There is growing evidence in American life that citizenship is being further emptied of any critical social and political content. Of course, citizenship itself is a problematic and contested concept; even in its best moments historically, when it was strongly aligned with concerns for human rights, equality, justice, and freedom as social provisions, it never completely escaped from the exclusionary legacies of class, gender, and racial inequality. Yet, in spite of such drawbacks, social citizenship contained, even within the watered-down version characteristic of liberal democracy, the possibility for both reflecting critically on its own limitations and implementing the promises of radical democracy. Accentuating the importance of public issues, social citizenship provided a referent, however limited, for individuals to think of themselves as active citizens and not merely as taxpayers and homeowners. Moreover, as the site of many diverse struggles, citizenship often brought to the fore models of political agency in which people were encour-

1. One excellent source analyzing the various debates over citizenship can be found in Gershon Shafir, ed., The Citizenship Debates: A Reader (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

aged to address public issues that would benefit the larger collective good. Substantive citizenship also recognized that, for democracy to work, individuals must feel a connection with each other that transcends the selfishness, competitiveness, and brutal self-interests unleashed by an ever-expanding market economy. In this context, the state was forced at times to offer a modicum of social services and forums designed to meet basic social needs. State-supported social provisions paralleled modest efforts to affirm public goods such as schools and to provide public spaces in which diverse individuals had the opportunity to debate, deliberate, and acquire the know-how to be critical and effective citizens. This is not meant to suggest that before neoliberalism's current onslaught on all things public, liberal, democratic culture encouraged widespread critical thinking and inclusive debate. On the contrary, liberal democracy offered little more than the swindle of formalistic, ritualized democracy, but at least it contained a referent for addressing the deep gap between the promise of a radical democracy and the existing reality. With the rise of neoliberalism, referents for imagining even a weak democracy, or, for that matter, understanding the tensions between capitalism and democracy, which animated political discourse for the first half of the twentieth century, appear to be overwhelmed by market discourses, identities, and practices. Democracy has now been reduced to a metaphor for the alleged free market. It is not that a genuine democratic public space once existed in some ideal form and has now been corrupted by the values of the market, but that these democratic public spheres, even in limited forms, seem no longer to be animating concepts for making visible the contradiction and tension between what Jacques Derrida refers to as the reality of existing democracy and "the promise of a democracy to come."  

With the advent of neoliberalism, corporate culture has made efforts to privatize all things social, stripping citizenship of its emancipatory possibilities. As a result, the state has been hollowed out as its police functions increasingly overpower and mediate its diminishing social functions. Consequently, the government at all levels is largely abandoning its support for child protection, health care for the poor, and basic social services for the aged. The government is now discounted as a means of addressing basic public needs.
economic, educational, environmental, and social problems. Market-based initiatives are touted as the only avenue for resolving issues such as unemployment, education, housing, and poverty. Public goods are now disparaged in the name of privatization, and those public forums in which association and debate thrive are being replaced by what Paul Gilroy calls an "info-tainment telesector" industry driven by dictates of the marketplace.4

Consumerism increasingly drives the meaning of citizenship as the principles of self-preservation and self-interest sabotage political agency, if not public life itself. As the public sector is remade in the image of the market, commercial values replace social values, and the spectacle of politics gives way to the politics of the spectacle. For example, in the summer of 2000, the prime time entertainment hit Survivor drew an audience of over 50 million viewers for its final show, twice the number of viewers who tuned in on the best night to watch either the Republican or Democratic National Conventions. New "reality"-based TV spectacles, with their aggressive celebration of individualism, competitiveness, and social Darwinism, do more than mimic the market and put into place notions of agency that assist the transformation of the political citizen into a consumer. They also signify the death of those public forums where private troubles can be translated into public concerns by gradually displacing those noncommodified spaces that offer resources and possibilities for resisting the dissolution of civic culture, democratic politics, and social citizenship itself. This is not to suggest that neoliberalism’s celebration of commercial values and hyperindividualism simply turns everybody into a customer or merely expresses itself in the rise of a sensation-seeking public searching for relief from its alienation and boredom in mass-produced spectacles. But it does create, on the whole, a

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depoliticized citizenry by drastically limiting not only the access to but also the capacity for imagining those public spheres and democratic cultures that might offer the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to engage human suffering, define responsible public action as an enabling quality, and provide public forums, spaces, and events “where the occupants of different residential areas [can] meet face-to-face, engage in casual encounters, accost and challenge one another, talk, quarrel, argue or agree, lifting their private problems to the level of public issues and make public issues into matters of private concerns.”

In what follows, I examine the social and political costs that neoliberal and neoconservative policies are exacting on a generation of youth who increasingly are being framed as a generation of suspects. In addressing the interface between youth and public policy, especially the rapid growth of zero-tolerance policies within public schools, I consider some broader questions about how the growing popular perception of youth as a threat to public life is connected to the collapse of public discourse, the increasing militarization of public space, and the rise of a state apparatus bent on substituting policing functions for social services. I then examine the implications these shifts in public discourse have for rethinking the relationship between pedagogy, political agency, and the imperatives of an energized, vibrant culture and radical democracy.

Privatizing and Commodifying Youth

In the summer of 2000, the New York Times Sunday Magazine ran two major stories on youth within a three-week period between the latter part of July and the beginning of August. The stories are important, because they signify not only how youth fare in the politics of representation but also what identifications are made available for them to locate themselves in public discourse. The first article to appear, “The Backlash against Children,” by Lisa Belkin, is a feature story represented on the magazine’s cover by a visually disturbing, albeit familiar, close-up of a young boy’s face. The boy’s mouth is wide open in a distorted manner, and he appears to be in the throes of a tantrum. The image goes right to that subliminal place that conjures up the ambiguities adults feel in the presence of screaming children, especially when they appear in public places, such as R-rated movies or upscale res-

taurants, where their presence is seen as an intrusion on adult life. The other full-page image that follows the opening text is even more grotesque, portraying a young boy dressed in a jacket and tie with chocolate cake smeared all over his face. His hands, covered with the gooey confection, reach out toward the viewer, capturing the child’s mischievous attempt to grab some hapless adult by the lapels and add a bit of culinary dash to his or her wardrobe. The images match the text.

According to Belkin, a new movement is on the rise in American culture, one founded by individuals who don’t have children, militantly describing themselves as “child free,” and who view the presence of young people as an intrusion on adults’ private space and rights. Belkin charts this growing phenomenon with the precision of an obsessed accountant. She commences with an ethnographic account of thirty-one-year-old Jason Gill, a software computer consultant from California, who is looking for a new place to live because the couple who have moved in next door to him have a new baby, and he can hear “every wail and whimper.” Even more calamitous for the yuppie consultant, the fence he replaced to prevent another neighbor’s children from peering through at him is now used by the kids as a soccer goal, “often while Gill is trying to read a book or have a quiet glass of wine.”

But Belkin doesn’t limit her analysis to such anecdotal evidence; she also points to the emergence of national movements, such as No Kidding!, an organization that sets up social events only for those who remain childless. She reports that No Kidding! had only two chapters in 1995 but had forty-seven by the end of the century. In addition, she comments on the countless number of on-line “child-free” sites with names such as “Brats!” and a growing number of hotels that do not allow children under eighteen unless they are paying guests.

Of course, many parents and nonparents alike desire, at least for a short time, a reprieve from the often chaotic space of children, but Belkin takes such ambivalences to new heights. To be sure, her real ambition has very little to do with providing a space for adult catharsis. Rather, it is to give public voice to a political and financial agenda captured by Elinor Burkett’s *The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless*—an agenda designed to expose and rewrite governmental policies that relegate “the Childless to second-class citizens.”

