

Essay Review

Cervone, J. A. (2018). *Corporatizing rural education: Neoliberal globalization and reaction in the United States*. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan.

Review by Craig B. Howley, James Clifton & Aimee Howley
WordFarmers Associates

Citation: Howley, C. B., Clifton, J., & Howley, A. (2018). Book review of “Corporatizing rural education: Neoliberal globalization and reaction in the United States.” *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 33(6), 1-11. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.18113/P8JRRE3306>

Citizens Must Go!

Jason Cervone’s *Corporatizing Rural Education* offers a critical account of contemporary corporate power over rural schooling, writ very large. Rural education especially needs these broad and critical accounts to remind educators and rural community members whose world this is (ours) and who should own it (we should): as in *we, the people*. Powerful members of the corporatizing nation state and world, needless to say, think and act otherwise.

This article is an essay review in which we engage ideas raised by our reading of books, especially this one,¹ but including long reading in related domains (such as economics, politics, sociology, history, and philosophy)—and also our joint reading and writing of the evolving world,² wretched as it now again seems.

The appearance of Cervone’s critique is timely because, since the rise of post-industrial society (see, for example, Bell, 1973), big business has enjoyed a much freer hand in shaping, seizing, and running schools. The onslaught is hardly a recent trend, though. Rural schools, in particular, were a focus of a business onslaught in the 20th century (Callahan, 1962; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Tyack, 1974). The contemporary onslaught, though, is sufficiently thorough that one might well apply the time-worn term from critical theory: *hegemonic*.

Here’s why. Rural schools are *not* the most promising resource for corporations, but the new global business

¹*Corporatizing Rural Education* is Cervone’s dissertation (Ken Saltman chaired the committee), and that’s momentous. To our knowledge, the last specifically rural education dissertation to make its way to press was Paul Theobald’s *Call School* (1995). A quarter-century is a long time to wait between wins.

²Craig and Aimee are working on a book about atheist teachers in the United States; James is an historian working on a book about the life of a prominent classical violinist.

All correspondence should be directed to Craig B. Howley, Senior Researcher, WordFarmers Associates LLC, 75619 Lively Ridge Road, Albany, OH 45710 (howleycb@gmail.com).

The *Journal of Research in Rural Education* is published by the Center on Rural Education and Communities, College of Education, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802. ISSN 1551-0670

model has been remarkably successful in recent years at farming the poor through the schooling denied *and* provided to them (C. W. Howley & C. B. Howley, 2015). Many rural districts are poorly funded because their tax bases are meager, and the state’s foundation funding schemes are, of course, slanted towards wealth (H. Johnson, 2014; for rural perspectives, see, for example, J. Johnson, 2014; Purdy, 1997; Thorson & Edmondson, 2002). That disparity is one legacy of the earlier onslaught, and there are many others (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012).

Cervone’s critique is provocative. In our case it goaded us to think deeply about two fundamentalisms (economic and religious) contributing to the overthrow of the nation state—and the mischief they have caused. The implications of that overthrow for rural places and for rural schooling will prove—are proving—momentous. To introduce our response to these considerations, we first characterize the book’s themes.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One

The introduction puts Cervone’s project in the context of Trump’s ascendance to power. It is a problem for rural researchers and advocates who now find they must explain to themselves as well as to colleagues, friends, and relatives why a sizable portion of rural Americans supported Trump. The reasons have been building for perhaps 50 years. The short answer in the book is *rural marginalization*: cultural, political, economic, and (alas) racial. (It is still the America where Whites think they are the ones privileged to rule.) The misconception of race is America’s tragic flaw. The much longer answer to “why Trump” is *capitalism*. The rest of the book explains the answers, especially the long one, at greater length.

Chapter Two

The discussion here reminds one that state schooling reflects dominant ideology (see Bowles & Gintis, 1976), which, under capitalism, justifies capitalism. These days, the ideological portion of contemporary capitalism (which

has made significant headway with its “globalizing” project) is *neoliberalism*. The term is not too confusing if one remembers that (1) *economic liberalism* always glorified free markets; (2) *globalization* is the material reality of the new age, with capital running from some national regimes and into others with little transparency; and (3) *neoliberalism* is an ideology.³ To oversimplify, neoliberalism is a cultural phenomenon; capitalism an economic one.⁴

The Rural Opportunities Consortium of Idaho (ROCI) illustrates the application of neoliberalism to rural schooling. ROCI seeks to supplant *rural* public school districts with virtual schools, funded by the Albertson Foundation and with cheerleading from Trump’s education secretary (Betsy DeVos, of the mercenary Blackwater army family). ROCI argues that virtual schools will make rural education great again: more cheaply, more responsively, and without the baggage of unions (see Smarick, 2014, for the improbable claims, and Howley, 2014, for an even-handed critique).

It is a sort of enclosure (Theobald & Rochon, 2006): a take-over of shared educational purpose, ideas, and especially common intellectual “property” (otherwise known as the curriculum) by private enterprise. A hallmark of contemporary capitalism is that it monetizes, exploits, and dominates cultural activity, ending with the privatization of the cultural commons. Under this regime, schools that once served the public interest—the once-common good—must now ready children exclusively for employment and consumption.

Cervone recognizes its evil purpose in the context of the privatization of the cultural commons. Education should instead, it once went without saying, help people unpack and use ideas well—otherwise known as *thinking*. People who cannot think are likely to accept corporate will as readily as they once accepted the rule of the First and Second Estates.⁵ The chapter reminds us to ask a couple of key questions: Whose world is this? Who owns it? We do, says Cervone, and we should not give it up.

