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Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies

The great masses of people ... will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one.

—Adolf Hitler

MOST AMERICANS WOULD CRINGE at the thought that they have repeatedly fallen victim to big lies told by their government. In fact, they would probably instinctively point out that the manipulation of people through big lies only occurs in totalitarian, fascist governments such as Hitler's. In the same breath, they might remind us that their ancestors gave their lives in the great wars so that we could enjoy the freedom and democracy we now have. They might also hasten to recite slogans such as "live free or die," "freedom of speech," and "freedom of information." While busily calling out slogans from their patriotic vocabulary memory warehouse, these same Americans dutifully vote, for example, for Ronald Reagan, giving him a landslide victory when he ran on a platform that promised to balance the budget, cut taxes, and increase military spending. This "unreason of reason" led George Bush to characterize Reagan's economic plan as voodoo economics—even though he himself later became entranced by the big lie of this same voodooism.

What U.S. voters failed to do was to demand that Reagan tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In other words, they failed to require that Reagan acknowledge that, in order for his proposition to be true (and not a lie), the voters would have to give him and Bush a blank credit card with \$4.3 trillion in deficit credit to create the false sense of economic prosperity enjoyed under their leadership. I say a false sense not only because of the present economic malaise but also because the Reagan economic boom was a bust. According to Samuel Bowles, David M. Gordon, and E. Thomas Weisskopf: "Output growth did not revive during the 1980's cycle. Far from stimulating investment through massive tax cuts and concessions to the wealthy, Reagan-Bush economic policy has dealt investment a blow; compared with the previous busi-

ness cycle, the pace of real net productive investment declined by a quarter during the most recent business cycle."¹

Despite concrete evidence indicating that the Reagan-Bush economic plan was a failure, U.S. voters swept Bush into office in 1988 with the same voodoo trickle-down economics, now ornamented with a thousand points of short-circuited lights. These same voters ascended to Bush's morally high-minded call to apply international laws against Saddam Hussein's tyranny and his invasion of Kuwait. The great mass of voters who rallied behind Bush, pushing his popular approval rating beyond 90 percent during the Gulf War, failed to realize that these same international laws had been broken by Bush a year or so before in Panama and by his predecessor in Grenada, Libya, and Nicaragua. This leads to the question why we supposedly highly literate and principled citizens of a great democracy frequently demonstrate the inability to separate myth from reality. This inability pushes us to perpetual flirtation with historical hypocrisy. However, not all Americans suffer from the inability to separate myths from reality, to read the world critically. For example, David Spritzler, a twelve-year-old student at Boston Latin School, faced disciplinary action for his refusal to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, which he considered "a hypocritical exhortation to patriotism" in that there is not "liberty and justice for all." According to Spritzler, the pledge is an attempt to unite the "oppressed and the oppressors. You have people who drive nice cars, live in nice houses and don't have to worry about money. Then you have the poor people, living in bad neighborhoods and going to bad schools. Somehow the Pledge makes it seem that everybody's equal when that's not happening. There's no justice for everybody."²

Spritzler was spared disciplinary action only after the American Civil Liberties Union wrote a letter on his behalf, citing a 1943 case, *West Virginia State Board of Education versus Barnet*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a student's right not to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain seated.

What remains incomprehensible is why a twelve-year-old boy could readily see through the obvious hypocrisy contained in the Pledge of Allegiance, while his teachers and administrators, who have received much higher levels of education, cannot. As Noam Chomsky pointed out in reference to a similar situation, these teachers' and administrators' inability to see through the obvious represents "a real sign of deep indoctrination [in] that you can't understand elementary thoughts that any 10-year-old can understand. That's real indoctrination. So for him [the indoctrinated individual] it's kind of like a theological truth, a truth of received religion."³ These teachers and administrators should know that history shows us convincingly and factually that the United States

has systematically violated the Pledge of Allegiance, from the legalization of slavery, the denial of women's rights, and the near-genocide of Native Americans to the contemporary discriminatory practices against people who, by virtue of their race, ethnicity, class, or gender, are not treated with the dignity and respect called for in the pledge.

If we did not suffer from historical amnesia, we would easily recall that, once upon a time, the Massachusetts legislature promulgated a law that provided monetary rewards for dead Indians: "For every scalp of a male Indian brought in ... forty pounds. For every scalp of such female Indian or male Indian under the age of twelve years that shall be killed ... twenty pounds."⁴ Even the abolitionist President Abraham Lincoln did not truly uphold the U.S. Declaration of Independence propositions of equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness when he declared: "I will say, then, that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races. ... I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race."⁵

One could argue that the above-cited incidents belong to the dusty archives of our early history, but I do not believe that we have learned a great deal from historically dangerous memories, considering that our leaders continue to incite racial tensions, as evidenced in the issue of Willie Horton in the presidential campaign or in Bush's opposition to job quotas on the pretext that they were a renewed invitation to racial divisiveness. This racial divisiveness actually has served the Republican Party's interest of splitting voters along class, racial, and ethnic lines. Our perpetual flirtation (if not marriage) with historical hypocrisy becomes abundantly clear if we imagine the juxtaposition of students reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in Charlestown High School in 1976, in classrooms ornamented with copies of the Declaration of Independence hanging alongside racial epithets scrawled on the walls: "Welcome Niggers," "Niggers Suck," "White Power," "KKK," "Bus is for Nuts," and "Be filthy-rate, fight busing."⁶

Our inability to see the obvious was never more evident than when a predominantly white jury found the four white policemen who brutally beat Rodney King "not guilty." Even though the world was shocked beyond belief by the raw brutality and barbarism of the Los Angeles law enforcers, the jurors who saw the actual video shots of King struggling on his hands and knees while being hit repeatedly by the policemen's batons concluded that "Mr. King was controlling the whole show with his action."⁷ The racist ideology of Simi Valley, California, blinded these jurors to such an extent that they could readily accept the savage beatings they had seen on the video to have been, as the defense attorney's claimed, nothing more than a "controlled application of fifty-six batons."

in order to contain King, who had been portrayed as a dangerous "animal," like "gorillas in the mist."⁸ However, one of the jurors did not fully accept the view of reality suggested by the defense attorneys: "I fought so hard to hang on, and hang on to what I saw on the video. ... There was no way I could change the others. They couldn't see what I saw. ... [But] they could not take away from what my eyes saw."⁹

The real educational question and challenge for us is to understand why most of the jurors either could not see, or refused to see, what their eyes and the eyes of the entire world saw on television. Unfortunately, in the present setup of our educational system, particularly in our schools of education, it is very difficult to acquire the necessary critical tools that would unveil the ideology responsible for these jurors' blinders. A critical understanding of the savage beating of Rodney King and the subsequent acquittal of the four White police officers necessitates the deconstruction of the intricate interplay of race, ethics, and ideology—issues that schools of education, by and large, neglect to take on rigorously. Courses that deal with issues such as race relations, ethics, and ideology are almost absent from the teacher-preparation curricula. This serious omission is, by its very nature, ideological and constitutes the foundation for what I call the pedagogy of big lies.

