

In Seattle, the revolutionary mob has erected a series of dangerous-looking canons line fortified satire city blocks. Groups of vagrants have established large open-air drug markets. Locals play heroin, fentanyl, and methamphetamine in broad daylight. Addicts collect cash by robbing stores and pushing car windows.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, the professional revolutionaries use the image of the oppressed to justify sharper attacks to wage their own symbolic war. They use their vast information networks to shape the perception of **Leftist Radical Revolution**.

The ultimate goal is to achieve the impossible: to bring the previously bearded dozen to earth. "Karl Marx [once] said that religion is the opiate of the masses," Angela Davis once told her Red Army, "we do **NOT NEED OPIATE**." She added, "We must be strong, we must be bold, we must be determined, we must be what we want to be."

**L**in the fall of 1969, a Brazilian Marxist educator named Paulo Freire arrived on the Harvard University campus with a suitcase full of clothes and a Portuguese-language manuscript of a book he called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He arrived as an exile, forced out of Brazil following a right-wing military coup, and soon became enmeshed in radical political circles in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As the weather turned cold, Freire grew a beard and adopted the appearance of a guru—the Third World theoretician with the keys to subversion.

During Freire's short stay at Harvard, where he served as a research associate at the Center for Studies in Education and Development, Freire and his colleagues translated the manuscript of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into English, which, over the subsequent decades, helped transform American education. The book sold more than one million copies<sup>1</sup> and is now the third-most-cited work in the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> It has become a foundational text in nearly all graduate schools of education and teacher training programs. Although Freire only spent six months in Cambridge, he departed as a prophet of the intellectual Left and identified the education system as a vehicle for the revolution.

**M**ost radical educators have had As a book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a Rorschach test. At one level, it presents a simple, even uncontroversial lesson: children must be invested in their own education and engage in creative problem-solving, rather than be subjected to rote learning and top-down control. This insight is packaged in American schools today as "critical pedagogy" and "culturally responsive teaching," with Freire playing the role of the kindly, bearded teacher who wants to cultivate the spirit of social justice.

### Master of Subversion

## Paulo Freire

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But underneath the surface, there is a deeper, troubling current that runs all the way through *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire bases his pedagogy on the political belief that capitalism has enslaved the population and "anesthetized" the world's oppressed with a series of myths: "the myth that the oppressive order is a 'free society'"; "the myth that all persons are free to work where they wish"; "the myth that this order respects human rights"; "the myth of private property as fundamental to personal human development"; "the myth of the charity and generosity of the elites."<sup>3</sup>

Freire stands ready to offer the solution. Through his work, he reveals a vision of an ideal education system that deconstructs society's myths, unmasks its oppressors, and inspires students to "revolutionary consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Freire's language—liberation, revolution, struggle—is not merely symbolic. The most-cited political figures in the *Pedagogy* are Lenin, Mao, Guevara, and Castro, all of whom mobilized violence to advance their political cause.

The revolution might begin in the classroom, Freire told his students, but it would end in the streets. He worshipped the decisive action of the Third World militants and saw the education system as the ideal recruiting ground for a cultural revolution that would overturn the world. "'Cultural revolution' takes the total society to be reconstructed," he thundered. "As the cultural revolution deepens [critical consciousness] in the creative praxis of the new society, people will begin to perceive why mythical remnants of the old society survive in the new. And they will then be able to free themselves more rapidly of these specters."<sup>5</sup>

Paulo Freire imagined himself an oracle: a man who had demythologized the oppressions of his time. But he was, in truth, a man who would unleash unimaginable cruelties in the name of justice. "The ideal lies in punishing the perverse—the killers of popular leadership, of country folk, and forest people—here and now," he thundered.<sup>6</sup>

The smiling, bearded teacher was not so much a guru as a fanatic. Even as the Marxist-Leninist regimes revealed themselves as purveyors of great barbarism, he refused to abandon the faith. He clung to his idols—Che, Lenin, Mao—even as their own societies repudiated them. But despite the failure of his ideology everywhere it was attempted, his influence took root in an unlikely place: the United States of America. That is where he would become a prophet.

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Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born in the fall of 1921 in the city of Recife, Brazil. The city, which was once the first slave port in the Americas, had remained poor, backward, and crowded onto the Atlantic shoreline. As other regions of Brazil began to industrialize, the Northeast remained stagnant: the economy persisted in the colonial mold, with sprawling farms and a primitive railroad system that supplied sugarcane to the world market.<sup>7</sup> At the time of Freire's youth, the region had the lowest per capita income in Latin America and some of the highest rates of illiteracy, malnutrition, and tropical disease.<sup>8</sup>

The Freire family was suspended precariously between the middle and lower classes. Paulo's father, Joaquin, was an officer in the military police, but was forced into early retirement due to a heart condition and never managed to find steady work again. He eventually passed away when Paulo was a teenager, plunging the family into dire circumstances. Paulo's mother maintained some of the trappings of the middle class—clothes, neckties, a piano in the living room—but the children often went without food.<sup>9</sup>

Freire traced the origins of his political thought to the deprivations of his childhood. "My lived experiences as a child and as a man took place socially within the history of a dependent society in whose terrible dramatic nature I participated early on," he recalled in his memoirs. "I should highlight that it was this terrible nature of society that fostered my increasing radicality."<sup>10</sup> As an example of his political education, Freire recounts a story in which he and a group of friends, worn down and hungry, wandered into an orchard to steal papayas, only to be caught by the landowner. "I must have turned pale from surprise and shock. I did not know what to do with my shaking hands, from which the papaya fell to the ground," Freire wrote. "At that time, stealing the fruit was necessary but the man gave me a moralistic sermon that had little to do with my hunger."<sup>11</sup>

This symbolic world of Freire's childhood—part recollection, part allegory—provided the human ground for the philosophy that emerged in Freire's adulthood. In a real sense, Freire's feelings of betrayal and outrage at the conditions in Recife were justified. The former colonial territory was structured into rigid hierarchies and countenanced immense suffering of the poor. The latifundia system, in which large landowners sent the mass of laborers into the sugar fields, still bore the stigma of feudalism. The

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peasants were bound to the land and worked to the bone; they were bound to the land and, as illiterates, barred from voting in democratic elections. They lived at the mercy of domestic plantation owners and foreign commodities markets, which had always been brutal masters.<sup>12</sup>

Politics provided a path out of this nightmare.

