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When Capitalism is the Social Problem: Crafting Radical Truths Sensitively and Strategically in the Classroom

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In this essay I discuss the challenges in taking a radical approach in my Social Problems course. I argue that sensitivity to students' identities is especially important when conveying counterhegemonic ideas such as the hollowness of capitalist democracy and consumer choice, the capitalist roots of ecological crises, and the material causes of war. To convey such themes effectively, I have developed three interrelated strategies: strategic empathy; overstating of the structural roots of social problems; and complete openness about my political background. I explain and justify my use of such strategies on pedagogic, normative and instrumental grounds. *[Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: http://www.transformativestudies.org ©2012 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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Radical educators face an array of challenges both in the classroom and in their institutional roles (Allen and Rossatto2009; Bohman and Briggs 1991; Braa and Callero 2006; Fobes and Kaufman 2008; Gimenez 1998; Shor 1987; Rodriguez 2005; Sweet 1998). Although there is no universally-agreed framework of what it means to carry out radical pedagogy, most practitioners stress some combination of counterhegemonic critique, democratic classroom practices, and promotion of social activism outside the classroom. I contribute to the dialogue here by sharing a radical approach I have developed in my

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Social Problems course. I have taught this lower-division course for over ten years in diverse university settings—from privileged Anglo honors students to disadvantaged Hispanic students. Through such opportunities I have discovered that making politically-charged, controversial ideas accessible to students requires sensitivity to their backgrounds and aspirations. As sustained criticism of our dominant institutions contradicts students' socialization, I recommend a strategy of empathetic teaching to defuse emotional barriers students might impose to counterhegemonic content.

Consider the following statement I make at one point each semester in my Social Problems course:

> "There are no topics more difficult to teach than war and military power. How do I as a professor have you read material that argues that the war in Iraq, for example, was launched principally for economic and geopolitical motives? Or that political leaders used a politics of fear and a public relations campaign to mobilize mass support? I had a student not long ago approach me with tears rolling down her face after class to say that she lost her brother in Iraq. And I can understand how the last thing a parent would want to be told is that they lost a son or daughter for oil. *'No, my child died for freedom and justice and the safety of the American people!'* What else *could* they believe? But if you believe that the struggle over resources is at the heart of war; and if you believe that through progressive change there is a chance we could move society toward minimizing, if not eliminating war, then we have to be honest about its reality. If any of you have ideas about how to discuss this issue in class with the utmost sensitivity please let me know."

I call this virtual soliloquy to class an example of "strategic empathy." It is empathy in the simple sense that I am conveying to students that I am sensitive to those who may perceive the course content as offensive or threatening. This is not a fanciful concern. As a "military-friendly" university in an area of highly concentrated poverty, our region provides more than its fair share of military recruits.

Yet such empathy is strategic as well, in a double sense. First, I have found that sharing with students my awareness of their potential feelings helps break down barriers to their reception of counterhegemonic ideas. In the case above, seeking students' input suggests a collaborative engagement with sensitive material, rather than a top-down imposition of unsettling ideas. Revealing compassion for soldiers and their families,

moreover, may defuse antagonism by students influenced by right-wing media portrayals of radicals who "blame American first" or who don't "support" the troops. Yet there is also an instrumental advantage. As a variety of authors note (Braa and Callero 2006; Fobes and Kaufman 2008; Sweet 1998), gaining a reputation as a radical or "troublemaker" is risky for probationary faculty as they work their way through the tenure process. This may be especially so in conservative teaching environments.

The typical strategy employed by faculty to avoid such problems is to simply conceal their political sympathies from students. Yet to practice radical pedagogy honestly means recognition that the transference of knowledge is not value free, but bound up with the reproduction of dominant power relations in society. As Braa and Callero maintain (2006:358), critical pedagogy ought to include "…theories, practices (praxis), values, morality, and an overall culture that acts as critique and negation of corporate, capitalist hegemony." If professors emphasize in their courses the destructiveness of capitalism and the defectiveness of the political system to transform it, clearly students will perceive their politics to be to the left of the conventional spectrum. Indeed, it is not surprising that students are usually able to identity their professors' political orientations even when they avoid revealing them (see Woessner and Kelly-Woessner 2009).

