

# Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy: Social Justice Reconsidered

by  
Carlos Tejada  
Kris D. Gutierrez  
Manuel Espinoza

*Colonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come about as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: That is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible, nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content (Fanon 1963, 36).*

*I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with even greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition of where I stand. A break with what is not right ethically. I must choose between one thing and another thing. I cannot be a teacher and be in favor of everyone and everything. I cannot be in favor merely of people, humanity, vague phrases far from the concrete nature of educative practice. Mass hunger and unemployment, side by side with opulence, are not the result of destiny . . . . (Freire 1998, 93).*

In the contemporary contexts of what many refer to as the United States, working-class indigenous and non-white peoples are often reduced to ontological foreigners in the very space and time they occupy. In these contexts, people are assaulted by multiple and mutually constitutive forms of violence in the various dimensions—the economic, the cultural, the political, the linguistic, the sexual, the spatial, the psychological, and epistemological—of their daily lives. Defining violence as “any relation, process, or condition by which an individual or group violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group,” Bulhan (1981 53) explains that violence inhibits human growth, negates inherent potential, limits productive living, and causes death. We contend that one cannot ignore this violence when calling for social justice, and that it is necessary to define explicitly one’s particular understanding of the term—in other words, the meaning of social justice that grounds one’s politics and projects. Meanings are never neutral; they are always situated socially, culturally, and historically, and they operate within the logic of differing ideologies that imply differing sets of social practices. These practices, in turn, serve and sustain particular sets of interests, while they simultaneously work against others. Hence, we argue that any

notion of social justice should be interrogated with the following questions: What ideologies underlie particular notions of social justice? Who benefits from the instantiation of those notions? And, at whose expense are those notions instantiated?

We argue for a notion of social justice that recognizes that the contemporary United States is essentially characterized by an *internal neocolonialism* (Almaguer 1974; Barrera 1979; Blauner 1972) that has its origins in the mutually reinforcing systems of colonial and capitalist domination and exploitation that enslaved Africans



and dispossessed indigenous populations throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We insist on a notion of social justice that acknowledges that the forms of violence and “microaggressions” (Davis 1995) experienced by dominated and exploited groups in the context of everyday life are both normalized and officially sanctioned by dominant ideologies and institutional arrangements in “American” society. Most importantly, we argue for a notion of social justice that sees dismantling our internal neocolonial condition and abolishing its multiple forms of violence as preconditions to the existence of justice between all peoples that inhabit the contemporary United States.

Working-class indigenous and non-white peoples’ interests cannot be represented by amnesia-ridden notions of social justice that ignore the current manifestations and effects of the corporal and cultural genocide that has been taking place in “American” society throughout the last four centuries. At worst, many of these notions are calls for social reform that ignore the racial and cultural dimensions of the social injustice we inherit from our colonial and capitalist past; at worst, they are calls for a more socially equitable (i.e., racially and ethnically diverse) participation in the existing structures of domination and exploitation. For us, the struggle for social justice is inextricably tied to the struggle for a politics and praxis of anti-capitalist decolonization in the

mutually constitutive terrains of social existence—in the economic, the cultural, the political, the juridical, and the educational. Focusing specifically on the educational terrain, we argue for engaging in the struggle for social justice through a *decolonizing pedagogical praxis*.

In this chapter, we outline an emergent theory of pedagogy—a decolonizing pedagogy—that stands in stark contrast to most social justice pedagogies currently en vogue. More specifically, we propose the concept of a decolonizing pedagogy to address the issue of social justice from and within the educational arena. We argue that an anti-capitalist decolonizing pedagogical praxis is a concrete way to struggle for a social justice that serves the interests of working-class indigenous and non-white peoples in the internal neocolonial contexts of the contemporary United States. In what follows, we define our developing conception of a decolonizing pedagogy by providing a provisional definition of the term and outlining its constituent elements. This is followed by a discussion of some fundamental premises of our call for a decolonizing pedagogy and an outline of conceptual frameworks that currently inform its conceptualization. We conclude with a discussion of decolonizing pedagogical praxis that outlines its curricular contents and explicates its grounding in cultural-historical conceptions of learning and development.