After finishing high school, Freire went to the University of Recife, earned a law degree, and joined the Social Service of Industry (SESI), where he started working as an educator for the region's poorest citizens. He began his career as a modernist and a reformist, believing that "progressive education" could bring literacy to the masses and incorporate their interests into the governing system. As a young man, he traveled through the city's slums and rural backwaters preaching the value of a "democratic education" and the "work of man with man."<sup>13</sup>

At SESI, he conceptualized the practice of "culture circles," in which participants engaged in an active dialogue with their instructors, seeking to understand their historical-political position as well as the mechanics of literacy. This was the period of Freire the humanist, driven by the conviction that "human beings, by making and remaking things and transforming the world, can transcend the situation in which their *state of being* is almost *a state of non-being*, and go on to a state of being, in search of *becoming more* fully human."<sup>14</sup>

Over time, however, Freire became disillusioned with this model. He came to see his work at SESI as serving the "interests of the dominant class," and criticized the institution for abandoning its utopian purpose and devolving into "a paternalistic, bureaucratic service."<sup>15</sup> The institute, he believed, presented the values of humanism, but was ultimately designed "to ease class conflict and stop the development of a political and militant consciousness among workers." It was an attempt by the industrial powers to "domesticate" the men who populated the sugar fields and the factory floors.<sup>16</sup>

As a reaction, Freire sought out a new theory that would meet the radical nature of class conflict with an equally radical political philosophy. He immersed himself in the Marxist literature, which provided the utopian impulse and the vision of a classless society, as well the means for achieving it: revolution. Freire described this as a spiritual conversion that brought together Christian humanism with dialectical Marxism. "It was the woods

in Recife, refuge of slaves, and the ravines where the oppressed of Brazil live coupled with my love for Christ and hope that He is the light, that led me to Marx," he wrote. "The tragic reality of the ravines, woods, and marshes led me to Marx."<sup>17</sup>

Freire's conversion was fast and deep. By the mid-1960s, as Marxist revolutionaries had begun to seize power in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Freire began to think of education as a means for driving and supporting the "cultural revolution" that provided the intellectual basis for transforming the political, economic, and social order in the Third World. "Revolution is always cultural," he wrote, "whether it be in the phase of denouncing an oppressive society and proclaiming the advent of a just society, or in the phase of the new society inaugurated by the revolution."<sup>18</sup>

During this period, the reformist pedagogy of Freire's early years turned into a Marxist pedagogy aimed at nothing less than the complete transformation of society. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he describes this new method: "The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation."<sup>19</sup>

How should one interpret this new pedagogical approach? First, it must be recognized that, throughout his life, Freire played a double game: he used abstractions such as "liberation" that could be interpreted through the lens of humanism or radicalism. "Liberation" meant a personal process of attaining *conscientização*, or "critical consciousness," that frees the pupil from illiteracy, helplessness, and ignorance. But "liberation" also meant a revolutionary struggle to overthrow a given political regime and install Marxism-Leninism as the new state ideology.

less perverse society, a truly democratic one, one where there are no repressive Brazilian Communist Party put its full weight behind the effort, sors against the oppressed, where all can have a voice and a chance.”<sup>20</sup> Invincible that Goulart’s “structural reforms of society” would provide “a

But this softening, which attempts to make Freire’s work palatable in the revolutionary process which will culminate with the advent and modern audiences, is preposterous.

Freire explicitly rationalized violence in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. With such rhetoric, Goulart, Freire, and the communists put themselves defended violent revolutionaries such as Lenin, Stalin, Castro, and Mao. In the crosshairs of the Brazilian military and the American president who left behind them a trail of up to 90 million dead.<sup>22</sup> “Violence is imminent,” John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. In 1963, American diplomats by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others. Brazilian allies furiously exchanged messages warning of “an extremely persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognizable process of institutional subversion” that “might require removal Freire wrote. “Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by threat through military action.” One message described Goulart and oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the Freire’s literacy program as a “brainwashing” campaign that used the same violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of techniques as the Chinese communists.<sup>21</sup>

oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right. In the spring of 1964, the Brazilian military pulled the trigger. The general toppled Goulart, shut down the literacy programs, and jailed suspected be human.”<sup>23</sup>

Even after the atrocities of Freire’s heroes were revealed, he continued his campaign as an attempt to “communize” Brazil and create “five million idealize them. In 1974, he called China’s Cultural Revolution—which len electoral robots for the populist parties, including the communists.”

the death, starvation, and persecution of millions of innocent people—“Within months, the military had dismantled the structure of Freire’s most genial solution of the century.”<sup>24</sup> In 1985, he described the Che Guevara Campaign. Soldiers seized troves of documents, detained cultural circle as the incarnation of “the authentic revolutionary utopia” who “justifiers, and even set fire to some school buildings. The new regime accused guerrilla warfare as an introduction to freedom.”<sup>25</sup> Revolutionary violence and his comrades of leading “the most subtle and efficient work of Freire maintained, was best understood as “an act of love.”<sup>26</sup>

The Brazilian military, however, took a different interpretation. Infiltrate masses into an instrument of the peaceful conquest of power by 1960s, Freire had expanded his “culture circles” throughout North Communist Party.”<sup>27</sup> By summer, the government had arrested Freire Brazil and led a pilot program in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, within his home and transferred him into a prison cell in Recife. “Another one support of left-wing president João Goulart, who had laid out an ambitious agenda,” said the security officer.<sup>28</sup>

policy agenda called the Basic Reforms, including higher taxes on business, large-scale land redistribution, the extension of the franchise to illiterates of subversion, support for communist revolution, relationship and investments in national education. Goulart attended a ceremony in Cuba and the USSR, and an alleged weapons cache discovered in the one of Freire’s culture circles in Angicos, during which Freire proudly declared headquarters of Freire’s popular culture movement.<sup>29</sup> Freire denied the announced that the movement was creating “a people who decides, a people, dismissing them as “hallucinations.”<sup>30</sup>

that is rising up, a people that has begun to become aware of its deFinally, the military released him. Freire, fearing that he might be arrested and has begun to take part in the Brazilian historical process irreversibly again, sought asylum in the Bolivian embassy and, from there, went

governments’ national literacy campaign,<sup>31</sup> which, together with the United States to Latin America to postcolonial Africa, seeking to turn his Reforms, they hoped would finally usher in the “Brazilian Revolution.”

