

Revisiting the master's toolset: concerning pedagogy, privilege, and the classroom-to-war room pipeline

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I.

I work as a professional terrorist apologist, instructing the future leaders of the world at what is deemed to be an elite, 'inside the beltway', Catholic institution of higher education. Now while that's all well and good, the problem is, my work aims to dismantle the State and capitalism; to carve out a new world in the shell of the old. How does one reconcile revolutionary goals and Ivory Tower employment? To be honest I'm not quite sure yet but am hoping that by the end of writing this, we'll all have it all figured out.

I teach, as many of us do these days. I am a precariously employed, on-again-off again adjunct. I work at a rather prestigious University, one that has graduated a king, 12 princes, ten Presidents, 21 Senators, 69 House Representatives, 22 governors, and literally hordes of White House staffers, Presidential cabinets members, Chiefs of Staff, executive advisors, Secretaries, Directors, Ministers, Supreme Court Justices, ambassadors, judges, military commanders, famous businessmen, scientists, lawyers and most importantly, David Palmer, the President of the United States in the fictional post-9/11 terrorist drama, 24. Now while this non-exhaustive list is unabashedly stolen from Georgetown University's Wikipedia page, I have no reason to contest its accuracy.

II.

Having an affiliation with such an institution is a component of a performative costume that I like to deploy when it suits me. Just like a funny hat or a pair of ass-less chaps, it can really surprise someone if you bring it out at the right time. My favorite time is when I'm working one of my other jobs, providing table service at a club-like lounge in DC. Now while the 4pm-4am weekend shifts don't serve to add to my fieldwork, in a sense every mediated interaction under capitalism is a form of sociological inquiry and anthropological action research. You can learn to read patterns: What collectivities are the best tippers; How people communicate sex, gender and sexuality while trying to 'hook up'; The group dynamics of splitting a \$700 tab five ways; What Washington insiders loudly scream about over the DJ's beats while they're drunk...It's not quite observing religious rites of the indigenous hidden away in the Peruvian Amazon, but it is certainly not without its own truths to be had. But I digress.

Until we win the revolution, and higher education is liberated from the constraints of privatization, fiscal austerity and the like, folks like me will have to be Professor by day and drink slinger by night. In a sociological sense, its great field work to be on different end of the service provision spectrum. As a

professor, I am given deference, respect, and a presumption of professionalism and achievement, while as a club waiter serving out my shifts amongst a strip of bars known in DC as 'black Broadway', I get a different experience. Anyone who's ever worked in the service industry, especially food service, will get what I mean. Everyone who is rude and disrespectful to their server, remember that it could be me, and that some waiters are also professors. Moreover, I'm not the only person serving drinks on Saturday who has a 'real job' come Monday. One of our bartenders conducted netwar for the Army, and another worked tracking illegal weapons in North Africa. Others work for various branches of the federal government, city government or a host of NGOs. Shocked? Come on it's DC and it's a recession. So yeah, when a mean customer makes some asinine comment such as: 'Well what else do *you* do, don't you have a *real* job?', I can (and do) come back sharply with, 'Well I am also a professor at Georgetown, and while it pays less, it's no more 'real' than serving drinks and food to your entitled ass.' Like I said, having the 'I'm a professor' card to play when you want is a nice ego boost.

III.

Although I am a mere adjunct, the prestige of the University is enough to make one feel like a career trajectory of exploitation—in the traditional Marxist sense of course—is worth it. Without much of a sneer I can honestly call such murderous ruffians as ex-Colombian President Álvaro Uribe, and former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, co-workers. Yeah of course we've never met, but Madeline and I taught classes during the same time slot, so we were at least institutional colleagues. Sorry to say Madeleine, but my class filled up during pre-registration too, so you're no better than the rest of us.

Anyway, I have had quite a time molding young hearts and minds one 2.5 hour lecture at a time. The *Program on Justice and Peace*, as lefty a department as this school can sustain, hired me way back in 2010, and I was tasked with teaching a course related to 'terrorism.' I thought about the topic—one in which I have prestigious formal training in [insert twirls of my fictional handlebar mustache between my thumb and pointer finger]—came up with a few abstract-length proposals, sent them up the food chain and crossed my fingers. My point in retelling this is simply to state that my job requirements are pretty vague as far as canonical requirements are concerned. Because of the University's counter-terrorist themed Security Studies program and its realist, neoliberal International Relations/Government programs, I am the sole (explicit) counterbalance on the topic.

For example, if you study the topic of terrorism at Georgetown and you're well read in the topic, you'll fight for a chance to take a class with Bruce Hoffman. Why? Well because he wrote the book on the modern field (as they say), has worked as a scholar in the field for three decades, and has former high level positions with RAND, FBI, CIA, Coalition Provisional Authority Iraq, Iraq Study Group, National Security Preparedness Group, West Point and Human Rights

Watch. Or maybe it's because he is a scholar-professor at six universities in four countries and the editor of the field's most prestigious journal. Or maybe it's his fieldwork conducted in Afghanistan, Argentina, Colombia, India, Kashmir, Indonesia, Israel, Iraq, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, the Philippines, Palestine, Sri Lanka and Turkey. So...you can take a class with Professor Hoffman—who after inviting him to my class I can positively say is an approachable, humble and super nice individual—or you can take one with me.

