and educational projects runs contrary to the brutal actions of the Coca-Cola corporation in the nations where many of these students and their families were born, including



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Mexico, Colombia, and Guatemala. Instead of excoriating the company for its involvement in domestic and international violence, Vallas (2001), in a speech made to the U.S. Congressional Committee on Education and the Workforce, voiced the importance of extending the private/public collaboration between Coke and public schools to include the military:

To assist teachers in teaching to the standards, we have developed curriculum frameworks, programs of study, and curriculum models with daily lessons. These materials are based on training models designed by the Military Command and General Staff Council...

Such programs celebrate corporate and military models of accountability, corporate and military styles of governance, and they project a positive image of corporate and military culture conveniently cleansed of the realities of what Coke and the U.S. military do around the world to increase profits. What becomes very evident in both Coca-Cola's educational enterprises and Vallas's vision is that schooling should be principally about making disciplined consumers, workers, and soldiers who are good at following orders, and less about students developing the skills of intellectual inquiry necessary for a vibrant participatory democracy.

Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the "Reach for Tomorrow" program exemplifies further Vallas' dream of merging corporate and military models of schooling. The program sends groups of "at risk" urban youth to the U.S. Air Force Academy to be empowered by the opportunity to emulate military role models. According to its founder (2003):

RFT is an intervention program in partnership with American business. Corporate America will be a key partner in all RFT programs as the federal government down sizes. For years people have criticized the bureaucracy and inefficiencies of federal programs, and RFT offers a privatized solution to promote education, opportunities, and service to our youth. Through partnerships with business RFT provides a "win-win" scenario for everyone: students, colleges, business, and our country. (p. 2)

We might wonder why Coca-Cola does not send "at risk" youth to work with labor leaders or other civic leaders to learn what and who put them "at risk", and what they can do to bring about social change. Of course, this would involve students in learning about why there are no jobs in their communities, why their schools are sorely under-funded, and who benefits by the fact that the military remains one of the few choices for students from impoverished communities — a point briefly highlighted in mainstream media coverage of those Americans killed in action in Iraq. In the type of pedagogy oriented towards the development of critical citizenship rather than consumerism, students are encouraged to explore why it is that students of color are being targeted for military service and school privatization in the U.S. while nations "of color" are being targeted for military action to destroy unions and political parties that want to eradicate corporate-led human rights, labor and environmental abuses.



## **Corporate Globalization and the Neoliberal Agenda**

Corporate globalization, which should be viewed as a doctrine rather than a natural and thus inevitable phenomenon, is driven by the philosophy of neoliberalism. The economic and political doctrine of neoliberalism insists upon the virtues of privatization and liberalization of trade and concomitantly places faith in the hard discipline of the market for resolving all social and individual problems. As McChesney (1999) notes, within the United States, neoliberal policies have been characterized by their supporters as, “free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, reward personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative, and undermine the dead hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic and parasitic government, that can never do good even if well intended, which it rarely is” (p. 7). Within this neoliberal view, the public sphere should either be privatized as in the call to privatize public schools, parks, social security, healthcare, etc., or it should be in the service of the private sector by doling out U.S. federal subsidies for corporate agriculture, entertainment, and defense.

As many researchers have observed, corporate globalization efforts have hardly resulted in more just social relations, democratic access to political power, or public control over the economy. In fact, the world’s richest three hundred individuals possess more wealth than the world’s poorest forty-eight countries combined, and the richest fifteen people have a greater fortune than the total product value of sub-Saharan Africa. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) reveals:

According to the most recent report of the United Nations Development Programme, while the global consumption of goods and services was twice as big in 1997 as in 1975 and had multiplied by a factor of six since 1950, 1 billion people cannot satisfy even their elementary needs. Among the 4.5 billion residents of the ‘developing’ countries, three in every five are deprived of access to basic infrastructures: a third have no access to drinkable water, a quarter have no accommodation worthy of its name, one-fifth have no use of sanitary and medical services. One in five children spend less than five years in any form of schooling; a similar proportion is permanently undernourished. (p. 114)

In the U.S., while corporate news media heralded the economic boom at the millennium’s turn, disparities in wealth have reached greater proportions than during the great depression.

“By far the richest country in the world and the homeland of the world’s wealthiest people, 16.5 percent of the population live in poverty; one fifth of adult men and women can neither read nor write, while 13 percent have a life expectancy shorter than sixty years” (Bauman, 2001, p. 115). “Since the mid-1970’s, the most fortunate one percent of households have doubled their share of the national wealth. They now hold more wealth than the bottom 95 percent of the population” (Hartman, 2000; see also [www.inequality.org/factsfr.html](http://www.inequality.org/factsfr.html)). The official unemployment rate in the

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United States now hovers around 6 percent, and real wages have steadily decreased since the seventies to the point that affordable housing, especially for a single, minimum wage earner, is difficult to come by (Harper's Magazine Index, 2000).

