

Unmuting the Socio-Politically Muted

A Theoretical Conversation on Centering the Periphery through Radical Literature and Critical Literacy¹

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What does it mean to live in a society where there exist conditions saturated with both destitution and excess? What does it mean to exist in a world where communities are nourished with things which are beneficial to the body—and what is left of a greed-inundated soul; while nearby communities are, metaphorically—and in some cases, de facto—malnourished and thus unable to feed their commodified bodies and fractured souls? Additionally, what does it mean to speak of “democracy,” when only *portions* of society are able to reap the “beautiful” byproducts of the American “dream” which requires, one could argue, a capital-filled coffer internationally produced by the three “isms”—which I *hesitatingly* and, to be honest, *fearfully* employ: neoliberalism, imperialism, and a sense of uncritical patriotism—which in the case of the latter, is—by consequence of the term, *uncritical*—without historical context? These questions are inquiries which are central to the present essay. For, at the core of this extensive theoretical *conversation* is the demand to see that that which is putatively deemed normal, within the framework of our current state of “existence,” is abnormal—and, essentially, rooted within a normalized state of justice-centered rhetoric[al]

¹ This essay is based on a paper presented at the 2021 AGLSP national conference, October 16, 2021.

and political-literary silence vis-à-vis the national and international periphery. Ergo, this paper will, specifically and conversationally, argue and detail that national and international progress will only occur through the ensuing tripartite: Critical literacy, the uninhibited dissemination of [Radical²] Literature, and a genuine and nonviolent concern for the “least of these.” Of course, there are innumerable questions concerning the beloved: “who, what, when, where, and whys”—however, it is crucial to embark on a theoretical and literary journey to reveal one of many roads toward beloved community. Thus, the present journey begins through the foundational and imperative words of Edward Said, author of *Culture and Imperialism*:

What to read and what to do with that reading, that is the full form of the question. All the energies poured into critical theory, into novel and demystifying theoretical praxes like the new historicism and deconstruction and Marxism have avoided the major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture, namely imperialism. This massive avoidance has sustained a canonical inclusion and exclusion: you include the Rousseaus, the Nietzsches, the Wordsworths, the Dickenses, Flauberts, and so on, and at the same you exclude their relationships with the protracted, complex, and striated work of empire.³

Said’s cogent point extends well beyond the realm of any field or profession. In fact, Said here speaks to the heart of critical illiteracy.⁴ To expand and clarify: Said’s point, indirectly and in part, speaks to the many [North] Americans—those rhetorically opposed to right-of-center and, surely, far-right politics—who wallow in the notion that they are “progressive” because they *dream* of the day that [c]onfederate statues are removed and *Judas and the Black Messiah*

² *Radical* in the sense of stimulating *progressivity*—ergo, the “[radical] literature” not being genre-specific.

³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 60.

⁴ The term “illiteracy” in this paper (unless attached to the term “functional”)—when used within a *contemporary* framework—is meant to speak to those who are unable or unwilling to understand that which is progressive—*or*, that which can stimulate progressivity.

can show in all theaters for an extended duration of time; while sending [a]mazon links of Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist* to their friends. These individuals consider themselves to be "left-leaning" while innocently—and in all fairness—genuinely, believing that one day capitalism (or, profit-over-justice)—and its shadowy parent, imperialism (expansion for profit)—can locate their heart and soul and sooner-rather-than-later: pour out their demilitarized monetary blessings to the national periphery. It is critical literacy, hence, which Said, also within the excerpt, speaks to as well—as the act of approximating oneself to guilt-assuaging and soul-numbing literature—or, at the most, sitting on "left-of-center" sentiments—does not suggest a comprehensive understanding of world systems and how they affect our daily lives. Which positions the core argument concerning critical literacy toward the self-proclaimed "progressives" who, I contend, inadvertently, maintain the locks on the mouths of the socio-politically muted—more than those who want to replace the locks with that which departs the barrels of 1776-stained rifles.