### *Why Social Justice from a Decolonizing Perspective?*

In California's recent past, voter propositions designed to eliminate health and educational services to "undocumented, immigrant" populations (Proposition 187), to roll-back the limited civil rights gains of the 1960's (Proposition 209), and to prohibit the use of the home language in teaching and learning (Proposition 227) have been the order of the day. To some people, these propositions are mere vestiges of a racial discrimination and a social inequality that persist despite a long and concerted effort to uphold the founding ideals (e.g., liberty, democratic participation, and equality) of the "American" nation. To us, these policies are refurbished historical practices that produce racial and class domination and reiterate century-old questions: What are the value and place of non-white peoples in an Anglo-European nation and society? And, what should be the role of education for poor, indigenous, and non-white children?

These recent policies are manifestations of contemporary struggles and conflicting interests between differing groups in a neocolonial context that has been imposed, maintained, and dominated by

Anglo-Europeans since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They are manifestations of power, domination, conflict, and struggle that can be traced to European conquest, colonization, and imperialist expansion throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

While we acknowledge that the past is obviously not the present, we argue that the latter can neither exist nor be understood outside of the former. It is impossible for social subjects to be ontologically disconnected; their being in the world cannot be detached from and unaffected by the time and space they have already occupied. In our recent past, social subjects, social relations, and forms of social organization have been so fundamentally marked by colonialism and capitalism that we believe it is naïve, erroneous, and even deceitful to contemplate our present existence without an analysis and understanding of the unfolding enconcretizations and effects of these. We are not, of course arguing that we are living the actual colonialism or capitalist colonialism of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and/or 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is clear that many of the processes and practices of that colonial and capitalist domination and exploitation have evolved, have been altered, have been abandoned, or have been legally terminated, but it is also clear that essential features of that domination and exploitation continue to structure the social relations between differing groups in "American" society. We insist on discussing contemporary notions and issues of social justice from a decolonizing perspective because we understand that for working class indigenous and non-white peoples and their descendants the materialization of social justice on one hand, and the discrediting and dismantling of the lasting effects and contemporary manifestations of our capitalist colonialism on the other hand, are inseparable.

### *Fundamental Premises of a Decolonizing Pedagogy*

A basic premise of our call for a decolonizing pedagogy is that the dominant economic, cultural, political, judicial, and educational arrangements in contemporary "American" society are those of an *internal neocolonialism* produced by the mutually reinforcing systems of colonial and capitalist domination and exploitation that have organized social relations throughout the history of what today constitutes the United States. Given the underlying significance of this premise, we elaborate on the concept of internal neocolonialism.

The concept of internal neocolonialism we employ to characterize the dominant condition of social existence in what today constitutes the United States is indebted to the work of Barrera (1979) and

Almaguer (1974). Barrera employs the concept in the development of a theory of racial inequality that is proposed as an alternative to the theories of deficiency, theories of bias, and theories of structural discrimination that attempted to explicate the issue of



Chicana/o inequality in the United States. In outlining this theory, he offers a discussion of colonialism and internal colonialism that is essential to the notion of internal neocolonialism we propose. Colonialism is defined by Barrera as follows:

**Colonialism is a structured relationship of domination and subordination, where the dominant and subordinate groups are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines, and where the relationship is established and maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group (193).**

Internal colonialism is distinguished from colonialism in the following terms:

**Internal colonialism is a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct, "metropolis" separate from the "colony" (194).**

Almaguer (1974) links internal colonialism in the United States to advanced monopoly capitalism in a manner that is also essential to our developing concept of internal neocolonialism. In his examination of Chicana/o oppression in North America, Almaguer calls for a simultaneous analysis of capitalist and colonial structures, arguing that both the historical process of colonization (be it classical colonialism, neo-colonialism, or internal colonialism) and the rise and spread of capitalism should be viewed as fundamental in the organization of social and economic power in the United States. He explains that the histories of oppressed peoples have been largely formed both by the rise of capitalism and the expansion of colonial domination, and he further theorizes that there is a dialectical relationship in the

development of monopoly capitalism and the development of internal colonialism. He describes this relationship as follows:

**... the colonial expansionism by which the U.S. absorbed vast territories paved the way for the incorporation of its non-white colonial labor force. This contributed in turn to the accelerated process of capital accumulation. Necessary for the development of modern capitalism ... not only did internal colonialism and monopoly capitalism develop concurrently, but ... both processes are intimately interrelated and feed each other. At the same time that the utilization of non-whites as a controlled, colonized labor force contributed to the development of the U.S. as a major metropolis of the international capitalist system, the attendant class system in the U.S. provided a means of reinforcing a racially and culturally defined social hierarchy ... (42)**

As this passage indicates, capitalism did not simply develop side by side with internal colonial domination; it became inextricably interrelated with it. More significantly, Almaguer contends that capitalism is now the dominant mode of production and that it continues to systematically perpetuate a colonial domination in which the brunt of its oppression and class contradictions "have been largely carried over on racial terms and fall on the backs of colonized people of color" (1974, 42).