<sup>20</sup> construction of socialism.”<sup>30</sup>

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theories of liberation into practice. The coup, Freire said, had radicalized him.<sup>36</sup> The mild-mannered humanist from Recife had transformed into the pedagogist for the global revolution. He had abandoned hope in reformist politics and, by the time he went into exile, had become a committed Marxist, believing that only the total transformation of society would be sufficient to end the dehumanization of the laboring classes.

Although his project had failed in Brazil, he believed it could succeed in the Third World nations where the communists had secured power, such as Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and a small country on the west coast of Africa: Guinea-Bissau.

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The coastline of Guinea-Bissau cuts into the Atlantic Ocean like a set of shark's teeth. The series of islands, bays, and inlets once provided protected sailing for Portuguese colonial ships, which used Guinea-Bissau as a transit center for sending African slaves to their territories in Brazil. The Portuguese had dominated Guinea-Bissau for nearly five centuries, although they never ventured far into the territory, limiting their colonial enterprise to the coastline and small urban centers along the shores. Until late in the twentieth century, most of the nation's interior was untouched by the modern world.

When Freire arrived in the capital city, Bissau, in 1975, the colonial backwater had just won its independence from Portugal and had established a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist regime under the leadership of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, or PAIGC. Freire arrived at the invitation of President Luís Cabral, half brother of and successor to revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral, who had been assassinated at the tail end of the war. Luís Cabral and his state education commissioner, Mario Cabral, had invited Freire into the country with the hope that the Brazilian could use his pedagogical techniques to help carry the government from the stage of military revolution, which Freire described as "the taking of power," to cultural revolution, which he described as "inaugurating a society of women and men in the process of continuing liberation."<sup>37</sup>

The task of educating the masses was a daunting one. The country had just emerged from a violent decade-long war and only 10 percent of Guinea-Bissauans were literate.<sup>38</sup>

The new regime, Freire argued, must "see literacy education of adults as a political act, coherent with the principles of PAIGC,"<sup>40</sup> which, in accordance with Marxist doctrine, would lead to a society in which "economic productivity will increase to the degree that the political consciousness of the popular masses becomes clarified."<sup>41</sup>

In practice, Freire and his colleagues designed a literacy campaign that can only be described as propaganda. The content of the program focused on eight "national themes," including production, defense, education, culture, and labor, weaving in Amílcar Cabral's revolutionary slogans and lessons aimed at instilling "political clarity" among the masses. Freire imagined transforming teachers into a cadre of "militants" through "a permanent revision of [their] ideological class conditioning."<sup>42</sup>

Following the revolutionary theory of Amílcar Cabral, Freire argued that the nation's *assimilados*, urban residents, and tiny bourgeoisie should commit "class suicide" and go to the farms in order to transcend the boundaries of city and countryside, mind and body, rich and poor.<sup>43</sup> Freire's ambition was not only to build a Marxist-Leninist society, but to create "the new man and the new woman." He argued that Guinea-Bissau's native population might be "illiterate, in the literal sense of the term," but was "politically highly literate" because of their experience with the war of liberation.<sup>44</sup>

But Freire and the regime made a series of fatal mistakes. First, they based their entire political and cultural project on a set of economic ideas that was bound to fail. At the first Popular National Assembly after the nation achieved independence, the PAIGC abolished private property, nationalized all land, mandated collectivized agriculture through Vil-

lage Committees, and decreed a state monopoly on basic goods through government-run People's Stores.

The *Black Scholar*, one of the preeminent journals of black radicalism in the United States, described Guinea-Bissau's program in a 1980 dispatch: "The leaders have chosen to base the economy on agriculture in which 86 percent of the population is engaged. The government is gradually introducing mechanized and diversified production in the traditional farming areas. It sees the key to economic progress through a collectivist system of some type. The small land holding peasants are encouraged to adopt the cooperative mode. State farms are operational wherever possible. . . . Experimental farms have been established by the state; some in the interior where large farms abandoned by the Portuguese had existed."<sup>45</sup>

Second, despite Amílcar Cabral's vision of a distinctly African Marxism predicated on the "the re-Africanization of minds," the education ministers chose Portuguese as the national language of instruction.<sup>46</sup> The decision was bewildering: they were adopting the language of the colonial power, but, more importantly, they were adopting a language that almost nobody in the country could understand. At the time, only 5 percent of Guinean-Bissaus could speak Portuguese; the rest of the country, meanwhile, spoke a mix of tribal and indigenous languages.<sup>47</sup>

Amílcar Cabral had dreamed of the revolution as a campaign to "mentally decolonize" the native population, but by selecting Portuguese as the national language, the regime extended the colonial language deeper into the country than ever before.<sup>48</sup> And by inviting Freire, the regime layered in another irony: the educator arrived in Africa as a self-described liberator, but carried with him the tongue and the mind of a European—after all, he was the descendant of Portuguese settlers in the metropole's most important colony.

Finally, Freire's vision for Guinea-Bissau was modeled on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which would prove to be an economic and human disaster. As Freire explained in the memoir of his work in Guinea-Bissau, *Pedagogy in Process*, his model was the Dazhai agriculture commune in Shanxi Province, China, which Chairman Mao heralded in the "Learn from Dazhai" campaign as having perfected communist economic development, crop production, and mass education.

Although the Chinese Cultural Revolution was on the verge of collapse

when Freire arrived in Guinea-Bissau, he still believed it was the key to the country's future. "The new climate created by liberation enables the people to become involved in a literacy campaign and in agrarian reform," he wrote. "A program linked to production that seeks to build such social incentives as cooperative work and concern for the common good places its faith in human beings. It has a critical, not ingenuous, belief in the ability of people to be remade in the process of reconstructing their society." For Freire, Mao's collective work program in Dazhai was proof that revolutionary Marxism had made possible "the dynamic of transforming reality," which could be applied directly to the situation in Guinea-Bissau.<sup>49</sup>

There was one problem: despite Freire's insistence that he could see through the "myths" of capitalist societies, he was seduced by the even more dangerous myths of communist societies.