Austerity measures imposed by world trade organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ensure that poor nations stay poor by imposing "fiscal discipline" while no such discipline applies to entire industries that are heavily subsidized by the public sector in the U.S. At the same time, 'free trade agreements' such as NAFTA (and the FTAA that aims to extend it) and GATT have enriched corporate elites in Mexico and the U.S. while intensifying poverty along the border. Jerry Sanders (2001) is worth quoting at length on this issue:

According to data from the 2000 consensus, fully 75 percent of the population of Mexico lives in poverty today (with fully one-third in extreme poverty), as compared with 49 percent in 1981, before the imposition of the neoliberal regimen and, later, NAFTA. Meanwhile, the longstanding gap between the northern and southern regions, as manifested in poverty, infant mortality and malnutrition rates, has grown wider as the latter has borne the brunt of neoliberal adjustment policies. Chiapas, for example, produces more than half of Mexico's hydroelectric power, an increasing portion of which flows north to the maquiladora zone on the Mexico-U.S. border. Yet, even including its major cities of Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal de las Casas, only half of Chiapanecan households have electricity or running water. Additional water sources have been diverted to irrigate large landholdings devoted to export-oriented agriculture and commercial forestry, while peasant farmers have suffered reductions in water and other necessities as well as an end to land reform, even as they have endured a flood of U.S. agribusiness exports that followed the NAFTA opening. According to the Mexican government's own official estimates, 1.5 million peasants will be forced to leave agriculture in the next one to two decades, many driven northward to face low-wage maquiladoras on one side of the border and high-tech militarization on the other. (pp. 18-19)

'Free trade' has meant capital flight, job loss, diminishing wages, the dismantling of labor unions in the U.S., and the growth of slave labor conditions in nations that are exported industrial production such as Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, Haiti, and China. But perhaps the ultimate failure of neoliberal capitalism is indicated by its success in distributing Coca-Cola to every last niche of the globe while it has neglected to supply inexpensive medicines for preventable diseases, nutritious food, or living wages to these same sprawling shanty towns in Ethiopia, Brazil, and the United States. Also victims of such corporate logic and greed are the 47 million children in the richest 29 nations in the world who are living below the poverty line. In fact, child poverty in the *wealthiest* nations has worsened (Hartman, 2000; Williams, 2000).

Neoliberalism should be understood in relation to the practice of what Ellen Meiskins Wood (2000) calls the "new imperialism" that is "not just a matter of controlling particular territories. It is a matter of controlling a whole world economy and global markets, everywhere and all the time" (p. 199). The project of global-

ization according to *New York Times* foreign correspondent Thomas L. Friedman (1999) “is our overarching national interest” and it “requires a stable power structure, and no country is more essential for this than the United States” (p. 373) for “[i]t has a large standing army, equipped with more aircraft carriers, advanced fighter jets, transport aircraft and nuclear weapons than ever, so that it can project more power farther than any country in the world...America excels in all the new measures of power in the era of globalization” (p. 304). As Friedman explains, rallying for the “humanitarian” bombing of Kosovo:

The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist — McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. (p. 373)

It should come as no surprise how U.S. military forces have achieved the status that Friedman lauds. The United State’s military expenditures are part of a longer legacy of military spending since World War II that has resulted in a U.S. economy that is, in the words of economist Samir Amin (2000), “monstrously deformed” (p. 48), with about a third of all economic activity depending directly or indirectly on the military industrial complex — a level, Amin notes, only reached by the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev era. The recent return to cold war levels of military spending is part of an overt strategy of U.S. imperial expansion facilitated by skillful media spin amid post-9/11 anxiety. The framing of that event not only has enabled additional military spending that facilitates a more open admission of violent power politics and defiant U.S. unilateralism, but it has also worked to reduce democracy to consumer capitalism. Who can forget the day after 9/11 when State and corporate proclamations insisted that in order to be patriotic and save the damaged economy we all have to join together and go out shopping.

At the same time, power brokers in education, such as Bill Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and Diane Ravitch, proudly announced that teachers must educate students towards understanding that we have the best “way of life” and that the reason people are intent on harming us is because “they are jealous of our freedoms,” and because “they are irrational for failing to grasp that our way of life benefits everybody.” Behind the rhetoric, what we are really teaching is that those in power who profit from current social formations should continue to get the green light to dominate, control, and wage war on other nations who could threaten ‘our’ economic and military dominance. In fact, the Bush administration’s new military policies of permanent war expressed in the National Security Strategy permit the attack of any nation that *could* in the future pose an economic or military threat to U.S. hegemony; in other words, any party, organization, or government that could stand in the way of multinational corporations determining the fate of resources and people.

