

Liberation from the Gringos

Bill Ayers' Comrades Target Mexican-American Youth for Revolution

By Cliff Kincaid

One of Bill Ayers' courses, ironically titled, "Improving Learning Environments," includes as required reading a book by his brother, former high school teacher Rick Ayers, ¹ *The Berkeley High School Slang Dictionary*, as well as *Teaching Toward Freedom*, by Bill Ayers himself. The Rick Ayers book was self-published and available for \$5 by contacting Rick Ayers directly. A story in the *San Francisco Chronicle* quoted Rick Ayers as saying that the book grew out of the fact that students were having a tough time with standard English and "because the traditional format of school was forcing them to ignore their culture and home languages instead of using them as a jumping-off place for creativity." He let them use slang to write their papers.

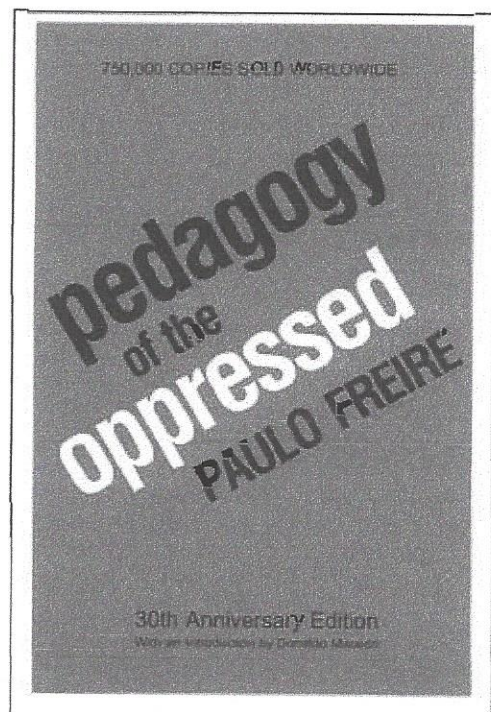
The promotion of these books might be viewed as a crass maneuver designed to fill the Ayers' brothers pockets. But the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, also required by Bill Ayers in his course, cannot be dismissed. Author Paulo Freire, a Brazilian Marxist, declared.

"This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well."

The footnotes for *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* tell us a lot about the nature of the book. Sources include Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Mao, Herbert Marcuse, and Vladimir Lenin.

The American Educational Research Association (AERA), which Bill Ayers serves as a vice-president, includes a "Paulo Freire Special Interest Group" in his honor. AERA has more than 25,000 members, including "educators; administrators; directors of research; persons working with testing or evaluation in federal, state and local agencies; counselors; evaluators; graduate students; and behavioral scientists."²

More open than even Bill Ayers about the mission, Paula Allman wrote *Critical Education Against Global Capitalism*, incorporating the ideas of Marx, Freire and Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist who emphasized the subversion of Western



cultural institutions such as the educational system. Allman is in the School of Continuing Education at the University of Nottingham, England. The foreword to her book is by UCLA Professor Peter McLaren, one of those on Bill Ayers' own "blog roll" of favorite web sites, and an open advocate of "Revolution as education," the subtitle of one of his books. Allman, he wrote, was "part of a bold new group of Marxist educationalists in Britain..."

Here, McLaren is leading the charge, as Ayers tags along and gets most of the "glory."

Bill Ayers explains to his students that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is "a complicated and layered book that will likely take you some time and sustained commitment." This is a book written by a Marxist for the purpose of sparking communist revolution. As the title indicates, this is a Marxist view of oppressors and the oppressed. Hence, students reading this book are supposed to come to an understanding of how various groups in society are being "oppressed." In fact, students themselves may come to believe, under careful guidance, that they, too, are members of the "oppressed" class. Didn't such a realization lead to the "student movement" of the 1960s, of which Ayers and his wife Bernardine Dohrn, were prominent members?