At this juncture, I can easily frame my argument to demonstrate that many, if not all, of David Spritzler's teachers and administrators are either naive victims of a big lie or are cognizant of the deceptive ideological mechanisms inherent in the pledge and consciously reproduce them, even if it means violating the very rights the oath proclaims. I argue that the latter is true. Even if we want to give such educators the benefit of the doubt, their naïveté is never innocent, but ideological. It is ideological to the degree that they have invested in a system that rewards them for reproducing and not questioning dominant mechanisms designed to produce power asymmetries along the lines of race, gender, class, culture, and ethnicity.

Those teachers who refuse such investments in the dominant ideological system usually think more critically, thus recognizing the falsehoods embedded in the various myths created by the dominant class. Critical teachers of this sort, instead of sending David to the principal's office, would seize the pedagogical moment to engage the entire class in a consciousness-raising exercise that would be in line with both the democratic ideals of the Pledge of Allegiance and the development of critical thinking skills. For instance, the teacher could have given David the opportunity to have his voice heard as he discussed the enormous contradictions inherent in the Pledge of Allegiance. The teacher could also have engaged the other students by asking them if they agreed or disagreed with David's position. The teacher could have asked the follow-

ing: "Do you agree that the pledge is a 'hypocritical exhortation to patriotism'? Explain why." This question would enable other students to voice their opinions regarding their perception of the Pledge of Allegiance. Students could also be asked whether David was right in asserting that the Pledge of Allegiance is a mere attempt to unite the "oppressed and the oppressors," since "you have people who drive nice cars, live in nice houses and don't have to worry about money. Then you have the poor people, living in bad neighborhoods and going to bad schools." The teacher could continue to encourage an open dialogue by asking students if they knew people who were poor, "living in bad neighborhoods and going to bad schools." If many students were to confirm David's position, then the teacher could raise the following questions: "Why do you think that we have so many poor people living in bad neighborhoods? Do you think that poor people choose to live in bad neighborhoods? Who is responsible for the present inequality? Would you like to live in a bad neighborhood and go to a bad school? What would you do if you were forced to live in poverty and to go to a bad school?"

I am sure that a multiplicity of responses would have been given by the students, according to their own social class and race position as well as their different levels of political awareness. This exercise could have provided great insights into the students' personal narratives. It would also help the students to understand that the Pledge of Allegiance cannot fulfill its ideals in light of the social disparities and inequalities in our society. This exercise would also have provided the students the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the proposition "liberty and justice for all." This reflection could also have prepared these students to understand their civic responsibility and their role in a society that, although it promises "equality, liberty and justice for all," is replete with inequality and injustice for those groups of people who are from different racial, class, and ethnic backgrounds.

The above exercise is one of the many constructive and creative ways that a critical teacher could begin to problem-pose with the class, as together they engage in a pedagogical process to deconstruct the myth sustained by the Pledge of Allegiance. However, in order to do so, the teacher has to be not only critical but also willing to take great risks, including losing his or her job, since the doctrinal system does not reward dissent. This risk became obvious when Jonathan Kozol was fired from the Boston Public Schools in 1964 for having his all-Black segregated fourth-grade class read Robert Frost and Langston Hughes. The reason for his dismissal was that he did not follow the curriculum. Kozol wrote that according to school officials, "Robert Frost and Langston Hughes were 'too advanced' for children of this age. Hughes, moreover, was re-

garded as 'inflammatory.'"¹⁰ It did not matter that "one of the most embittered children in the class began to cry when she first heard the words of Langston Hughes."

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

*like a raisin in the sun?*¹¹

It did not matter to the Boston school officials that this fourth-grade girl was touched by the poem and went "home and memorized the lines." What mattered to them in 1964 when they fired Jonathan Kozol and in 1992 when they attempted to expel David Spritzler for refusing to say the Pledge of Allegiance was to deny the fourth grade the opportunity to answer and understand "what happens to a dream deferred" and to prevent David Spritzler from exposing the hypocrisy embedded in the Pledge of Allegiance. Boston school officials and educators of this sort have chosen to "live within a lie" to protect their privileged positions and the rewards the doctrinal system provides them.

What I have described so far points to an intricate and complex web of lies that functions to reproduce the dominant ideology through cultural literacy. This will become clearer in my analysis of the role of literacy in cultural reproduction, an analysis in which I will show how collective experiences function in the interest of the dominant ruling elites rather than in the interest of the oppressed groups that are the object of the policies of cultural reproduction.

Literacy for cultural reproduction uses institutional mechanisms to undermine independent thought, a prerequisite for the Orwellian "manufacture of consent" or "engineering of consent." In this light, schools are seen as ideological institutions designed to prevent the so-called crisis of democracy, another Orwellian concept, meaning the beginnings of democracy.¹²

In fact, this very perspective on schools was proposed by the Trilateral Commission, whose members—among them Jimmy Carter—belonged to the international and essentially liberal elite. This commission was created in response to the general democratic participation of masses of people in the Western world in questioning their governments' ethical behavior. Its major purpose, as many understand it, was to seek ways to maintain the Western capitalist cultural hegemony. The Trilateral Commission referred to schools as "institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young."¹³ Noam Chomsky stated it simply: "The Trilateral Commission argued that schools should be institutions for indoctrination, "for imposing obedience, for blocking the possibility of independent thought, and they play an institutional role in a system of control

and coercion."¹⁴ This becomes clear in the conservative call for the control of the so-called excess of democracy. For example, according to Henry Giroux, Boston University President John Silber, who prided himself on being an education "expert," "has urged fellow conservatives to abandon any civility toward scholars whose work is considered political."¹⁵ What Silber failed to realize is that the very act of viewing education as neutral and devoid of politics is, in fact, a political act. In order to maintain schools as sites for cultural reproduction and indoctrination, Silber preferred an educational system that brooks no debate or dissent. This is apparent in his urging of "his fellow conservatives to name names, to discredit educators who have chosen to engage in forms of social criticism (work that the New Right considers political) at odds with the agenda of the New Right's mythic conception of the university as a warehouse built on the pillars of an unproblematic and revered tradition."¹⁶

Although it is important to analyze how ideologies inform various literacy traditions, in this chapter I limit my discussion to a brief analysis of the instrumentalist approach to literacy and its linkage to cultural reproduction. I also argue that the instrumentalist approach to literacy does not only refer to the goal of producing readers who meet the basic requirements of contemporary society but also includes the highest level of literacy found in disciplinary specialism and hyperspecialization.

Finally, I analyze how the instrumentalist approach to literacy, even at the highest level of specialism, functions to domesticate the consciousness via a constant disarticulation between the narrow reductionistic reading of one's field of specialization and the reading of the universe within which one's specialism is situated. This inability to link the reading of the word with the world, if not combated, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions and the unjust, asymmetrical power relations that characterize the hypocritical nature of contemporary democracies. The inherent hypocrisy in the actual use of the term "democracy" is eloquently captured by Noam Chomsky in his analysis of the United States. Chomsky wrote:

"Democracy" in the United States rhetoric refers to a system of governance in which elite elements based in the business community control the state by virtue of their dominance of the private society while the population obeys quietly. So understood, democracy is a system of elite decision and public ratification, as in the United States itself. Correspondingly, popular involvement in the formation of public policy is considered a serious threat. It is not a step towards democracy; rather, it constitutes a "crisis of democracy" that must be overcome.¹⁷

The Instrumentalist Approach to Literacy

The instrumental literacy for the poor, in the form of a competency-based skills-banking approach, and the highest form of instrumental literacy for the rich, acquired through the universality in the form of professional specialization, share one common feature: They both prevent the development of the critical thinking that enables one to "read the world" critically and to understand the reasons and linkages behind the facts.