We define the dominant condition characterizing social existence in what today constitutes the United States as a colonial one because there continues to be a structured relationship of cultural, political, and economic domination and subordination between European whites on the one hand, and indigenous and non-white peoples on the other. What's more, this relationship (which was imposed and institutionalized throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and has been maintained, in essence, up to the present) continues to serve primarily the interests of the dominant White, English-speaking, and Christian population. We qualify it as an internal colonial condition because the colonizing/dominant and colonized/subordinate populations co-exist, are often socially integrated, and even share citizenship within the same national borders. What's more, we see this internal colonial condition, its forms of social organization, and its institutional apparatuses as inextricably tied to and perpetuated by capitalism and capitalist social relations—a capitalism that Almaguer discussed as advanced monopoly capitalism and we currently see as global capitalism (Stromquist and Monkman 2000; McLaren and Farahmandpur 2000). Our conception of internal colonialism, then, assumes the fundamentality of capitalism and capitalist social relations in the various dimensions of our neo-colonial condition and social interaction.

We propose expanding the concept from internal colonialism to internal *neocolonialism* because we think it is necessary to distinguish between the forms of domination, oppression, and exploitation of the internal colonialism of the 17<sup>th</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the forms of domination, oppression, and exploitation that have characterized the internal colonialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Landmark legislation and its effects (e.g., the Emancipation, Proclamation, the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. constitution, the Indian Citizenship Act, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, and the Native American Languages Act) have altered the nature of the domination, oppression, and exploitation of subordinated groups. We think it is fundamentally important to acknowledge and account for significant changes in the condition that has characterized social existence in the United States. The past is obviously not the present, nor is the condition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the same as the condition of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We contend, however, that the condition characterizing the present maintains essential features of the condition that characterized social the past.

It is important to point out that our argument about the continuity of colonial relations is not grounded in simplistic representations of colonizing and the colonized populations. We are cognizant that the population of settling/invading Europeans was defined by difference and division along ethnic, linguistic, gender, and social class lines—not even the dominant population of Anglos was socially homogenous. Similarly, we are aware that there was tremendous diversity among both the indigenous population and African slaves. We are conscious that in referring to Indigenous people, African slaves, and/or their descendants, we reference people from a plurality of groups with differing cultures, languages, and forms of social organization. Similarly, our conception of the processes and practices (both past and present) of colonialism acknowledges that not all European groups (nor differing social groups within the dominant Anglo population) have been equally complicit in the colonial relations of domination and exploitation that have taken place. Not all European groups have benefited equally from the establishment and perpetuation of the colonial/neocolonial condition. Our conception of internal colonialism in the United States (both past and present) also acknowledges that not all indigenous or non-white peoples and their descendants experienced or are experiencing colonialism in a uniform manner.

Another fundamental premise of our call for a decolonizing pedagogy is that the internal neocolonial

condition of our social existence (i.e., our reality) can be transformed through *praxis*—guided action aimed at transforming individuals and their world that is reflected upon and leads to further action. This understanding of the malleability of social reality and the transformative potential of human praxis has its origins in the materialist philosophy of Marx and Engels and is clearly articulated in Freire's pedagogy for the oppressed.