Perhaps this has something to do with the "new SDS," a new group of student activists being groomed by the Movement for a Democratic Society, under the watchful eyes of Ayers, Dohrn and their comrades.³

But the campaign doesn't stop at colleges and universities. Anti-illegal immigration activists in Tucson, Arizona have contacted America's Survival Inc. with information about how the Freire book is required reading in "Raza Studies" or Mexican-American courses in the high schools there. Other required books are *Occupied America* by Rodolfo Acuña, a professor emeritus of Chicano studies at California State University in Northridge (CSUN), and *Prison Notebooks* by Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Communist.

Gramsci's *The Modern Prince & Other Writings* was published in 1959 by International Publishers Inc., the Communist Party USA publishing house,⁴ and a copy supplied by Herbert Romerstein, the anti-communist researcher, includes the signatures of many top party officials, including chairman Gus Hall. This demonstrates their high regard for Gramsci and his methods. International Publishers also offers *Prison Notebooks*.

Occupied America, the fifth edition,⁵ includes an image of Fidel Castro on the front cover, and Castro and Che Guevara on the back cover. It refers to white people as "gringos" and actually includes a quotation on page 323 from Jose Angel Gutierrez of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), who was angry over the cancellation of a government program. He declared:

"We are fed up. We are going to move to do away with the injustice to the Chicano and if the 'gringo' doesn't get out of our way, we will stampede over him."

The book goes on:

“Gutierrez attacked the gringo establishment angrily at a press conference and called upon Chicanos to ‘Kill the gringo,’ which meant to end white control over Mexicans.”

Reviewing this material for the National Association of Scholars, Ashley Thorne commented that, “Actually, ‘kill the gringo’ meant ‘kill the gringo.’ But admitting that makes Mexicans look radical, infuriated, revolutionary. Acuña sidestepped that image and substituted it with one of browbeaten Latinos rising to overthrow injustice.”⁶

The citizens upset about this kind of material said that they initiated an investigation into the problem back in 2007 and found it difficult to get access to the books. **One activist told me the concern began when parents came to be aware of violence in the schools directed against white and black children.** “This investigation was undertaken to find the roots of this hate,” she told me. Another person, in turn, “told me the books in their Mexican-American classes are kept under ‘lock and key’ and the kids can’t even take them home. She said she asked to see them but they were very secretive about them and she was prohibited.”

However, the citizen activists persisted, demanding access to the books under a state open records law. The courses, after all, are taxpayer-funded. Eventually, a list of books was produced, and a controversy ensued.

In the hands of a skillful “educator,” and in the context of the reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Occupied America*, the apparent aim is to convince the Mexican-American youth that THEY are the victims of the “oppressors” – white society. *Occupied America* opens with a map of “The Mexican Republic, 1821,” showing Mexico in control of the Southwest United States. The subtitle of *Occupied America*, “A History of Chicanos,” sets the tone. Freire promises them “liberation” from the gringos.

There are many obvious flaws in the book, and the treatment of communist subversion in the Western hemisphere is one of them. The book examines the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s from the standpoint of the U.S. trying to maintain “North American hegemony” and the power of the “ruling elite.” President Reagan is portrayed as a fool for insisting that the Soviets and Cubans constituted any kind of threat to the region. Pro-communist groups such as the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) are depicted as helping refugees and countering “Reagan’s propaganda.”

But Reagan is attacked not only for resisting communist subversion. “In 1981 Reagan declared war on working families by firing 11,400 air traffic controllers...” it declares. When Reagan was elected president, “he appointed *his* Mexicans to offices.” (emphasis in original). The book explains that Reagan’s Mexicans were not “committed people” but “were conservative” and, for the most part, had “few links to the community.”

What's more, "resistance to bilingual education increased during the Ronald Reagan years," it says ominously.

Despite a controversy over the use of such books as *Occupied America* in the Tucson, Arizona schools, the University of Arizona in 2008 co-sponsored a four-day institute with Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American/Raza Studies program that featured Peter McLaren as a keynote speaker. McLaren's website opens with music and the face of Che Guevara on a red flag urging people to "join the revolution," while another speaker, Sandy Grande, an associate professor of education at Connecticut College, has a website ⁷ that features a Che Guevara quotation:

"The first step to educate the people is to introduce them to the revolution. Never pretend you can help them conquer their rights by education alone, while they must endure a despotic government."