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targets are: the federal tax code and its dependent deductions, dependent care credits, child tax credits among “dozens of bills designed to lighten the tax burden of parents,” and, “most absurd of all,” an executive order prohibiting discrimination against parents in all areas of federal employment. Her position is straightforward enough: to end “fancy” benefits (for example, on-site child care and health insurance for dependents) that privilege parents at the expense of the childless and to bar discrimination on the basis of family status. “Why not make it illegal to presuppose that a nonparent is free to work the night shift or presuppose that nonparents are more able to work on Christmas than parents?” Burkett demands. Indeed, in an era marked by zero-tolerance policies, why should the government provide any safety nets for the nation’s children at all? Why should whole communities be taxed to pay for the education and health of other people’s children? In the face of such irresponsible claims, it seems all too obvious to suggest society nurture children because they will be our future leaders, workers, and parents—they are the nation’s future, who will, in turn, support a generation of elderly (parents and “child free” alike) by paying taxes for Medicare, Social Security, and those other “fancy perks” provided to senior citizens. Ironically, Burkett’s arguments are as childish and thoughtless as the worst offenders in the group against whom she attempts to mobilize public sentiment.

Belkin modifies her somewhat sympathetic encounter with the childfree worldview by interviewing Sylvia Ann Hewlett, a Harvard-educated economist who is a nationally known spokesperson for protecting the rights of parents and the founder of the National Parenting Association. Hewlett argues that parents have become yet another victimized group who are portrayed by the media as the enemy. She translates her concerns into a call for parents to organize in order to wield more economic and political power. As important as Hewlett’s comments are, they occupy a minor commentary in the text that overwhelmingly privileges the voices of those individuals and groups who view children and young people as a burden, a personal irritant, rather than a social good.

The notion that children should be understood as a crucial social resource who present for any healthy society important ethical and political considerations about the quality of public life, the allocation of social provisions, and the role of the state as a guardian of public interests appears to be lost in Belkin’s article. Indeed, Belkin ignores the social gravity and impli-

cations of these issues and focuses on youth exclusively as a private consideration rather than as part of a broader public discourse about democracy and social justice. In addition, she participates in an assault on youth, buttressed by two decades of a Reagan-Bush–New Right neoconservativism and a more recent period of neoliberalism and hypercapitalism during which the language of democracy, solidarity, and the social are subordinated to the ethos of self-interest and self-preservation in the relentless pursuit of private satisfactions and pleasures. In this sense, the backlash against children that Belkin attempts to chronicle is symptomatic of an attack on public life itself, on the very legitimacy of those noncommercial values that are critical to defending a just and substantive democratic society.

I have spent some time on Belkin’s article because it highlights, though uncritically, how market pressures work in society to undermine social structures and public spaces, which are capable of raising questions about how particular groups such as youth are being abstracted from the language of justice, reciprocity, and compassion, and how the institutional and collective structures that once protected such groups are also being privatized, displaced, and defined almost entirely through the logic of the market. As the language of the public is emptied of its social considerations, private troubles and personal pathologies occupy center stage, and matters of resistance and struggle are displaced by the spectacle of a competitive war-against-all ethos that may offer fodder for prime time television but proves disastrous for children, the poor, the aged, and those groups consigned to the margins of society.

The second article to appear in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* is titled “Among the Mooks,” by R. J. Smith. According to the author, there is an emerging group of poor white males called “mooks,” whose cultural style is fashioned out of an interest in fusing the transgressive languages, sensibilities, and styles that cut across and connect the worlds of rap and heavy metal music, ultraviolent sports, such as professional wrestling, and the misogyny rampant in the subculture of pornography. For Smith, the kids who inhabit this cultural landscape are losers from broken families, working-class fatalities whose anger and unexamined bitterness translates into bad manners, antisocial music, and uncensored rage.

Smith appears uninterested in contextualizing the larger forces and conditions that give rise to this matrix of cultural phenomena—deindustri-

alization, economic restructuring, domestic militarization, poverty, joblessness. The youth portrayed in his account live in a historical, political, and economic vacuum. The ideological, cultural, and institutional forces that work on and through these teens simply disappear. Moreover, the teens represented by Smith have little recourse to adults who try to understand and help them navigate a complex and rapidly changing cultural landscape in which they must attempt to locate and define themselves. Along with the absence of adult protection and guidance, there is a lack of serious critique and social vision in dealing with the limits of youth culture. No questions are raised about the relationship between the popular forums teens inhabit and the ongoing commercialization and commodification of youth culture, or what the relationship might be between the subject positions young people invest in and those mainstream, commercially saturated dreamscapes of affect and representation that increasingly eat up social space and displace noncommodified public spheres. There is no understanding in Smith's analysis of how market-driven politics and established forms of power increasingly eliminate noncommodified social domains through which young people might learn an oppositional language for challenging those adult ideologies and institutional forces that both demonize them and limit their sense of dignity and capacity for political agency.

Of course, vulgarity, pathology, and violence are not limited to the spaces inhabited by the hypermasculine worlds of gangsta rap, porn, extreme sports, and professional wrestling. But Smith ignores all of this because he is much too interested in depicting today's teens, and popular culture in general, as the embodiment of moral decay and bad cultural values, an assessment that mimics the retrograde neoconservative ideological attacks on youth that have taken place since the 1980s. Smith suggests that poor white kids are nothing more than semi-Nazis with a lot of pent-up rage. There are no victims in his analysis, as social disorder is reduced to indi-

vidualized pathology, and any appeal to injustice is viewed as mere whining. He is too intent on reinforcing images of demonization and ignorance that resonate comfortably with right-wing moral panics about youth culture. He succeeds, in part, by focusing on the icons of this movement in terms that move between caricature and scapegoating. For instance, The Insane Posse is singled out for appearing on cable-access porn shows; the group Limp Biskit is accused of using their music to precipitate a gang rape at a late '90s Woodstock melee; and the performer Kid Rock is defined in racially coded terms as a "vanilla version of a blackploitation pimp," whose concerts inspire fans to commit vandalism and prompts teenage girls to "pull off their tops as the boys whoop." 13 It gets worse.

At one level, "mooks" are portrayed as poor, working-class white kids who have seized upon the most crude aspects of popular culture in order to provide an outlet for their rage. But for Smith, the distinctive form this culture takes with its appropriation of the transgressive symbolism of rap music, porn, and wrestling does not entirely explain its descent into pathology and bad taste. Rather, he charges that black youth culture is largely responsible for the self-destructive, angst-ridden journey that poor white male youth are making through the cultural landmines of hypermasculinity, unbridled violence, "ghetto" discourse, erotic fantasy, and drugs. He points an accusing finger at the black "underclass" and the recent explosion of hip-hop, which allegedly offers poor white kids both an imaginary alternative to their trailer-park boredom and a vast array of transgressive resources that they proceed to fashion through their own lived experiences and interests. Relying on all too common racist assumptions about black urban life, Smith argues that black youth culture offers white youth "a wide-screen movie of ghetto life, relishing the details, relating the intricacy of topics like drug dealing, brawling, pimping and black-on-black crime. Rap makes these things seem sexy, and makes life on the street seem as thrilling as a Playstation game. Pimping and gangbangganging equal rebellion, especially for white kids who aren't going to get pulled over for driving while black, let alone die in a hail of bullets (as Tupac and B.I.G. both did)." 14 Trading substantive analysis for right-wing clichés, he is indifferent to both the complexity of rap as well as the "wide array of complex cultural forms" that characterize black urban culture. 15 He alleges

that if poor white youth are in trouble, it is not because of regressive government policies, the growing militarization of urban space, the attack on basic social provisions for the poor and young, the disinvestment in such public goods as public schools, or the growing criminalization of social policy. On the contrary, the problem of white youth is rooted in the seductive lure of a black youth, marked by criminality, violent hypermasculinity, welfare fraud, drug abuse, and unchecked misogyny. Smith unapologetically relies on this analysis of black youth culture to portray poor white youth as dangerous and hip-hop culture as the source of that danger. Within this discourse, the representation of youth moves from caricature to that poisonous terrain Toni Morrison calls race talk: “The explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy. . . . The rhetorical [and representational] experience renders blacks as noncitizens, already discredited outlaws.”