I elaborate below on why I have chosen to be completely honest with students regarding my own political values and background. In my case, such honesty entails disavowing some familiar aspects of Freirian-influenced critical pedagogy, such as ceding power over content and grading, or seeing the classroom as a vehicle for social change. Furthermore, I share with students my decision to *overstate* the structural roots of social problems. From an educational standpoint, it appears absurd to exaggerate any aspect of reality (as a disservice to "Truth"). Yet as I stress below, we are not anonymous purveyors of truth in the classroom, like robots churning out facts. We carry our identities and backgrounds with us, as do students. And when we convey counterhegemonic claims that run counter to students' experiences, identities, and aspirations, I suggest we ought to navigate such identities sensitively and strategically in the classroom.

Before I turn to my specific teaching strategies, I need to clearly unpack the paradigmatic critiques expounded in the course. Such critiques are "paradigmatic" in that they constitute a critical worldview conveyed to students.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS: A CRITICAL, STRUCTURAL APPROACH

It is oft-stated that facts never stand alone, but must always be interpreted. As sociologists, critical or otherwise, we typically interpret the facts from the standpoint of a paradigm—a set of implicit assumptions about social processes and how to investigate them. These assumptions about how society "works" exist in a sense "behind" the data and may take time to crystallize. In fact, although I state the core themes of the course explicitly at the outset, I find it takes ample dialogue before students grasp the ideas and their implications.

The following are the paradigmatic critiques developed in the course:

- Critique of capitalism and class inequality: Corporate profit maximization and class inequality generate severe social problems, including skewed fiscal priorities, poverty, militarism, war, and ecological crises.
- Critique of capitalist democracy: Major policy decisions of the government do not reflect the will of the citizenry, but systematically serve the wealthy through the "power elite" or "corporate-state nexus." Networks of elites share class and ideological backgrounds and shift back and forth between the corporate and political spheres.
- Critique of consumer sovereignty: Economic production does not ultimately reflect the individual choices of consumers. On the contrary, supply ultimately creates demand, especially given the key role of advertising in promoting consumer culture.
- Critique of corporate media: As a network of huge corporations, interlocked and owned by larger conglomerates, the major media in the U.S. consistently present a narrow ideological spectrum to the public that systematically ignores the political-economic roots of our social problems (as public awareness tends to contradict elite interests).
- Critique of social hierarchies: People's investments in race, gender, sexual and other hierarchies are exacerbated by elites, preempting vital collectivist measures to address our most severe social problems.
- Critique of populist and conspiratorial views of social problems: "Corporate greed" and "political corruption," although real, are not useful starting points in comprehending the structural roots of major social problems. Indeed, our most severe problems are not ultimately generated by the behavior of corrupt individuals

> behind closed doors, but by taken-for-granted political-economic arrangements. Not just elites, but working people are implicated in unsustainable and damaging production and consumption processes. Hence, people across the class spectrum tend to rationalize how they make a living.

I will not attempt to substantiate these claims here. Many of the ideas appear in critical Social Problems texts that I have used in my course before, such as textbooks by Eitzen, Baca Zinn and Smith (2009), Feagin, Feagin and Baker (2005), and Parenti (2010). Supplementary readings by progressive thinkers bolster the claims as well.[i] In any event, the theme of most interest in this essay is the last one—the critique of populist and conspiratorial views. As will be seen, constructing this claim has rich pedagogic implications.

To be sure, most sociologists take an eclectic approach to social problems, with greater attention to positivist and interpretive frameworks. My hope is that sociologists who disregard a critical approach may still find insight in my discussion of identity, values, and claims-making strategies in the classroom.

STRATEGIC OVERSTATING OF THE STRUCTURAL

Student resistance to critical ideas, especially among the privileged, has been an ongoing concern for radical educators (Allen and Rossatto 2009; Bohman and Briggs 1991; Davis 1992; Sweet 1998). For Allen and Rossatto (2009), the antipathy that privileged, white students often feel toward critical literature stems from its Freirean foundation and emphasis on the experiences of the oppressed. The authors call for a transformative pedagogy attentive to the lived experiences of "oppressors" as well. Creating an environment of openness, love and trust in the classroom is a key step in this regard. "Loving the oppressor student," Allen and Rossatto write (2009:178), may aid them in moving beyond "knee-jerk reactions to feelings of guilt" and toward a deeper humanization of themselves and the oppressed. Although I generally do not use the categories of "oppressor" and "oppressed" in class (much less "oppressor student"), the spirit of Allen and Rossatto's approach dovetails with mine. Years of classroom experience have taught me that attentiveness to how privileged students react to critical ideas is vital. Indeed, it is in this spirit that I choose to overstate the structural roots of social problems. In doing so, I highlight

how the political-economic system is larger than the participants in it. As I say at the start of the semester and periodically throughout the course:

> "Some of you will leave this course—I know because I read your evaluations—thinking that what we have learned is that there is a conspiracy of [said in ominous tone] 'evil' corporations out to oppress people and destroy the environment. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is not a criticism of the moral character of people in power in corporations or government. This course is an *institutional* critique of the roles people are forced to play as they climb up within the system."

This critique, it bears mention, is consistent with the classical Marxian focus on structured roles with the capitalist economy. As Marx states in the Preface to the First German edition of Capital:

> To prevent possible misunderstanding, a word. I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose* [i.e., seen through rose-tinted glasses]. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history*, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.* (Emphasis added)

Marx's stress on the individual as a product of wider capitalist social relations, and his consequent softening of the individual's responsibility for such relations, is particularly relevant to my course. This may be surprising in an approach informed by radical pedagogy. One would presume that I place major emphasis on taking responsibility for and transforming our social roles.

To clarify the matter it is useful to consider the course content empathetically—that is, in terms of how it is likely viewed by students. Hegemonic culture teaches students that education is simply the value-free transmission of knowledge or skill sets to get a job. Most students, socialized within the wider consumer culture, desire—quite reasonably—the comforts and status of a well-paying job. Yet when they enter the course they encounter the claim that the economic system is destructive of human values and the environment. Indeed, entrenched inequalities

and maldistribution of resources (bolstered globally through military force), as well as even our long-term species survival, are at stake. Apart from the alarming nature of such realities, students are presented with a basic contradiction. Most come to university to secure a position within the very economy that is subject to such trenchant critique in the course. This is a recipe at the least for significant cognitive dissonance among students. Hence the relevant question, as I see it, is how to make such disturbing material accessible to students in a way that minimizes knee-jerk dismissals or other emotional barriers.

Let me give a couple of concrete examples of how exaggerating the structural serves this purpose. Class discussion on the debate over global sweatshops is particularly instructive in this regard.

GLOBALIZATION AND EXPORT PRODUCTION

When we address corporate globalization in class, I regularly bring up the case of Levi Strauss. It turns out the company closed two plants in the area about a decade ago, displacing over 1000 workers. Students uniformly reveal their awareness of profit maximization ("cheap labor") as the motive behind Levi's move. Yet I ask students whether the company had a choice in moving its plants or not. Citing literature on Levi's historically progressive corporate culture (see Choate 2008), I show how company executives were distressed by international competition and hardly embraced the decision to globalize production. I then ask students whether it is realistic, with competitors like the Gap and Liz Clairborne contracting workers for pennies an hour in Asia, for Levis to continue to pay U.S. wages in Brownsville, TX. I stress that this is *not* a justification of capital flight, but an explanation. "Unlike the corporate libertarian view," I add, "where we must bow before market forces whatever the consequences, I believe we need to understand the structural nature of unemployment if we are to consider systemic solutions."

The basic logic in emphasizing the structural is not difficult to discern. If students believe the fundamental problems with our political-economic system stem from the malfeasance of elites, then our problems could be solved by promoting "good people" in leadership positions. Yet this is palpably not so. As the case of Levis shows, no amount of good will on the part of company executives could ignore the coercive force of competition driving corporate decisions. Moreover, a structural approach has the additional advantage of potentially preempting student cynicism. Believing that poverty, environmental destruction, and the like are

ultimately the result of selfish or corrupt leaders is not far removed from seeing people in general as selfish or corrupt. The resulting cynicism is politically paralyzing. How often we hear the conservative wisdom, "Human nature is too selfish for utopian visions;" "Socialism is a good idea *in theory*…"

Another practical application of a structural approach is my "critique" of Michael Moore's classic, *Roger & Me.* Moore documents the decline of Flint, Michigan after General Motors laid off tens of thousands of workers in the late 1980s. The film is a staple of introductory sociology courses, and rightly so for its cogent illustration of the sociological imagination. Yet after showing it to class, I find it instructive to challenge Moore's populist criticism of Roger Smith (the Chair of GM at the time). I ask the class whether it is fair for Moore to denounce Smith for closing the Flint plants. In fact, in a paper assignment, I pose the following question: "Would it have made a difference for Flint, Michigan, if someone else had been Chair of General Motors?" The question compels students to think about the wider context of General Motors' decision and the reality of global capitalist competition. Ideally, students recognize that such forces, rather than Roger Smith's moral inclinations, were ultimately responsible for the devastation of Flint.