³See Eagleton (1983) for the varieties of ideology. Our usage here, though, is the one favored by Marx, and most apt here: that is, *lies in the head*. More broadly, however, we appreciate Eagleton’s (1983) definition: “those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power” (p. 12).

⁴ According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). So in a world where neoliberalism is the dominant ideology, policymaking favors deregulation, privatization, and the undoing of state-sponsored social protections.

⁵The aristocracy and the established (state-endorsed and state-entangled) church.

Chapter Three

This chapter on religious and market fundamentalisms (plural) notes that both sorts share “a profound mistrust of public institutions” (Cervone, 2018, p. 39). *Market* fundamentalists (neoliberals) simply find that private enterprise does everything more efficiently and effectively than government, whereas *religious* fundamentalists prefer to supplant secular institutions (government and other public institutions) with religious ones. It is too bad the chapter overlooks Weber’s (1905/1958) *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which would supply a missing link in the discussion of the affinity of the protestant tradition with the accumulation of private wealth. After all, according to Weber, wealth (in the Calvinist tradition) comes from the Lord as a mark of divine favor. The chapter outlines the political and economic forces exploiting the religious affinity, but there is no mention of the so-called Prosperity Gospel (see Bowler, 2013)—a form of Christianity that heretically, as one might say, misses the point of the Sermon on the Mount.

Chapter Four

“Environmental Sacrifice” examines the misuse of rural places in the name of resource extraction. It argues that notions of religious sacrifice dovetail with neoliberal ideology to perpetuate catastrophic environmental practices: mountaintop removal, hydraulic fracturing, concentrated animal feeding operations, and the poisoning of rural land and water with anhydrous ammonia. Rural places are constructed (materially and socially, cf. Lefebvre, 1991) as national sacrifice zones. Of course, anywhere can become such a zone: it is just that coal, timber, oil, arable land are (as if) by happenstance located in rural places! Too bad for them; good for the corporatized nation. At any rate, that is how the endangered citizen is schooled to regard the issues. The chapter connects these misuses and misconstructions to a fundamentalist religion: the world is made by God for humans to exploit. Environmental education here figures at the other extreme as part of democratic education (see, for example, Bowers, 2012).

Chapter Five

This discussion applies insights from critical geography to the issues under consideration in the book (see, for example, Harvey, 1996; Smith, 1984; Soja, 1996): capitalist enterprises reshape *the rural* as a space of extraction for *the metropolitan*. A prominent concept is “uneven development.” Briefly, regions of the planet and regions of nations are organized differentially (with respect to how they are “developed” economically) to expand corporate profitability. Rural places are organized and

sacrificed (rural sacrifice zones) to this end. Natural gas (the current darling) fuels power plants; foreign trade; and most critically, corporate profit and national defense. In this chapter Cervone argues that federal policy focusing on rural economic development has not just been misguided; to the contrary, it has been carefully guided to sustain lies about rural places and purposes. Rural people dying from meth and opioid epidemics? Part of the sacrifice.⁶

Chapter Six

Chapter six (“Destructive Identities”) takes a psychological turn—a turn, that is, towards identity politics. It is an identity politics with more of a problem, though, than a program. For Americans in general, identity formation is conducted with respect to what one owns and what one can afford. Getting and spending might have disgusted the English poet Wordsworth, but it delights most Americans. Unfortunately, living in a rural sacrifice zone generally puts a delightful identity of this sort out of reach. In the account of this chapter, “This creates anxiety, anger, and resentment that leads to the formation of destructive identities and an anger at perceived others, whether it be racial others, immigrants, or urban elitists” (Cervone, 2018, p. 123).

Are rural people racists? According to Cervone, no, but racism *seems* normal *far too often* to rural Americans. (Trump’s style supports this anachronism, but it has been a durable reality.)

In short, identity formation is a special kind of train wreck in a national sacrifice zone. Cervone argues for a way out of the wreck: a schooling that produces Gramscian organic intellectuals (cf. Gramsci, 1966/1991).

Chapter Seven

The final chapter presents the educational program, recasting Lefebvre’s (1991) right to the city as *right to the rural*. A combination pedagogy is required: place-based, critical (from critical theory), democratic; and the delivery vehicle should be the common school, locally governed.

For educators, the challenge is to embrace the local and use it to contextualize general knowledge, thereby removing the hegemonic function of education and democratizing it by valuing various types of knowledge. (Cervone, 2018, p. 144)

Provocations

Corporatizing Rural Education captures the broad consensus of the generally left-leaning rural education

⁶Many Americans cannot see the link and believe that addiction and death (among the poor especially) result from bad personal choices and have almost nothing to do with the how the political economy is managed (see, for example, Rank, Yoon, & Hirschl, 2003).

critique. What it leaves out in presenting the synthesis, though, is the past (history) and the future (an effort of imagination, perhaps for science fiction). We will fill in those gaps in what follows, but we begin with a few observations about the book.

Cervone’s project is an application of critical theory that is fully aware of the Marxist roots of the approach: readers do hear about Adorno and Horkheimer, for instance. Moreover, in this book, political economy (a.k.a. “economics”) remains the basis of social life (as in Marx). Culture is treated seriously (as it must be in education), but not as a distraction from the domineering influence of the economic base. The book’s historical ellipsis, from this vantage, is key because, for Marx, history was not just what happened, but the dynamic of its happening: how it happened. The progress of history was “dialectical”: opposing forces (or influences, or movements) leading through their struggle with one another to a better life for all. Marx the optimist concluded that capitalism (political, economic, and cultural organization based on private accumulation) carried the seeds of its own destruction in the power of the proletariat (the chosen people).