Whatever his intentions, Smith’s analysis contributes to the growing assumption in the popular imagination that young people are, at best, a social nuisance and, at worse, a danger to social order. Clearly, his analysis of working-class and black youth bespeaks an ideological and political irresponsibility rooted in an overidentification with the recklessness of the young. As such, these representations contribute not only to the ongoing demonization of youth, especially youth of color, but further legitimate the emergence of a state that is radically moving from a politics of social investment to a politics of containment and militarization.

16. What writers such as Belkin and Smith leave out of their account of children in America is astonishing. For instance, Marian Wright Edelman reports that “13.5 million children live in poverty, 12 million have no health insurance, 5 million are home alone every day after school lets out. And more than 4,000 each year pay the ultimate price of adult irresponsibility: they are killed by guns. [Moreover,] millions more receive substandard education in crumbling schools without enough books, equipment or teachers. Or they are eligible for Head Start programs or child care assistance when parents work, but receive neither. Or they are abused or neglected, or are languishing in temporary foster homes, waiting for adoption.” See Marian Wright Edelman, “There’s No Trademark on Concern for Kids,” New York Times, 29 July 2000, A27.


18. It is important to stress here that in arguing that the state is being hollowed out, I am not suggesting that the state is homogeneous, nor am I suggesting that the state is losing its power. On the contrary, rather than losing its power, the state is simply abdicating power by refusing both to curb the excesses of capital and to guarantee those public goods, provisions, and safety nets that offer people a modicum of basic needs.
These articles reflect and perpetuate in dramatically different ways not only the ongoing demonization of young people but also the growing refusal within the larger society to understand the problems of youth (and especially youth of color) as symptomatic of the crisis of democratic politics itself. Under the rule of neoconservative and neoliberal ideology, American society increasingly finds it difficult to invest in those ethical and political values that support public spaces in an earnest, if not fully realized, manner in which norms are made explicit and debated, institutions are maintained that promote democratic notions of the collective good, and support is given to forms of civic education that provide the foundation for nurturing and sustaining individual and collective agency. As the state is stripped of its power to mediate between capital and human needs, thus losing its capacity to offer social guarantees to youth and other marginalized groups, public life becomes barren, vacuous, and stripped of substance. Of course, the crisis over public schools has been escalating for at least a decade, as forms of civic education that promote individual agency, social responsibility, and noncommercial values have been abandoned for job training and accountability schemes.

As the state is divested of its capacity to regulate social services and limit the power of capital, those public spheres that traditionally served to empower individuals and groups to strike a balance between “the individual’s liberty from interference and the citizen’s right to interfere” are dismantled. At the same time, it becomes more difficult for citizens to put limits on the power of neoliberalism to shape daily life—particularly as corporate economic power is feverishly consolidated on a transnational level. Nor can they prevent the assault on the state as it is being forced to abandon its already limited social role as the guardian of public interests. The result is a state increasingly reduced to its policing functions and a public sector reduced to a replica of the market. As neoliberalism increases its grip over all aspects of cultural and economic life, the relative autonomy once afforded to the worlds of cinema, publishing, and media production be-

and protection. Peter Marcuse rightly suggests that “the importance of state action in enabling the capitalist system of the industrialized world to function is increased, not reduced, as that system spreads internationally.” On this issue, see Peter Marcuse, “The Language of Globalization,” *Monthly Review* 53, no. 2 (July–August 2000), 2; also available at http://www.monthlyreview.org/700marc.htm.

gins to erode. Public schools are increasingly defined as a source of profit rather than a public good. And, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, neoliberalism emerges throughout the social order as a “new kind of moral Darwinism which, with the cult of the ‘winner,’ establishes the struggle of all against all and cynicism as the norm of all practices.”

Through talk shows, film, music, and cable television, for example, the media promote a growing political apathy and cynicism by providing a steady stream of daily representations and spectacles in which abuse becomes the primary vehicle for registering human interaction. At the same time, dominant media such as the *New York Times* condemn the current cultural landscape—represented in their account through reality television, professional wrestling, gross-out blockbuster films, and the beat-driven boasts and retorts of hip-hop—as aggressively evoking a vision of humanity marked by a “pure Darwinism,” in which “the messages of popular culture are becoming more brutally competitive.”

Unfortunately, for mainstream media commentators in general, the emergence of such representations and values is about the lack of civility and has little to do with considerations of youth bashing, racism, corporate power, and politics. In this sense, witness to degradation now becomes the governing feature of community and social life. Most importantly, what critics take up as a “youth problem” is really a problem about the corruption of politics, the shriveling up of public spaces and resources for young people, the depoliticization of large segments of the population, and the emergence of a corporate and media culture that is defined through an unadulterated “authoritarian form of kinship that is masculinist, intolerant and militaristic.”

At issue here is how we understand the ways youth produce and engage popular culture at a time in history when deprivation is read as depravity. How do we comprehend the choices young people are making under circumstances in which they have become the object of policies that signal a shift from investing in their future to assuming they have no future? Certainly


not a future in which they can depend on adult society for either compassion or support.

**Zero Tolerance and the Politics/Color of Punishment**

In what follows, I will address the social costs and implications of removing youth from the inventory of ethical and political concerns through policies that replace social compassion with containment while increasingly abandoning young people, especially youth of color, to the dictates of a repressive penal state, in which government, at all levels, is addressing social problems through the police, courts, and prison system. More specifically, by examining, in particular, the emergence of zero-tolerance policies in the public schools, I will address how the policing function of the state bears down on young people. While my focus is on the relationship between education and zero-tolerance policies, the context for my analysis points to a broader set of repressive conditions that not only target young people across a wider variety of public spheres but also undermine the guarantee of rights and institutional structures that a realized democracy represents.

I begin with a definition of domestic militarization taken from critical educator and activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore, in order to provide the larger political, social, and cultural context for understanding the growing attacks on youth through the emergence of zero-tolerance policies. According to Gilmore, expressions of domestic militarization can be found in the deadly violence waged against people of color, such as Amadou Diallo, an unarmed black man shot forty-one times by New York City policemen, and Tyisha Miller, shot a dozen times by California police while she was sitting in her car. Such violence can also be found in the countless acts of humiliation, harassment, and punishment handed out to the poor and to people of color every day in the United States by the forces of the repressive state. In this regard, the brutal attacks by police on Rodney King and Abner Louima stand out. Evidence of domestic militarization can also be seen in the rise of the prison industrial complex, the passing of retrograde legislation that targets immigrants, the appearance of gated communities, the widespread use of

racial profiling by the police, and the ongoing attacks on the welfare state. Of course, state repression is not new, but contemporary political culture is unique in that

[the new State is shedding social welfare in favor of domestic militarization. Programs that provide for people's welfare, protect the environment, or regulate corporate behavior have been delegitimized and jettisoned. There is a new consensus among the powers that be that focuses the domestic State on defense against enemies, both foreign and U.S.-born. What's new is the scale of militarism being directed at people inside the U.S., and the scope for what comes into the crosshairs of the prison industrial complex rather than some helping agency.]