The reader might wonder why I believe my approach *overstates* the structural. After all, the focus on social context is the heart of what we do as sociologists. I would suggest, in this regard, that just because the roots of our most severe social problems are structural does not mean that people are merely puppets of their institutional roles. I explicitly disregard the moral character of elites in my course, yet in reality character clearly matters. How people carry out their roles can have significant consequences. While some corporate leaders, for example, might take every opportunity to cut corners and dump toxins in the environment, others might pursue profit in less damaging ways. Some political elites might revel in the use of torture during war, while others take a more enlightened approach. There are no doubt myriad examples. Leaders whose conscience compels them to resign from corrupt posts, and whistleblowers who expose corporate or state wrongdoing, are two cases in point. Of course, the personal costs of defying one's role demands may be steep, as I touch on below.

In sum, I disregard characterological issues in class for strategic reasons, not because I view character as irrelevant. It is simply counterproductive to highlight the malevolence of corporate or political leaders, cognizant that students aspire to such roles, or come from families who represent them. Consider a final case. Over the past several

years I have taught at two border universities, literally minutes from major industrial cities in Northern Mexico. It is not uncommon to encounter students whose parents work in managerial positions connected to the factories, or *maquiladoras*, just across the border. To participate in the discourse of "corporate greed" when framing the debate over export production would most certainly alienate students whose familial backgrounds likely legitimize such practices.

One morning a student approached me after watching a disturbing video in class by the National Labor Committee, documenting worker abuses and forced abortions at a Honduran *maquiladora*. "My family moved down to the border from Michigan last year," the student said, "because my father got a job as a factory manager in Matamoros." In my years as a graduate instructor, the student's comment might have worried me. But given my strategic framing in class discussion, I simply asked, "Has your father ever talked to you about the pressures management confronts to cut costs?" By regularly framing issues in structural terms, I have learned that many students, especially privileged ones, are more inclined to consider the systemic roots of social problems, as they may find such explanations less personally threatening.

STRATEGIC EMPATHY AND POLITICAL IDENTITY

My reluctance to criticize the moral character of elites manifests in my approach to explaining political identities as well. Students regularly express befuddlement about what it means to be a "liberal" or "conservative" in political discourse. Yet to explain the meaning of such labels, especially in connection to party affiliations, is a thorny affair in a radical course that trenchantly criticizes the political-economic system. Students from conservative backgrounds in particular may express discomfort, or even hostility, toward criticism of the political values they have learned from their parents.

The structural approach of the course tends to preempt such reactions, however. Recall the course's paradigmatic critique of capitalist democracy. This perspective challenges the traditional view of the government as a neutral arbiter making decisions that reflect the plural interests of the electorate. On the contrary, a variety of mechanisms (campaign finance, candidate selection, corporate lobbyists, etc.) are seen to systematically shape government decision-making in the interests of the wealthy and major corporations. In this view, *both* political parties are embedded within "structural imperatives" that tend to predetermine outcomes, regardless of the intentions of political actors (see Eitzen,

Baca Zinn and Smith 2009: 46). Those politicians who might desire systemic changes find that their political survival depends not only on crucial corporate funding, but also the job security of their constituents. It is not surprising, hence, that the prospects of building the political will for vitally-needed structural changes—such as a transition to alternative energy or major reductions in military spending—appear quixotic when jobs are at stake.

A useful film to illustrate these structural themes is Eugene Jarecki's award-winning documentary, *Why We Fight*. Jarecki examines the political-economic underpinnings and perils of the military-industrial complex. In an interview with Chalmers Johnson regarding military spending, Johnson notes aptly: "The B-2 Bomber has a piece that is made in every state to make sure that if you ever tried to phase that project out you would get howls from among the most liberal members of Congress."