Literacy for the poor is, by and large, characterized by mindless, meaningless drills and exercises given "in preparation for multiple choice exams and writing gobbledegook in imitation of the psycho-babble that surrounds them."¹⁸ This instrumental approach to literacy sets the stage for the anesthetization of the mind, as poet John Ashbery eloquently captured in "What Is Poetry":

In School

All the thoughts got combed out:

What was left was like a field.¹⁹

The educational "comb," for those teachers who have blindly accepted the status quo, is embodied in the ditto sheets and workbooks that mark and control the pace of routinization in the drill-and-practice assembly line. Patrick Courts correctly described the function of these workbooks and ditto sheets:

Either you must fill in the blank (or does the blank fill you in?—they have lots of blanks) or you must identify the correct or incorrect answer by circling it, underlining it, or drawing an X through it. In addition to all this, students will find that learning to spell involves copying the same word five times and copying the definition; and learning the meaning of the word involves looking it up in the dictionary and copying the definition; and learning to write involves writing a sentence or two using the word they copied five times and looked up in the dictionary. Much of what they read in the first four or five grades, they will read-to-read: That is, they will be practicing reading in order to show that they can read, which much of the time means that they will be involved in "word-perfect" oral-reading activities, grouped as Cardinals (if they are good at it), or Bluebirds (if they are not). They will learn that reading has one of two functions: Either you read orally to show that you can "bark at print" well (delighting your teachers and boring your peers), or you read silently in order to fill in those blanks in the workbook.²⁰

One would hope the students grouped as Cardinals, who survived reading-and-writing drill boot camp to become fully literate, were empowered with some sort of ability for independent critical analysis and thought. Unfortunately, these Cardinals continue in their literacy prac-

tices to experience the same fragmentation of knowledge, albeit with more sophistication. The fragmentation of knowledge via specialization produces an intellectual mechanization that, in the end, serves the same function as the fragmentation of skills in the literacy for the poor. It is not a coincidence that the defense lawyers for the White policemen in the Rodney King trial insisted on showing the jurors the video frame by frame over and over again, instead of running the video at the normal speed. The fragmentation of the Rodney King beating served two important functions: (1) By being shown each frame separately, the jurors were not allowed to see and experience the total impact of the violence applied in the beatings, and (2) by repeating the frames over and over again, the defense lawyers were able to anesthetize the sensibilities of the jurors and routinize the action captured in each frame.

Although the fragmentation of skills and bodies of knowledge is not the same as the fragmentation of the video into separate frames, the underlying principle serves the same function: On the one hand, it creates the inability to make linkages, and on the other hand, it deadens the senses. This process leads to a de facto social construction of not seeing. My colleague Robert Greene²¹ noted that this once again proves the old proverb, The eyes do not see; they only record while the mind sees. To the extent that the mind can be ideologically controlled, it filters in order to transform what the eyes record, as was the case in the transformation of Rodney King's brutal beating to a "systematic application of fifty-six batons." However, an African-American colleague, Pancho Savery, correctly pointed out to me²² that the defense attorney's machinations to prevent linkages and to deaden the jurors' senses could work only if jurors were already invested in the doctrinal system that imposed a willful blindness to realities that contradicted or questioned the system. In other words, the success of the ideological manipulation depends on the degree to which one invests in the doctrinal system and expects rewards from it. Savery argued that the fragmentation of the video frames and the playing of them over and over again would not deaden the senses of most African-Americans. On the contrary, the more they were to see the video of King's beating, even in fragmented frames, the more enraged they would become, as they are not invested in the racist doctrinal system of which they are the victims.

For some, the instrumentalist approach to literacy may have the appeal of producing readers who are capable of meeting the demands of our ever more complex technological society. However, such an approach emphasizes the mechanical learning of reading skills while sacrificing the critical analysis of the social and political order that generates the need for reading in the first place. Seldom do teachers require students to analyze the social and political structures that inform their real-

ties. Rarely do students read about the racist and discriminatory practices that they face in school and the community at large. The instrumentalist approach has led to the development of "functional literates" groomed primarily to meet the requirements of our contemporary society. The instrumentalist view also champions literacy as a vehicle for economic betterment, access to jobs, and increase in the productivity level. As was clearly stated by UNESCO: "Literacy programs should preferably be linked with economic priorities. [They] must impart not only reading and writing, but also professional and technical knowledge, thereby leading to a fuller participation of adults in economic life."²³

This notion of literacy has been enthusiastically incorporated as a major goal by the back-to-basics proponents of reading. It has also contributed to the development of neatly packaged reading programs that are presented as the solution to difficulties students experience in reading job application forms, tax forms, advertisement literature, sales catalogs, product labels, and the like. In general, the instrumentalist approach views literacy as meeting the basic reading demand of an industrialized society. As Henry Giroux pointed out:

Literacy within this perspective is geared to make adults more productive workers and citizens within a given society. In spite of its appeal to economic mobility, functional literacy reduces the concept of literacy and the pedagogy in which it is suited to the pragmatic requirements of capital; consequently, the notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor process and the need of capital accumulation.²⁴

A society that reduces the priorities of reading to the pragmatic requirements of capital necessarily has to create educational structures that anesthetize students' critical abilities, in order to "domesticate social order for its self-preservation."²⁵ Accordingly, it must create educational structures that involve "practices by which one strives to domesticate consciousness, transforming it into an empty receptacle. Education in cultural action for domination is reduced to a situation in which the educator as 'the one who knows' transfers existing knowledge to the learner as 'the one who does not know.'"²⁶

Paulo Freire's concept of banking refers to this treatment of students as empty vessels to be filled with predetermined bodies of knowledge, which are often disconnected from students' social realities. This type of education for domestication, which borders on stupidification, provides no pedagogical space for critical students like David Spritzer, who questions the received knowledge and want to know the reasons behind the facts. His defiance of the rigid bureaucracy, his refusal to surrender his civil rights, is rewarded by a threat of disciplinary action. In other words,

according to Freire, the real rewards go to the "so-called good student who repeats, who renounces critical thinking, who adjusts to models, ... [wh]o should do nothing other than receive contents that are impregnated with the ideological character vital to the interests of the sacred order."²⁷ A good student is the one who piously recites the fossilized slogans contained in the Pledge of Allegiance. A good student is the one who willfully and unreflectively accepts big lies, as described in Tom Paxton's song:

*What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?
I learned that Washington never told a lie,
I learned that soldiers seldom die,
I learned that everybody's free,
And that's what the teacher said to me.
That's what I learned in school today.
I learned that policemen are my friends,
I learned that justice never ends,
I learned that murderers die for their crimes
Even if we make a mistake sometimes.
I learned our government must be strong,
It's always right and never wrong
Our leaders are the finest men
And we elect them again and again.
I learned that war is not so bad,
I learned about the great ones we have had,
We've fought in Germany and in France,
And someday I may get my chance.
That's what I learned in school today
That's what I learned in school today
That's what I learned in school today*²⁸