Critics such as Gilmore and Christian Parenti rightfully argue that as the "War on Poverty" ran out of steam with the social and economic crisis that emerged in the 1970s, it has been replaced with an emphasis on domestic warfare, and that the policies of social investment, at all levels of government, have given way to an emphasis on repression, surveillance, and control. Starting with Reagan's war on drugs and the privatization of the prison industry in the 1980s, and escalating to the war on immigrants in the early 1990s and the rise of the prison industrial complex by the close of the decade, the criminalization of social policy has now become a part of everyday culture and provides a common reference point that extends from governing prisons and regulating urban culture to running schools. Hence, it comes as no surprise when New York City Mayor Rudi Giuliani, "over the opposition of most parents and the schools chancellor, formally assigns the oversight of discipline in the public schools to the police department." Once it was clear that Giuliani would receive high marks in the press for lowering the crime rate due to zero-tolerance policies adopted by the city's police force, it seemed reasonable to him to use the same policies in the public schools. What the popular press ignored, until the killing of Diallo at the hands of New York City's police, was that zero-tolerance policingstrate-

27. For an analysis of the rise of the culture of repression, see Parenti, Lockdown America.
gies exacted a heavy price on the poor and people of color, and resulted in more people being stopped and searched as well as larger settlements being paid out to those victims of the police to quell charges of abuse. What was also ignored by the public and popular press nationally was that as the call for more police, prisons, and get-tough laws reached fever pitch among politicians and legislators, the investment in domestic militarization began to exceed more than $100 billion a year.

Domestic militarization as a central feature of American life is evident in the ongoing criminalization of social policy and is probably most visible in the emergence of zero-tolerance laws that have swept the nation since the 1980s and gained full legislative strength with the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Following the mandatory sentencing legislation and get-tough policies associated with the “war on drugs” declared by the Reagan and Bush administrations, this bill calls for a “three strikes and you’re out” policy, which puts repeat offenders, including nonviolent offenders, in jail for life, regardless of the seriousness of the crime. The general idea behind the bill is “to increase the prison sentence for a second offense and require life in custody without parole for a third offense.” It also provides sixty new offenses punishable by death, while at the same time limiting the civil rights and appeal process for those inmates sentenced to die. In addition, the largest single allocation in the bill is for prison construction. Since the crime bill was passed in 1994, the prison industry has become big business, with many states spending “more on prison construction than on university construction.” Yet, even as the crime rate plummets dramatically, more people, especially people of color, are being arrested, harassed, punished, and put in jail. At the millennium,

35. For some extensive analyses of the devastating affects the criminal justice system is having on black males, see Michael Tonry, Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jerome Miller, Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-
the United States was the biggest jailer in the world. Between 1985 and 2000, the prison population grew from 744,206 to 2 million (approaching the combined populations of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana), and prison budgets jumped from $7 billion in 1980 to $40 billion in 2000. Manning Marable points out that the United States is “spending $35,000 a year to maintain a single prisoner, one prisoner, in a minimum-security cell. It costs nearly $80,000 a year to confine a prisoner in a maximum-security cell. We are building over a hundred new prison cells a day.”

The explosion in the prison population has also resulted in a big increase in the move toward privatizing prisons. As Robin D. G. Kelley points out, by the close of 1997, at least 102 for-profit private prisons existed in the United States, “each receiving some form of federal subsidy with limited federal protection of prisoners’ rights or prison conditions.” Prisoners, especially the widely disproportionate pool of African American inmates, which has tripled since 1980, provide big business not only “with a new source of consumers but a reservoir of cheap labor.” The Report of the National Criminal Justice Commission noted in 1996 that as “spending on crime fighting has risen three times faster than defense spending,” the biggest beneficiary appears to be “private businesses [that] reap enormous profits from the fear of crime and the expansion of the criminal justice system.” Moreover, as many critics of the private prison system have correctly pointed out, it “is particularly disturbing that corporations should be making a profit from policies that are not in the public interest—such as excessive prison sentences and the incarceration of nonviolent offenders.”

38. Prisoners being held in private facilities make up the fastest-growing segment of the jail and prison population in the United States. At the same time, only 7 percent of prisons and jails are privately run. It is worth noting that such prisons have bad track records around human rights and providing decent services. They are also actively opposed by corrections guards’ unions. Cited in Lisa Featherstone, “A Common Enemy: Students Fight Private Prisons,” Dissent, 1 October 2000, 78.
550,000 black males are interned in jails in the United States, “the concept of private companies profiting from prisoners evokes the convict leasing system of the Old South.”

As the “prison industrial complex” becomes a dominant force in the economy of states such as California, competing with land developers, service industries, and unions, it does more than rake in huge profits for corporations; it also contributes to what Mike Davis calls a “permanent prison class.”

One measure of the power of the prison industrial complex as a high-powered growth industry can be gauged by the increasing power of prison guard unions to shape legislative policy in many states. For instance, the California Correctional Peace Officers Union has grown in one decade from 4,000 to over 29,000 members. During the 1998 political campaign, the prison guard union was the state’s number one “donor to legislative races, setting a record by spending $1.9 million.”

Yet, the prison industrial complex does more than fuel profits and shape legislative policies for those eager to invest in high-growth industries; it also legitimates a culture of punishment and incarceration, aimed most decisively at “African-American males who make up less than 7 percent of the U.S. population, yet they comprise almost half of the prison and jail population.” The racist significance of this figure can be measured by a wide range of statistics, but the shameful fact is that the number of African Americans in prison far exceeds the number of African American males who commit crimes. For instance, law professor David Cole, in his unsparing analysis of the racial disparities that fuel the government’s drug war, points out that while “76 percent of illicit drug users were white, 14 percent black, and 8 percent Hispanic—figures which roughly match each group’s share of the general population,” African Americans constitute “35 percent of all drug arrests, 55 percent of all drug convictions, and 74 percent of all sentences for drug offences.”

A Justice Department report points out that on any given day in this country, “more than a third of the young African-American men aged 18–34 in some of our major cities are either in prison or under some form of criminal justice supervision.”

43. Mike Davis, “The Politics of Super Incarceration,” in Criminal Injustice, 73.
46. Cole, No Equal Justice, 144.
Domestic militarization in this instance functions not only to contain “surplus populations” and provide new sources of revenue; it also actively promotes and legitimizes retrograde social policies. For example, an increasing number of states, including California and New York, are spending more on prison construction than on higher education and are hiring more prison guards than teachers. A recent study by the Correctional Association of New York and the Washington, D.C.—based Justice Policy Institute claims that millions of dollars are being diverted from the public university budget in New York and diverted to prison construction. The reports point out that “between fiscal year 1988 and fiscal year 1998, New York’s public universities saw their operating budgets plummet by 29% while funding for prisons rose 76%. In actual dollars, there has been nearly a one-to-one trade-off, with the Department of Corrections in New York State receiving a $761 million increase during that ten-year period, while state funding for New York City and state university systems declined by $615 million.” In California, the average prison guard now earns $10,000 more than the average public school teacher and increasingly more than many professors working in the state university system. This is more than a travesty of justice; it is a stern lesson for many students of color and working-class white youth—viewed as a generation of suspects by the dominant society—that it is easier for them to go to jail than it is to get a decent education. For the wider public, the lesson to be learned is that there is a greater payoff when society invests more in prisons than in those public institutions that educate young people to become public servants in crucial spheres such as education. In this instance, the culture of punishment and its policies of containment and brutalization become more valued to the dominant social order than any consideration of what it means for a society to expand and strengthen the mechanisms and freedoms central to sustaining a substantive democracy.

