

Paulo Freire's Legacy of Hope and Struggle.

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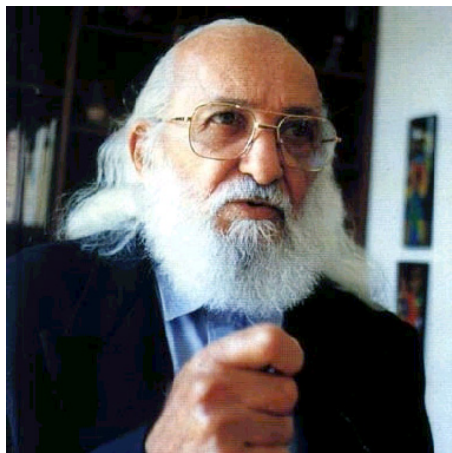
Paulo Freire died May 2, 1997. Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born on September 19th, 1921 in Recife, in the Northeast of Brasil. As a courageous and humble scholar, social activist, and cultural worker, Freire was able to develop an anti-imperialist and anti capitalist literacy praxis that served as the foundation for a more broadly based struggle for liberation. In his first experiment in 1963, Freire taught 300 adults to read and write in 45 days. This method was adopted by Pernambuco, a sugar cane-growing state 1,160 miles northeast of Rio. This success marked the beginning of what was to become a legendary approach in education.

Freire's internationally celebrated work with the poor began in the late 1940s and continued unabated until 1964, when a right-wing military coup overthrew the democratically elected government of President Joao Goulart. Freire was accused of preaching communism and arrested. He was imprisoned by the military government for seventy days, and exiled for his work in the national literacy campaign, of which he had served as director. According to Moacir Gadotti, the Brazilian military considered Freire "an international subversive," "a traitor to Christ and the Brazilian people" and accused him of developing a teaching method "similar to that of Stalin, Hitler, Peron, and Mussolini." He was furthermore accused of trying to turn Brazil into a "bolshevik country" (1994). Freire's 16 years of exile were tumultuous and productive times: a five-year stay in Chile as a UNESCO consultant with the Research and Training Institute for Agrarian Reform; an appointment in 1969 to Harvard University's Center for Studies in Development and Social Change; a move to Geneva, Switzerland in 1970 as consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches, where he developed literacy programs for Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau that focused on the re-Africanization of their countries; the development of literacy programs in some postrevolutionary former Portuguese colonies such as Angola and Mozambique; assisting the government of Peru and Nicaragua with their literacy campaigns; the establishment of the Institute of Cultural Action in Geneva in 1971; a brief return to Chile after Salvador Allende was assassinated in 1973, provoking General Pinochet to declare Freire a subversive; and his brief visit to Brazil under a political amnesty in 1979 and his final return to Brazil in 1980 to teach at the Pontificia Universidade Catolica de Sao Paulo and the Universidade de Campinas in Sao Paulo. These events were accompanied by numerous works, most notably *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Cultural Action for Freedom* and *Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau*. In more recent years, Freire worked briefly as Secretary of Education of Sao Paulo, continuing his radical agenda of literacy reform for the people of that city.

Based on a recognition of the cultural underpinnings of folk traditions and the importance of the collective construction of knowledge, Freire's literacy programs for disempowered peasants are now employed in countries all over the world. By linking the categories of history, politics, economics, and class to the concepts of culture and power, Freire has managed to develop both a language of critique and a language of hope that work conjointly and dialectically and which have proven successful in helping generations of disenfranchised peoples to liberate themselves.

With a liberating pedagogy such as Freire's, educators and cultural workers in the United States and elsewhere - both male and female, and from different ethnic locations - have an opportunity to engage in a global struggle for transforming existing relations of power and privilege in the interest of greater social justice and human freedom.

What is remarkable about Freire's work is that it continues to be vigorously engaged by scholars in numerous disciplines: literary theory; composition; philosophy; ethnography; political science; sociology; teacher education; theology, etc. He has given the word "educator" a new meaning, inflecting the term to embrace multiple perspectives: border intellectual; social activist; critical researcher; moral agent; radical philosopher; political revolutionary. To a greater extent than any other educator of this century, Freire was able to develop a pedagogy of resistance to oppression. More than this, he lived what he taught. His life is the story of courage, hardship, perseverance, and unyielding belief in the power of love.



