



## Social Justice Feature

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Feature Editor

### Questions of Disbelief: Can We Transform the Situation? Or Is Rome Burning?

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#### *Abstract*

*Out of diminishing democratic ideals upon which this country was founded due to the blurring of the governmental branches by the current administration, one of the most worrisome is the piece of NCLB (2001) that has decreased the teaching of social studies in the early childhood/elementary curriculum. It appears there is a plan for failure for marginalized children that might open the doors to privatize public education. The planned deficit of social studies knowledge to problem solve and to think critically is not equal, nor just. To have a socially just tomorrow, social studies matters for our social studies students today.*

Here we are, really very privileged to live in the United States in a supposed democracy. Day after day, we hear that our troops in Iraq are there to create a democracy. But...there are more mercenaries (such as the Blackwater Corporation) than U.S. troops, and these are being paid more than are our courageous troops in an imperialistic war. Is that democracy and social justice? There are children in Baghdad and all over Iraq. How are they faring? Does anyone every worry about what trauma they are suffering as a result of war, carnage, rape, and becoming orphans?

What about declaring a unilateral war against a dictatorship that wasn't harboring Osama bin Laden? Halliburton Corporation is rebuilding Iraq, while our nation's infrastructure is failing. What happened to Habeas Corpus? Now, torture, such as head slapping, submitting human beings to frigid temperatures, and water-boarding is occurring. Means of "harsh interrogation" are fine, even though they may be done to our own soldiers in retaliation. Where are we going in this big mistake? Maybe this question should be stated in more of a tongue-in-cheek fashion, "Is Rome burning?"

Our government is snooping in our emails, phone calls, and books that we check out at our local libraries. They can even watch you in flight and see what you are reading. Over countless times *The Constitution* has been breached. Wow, now, that is democracy!

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was initiated with G. H. Bush, more jobs are outsourced and unemployment in the USA is high. Thanks to faulty oversight on trade, we have beautifully colored toys for our youngsters made cheaply abroad with lead paint.

Recently, President G. W. Bush vetoed a bipartisan bill that would have reauthorized approximately nine million dollars to provide children without adequate health insurance with such insurance, because it too expensive. Conversely, soon the US will be spending \$600 billion on the war in Iraq (Robinson, 2007). It is a harsh reality. Are we acting with social justice toward the most vulnerable treasures in our country: our children and our people?

We are allowing *Brown v Board of Education* virtually to be rescinded. The Supreme Court of 2007 has turned its back on economically and ethnically disenfranchised children (Bond, 2007). We have stepped back 53 years in history. As Jonathan Kozol (2005) repeatedly admonishes, we are "still separate, still unequal" in this apartheid educational system. A blind eye is turned toward places like Jena, LA., until social action is taken. What happened to educational social justice?

Oh, but we can test the youngest of children from preschool Head Start programs upward for the profit of McGraw Hill, one of the largest test manufacturers and editors of scripted curriculum programs that are most prevalently used in urban and high poverty areas (Kohn, 2002). No Child Left Behind (NCLB), without proper funding, thought, research, historical understanding, and lack of forethought about consequences still pressures the curriculum in most states. And, in lower socioeconomic and urban areas, scripted curricula are readily mandated.

Surprise, we haven't even gotten to children who come to school speaking English as a second language. They, too, are subjected to the testing frenzy, and most often are in schools where a scripted program is implemented. Listen to a Bank Street College teacher educator eloquently discuss the situation at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlUEEdj6lkw>

It is tough to decide the worst of the present social justice quagmires facing the United States. For social studies educators for social justice, however, the piece of legislation under NCLB Act that has virtually eliminated social studies for children in grades K- 6 is one of the worst because of the extreme focus on literacy and mathematics due to testing for the last seven years.

As cynicism rears its ugly head about a diminishing democracy in our remarkable country, which is full of potential and committed to establishing justice, consider that we are going to have a generation that will know even less about geography, history, economics, government, civics, and the rest of the disciplines of the social studies, areas about which the public already knows so little. Why? In my humble opinion, this federal administration carefully orchestrated it to be that way.

To have a generation of children that does not know social studies and is not able to think critically or for social justice might just be advantageous to future politics. Keeping people in poverty, perpetuating a lower class of people of color and ethnicity, and making sure there is a working class gives the impression of a plan. Why would there be tax relief for the exceptionally rich? Planning failure for some, whom others might deem nonessential, might only open the doors to privatize public education. It appears to be a scheme.

What about when young students reach college age or enter as teacher candidates? Will the deficit of knowledge be established along with a lack of ability to problem solve and critically think? The present public education system for our children is not equal, nor just.

To what extent can social studies teachers for social justice reach to intervene? Geography, history, economics, government, and civics matter. Social studies matter. What do you think? What will you do? How can we problem solve together for a more socially just tomorrow for our social studies students today?

### References

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