51. Even more shameful is the fact that such discrimination against African Americans is often justified from the Olympian heights of such institutions as Harvard University, by apologists, such as lawyer/author Randall Kennedy, who argue that such laws, criminal policies, and police practices are necessary to protect “good” blacks from “bad” blacks who commit crimes. See Randall Kennedy, Race, Crime, and the Law (New York: Pantheon, 1997).
Rather than viewing “three strike” policies and mandatory sentencing as part of a racist-inspired expression of domestic militarization and a source of massive injustice, corporate America and conservative politicians embrace it as both a new venue for profit and a legitimate expression of the market-driven policies of neoliberalism. Within this discourse, social costs and racial injustice, when compared to corporate profit, are rendered irrelevant. How else to explain a recent New York Times article by Guy Trebay that focuses on “jailhouse chic” as the latest in youth fashion. Surrendering any attempt at socially responsible analysis, Trebay reports that the reason so many teens are turning prison garb into a fashion statement is that an unprecedented number of youth are incarcerated in the United States. When they get released, “they take part of that culture with them.” The retail market for prison-style work clothes is so strong, Trebay points out, that prisons, such as those managed by the Oregon Corrections Department, are gaining a foothold in the fashion market by producing their own prison blues clothing lines (which can be found on their Web site, www.prisonblues.com). The market trumps social justice in this account as incarcerated youth are praised for being fashion trendsetters, prisons are celebrated for their market savvy, and cheap prison labor is affirmed for its contribution to cutting-edge street culture.

Zero-tolerance policies, as one manifestation of domestic militarization, have been especially cruel in the treatment of juvenile offenders. Rather than attempting to work with youth and making an investment in their psychological, economic, and social well-being, a growing number of cities are passing sweep laws—curfews and bans against loitering and cruising—designed not only to keep youth off the streets but to make it easier to crimi-

52. In their drive to turn a profit, private prisons often keep their facilities full, “cut costs by trimming prisoner facilities and services [such as training for guards and programs for inmates], and inasmuch as they are paid on a per capita basis, they have a strong financial incentive to retain prisoners in lockup as long as possible.” Corrections Corporation of America, one of the nation’s leading private prison conglomerates, has seen its stock go through the roof since the late 1990s. In fact, one of its facilities, Wackenhut Corrections in Florida, was so successful in turning a profit due to its use of cheap prison labor that it was named by Forbes magazine as one of the “200 Best Small Companies” in 1996. Cited in Kelley, Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! 98.
nalize their behavior. For example, within the last decade, “45 states . . .
have passed or amended legislation making it easier to prosecute juveniles
as adults,” and, in some states, “prosecutors can bump a juvenile case into
adult court at their own discretion.”55 A particularly harsh example of these
Draconian measures can be seen in the recent passing of Proposition 21 in
California. The law makes it easier for prosecutors to try in adult court teens
fourteen and older who are charged with felonies. These youth would auto-
matically be put in adult prisons and given lengthy mandated sentences if
convicted. As Louise Cooper points out, “It also . . . increases the discre-
tionary powers for routine police surveillance, random searches, and arrest
of young people.”56 The overall consequences of the law are to largely elimi-
nate intervention programs, increase the number of youth in prisons, espe-
cially minority youth, and keep them there for longer periods of time. More-
over, the law is at odds with a number of studies that indicate that putting
youth in jail with adults both increases recidivism and poses a grave danger
to young offenders, who, as a recent Columbia University study suggested,
are “five times as likely to be raped, twice as likely to be beaten and eight
times as likely to commit suicide than adults in the adult prison system.”57

Paradoxically, the moral panic against crime that increasingly feeds
the calls for punishment rather than rehabilitation programs for young people
exists in conjunction with the disturbing facts that the United States is cur-
rently one of only seven countries (Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi
Arabia, and Yemen) in the world that permit the death penalty for juveniles
and that in the last decade it has executed more juvenile offenders than all
other countries combined that allow such executions.58 Given the assump-
tion among neoliberal hard-liners that market values are more important
than values that involve trust, compassion, and solidarity, it is not surpris-
ing that Wall Street, which emphasizes profits, views the growth in the prison
industry and the growing incarceration of young people as good news. For
instance, even though “crime has dropped precipitously,” stock analyst Bob
Hirschfield notes that “males 15–17 years old are three times as likely to be

10 September 2000, 42.
56. Louise Cooper, “Youth Activists Fight Prop 21,” Against the Current 86 (May/June
57. Cited in Evelyn Nieves, “California Proposal Toughens Penalties for Young Criminals,”
58. Cited in Sara Rimer and Raymond Bonner, “Whether to Kill Those Who Killed as
arrested than the population at large, and the proportion of 15–17 year olds is expanding at twice the overall population.” Rather than being alarmed, if not morally repulsed, by these figures, Hirschfield concludes that it is a “great time to purchase shares” in the new prison growth industry. 59

While the social costs for such policies are cause for grave alarm, they are all the more disturbing since the burden they inflict on society appears to be far greater for young people of color than for any other group. The National Criminal Justice Commission Report claims that while “get tough” policies are likely to be more severe when dealing with children, they are particularly repressive when applied to youth of color, especially as a result of the war on drugs and the more recent eruption of school shootings. Numerous studies have documented that unlike middle-class white youth, minority youth are “more likely to be arrested, referred to court, and placed outside the home when awaiting disposition of their cases. . . . [Moreover,] all things being equal, minority youths face criminal charges more often than white youths for the same offenses. Also, African-American youths are charged more often than whites with a felony when the offense could be considered a misdemeanor. . . . Minority youth are also more likely to be waived to adult court, where they will face longer sentences and fewer opportunities for rehabilitative programs.” 60 Fed by widespread stereotypical images of black youth as superpredators and black culture as the culture of criminality, minority youth face not only a criminal justice system that harasses and humiliates them but also a larger society that increasingly undercuts their chances for a living wage, quality jobs, essential social services, and decent schools. 61 Within such a context, the possibilities for treating young

60. Donziger, The Real War on Crime, 123.
61. When Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago asked respondents to compare blacks and other minorities “on a variety of personal traits in 1990, he found that 62% of nonblack respondents thought that blacks were lazier than other groups, 56% felt they were more prone to violence, 53% see them as less intelligent, and 78% thought they were less self-supporting and more likely to live off welfare.” Cited in Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, American Apartheid (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 95. I mention this study as simply one example of the widespread racism that permeates American culture. Of course, while blacks are not the only group victimized by stereotypes, unlike many other groups, they often do not have the material resources to fight back and prevent such stereotypes from spreading and influencing individual behavior and social policy. Hence, African Americans, especially black youth, as a group are more likely to suffer the abuse that such stereotypes generate. For a more extensive study of the ongoing presence of racism in American society, see David K. Shipler,
people of color with respect, dignity, and support vanishes, and with it the hope of overcoming a racial abyss that makes a mockery out of justice and a travesty of democracy.

The growing influence of zero-tolerance laws in the United States can be seen in the application of such laws in areas as different as airport security, the criminal justice system, immigration policy, and drug-testing programs for athletes. The widespread use of these policies has received a substantial amount of critical analysis within the last decade. Unfortunately, these analyses rarely make connections between what is going on in the criminal justice system and the public schools. While schools share some proximity to prisons in that they are both about disciplining the body, though for allegedly different purposes, little has been written about how zero-tolerance policies in schools resonate powerfully with prison practices that signify a shift away from treating the body as a social investment (rehabilitation) to viewing it as a threat to security, demanding control, surveillance, and punishment. Also, little has been written on how such practices have exceeded the boundaries of the prison industrial complex, providing models and perpetuating a shift in the very nature of educational