Grande's research "has focused on critical theory and American Indian intellectualism and she has written widely on topics that include revolutionary struggle, identity, power and environmental ethics." ⁸ According to her bio, Professor Grande's approach "is profoundly inter- and cross-disciplinary, and has included the integration of critical, feminist and Marxist theories of education with the concerns of American Indian and environmental education." It says that she "teaches Foundations of Modern Education, School and Society, and Methods of Teaching. In addition to these courses, she has also taught courses in Multicultural Education, History of American Education, and the Pedagogy of Revolution."

Grande, chair of the Education Department, says that "our legacy builds upon on a long list of teacher/intellectuals: Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene, Peter McLaren, Michelle Fine, Antonia Darder, Joel Spring, Michael Apple, Marie Clay, Linda Thuwai Smith, Lisa Delpit, and Vine Deloria." ⁹

Ayers must be wondering why he failed to make the grade.

One of the leading critics of the Freire approach is Sol Stern of the Manhattan Institute, who points out that China and Cuba, "whose regimes Mr. Freire praised," never reformed their own educational systems along these lines and instead have concentrated on producing more industrial managers, engineers and scientists. ¹⁰

It seems that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is being reserved for the capitalist countries still in need of "liberation."

In a lengthy analysis, ¹¹ Stern notes that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* "has achieved near-iconic status in America's teacher-training programs" and that one study found that it was "one of the most frequently assigned texts" in the curricula of 16 schools of education -- 14 of them among the top-ranked institutions in the country. "These course assignments are undoubtedly part of the reason that, according to the publisher, almost

1 million copies have sold, a remarkable number for a book in the education field," he noted.

Thanks to Bill Ayers, copies of the book are being sold to University of Illinois students, who are required to buy it.

¹ His bio at the Huffington Post also identifies him this way: "Ayers is an Adjunct Professor in Education at University of San Francisco and teaches at UC Berkeley and New College. He is in the Language, Literacy, and Culture PhD program of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education. Rick Ayers is an Adjunct Professor in Education at University of San Francisco and teaches at UC Berkeley and New College. He is in the Language, Literacy, and Culture PhD program of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education."

² http://www.aera.net/AboutAERA/Default.aspx?menu_id=90&ID=177

³ See <http://www.usasurvival.org/docs/Kincaid-Loudon.pdf>

⁴ See <http://www.intpubnyc.com/Authors.html>

⁵ *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, Fifth Edition, Pearson/Longman, New York.

⁶ http://www.nas.org/polArgus.cfm?doc_id=323

⁷ http://www.conncoll.edu/academics/web_profiles/grande.html

⁸ <http://uanews.org/node/20377>

⁹ <http://www.conncoll.edu/departments/education/>

¹⁰ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/27/pedagogy-of-the-oppressor/print/>

¹¹ http://www.city-journal.org/2009/19_2_freirian-pedagogy.html

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* READINGS *

REQUIRED:

1. Freedom School Curriculum
2. Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
3. bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress*
4. William Ayers. *Teaching Toward Freedom*
5. John Dewey. *Democracy and Education*
6. Rick Ayers. *The Berkeley High School Slang Dictionary*
7. Erin Grunwell. *The Freedom Writers Diary*
8. Anna Devere Smith. *Twilight Los Angeles*

NOVEL

(Choose One):

1. Sapphire. *Push*
2. Ernest Gaines. *A Lesson Before Dying*
3. Carolyn Chute. *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*
4. Keri Hulme. *The Bone People*
5. Anthony Burgess. *Clockwork Orange*
6. Richard Wright. *Native Son*
7. James Baldwin. *Go Tell It on The Mountain*
8. Sandra Cisneros. *The House on Mango Street*
9. Francine Prose. *After*
10. David Malouf. *Remembering Babylon*
11. Gish Jen. *Mona in the Promised Land*
12. Mark Haddon. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time.*

MEMOIR

(Choose one):