The Barbarism of Specialization, or the Specialization of Barbarism

Long before the explosion of hyperspecialization and the tragedies of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset cautioned us against the demand for specialization so that science could progress. According to Ortega y Gasset, "The specialist 'knows' very well his own tiny corner of the universe; he is radically ignorant of all the rest."²⁹ I am reminded of a former classmate of mine in linguistics, whom I met while doing research work at MIT. When she learned that I was working with pidgin and creole languages, she curiously asked

me, "What's a pidgin language?" At first I thought she was joking, but soon I realized that her question was in fact genuine. Here we had a perfect case of a technician of linguistics doing the highest level theory available in the field without any clue about historical linguistics. It is not difficult to find other examples of such limited specialization because, more and more, specialists dominate institutions of learning and other institutional structures of our society. The social organization of knowledge via rigidly defined disciplinary boundaries further contributes to the formation of the specialist class, that is, engineers, doctors, professors, and so on. This sort of specialist is "only acquainted with one science, and even of that one only knows the small corner in which he is an active investigator. He even proclaims it as a virtue that he takes no cognizance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself and gives the name 'dilettantism' to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge."³⁰

This "dilettantism" is discouraged through the mythical need to discover absolute objective truth. I remember vividly when I gave my linguist friend at MIT articles to read on pidgins and creoles. I later questioned her as to whether she had found the readings interesting and informative. Half apologizing but with a certain pride in her voice, she told me: "If I want to be a great theoretical linguist, I just can't be reading too much outside theoretical linguistics. I can't even keep up with all the reading in syntax alone." Obviously there are exceptions to this attitude, Noam Chomsky, bell hooks, Howard Zinn, Gayatri Spivak, and Henry Giroux being prime examples. However, it is quite frequent in specialization to divorce science from the general culture within which it exists.

Not only does specialization represent a rupture with philosophies of social and cultural relations, but it also hides behind an ideology that creates and sustains false dichotomies rigidly delineated by disciplinary boundaries. This ideology also informs the view that "hard science," "objectivity," and "scientific rigor" must be divorced from the messy data of "soft science" and from the social and political practices that generate these categories in the first place. For example, those linguists and psychologists who "believe that what they study has little to do with social values or politics in any sense"³¹ fail to realize that their research results are "the product of a particular model of social structures that gear the theoretical concepts to the pragmatics of the society that devised . . . the model to begin with."³² That is, if the results are presented as facts determined by a particular ideological framework, "these facts cannot in themselves get us beyond that framework."³³ Too often, the positivistic overemphasis on "hard science" and "absolute objectivity" has given rise to a form of "scientism" rather than science. By "scientism" I refer to the mechanization of the intellectual work cultivated by

specialists, which often leads to the fragmentation of knowledge, as accurately understood by Ortega y Gasset: "A fair amount of things that have to be done in physics or in biology is mechanical work of the mind which can be done by anyone, or almost anyone . . . to divide science into small sections, to enclose oneself in one of these, and leave out all consideration of the rest."³⁴ Specialists of this sort have often contributed to a further fragmentation of knowledge because of their reductionist view of the act of knowing. They have repeatedly refused to admit to themselves that their very claim of objectivity is, in fact, an ideological act. Objectivity always contains within it a dimension of subjectivity; thus, it is dialectical.

Almost without exception, traditional approaches to literacy do not escape the fragmentation of knowledge and are deeply ingrained in a positivistic method of inquiry. This has resulted, in effect, in an epistemological stance in which scientific rigor and methodological refinement are celebrated, whereas "theory and knowledge are subordinated to the imperatives of efficiency and technical mastery, and history is reduced to a minor footnote in the priorities of 'empirical' scientific inquiry."³⁵ In general, this approach abstracts methodological issues from their ideological contexts and consequently ignores the interrelationship between the sociopolitical structures of a society and the act of reading and learning. In part, the exclusion of social, cultural and political dimensions from literacy practices gives rise to an ideology of cultural reproduction that produces semiliterates. My linguist friend at MIT, who reads only the theoretical work in syntax and dismisses relevant literature that links linguistics to the social and historical context, serves as a prime example of the highest level of instrumental literacy. In other words, at the lowest level of instrumental literacy, a semiliterate reads the word but is unable to read the world. At the highest level of instrumental literacy achieved via specialization, the semiliterate is able to read the text of his or her specialization but is ignorant of all other bodies of knowledge that constitute the world of knowledge. This semiliterate specialist was characterized by Ortega y Gasset as a "learned ignorant."³⁶ That is to say, "He is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his speciality; but neither is he ignorant, because he is a 'scientist' and 'knows' very well his own tiny portion of the universe."³⁷

Because the "learned ignorant" is mainly concerned with his or her tiny portion of the world, disconnected from other bodies of knowledge, he or she is never able to interrelate the flux of information so as to gain a critical reading of the world. A critical reading of the world implies, according to Freire, "a dynamic comprehension between the least coherent sensibility of the world and a more coherent understanding of the

world."³⁷ This means, for example, that medical specialists in the United States, who have contributed to a great technological advancement in medicine, should have the ability to understand and appreciate why over 30 million Americans do not have access to this medical technology and why we still have the highest infant mortality rate of the developed nations. (The United States in 1989 ranked twenty-fourth in child mortality rate as compared to other nations.)³⁸

The inability to make linkages between bodies of knowledge and the social and political realities that generate them is predominant even among those who recognize that a coherent comprehension of the world cannot be achieved through fragmentation of knowledge. For example, at a recent professional meeting, a concerned environmental scientist decried the absence of critical perspectives in his field of study. He eloquently called for an interdisciplinary approach to world environmental problems, particularly within the developing countries. His present research is linked with environmental concerns in Mexico. With a certain amount of pride he emphasized that his research breakthrough could be used as a commodity in Mexico, since that country is becoming more and more rigorous with respect to environmental laws. He failed, however, to ask a fundamental question: How can the United States package environmental technology for Mexico while it is establishing factories there that pollute the country because they can operate with less government regulation than at home? This environmentalist was baffled that such a question should even be raised.

Although specialization may lead to a high level of literacy acquisition in a particular subfield of knowledge, it often produces a disarticulation of this same knowledge by dislodging it from a critical and coherent comprehension of the world that informs and sustains it. This disarticulation of knowledge anesthetizes consciousness, without which one can never develop clarity of reality. As suggested by Frei Betto, clarity of reality requires that a person transcend "the perception of life as a pure biological process to arrive at a perception of life as a pure biological and collective process."³⁹ Betto viewed his concept as "a clothesline of information." In other words, "on the clothesline we may have a flux of information and yet remain unable to link one piece of information with another. A politicized person is one who can sort out the different and often fragmented pieces contained in the flux."⁴⁰ The apprehension and clarity of reality requires a high level of political clarity, which can be achieved by sifting through the flux of information and relating each piece to another one so as to gain a global comprehension of the facts and their *raison d'être*.

We can now see the reasons why David Spritzler's teachers and administrators, who had attained a higher level of literacy through a bank-

ing model of transference of knowledge, could not make connections between the pieces of this knowledge to separate the mythical dimension of the Pledge of Allegiance from factual reality. Part of the reason lies in the fact that the teachers, who, like most specialists, have accepted the dominant ideology, are technicians who, by virtue of the specialized training they receive in an assembly line of ideas and aided by the mystification of this transferred knowledge, seldom reach the critical capacity of analysis to develop a coherent comprehension of the world. In reality, there is little difference between the pedagogy for schoolchildren described in Tom Paxton's song and the prevalent pedagogy in universities as described by Freire:

Today at the university we learned that objectivity in science requires neutrality on the part of the scientist; we learned today that knowledge is pure, universal, and unconditional and that the university is the site of this knowledge. We learned today, although only tacitly, that the world is divided between those who know and those who don't (that is, those who do manual work) and the university is the home of the former. We learned today that the university is a temple of pure knowledge and that it has to soar above earthly preoccupations, such as mankind's liberation.