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62. A typical example can be seen in Talbot, “The Maximum Security Adolescent,” 41–47, 58–60, 88, 96. Talbot takes up the “get tough” policies that currently characterize the juvenile justice system but makes no connections to wider social, economic, or political considerations or, for that matter, to the related assaults on teens taking place in a variety of spheres outside of the criminal justice system. Of course, the right-wingers and reactionary-leaning liberals who call for zero-tolerance policies have almost nothing to say about the hypocrisy involved in the contradiction between punishing minorities according to “get tough” policies and either saying nothing or actively supporting a corporate culture that appears addicted to marketing guns and the imagery and culture of gun violence to young children, teens, and adults. The call for zero-tolerance laws rather than gun control appears odd in a country in which handguns were used to kill 9,390 people in 1996, while in countries with tough handgun laws, the number of such deaths was drastically reduced. For example, “handguns were used to kill 2 people in New Zealand, 15 in Japan, 30 in Great Britain, 106 in Canada, and 213 in Germany” (cited in Bob Herbert, “Addicted to Guns,” New York Times on the Web, 1 January 2001, available at www.nytimes.com/2001/01/01opinion/01Herb.html).

leadership and pedagogy. Of course, there are exceptions, such as Lewis Lapham's lament that schools do more than teach students to take their place within a highly iniquitous class-based society. In many larger cities, according to Lapham, high schools now “possess many of the same attributes as minimum-security prisons—metal detectors in the corridors, zero tolerance for rowdy behavior, the principal as a warden and the faculty familiar with the syllabus of concealed weapons.” According to Lapham, schools resemble prisons in that they both warehouse students to prevent flooding the labor market while simultaneously “instilling the attitudes of passivity and apprehension, which in turn induce the fear of authority and the habits of obedience.”

Another notable and far more insightful exception is Marable, who argues that “one of the central battlegrounds for democracy in the U.S. in the twenty-first century will be the effort to halt the dismantling of public education and public institutions in general for the expansion of [the] prison industrial complex.”

As schooling is defined largely as a disciplinary institution that prepares students for the workplace, the discourse of leadership has been superseded by a pragmatics of classroom management. Similarly, pedagogy often ignores the specificity of contexts that informs students' lives and substitutes issues of accountability (measured through test scores) for a qualitative interest in producing critical citizens; moreover, such pedagogies of transmission are particularly intolerant of notions of difference, critical questioning, or resistance. Pedagogy, in this model of control, relies heavily on those forms of standardization and values that are consistent with the norms and relations that drive the market economy. Teachers teach for the tests as students' behaviors are consistently monitored and knowledge is increasingly quantified.

Made over in the image of corporate culture, schools are no longer valued as a public good but as a private interest; hence, the appeal of such schools is less in their capacity to educate students according to the demands of critical citizenship than in enabling students to master the requirements of a market-driven economy. Under these circumstances, many students increasingly find themselves in schools that lack any language for relating the self to public life, social responsibility, or the imperatives of democratic life. In this instance, democratic education, with its emphasis on respect for others, critical inquiry, civic courage, and concern for the


collective good, is suppressed and replaced by an excessive emphasis on
the language of privatization, individualism, self-interest, and brutal com-
petitiveness. Lost in this discourse of schooling is any notion of democratic
community or models of leadership capable of raising questions about what
public schools should accomplish in a democracy and why, under certain
circumstances, they fail.

The growth and popularity of zero-tolerance policies within pub-
lic schools have to be understood as part of a broader educational re-
form movement in which the market is now seen as the master design for
all pedagogical encounters. At the same time, the corporatizing of public
schooling cannot be disassociated from the assault on those public spheres
within the larger society that provide the conditions for greater democratic
participation in shaping society. As the state is downsized and support ser-
vices dry up, containment policies become the principle means to discipline youth and restrict dissent. Within this context, zero-tolerance legisla-
tion within the schools simply extends to young people elements of harsh
control and administration implemented in other public spheres where in-
equalities breed the conditions for dissent and resistance. Schools increas-
ingly resemble other enervated public spheres as they cut back on trained
psychologists, school nurses, and programs such as music, art, athletics,
and valuable after-school activities. Jesse Jackson argues that under such
circumstances, schools do more than fail to provide students with a well-
rounded education; they often “bring in the police, [and] the school gets
turned into a feeder system for the penal system.” 66 In addition, the growing
movement to define schools as private interests rather than as public as-
sets not only reinforces the trend to administer them in ways that resemble
how prisons are governed but also points to a disturbing tendency on the
part of adult society to direct a great deal of anger and resentment toward
youth. In what follows, I analyze zero-tolerance policies in schools and ad-
dress the implications these policies have for a society in signaling a dra-
matic shift away from civic education—the task and responsibility of which
is to prepare students for shaping and actively participating in democratic
public life—to models of training and regulation, whose purpose opens the
door to ultraconservative forms of political culture and authoritarian modes
of social regulation.

66. Interview with Jesse Jackson, “First-Class Jails, Second-Class Schools,” Rethinking
Schools (spring 2000): 16.
Schooling and the Pedagogy of Zero Tolerance

Across the nation, school districts are lining up to embrace zero-tolerance policies. Emulating state and federal laws passed in the 1990s, such as the federal Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, that were based on mandatory sentencing and “three strikes and you’re out” policies, many educators first invoked zero-tolerance rules against those students who brought guns to schools. But over time, the policy was broadened and now includes a range of behavioral infractions that include everything from possessing drugs to harboring a weapon to threatening other students—all broadly conceived. For instance, “in many districts, school administrators won’t tolerate even one instance of weapon possession, drug use, or harassment.”67 One of the most publicized cases illustrating the harshness of zero-tolerance policies took place recently in Decatur, Illinois, when seven African American students, who participated in a fight that lasted 17 seconds at a football game and was marked by the absence of any weapons, were expelled for two years. Two of the young men were seniors who were about to graduate. At their hearing, none of the boys was allowed counsel or the right to face his accusers; nor were their parents allowed any degree of involvement in the case. When Jesse Jackson brought national attention to the incident, the Decatur School Board reduced the expulsions to one year.

Fueled by moral panics about the war on drugs and images of urban youth of color as ultraviolent, drug-pushers, a national mood of fear provided legitimacy for zero-tolerance policies in the schools as both an ideology of disdain and a policy of punishment. Unfortunately, any sense of perspective seems lost, as school systems across the country clamor for metal detectors, armed guards, see-through knapsacks, and, in some cases, armed teachers. Some school systems are investing in new software in order to “profile” students who might exhibit criminal behavior.68 Overzealous laws relieve educators of exercising deliberation and critical judgment as more and more young people are either suspended or expelled from school, often for ludicrous reasons. For example, two Virginia fifth graders, who allegedly put soap in their teacher’s drinking water, were charged with a felony.69 Officials at Rangeview High School in Colorado, after unsuccess-

fully trying to expel a student because they found three baseball bats on
the floor of his car, ended up suspending him. In a similar litany of absurd-
ities, USA Today reported on two Illinois seven year olds who were “sus-
pended for having nail clippers with knifelike attachments.” Jesse Jackson
offers the example of a student who was suspended on a weapons charge
because school officials discovered a little rubber hammer as part of his
Halloween costume. He provides another equally absurd example of a stu-
dent accused with a drug charge because he gave another youth two lemon
cough drops.