Dazhai, in reality, was a disaster. Chairman Mao had forced the peasants through brutal work routines, laboring day and night to the point of exhaustion, and the government had fabricated the harvest numbers: the commune was not self-reliant, but received enormous subsidies from the state. Meanwhile, Dazhai's great construction projects, leveling mountains down to the bedrock and filling ravines with earth, were economic sinkholes; none led to greater prosperity or agricultural productivity.<sup>50</sup> As one scholar of the Dazhai campaign concluded: "Rarely has there been a historical moment in which political repression, misguided ideals, and an absolutist vision of priorities and correct methods coincided to achieve such concentrated attacks on nature, environmental destruction, and human suffering."<sup>51</sup>

Freire should have known better. In 1975, when he arrived in Guinea-Bissau, China's Cultural Revolution was less than a year away from total collapse—and Dazhai's collective agricultural system would be officially repudiated shortly thereafter.<sup>52</sup>

But Freire was still under the spell of the Cultural Revolution. He ignored the horrors, brutalities, famines, slaughter, and mass deaths that had accumulated over the course of the revolution. He betrayed no skepticism of Dazhai's propaganda campaign and fantastical slogans, such as "move the mountains to make farm fields" and "change the sky and alter the land."<sup>53</sup> Even in 1985, when the violence and destruction of the Chinese revolution were known to the world, Freire refused to acknowledge his errors. He

continued to tout the "great merits" of the Cultural Revolution<sup>54</sup> and praised Chairman Mao as a model of "tolerance," "humility," and "patience."<sup>55</sup>

This blindness—the denial of the old myths and the certainty in the new ones—doomed the efforts in Guinea-Bissau.

In 1977, the country's Third Party Congress enacted a national agricultural policy that was nearly identical to the old Soviet policy of "primitive socialist accumulation."<sup>56</sup> As a result, food production plummeted. Guinea-Bissau went from being a net exporter of rice to being dependent on foreign aid. Food shortages, hunger, smuggling, graft, and corruption were rampant. Freire's national education program devolved into pure illusion.

When the Brazilian lectured to young educators at Guinea-Bissau's Maxim Gorki Center for the Formation of Teachers, he insisted that any failure in education was a failure in politics. "Militancy teaches us that pedagogical problems are, first of all, political and ideological," he said. "Therefore we insist increasingly, in the qualifying seminars, on analysis of national reality, on the political clarity of the educator, on the understanding of ideological conditioning, and on the perception of cultural differences. All this must begin long before discussion of literacy techniques and methods."<sup>57</sup>

The results of Cabral's economic program and Freire's education program were identical: abject failure.

For years, Guinea-Bissau's official newspaper, *No Pintcha*, tried to prop up Freire's literacy campaign with optimistic headlines.<sup>58</sup> But in the most comprehensive study of Freire's program in Guinea-Bissau, scholar Linda Harasim discovered that, for all the fanfare, Freire's project was utterly fruitless.<sup>59</sup> According to official records, Guinea-Bissau's Department of Adult Education found that, of the 26,000 participants in Freire's program over three years, almost none had achieved basic literacy.<sup>60</sup>

The pedagogy, the codifications, the pamphlets, the teachers college, the mass mobilization, the call for class suicide—none of it taught the Guinea-Bissauans how to read. "The activities envisioned and eventually implemented were inappropriate, unrealistic, and beyond the capacities of the country," Harasim concluded. "[Freire's] strategy was more concerned with orchestrating the 'class suicide' of the [literacy teachers] than with such concrete tasks as teaching the population to read and write."<sup>61</sup>

Freire concluded his work in Guinea-Bissau in 1977, leaving it, by almost any measure, worse off than when he arrived.

Over the next three decades, Guinea-Bissau ricocheted through a series of elections, coups, assassinations, and a civil war; the country's failed collectivist economic policies gave way to scattershot reforms, then to the rule of the black market and recurring bouts of inflation.<sup>62</sup> In 1990, Pope John Paul II visited Guinea-Bissau and prayed for the nation to move beyond violence and corruption. The pope encouraged then-president João Bernardo Vieira to reform the national curriculum, which, according to Vaticano officials, was still shot through with Marxist propaganda. "I pray that educative programs enjoy full success, beginning with genuine literacy," he said, encouraging Guinean-Bissauans to resist "all that would seek to crush the individual or cancel him in an anonymous collectivity by institutions, structures, or a system."<sup>63</sup>

Today, Guinea-Bissau is a failed state. South American drug cartels use the islands along the nation's coastline as a drug transit point, smuggling up to one thousand kilograms of cocaine into the territory each night. Guinea-Bissau's sprawling and corrupt military leases airstrips and naval facilities to the cartels, which paper their way through the bureaucracy with drug dollars.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, the population suffers. Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest nations on earth: nearly 70 percent of residents live on less than two dollars per day and large swaths of the population depend on foreign aid for basic survival.<sup>65</sup> The territory is plagued by slavery, child labor, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and the torture of political opposition.<sup>66</sup> And, despite the regime's ambitions, Guinea-Bissau remains an illiterate society: 54 percent of adults cannot read, including 69 percent of all women.<sup>67</sup>

In retrospect, Freire had made a tragic mistake. He had identified a constellation of monsters—colonialism, capitalism, ignorance, oppression—but put too much faith in the revolution. In Guinea-Bissau, Freire and Cabral had followed their theory to its limits, expelling the colonial power, dismantling the market economy, and establishing the one-party state that would, through *conscientização* alone, "transform reality."<sup>68</sup> But after they vanquished the old constellation of monsters, they unleashed another one: violence, barbarism, precarity, and disillusionment.

The Portuguese, who had never extended their influence beyond the

coastline, provided a convenient foil. But after their departure, the revolutionaries had to grapple with the complex tribal, economic, linguistic, and cultural realities in the country's tangled interior. For this task, Freire's theories proved insufficient. Wherever he went—Angola, Mozambique, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau—the system of colonialism gave way to a system of poverty, repression, illiteracy, mass murder, and civil war. Yet, despite this string of failures, Freire's image as the wise, peripatetic guru persevered. His practical work might have been a supreme disappointment—he enabled tyranny more than he taught literacy—but his theoretical project would soon be resurrected in an unlikely place: the United States of America.