We learned today that reality is a given, that it is our scientific impartiality that allows us to describe it somewhat as it is. Since we have described it as it is, we don't have to investigate the principal reasons that would explain it as it is. But if we should try to denounce the real world as it is by proclaiming a new way of living, we learned at the university today that we would no longer be scientists, but ideologues.

We learned today that economic development is a purely technical problem, that the underdeveloped peoples are incapable (sometimes because of their mixed blood, their nature, or climatic reasons).

We were informed that blacks learn less than whites because they are genetically inferior.⁴¹

In short, this type of educational training makes it possible for us to rally behind our political leaders, who ritualistically call for the protection of human rights all over the world, without our recognizing these same leaders' complicity in the denial of rights of human beings who live under dictatorships that we support either overtly or covertly. The selective selection of our strong support for human rights becomes glaringly clear in the case of Haitians. In fact, the *Boston Globe*, confident of readers' inability to link historical events, published a front-page article on the U.S. Supreme Court decision that allowed the administration to repatriate thousands of Haitian refugees. (On page 2 of the same issue, the *Boston Globe* also ran a story about groups organized in Miami to search for and assist Cuban boat people to reach their final destination in Florida.)⁴²

Although U.S. foreign policy is so glaringly contradictory, most Americans are unable or unwilling to see it. For example, on the one hand, the United States has had a macho-man policy of nonnegotiation with Cuba, Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, and Libya. On the other hand, the United States has engaged in endless negotiations with the Haitian military. According to Derrick Z. Jackson of the *Boston Globe*, the vacillating policy toward Haiti was evident when a U.S. naval vessel carrying military engineers was not able to dock at Port-au-Prince. However, the same naval force was fully equipped and ready to intercept and send back any Haitian refugees it encountered in the open sea. We now have learned from Representative Robert Torricelli, a Democrat from New Jersey who is a member of the House Intelligence and Foreign Affairs Committee, that from the mid 1980s until the overthrow of the democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Central Intelligence Agency made payments to Aristide's top military opponents. Jackson reported that Torricelli defended the payments as if they were scholarships sponsored by the Cub Scouts: "The U.S. government develops relationships with ambitious and bright young men at the beginning of their careers and often follows them through their public service ... [it] should not surprise anyone that these include people in sensitive positions in current situations in Haiti."⁴³

"Sensitive positions" in the official discourse is a euphemism for death squads directed by Port-au-Prince Chief of Police Michel François and Raoul Cédras who were responsible for over three thousand deaths during a period of two years since the coup. The callous U.S. insensitivity toward human misery and overlooking of massacres when convenient for its policies led Jackson to conclude that it "should not surprise anyone why the United States developed relationships with ambitious and bright young men whose idea of 'public service' was the overthrow of democracy. The United States was never comfortable with Aristide. Haiti's first democratically elected leader."⁴⁴

Whereas the United States is most comfortable with brutal totalitarian leaders like the Duvaliers and the El Salvador military leaders, who have records of barbarous massacres, it is often very uncomfortable with any democratic movement whose major purpose is the institutionalization of a democratic vision that emphasizes agrarian reform, education, less military spending, and more spending on social programs such as health care and social security. Contrary to the U.S. proselytizing about democracy in the Third World, a closer analysis of its foreign policy reveals a sad truth: the U.S. fatal attraction to undemocratic and cruel military dictatorships.

It is this lack of connectedness that helped Bush to prevail in erasing the public's historical memory file of foreign policy in order to garner

support for his fabricated high-tech war in the Gulf. In what follows, I use the Gulf War as an example of how questions of literacy and ideology can be used to separate events from their historical contexts. This fragmentation serves to create a self-serving history that feeds the recontextualization of a distorted and often false reality, leading (sometimes) to a specialization of barbarism *ipso facto*. In other words, the high-tech management of the Gulf War celebrated technical wizardry while it dehumanized the tens of thousands of people who were victims of specialized technical prowess.

The Illiteracy of Literacy of the Gulf War

It is not a coincidence that during the Gulf War we were saturated with information around the clock in the comfort of our homes, and yet we remained poorly informed. It is also not a coincidence that George Bush categorically and arrogantly stated there would be "no linkage" in any possible diplomatic settlements in the Gulf crisis. Bush's insistence on "no linkage" served to eclipse historicity so as to further add to a total social amnesia. How else could we explain that a highly developed society that prides itself on its freedom of information and high democratic values could ignore the clarity of the obvious? I say the "clarity of the obvious" because it is a well-known fact that the Reagan-Bush decade was characterized by a total disdain for the United Nations. The Reagan-Bush administration stopped paying the U.S. membership contribution to the United Nations and threatened to withdraw from the world body because the rest of the world was not, in their view, subservient enough to U.S. interests. And yet, during the Gulf crisis, the same George Bush found it convenient to hail the United Nations as the theater where "civilized" nations uphold international laws and high principles.

If it had not been for the denial of linkage and the social amnesia, we could have easily referred to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's role as the ambassador to the United Nations. In his memoir, *A Dangerous Place*, Moynihan discussed the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia and shed light on his role as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations: "The U.S. government wanted the United Nations to be rendered ineffective in any measures that it undertook. I was given this responsibility and I filled it with no inconsiderable success."⁴⁵ Moynihan later recounted his success when he stated that "within two months, reports indicated that Indonesia had killed about 60,000 people. That is roughly the proportion of the population that the Nazis had killed in Eastern Europe through World War II."⁴⁶ By not linking these historical events, the Bush administration was able to claim the moral high ground in the defense of international laws and the sanctity of national borders during the Gulf crisis.

The U.S. defense of high principles and international laws that led to the Gulf War could only have moral currency if we were to obliterate our memory of recent history. Before proceeding, let me make it clear that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was brutal, cruel, and unforgivable. The violation of international laws and borders by other nations, including the United States, is no small matter. According to Noam Chomsky, the irony of the U.S. opposition to such violation and defense of high principles can be seen in reviewing recent U.S. actions:

- The U.S. invasion of Grenada.
- The U.S. invasion of Panama, where the United States installed a puppet regime of its choice with U.S. military advisors running it at every level.
- The U.S. mining of the Nicaraguan harbor. The World Court found the United States guilty, and the U.S. reaction was to arrogantly dismiss the World Court.
- The Turkish invasion and virtual annexation of northern Cyprus that killed several hundred people and drove out thousands more. The United States was in favor of the action.
- The Moroccan invasion of the western Sahara, also supported by the United States.
- The Israeli invasion of Lebanon, where the United States vetoed a whole series of resolutions in the Security Council, which was trying to terminate the aggression. In human terms, at least 20,000 were killed, mostly civilians.
- The Indonesian invasion of East Timor in which 60,000 people were massacred. The Carter administration provided 90 percent of the armaments to the invaders.⁴⁷

Against this landscape of violation of international laws and aggression perpetrated by the United States or by other countries with U.S. support, how can we explain the ease with which Bush convinced a supposedly highly literate and civilized citizenry that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was an isolated case of aggression against a weaker nation and had nothing to do with the historical record? The inability to link and treat the "clothesline" of the Gulf War had to do with ideological obstacles that too often obfuscate political clarity. We need to develop a more critical literacy along Freirian lines where, "as knowing subjects (sometimes of existing knowledge, sometimes of objects to be produced), our relation to knowable objects cannot be reduced to the objects themselves. We need to reach a level of comprehension of the complex whole of relations among objects."⁴⁸ In his book *The Social Mind*, Jim Gee elegantly demonstrated that "to explicate the 'internal working'

of the 'machine,' and not the uses to which the machine is put in the world of value conflicts and political action," is to treat each piece of the "clothesline" separately so as to never allow us to reach a level of comprehension of the complex whole of relations among objects.⁴⁹ This level of literacy in a given discourse while remaining semiliterate or illiterate in a whole range of other discourses that constitute the ideological world in which we travel as thinking beings.