Marx and Engels posit that human existence and society are produced by people and can be transformed by people. In a letter to one of his contemporaries, Marx asks, "what is society, whatever its form may be?" He then answers that it is "the product of men's/[women's] reciprocal activity?" (1973, 3). For Marx and Engels (1984) the activity of men and women in the world is the fundamental basis of human existence because it is at the center of the production of material life itself; it produces society and is the driving force of history. Their critique of the German idealism of their day clearly articulates the essential importance of human activity to the social existence and historical being of men and women in the world:

**Since we are dealing with the Germans who are devoid of premises, we must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history, the premise, namely, that men/[women] must be in a position to live in order to "make history". But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today as a thousand years ago must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life. Even when the sensuous world is reduced to a minimum, to as stick as with Saint Bruno [Bauer] it presupposes the action of producing the stick (48).**

Marx and Engels argue that history *is made* by men and women who have secured the ability to live, but they are not arguing that having insured this ability they can go about making history as they choose. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx points out that "men/[women] make their own history", but that they "are not free to make it as they please, under circumstances chosen by themselves." Those circumstances "are directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past" (1978, 9; our translation from Spanish). Marx and Engels do not see men and women making history free from the social condition inherited from their past, but neither do they see that social condition absolutely determining the history they can make. While the past weighs heavily upon the present, it does not preclude men and women from radically

altering the social existence imposed by their past. Marx and Engels explicitly posit this in their third thesis on Feuerbach:

**The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men[women] and that it is essential to educate the educator himself/herself].**

**The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice* (p. 1984, 121).**

Through this materialist philosophy and social theorization, we understand that the condition of our social existence in “American” society is a product of our most fundamental activity as living beings.



We live an internal neocolonialism because we engage in colonial relations of domination and exploitation in the production and reproduction of our material existence and its cultural expression. We make the history of our internal colonial domination through the practice of our everyday lives. Our domination and exploitation do not reside exclusively in an ideological and discursive legacy; nor are these to be found only at the centers of power in “American” society. They reside and can be found in the labor and mundane displacements of our bodies. Our colonial domination and oppression materialize in the here and now of the processes and practices of our everyday lives—especially those related to securing the basic necessities of life. We also understand that we do not simply choose to engage in processes and practices that make and remake the internal colonialism we experience. We labor and relate to others in the production and reproduction of our social existence with the weight of a colonial and imperialist past squarely on our backs. It is within the circumstances inherited from that past that we

reproduce the condition of our social existence and make our history. We are not, however, condemned to continue making and remaking the condition of our existence according to the circumstances imposed by our past. Those circumstances can be changed instead of merely reproduced and made anew. We understand that the very practice that makes possible our existence and characterizes its condition also holds the potential to radically transform them.

Mere practice, however, will not lead to a social transformation that effectively alters the internal neocolonialism we experience. It needs to be practice that is grounded in a critical consciousness of this condition and its possible transformation. This understanding finds clear expression in Freire’s (1990) pedagogy for the oppressed and his call for a praxis of liberation. His pedagogical conception begins with the materialist theorization that social existence is the product of human action and can be transformed by human praxis:

**Just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of action, so it is not transformed by chance. If men[women] produce social reality (which in the “inversion of praxis” turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for men[women].**

**Reality which becomes oppressive results in the contradistinction of men[women] as oppressors and oppressed. The latter, whose task it is to struggle for their liberation together with those who show true solidarity, must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle. One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge men’s[woman’s] consciousness. Functionally oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (1990, 36).**

In this passage we see the fundamental importance that Freire places on the development of a critical consciousness of social existence. An end to oppression, which is the fundamental objective of Freire’s call for a socially transformative praxis, requires that men and women have the ability to perceive their existence in the world. He argues that their action in the world is largely determined by way they see themselves within it, and that a correct perception necessitates of an ongoing reflection on their world. For Freire it is neither the mere action nor the mere reflection and critical consciousness of men and women that will transform the world and end oppression. This can only be achieved through “praxis: the action and reflection of men in the world in order to transform it” (1990, 66).

The ability to perceive correctly and arrive at a critical consciousness of the world, however, does not come automatically; it is itself the product of praxis. From this position Freire argues for and educational practice (a pedagogical praxis) that engages with the oppressed in reflection that leads to action on their concrete reality. He calls for a pedagogy that makes oppression and its causes objects of a reflection that will allow the oppressed to develop a consciousness of “their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation” (1990, 33). Freire clearly articulates the essential importance of critical consciousness to transformative action that is liberating:

**In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action (34).**

He attributes to education an essential role in the development of developing critical consciousness that Freire ascribes to education:

**In problem posing education, men[women] develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves. They come to see the world not as static reality, but as reality in process, in transformation. Although the dialectical relations of men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether or not they are perceived at all) it is also true that the form of action men adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceived themselves in the world. Hence the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action (71).**