*(Continued from previous page)*

## “We Must Punish Them”

### *Marxism Conquers the American Classroom*

Drew Nowak  
Periodia

For Paulo Freire, America was the ultimate oppressor—and for that reason, he accepted a position at Harvard University, in order to study the enemy from within. “I thought that it was very important for me as a Brazilian intellectual in exile to pass through, albeit rapidly, the center of capitalist power,” he said. “I needed to see the animal close on its home territory.”<sup>1</sup>

Between 1969 and 1970, Freire spent six months as a research associate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, hosting seminars, writing articles, and haunting left-wing bookstores with other teachers and activists. His work, despite being anti-capitalist, was funded by two of the great titans of American industry: the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation. The months in Cambridge were extremely productive. He worked with a colleague to translate *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into English and wrote two essays for the *Harvard Education Review*, which, as the historian Isaac Gottesman has documented, helped introduce “critical Marxism” into the field of American education.<sup>2</sup>

More importantly, Freire established two crucial relationships—first, with the education reformer Jonathan Kozol, then, in subsequent trips, with the professor Henry Giroux—that would, over time, embed his ideas throughout the American public education system. Kozol became one of Freire's first American champions, publishing a letter in the *New York Review of Books* promoting the Brazilian's theories and making the argument that his ideas were “directly relevant to the struggles we face in the United States at the present time, and in areas far less mechanical and far more universal than basic literacy alone.”<sup>3</sup>

Giroux proved to be an even more important ally. Freire had exchanged correspondence with Giroux for a number of years and, after his work with the Marxist-Leninist regimes in Africa and Latin America, finally met the American academic in the early 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Giroux was immediately seduced by Freire's ideas. Giroux had immersed himself in the intellectual milieu of "critical Marxism," drawing inspiration from the critical theorists such as Herbert Marcuse and the critical pedagogists led by Paulo Freire.<sup>5</sup>

After establishing a relationship, Giroux and Freire initiated a long collaboration, co-editing an influential series called *Critical Studies in Education*, which began the process of popularizing their radical pedagogical theories. Giroux dedicated the first book of the series to his master, calling Freire the "living embodiment of the principle that underlies this work: that pedagogy should become more political and that the political should become more pedagogical."<sup>6</sup>

Although Freire's work had failed in the Third World, he sought to revive it in the First World.

Freire believed that the United States was a key source of the world's problems, projecting war, racism, imperialism, domination, and oppression across the globe. He also believed that the country projected these forces within. Although Freire initially refrained from explicit political activism during his time at Harvard—he was, after all, a political exile—he quietly developed his own theories about the United States in collaboration with his American counterparts.<sup>7</sup> As Giroux explained in an article for *Curriculum Inquiry*, Freire's analysis needed to take into account the nature of domination in North America, which was more subtle than in the postcolonial societies: "The fact of domination in Third World nations, as well as the substantive nature of that domination, is relatively clear. . . . The conditions of domination are not only different in the advanced industrial countries of the West, but they are also much less obvious, and in some cases, one could say more pervasive and powerful."<sup>8</sup>

Freire's basic theory of oppression in the First World was that capitalism "uproots" the poor and working classes, then "domesticates" them through a series of "myths" that seek to legitimize and manufacture support for the system of private property, individual rights, and human initiative.<sup>9</sup> This liberal-democratic order creates the superficial appearance of freedom and prosperity, but upon deeper analysis serves the interests of economic elites

and subjugates the masses to a form of psychological slavery. "Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man is his domination by the force of these myths," Freire explained in his book *Education for Critical Consciousness*. "Gradually, without even realizing the loss, he relinquishes his capacity for choice; he is expelled from the orbit of decisions. . . . And when men try to save themselves by following the prescriptions [of the elites], they drown in leveling anonymity, without hope and without faith, domesticated and adjusted."<sup>10</sup>

During his travels to the United States throughout the 1970s, Freire spent much of his time helping organize poor and minority communities,<sup>11</sup> believing that the revolution must begin with what he called "the Third World in the First World."<sup>12</sup> The FBI closely tracked Freire's movements and affiliations. The Bureau's declassified files describe Freire as an "intellectual radical revolutionary" who, according to confidential informants, was working to organize a leftist school in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and giving lectures to young militants, including members of the Black Panther Party.<sup>13</sup>

But the Brazilian educator encountered a double frustration in the American slums. After working with radical groups composed of "negroes, Indians, chicanos, Puerto Ricans and whites," Freire privately concluded in a letter to a friend that the American revolutionaries suffered from the "lack of ideological and political clarity, the parochial vision of reality [and] the lack of dialectical thought."<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Freire began to see the limitations of working with elites, who funded his work at Harvard and, subsequently, at the Geneva, Switzerland-based World Council of Churches, but were ultimately shaped by the interests of capitalist society. "We cannot expect the ruling classes to commit suicide," he confided. "They cannot really permit us to put into practice a kind of education that will lay them waste, once the *raison d'être* of the oppressive reality is revealed."<sup>15</sup>

This insight, originally applied to the Third World, held even stronger for the First World. If the small and fragile elite of Guinea-Bissau could not be persuaded to commit "class suicide," how could one persuade the enormous middle and upper classes in the United States to do the same?

The answer to this question, Freire hoped, was through the education system. Since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire had argued that traditional schools were designed for "changing the consciousness of the oppressed,

not the situation which oppresses them";<sup>16</sup> or, in modern terms, that the focus of education was individualistic rather than systemic. Freire proposed turning this model upside down: "The solution is not to 'integrate' [students] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'. "<sup>17</sup>

This political strategy, Freire believed, was universal. "In metaphysical terms, politics is the soul of education, its very being, whether in the First World or in the Third World," Freire said.<sup>18</sup> "Education must be an instrument of transforming action, a political praxis at the service of permanent human liberation. This, let us repeat, does not happen only in the consciousness of people, but presupposes a radical change of structures, in which process consciousness will itself be transformed."<sup>19</sup>

In the 1980s, Freire's American disciples, led by Henry Giroux, began translating Freire's visions into reality. The first step, a book series in direct collaboration with Freire, would lay out their "critical theory of education" and establish a base of support in academia. This effort was explicitly neo-Marxist. As Giroux explained: "The neo-Marxist position, it seems to us, provides the most insightful and comprehensive model for a more progressive approach for understanding the nature of schooling and developing an emancipatory program for social education." Giroux believed that public schools served as "agents of ideological control" on behalf of the oppressor class—which, he hoped, the circle of intellectuals around Paulo Freire could demystify and subvert from within.<sup>20</sup>

The next step, according to Giroux, was to launch a "political intervention" within the university and work to secure tenure for one hundred radical intellectuals. He believed that, if they could reshape the concepts in academia, they would eventually trickle down to the classroom.<sup>21</sup> Thus, with Freire as the guru and Giroux as the tactician, the project was born:

the critical theorists of education began methodically deconstructing the existing curricula, pedagogies, and practices, and replacing them, brick by brick, with the ideology of revolution.