In an era in which we are more and more controlled by ever-increasing technological wizardry—ephemeral sound bites, metaphorical manipulations of language, and prepackaged ideas void of substance—it becomes that much more urgent to adhere to Gee's proposal that we acquire literacies rather than literacy. Given our tendency as humans to construct "satisfying and often self-deceptive 'stories,' stories that often advantage themselves and their groups," the development of a critical comprehension between the meaning of words and a more coherent understanding of the meaning of the world is a prerequisite to achieving clarity of reality. As Freire suggested, it is only "through political practice [that] the less coherent sensibility of the world begins to be surpassed and more rigorous intellectual pursuits give rise to a more coherent comprehension of the world."⁵⁰ Thus, in order to go beyond a mere word-level reading of reality, we must develop a critical comprehension of psychological entities such as "memories, beliefs, values, meanings, and so forth . . . which are actually out in the social world of action and interaction."⁵¹ We must first read the world—the cultural, social, and political practices that constitute it—before we can make sense of the word-level description of reality.

The reading of the world must precede the reading of the word. That is to say, to access the true and total meaning of an entity, we must resort to the cultural practices that mediate our access to the world's semantic field and its interaction with the world's semantic features. Since meaning is, at best, very leaky, we have to depend on the cultural models that contain the necessary cultural features responsible for "our stories" and "often self-deceptive stories."⁵² Let's look at the Gulf War again to see how the role of cultural practices not only shapes but also determines metaphorical manipulations of language, which are facilitated by the electronically controlled images and messages through "the strategic use of doublespeak to disguise from television viewers the extent of the real terror and carnage of the military campaign against Iraq."⁵³ According to William Lutz, doublespeak "is a language that avoids or shifts responsibility, language that is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is a language that conceals or prevents thought; rather than extending thought, doublespeak limits it."⁵⁴

The Gulf War coverage represented the production of double-speak par excellence. The media's and the government's successful use of euphemisms to misinform and deceive can be seen in the transformation of the horrible carnage of the battlefield into a "theater of operation," where the U.S. citizenry became willfully mesmerized by the near-precision zapping of "smart bombs" during the aseptic "surgical strikes." The "theater of operation" positioned viewers to see "human beings become insentient things while weapons become the living actors of war. 'Smart' weapons that have eyes and computer 'brains' make decisions when and where to drop seven and a half tons of bombs, taking away the moral responsibility of the combatants themselves."⁵⁵

The effective outcome of the double-speak during the Gulf War not only gave primacy to sophisticated weaponry with its newly acquired human attributes; the double-speak also functioned as a means to dehumanize human beings by removing them from center stage. The preoccupation of reporters and so-called experts was to point out zealously the "accuracy" of the "smart bombs" while showing over and over again Star Wars-like images of "surgical strikes." What these reporters did not show was that of the roughly 82,000 tons of bombs dropped, 92.6 percent were not "precision guided ordinances." Even the "smart bombs," which made up 7.4 percent of the total that were dropped during the war, had a widely varied reliability rate of between 20 percent and 90 percent.⁵⁶ However, it would be considered unpatriotic and un-American to question the Pentagon-controlled deceit of the U.S. public. In fact, after the Gulf War had all but faded in our national consciousness, the Pentagon ordered Theodore Postal, an MIT professor and leading critic of the Patriot missile, "to cease all public discussion of his critique or face disciplinary action."⁵⁷ The Pentagon's gag order was summarized by Postal himself: "The Army and Raytheon are now using DIS [Defense Investigation Service] which appears to be more than an unwitting partner to suppress my speech on the subject of Patriot performance in the Gulf."⁵⁸ So much for independent thought, critical thinking, and freedom of speech.

What the U.S. citizenry was less concerned with was the terror of war and the horrible carnage caused by the 82,000 tons of "delivered packages" that ended up as de facto carpet bombings. But then, the U.S. television viewers and newspaper readers had already been positioned in a "theater of operation" context as passive observers seduced and fascinated by the wizardry of exciting precision-guided missiles. The "theater ... overfloweth with computer graphics, night-vision lenses, cruise missiles and, best ever, the replay of the impact of laser guided bombs."⁵⁹ Missing from the "theater" center stage were the horrified human faces of tens of thousands of Iraqis, including women and children, who were

decimated by the unparalleled bombing "sorties." The U.S. public's feelings were steered away from the reality of over 100,000 Iraqi casualties to the degree that the electronic management of the Gulf War vulgarly reduced human suffering and casualties to mere "collateral damage."

In "Media Knowledge, Warrior Citizenry, and the Postmodern Literacies," Peter McLaren and Rhonda Hammer accurately characterized the Gulf War as "a gaudy sideshow of flags, emblems, and military hardware—a counterfeit democracy produced through media knowledge able to effectively harness the affective currency of popular culture such that the average American's investment in being 'American' reached an unparalleled high which has not been approximated since the years surrounding the post World War II McCarthy hearings."⁶⁰ This unparalleled patriotism was cemented by the signifier yellow ribbon that functioned effectively to suffocate any truly democratic dialogue. The yellow ribbon ideologically structured the Gulf War debate so as to brook no dissent or dialogue. Criticizing the Bush administration's policies was viewed as not supporting the troops. In fact, the yellow ribbon did more to ideologically cage the American mind than all the speeches given by politicians. One could easily argue that the yellow ribbon patriotically tied American minds by making them sufficiently complacent so that they would comply with the manufacture of consent for a fabricated war.