From Freire we understand that a social transformation that works in the interests of working class indigenous and non-white peoples necessitates a critical consciousness of social existence and the possibility of its transformation. We argue that a critical decolonizing consciousness is fundamental to the transformation of the internal neocolonial condition of social existence in the contemporary United States. One need only consider the level of post September 11<sup>th</sup> patriotism and expressed belief in official rhetoric (about America’s moral righteousness and freedom loving and defending tradition) among working-class Indigenous and non-white people to see the degree to which our internal neocolonial condition has “submerged” the

consciousness of men and women who live and experience the effects of that condition on a daily basis. The vast majority of working-class indigenous and non-white people in the contemporary United States cannot see the extent to which the essence of the colonialism that made them English-speaking, Christian individuals continues to define their social existence. We agree with Freire that how men and women act in the world is largely related to how they perceive themselves in the world, and thus we understand that the existent potential to transform our internal neocolonial condition will remain unrealized if we fail to appropriately perceive and develop a critical consciousness of this condition and its possible undoing. A social transformation that ends our neocolonial oppression and exploitation in “American” society will require a cycle of emancipatory thought, action, and reflection—in other words, a praxiological cycle. We build on Freire and contend that critical consciousness is developed through the struggle against internal neocolonialism both in the classroom and the larger social context.

### *Toward the Definition of a Decolonizing Pedagogy*

Critical pedagogy has put forth the notion that classroom practice integrates particular curriculum content and design, instructional strategies and techniques, and forms of evaluation. It argues that these specify a particular version about what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct a representation of our world and our place within it (McLaren 1998). From this perspective, the pedagogical is inherently political. For us a decolonizing pedagogy encompasses both an anticolonial and decolonizing notion of pedagogy and an anticolonial and decolonizing pedagogical praxis. It is an anticolonial and decolonizing theory and praxis that insists that colonial domination and its ideological frameworks operate and are reproduced in and through the curricular content and design, the instructional practices, the social organization of learning, and the forms of evaluation that inexorably sort and label students into enduring categories of success and failure of schooling. Thus, an anticolonial and decolonizing pedagogical praxis explicitly works to transform these dimensions of schooling so that schools become sites for the development of a critical decolonizing consciousness and activity that work to ameliorate and ultimately end the mutually constitutive forms of violence that characterize our internal neocolonial condition. For us, a decolonizing pedagogy addresses both the means and the ends of schooling.

*The Conceptual Orientations  
of a Decolonizing Pedagogy*

The decolonizing pedagogy we propose must be guided by a conceptually-dynamic worldview and a set of values that make it anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic. It is informed by a theoretical heteroglossia that strategically utilizes theorizations and understandings from various fields and conceptual frameworks to unmask the logics, workings, and effects of internal colonial domination, oppression and exploitation in our contemporary contexts. Amongst the most significant of these are postcolonial studies, spatial theory, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and cultural-historical activity theory of learning and human development.

*The Curricular Contents of a  
Decolonizing Pedagogical Praxis  
and Its Cultural-Historical Conception  
of Learning and Cognition*

Shortly after the military phase of the Spanish conquest, the Aristotelian philosopher Juan Gines de Sepulveda, the Dominican priest Bartolome de Las Casas, and their contemporaries debated whether the "Indian" should be educated and, if so, to what end (Hanke 1974). Conceptualizing indigenous people as children, Thomas L. McKenney, superintendent of Indian trade, argued that the creation of tribal school systems run by white missionaries could culturally transform Native Americans in one generation; his ideas were enacted by the U.S. congress in the Civilization Act of 1819 (Spring 2001a). Those type of debates and arguments and their underlying ideologies of cultural and racial superiority have persisted into the present. They continue to largely define the educational opportunities and schooling experiences of indigenous and non-white peoples throughout the "Americas." The United States, of course, is no exception.