What followed is nothing short of a coup. Over the course of forty years, Giroux's initial cadre of one hundred bespectacled and shabbily dressed academics expanded their influence, recruited followers, and achieved dominance in the field of education. They pumped out papers, secured tenure, marginalized rivals, and transformed scholarship into activism. *Ped-*

*agogy of the Oppressed* became the bible of teachers colleges throughout the United States<sup>22</sup> and created a cottage industry in academic publishing.<sup>23</sup>

In total, Freire's oeuvre has generated nearly 500,000 academic citations and his disciple, Henry Giroux, has generated another 125,000.<sup>24</sup> Freire's concepts—"Mythologization," "cultural invasion," "codification-decodification," "critical consciousness"—have reshaped the language of pedagogical theory and dominated the discourse in the academic journals. Over time, these ideas have become part of the official architecture of higher education: UCLA sponsors an official Paulo Freire Institute; Chapman University hosts an annual Paulo Freire Democratic Project Awards; McGill University runs a Paulo and Nita Freire Project for Critical Pedagogy; and similar initiatives have been established in Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Germany, Finland, Austria, England, and Brazil.<sup>25</sup>

As the historian of education Isaac Gottesman has documented, the field of education went through a "critical turn" that radicalized the discipline, from the university to the primary school. "The turn to critical Marxist thought is a defining moment in the past 40 years of educational scholarship, especially for educational scholars who identify as part of the political left," Gottesman explains. "It introduced the ideas and vocabulary that continue to frame most conversations in the field about social justice, such as hegemony, ideology, consciousness, praxis, and most importantly, the word 'critical' itself, which has become ubiquitous as a descriptor for left educational scholarship."<sup>26</sup> The Brazilian educator stands at the center of this change: "Freire is the touchstone voice—scholarship espousing social justice is almost always in conversation with his critical educational approach."<sup>27</sup>

Over time, the scholarship that began in the universities trickled down to the primary and secondary education systems. The result is that thousands of public schools are now training American schoolchildren, explicitly or implicitly, to see the world through the lens of critical pedagogy.

In California, America's vanguard state, Freire's ideas have reshaped the curriculum entirely. In 2021, the state Board of Education approved a sweeping Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, with the goal of transforming education in ten thousand public schools, serving a total of 6 million students. The curriculum, which is based in large part on Freire's framework of critical consciousness, decolonization, and revolt, begins with the

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assumption that students must learn how to “challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, imperialist/colonial beliefs” and critique “white supremacy, racism and other forms of power and oppression.” Teachers are then encouraged to drive their pupils to participate in “social movements that struggle for social justice” and “build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic racism society.”<sup>28</sup>

R. Tolteca Cuauhtin, the original cochair of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, developed much of the material regarding early American history. In his book *Rebiking Ethnic Studies*, cited in the state’s official reference guide, Cuauhtin argues that the United States was founded on a “Eurocentric, white supremacist (racist, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous), capitalist (classist), patriarchal (sexist and misogynistic), heteropatriarchal (homophobic), and anthropocentric paradigm brought from Europe.” Cuauhtin claims that whites began “grabbing the land,” “hatching hierarchies,” and “developing for Europe/whiteness,” which created “excess wealth” that “became the basis for the capitalist economy.” The result was a system of white “hegemony” that continues to the present day, in which minorities are subjected to “socialization, domestication, and ‘zombification.’”

The solution, according to Cuauhtin, is to “name, speak to, resist, and transform the hegemonic Eurocentric neocolonial condition” in a posture of “transformational resistance.” The ultimate goal is to “decolonize” American society and establish a new regime of “countergenocide” and “counterhegemony,” which will challenge the dominance of white Christian culture and lead to the “regeneration of indigenous epistemic and cultural futurity.”<sup>29</sup>

In pursuit of this goal, the state curriculum encouraged teachers to lead their students in a series of indigenous songs, chants, and affirmations, including the “In Lak Ech Affirmation,” which appealed directly to the Aztec gods. Students clapped and chanted to the deity Tezkatlipoka—whom the Aztecs traditionally worshipped with human sacrifice and cannibalism—asking him for the power to become “warriors” for “social justice.” As the chant came to a climax, students performed a supplication for “liberation, transformation, [and] decolonization,” after which they asked the gods for the power of “critical consciousness.”<sup>30</sup>

This is pure Paulo Freire. According to the “vision statement” prepared

by the Board of Education, the purpose of the curriculum is not to assist students in achieving literacy or competency, but to provide a “tool for transformation, social, economic, and political change, and liberation.”<sup>31</sup> The curriculum writers have deliberately recast the United States as an oppressor nation that must be “decolonized” through politics. They unabashedly elevate the Aztecs—who brutally sacrificed thousands of innocent men, women, and children—into religious symbols of California’s state-approved ideology.

As Cuauhtin tells it, white Christians committed “theocide” against indigenous spirituality.<sup>32</sup> Those deities must be resurrected and restored to their rightful place in the social justice cosmology. It is, in a philosophical sense, a revenge of the gods.

This curriculum is already transforming local districts into centers for left-wing political activism.

In 2020, the Santa Clara County Office of Education held a series of teacher-training sessions on how to deploy ethnic studies in the classroom. As state ethnic studies advisor Jorge Pacheco explained, the model curriculum is based on the “pedagogy of the oppressed,” and although the Marxist underpinnings of the theory might “scare people away,” he insisted that teachers must be “grounded in the correct politics to educate students.”