Capitalism, though, has hardly destroyed itself. In fact, it is now triumphant across the globe. The triumph is probably temporary, though, considering the nature of history as both long and tragic. An historical account of neoliberalism provides two things on which Cervone’s project actually depends.

First, an account of the relevant historical dynamics clarifies the interdependencies of capitalism, globalization, and neoliberalism. Yes, they are features of the same phenomenon, traceable back across the industrial revolution and feudalism. But they are also a dynamic extension of all that came before.

Second, an historical account shows where the corporate invasion of rural schooling has come from. It is an analysis not mostly about education or schooling, and so is not often given to educators. Their lack of clarity about these matters is a blessing to the beneficiaries of neoliberalism and globalization.

Schooling was created as part of the ascendancy of state-sponsored and state-adulated capitalism, particularly after the industrial revolution really took hold. Notably, the authority for the creation and operation of mass education, in mass society, has been the nation state. The dubious future of the nation state (see, for example, Dasgupta, 2018; Sassen, 2017) thus makes dubious the conventional authority for schooling: the formation of the citizen. It is no wonder that schooling is privatizing; it is a force of history. What about the future of schooling overall in the course of that history? What about the future of schooling in anyplace known as rural? We will start with the history and then consider the state of the nation state.

Historical Origins of Globalization and Neoliberalism

Although *Corporatizing Rural Education* notes that American (rural) education “shows a complicity” in reproducing neoliberalism (Cervone, 2018, p. 102), it has little to say about where neoliberalism comes from. But educators need to grasp the backstory in order to see the full scope of what they are up against. The long historical precedent can be given in one outrageous paragraph, followed by some of the relevant details (Bretton Woods, the discontents of the 1970s, and the subsequent emergence of the “New World Order”).

Imperialism, War, and Pax Americana (Very Briefly)

The imperialist system that led to two wretched global wars ended in 1945 by elevating the United States to global pre-eminence, and the Bretton Woods monetary agreement (1944) established the foundation of international trade for the capitalist world under the hegemony of the Pax Americana. All currencies subsequently pegged to a U.S. dollar backed by gold. So what? The new system was the first international monetary agreement, and under the circumstances of emerging U.S. hegemony it made trade more open within the American (capitalist, non-socialist) sphere. That is half the backstory. The other half is Communism, Soviet and Chinese. The United States was the lead global hegemon, certainly, but the Soviet Union (victorious over the Germans at great cost) made certain (in a series of end-of-war conferences) that eastern Europe would come into the socialist sphere. It was a competitive hegemon, and (the possibility of nuclear Armageddon aside) its existence contributed a temporary stability to the global system. Of course, when China “went” communist in 1949, stability became more precarious; and the America (Western, capitalist) sphere had substantial territorial limits imposed on its activity, and much to manage at the borders. But U.S. (and European and Japanese) businesses, thanks to Bretton Woods, continued their international expansion much more robustly across the entire capitalist world. In other words, capitalism survived the wars and continued its historic economic and cultural integration of the world under the “great” dominion of the American nation state.

Bretton Woods and the New World Order Before “Globalization”

The post-World War II economic and political consensus established an international system defined by several key features, particularly the gold standard and the U.S. dollar as the reference currency for all others. In this way, world currencies were both universally convertible (tied to the dollar) and based on a fixed price for gold (that is, in dollars). While such mechanisms made trade far more open to U.S. influence, they were also intended to subvert

imperialism (economic nationalism run globally amok) that had arguably caused the world wars just concluded. Notably, Bretton Woods also created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), durable institutions initially structured to help rebuild Europe, later serving more to manage the “Third World” (the one now known as “developing”).

As to the political order, the precedent was set by several conferences, the most important of which was Yalta (February 1945). In these conferences Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin redrew the map of Europe with the ostensible aims of ensuring collective security and national self-determination. In reality, they assigned European nation states to the U.S. or Soviet hegemony. The Third World was dependent on the First (American sway) and Second (Soviet sway) even after the European empires—especially the British one—contracted sharply in the 1950s and 1960s. Much contest between the hegemony roiled the world, particularly in “developing” regions.

At any rate, the world entered an unprecedented and sustained economic expansion in America, Europe, the Soviet Union, and Japan. Many people, particularly in the First and Second Worlds, lived better than had previous generations. Actual apocalypse (the global misery of the two wars) had been supplanted by a seemingly unstoppable progress, whether capitalist or communist. China, of course, was not a world military or economic power: but that was about to change, along with much else.

Discontents Economic and Political: Tremors Prior

Changes that threatened to disrupt this system—and the successes of the winners in it—were not, of course, welcomed by the winners (that is, U.S. and Soviet powers). Their spheres, after all, were guarded with nuclear weapons. Nonetheless the specter of deep discontent with the hegemony became evident in the global revolutionary tumult of 1968 (including student protests in Europe and America, the Prague Spring, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution). In the United States, a conservative backlash brought Richard Nixon to power, putatively with the votes of a “silent majority.” When the two global hegemony reached their détente (arguably also starting with 1968’s nuclear nonproliferation treaty), a global status quo emerged. Suri (2003) identifies it as a global counter-revolution. Nonetheless, global economic shocks were about to topple the postwar consensus.