1. Greg Michie. *Holler If You Hear Me*
2. Marv Hoffman. *Chasing Hellhounds*
3. Sylvia Ashton-Warner. *Teacher*
4. Geoffrey Canada. *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*
5. Richard Wright. *Black Boy*
6. Luis Rodriguez. *Always Running*
7. Claude Brown. *Manchild in the Promised Land*

Occupied America: A History of Chic
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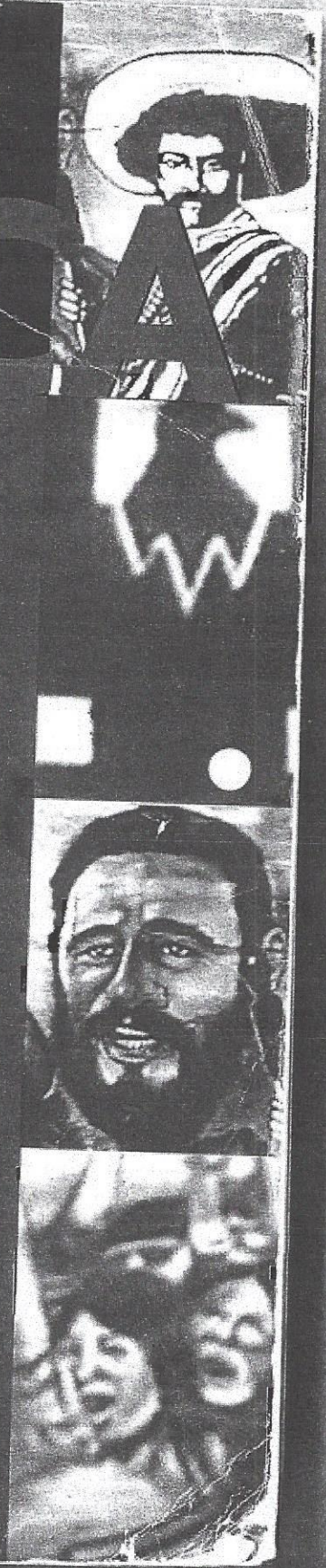
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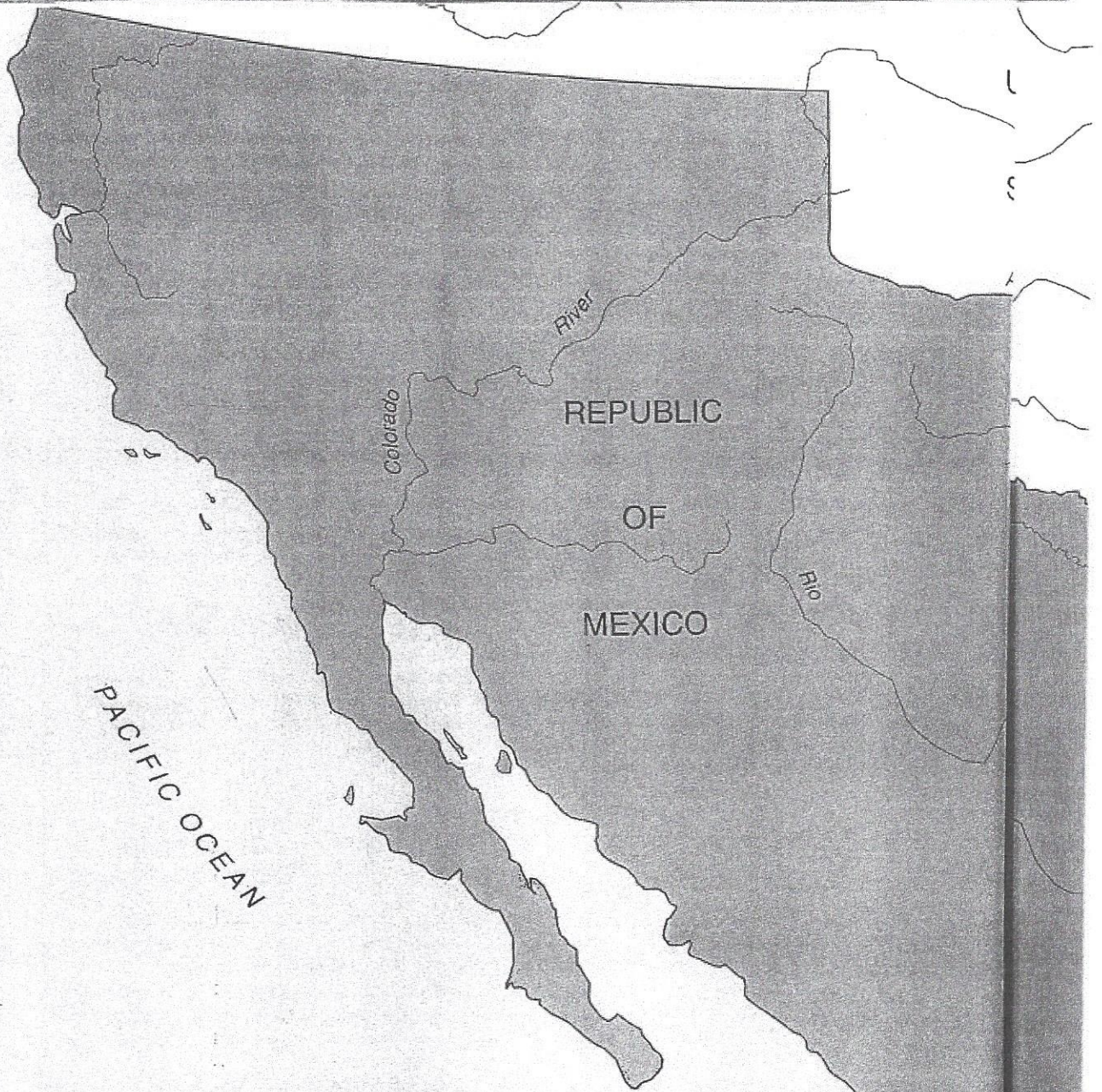
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The Mexican Republic, 1821

Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Politics of Hope: Reclaiming Critical Pedagogy

Peter McLaren
University of California, Los Angeles

Over the past several years, there has been a renewed interest in the life and teachings of Che Guevara and Paulo Freire among the revolutionary-minded. This renewed interest in Che and Freire is occurring at a time when left educators are attempting to address the consequences of the globalization of capital and the effects of transnational capital on public education. The educational left's current enthrallment with postmodern theory has done little to advance the cause of critical pedagogy, especially in the face of the current corporate assault on public schooling. This article argues that a renewed engagement with historical materialist analysis and revolutionary politics is urgently necessary to cut through the equivocations and revisionism of the postmodern left and develop a critical pedagogy that is able to challenge the devastating effects brought about by the globalization of capitalism. Education workers are encouraged to move beyond mere efforts at reforming institutions of public education and to take up a dynamic new revolutionary politics in keeping with the examples offered by the life and dialectical thought of Che Guevara and Paulo Freire.

On a recent voyage to the rain forests of Costa Rica, I rode a bus through the beautiful city of Cartago. From my window I noticed a young man with a long ponytail running beside the bus. As the bus passed him, he glanced up and our eyes momentarily met; I noticed that he was wearing a Che T-shirt with the inscription "¡Che Vive!" A fleeting sensation of plaintive connectedness overcame me, and I managed to give him a quick thumbs-up gesture of affirmation just in time for him to return a broad smile to the crazy gringo. For a brief moment, I felt that this ponytailed stranger and I were linked by a project larger than both of us. During that instant, I could tangibly sense between us a collective yearning for a world free from the burdens of this one, and I knew that I was not alone. The image of Che that he wore on his breast like a secular Panagia pointed to a realm of revolutionary values held in trust by all those who wish to break the chains of capital and be free. Che has a way of connecting—if only in this whimsical way—people who share a common resolve to fight injustice and

Author's Note: This article has been expanded from the introduction to my book, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

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CRITICAL EDUCATION AGAINST GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Karl Marx
and Revolutionary Critical Education

Paula Allman

Foreword by
Peter McLaren

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