

Afterword: On Truth and Profit in an Extra-Moral Sense

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Anyone reading the preceding collection of essays will undoubtedly be impressed by the remarkable sense of solidarity among the contributors. However they might differ on the fine points, this much is clear: Any management or administrative infringement on the academic freedoms necessary for inquiry and exchange by both faculty and students is destructive of the well-being of higher education. Overtly political and economic suppression of dissent will unequivocally be resisted by the many defenders of academic freedom, and some of the leaders of that resistance appear in this volume. Exactly where and how those lines of defense are or must be drawn is, of course, the substantive debate waged in these pages. But from different fields, different disciplines, different discourses, the agreement on the basic issues is palpable. And that solidarity is the underlying reason for this volume: to extend the coalitions for justice in higher education in terms of the broadest conception of the public good that we can imagine.

We live in a time when the experiment in privatization and neo-liberal capitalism has now run its course and the results are in: It doesn't work. The global financial collapse we have been witnessing this past fall as we go to press has been well-predicted by many like William Greider who warned us in 1997 "that the global system will, indeed, probably experience a series of terrible events—wrenching calamities that are economic or social or environmental in nature—before common sense prevails" (473). Back then, before the high-tech bust and the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Greider's words struck the high-flying market fundamentalists like Milton Friedman, Francis Fukuyama, and others as nothing more than a kind of frustrated socialist doom-saying. More recently, "Dr. Doom" himself, Nouriel Roubini, a professor of economics at New York University, predicted the effect of the housing and banking meltdown on the global economy, and many analysts laughed (Rush n. pag.). But not anymore, because the data collected is massive: 2.3 million U.S. citizens incarcerated; a 10 trillion dollar national debt; a ratio of CEO salaries to average workers at about 500:1; the unionized labor force in the U.S. decimated by 75 percent in thirty years; housing

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and financial markets extended beyond relief (and belief); more bailouts to corporations at the expense of taxpayers; an ill-advised war draining what's left of any social resources; unemployment on the rise and real wages shrinking; affordable health care and child care out of reach for many Americans; ratios of tenure-track to part-time nontenured faculty inverted from 75/25 percent to 25/75 percent; global warming and environmental degradation an everyday situation; student and homeowner debt increased so much as to leave many "indentured" (Williams) beyond reasonable hopes for recovery. The list could go on even though we have barely mentioned the global impact of the neoliberal experiment, but the point is clear for many people: we live in a time of dwindling freedoms.

The contributors to this volume provide comprehensive evidence that higher education has experienced similar infringements on its special institutional and epistemological version of freedom called "academic." Similar, that is, to the orchestrated set of attacks on the constitutional rights of citizens, the international rights of prisoners, the economic rights of developing nations, and the human rights of most people on earth. But the *Works and Days* contributors also provide evidence of a wide range of resistance to those attacks on academic and social freedoms. Let us not miss the depth of those resources still available to us for dissent.

Few of us would dismiss the significance of an important historical turning point. 9/11 marks a unique moment after which the discourse of terrorism became the rhetorical and political fuel to further empower the neoliberal attacks on the social welfare state. Terror often has a public ring, but a private justification: save the nation from evil but (really) open new markets for profit (Giroux, *Against*). Indeed, privatization (or *piratization*) has been a predatory activity seeking to shrink the public commons and the few relatively noncommodified spaces we might hope to protect. The protections of academic freedom strike at the heart of the efforts to preserve a public commons, a space relatively free of direct capital control that will invariably be a necessary part of any free and democratic society.

The struggle for academic freedom is, therefore, a part of the larger project of social hope for a better future, a more just society. The recent past has indeed dimmed many of those aspirations for understandable reasons. Even in its own terms, the hard line of cool profits has evaporated into its own global recession when most every major corporation except for the oil companies has suffered more losses than gains. The failures of market fundamentalism can no longer be marginalized in the historical archive under the rubrics of patriotism. The suffering of the disenfranchised is all too plain to see. So in many quarters of the globe there is some fairly raw resentment and anger. Yet also, in some places and some pages, hope.