The American protests swirled around race and the United States’ war in Vietnam. The war, however, entailed large expenditures and massive debt, and the world currency (the dollar) became unstable as a result. The conservative Nixon abandoned the vestiges of the gold standard in 1971,⁷

⁷Starting with World War I, application of “the gold standard” was progressively decoupled from the public’s ability to convert notes into gold (specie gold). Withdrawal of “specie gold” (notes

and other nation states followed suit. This change meant that control of the currency market by nation states had ended. In the West, the free market took charge of that feature of the global economy.

Another global shock hit in 1973-1974. In response to Western support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) imposed a worldwide embargo that produced oil shortages in the First World. In the United States the response was: “How *dare* they?” Given the backstory just recounted, the reaction is easy to appreciate (no matter the paternalism and hubris involved). Alas, the embargo resulted in more economic complications. The immediate result for the United States was that not only was the dollar “unstable,” it steadily lost value. The U.S. economy entered a recession. The recession, though, was peculiar and long-lasting, unusually characterized by both (1) very high inflation and (2) low economic growth (dubbed “stagflation”). The average yearly inflation rate in the United States from 1969 to 1981 was an impressive 7.2%, reaching 12.4% in 1980 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Economic upheaval characterized the 1970s, but so did worldwide political upheaval (Suri, 2003). The United States’ war in Vietnam produced devastating effects for Southeast Asian peasants in particular, but in world politics the American defeat by a minor Third World nation was (by 1975), following the “affront” of the oil embargo, yet another demonstration of American fallibility on the world stage. The historical dynamics were momentous for the entire world, but corporations were simultaneously establishing a new global reach (see Barnett & Müller, 1974, for a very early, and telling, account).

It was all too much—the combination of (counter) cultural agitation and economic turmoil led to global regime change. The world system itself (see, e.g., Wallerstein, 2004) experienced a change of state and would henceforth rotate around a new economic and ideological center: globalization and neoliberalism. The nation state itself began to seem weak.

Globalization and Neoliberalism

Globalization actually became recognizable as a phenomenon—named as such to refer to the activity of transnational corporations and regimes supporting their global activity (including their rights to it)—beginning in the early 1980s (see, for example, Levitt, 1983).⁸

convertible to gold) came first. During the Great Depression in the United States, the gold supply was nationalized and banks sent their supply to Fort Knox. By the time of Bretton Woods, the gold standard was the useful fiscal abstraction explained previously.

⁸The deployment of the term, mirroring Levitt’s enthusiasm, was universally approving and laudatory in the United States:

Remember, though, that the Bretton Woods agreement had already advanced the activity of U.S. firms across the globe, though not actually in all parts (as some parts were off limits within communist nations).

So in a wider circle, globalization included the collapse of the main roadblock to free trade, the Soviet Union—a collapse hastened by its Afghan invasion. And later, of course, in 1978 the access of capital to Chinese territory also began when Deng Xiaoping took the “capitalist road” that had been anathema to Chairman Mao. China was on its way to becoming the workshop of the world.⁹

At this juncture (the early 1980s), the term *globalization* may have made sense of what was going on, but the gloating of the U.S. press circa 1980 was hardly appropriate. The idea that American (or for that matter, global) interests could be well served when transnational corporations ran the *entire* world was an assertion as worrisome for Europe and the United States as it was for Russia and China, not to mention the “developing” world. The opening of the Communist world to capital was celebrated in about the way the opening of the North American continent had been: plunder was to be had.

Arguably, the move took hegemony to a whole new plane. Although details of this hegemony are varied and interesting, the *dominant global power of a transnational business* regime is hardly in doubt any longer (Bauman, 1998; Dasgupta, 2018; Guéhenno, 1995; Huang, 2008; Jacques, 2009; Sassen, 1996). The fact of this economic power is what *globalization* indicates.

The global ascendancy was hardly glorious. For instance, contributing to the Soviet collapse, the CIA-funded Afghan opposition to the Soviets transformed itself into al-Qaida and the Taliban (see, for example, Crile, 2003). It is an outcome of globalization, as are the endless Mideast wars, the Islamic Republic in Iran, the Syrian civil war, human trafficking, and the fragility of very many states in Africa and Asia (see Fund for Peace, 2018; Gilman, Goldhammer, & Weber, 2011). The revivification of theocratic aspirations in the East and West has also been a predictable outcome. After all, free trade substitutes competition of the war of each against each *even* for national solidarity. In the

one did not encounter the term used skeptically or critically in lead stories in such newspapers as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Traveling abroad in 2002 for the first time in many years, Craig was surprised to read in *Le Monde* a front-page article (in a major newspaper) that offered a critical outlook. Of course, *Le Monde*, though a major paper, articulates a socialist position.

⁹According to Ramo (2004), “While the US is pursuing unilateral policies designed to protect United States interests, China is assembling the resources to eclipse the US in many essential areas of international affairs and constructing an environment that will make U.S. hegemonic action more difficult” (p. 3).

absence of this secular version of solidarity, religion reasserts traditional certitudes of clan membership (see, for example, Norenzayan, 2013). As Cervone appreciates, this substitution is taking place in the United States: religious fundamentalism slides strangely into bed with wildly immoral Trump and his regime.¹⁰

In any case, globalization happens, and the dominion thus established—the subordination of nation-level control to free-market abandon—requires legitimation, justification, and indeed—for the benefit of world-wide capital—management. And this need is met ideologically by neoliberalism.¹¹

What, then, is *neoliberalism*? First and foremost, it is writing that defends and promotes economic “liberalism”—the old ideology of laissez-faire capitalism (which was once despised by labor movements as *brutal*). Laissez faire means “left alone”: business left alone to do whatever it likes. After all, it was hard for anyone to predict in 1800 that business activity might *need* to be regulated by the nation state. In early-stage capitalism, for instance, liberalism allowed children to be employed 12 hours a day in factories, and it allowed Britain to assert its right to propagate opium dependence in China. Such practices had to be identified, when they happened, as outrages (not all such practices were identified, of course).