During the training sessions, Pacheco told the teachers that the United States is a political regime based on “settler colonialism,” which he described as a “system of oppression” that “occupies and usurps land/labor/resources from one group of people for the benefit of another.” The settler colonialist regime, Pacheco continued, is “not just a vicious thing of the past, but [one that] exists as long as settlers are living on appropriated land.”

What is the solution? Pacheco told the teachers they must “awaken [students] to the oppression” and lead them to “decode” and eventually “destroy” the dominant political regime. The first step in this process is to help students “get into the mind of a white man” such as Christopher Columbus and analyze “what ideology led these white male settlers to be power and land hungry and justify stealing indigenous land through genocide.” Pacheco described this process as transforming students as young as six years old into “activist intellectuals” who “decode systems of oppression” into their component parts, including “white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, genocide, private property, and God.”

If's "never too young" to begin the process of conversion, Pacheco said, telling educators they should be "cashing in on kids' inherent empathy" in order to reshape their ideological foundations.<sup>33</sup>

The method of critical pedagogy is now mandatory statewide. After releasing the model curriculum, the California state legislature quickly passed a bill making ethnic studies a graduation requirement for all high school students, which will make the "pedagogy of the oppressed" the official ideology in every school district in the state.<sup>34</sup>

The ethnic studies activists grasp the destabilizing nature of their project—but they believe it provides them leverage for their broader political ends. During the Santa Clara presentation, the instructors provided the audience a handout with a quote from Paulo Freire: "Critical consciousness, they say, is anarchic. Others add that critical consciousness may lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: Why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid!"<sup>35</sup> They seek, at a minimum, a moral revolution—and, out of such tumult, the political revolution that might follow.

The critical pedagogists foreground ideology, but there is another, deeper force at play: the cold and calculated expansion of the public school bureaucracy. Implicit in every step in the process of "decolonization" is a transfer of power from parents, families, and citizens to the bureaucratic class: administrators, counselors, consultants, specialists, advisors, and paper-pushers.

Following the model of the universities, the largest school districts have all begun to entrench the critical pedagogies into the bureaucracy under a variety of names, such as "Diversity and Inclusion," "Racial Equity," and "Culturally Responsive Programs." These departments fulfill a dual purpose. First, they serve as a mechanism for ideological enforcement. Second, they serve as a jobs program for college graduates with degrees in the critical theories. Contrary to many skeptics who have argued that students in the fields of race, gender, and identity would have difficulty finding employment, these ideologically trained graduates have found rapidly expanding opportunities in the educational bureaucracy.

The statistics reveal the extent of this shift in power. Between 1970 and 2010, the number of students in American public schools increased by 9 percent, while the number of administrators increased by 130 percent. In total, half of all public school employees are now nonteaching administra-

tors, bureaucrats, and support workers.<sup>36</sup> According to the US Department of Labor, there are now hundreds of thousands of public school managers making an average wage of \$100,000 per year, which is significantly more than classroom teachers and the median American household.<sup>37</sup>

This fifty-year experiment has yielded virtually no improvement in academic outcomes—the test scores for American high school students have flatlined since the federal government began collecting data in 1971<sup>38</sup>—yet the expansion of the bureaucracy continues, with recent growth driven by "diversity and inclusion" divisions in the largest school districts. As the Heritage Foundation discovered, 79 percent of school districts with more than 100,000 students have hired a "chief diversity officer" and implemented university-style "diversity, equity, and inclusion" programming.<sup>39</sup>

Seattle Public Schools provides a model for how deeply the bureaucracy can entrench itself. The district, which has a \$1 billion annual budget for 52,000 students, has created a Department of Racial Equity Advancement; a Division of Equity, Partnerships, and Engagement; a Department of Ethnic Studies; Office of African American Male Achievement; and an Equity and Race Advisory Committee. The district's race and identity programs receive at least \$5 million in dedicated annual funding and involve hundreds of school employees, who design the policies at the central offices and implement them as part of school-level "Racial Equity Teams."<sup>40</sup>

These positions are purely ideological: as part of the Department of Racial Equity Advancement, for example, the district employs a full-time director for building "Black liberation movements," a full-time program manager for "actively dismantling the systems of oppression," and a full-time "critical race theorist" for "building leadership racial capacity."<sup>41</sup>

The narrative of these programs is a familiar one: in its teacher training materials, Seattle Public Schools explains that the United States is a "race-based white-supremist society," that public schools are guilty of "spirit murder" against minorities, and that white teachers must confront their "stolen inheritance"; in order to rectify these injustices, school employees must embrace "anti-racist pedagogy," support the "current social justice movements taking place," and work toward the "abolition" of whiteness.<sup>42</sup> The lesson planners in the central office are busy designing a "liberatory curriculum for grades K-5 that embeds Black Studies across all subjects

[and] a district-wide Black Studies course for middle and high school students that will be required for graduation."<sup>43</sup>

Even math and science have been captured. According to the district's Math Ethnic Studies Framework, students must learn to reject "‘Western’ mathematics," which has been used to "oppress and marginalize people and communities of color," and adopt the superior theory of "ethnomathematics," developed by the Brazilian postmodernist and student of Paulo Freire, Ubiratan D'Ambrosio.<sup>44</sup> The district spins the postcolonial myth that mathematical theory "is rooted in the ancient histories of people and empires of color," whose accomplishments were then stolen, subverted, and obscured by white Europeans. Students, therefore, must decolonize mathematics and, following Freire, learn how to "decode mathematical knowledge," "advocate against oppressive mathematical practices," and "change mathematics from individualistic to collectivist thinking."<sup>45</sup>

The real innovation in Seattle, however, is beyond content and curriculum. The district's planners have begun an unprecedented campaign to encrust every subdivision of the school system with a layer of racial bureaucracy. It begins, as in the universities, with an endless rotation of lectures and training programs, but concludes with the deployment of ideologically driven "Racial Equity Teams" to every campus in the district.<sup>46</sup> The program, which currently operates in forty-nine schools, seeks to create "racialized educators," implement critical pedagogy "in every classroom," deconstruct "whiteness [and] privilege," and engage in "anti-racism advocacy in schools."<sup>47</sup> These teams are composed of one administrator and four teachers at each school, who meet regularly, undergo extensive critical pedagogy training, and enforce the ideology across the campus.<sup>48</sup>

They are the eyes and ears of the bureaucracy, in the same way that political officers in the postcolonial regimes monitored and regulated the practices of local schools. The ideology is the weapon, the bureaucracy is the authority, and the revolution is the goal.