Equally important and for further context, it is also these individuals—to which I address this conversational essay—who are consumers of [palatable] literature and advocates for a functionally literate society—while negating the fact that they, through the subconscious omission of normative world-systems, stimulate political illiteracy which is the anchor for *both* functional and historical illiteracy; thus requiring a foundational and cogent statement from Paulo Freire to be coupled with Said's point in hopes of steadily building a long and clear road toward understanding not only society but also ourselves and our relationship to the plight of those who suffer, nearby:

The education of children, young adults, and adults has great importance in the education of the new man and the new woman. It has to be a new education, as well, that we are trying to put into practice according to our possibilities. A *completely different* [author's emphasis] education from that of colonial days. An education through work, which stimulates collaboration, not competition. An education that places value on mutual help, not on individualism; that develops a critical spirit and creativity, not passivity. An education that is based on the unity between

practice and theory, between manual labor and intellectual work, and for this reason motivates those becoming educated to think correctly.⁵

Illuminate the words “completely different,” because these words suggest that to produce an education that is completely different, the educators must become completely different. Now, what does this mean? *Analogically*, this means that to be completely different is to become, with time, what the historical Moses was to Ramessidian normalcy; what the historical Jesus of Nazareth was to Herodian normalcy; to be what David Walker was to the southern slaveocratic state of normalcy; or, perchance, what the preachers Nat Turner and Reverend James Simms were to Virginian and Georgian advocates for Afro-illiteracy; or, finally—yet poignantly—to be what Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church when he gave his anti-militarism speech “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence.” To produce a completely different education is not to be simply left-leaning; rather, it is to horizontally share the vehicle of a righteous radicalism. Further, it is not only the requirement of comrade educators to, solely, share the vehicle of righteous radicalism, but it is also the duty of said progressive passengers to employ the vehicle as a revolutionary vehicle capable of distributing an emancipatory literature and literacy. In easier terms, the metaphorical vehicle of righteous radicalism must not be extricated from radical—which means, *progressive*—literature: Radical literature is to society what fuel is to a stranded vehicle. In fact, the following excerpt from David Gullette, taken from *Gaspar! A Spanish Poet/Priest in the Nicaraguan Revolution*, speaks to the relationship between literacy—as well as the *literary*—and concrete steps towards constructing a *completely different* society—where those who have been socially and politically muted can express themselves creatively, fully, and unapologetically:

By October 1977, the poet/priest Ernesto Cardenal had lived for 12 years in the Solentiname archipelago at the southern end of Lake Nicaragua. During those years, the consciousness raising of the campesinos of Solentiname included a literacy campaign; vigorous campaign debates about the meaning of the Gospel (debates which Cardenal

⁵ Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, trans. Donald Macedo (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), 93.

taped and published in a four-volume edition translated into seven languages); a painting workshop, which led to the creation of a distinct Solentiname style now highly valued by connoisseurs of “primitive” painting; and early in 1977, thanks to a visit from Costa Rican poet Mayra Jimenez, a poetry workshop in which more than 20 newly literate campesinos began to write verse of remarkable energy and expressive power. Like Gaspar, Ernesto had come to realize that nonviolent means would never end the horrors of somocismo, and like Gaspar, Ernesto collaborated with and finally joined the Frente Sandinista. But unlike Gaspar, Ernesto never bore arms in combat.⁶

The excerpt from Gullette’s text emphasizes the importance of understanding that being “progressive” or “radical” does not require one to “bear arms” or engage in methods outside of the revolutionary confines of nonviolence—but rather, being either of the two requires one—such as the late poet and revolutionary Ernesto Cardenal—to *love* the marginalized of society through providing tangible avenues which allow those who are marginalized/peripheralized to unmute themselves inasmuch as they are able to project the force which is typically *exported* from the imperial center—yet never imported into the destitute peripheries. In addition, through the aforementioned excerpt, it is also critical to understand that literacy and the literary share a vital role in the struggle to unmute those who have been muted—and prescribed the lock of silence and clientelism—such as those silenced by the historical Nicaragua’s Anastasio Somoza’s, *somocismo*. To elucidate: From within the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s—Nazdezhda K. Krupskaya awarded Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade which followed the “victorious” revolution of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN), there existed a poster which stated the following:

En cada casa un aula.
En cada mesa un pupitre.
En cada Nica un maestro!