As Boston Globe columnist Ellen Goodman points out, zero toler-
ance does more than offer a simple solution to a complex problem; it has be-
come a code word for a “quick and dirty way of kicking kids out” of school.
This becomes clear as states such as Colorado, in their eagerness to approp-
riate and enforce zero-tolerance policies in their districts, do less to create
a safe environment for students than to simply kick more kids out of the pub-
lic school system. For example, the Denver Rocky Mountain News reported
in June 1999 that “partly as a result of such rigor in enforcing Colorado’s
zero tolerance law, the number of kids kicked out of public schools has sky-
rocketed since 1993—from 437 before the law to nearly 2,000 in the 1996–
1997 school year.” In Chicago, the widespread adoption of zero-tolerance
policies in 1994 resulted in a 51-percent increase in student suspensions
for the next four years, and a 3,000-percent increase in expulsions, jumping
“from 21 in 1994–95 to 668 in 1997–98.” Within such a climate of disdain
and intolerance, expelling students does more than pose a threat to inno-
cent kids; it also suggests that local school boards are refusing to do the
hard work of exercising judgment, trying to understand what the conditions
are that undermine school safety, and providing reasonable services for all
students and viable alternatives for the troubled ones. But there is more at
stake than merely bad judgment behind the use of zero-tolerance laws in
American public schools. As the criminalization of young people finds its way
into the classroom, it becomes easier to punish students rather than listen

38A.
71. Editorial, “Growing Zeal for Zero Tolerance Ignores Needs of Troubled Youth,” USA
Today, 22 November 1999, 27A.
72. Jackson, interview, 16.
74. Editorial, “Zero Tolerance Is the Policy,” 38A.
to them.\textsuperscript{76} Even though such policies clog up the courts and put additional pressure on an already overburdened juvenile justice system, educators appear to have few qualms about implementing them. And the results are far from inconsequential for the students themselves.

Zero-tolerance laws make it easier to expel students than for school administrators to work with parents, community justice programs, religious organizations, and social service agencies. Moreover, automatic expulsion policies do little to either produce a safer school or society, since, as Clare Kittredge points out, “we already know that lack of attachment to the school is one of the prime predictors of delinquency.”\textsuperscript{77} Most insidiously, zero-tolerance laws, while a threat to all youth and any viable notion of democratic public education, reinforce in the public imagination the image of students of color as a source of public fear and a threat to public school safety. Zero-tolerance policies and laws appear to be well tailored to mobilizing racialized codes and race-based moral panics that portray black and brown urban youth as a new and frightening violent threat to the safety of “decent” Americans. Not only do most of the high-profile zero-tolerance cases, such as the Decatur school incident, often involve African American students; such policies also reinforce the racial inequities that plague school systems across the country. For example, Tamar Lewin, a writer for the \textit{New York Times}, has reported on a number of studies illustrating “that black students in public schools across the country are far more likely than whites to be suspended or expelled, and far less likely to be in gifted or advanced placement classes.”\textsuperscript{78} Even in a city such as San Francisco, considered a bastion of liberalism, African American students pay a far greater price for zero-tolerance policies. Libero Della Piana reports that, “according to data collected by Justice Matters, a San Francisco agency advocating equity in

\textsuperscript{76} The \textit{New York Times} reported that, in responding to the spate of recent school shootings, the FBI had provided educators across the country with a list of behaviors that could identify “students likely to commit an act of lethal violence.” One such behavior is “resentment over real or perceived injustices.” The reach of domestic militarization becomes more evident as the FBI not only takes on the role of monitoring potentially disruptive student behavior but also positions teachers to become adjuncts of the criminal justice system. The story and quotes appear in Editorial, “FBI Caution Signs for Violence in Classroom,” \textit{New York Times}, 7 September 2000, A18.


education, African Americans make up 52 percent of all suspended students in the district—far in excess of the 16 percent of the general population.”79 Marilyn Elias reports, in a recent issue of USA Today, that “in 1998, the first year national expulsion figures were gathered, 31% of kids expelled were black, but blacks made up only 17% of the students in public schools.”80

The tragedy underlying such disparities in treating black and white students appears to be completely lost on those educators defending zero-tolerance policies. For instance, Gerald Tirozzi, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, argues, without irony, that such policies “make everything very clear” and “promote fair, equitable treatment in [school] discipline.”81

As compassion and understanding give way to rigidity and intolerance, schools increasingly become more militarized and function as a conduit to the penal system. The measure of such a transformation is not limited to the increasing fortress quality of American schools—which are marked by the foreboding presence of hired armed guards in the corridors, patrolled cafeterias, locked doors, video surveillance cameras, electronic badges, police dogs, and routine drug searches. It is also present in the racist culture of fear that exhibits a deep distrust in, if not hostility and revulsion toward, young people, especially youth of color.82 For instance, in Louisiana, board member Ray St. Pierre proposed that any student in junior high or high school who is caught fighting “would be handcuffed inside the school by sheriff’s deputies and taken to a juvenile facility where he would be charged with disturbing the peace.”83 In case parents miss the point, they would have

81. Gerald Tirozzi is cited and paraphrased in Elias, “Disparity in Black and White,” 9D.
82. One example of the effects this system of punishment has on African American students can be seen in a recent report from the Kids First! Coalition in Oakland, California, which reported that “local discipline policies resulted in students missing more than 29,000 school days in the 1997–1998 school year alone. Seventy-two percent of these students were African American.” Cited in Libero Della Piana, “Crime and Punishment in Schools,” A21. For a systematic examination of the effects of racial discrimination in U.S. public schools, see Rebecca Gordon, Libero Della Piana, and Terry Keleher, Facing the Consequences: An Examination of Racial Discrimination in U.S. Public Schools (Oakland, Calif.: Applied Research Center, 2000).
to pay a cash bond for their child’s release. As a result of St. Pierre’s notion of getting tough on misbehavior, the school provides an opportunity for students to leave not only with a diploma but also with a police record. The image of kids being handcuffed, pulled out of a school, and dragged away in the back of a police van or patrol car has become so commonplace in the United States that the psychological, political, and social consequences of such brutal practices barely lift an eyebrow and are more routinely met with public approval. In some instances, the zero-tolerance policies are not just affecting students in schools. In an attempt to root out pedophiles in the public school system in the state of Maine, the FBI is demanding that teachers submit to fingerprinting and criminal-history checks. Many teachers have refused to comply and may lose their certification and jobs.84 Within the current climate of domestic militarization, it may be just a matter of time before the surveillance cameras, profiling technologies, and other tools of the penal state become a routine part of the climate of teaching in America’s schools. Stanley Aronowitz is right in arguing that as the “state’s police functions tend to overpower and mediate its diminishing social functions,” one consequence is that “[p]olice now routinely patrol urban public high schools and universities as if they were identical with the mean streets of the central cities or, more to the point, tantamount to day-prisons.”85

To be sure, zero-tolerance policies turn schools into an adjunct of the criminal justice system, but they also further rationalize misplaced legislative priorities. And that has profound social costs. Instead of investing in early childhood programs, repairing deteriorating school buildings, or hiring more qualified teachers, schools now spend millions of dollars to upgrade security. Moral panic and fear reproduce a fortress mentality in which the logic of domestic militarization produces an authoritarian irrationalism, as in Fremont High School in Oakland, California, where school administrators decided to build a security fence costing $500,000, “while the heating remained out of commission.”86 Another instance of such irrationality can be found, as I mentioned earlier, in the fact that many states now spend “more on prisons than on university construction.”87 Young people are quickly realizing that schools have more in common with military boot camps and pris-

ons than they do with other institutions in American society. In addition, as schools abandon their role as democratic public spheres and are literally “fenced off” from the communities that surround them, they lose their ability to become anything other than spaces of containment and control. As schools become militarized, they lose their ability to provide students with the skills to cope with human differences, uncertainty, and the various symbolic and institutional forces that undermine political agency and democratic public life itself. In this context, discipline and training replace education for all but the privileged, as schools increasingly take on an uncanny resemblance to oversized police precincts, tragically disconnected both from the students who inhabit them and the communities that give meaning to their historical experiences and daily lives. Coupled with the corporate emphasis on privatizing schools, the motif of punishment and withdrawal—civic and interpersonal—governs this new form of school regulation and administration.