One need only consider the recent propositions in the state of California to see how voices from the past speak loudly in our present. The electorate in the state actually voted to deny education to children who could not prove their "legal" status in the country. It then voted to rescind affirmative action programs that functioned to increase educational access and opportunity for non-white people. Most recently, the same electorate voted to deny the Spanish-speaking population in the state the opportunity to be educated in its own

language. Indeed, the violence against indigenous and non-white peoples institutionalized during "America's" colonial past continues in its internal neocolonial present. We insist that there can be no social justice in the context of this violence, and that the struggle for social justice necessarily implies a struggle within and against the institutions that perpetuate, legitimize, and/or conceal the multiple forms of violence perpetuated against working-class indigenous and non-white peoples. This is not a struggle that will be waged with AK-47's; it is struggle that must be waged with pedagogies, and we call for engaging in that struggle through a decolonizing pedagogical praxis in the classroom.

By calling for a decolonizing pedagogical praxis, it is not us who propose to politicize the curriculum and place the school at the service of political ends. The school in "American" society has been implicated in the politics of colonial domination from its inception. The deculturalization and Americanization that dominant groups saw as integral to cultural, political, and economic domination of indigenous and non-white peoples have always found a most hospitable site and effective mechanism in the school (Spring 2001a, 2001b).

*Curricular Contents of A  
Decolonizing Pedagogy*

What is the subject matter of a decolonizing pedagogy? What do teachers and students engaged in decolonizing pedagogical praxis teach and learn from one another? We contend that developing a critical consciousness of our internal neo-colonial condition and its possible transformation is fundamental to what teachers and students do in decolonizing pedagogical spaces. This requires explicit attention to the history and contemporary manifestations of internal neocolonialism in a manner that clearly explicates their social origin and rejects their historical consequence. It also introduces students to robust theories and conceptual frameworks that provide them the analytical tools to excavate history and examine the present. It is a pedagogical content that must be guided by a conceptually dynamic worldview and a set of values that are anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic.

We view the contents described above as necessarily contingent and context-specific. While internal neocolonialism indelibly marks all social existence and largely defines every dimension of life, it assumes diverse forms and is experienced differently in the various social spaces of "American Society." Hence, we contend that the specific history and specific manifestations of neocolonialism that

students and teachers engage should be determined by the particular social spaces of their existence—the specific places and social contexts where they experience internal neocolonialism. Likewise, the specific theorizations and conceptual frameworks that students and teachers engage should be determined by the specificity of neocolonial domination and exploitation in the social spaces they inhabit. The content of a decolonizing pedagogical praxis on an Indian reservation, for example, would necessarily be different than the content of a decolonizing pedagogical praxis in the urban spaces of metropolitan Los Angeles. In other words, the content is situated and contingent and thus open to continuous modification and expansion.

While history and social science courses are seemingly ideal and most immediately relevant for addressing the history and current manifestations of internal neocolonialism, we call for decolonizing pedagogical praxis across the curriculum. All curricular subject matter (e.g., the social sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences) can be used to examine neocolonial conditions or can be engaged in a manner that addresses the neocolonial production, utilization, and/or effects of its related bodies of knowledge. Whether we engage students in the learning of mathematics, history/social studies, language arts, chemistry, physics, or vocational skills, the content of our pedagogy highlights, examines, and discusses transforming the mutually reinforcing systems of neocolonial and capitalist domination and exploitation in the United States. Our proposed pedagogy also necessarily addresses how working-class indigenous and none-white teachers and students are assaulted by multiple and mutually constitutive forms of violence in the various dimensions of their daily lives. In this way, a decolonizing praxis seeks to provide students a rich theoretical, analytical, and pragmatic toolkit for individual and social transformation.

While we argue for a specific curricular focus for a decolonizing pedagogical praxis, we are also committed to ensuring students the opportunity to master the traditional curriculum necessary for academic success within the present system of schooling. We do not, however, argue for ignoring or replacing the official curricular content for which students are held accountable. While we see the need to problematize and expose the official curriculum's complicity with neocolonial domination and exploitation, we know that failing to prepare students in the mastery of this curriculum only sets them up for academic failure and its related social consequences. The decolonizing pedagogical praxis we propose sets out, for example, to prepare high school students to dynamically critique and actively

work against neocolonialism while preparing and making themselves eligible for admission to and success at the most prestigious universities in the United States. Such contradictions are inevitable in internal neo-colonial contexts.