In large part, this practice of violence is not new. For example, as part of the Clinton and Bush administrations, Plan Colombia has and continues to funnel

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billions of dollars, mostly in the form of military aid, in order to destabilize the country and eradicate any democratic efforts there. Paramilitaries have close ties to the military and to many large corporations including Coca-Cola. Luis Cardona, who is being sponsored by the AFL-CIO, has been speaking in the U.S. about the plight of Coke workers attacked for labor organizing. Cardona's co-workers and fellow organizers were killed by paramilitaries allegedly hired by Coca-Cola to destroy the labor union and Luis was nearly killed himself before managing to escape his captors. As David Bacon (2002) describes:

The level of violence against Colombian unionists is staggering: In 2000, assassinations took the lives of 153 of the nation's trade-union leaders. In 2001 the figure had reached 143 by the end of November. According to Hector Fajardo, general secretary of the United Confederation of Workers (CUT), Colombia's largest union federation, 3,800 trade unionists have been assassinated in Colombia since 1986. In the year 2000, three out of every five trade unionists killed in the world were Colombian, according to a recent report by the United Steelworkers. (p. 12)

Bacon (2002) adds:

Colombia is the third-largest recipient of U.S. military aid in the world, and several members of Congress have tried to call attention to the possibility that some of our aid may be funding the anti-union bloodbath. (p. 12)

The corporate attacks on labor — through the paramilitaries — are aided by the intensified U.S. military funding that aims to attack progressive political opposition under the pretext of the drug war. Helping to disable Columbia, the United States government is using private U.S.-based military contracting companies in conjunction with U.S. and Colombian military and civilian contractors to dump toxic chemicals — in the form of Monsanto's Roundup — that are not only destroying Coca plants but virtually all agriculture while also contaminating the watershed, animals, and people (Silverstein, 2001). If the United States government were sincerely interested in curbing drug production and distribution around the world then we would have to ask why is it that since the U.S. used its military might to end the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, that country has been restored to its previous status of the number one poppy producer on the planet.

### **From Education for Corporate Globalization to Education for Global Justice**

While the destructive imperialistic power of the United States military to enforce neoliberal policy to make the world safe for U.S. markets is immense, weapons are not the predominant means for gaining and maintaining consent among Americans (or marginalizing dissent) to economic policies and political arrangements that impoverish the world materially. Rather, as previously discussed, the cultural pedagogies of corporate mass media have succeeded in turning

savage inequalities into common sense, framing issues in the best interests of corporations, inspiring a populous celebration of raw and abusive power, and presenting history in ways that eviscerate popular struggle. Educational institutions are also deeply implicated in this type of cultural production. Public schooling is consequently being increasingly monopolized within the conservative language of accountability, choice, and efficiency, while civic responsibility and dissent are written out of the equation (Saltman, 2000).

Countering this conservative assault on public schools, education for critical democracy confronts efforts by corporations, in conjunction with governments, to expand their power locally, nationally, and internationally. This broader approach to education recognizes that corporations know just how much knowledge and schooling matter in the exercise of power — to frame events, construct meanings, and disseminate values favorable to financial and ideological interests. Given this orientation, critical pedagogy works to interrogate corporate logic, to expose this neoliberal agenda, and to democratize knowledge. For example, within a critical classroom, students are encouraged to uncover the contradictions when a company such as Amoco (now BP Amoco) in conjunction with Scholastic, Waste Management, and public television freely distributes a middle school science curriculum in Chicago Public Schools that portrays the earth under benevolent corporate management, while that same curriculum fails to mention domestic pollution that has resulted in vast environmental devastation and cancer in entire neighborhoods in the mid-west, the spilling of millions of barrels of oil in pristine Alaskan arctic land, the defiance of government orders to stop spilling, the involvement of the company in the murderous actions of right-wing paramilitaries in Colombia, or how BP Amoco and other oil companies will benefit from the U.S. waging war on countries with great oil reserves. Chevron, involved in helicopter gunship attacks on protesters in Nigeria, is quite clear on what is at stake in the battle over who controls knowledge. H.F. Islander, the General Manager of Chevron's Kuwait office, told *New York Times* Foreign Correspondent Thomas Friedman that Chevron is “not an oil company, it's a learning company” (Friedman, 1999, p. 176).