At any rate, an unregulated business climate permits market forces to determine all economic and political relations (see, for example, Manent, 1995). Neoliberal theorists argue that such freedom is the best way to enact the common good especially under globalization. Capitalism is essential to freedom (Friedman, 2002); they argue for wholesale privatization of state enterprises (see, for example, Friedman, 1997).

What is new about neoliberalism is its global scope and its conversation with the opponents of old liberalism (such as Marx, labor unions, social democrats, Keynes).¹² Arguably, nation states had an interest in protecting their citizens

¹⁰The reaction also includes an inchoate and politically ill-informed resentment of globalization, which explains why Trump’s “cancellation” of global and regional pacts (such as the Paris climate accord and NAFTA, respectively) plays well to his base.

¹¹Also, to a lesser degree, it is met by the convenient conflation of “globalization” with “internationalization”—a putatively positive development in which peoples from across the globe show appreciation for one another and see their increased interdependency as a sign of common purpose (such as preserving the planet).

¹²Keynes was the early 20th century economist who argued that “fiscal policy”—taxing and spending—supported economic growth. Neoliberalism argues for reductions in public spending and the expansion of markets. The phrase “tax-and-spend liberals” is neoliberal slogan used to turn the public against the once-prevalent Keynesian approach.

from the worst ravages of a competitive market. When the weakened remnants of the nation state, however, serve the competitive market, protection by the state itself becomes a commodity. State-sponsored privatization of schooling provides a good example. Claiming to offer a benefit to all, charter schools actually secure benefits for a small elite only (including affluent people whose children’s private schooling is now subsidized, management corporations that profit from public-school funding streams, gun lobbies). In fact, neoliberalism has brought back much of what nation states had once constrained, including child and slave labor and drug cartels of various sorts, especially in the “developing” parts of the world system (see, for example, Gilman et al., 2011).

The Citizen Vanishes: The Futures of Common Schooling

What’s all this have to do with education? Everything, of course, as *Corporatizing Rural Education* explains. Economics, politics, and culture format schooling. Education systems are part of *the* system, and this, of course, is where *even* rural schools come into play, as Cervone (2018) notes:

the history of education in rural communities ... shows a complicity in reproducing the capitalist ideology as well as pushing rural youth to accept the ideology that they are merely economic beings. (p. 102)

As Cervone also claims, students are political as well as economic beings. They are *citizens*, and as citizens of the nation state, they do its bidding. For a long time, that bidding has placed rural students in service of urban interests. More recently, it has also placed them in service of global capitalist interests. It is no wonder that place-based education gets so little traction. Worse still, *education itself* gets little traction these days, especially when it is seen as a way to create citizens for a *state that protects citizens*. We might call this kind of (public) education “service to the common good.” Under neoliberalism (an ideology), there is little need for this service. Business itself will secure freedom (and other features of goodness).

Perhaps, as Cervone implies, neither the nation state, nor the corporate state has paid sufficient attention to the common good. After all, the nation state was a political invention of the centralizing, industrializing European and American world power base. It notably entailed characteristics that *ran counter to local definitions of what we hold in common and what we see as good*. These characteristics include (1) larger territory, (2) linguistic uniformity, (3) greater dominance and integration of internal territory, (4) sly justification via the construct of the citizen with inalienable rights, and (5) competition—including military contestation—with other nation states.

These features not only had notable consequences for the subordination of rural places, they also contributed to the development of systems of mass education (see Weber, 1976, for the case of France). When nation states took a progressive turn, they offered benefits to citizens. Arguably, some of them still do. But in exchange, they all exact a high price—one that becomes intolerable when the protection they offer (or might offer) becomes a scarce commodity—as it is becoming under the sway of neoliberal direction.

Nation State on the Run; Citizens on the Out

The grip of the nation state on the world order is slipping badly as corporate power has grown (see Bauman, 1998; Dasgupta, 2018; Guéhenno, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1992; Sassen, 2017). History, and the teaching of history, is actually part of the problem. Its curricular function has often been to inculcate patriotism, usually defaulting to blind allegiance (see Fitzgerald, 1979; Weber, 1976; Williams & Bokhorst-Heng, 2016). In rural places, such misguided allegiance has *already* imposed a high price (that is, exploitation in “national sacrifice zones,” destructive identities, and various forms of bad schooling). Cervone describes this sort of subversion:

Central here is the degree to which public schools, sites that should serve to strengthen the community, have been reshaped as sites where local democratic control is being destroyed. (p. 45)

Nevertheless, inadequate as the nation state might be for the common good, the contemporary alternative seems to be worse (Bauman, 1998; Gilman et al., 2011). For 100 years, perhaps 200, the nation state provided the political stability needed by a globally expanding capitalism. A nation state shaped how people in its domain conducted themselves, what they thought the world to be, and how they assisted in making it so (such as via public schooling). Under the best of circumstances, it protected its citizens in an orderly and systematic way from their own worst impulses as well as from the worst excesses of capitalism. With globalization, though, corporations have outgrown the nation state and they defend their dominion and importance with neoliberal thought (see, for example, Friedman, 2002; Hayek, 1944, 1988).