And what are my qualifications? My pedigree? I am a queer, vegan, Jewish, anti-authoritarian, political theorist with four interdisciplinary degrees under my belt. All of my studies have focused on social movements and political violence. I have seventeen years of experience working amongst and in solidarity with radical social movements. I have traveled a great bit of the world often doing fieldwork of my own...but I'm admittedly no Bruce Hoffman, not even close.

While we both may have FBI files, mine is not in the HR department. While we both may have spent time in Nablus, we had vastly different purposes.

So myself, Álvaro, Madeline and Bruce all teach about terrorism, and while three-fourths of us have dealt out lethal State violence, all but Bruce have been called 'terrorists.' While Álvaro earned his title killing scores of people and calling them FARC, and Madeline earned hers while wielding US power in the Balkans, Iraq and elsewhere, I just argue for a bit of evenhandedness in labeling violence. This is my academic goal and what separates me from the others. They are 'terrorist stoppers' and I am a 'terrorist understander', often called a terrorist apologist. This is what makes me the odd man out. That, and I'm the only one still a student, and with no experience in the service of Western-styled capitalism and empire.

IV.

This is all to explain that when a Georgetown student wants to study terrorism, they have quite a few respectable choices for professors, and yet year after year, for the past five years we've tried, my class has filled prior to the first day. This says to me that students are hungry for a counter narrative, eager to hear about stone-throwing anarchists, masked Hamas fighters, and anti-abortion survivalist assassins from none other than a septum-ringed, early 30s, in-your-face lefty. Just think, when someone says, 'Yeah I studied terrorism at Georgetown,' they could have just spent 12 weeks with me or with my colleges, yet on paper, it all looks the same. This to me is one of the peculiarities of the University system. Even within rigid degree requirements and a seemingly hegemonic frame of political reference, students can self-select a course of study to fit their preferred politic.

My students tend to me quite diverse. Some are activists eager to find affinity in an academic setting. These students tend to hear about the class through leftist social networks, email list serves and word of mouth. They usually make up about three or four out of 20. Then the remaining 16 or so tend to fall well dispersed along the political spectrum with many clustered around the self-

described 'progressive', 'liberal' or 'social justice' markers. They tend to be more than 90% female.

To demonstrate such diversity and build a classroom culture of cooperation, I try to display our collective political diversity through a series of activities the first weeks of class. On the first day I show a 'name that non-State actor' slideshow and have students mark their answers on papers for extra credit. With the promise of 5% added to their final paper, students are very participatory. What I have learned after doing this activity three times are some strange patterns. Everyone can pick out and explain the Klan and the Westboro Baptist Church. About half can identify the Black Panthers, the Zapatistas and Hamas, and nearly no one can name the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, or Hassan Nasrallah, the iconic and longtime leader of Lebanese Hezbollah. The activity has 30 cases to name. Those are the patterns as best as I can report them.

This to me is very telling.

Amongst other lessons, it says to me that we are not doing a good enough job as educators in teaching students about the complexities of violent social and political movements. If Hassan Nasrallah is just another Arab in a turban aligned with evil then its time to review the multi-decade, CIA-issued, iconic figure flashcards. Sorry to say but in 2015 if you are a student in IR, Government or Security Studies and you can't identify the ideological and strategic differences between al-Qaeda, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Lebanon's Hezbollah then you need to hold off calling yourself a 'terrorism scholar' on job applications to the Department of State or Defense.

So why is all this relevant to a discussion of social justice and education? For an answer we can turn to a quote often placed atop the syllabi of Profs who consider themselves to be revolutionaries...myself included. In 1968, Brazilian educator and radical Paulo Freire wrote:

Education either functions as an instrument which used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

When your school is a direct pipeline from high schools across the world and the megamachine of US-dominated Empire, keeping such goals in mind is key. Imagine you are a well-intentioned, 18-year-old attending high school at one of our many rapidly crumbling educational institutions. By the New Year you have one foot out the door, and by the fall you are settling into the four-year roller coaster that is undergraduate study. As soon as you cross that dormitory threshold, before your very first moment of self-doubt when your Introduction to Western Traditions Professor tells you that everything you know is wrong, even before this point a countdown begins. While some students take a while to

see the writing on the walls, the clock starts as soon as the first semester's fees are debited from your inheritance, or disbursed by the lender. This countdown is pretty simple. You now have less than four years to figure out what you believe, who you want to work for, and find yourself sustained employment. If any of this seems like a type-a exaggeration or over preparedness, we must teach at different schools. At my school, students get the job in their cross hairs early and they aim high.