⁶ David Gullette, *Gaspar!: A Spanish Poet/Priest in the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue, 1994), 61.

[Every home a classroom.
Every table a school desk.
Every Nicaraguan a teacher!]

Of course, within North America, contrary to the early declaration from the—putatively deemed, complex—Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade, the aforementioned is not entirely the case, I respectfully argue. In nearly every home there is a television; on almost every table, an app; and virtually every American, an individualist. And thus, because of this seductive construction and distraction, there will exist those at the “reactionary ready,” positioned to critique my use of the [historical] Nicaragua’s application of literacy and the literary—especially concerning the perceived travesty of implementing Freirean dialogue and the contemporary [political] “left–left” chasm in Nicaragua—as it pertains to the myriad sequestered peripheries today. However, Robert F. Arnove, author of *The 1980 Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade*,⁷ provides a perfect preemptive statement which curtails any uncritical and reactionary counter to such assertion:

The most common criticisms of the literacy materials pertain to the pro-FSLN content of the literacy crusade. Those who object to political propagandizing as part of the literacy process are oblivious to the indoctrination that occurs in all education systems. What differs from one system to another is the subtlety of the indoctrination, the content of the messages, and the socio-political purposes of instruction.⁷

Such clarification from Arnove also serves as a theoretical officiant through underscoring and marrying Freire’s subsequent point from within *Education for Critical Consciousness* with the central point concerning all lovers of justice having the responsibility to unmute the socio-politically muted: “Those who talk of neutrality are precisely those who are afraid of losing their right to use neutrality to their own advantage.”⁸ Freire’s point not only emphasizes the crux of this conversation but furthermore serves as a prosecution of various educational sectors—and in the case of this essay, particularly,

⁷ Robert F. Arnove, *National Literacy Campaigns and Movements: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2017), 277.

⁸ Arnove, 131.

literary studies programs. For literary studies programs—akin to the public-school sector(s)—have neither lived up to the indications submitted by Freire nor to the message within the [*historical*] Nicaragua’s Literacy Crusade poster. In easier terms, literary studies have been as much of help to building a horizontal community as militarism has volunteered to dissipate for the greater good of humanity and the climate. Or, to articulate it, fundamentally: Literary studies has not explicitly stated that they are on the side of human liberation—nor have they stated that they are on the side of human domestication; which, overarchingly, indicates a tacit support for the continuous existence of the latter. To continue to simplify this critical point: Within Addison Gayle’s *The Black Situation*, and particularly within his chapter titled “Racism and the American University,” Gayle contends the following:

Real power resides in the hands of the faculty. It is they who set policy, determine curriculum content, and develop admission requirements. More often than not, they run the university in a manner more dictatorial and capricious than the early church fathers would have thought possible. They are men of limited vision and questionable capacity whose ideas of education belong to the age of Aquinas and the Scholastics. They are young and old, black and white, and their most suitable metaphor is Dr. Bledsoe, the college president in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. The controversy in higher education in the twentieth [and twenty-first] century centers about the arrogant use of faculty power to impede change and maintain the *status quo* in the political, economic and social areas of American life.⁹

Thus, when one is considering the conditions of the national and international periphery one must note that it is not simply the nominal progressive, or right-leaning, politicians who have stock in the *status-quo*; but that the universities—and the various departments within it—play a key role, as stated by Gayle, in impeding change, as well. It is the university, I respectfully argue, which seeks to facilitate that which is intellectually *progressive* as well

⁹ Addison Gayle, *The Black Situation* (New York: Dell, 1972), 104.

as that which is intellectually *regressive* to exhibit a “democratic” image; whilst, in my estimation, to conflate and display both engenders nothing short of a multicultural and multidisciplinary veneer which conceals a neoliberal and community-fracturing agenda. To be clear, Paulo Freire, within the seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, highlighted the previous assertion through the ensuing words:

Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party [think *academic institution*] provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party’s [or institution’s] words do not coincide with their intentions; it cannot exist if that party’s [or institution’s] words do not coincide with their actions. To say one thing and do another—to take one’s own word lightly—cannot inspire trust. To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie.¹⁰

There are two terms which are imperative within the Freirean excerpt: “people” and “discourse.” To engage in dialectics concerning the human being, while negating the state in which human beings find themselves—renders such work as an exercise in, perhaps, intellectual stimulation yet socio-political futility. In easier terms, to offer lessons as an English or Literary Studies instructor, for example, yet fail to horizontally introduce attention, *at the least*, to those who are functionally and politically illiterate, is nothing short of an “elitist-only” performance.

In fact, more than the action being an “elitist-only” performance, the action, unmistakably, underscores the difference between what Freire considered an “oppressor elite” and a “revolutionary leader.”¹¹ For context, within the same text, Freire made the delineation abundantly clear by stating the following:

It would be naïve to expect oppressor elites to denounce the myth which absolutizes the ignorance of the people; it would be a contradiction in terms

¹⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 91.

¹¹ Note that the term, “revolutionary,” does not indicate any form of violence, but social change.

if revolutionary leaders were *not* to do so, and more contradictory still were they to act in accordance with that myth. The task of revolutionary leaders is to pose as problems not only this myth, but all the other myths used by the oppressor elites to oppress. If, instead, revolutionary leaders persist in imitating the oppressors' methods of domination, the people may respond in either of two ways. In certain historical circumstances, they may become domesticated by the new contents which the leaders deposit in them. In other circumstances, they become frightened by a "word" which threatens the oppressor housed within them. In neither event do they become revolutionary. In the first case, the revolution is an illusion; in the second case, an impossibility.¹²

If the goal, therefore, agreed on by those who reside left-of-neutrality, is that the voice(s) of peripheralized people must be unlocked, then it is critical to demystify that which the ruling and quasi-elite—and those under the spell of [a homogenized] "American greatness"—have constructed into an object of impossibility: *human liberation*. For despite [North] America—as the capitalist epicenter—having the affinity to present itself as the "beacon on the hill," it must be stated, for historical context and respectful clarity, that not only was the hill conquered through settler-violence but the "beacon" of today is a warning to those who dare to stimulate progressivity and give life—through radical literature and critical literacy—to the battered, hidden, and uncritical laborers who ensure that the beacon of uneven development and militarism continues to operate, unscathed. Which suggests that the following excerpt from within Andrew J. Kirkendall's *Paulo Freire & the Cold War Politics of Literacy* underscores the reality of the nameless multitude who are structurally prescribed to uncritically labor, live with precarity, and spiritually and physically die within the belly of the profiteering and avaricious animal: "I [Paulo Freire] thought that it was very important for me as a Brazilian intellectual in exile to pass through, albeit rapidly, the center of capitalist power... I needed to see the

¹² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 134–5.

animal close on its home territory.”¹³ Ergo, if Freire wanted to *transiently* get a look at the animal within its kingdom, what does this convey concerning those who are preyed on, daily—yet, do not have the “sight” (i.e., critical literacy) to perceive what sort of predator it was/is? Furthermore, what does Freire’s point indicate concerning those who do not have the voice (i.e., power) to scream for help when they are able to see (i.e., critical literacy) the predator inching towards their quiescent bodies? Freire’s point, indirectly, suggests that only through a collective and concerted action—which transcends a “Foxian” or “McCarthyian” categorization—can the beast of capitalism be met and relegated to the annals of history in preparation for a new system which is built on the masses being properly educated and centered on social horizontalism and, surely, justice. The term, “properly educated”—in the case of unmuting the socio-politically muted through critical literacy and radical literature—can be best expounded on by the timeless critique of colonial education from the late revolutionary Maurice Bishop:

As a colonial people up to a few years ago, it has been our practice to look outward, outward away from the needs of our country and the problems facing our people, and outward instead to the needs, to the problems, to the solutions that the metropolitan masters wish to impose on us. Perhaps the worst crime that colonialism left our country, has indeed left all former colonies, is the education system. This was so because the way in which that system developed, the way in which that system was used, was to teach our people an attitude of self-hate, to get us to abandon our history, our culture, our values. To get us to accept the principles of white superiority, to destroy our confidence, to stifle our creativity, to perpetuate in our society class privilege and class difference. The colonial masters recognized very early on that if you get a subject people to think like they do, to forget their own history and their own culture, to develop a system of education

¹³ Andrew J. Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire and the Cold War Politics of Literacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 91.

that is going to have relevance to our outward needs and be almost entirely irrelevant to our internal needs, then they have already won the job of keeping us in perpetual domination and exploitation. Our educational process, therefore, was used mainly as a tool of the ruling elite.¹⁴

Although the conditions of Grenada during the era of Maurice Bishop's prime-ministership and the *People's Revolutionary Government* are totally different, if one conflates Bishop's statement with Gayle's and Freire's statements concerning the proximity between literary studies, for example, and "status quo"—as well as the animal of capitalism and its ilk being the, *de facto*, status quo—one can discover that concerning human liberation, there exists a void which needs to be filled by a horizontally oriented body of teachers and [horizontally oriented] leaders who are invested in [horizontally] recentering the intellectual and socio-political periphery. Again, this point speaks directly to those centered on the paradoxical conflation of progressive education and *palatable* literature. If the term "progress" speaks to moving *forward*—as opposed to *backward*—then education, educators, and [radical] literature should be collectivized—local, regionally, nationally, and internationally—and, importantly, fearlessly impervious to all that is reminiscent of a racist, exploitative, and dehumanizing past—even if that past is, *yesterday*. Although, within the same breath, it is just as critical to *not* be naïve to the fact that there are those who will resort to extreme—January 6, 2021,—like—measures to ensure that progress, especially with regard to education and literature, does not inhibit them from displaying their patriotic pride in *critical and historical illiteracy*. Such point, although highly unfortunate, engenders, henceforth, a necessary and temporary understanding of the martyred and, publicly contested, Columbian priest, Father Camilo Torres' answer concerning, "Should Communism be Outlawed" vis-à-vis moving beyond the intransigent positions of those against national and international progressivity as well as the

¹⁴ Maurice Bishop, *Maurice Bishop Speaks*, ed. Bruce Marcus and Michael Taber (New York: Pathfinder, 2001), 128–9.

rightist and contumacious reaction to emancipatory literature and critical literacy¹⁵:

From the theoretical point of view, I believe that the best weapons to combat ideas are ideas; the best way to combat political movements, is by showing a greater efficiency in the use of power. Therefore, laws against political ideas or movements are, in my opinion, a demonstration of weakness. However, in any country where the Communists are actually excluded from public office, from the right to be elected, from occupying chairs at the university, and in many cases from the right to study and work, it would be *less hypocritical* [author's emphasis] to outlaw them officially. It would be less hypocritical than to keep up legal appearances just to dress the real state of affairs in the disguise of democracy and just to prevent Communists from turning to their advantage the victim of mystique that clandestineness would give them.¹⁶

Ergo—in the case of Fr. Torres' historical answer: Why is there an antidiological, anti-literary, and anti-intellectual attack on left-of-center politics, education, and literature—that is in some cases, *incrementally*, and, also, in some cases, *rapidly*, becoming more critical of the core-periphery structure, which was and is, in my estimation, racialized, legitimized, and built off what Freire described as, *the culture of silence*? In addition, why are various—violent, governmental, and conspiratorial—obstacles being placed in front of people who are armed *only* with passions, community support, and [historical as well as modern] political theories? In easier terms, why are individuals, in the year(s) 2021–2022, using the words “far-right,” “populism,” and “fascism” in a nation which is ostensibly centered on independence of thought, expression, and choice? Although I cannot monopolize the answer, I would argue that such terms are being used and such attacks are being dislodged as a result of the violent settler–colonial fabric of this nation being gradually torn apart by a critically literate and phenotypically

¹⁵ Note that the excerpt speaks to an *issue* and historical point, rather than embodying or displaying an allegiance to an ideology.