Freire believed that the challenge of transforming schools should be directed at overcoming socio-economic injustice linked to the political and economic structures of society. Any attempt at school reform that claims to be inspired by Freire- but that is only concerned with social patterns of representation, interpretation, or communication, and that does not connect these patterns to redistributive measures and structures that reinforce such patterns- exempts itself from the most important insights of Freire's work. Freire's approach stipulates a trenchant understanding of patterns of redistribution in order to transform the underlying economic structures that produce relations of exploitation. Freire was also concerned with practicing a politics of diversity and self

affirmation - in short, a cultural politics - but not as a mere end-in-itself, but rather in relation to a larger politics of liberation and social justice. Consequently, a Freirean pedagogy of liberation is totalizing without being dominating in that it always regards the specific or local "act of knowing" as a political process that takes place in the larger conflictual arena of capitalist relations of exploitation. Thus, a pedagogy of the oppressed involves not only a redistribution of material resources, but also a struggle over cultural meanings in relation to the multiple social locations of students and teachers and their position within the global division of labor.

Has Freire's name become a floating signifier to be attached adventitiously to any chosen referent within the multi-stranded terrain of progressive education? To a certain extent this has already happened. Liberal progressives are drawn to Freire's humanism; Marxists and neo-Marxists are drawn to his revolutionary praxis and his history of working with revolutionary political regimes; left liberals are drawn to his critical utopianism; and even conservatives begrudgingly respect his stress on ethics. No doubt his work will be domesticated by his followers - as selected aspects of his corpus are appropriated uncritically and decontextualized from his larger political project of struggling for the realization of a truly socialist democracy -in order to make a more comfortable fit with various conflicting political agendas. Consequently, it is important to read Freire in the context of his entire corpus of works, from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to

Pedagogy of Hope. The globalization of capital, the move toward post-Fordist economic arrangements of flexible specialization, and the consolidation of neo-liberal educational policies demands not only a vigorous and ongoing engagement with Freire's work, but also a re-invention of Freire in the context of current debates over information technologies, global economic restructuring, and the struggle to develop new modes of revolutionary struggle. Freire's pedagogy offers a powerful context from which to consider rebuilding democracy and living and struggling for a qualitatively better life for the oppressed, for the non-oppressed, and for generations to follow. His pedagogy poses the postmodern challenge of finding new ways of facing up to our own frailty and finitude as global citizens while at the same time searching for the strength of will and loyalty to hope that will enable us to continue dreaming utopia into reality.

As Freire's future hagiographers wrestle in the educational arena over what represents the "real" Freire and his legacy, Freire's work will continue to be felt in the lives of those who knew him and who loved him. Just as importantly, his work will continue to influence generations of educators, scholars, and activists around the world.



His pedagogy of the oppressed helped me as young man to unlearn my privilege as a white, Anglo male, and to "decolonize" my own perspectives as an educator teaching in the industrialized West. I first began reading Freire after five years of teaching in an inner-city school in hometown of Toronto, in my native Canada. In trying to analyze my inner-city teaching experiences once I had left the classroom to pursue graduate studies, Freire's work helped me both to recognize and to name my own complicity in the oppression that I was trying to help my students resist. In other words, Freire's writings helped me to unlearn the influences of my liberal heritage that positions so many white teachers as "missionaries" among the disenfranchised. Freire's work has further helped me to recognize how the system of education

is situated within a discourse and legacy of imperialism, patriarchy, and Eurocentrism. More important, Freire's work was able to help me develop counterhegemonic strategies and tactics of urban educational reform. This project is a difficult one, especially for many white, male educators who want to make a difference in the metropolitan contexts of contemporary urban schooling. It is also a difficult lesson for teachers and prospective teachers who come from the ranks of the privileged.

In 1996, I was privileged to share the platform with Paulo and Augusto Boal (who developed the "theater of the oppressed" based on Freire's work) at the Rose Theater in Omaha, Nebraska. It was the first time the three of us had ever presented together. Paulo was remarkable during our dialogue with the audience, fielding questions with the agility of a man half his age. What struck me most about Paulo was his humility. I remember a lunch we had together in Freire's home in Sao Paulo. In trying to find the bathroom, I ended up in Freire's bedroom where I was astonished to find dozens of honorary doctorates on the wall. He kept such honors consigned to his own person space, having no need to reveal them to the many guests whom he generously invited to

spend time with him. He was also kind enough to help translate a speech I gave at the Pontificia Universidade Catolica de Sao Paulo, when the official translator ran into trouble with my prose. The week after his unexpected death, Freire was scheduled to attend a ceremony in Cuba where Fidel Castro was to present him with a major award for his contribution to education. According to his friends, this was to be the most important award of Freire's life.

Shortly before his death, Freire was reported to say something to this effect: "I could never think of education without love and that is why I think I am an educator, first of all because I feel love . . ." As Marcia Moraes remarked to me recently: "Freire is not leaving the struggle, he has merely changed his location."

We will miss him.

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