So you buy your books, binge eat pasta, have some possibly homoerotic, possibly drug induced experiences, maybe discover some political truths, and after four years, you're done. As critical scholars have been quick to label the entry of vast numbers of youths into the jail and prison system the school-to-prison pipeline, at Georgetown we are the high school-to-State Department pipeline and for a few, I am a last stop. If we as educators take a second and consider this, it can be daunting. Certainly it carries with it a great deal of responsibility. Professors teaching thoracic surgery know that they may be the last voice running through the head of a new doctor slicing into a heart or lung. A Professor in structural engineering knows that the knowledge they construct for their students could be use to build bridges and tunnels that inspire awe or those which collapse and kill. Every Supreme Court Justice was once an undergraduate and I would venture that every foreign diplomat, Joint Chief, and CIA analyst had at least one undergraduate instructor that altered the trajectory of his or her politics in one way or another. Given this reality and Georgetown's history of staffing the embassies, court rooms, NGOs, palaces and secret smoky rooms of the global elite, I feel a weighty sense of responsibility that all educators should feel.

Let us not over sell this point but let's be clear. Some schools make great doctors, world-class brain surgeons, pediatric nurses, and anesthesiologists. Some schools make business folk. Some schools make critical theorists, continental philosophers, feminist scholars and radical geographers. Georgetown makes statesmen, big and small. While it has only graduated one US President, it fills the halls of government, the inner-beltway boardrooms of lobbyists, and the doomsday shelters hidden deep under the Cheyenne Mountains. Georgetown students get to see that big red button that if pressed, would end humanity. They grow up to be Alexander Haig, former Secretary of State, Supreme Commander of NATO forces and White House Chief of Staff. They grow up to be General Dunford, commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. They grow up to be General Casey, Army Chief of Staff and commander of multi-national forces in Iraq. They grow up to be the Presidents of not only the US but also of Panama, the Philippines, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Bosnia, Colombia, the European Commission. They graduate the Prime Ministers of Portugal and Lebanon and the King of Jordan.

They grow up to be Major General Enis, Deputy Director of human intelligence for the CIA. They grow up to be General Jones, Obama's former National Security Advisor and NATO Supreme Commander for Europe. They grow up to be General Petraeus, director of the CIA, and former Commander of

multinational forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. The CIA especially seems to have roots in the Georgetown alumni graduating three directors including Robert Gates (also former Secretary of State), George Tenet and Petraeus. So yes, it is not a stretch to imagine that Georgetown students self-selecting a course on political violence and terrorism may one day be in a position to operationalization such knowledge.

To be fair, it's not all a dark cloud of spies, statesmen, assassins and White Housers. Some alum go on to be Richard Mudd, imprisoned for conspiring along with John Wilkes Booth to assassinate President Lincoln. Some become Matthew VanDyke who fought in Libya alongside the Ali Hassan al-Jaber Brigades of the anti-Gaddafi 'resistance'. Then of course there are others who act in furtherance of justice, peace, equality and freedom but take a decidedly less murdersome path. Within this vein the University has graduated great social justice activists working amongst a litany of local, national and international organizations too numerous to name. Recalling those known to me personally, we have key players in projects such as Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive, United Students Against Sweatshops, the DC Action Lab, the Wayside Center for Popular Education, Family and Friends of Incarcerated People and Advocates for Youth. Certainly, *these folks* are not small in number.

V.

In my short 'career' as an adjunct, I have already received emails from former students that confirm the hypothesis developed above. More than once, I have received an email that reads like this:

Hi Professor Loadenthal! It's Jane from your terrorism class last spring. Remember me? I am living in Kabul working for a logistics and security firm. Our work is mostly hush hush but I wanted you to know that I think about our class a lot and I think it has really helped me be a more effective team member here. In a few weeks we're off to Baghdad and then Mogadishu. Just wanted to say thanks for exposing me to all of the interesting perspectives in our class and if you're ever in Somalia, give me a ring.

Yes, that is an email received nearly verbatim, and it's one of a growing number.

Now being a keen decrypter of government New Speak, I know exactly what "logistics and security" means and its not making sure your Amazon books arrive to their point of destination on time. In the realm of these providers, most famously being Blackwater USA (later known as "Blackwater Worldwide," then "Xe Services LLC", and now Academi) it means putting bullets into brown and black flesh and insulating US-affiliated interests through the protection of personnel and property. In the case of this student regardless of she spends her days behind a desk directing subordinates, behind a computer screen directing drones, or behind a rifle scope directing lead whatever experiences informed her

time prior to those actions will have a significant impact on her decisions. In those moments when your lecturing and it feels like its just not penetrating, I like to imagine I'm one of those miniature angel/devil figures perched on my students' shoulder and speaking into their ear. When they're flying that F-16 fighter jet, recommending sentencing for a defendant, or providing policy suggestions for their department head I like to think that some of the truths I tried to impart echo within. I like to think that before they add yet another Mohammed to that 'approved for assassination' kill list they consider our class's lengthy discussions about the asymmetric application of the rhetoric of terrorism. I like to think that my wee voice gives them a bit of that pang of doubt. I like to think that all the energy expended explaining "terrorism" and "politics" as two sites on a spectrum of power has an impact. When it really counts, in the moments before the drones are dispatched, the policies written, and the laws passed, I like to think that we make a difference for the students we encounter.

You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.

About the author

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