When the international order of states (liberal-democratic nation states) began to come apart, however, so did its ordinary exercise of protection and its motivating ideologies (such as “the citizen,” “equal protection,” and “the common school”). As Wright (2013) argued,

[The state] is ceasing to be the *public* state it once was; it is becoming a government explicitly for

the rich, a “private” state, a “security” state. More and more of its functions are privatized, including education, national security, law enforcement, and administration of prisons. The repressive functions of government—some of them taken over by outside contractors—become more important as the citizen-empowering, civil-society-enhancing functions start to wither away. Again, this is all in the interest of “The Corporation,” which can accumulate more capital and power as citizens lose their capacity to resist. (p. 170)

How could the citizen let this happen? After all, as imagined by the most high-minded Enlightenment-inspired revolutionaries, the critical and crafty citizen *would be* an active one: habitually informed and thoughtful.¹³ According to myth, the free schooling provided by the (idealized) nation state existed (in theory) to form citizens of that sort. Cervone imagines what those citizens would look like in rural places:

Students [would] see themselves as part of the natural environment, rather than that ... nature is wild and separate and in need of domination ... or that it is the will of God that man exploit nature for profit. (p. 88)

The most high-minded revolutionaries, however, did not hold sway, and nation states actually arose in bourgeois revolutions.¹⁴ The original franchise for this very important citizen (whose mythical existence justified the actual existence of the nation state born in revolution against the *divine* right of *kings*) was confined to White, property-owning males over the age of 21. Right at the outset, reality differed sharply from the high-minded aspiration.

Also different was what schooling *actually* added to the mix in the practice of forming citizens for a liberal democracy. A *common* schooling that might liberate individuals while at the same time linking them in solidarity to larger purpose (such as, community or nation or planet earth) *never* materialized in the ways Dewey and Counts had imagined (or hoped). Free state schooling has, in fact, never been very good, even in the honest view of some its supporters (see Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Blacker, 2013; Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 2017): it has rarely been good enough to form active citizens. Cervone implies,

¹³The brutal ones, by definition, did not care and have never cared: with the present U.S. regime a nice example.

¹⁴That is, the revolutions were led by merchants and tradespeople and lawyers with enterprises we would judge small in comparison to contemporary enterprises in order to advance their interests. The interests of landless peasants and domestics, and those of early industrial workers, were subsidiary.

moreover, that as the corporate purposes of schooling have become ascendant, its citizenship purposes have been made trivial. Citizenship now requires regurgitation of facts and compliant behavior rather than questioning, curiosity, and dissent (Saltman, 2014).

But Cervone recognizes too that empathy and insight, ideas and concepts, and the need for thinking and for the exercise of judgment will endure. They are among the things humans do, and they might be the best foot that humans can put forward. As he notes with contemporary urgency, “Overcoming the forces that can produce a Trump requires overcoming an ideology of anti-intellectualism” (p. 145).

The Secular Vanishes Along with the Nation State

The forces that can produce a Trump also depend on widespread retreat into fundamentalist religion, according to Cervone. For rural people, the retreat is from their own diminished identity.

Seeing themselves in national terms would require rural people to take a close look at their own marginalization and what it implies for marginalized people in general. Rather than taking this step, rural people (like underdogs everywhere) blame someone else—in particular in the United States, they blame the secular world. Cervone observes, “For rural fundamentalists, the secular world is signified by the public sector, with public schools being a main target” (p. 48).

But under the surface, they also blame themselves—taking their marginalization to heart as evidence of their inadequacy and irrelevance. For Cervone, the apparent false consciousness of rural Trump supporters reflects a confluence of what the church tells them, what projection of evil onto the “other” accomplishes in strengthening one’s own weak ego, and what self-loathing allows one to do. Other commentators (such as Howley & Howley, 2018) see racism as the centerpiece—but also acknowledge these other dynamics.

Schooling After the Centuries of the Nation State

What might displace, transform, or replace the nation state? A government with planetary reach has been anticipated for some time, but even science fiction has failed¹⁵ to conceptualize alternatives to the nation state according to one critic (Csicsery-Ronay, 2002), though the alternatives are not actually difficult to imagine:

¹⁵Older’s 2016 *Infomocracy* is a recent exception (there is a 2018 sequel as well). Older is a political scientist, which may explain why she could sponsor this sort of alternative world (“nations” each have just 100,000 residents, and nations are recast every 10 years); and, of course, corporations pull the strings in these novels.

Although the mutability of the concept of nation is an obstacle to the sort of clear historical taxonomy desired by social theory, one would think it should offer rich possibilities for the political imagination of science fiction. Consider a few of them: perhaps a Roma state, with no political borders, but international recognition . . . A technologically advanced, hegemonic Black African empire dominating the world as the US dominates it now. Two, or even three, independent Jewish states. A nation of Indian women, with its own political structure and borders. A globe in which nations cease to be territorial, operating entirely virtually, yet jealously safeguarding certain traditions. (Csicsery-Ronay, 2002, ¶12)

Educators, too, need to take on this imaginative project, asking (1) what might one expect for schooling under neoliberalism without the nation state? and (2) what opportunities might rural ordinary life harbor for schooling without the nation state? Answers should be attempted, in the name of the relevant commitments (thinking about solidarity, equality, and liberty) precisely *because* the future is unknowable, and therefore surely needful of preparation. After all, the commitments will remain in play no matter how far off the mark any answers prove.