Zero-tolerance policies in schools have been criticized roundly by a number of social and educational critics. William Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn rightly argue that zero-tolerance policies do not teach but punish, and that students need not less but more tolerance.88 Goodman echoes this view by claiming that schools which implement such laws are not paying attention to children’s lives, because, as she nicely puts it, it is “harder to talk with troubled teens than to profile them.”89 Daniel Perlstein has argued that zero-tolerance programs not only fail to ensure school safety; they also deflect educators from addressing crucial considerations that structure racial, class, and social divisions in schools.90 Of course, as all of these critics point out, zero-tolerance laws do more than turn schools into policing institutions that ignore the problems of tracking, racism, and the exclusionary and hierarchical nature of school culture; they also further reproduce such problems. These critiques are important, and I have addressed them elsewhere.91 But these criticisms do not go far enough. It is also necessary

for educators to place school-based zero-tolerance policies within a broader context that makes it possible to see them as part of the ideology of neoconservatism, neoliberalism, and domestic militarization that is ravaging conditions for critical political agency, destroying the deployment of even minimal ethical principles, and undermining the conditions necessary within schools and other public spheres to produce the symbolic and material resources necessary to engage in the struggle for critical citizenship, freedom, democracy, and justice.

Schooling and the Crisis of Public Life

Zero-tolerance policies in both the schools and other domestic spheres cannot be understood outside of a range of broader considerations that constitute a crisis in the very nature of civic agency, ethics, politics, and democracy. As the state disengages from its role as a mediator between capital and human needs, and as market forces bear heavily on redefining the meaning of education as a private enterprise, it becomes all the more difficult to imagine public schools as important contested sites in the struggle for civic education and authentic democracy. If neoconservatism provides the ideological ammunition to turn a generation of youth into suspects, neoliberalism works both to produce a deregulated consumer culture and to limit the possibilities for noncommodified social domains where young and old alike can experience dissent and difference as part of a multicultural democracy, locate metaphors of hope, respond to those who carry on the legacies of moral witnessing, and imagine relationships outside of the dictates of the market and the authoritarian rule of penal control. Educators and others need to rethink what it would mean both to interrogate and break away from the dangerous and destructive representations and practices of zero-tolerance policies as they work to reinforce modes of authoritarian control and social amnesia in a vast and related number of powerful institutional spheres. This suggests a struggle for public space and a public dialogue about how to imagine reappropriating a notion of politics that is linked to the regime of authentic democracy while simultaneously articulating a new discourse, a set of theoretical tools, and social possibilities for re-visioning civic education as the basis for political agency and social transformation in ways that go beyond its historical limitations. Zero tolerance is not the problem as much as it is symptomatic of a much broader set of issues centered around the gulf between the regime of the political—everything that concerns modes of power and the realm of politics—the multiple ways in
which human beings question established power, transform institutions, and reject "all authority that would fail to render an account and provide reasons . . . for the validity of its pronouncements." Neoliberalism offers no intellectual tools or political vocabulary for addressing this gap, because it has no stake in defining political culture outside of the interest of the market. Nor does it have any interest in supporting forms of civic education designed to question, challenge, and transform power as part of a political and ethical response to the demise of democratic public life. Neoliberalism has thrown into question the very feasibility of politics and democracy, and, in part, has been successful in doing so because it defines citizenship through the narrow logic of consumerism and politics as having no foundation in agency as a form of self-determination and critical strategic action. Hence, there is no room in this discourse for providing the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for young people and adults to define anew civic education as an "essential step towards agency, self-representation, and an effective democracy." 

Against the social and economic policies of neoliberalism, educators, youth, parents, and various cultural workers need to rethink the meaning of democracy, ethics, and political agency in an increasingly globalized world in which power is being separated from traditional political forms such as the nation-state. But the war against youth must be understood as an attempt to contain, warehouse, control, and even eliminate all those groups and social formations that the market finds expendable (that is, unable to further the interests of the bottom line or the logic of cost-effectiveness). For progressives, this suggests a decisive and important struggle over a notion of politics that refuses the ongoing attempts on the part of huge corporations, conservatives, and other "masters of the private economy" to make public life irrelevant, if not dangerous, by replacing an ethic of reciprocity and mutual responsibility with a market-driven ethic of individualism, in which "competitiveness is the only human ethic, one that promotes a war against all." 

There is more at stake here than recognizing the limits and social

costs of a neoliberal philosophy that reduces all relationships to the exchange of goods and money; there is also the responsibility on the part of critical intellectuals and other activists to rethink the nature of the public. Challenging neoliberalism also demands new forms of social citizenship and civic education that have a purchase on people’s everyday lives and struggles, expressed through a wide range of institutions. Central here is the need to rethink a notion of cultural politics that makes politics more pedagogical, and the pedagogical a permanent feature of politics in a wide variety of sites, including schools. In this instance, politics is inextricably connected to pedagogies that effectively mobilize the beliefs, desires, and forms of persuasion that organize and give meaning to particular strategies of social engagement and policy transformation. Education as a form of persuasion, power, and intervention is constitutive of those ongoing struggles that shape the social. Challenging neoliberal hegemony as a form of domination is crucial to reclaiming an alternative notion of the political and rearticulating the relationship between political agency and substantive democracy.

Intellectuals and other cultural workers bear an enormous responsibility in opposing neoliberalism not only by reviving the rhetoric of democratic political culture but also by expanding its social consequences in ways that democratic societies have yet to realize. Part of this challenge suggests creating new locations of struggle, vocabularies, and subject positions that allow people in a wide variety of public spheres to become more than they are now, to question what it is they have become within existing institutional and social formations, and “to give some thought to their experiences so that they can transform their relations of subordination and oppression.” Cornelius Castoriadis insightfully argues that for any regime of democracy to be vital, it needs to create citizens who are critical thinkers capable of calling existing institutions into question, asserting individual rights, and assum-

96. In this instance, I am not suggesting that education simply be viewed as a way to promote critical consciousness, demystify knowledge, or provide alternative, progressive views of the world. Rather, I am suggesting that pedagogy become performative and be seen as a valuable, if not crucial tool, in linking theory to action and, in particular, in shaping social policy. On the issue of linking cultural politics and public policy, see Tony Bennett, “Putting Policy into Cultural Studies,” in Cultural Studies, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 23–37; Michael Bérubé, The Employment of English: Theory, Jobs, and the Future of Literary Studies (New York: New York University Press, 1998), especially the chapter entitled “Cultural Criticism and the Politics of Selling Out,” 216–42.

ing public responsibility. In this instance, critical pedagogy as an alternative form of civic education and literacy provides oppositional knowledges, skills, and theoretical tools for highlighting the workings of power and reclaiming the possibility of intervening in its operations and effects. But Castoriadis also suggests that civic education must be linked to the task of creating new locations of struggle that offer critical opportunities for experiencing political agency within social domains that provide the concrete conditions in which people can exercise their capacities and skills “as part of the very process of governing.” In this context, culture becomes a space for hope, and pedagogy becomes a valuable tool in reclaiming the promise of democracy and reabsorbing the political back into a viable notion of politics.

Zero tolerance has become a metaphor for hollowing out the state and expanding the forces of domestic militarization, for reducing democracy to the rule of capital, and for replacing an ethic of mutual aid with an appeal to excessive individualism and social indifference. Within this logic, the notion of the political increasingly equates power with domination, and politics with consumerism and passivity. Under this insufferable climate of manufactured indifference, increased repression, and unabated exploitation, young people become the new casualties in an ongoing war against justice, freedom, social citizenship, and democracy. As despairing as these conditions appear at the present moment, they increasingly have become the basis for a surge of political resistance on the part of many youth, intellectuals, labor unions, educators, and other activists and social movements. Under such circumstances, it is time to remind ourselves that collective problems deserve collective solutions and that what is at risk is not only a generation of young people now considered to be a generation of suspects but the very promise of democracy itself. The issue is no longer whether it is possible to invest in the idea of the political and politics but what are the consequences of not doing so.