### *Decolonizing Pedagogical Praxis and the Cultural-Historical Conception of Learning and Cognition*

A decolonizing pedagogical praxis challenges not only the forms, content, and intent of other pedagogies and their historical antecedents, but also requires a complete reconceptualization of the social organization of learning in schooling institutions and fundamentally in classrooms. Such a reconceptualization calls for a transformation in the social and intellectual relationships among the participants both in schools and in particular communities in which the schools reside. To date, the most productive theory of human development from our perspective—one that aligns with a decolonizing perspective—is cultural-historical activity theory (Cole 1996; Gutierrez 2000; Moll 2000; Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1985, 1991). At its core, cultural-historical or sociocultural theory recognizes the fundamentally relational nature of teaching and learning, the microgenetic, sociohistorical and cultural planes, and the centrality of culture in human development. Its dynamic and processual notion of culture requires a focus on everyday practice within larger systems of activity that are, of course, always socially and culturally organized. As Cole and Engestrom argue, “A natural unit of analysis for the study of human behavior is activity systems, historically conditioned systems of relations among individuals and their proximal, culturally organized environments” (1991, 8). From our perspective, these practices are inescapably organized within particular neocolonial spaces of domination and oppression.

From this perspective, teaching and learning cannot be disconnected from the larger contexts of their development, from the microgenetic or moment-to-moment and its larger sociohistorical context. This simultaneous focus on historicity and the quotidian requires us to understand the practices of schools as inseparable from our contemporary neocolonial contexts. For us, cultural-historical activity theory provides both a theoretical lens and methodological toolkit for examining and understanding how cultural artifacts that are both material and ideational mediate human beings' interaction with their social worlds. As such, tools or artifacts are never neutral and always a particular politic.

Conceptualizing teaching and learning as fundamentally situated and socially mediated forces us to always ground instructional practices in the present and past realities of teachers and students and to organize learning in ways that promote and assist their potential. Inherent in cultural historical theory is a pedagogy of potential in that its primary concern is on what students can accomplish with assistance in robust contexts of learning (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Tejeda 2000). But here we argue not for contexts that treat all contents, practices, and ways of organizing learning as neutral but rather we argue for contexts in which knowing and knowledge lead to a critical consciousness that guides action toward a transformation of our neocolonial condition.

Within a decolonizing perspective, cultural-historical activity theory can be used to examine and expose the ways the social constructs of race and ethnicity and its proxies, language and ability, achievement and underachievement, as well as the social practices of racism, discrimination, and privileging mediate the schooling outcomes of working-class indigenous and non-white students (Gutierrez, Asato, Santos, and Gotanda, in press). In doing so, we create new social relations and systems of activity that move toward a fundamentally different instantiation of social justice—one that is defined by historically colonized peoples.

### *Conclusion*

The discourses of equity, access, and democracy act as currency in the political economy of academia. The race, class, gender and sexuality of those who traffic in these discourses weigh heavily on the development of these modes of thought. The question of social justice *by whom* begs us to ask the question: Social justice *for whom*? We move away from notions of social justice that seek to create social space for the poor, dark-skinned and indigenous to be more like their oppressors.

The ideology that pervades liberal notions of social justice is that of a hopeful Americanism. For all its talk against the social ills of “racism and economic inequalities,” it fails to translate into a lived *praxis* that adequately contests the multiplicity of ways racism, capitalism, homophobia, privilege, and sexism are made manifest. We assert that these social ills cannot be combated simply by pressing the popgun of liberal, middle-class love against the bosom of oppressive social structures. Particular strains of social justice bestow upon capitalism immunity against criticism and anti-capitalist action. We challenge progressive educators to walk with us, rather than defining the places, spaces, and modes for the inclusion of our voices and our experiences.

We seek to reposition to the center of this discourse those who have been silenced in the classroom—those who endure and have endured the internal neo-colonial condition. We seek to reclaim our intellectual heritage and argue that any notion of social justice that informs education in the United States must be derivative of and informed by the experiences and interpretations of those living an internal neo-colonial existence.

We argue the need for re-membling the brown body as central to social analysis and knowledge production (Espinoza and Alvarez 2001). Thus, the integrity of the indigenous mind/body is the standard by which we measure the success of any decolonizing pedagogy. Following Cruz, who writes from a Chicana lesbian experience, we conclude our call for a decolonizing notion of social justice with the following thoughts:

**Reclamation, for the Chicana social agent, is not only a strategy to make visible Chicana voices and histories, but is also the struggle to develop a critical practice that can propel the brown body from a neocolonial past and into the embodiments of radical subjectivities (2001, 4).**

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