The complexity of networks of relations in our present telecratic society is making our sensibilities of the world increasingly less coherent—leading to a real crisis of democracy, to the extent that the present "propaganda approach to media coverage suggests a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic interests. This should be observable in dichotomized choices of story and in the volume and quality of coverage."⁶¹ This political dichotomization became flagrantly obvious when, on the one hand, George Bush, in the style of John Wayne, rallied "civilized" nations to uphold high moral principles against aggression when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. On the other hand, Bush sheepishly watched and allowed thousands of Kurds, whom he had incited to revolt, to be exterminated by the same forces of aggression. So much for high moral principles. What is at stake here is our ability as democratic citizens and thinking beings to see through the obvious contradictions and discern myth from reality. However, our level of critical consciousness is being rapidly eroded to the degree that "today's cultural and historical events bombard our sensibilities with such exponential speed and frequency, and through a variety of media forms, that our critical comprehension skills have fallen into rapid deterioration."⁶²

The deterioration of Americans' critical comprehension of the world became self-evident when they readily rallied behind the "Pentagon's vacuous military briefings, lists of aircraft types, missions, and losses (that became) the sterilized equivalent of body counts recited in Saigon. Far more important elements—human and political—[were] lost."⁶¹ It is indeed a sad statement about the inability of the U.S. citizenry to make the necessary historical linkages so as to develop a rigorous comprehension of the world when, with the exception of a small minority, only Vice President Dan Quayle was able to read the Gulf War correctly by describing it as "a stirring victory for the forces of aggression."⁶⁴ President Bush became entrapped in a similar Freudian slip during an interview with Boston's Channel 5 TV news anchor, Natalie Jacobson. Referring to the Gulf War, Bush said, "We did fulfill our aggression," instead of the no doubt intended, "We did fulfill our mission."⁶⁵

The seemingly misspoken words by both Bush and Quayle denude the pedagogy of big lies to the extent that their statements more accurately capture the essence of Ortega y Gasset's proposition that civilization, if "abandoned to its own devices" and put at the mercy of specialists, would bring about the rebirth of primitivism and barbarism.⁶⁶ In many instances, the attainment of a high level of technical sophistication has been used in the most barbaric ways, as evidenced in the gassing of the Jews and the bombing of Hiroshima. It is certainly not an enlightened civilization that prides itself in reducing Iraq to a preindustrial age—killing tens of thousands of innocent victims, including women and children, while leaving Saddam Hussein, our chief reason for war, in power and with unreduced capacity to perpetuate genocide against his own people. Ask the Africans who endured the chains of slavery, the Indians who were victims of a quasi-genocide, the Jews who perished in the Holocaust, or the Japanese who experienced firsthand the destructive power of science to measure our so-called advanced Western civilization. If they apply the same rigorous, objective standards of science, intellectual honesty, and academic truth in their inquiry, their response would have to be that Western civilization is unequivocally primitive and barbaric. Ortega y Gasset could not have been more insightful on this issue when he wrote:

It may be regrettable that human nature tends on occasion to this form of violence, but it is undeniable that it implies the great tribute to reason and justice. For this form of violence is none other than reason exasperated. Force was, in fact, the "ultima ratio." Rather stupidly it has been the custom to take ironically this expression, to methods of reason. Civilization is nothing else than the attempt to reduce force to being the "ultima ratio." We are now beginning to realize this with startling clearness, because "direct action" consists in inventing the order and proclaiming violence as "prima ra-

to," or strictly as "ultima ratio." It is the norm which proposes the annulment of all norms, which suppresses all intermediate process between our purpose and its execution. It is the Magna Carta of barbarism.⁶⁷

Ortega y Gasset's profound thoughts enable us to deconstruct Bush's policy of violence parading under the veil of reason and justice. In fact, Bush successfully made force not only the "ultima ratio" but also the "unica ratio." His total disregard for a multitude of proposals to negotiate a settlement in the Gulf characterized the "norm which proposes the annulment of all norms, which suppresses all intermediate process between our purpose and its execution."⁶⁸ Flip-flopping from a defensive stance to the protection of our oil and the invocation of international laws and the sanctity of national borders, Bush simply refused to negotiate. When Saddam Hussein proposed to withdraw from Kuwait with the condition that an international conference be held to discuss the Middle East situation, Bush flatly refused the offer, which, incidentally, was very much in line with the UN General Assembly vote that had called for an international peace conference in the Middle East. It was just such a conference that Bush and his administration aggressively promoted after the execution of the violence and terror that reduced Iraq to a preindustrial age. Had Bush accepted Saddam's condition for an international conference, he would have avoided the carnage that cost over a hundred thousand lives and an ecological disaster of enormous proportions. Bush's insistence on force led his administration to a constant double standard, which the uncritical citizenry, including the media and the intelligentsia, failed to see and question. Bush, although he often referred to the UN resolution of November 29, 1990, which gave "the U.S. a green light to use military means to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait," totally rejected a "UN General Assembly resolution, passed a week later by a vote of 142 to 2, which called for an international peace conference on the Middle East."⁶⁹ Bush's convenient selective selection of the United Nations as a forum for international dispute resolution and justice points to a systematic gunboat diplomacy that views force as the "unica ratio" in our foreign policy. We do not have to dig too far in our historical memory files to understand that, over and over again, the United States resorts to force to promote its so-called national interest, which is, more appropriately, the interest of capital and the ruling elite. When we mined the Nicaraguan harbor and supported the Contras as our proxy army and were censured by the World Court, we arrogantly dismissed the much-hailed world body, the theater of justice, and the Mecca of international disputes and settlements. It is this same arrogance of power and force that justified and rationalized Desert Storm. And closer to home, it is this same arrogance of power and force that continues to justify and rationalize our war on drugs.

In order for us to better understand how our rationalization process works to transform force and violence into methods of reason, I will create two hypothetical scenarios. The first finds its parallel in the Gulf War, the second in the war on drugs. To begin the first scenario, let's imagine that the African countries decided to call the UN General Assembly to session to ask for permission to send a defensive armed force led by Ethiopia to the Canadian and Mexican borders with the United States to protect and guarantee the flow of grain in order to prevent the death of the more than 20 million people who die of hunger in Africa every year. These African countries would argue that the United States, being a major producer of food, should stop burning grain and paying farmers not to produce so that prices remain stable and crops be profitable. The Africans would also passionately point out that the burning of grain and the limitation on production constitute a crime against humanity, and that the 20 million Africans who are at risk of dying of hunger should be protected by international laws that view allowing hunger to be a human rights violation. If this hypothetical scenario were to occur in reality and a half-million African troops were dispatched to the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico, most of us would find the move so ridiculous as to be laughable.

Well, Bush's initial rationale to send troops to Saudi Arabia was to protect the flow of oil that otherwise would disrupt the economies of the developed and industrialized nations. Even though Bush later recanted his earlier position by claiming that the fight was not about oil but about naked aggression, all evidence points to oil as the reason for the Gulf War. If Bush were defending the world order from naked aggression, he would first have to bomb Washington, D.C., since we had recently been engaged in a number of naked aggressions, mainly the invasion of Panama, the war against Nicaragua via a proxy army, the bombing of Libya, the invasion of Grenada—to mention only a few of the most recent violations of the same international laws that Bush so passionately wanted to protect during the Gulf War. In fact, the oil rationale made infinitely more sense, given the architecture of our foreign policy throughout history. The question that we should now ask of ourselves is, Would it be ridiculous for the African nations to send an army to protect the flow of grain that would save the lives of millions of people who may die of hunger, but not ridiculous for the United States to send a half-million troops to the Gulf to protect the flow of oil so industrialized nations would avoid economic chaos?