As the United States takes on an increasingly open imperial mission in defiance of the international community and intensifies domestic militarization, it becomes clear that George W. Bush's ultimatum following 9/11 about other states being either “with us or against us” also applies to the ethical and political positions that educators take. The battle lines for educators, however, should not be drawn the way Bush would have them — between a jingoistic unquestioning nationalism versus a treasonous questioning of the motives of the state. Rather, ideally the battle for educators should be for the expansion of public rather than state-backed corporate control of knowledge, media, and foreign and domestic policy, as well as public control over the meaning and future of work, leisure, consumption, and culture. In light of intensified corporate control over knowledge production the role of teacher education programs is more important than ever for preparing teachers to

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comprehend the manipulative workings of corporations, and to teach against such malicious practices by encouraging students to become critical readers of the world around them. However, at this juncture in history of unprecedented power of multi/transnational corporations it is no longer possible for teacher educators to embrace democratic pedagogies without making global connections. In other words, what goes on in the classroom should be linked to broader economic, political, and cultural interests fought over nationally and internationally: struggles over resources like oil and water, ecological priorities, control of international decision-making power relevant to trade and ownership of production, information technologies, and such oppressive practices as sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism.

There is a growing global justice movement against neoliberalism, which includes labor, environmental, anti-racist, feminist, and other groups that recognize that the corporate management of the planet threatens the creation of a more just and democratic world. Educating for critical democracy should ideally be linked to these broader visions for global justice as they provide guidance and alternatives to the bleak future offered by the controllers of transnational corporations. As part of this multi-interest coalition and struggle, teachers should understand their defense of democratic pedagogies and teachers unions as related to the rights of workers and the interests of the public in other sectors here and around the world. Educators need to recognize that they have common cause with the Coke bottling plant workers in Colombia such as Luis Cardona. Critical coalitions should be seen as part of the long-term project of expanding global, public-based democracy.

As such, the struggle against Coca-Cola, here at home, by teachers and students needs to engage with but also go beyond concerns over public health. The “real thing” that students, teachers, and school boards need to consider is whether it makes sense in a democratic nation, and ideally in a democratic world, for public needs and civil rights to be beholden to massive corporations primarily interested in profit. This focus then needs to be expanded in order to link up with the broader struggle against the expansion of unchecked corporate power that dominates global knowledge production, that undermines public resources, that miseducates the public to identify themselves with corporate values, and that erases the real social relations undergirding the pretty red and white image of that sticky bubbly stuff in the can.

There are numerous sources of information about corporate actions on the internet that could be used in the formal classroom, such as Corporatewatch, Z-net, Thenation.com, and FAIR, as well as progressive education sites such as RethinkingSchools.org, Radicalteacher, and Workplace. Teachers can also use the corporate-produced curriculum as an object of analysis where students explore what kinds of education they condone.

One tradition in critical education that offers teachers insight for forging a global justice pedagogy is critical media literacy. Critical media literacy, used to help students comprehend, criticize, and challenge corporate pedagogies, begins with what students are familiar with and find meaningful, such as an advertisement.

Students are encouraged to pose questions about the meaning of the object/image in relation to larger social, economic, and cultural contexts, and how these in turn inform the production and circulation of the object under analysis. Students are asked such questions as: What does the advertisement ask you to believe about the product? About yourself? Who makes the product? What are the conditions under which the product is made? Why is the production of the product not included in the advertisement? Who makes the advertisement? How does the advertisement relate to other advertisements? What sort of social values are proposed by the advertisement? How does one reconcile those social values with the kinds of political ideals espoused in the democratic tradition? Where does the advertisement appear? How is the narrative content of a television program or film related to the primary mission of selling commodities with advertisements and product placements? What might the advertisement look like if it gave more information about the production of the product it advertises?

What's extremely important in building and sustaining a vibrant democracy is publicly recognizing the drastic differences that exist between conservative and progressive goals for public schooling. Whereas Coca-Cola's and other corporate educational programs encourage instrumental approaches to knowledge that emphasize the acquisition of discreet skills and quantifiably measurable performances, education for critical democracy encourages students to be intellectually curious and understand the historical and global dimensions of knowledge. Coca-Cola and other corporate educational programs disconnect knowledge from the structures of power that inform its creation. Education for critical democracy raises questions about broader structures of power in relation to particular interpretations of truth. Coca-Cola's and other corporate models encourage students to think about skills for their exchange value in an economy under the control of others. Education for critical democracy encourages students to develop the intellectual tools to act to transform the world around them in ways that make a more just and democratic society for everyone. Coca-Cola's and other corporate educational programs teach students that they had better learn to fit in to the present order of things. Education for critical democracy enhances students' capacities to imagine a future in which present inequalities and injustices are overcome and in which history is not inevitable and predetermined but rather open to transformation through collective action. Coca-Cola's and other corporate educational programs make hope an individual project expressed through social Darwinist ideals of survival of the fittest. Education for critical democracy makes hope a social and political project. Coca-Cola's and other corporate educational programs make freedom something you buy at the mall, or more conveniently inside or just outside the classroom, after selling your time to the highest bidder. Education for critical democracy makes individual freedom an ideal fulfilled through helping others to be free.



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