Realistic Expectations for Schooling

The evils of contemporary schooling are likely to persist and worsen under “a smooth, democratic unfreedom” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 1). According to neoliberal thinking, the whole funding stream is best managed by private enterprise:

A voucher system that would enable parents to choose freely the schools that their children attend is the most feasible way to improve elementary and secondary education in the US.... That will unleash the drive, imagination and energy of competitive free enterprise to revolutionize the education process. (Friedman, 1997, p. 1)

The system is, at any rate, well on the way to fulfilling Friedman’s admonition. By some accounts, the public system has *already* been lost (see, for example, Blacker, 2013; Mathews, 1996). Perhaps most schools and districts will be privately managed within a generation, all else equal.

Resistance will persist, though, because some people—in all colors, from all economic strata, and living in all kinds of places—will still insist on reading, writing, and thinking—and acting accordingly.

Rural Education

The coming corporate schools will *suppress reading, writing, and arithmetic as a pathway to thinking and questioning*, particularly to the questioning of everything that exists (Saltman, 2014). History so as see to root causes? Literature as a way to understand our and others' lives? Philosophy to discover how to live? Social science to see beyond the surface of everyday life? Math and science as tools and exemplars of logic and skepticism? Such aspirations are too expensive, and the results too dangerous (see Blacker, 2013). So what *does* a legitimate educational program (one that prizes thinking) have to do with *the rural*?

On one hand, rural is not an idyll. Indeed, rural people are—as Cervone notes—regarded as culturally and intellectually lesser (even superfluous); they are (overall) marginalized and impoverished; and they are increasingly *confined* to national sacrifice zones (see, for example, Bauman, 1998). On the other hand, rural places often exhibit community that is unfamiliar elsewhere, and they shelter a characteristic lifeworld (“the rural”). As a result, rural people engage a realm of solidarity, equality, and freedom that is arguably less accessible than is the one at the metropolitan center—where, for instance, the wealthiest enjoy solidarity, equality, and freedom among themselves.

This reality (yes, a debatable one) is, moreover, not principally American or European. But such observations may suggest that a peculiarly rural struggle is ongoing *everywhere* at the margins of the global system (cf. Wallerstein, 2004). Moreover, in a metrocentric world, the struggle (for rural people) is endemic. As Cervone notes,

In essence, urban life has become the ideal for the modern world, an ideal that is reflected in education, which portrays rural life as in decline ... [but] rural youth still value rural life despite feeling pushed out by their schools. (p. 125)

Surely, a true, a *legitimate*, education is difficult and dangerous work *in any world*. Thinking is an *inherent* threat to any dominant power, including the power of what the leading sociologist of globalization, Sassen (2017) calls an extreme form of extractive capitalism. In her nuanced analysis, in fact, the neoliberal project necessarily entails the creation of a *global* sacrifice zone, with the extant rural sacrifice zones a neoliberal curricular source for the whole world—teaching everyone else to hand over whatever is valuable and just lying around (such as time on one's hands, the local water system, the air one breathes, fears, loneliness, contempt).

In this light, rural places already have more on which to draw than other places. Moreover, they constitute the margins of the global system, and they do it worldwide.

They may be more expensive for the core to track and not sufficiently dangerous to threaten the core (all else equal).

Rural educators who know what education means (equality, solidarity, liberty) should keep doing what they are already doing, wherever and however they can (see, for example, Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 2006). They should make common cause with others, build coalitions, advocate, agitate, and manipulate as needed for the cause of helping students think well. But, admittedly, the past, the present, and the future look grim. What else is new? The work of educators in the grim world is to foster thinking. Teacher narratives show again and again that, if one knows things and thinks thoughts, students will talk, work, listen, question, advance claims, and offer proofs when they speak, write, and act.