Let's turn to the second scenario, which finds its parallel rationale in the war on drugs. Let's imagine that the developing countries, composed mainly of Latin American nations but including some African nations as well, were to call for a regional summit where a decision was made to

send troops to the United States to put a halt to the steady supply of armaments to support what they have characterized as the death industry in their countries. By "death industry" these nations are referring to the money spent arming their military forces. Many developing countries, because of the never-ending military rule, often supported by the Western powers, spend between 25 and 50 percent of their GNP on armaments. This militarization of their societies is not only destroying their economies but also leading to the killing of great numbers of people every year. Thus these developing countries would send their troops to strategically selected locations in the United States where research and production of destructive armaments are contributing to economic chaos in their own countries and the killing of millions worldwide. Their troops would be trained to bomb and destroy all research laboratories and armament factories—such as Raytheon, General Dynamics, Boeing—in the hope of stopping the flow of arms to their countries. All of this would have international approval, since this measure would be in the national interests of these countries. If this hypothetical scenario were to be enacted, we could readily imagine the panic of all of those highly trained specialists who would be jobless once their factories and research laboratories had been destroyed. We could imagine as well the chaos that would ensue when these same specialists were left without a livelihood and abandoned to luck or perhaps to some form of social welfare. A turn to the latter for support would entail a reliance on a social structure that they no doubt had fought most of their lives to destroy, or at least to curtail to a bare minimum.

I see little difference in what we are doing to fight the drug war. The United States has militarized many Latin American countries, including Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala, to fight and destroy coca fields and drug laboratories, which constitute the only means of economic survival for millions of natives in these countries. By randomly destroying these people's only means of economic support in already-poor countries with feeble economies, we are sentencing these native people to hunger and possibly death. However, we seldom think about the consequences and implications of the arrogance of power in the design of our drug war policy. That is to say, if we switch contexts and focus on our hypothetical scenario, we can clearly see through the infantile dimension and the lack of logic behind the imagined destruction of workplaces devoted to the production of armaments. I am arguing that it is the same infantile, illogical policy that we support when we ratify Bush's war on drugs. The only effective way to fight the war on drugs is to decrease demand. Even law enforcement officials and officials of these Latin countries have admitted that they are losing the drug war. In fact, by focusing only on the destruction of drug production while ignoring

the social causes that breed a high demand for drugs, we are contradicting even our principle of capitalism. In other words, the best way to control production is to control demand. If we try to destroy production while leaving demand unchecked, producers will find markets elsewhere—as is the case with drugs produced in Latin America that are reaching markets in Europe and safe ports elsewhere.

These contradictions and instances of the unreason of reason are rarely understood and just as rarely questioned. If, by coincidence, we come to understand the blatant contradictions and question them, the ideological machine will force us immediately into line. That is what happened to a reporter in San Antonio, Texas, who incessantly questioned Bush about the obvious failure of his drug war. He was immediately fired for being insistent and impolite to the president. Here politeness functioned as yet another mechanism to eliminate the possibility of publicizing the truth. Since our society functions more and more on a pedagogy of lies, it depends on ideological institutions, such as schools and the media, to reproduce cultural values that work to distort and falsify realities so as to benefit the interest of the power elite. If schools were really involved in the development of critical thinking to arm students against the orchestrated distortion and falsification of reality, they would have to teach the truth and teach how to question. That includes, obviously, the deconstruction of the Pledge of Allegiance to bare its hypocrisy and the rewriting of history books to keep alive unpleasant memories: Then slavery, the Holocaust, genocide, and Hiroshima could not be repeated under the guise and protection of Western civilization.

I believe that we can now return, with greater understanding, to our original question: Why is it that David Spritzer, a twelve-year-old boy, could readily see through the hypocrisy in the Pledge of Allegiance, while many of his teachers and administrators could not? According to Chomsky, when he was discussing other educational situations, these teachers and administrators, having been indoctrinated by schools, are unable to understand elementary thoughts that any ten-year-old can understand.⁷⁰ The indoctrination process imposes a willful blindness to facts and contradictions. However, the more educated and specialized individuals become, the more interest they have vested in the system that provides them with special privileges. For this reason, we often see people whose consciousness has not been totally atrophied, yet they fail to read reality critically and they side with hypocrisy. In most cases, these individuals begin to believe the lies, and in their roles as functionaries of the state, they propagate the lies. That is why, for example, according to Naam Chomsky, the majority of the educated population supported the war in Vietnam while it was being waged, whereas in 1982, according to a Gallup poll, over 70 percent of the general population

said that the Vietnam War was "fundamentally wrong and immoral, not a mistake."⁷¹ This is another example that supports the contention that more education does not necessarily entail a greater ability to read reality.

As I have tried to demonstrate, both the competency-based skills-banking approach to literacy and the highest level literacy acquisition via specialization fail to provide readers with the necessary intellectual tools to denude reality that is often veiled through the ideological manipulation of language. It is safe to assume, given the way the educated class more often than not supports "theological truths" (or unquoted truths), that the less educated one is, in the reproductive dominant model, the greater the chances that one can read the world critically. Chomsky accurately captured this form of illiteracy of literacy when he stated:

The less educated ... tend to be more sophisticated and perceptive about these matters, the reason being that education is a form of indoctrination and the less educated are less indoctrinated. Furthermore, the educated tend to be privileged and they tend to have a stake in the doctrinal system, so they naturally tend to internalize and believe it. As a result, not uncommonly and not only in the United States, you find a good deal more sophistication among people who learn about the world from their experience rather than those who learn about the world from a doctrinal framework that they are exposed to and that they are expected as part of professional obligation to propagate.⁷²

It is indeed ironic that in the United States, a country that prides itself on being the first and most advanced within the so-called First World, over 60 million people are illiterate or functionally illiterate. If Jonathan Kozol was correct, the 60 million illiterates and functional illiterates whom he documents in his book *Illiterate America* do not constitute a minority class of illiterates.⁷³ To those 60 million we should add the sizable groups who learn how to read but who are, by and large, incapable of developing independent and critical thought. In 1985, the United States was in 49th place among the 128 countries of the United Nations in terms of literacy rate. This ranking applies basically to the reading of the word and not the world. Our ranking, if applied to the reading of the world, would indeed be much lower. Although the literacy statistics given are nine years old, the literacy problem has gotten worse. According to a comprehensive literacy study done by the U.S. government, "an estimated 90 million adults ... cannot write a brief letter explaining an error on a credit card bill, for figure out a Saturday departure on a bus schedule."⁷⁴

Against this high illiteracy landscape, we can begin to wonder why a country that considers itself a model of democracy can tolerate an edu-

national system that contributes to such a high level of illiteracy and failure. I am increasingly convinced that the U.S. educational system is not a failure. The failure that it generates represents its ultimate victory to the extent that large groups of people, including the so-called minorities, were never intended to be educated. They were never intended to be part of the dominant political and economic spheres. How else can we explain why we sit idly by and tolerate dropout rates of minorities that exceed 60 percent in many urban cities, with New York City at 70 percent? I believe that, instead of the democratic education we claim to have, we really have in place a sophisticated colonial model of education designed primarily to train state functionaries and commissars while denying access to millions, which further exacerbates the equity gap already victimizing a great number of so-called minority students. Moreover, the education provided to those with class rights and privileges is devoid of the intellectual dimension of teaching, since the major objective of a colonial education is to further de-skill teachers and students so as to reduce them to mere technical agents who are destined to walk unreflectively through a labyrinth of procedures. What we have in the United States is not a system to encourage independent thought and critical thinking. Our colonial literacy model is designed to domesticate in order to enable the "manufacture of consent." The Trilateral Commission members could not have been more accurate when they referred to schools as "institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young." I see no real difference between the more or less liberal Trilateral Commission position on schooling and Adolf Hitler's fascist call against independent thought and critical thinking. As Hitler noted, "What good fortune for those in power that people do not think."