¹⁶ Gerassi, 314.

diverse population. Oh dear, the fear! For historical context and to avoid being humorously mislabeled as a “radical liberal”—such as U.S. Senator and Reverend Raphael Warnock was described by former U.S. Senator Kelly Loeffler—the subsequent excerpt from the French-Tunisian scholar and writer Albert Memmi articulates precisely why anything adjacent to progressivity and engendering a politically un-muted avenue for the periphery is attacked and labeled as an affiliate of that which is *categorically irrelevant* to the subject at-hand:

[T]he colonizer denies the colonized the most precious right granted to most [humans]: liberty. Living conditions imposed on the colonized by colonization make no provisions for it; indeed, they ignore it. The colonized has no way out of his state of woe—neither a legal outlet (naturalization) nor a religious outlet (conversion). The colonized is not free to choose between being colonized or not being colonized. What is left of the colonized at the end of this stubborn effort to dehumanize him [or her]? [They are] surely no longer an alter ego of the colonizer. [They are] hardly a human being. He [or she] tends rapidly toward becoming an object. As an end, in the colonizer’s supreme ambition, [they] should exist only as a function of the *needs* (author’s emphasis) of the colonizer, i.e., be transformed into a pure colonized.¹⁷

Certainly, it is obvious that the excerpt from Memmi cannot directly describe the modern neoliberal/colonial era in which many are caught and feel today. However, the dehumanizing and inassimilable conditions imposed on the periphery— notwithstanding, the non-white [sub]elite—remains the same. Therefore, the attack on that which is progressive is nothing short of a tentacled act centered on *maintaining* the Memmian-described colonial order as well as the grip on the slow-opening mouths of the marginalized; which speaks, furthermore, to the clarion call focused on the progressive body and the necessity of centering [radical] literature and critical literacy within the struggle to materialize justice—for all.

¹⁷ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 86.

As perhaps noticed and equally important, within the context of the conversational argument: The literature within this conversation has primarily functioned through the work of critical consciousness. One cannot extricate the work of unmuting the socio-politically muted without recentering literature and critical literacy from a tertiary and functional—or even, recreational (in the case of palatable literature)—position to a centered position. For clarification, within the chapter “Peasants and Their Reading Text,” from *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, Freire articulates:

Texts, of course, should never be reduced to “rhymes” that put one to sleep instead of rousing critical consciousness. Rather than follow typical routines, the “reading classes” should be actual reading seminars with constant opportunity to establish the relation between a passage of a text under discussion and various aspects of the real world of the *asentamiento*.¹⁸

In easier terms, not only must literature serve as a critical part of the liberating process, but understanding literature *as it relates to* the suffering and silencing of human beings must be paramount. And this assertion must not be one which is construed as personal or related to *my* scholarship; no, not at all. Rather, this assertion concerning the relationship between literature, critical literacy, and unmuting the socio-political periphery must be understood through the literary medium of, once again, Addison Gayle:

Here is the evidence of real power—the power to control [humans], not by tanks and guns, but by the supremacy of the mass media, the domination of the instruments of propaganda, and control of the educational institutions, which are used to destroy one truth and replace it with another. American society is unique in this respect. It manufactures people as it manufactures things. Its power stems, not from its vast military might, but instead from its

¹⁸ Gayle, 77.

ability to convince the victim that [they] deserv[e] the punishment which it metes out.¹⁹

Gayle's forceful, possibly contentious, yet relative statement speaks to the multi-layered issue which plagues [North] America. However, within the multi-layered construction and its by-products, there are two layers worth mentioning *en route* to this conversational conclusion: functional and political illiteracy. The phenomena of both forms of illiteracy are best introduced and explained, specifically with regard to unmuting those with a desire to cry out, by Jonathan Kozol, author of, *Illiterate America*, Paulo Freire, and, although, normatively deemed, *persona non grata*—Thomas Sankara.