Perhaps that justifiable outcry led even those who had doubts to cast a vote for Barack Obama. Perhaps more people than ever now share a hope that the global patterns of the last thirty years can be altered for the better for the vast majority of people in this world, rather than for a micro-elite set of financial globe-trotters. For that to happen, the solidarity represented in this volume is not a case of balance. We don't "balance" the truth with falsehoods any more than

we balance gender equity with patriarchy, independence with colonialism, freedom with oppression (Giroux, *The University* 142, 162-78). Yet balance, as if it meant fairness, is exactly the key term Lewis F. Powell deployed in 1971, only two months before his appointment by President Nixon as a Supreme Court Justice. In his infamous "Powell Memo" (or "Powell Manifesto" as it is sometimes called), he attacked universities for harboring intellectuals unsympathetic to free-market capitalism, and he called for "faculty balance" in academia. Although it was supposed to be a confidential memo to Eugene Sydnor, Jr., the director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, this lengthy, detailed memo outlining the reasons that every "major college [. . .] is graduating scores of bright young men [*sic*] who [. . .] despise the American political and economic system" (n. pag.) later circulated so widely that it influenced the formation of a whole set of powerful conservative institutions such as The Heritage Foundation, Accuracy in Academe, Citizens for a Sound Economy, and many others, all of which have invested huge sums of money trying to press home in the national media the generally counterfactual claims of liberal imbalance in the ivory tower (Wilson). Since 9/11, the most recent and more extreme invocation of balance as the key to academic freedom comes from David Horowitz and his notorious Academic Bill of Rights, as well as organizations such as the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), which seek to install balance as an answer to their misleading vision of a corrupted, left-wing academy. As Friedrich Nietzsche put it more than a century ago, liars are those who use "the valid designations, the words, to make the unreal appear as real" and who abuse "the fixed conventions by arbitrary changes or even by reversals of the names" (44-45). Rights and freedoms then become censorship and control.

The point made by all the contributors to this volume is that in any genuine education, one does not balance the search for whatever we can determine to be the truth with misinformation, lies, and deception. The truth is often hot, difficult to confront, and sometimes painfully so when it is easier, as it often is, to believe the myths that sweeten our vulnerable comforts. In this fundamental sense, ethos precedes logos, and the moral commitments to truth and freedom stand against all forms of racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, and ethnocentrism.

Regardless of how one might react to some of Ward Churchill's or Norman Finkelstein's articulations, they certainly have documented with great care some truths about U.S. militarism that many people would just as soon not confront. Academic freedom means we still have the spaces where we can hear some of those truths, where we can listen, question, argue, disagree, and pay attention to others and the truths they bear, rather than suppress them at the hands of political and economic rationales that would otherwise conceal them. Churchill and Finkelstein are just two of the contributors in this collection. The rigor, thoughtfulness, and care given to the discourse about academic freedom as exemplified by everyone whose name appears in the book in your hands, might, I hope, aid those of us who do indeed seek a more just educational and social world.

In the end, we can only get at the history of the present by telling the most accurate stories we can articulate of the recent past. The fundamental task that Ed and I set for this volume was nothing less than the fundamental task of higher education: to keep open to debate and dissensus, as well as consensus, the spaces available for the arduous tasks of assessing as fairly as we can what ought to count as the truth. The unsaid, the uninterpretable, and even the unspeakable may be all around us, but the struggle for social justice ought to be the grounds for our differing ways of creating and translating knowledge in and across any educational institution. As we go to press, Ward Churchill's trial is still a few months away. What you may have just read is his detailed account of his own tribulations with academic management and a political state more intent on preserving its version of patriotic America over and against any form of truth-telling regarding the more troublesome side of America's own contribution to global injustice. Let us hold tight to the possibility that some truth and freedom will prevail in the coming months and years. For that project, I feel confident I speak with all of us in this volume, and with many others who have a shared vision of a more just education for a more democratic future.

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