The idea that both liberals and conservatives are equally complicit in reproducing an unsustainable economic system is not altogether accurate, however. It is clear that some members of Congress—specifically progressive Democrats—do advocate a variety of vital regulatory and redistributive reforms (campaign finance, environmental protections, progressive taxation, etc.) that are implicit in any realistic vision of a transformation in wider capitalist social relations. Yet overstating the structural in this case helps defuse students' perception that I may be, as a radical professor, narrowly partisan to Democratic politicians. Such a perception would deflect from the structural critique of the course and potentially hinder conservative students' receptiveness to counterhegemonic ideas.

WHERE IS THE PRAXIS?

I presume that many educators would appraise my course as critical in content, but hardly an exemplar of radical pedagogy. After all, I have focused throughout on how I present radical content, but little on process or promotion of activism. For the record, I share with many critical educators identified by Sweet (1998) an approach that favors dialogue over lecture as the preferred teaching strategy. Moreover, I require students to ask questions and articulate positions in order to develop their confidence and communicative competency. However, I do not view classroom practices as vehicles for social change (at least not in any

immediate sense), nor do I share authority with students over content or grading. In fact, I am not convinced that such acts accomplish much more than "role playing with a radical label," as Gimenez (1998:117) puts it, in her response to Sweet (1998).

There are number of problems, in my view, in sharing authority over content and grading. As broadly observed (e.g., Braa and Callero 2006; Sweet 1998), such innovations face institutional constraints and perhaps even antagonism by administrators or traditionally-oriented personnel committees. The promotion of activism in particular may be especially risky for untenured professors if classroom organizing challenges campus policies (Sweet 1998:107). Putting aside such instrumental concerns, I think there are pedagogic and normative grounds for a more traditional approach. Faculty's "authority" stems from hard-sought erudition, "owed" to students not merely in a market sense but in the radical sense of raising consciousness through experience. Most importantly, ceding authority suggests to students that transformative societal change can occur by altering power relations in the classroom. This unrealistic view contradicts the core content of the course. Whatever empowerment students may feel in a more democratized classroom, will not change the fact that they will need to enter dominant, hierarchical institutions upon graduation should they hope for a comfortable income. For many, heavy college debt will expedite their entry. Once ensconced in their professional roles, moreover, they will likely feel institutional pressures to conform to the "market reality" of their roles, whatever the legitimacy (the executive compelled to shift production abroad; the advertiser who laments marketing to children; the teacher pressured to promote failing students; the idealistic politician succumbing to the reality of corporate funding; the journalist schooled in throwing softballs to the powerful; etc.). I suggest to students that our roles and material aspirations in capitalist society often present a contradiction between what is expedient and what is right.

TEACHER AND STUDENT AS SITUATED SUBJECTS

If the course is successful in raising students' consciousnesses about the social and environmental consequences of business as usual, they will hopefully appreciate the intractability of the problems we face. Indeed, in my own evolution as an intellectual and activist, I have come to see that an array of social and cultural changes in tandem with widespread social movement is needed to even imagine a fundamental transformation of our political-economy. It took years of intellectual

labor to appreciate the depth of the difficulties. Hence, a central aim of my course is to communicate such difficulties without conveying hopelessness. Above all, I want students to begin to comprehend the systemic challenges, while evaluating their own life goals and aspirations.

I am not, however, in a position to lecture students on what career choices they *should* make. It takes considerable trust with a student to address such matters. However, given the sustained critique in the course on the bankruptcy of our dominant institutions, it is absurd to deny the moral and political implications of the material. Students probe such implications anyway, with recurring questions that arise from the counterhegemonic content: Should I shop at Wal-Mart? Should I be a vegetarian? Should I vote for a third party? I have found that students ask many such questions not solely to discover what is right for them, but also to "authenticate" my identity as a radical professor. De Soto (2005:211-212) captures well the ways in which students construct their own identities by seeking validation and authentication vis-à-vis their professors:

> Not only is the course material the object of student scrutiny, but the professor as the manifestation of particular cultural, political, and social values is also under evaluation in the confines of the classroom. Students of all races bring….firm ideas of professorial representation, and the classroom politics of "representing" and "authenticating" identity are rarely as powerful as they are in classrooms of race, gender, and sexuality.