References

- Barnet, R., & Müller, R. E. (1974). *Global reach: The power of the multinational corporations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Globalization: The human consequences*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Bell, D. (1973). *The coming of post-industrial society: A venture in social forecasting*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Berliner, D. C., & Biddle, B. J. (1995). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools*. Redding, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Blacker, D. (2013). *The falling rate of learning and the neoliberal endgame*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books.
- Bowers, C. A. (2012). The challenge facing educational reformers: Making the transition from individual to ecological intelligence in an era of climate change. In R. Sternberg & D. Ambrose (Eds.), *How dogmatic beliefs harm creativity and higher-level thinking* (pp. 112-122). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bowler, K. (2013). *Blessed: A history of the American prosperity gospel*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). CPI—All urban consumers, current series. Retrieved from https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CUUR0000SA0L1E?output_view=pct_12mths
- Callahan, R. (1962). *Education and the cult of efficiency*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Cervone, J. A. (2018). *Corporatizing rural education: Neoliberal globalization and reaction in the United States*. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crile, G. (2003). *Charlie Wilson's war*. New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Csicsery-Ronay, I. (2002). Dis-imagined communities: Science fiction and the future of nations. In V. Hollinger & J. Gordon (Eds.), *Edging into the future: Science fiction and contemporary cultural transformation* (pp. 217-238). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Retrieved from (http://dpquadweb.depauw.edu/icronay_web/dis.htm)
- Dasgupta, R. (2018, April 5). The demise of the nation state. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/apr/05/demise-of-the-nation-state-rana-dasgupta>
- Eagleton, T. (1983). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- FitzGerald, F. (1979). *America revised: History schoolbooks in the twentieth century* (1st ed). Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Friedman, M. (1997). Public schools: Make them private. *Education Economics*, 5, 341-344. doi:10.1080/09645299700000026
- Friedman, M. (2002). *Capitalism and freedom* (30th anniversary ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Fund for Peace. (2018). Fragile states index. Retrieved from <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>
- Gilman, N., Goldhammer, J., & Weber, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Deviant globalization: Black market economy in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gramsci, A. (1966/1991). *Prison notebooks (Quaderni del carcere)* (J. Buttigieg & A. Callari, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Guéhenno, J.-M. (1995). *The end of the nation-state (La fin de la démocratie)* (V. Elliott, Trans.). St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press.
- Harvey, D. (1996). *Justice, nature, and the geography of difference*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hayek, F. A. (1944). *The road to serfdom*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hayek, F. A. (1988). *The fatal conceit: The errors of socialism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1992). *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Howley, C. B. (2014). *NEPC Review: A New Frontier: Utilizing charter schooling to strengthen rural education*. Retrieved from National Education Policy Center website: <https://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-new-frontier>
- Howley, C. B., & Howley, A. (2018). How blue was my valley: Invited paper for the AERA Special Interest Group on Rural Education. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 33(4). Retrieved from <http://jrre.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/33-4.pdf>
- Howley, C. B., Howley, A., & Pendarvis, E. (2017). Out of our minds: Turning the tide of anti-intellectualism in American schools. Waco, TX: Prufrock.
- Howley, C. W., & Howley, C. B. (2015). Farming the poor: Cultivating profit at the schoolhouse door. In K. Sturges (Ed.), *Neoliberalizing education reform: America's quest for profitable market-colonies and the undoing of public good* (pp. 23-51). Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.
- Huang, Y. (2008). *Capitalism with Chinese characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the state*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacques, M. (2009). *When China rules the world: The rise of the middle kingdom and the end of the western world*.

- London, UK: Allen Lane.
- Jardine, D., Friesen, S., & Clifford, P. (2006). *Curriculum in abundance*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnson, H. B. (2014). *The American dream and the power of wealth: Choosing schools and inheriting inequality in the land of opportunity* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnson, J. D. (2014). School funding in Mississippi: A critical history and policy analysis. in C. Howley, A. Howley, & J. Johnson (Eds.), *Dynamics of social class, race, and place in rural education* (pp. 193-216). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Press.
- Kannapel, P., & DeYoung, A. (1999). The rural school problem in 1999: A review and critique of the literature. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 15(2), 67-79. Retrieved from http://jrre.vhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/15-2_4.pdf
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Levitt, T. (1983). *The marketing imagination*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Manent, P. (1995). *An intellectual history of liberalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Mathews, D. (1996). *Is there a public for public schools?* Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press.
- Norenzayan, A. (2013). *Big gods: How religion transformed cooperation and conflict*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Older, M. (2016). *Infomocracy: A novel*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Purdy, D. H. (1997). An economical, thorough, and efficient school system: The West Virginia School Building Authority "economy of scale" numbers. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 13(3), 170-182. Retrieved from http://jrre.vhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/13-3_4.pdf
- Ramo, J. C. (2004). *The Beijing consensus*. London, UK: Foreign Policy Centre.
- Rank, M. R., Yoon, H. S., & Hirschl, T. A. (2003). American poverty as a structural failing: Evidence and arguments. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 30(4), 3-29.
- Saltman, K. J. (2014). *The politics of education: A critical introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sassen, S. (1996). *Losing control? Sovereignty in an age of globalization*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Sassen, S. (2017, March 21). *A world unified by the golden rule: Expropriation* (Benedetto Vecchi). *Il Manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://global.ilmanifesto.it/a-world-unified-by-the-golden-rule-expropriation/>
- Smarick, A. (2014). *A new frontier: Utilizing charter schooling to strengthen rural education*. Retrieved from Bellwether Education Partners website: <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/new-frontier-utilizing-charter-schooling-strengthen-rural-education>
- Smith, N. (1984). *Uneven development: Nature, capital, and the production of space*. New York, NY: Blackwell.
- Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. New York, NY: Wiley Blackwell.
- Strange, M., Johnson, J., Showalter, D., & Klein, R. (2012). *Why rural matters 2011-2012: The condition of rural education in the 50 states*. Washington, D.C.: Rural School and Community Trust.
- Suri, J. (2003). *Power and protest: Global revolution and the rise of détente*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Theobald, P. (1995). *Call school: Rural education in the Midwest to 1918*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Theobald, P., & Rochon, R. (2006). Enclosure then and now: Rural schools and communities in the wake of market-driven agriculture. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 21(12). Retrieved from <http://jrre.vhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/21-12.pdf>
- Thorson, G. R., & Edmondson, J. (2002). *Making difficult times worse: The impact of per pupil funding formulas on rural Minnesota schools*. Mankato, MN: Center for Rural Policy and Development.
- Tyack, D. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wallerstein, I. M. (2004). *World-systems analysis: An introduction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Weber, E. (1976). *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Weber, M. (1905/1958). *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (T. Parsons, Trans.). New York, NY: Scribner.
- Williams, J. H., & Bokhorst-Heng, W. D. (2016). *(Re) constructing memory: Textbooks, identity, nation, and state*. Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.
- Wright, C. (2013). *The tortured demise of the nation state*. In *Notes of an underground humanist* (pp. 164-171). Retrieved from <https://www.wrightswriting.com/nation-state>