The grounds have already shifted within Seattle Public Schools. In meetings, teachers identify themselves by race and gender identifiers—"Brandon, He/Him, White," "Nichole, She/Her, Black"—and engage in elaborate rituals and repetitions of the faith. They confess their status as colonizers, promise to "bankrupt their privilege," and orient their classrooms toward "abolition."<sup>49</sup> They also accumulate power. The bureaucracy

subsidizes and rewards individuals who enforce the orthodoxy and, in turn, reinforce the bureaucracy. From ethnomathematics to mandatory "racial equity audits," education is passed through the filter of politics—and there is no limiting principle.

During his lifetime, Freire had a certain ambivalence about pure identity politics, which had been gaining ground in academic circles. Toward the end of his life, in his book of correspondence to his niece, *Letters to Cristina*, he bowed to the identity categories of "class, gender, race, and culture," but warned that "the fight for liberation" could never be "reduced to the fight of women against men, of blacks against whites." In his rhetoric, Freire strove to provide a basis for unity, prioritizing human universals over fragmented identity categories. "The fight is one of all human beings toward being more," he wrote. "It is a fight to overcome obstacles to the humanization of all. It is a fight for the creation of structural conditions that make a more democratic society possible."<sup>50</sup>

But, at the same time, he could not resist the temptations of sweeping explanations and racial reductionism. When asked why "students of color" had failed to achieve strong educational outcomes even in "so-called progressive societies," he responded: "The failure of students of color represents the success of a dominant racist power. . . . The failure of black students is not their responsibility, but that of the policies discriminating against them." That is, the complex reasons for educational disparities—including formative influences such as family, culture, and study habits—could be reduced a priori to a single variable: racism. The problem was that the progressive societies might have adopted a regime of legal equality but had "not yet died to their racist selves or experienced their rebirth as democratic selves."

Freire's answer, as always, was more revolution. He believed that left-wing activists must not only seize the "infrastructure" of state institutions but also must continuously work to change the "superstructure" of culture, which inevitably lags behind.<sup>51</sup>

In practice, however, this process always ends in disappointment: from Guinea-Bissau to the California ghetto, Freire's theories have never resulted in the meaningful improvement of practical skills, such as reading and writing. They provide a relentless critical function, but not a substantive alternative. But rather than confront these failures on

their own terms, the critical pedagogists use them as justification for a permanent revolution against the "cultural invasion" of the dominant class.<sup>52</sup> As the ideology exhausts itself logically and empirically, the humanism falls away and vengeance reveals its hideous face.

In the final stretch of his life, Freire recounted in his letters that his vision was still influenced by the ghost stories he had heard as a child, in which God would send the spirits of the oppressors wailing into the darkness of the sugarcane fields. But, as a man, he believed that this retribution must be made real in the world of the flesh. "The ideal is to punish them in history, not in the imagination," he wrote. "The ideal is in overcoming our weakness and impotence by no longer concerning ourselves with punishing the souls of the unjust, by 'making them' wander with cries of remorse. Precisely because it is the live, conscious body of the cruel person that needs to weep, we must punish them in society."<sup>53</sup>

This—idealism that has devolved into revenge—is where his revolution would turn.

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Paulo Freire died in 1997 at the Albert Einstein Hospital in São Paulo, Brazil.<sup>54</sup> He died a hero of the global Left. In the last stretch of his life, he had traveled the world collecting the accolades of the liberal intelligentsia: the UNESCO Prize for Education for Peace, the King Balduin African Development Prize, and twenty-seven honorary doctorates from institutions scattered across the earth.<sup>55</sup>

For the men and women of the Third World, where poverty, hunger, disease, and corruption reigned, Freire's abstractions offered little sustenance; his call for "committing suicide as a class" was madness.<sup>56</sup> But in the First World, insulated from the concrete miseries of the postcolonial societies, Freire's abstract appeals to liberation, revolution, and socialism have found a receptive audience. American intellectuals took Freire's conceps as a metaphor, believing that the slums of the "Third World in the First World" provided a justification for, at minimum, a cultural revolution.

These writers and activists, maintained by the university system and celebrated in the public schools, imagined themselves as a new vanguard that could finally correct the unfinished business of the twentieth century. The grave diggers of São Paulo might have buried Paulo Freire's body,<sup>57</sup> but nothing, it seems, could adequately shake the world of his ideas. America might have vanquished the revolution abroad, only to find itself in the midst of a revolution at home.

Freire's legacy is, in some ways, a surprise. History should have reduced *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into an ideological curiosity. The revolutionary figures he idealized—Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, Guevara—turned out to be monsters. Lenin, Stalin, and Mao laid waste to their own societies in the name of the revolution. Castro and Guevara's Cuba still clings to state-run communism, but it is a poor, isolated, authoritarian nation. And all of the regimes that Freire advised—Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and El Salvador—abandoned Marxism-Leninism and have sought, sometimes furtively, to make the transition to a market economy and democratic system of government.

And yet, Freire remained unrepentant until the end. The old man, having watched his revolutions fail across the globe, having seen the mass deaths unleashed in the name of utopia, wanted to try once more. In his fi-

nal works, there is no sign of guilt or introspection, no trace of regret about the regimes he had guided and rationalized.

Long after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Freire still railed against "the intrinsic evil of capitalism" and "bourgeois democracy." He insisted, just before his death, that "the proclaimed triumph of capitalism and death of socialism actually just underlines the perversity of capitalism on the one hand and the enduring socialist dream on the other, if it is purified, with sacrifice and pain, from authoritarian distortion."<sup>58</sup> He downplayed the atrocities under Stalinism as "historical, philosophical, and epistemological errors," not intrinsic flaws of state communism. He insisted that his "dream," his "utopia," was still possible—it just needed to be purified, purged, reimagined.<sup>59</sup>

But while Freire failed to institutionalize his ideas in the Marxist-Leninist nations, his work has had a profound influence in the United States—the beating heart of global capitalism.