Although De Soto stresses ethnicity and sexuality in his essay, class and consumption are also key social values under "scrutiny." In this sense I would reconsider Sweet's (1998:107) observation that students might view radical faculty as "hypocritical" if they fail to shift authority in class. I find greater student interest in professors' behaviors *outside* the classroom. Marxist professors, in particular, are vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy should they live in a mansion or drive a luxury vehicle. To sustain critiques of capitalism, social inequality and the corrupting influence of money suggests, after all, a certain disavowal of "competitive consumption." In my view it is not unreasonable for students to think as much. Yet I wonder whether we forget as radical educators how much importance students place on our lifestyle choices.

Given our unavoidable involvement in the life choices of students, I contend that we as critical educators have a moral responsibility to be

open with students about our political identities and the normative implications of our course material. It is here that my approach may differ most from other radical teachers. Over the years, I find that contrary to the tenets of critical pedagogy, I increasingly *caution* students about a wholesale embrace of critical ideas in their life choices. Although it goes too far to suggest that I discourage praxis, I certainly feel compelled to stress to students that the dominant institutions do not reward the values of social justice and radical democracy. Hence I tell them that if they choose to pick battles in their lives, that they do so judiciously.

Moreover, I "authenticate" my advice to students in part by reference to my own personal biography. I agree with Friedrichs (1987:4) that as long as we avoid "self-indulgence," sharing our own experiences in class discussion is appropriate. My strategy to do so focuses on two experiences: my personal transformation (and the status-anxieties associated with it); and the opportunities I have lost due to my political background. Regarding the former, I reveal the following story to class each semester:

> "When I was in junior high school I wanted to be a corporate lawyer. People would ask me, 'Why corporate law?' I would respond [with disdainful expression], *Why* corporate law? [asking the class] Do you know what I meant by saying, why corporate law? I wanted the subtext to be: for the money, stupid! Yes, it's true; I had no soul [laughter]."

As indicated, I let students know that I had deeply internalized hegemonic materialist values in my upbringing. Moreover, moving away from them—and redefining my identity—was painful. I reveal to students how my first sociology courses exposed me to social inequalities and widespread suffering around the world. Coming to terms with such injustices, and my own privileges as a white, male from the United States (despite my working-class background), led to deep ambivalence that manifested in status-anxiety dreams and the fear of disappointing my parents.

I go on to stress to students that my transformation was far from glorious. I liken it to taking the red pill in the movie, The Matrix. I decided against Law School and to go to graduate school. I jumped head first into a host of social justice groups. I ended up living on Ramen noodles for years; was fortunate enough never to have gotten gravely ill while without health insurance; and when my beat-up old car would

break down it was a calamity of debt, stress, and (ultimately) bad credit. To be sure, I emphasize that I do not regret the decisions I made; and that the psychological rewards of following my humane impulses have been immeasurable. But it took a long time to wean myself from materialist values and status pursuits. And I imagine I would have had much less stress in my young adult life if I had taken a more conventional route.

Later on I discuss with class an academic position I applied for at a community college in the South when I was ABD. Making the mistake of showing my "activist resume" to an administrator (who responded startlingly, "I can't stand union people"), I went through a transparently "political" rejection, despite full support from the faculty. I justify my interpretation of the rejection in more detail than I need share here. Suffice to say that I use this example to show how taking the values of social justice beyond the classroom may have detrimental personal consequences.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Teaching counterhegemonic ideas is a challenging yet invigorating experience. I have honed over many semesters a strategic approach that puts a premium on empathetic teaching, structural analysis, and absolute candor about my background and critical agenda. I tell students directly each semester that I am trying to influence them. Indeed, it is precisely because I am trying to influence them that I need to be up front about who I am and how I see the world. "There will never be a test question where the right answer is 'I agree with Dr. Horowitz,'" I often say. And I add: "You don't have to agree with any of the authors you read this semester, but you do need to understand them."

I have discovered that students find such honesty refreshing. If critical pedagogy teaches us that all knowledge is political, it is incumbent on us to stress that not all knowledge is marketable.

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[i] Among some of the better known writers are William Domhoff, Chalmers Johnson, and Naomi Klein. I should add that although I teach the course from a sustained critical perspective, I find it essential to integrate conservative and pro-capitalist writers as well, such as Milton Friedman, Thomas Sowell, and Thomas Friedman.