From Kozol:

Only one serious difference does exist from city to suburb, and at times (within one city) from one district to the next: The children of those who are already literate, enfranchised, and empowered learn the exercise of power. The children of those who are not literate, who have been disenfranchised and remain excluded from the exercise of power, learn to accommodate themselves to impotence and to capitulation. Those who are privileged achieve the competence with which to shape the future. Those who are not acquire an attitude of civilized accommodation which will allow them to fit into slots that are provided for them in that future – or else to remain excluded from the future altogether. This alone is different from one district, or one classroom, or one child to the next. With this exception, it is one consistent and unbroken schooling system. National goals define it. National inequity degrades it. National myopia restricts it. But it is, for all of this, one education

¹⁹ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 86.

system indivisible, with liberty for some, illiteracy for others, the same oath of allegiance for us all.²⁰

From Freire:

From the linguistic point of view, if an illiterate is one who does not know how to read and write, a political illiterate—regardless of whether she or he knows how to read and write—is one who has an ingenuous perception of humanity in its relationships with the world. This person has a naïve outlook on social reality, which for this one is a given, that is, social reality is a *fait accompli* rather than something that's still in the making. One of the political illiterate's tendencies is to escape concrete reality as a way of rejecting it—by losing himself or herself in abstract visions of the world.²¹

And finally, from Sankara:

Our struggle is a call for building. But our demand is not to build a world for blacks alone and against other [humans]. As black people, we want to teach other people how to love each other. Despite their maliciousness towards us, we will know how to resist and then teach them the meaning of solidarity.²²

Through the profound excerpts from Kozol, Freire, and Sankara, one can detect a key commonality as it relates to the negated issue of, illiteracy: *the desire for progression*. Within each excerpt lies a clarion call concerning progress. Kozol implicitly suggests that the educational system provides liberty for some but illiteracy for others, indicating a need to reconstruct a *new* educational system which is beneficial for the masses. Similarly, Freire conveys that illiteracy cannot be circumscribed to the mechanics of literacy—owing, in part, to those who act out and through a state of political

²⁰ Jonathan Kozol, *Illiterate America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Pr./Doubleday, 1985), 76.

²¹ Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, 103.

²² Jean-Claude Kongo and Leo Zeilig, *Thomas Sankara: Voices of Liberation* (National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, HSRC Press, 2017), 90.

illiteracy, therefore also indicating a need to expand the horizons of literacy training as a means to progress, globally. And finally, Sankara felicitously states that to progress, as an international community, the masses must build a better future through transcending exclusionary politics—which is also a symptom of political illiteracy. Ergo, it is critical to emphasize that without the dissemination and promulgation of [radical] literature—such as the above mentioned—alongside a concomitant focus on critical literacy, *any* struggle engaged in recentering the periphery via unmuting the socio-politically muted will result in *potential* advances yet, most likely I argue: not enough to *counter* the far-advanced steps—on behalf of global capitalism (profit-over-justice)—to secure the linked locks on the mouths of the peripheralized and muted.

This thus closes in on the final issue within the present extensive conversation: *delving beyond the palatable*. As the author, I want to be clear that this paper is not invested in decentering nor relegating forms of literature which are not overtly political. *However*, as the author, I am imploring the self-proclaimed “progressive” body to take time to stretch beyond the confines of what is comfortable, as a sign of solidarity with those who are caught—vulnerable and fear-ridden—within the crosshairs of structural oppression and low-level vultures. What does this mean? When delving into a novel while sipping, in bourgeois fashion, on *Stella Rosa Black*, also consider the works and words of the late scholars: Dr. Vincent G. Harding, Dr. bell hooks, Dr. Cedric Robinson, Paulo Freire, among others. In addition, when *en route* to view the geographical embodiment of divinity, take the time out to *transition*—while not departing—from soul-captivating patriotic novels into, possibly, Dai Trang Ngyuen’s *The Black Race by Ho Chi Minh*. Additionally, when sitting across the table from family members on a holiday, make the attempt to oscillate between a nonfictional text on, perhaps, a sports giant and lean, transiently, into, perhaps, Frantz Fanon’s, *The Wretched of the Earth*. For I can only imagine what the conversation would evolve into through the conflation of an inspiring text on a sports figure/legend with the following excerpt from Fanon:

The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of

aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me.²³

Delving beyond the palatable is, in my opinion, the only way that progressives can beat back the winds of an unfortunately and rapidly approaching neofascism. Thus, by-and-large, the holding of benevolent and “apolitical” meetings with local ministers on “how to be less racist”; the myriad seminars on “individualism via diversity and inclusion”; the mandatory employment trainings centered on “equitable egoism”; *inter alia* will, I argue, not perform the job. The nation today is faced with the rising threat of neofascism, right-wing extremism within educational and media spaces, precarity-induced crimes in peripheralized communities, and the conflagration of cross-racial functional, critical, and political illiteracy. To be clear, this is not a time to consume—although, delicious—California rolls with eel sauce and soul-numbing literature which keeps one full, satisfied, and blinded from the nearing dystopia in North America. Contrariwise, this *is* a time to mobilize around the need to center radical literature and critical literacy. To introduce, henceforth, the final leg of the conversational argument, I feel compelled to fleetingly introduce a historical, yet relevant, point from Jonathan Koza within his 1980 text *Prisoners of Silence*:

I am thinking, also, not only of the competence to read a magazine or newspaper, but also of the sense of leverage, the critical analysis—“the lever of skepticism”—which will give a person power to see through the bias (or the pretense of “no bias”) in the national and local press. This latter item (the lever of skepticism in the face of a non-neutral press) is perhaps one aspect of *full literacy* (authors’ emphasis) which would be of use to people almost anywhere; but I am convinced that there is a great deal more variety than uniformity

²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2021), 15.

of need among the hundreds of thousands of illiterate communities in the United States.²⁴

From Kozol's excerpt, it should be evident that the progressive body within this nation must evolve from being quiescent and liberal—whatever the latter means. For being liberal means absolutely nothing when there exists, owing to political illiteracy and the ruse of “breaking news,” the potentiality that January 6, 2021, can become, in hindsight, a [God-forbid] precursor for a future reality. Thus, today, you—the reader—wherever you are sitting as you read this, must ascend to the point of understanding that literary leisure can, in this age, subconsciously leave those who are socio-politically vulnerable and forcibly silent to the hands of the critically illiterate and reactionary nature of those against progressivity. Henceforth, my concluding plea to those who read this is the following: Please allow radical literature to serve as individual defibrillators which, after the conclusion of each book, bring you *from* an imperial-like apathy *into* a world of compassion for the myriad peripheralized communities and individuals who currently await for the day that they [can]—despite how bleak their community and future looks—become who they have always wanted to be. For as bastions of a new social dawn, we must facilitate the inundation of progressive literature which engenders that which the Cuban Literacy Campaign *sought* to produce, materially: An education which would “replace the rigid class structure of capitalist [society] with a classless and *egalitarian* [author's emphasis] society; to eliminate sexism and racism; to end the city's [or center/core] economic and cultural domination over the countryside [or periphery].”²⁵ For without this literature, perhaps, we as a phenotypically diverse nation will never *collectively* be able to feel the joy that Lee Greenwood felt when he unlocked his patriotic lips to state: “I am proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free.”

²⁴ Jonathan Kozol, *Prisoners of Silence: Breaking the Bonds of Adult Illiteracy in the United States* (New York: Continuum, 1980), 57.

²⁵ Marvin Leiner, “The 1961 National Cuban Literacy Campaign,” in *National Literacy Campaigns and Movements: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Robert F. Arnove & Harvey J. Graff, (London: Routledge, 2017), 187.

Confluence